

# Hunter Education Session

## S.P.O.R.T.: Ethics for Everyone

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*Abstract:* Sportsmen Protecting Our Resources Together, (SPORT), is a Missouri Department of Conservation outdoor ethics program designed to improve our awareness of how we use the outdoors and the responsibility connected to that use. In Missouri, SPORT is the foundation for not only Hunter Education, but also our complete Outdoor Skills Education program. It provides enough variety in its form to integrate it into an overall outdoor education curriculum within a school or youth organization. This paper will discuss goals of the SPORT program, examine how it is used in hunter education and other outdoor education programs and evaluate the future need for outdoor ethics.

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Missouri has long been known as the Show Me State. With the conclusion of this presentation, I hope to live up to that slogan by showing all of you how Missouri's outdoor ethics program, SPORT, can be a model for other states which want to incorporate outdoor ethics into every aspect of education. As with any creative idea, SPORT, which stands for Sportsmen Protecting Our Resources Together, has been through a growing process since its conception in 1978. Much like a chameleon that changes its colors to fit its feelings, SPORT has the ability to change its focus to fit any form of outdoor ethics. We are very proud to have SPORT incorporated into all areas of Missouri's Outdoor Skills Education Program—from hunter education to aquatic resource education. This did not come about, however, without trial and error, lots of cussing and discussing and several false starts (C. Riley, unpubl. data).

### **Program Development**

The idea of promoting outdoor ethics is not new to Missouri or to some other states. Concern for how people use the outdoors, emphasis on relationships between sportsmen and landowners, and the concept of policing our own ranks have been tried by several states using various slogans. These have included the National Rifle Association's HOW program, the Kansas Youth Ethics Program, and one of the

earlier sportsmen/landowner related-oriented efforts, Manitoba's RESPECT. Most of the programs have been spurred as 1 means of retaliation to the anti-hunting movement. As a result, most of the programs have been directed to hunter ethics and to addressing the problem of the "slob hunter," (C. Riley, unpubl. data).

As most of you already know, Missouri's SPORT program was adapted from the Pennsylvania program "Sportsmen Policing Our Ranks Together," known by the same acronym. We had packets like these with bumper stickers, buttons, cards, and flyers made up. But Pennsylvania's emphasis was not really what we wanted in Missouri. From research conducted by John Hall, it became evident that the hunter does not stand alone in the abuse of Missouri's outdoors. Therefore, we had to take a much broader approach in developing Missouri's program if we were to be successful in addressing the complete problem. Thus, "Sportsmen Policing Our Ranks Together," as it had been known in Pennsylvania, in Missouri became "Sportsmen Protecting Our Resources Together," with the emphasis on ethical behavior instead of enforcement (C. Riley, unpubl. data).

### Goals

As the Missouri SPORT program continued to grow, the focus was to promote the need for protecting our resources by practicing outdoor ethics and respect. This focus and the following goals have remained the same: to make Missouri citizens more conscientious and responsible outdoor users, to improve relations between the sportsmen and the landowner, and to reduce the number of unethical outdoor enthusiasts.

SPORT focuses on identifying specific abuses by outdoor users, cooperating with private landowners, understanding and obeying the laws, and making a personal commitment to set a good example and to get involved. These goals are accomplished through a series of discussion activities designed to allow the participants, whether youth or adult, an opportunity to evaluate their feelings about different ethical and/or unethical situations. They are provided a chance to share their ideas, express their opinions, and gain support for being more ethical in their own recreational pursuits (Martin 1980). Not everyone has the same idea concerning what constitutes ethical outdoor behavior; therefore, the discussions are fascinating to watch as the students progress toward an understanding of just what outdoor ethics is really all about.

### SPORT in Education

I mentioned earlier that SPORT has been through a growing process. Hunter education has been the forerunner for using SPORT in Missouri's education programs. A portion of every hunter education class is devoted to the subject of hunter ethics. It addresses topics that we are all familiar with: hunter-landowner relations, identifying unethical hunting behavior, wildlife violations, and discussions on what the hunter can do to improve his sport.

The Outdoor Skills Education unit has, for some time, been developing what are generally referred to as modules. A module is a self-contained unit of study that

includes information on a given subject, lesson plans, activities, class exercises, tests, suggested visual aids, and reference materials. Modules have currently been developed in the following Outdoor Skills areas: shooting skills, aquatic skills, outdoor living skills, archery, and historic skills.

It was these module series which brought about another change in SPORT. The classroom teachers in our state were quick to recognize the importance of including the SPORT materials in their outdoor education programs. Therefore, to accommodate their need, we designed the SPORT manual and activities booklet to correlate with the established module format. The activities booklet contains activities for young citizens, kindergarten through twelfth grade, and teaches good outdoor manners by using the hands-on technique. Although it was designed to be used first and foremost by classroom teachers, it also has practical application with all youth organizations including boy scout, girl scout, and 4-H. Thus, SPORT has become a valuable asset to our module series (C. Riley, unpubl. data).

That brings me around to the "show me" part of this presentation. As I mentioned, SPORT has been continually growing, and is now the foundation for all of the Missouri Department of Conservation Outdoor Skills Education programs. Every one of our modules has a page dealing with ethics. A school or youth organization which teaches aquatic resource education or historic crafts and skills will devote the same attention to outdoor ethics as a teacher in a hunter education class. The philosophy behind this widespread integration also came directly from our teachers around the state: for any outdoor education program to be successful, outdoor ethics, behavior, and responsibilities must be discussed and understood. We know that all outdoor education involves use of the resource. SPORT looks at how we can minimize the abuse of that resource.

How does that happen? Well, when a teacher or youth leader decides to incorporate SPORT into a particular subject area, the goal remains the same: to make Missouri citizens aware of their responsibilities toward their outdoor use. The approach used, however, will focus on that particular topic. For instance, a unit on aquatic resource education looks at water ecology, casting and angling techniques and water safety. Woven throughout that unit is a discussion on outdoor ethics: how does our behavior impact the aquatic resource? And, more importantly, how can we improve our behavior to ensure that there will be an aquatic resource to use in the future?

A similar discussion occurs in a unit on map and compass or basic archery. Much like a hunter education student who lists activities that are considered unethical, so a student in archery or map and compass identifies unethical behavior related to their particular outdoor pursuit. As the students progress from one unit topic to another, they begin to realize how universal outdoor ethics is, and SPORT, like the chameleon, changes again.

### **Outdoor Ethics: Future Needs**

Up to this point, I have talked about how SPORT has developed into a comprehensive program used in all of our Outdoor Skills Education programs. We are very proud of that. However, its success will not be determined by you and me. It will ultimately be determined by those youngsters we are teaching.

As all of us adjust to a new century which is geared toward high technology and massive resource use, it is imperative that educators not lose sight of the importance that outdoor ethics carries in the classroom. More than ever, all of us need to be reminded that we are not separate from nature. The hunter, fisherman, camper, archer and outdoor photographer all have an ethical responsibility toward their sport. When we fail to point this out to students, whether they are 7 years old or 70, then we fail to provide an important facet of education: personal ethics and the ability to judge between right and wrong. SPORT is a tool that the Missouri Department of Conservation uses to "show you" this point: that SPORT truly is a program where ethics can be for everyone, regardless of their sport.

### **Literature Cited**

Martin, W. L. 1980. Instructor Manual. Sport Ethics Class. Conserv. Comm. 31pp.