

Hunter Information & Training Program News

Spring 2016

Coordinator's Corner-Ginamaria Smith

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DID YOU KNOW?

In 2001, 10% of hunters were women. In 2013, 19% of hunters were women.

In 2001, there were 1.8 million women hunters. In 2013, there were 3.3 million women hunters. This is an 85% increase!



Lee Rogers's retirement party

Spring definitely sprung for the HIT Program this year. On top of certification classes and volunteer instructor trainings running full speed ahead, our statewide Hunter Education Coordinator Lee Rogers retired at the end of April. Lee had 34+ years with ADF&G and he was the HIT Program Project Assistant from 2001-2016. His professionalism and genuine enthusiasm for teaching the public about the outdoors, wildlife management, and firearm safety will definitely be missed!

The HIT Program was honored by the Alaska Legislature with a citation for our quality programs and ongoing successful efforts to train Alaskans to be safe and ethical hunters. Three 10th grade students from East High School in Anchorage submitted the nomination and completed the research about our program as part of their World History class. Their teacher, Alex Bortnick, is one of our volunteer instructor. The students nominated the HIT Program for this honor because they really value our program and because of his involvement.



Lee Rogers, Gina Smith, Naomi Johnson & Matthew Brandt, Gail Volt, Marc Much, Kirk Lingofelt, Commissioner Sam Cotten

You may have noticed that this newsletter is a little thicker than normal. We added additional pages because the information that we want to share with you is so important. In November 2015, one of our volunteer instructors was involved in a non-fatal hunting incident on Montague Island. He was deer hunting with a friend and accidentally misidentified the friend as a deer and shot him in the shoulder. Luckily for both, it was a non-fatal wound. Both parties wish to share their experience with others so that people can learn from their mistakes. They included five mistakes that they made that contributed to the incident, and this is an extremely valuable take home lesson for all. Please take the time to read their stories and feel free to share them with others, including your hunter education classes. We have also submitted their stories to the IHEA Instructor Journal so that even more people are reached.

The HIT staff would like to thank you all for your volunteer contributions to our program so far this year, and for the multitude of hours that many of you will volunteer this summer. Good luck fishing, hiking, and enjoying the Alaska summer!

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2016 IHEA Conference



**Theodore Roosevelt
reenactor**

Vermont hosted the 2016 IHEA Conference at the Basin Harbor Club located on the shores of Lake Champlain. They welcomed state administrators, federal administrators, and volunteer instructors with open arms. “Theodore Roosevelt” told us about the highlights of his life and the role that he played as a conservation-minded President.

The opportunity to interact with other state hunter education administrators is invaluable. We’re all working towards the same goals of firearm safety, hunter recruitment, and continuing our hunting heritage, so the ability to meet face to face to discuss program capabilities, challenges, and solutions is extremely helpful.

Mark Duda of Responsive Management, which is a public opinion survey research firm specializing in natural resource, wildlife, environmental, and outdoor recreation issues, gave a very interesting presentation about the challenges ahead for hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation (R3). We plan to continue addressing some of these issues and work on some of these challenges as we make program plans for the future.

1. Changing demographics

- Increasing population, urban residents, older residents, minority residents, and immigrant populations

2. Access

- There aren’t enough places to hunt and not enough access to public land.

3. Non-hunting shooters and archers who contribute to Pittman-Robertson funds

- 2014 - 44% of the survey population are target shooting but not hunting, 41% are doing both, and 15% are hunting but not target shooting.

4. Low public knowledge about wildlife

- They don’t know who manages wildlife or how wildlife management is funded.

5. Anti-hunting sentiment

- The general public continues to support hunting, but public support varies by species, motivation, and method.

6. Poor hunter behavior

- Lots of the general public think hunters violate on purpose; hunters and wildlife professionals need to be better trained to debate about the importance of hunting.

7. Lack of opportunity

8. Fits and starts

- R3 programs come and go

9. Failing to follow the new action plan

- National Hunting & Shooting Sports Action Plan

10. New major funding sources

11. Focusing on outputs over outcomes

- outputs are things we can do to get there and outcomes are what we want to happen

12. Bad research

- developing R3 programs based on bad/no data



**Western Region state
administrators**

In future newsletters and emails I will continue to share additional information from presentations given at the IHEA Conference. Hopefully the insight that they shared will help us to be better instructors and help our students be more responsible hunters and conservationists.

I also got the chance to meet with the IHEA President and an event planner to start making plans for the 2018 IHEA Conference in Alaska. At this point, you can add June 25-28, 2018 into your calendars to save the date. We’ll keep you updated as more details get worked out and as we need help planning.

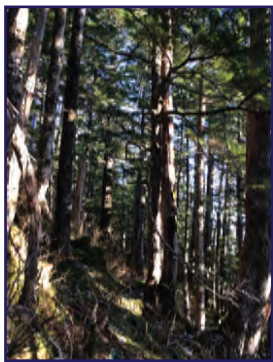
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It Could Never Happen to Me

Doug Moore

Those that know me know that I have spent a lifetime around firearms, over forty years of experience. I've hunted that entire time, I've taken multiple self-defense firearms classes, I've dedicated years to raising money for the Friends of NRA, and finally I have been a hunter education and bowhunter education instructor for the State of Alaska for the last five years. Up until this point, I have had exactly one negligent discharge with a handgun at age 16. Because I only violated one of the four rules of firearm safety, the only victim in that case was the floor. Other than that, and this recent incident, I have fired tens of thousands of rounds without a problem. I only mention this to put context on my level of experience, not as an excuse, just for people to realize that we can never be too careful.



Montague Island

My friend Erik and I had booked a four day black-tail deer hunt with a well know transporter to hunt on Montague Island in Prince William Sound. This was a boat-based trip where we spent the nights on a converted trawler and then were transported to the beach with a smaller skiff each morning to a location of our choosing. We were picked up right at dark every evening. On the first day we discovered that this hunt was going to be tough. There was about six-inches of crusty snow on the ground and it was nearly impossible to move without making a racket.

We spent a great deal of time catching up and visiting. Over the last few years our friendship had become closer and we were both really enjoying our time out in the woods. It was probably not the best hunting strategy, but time in the field isn't always about hunting. He graciously allowed me to shoot a button buck he spotted on day one, but other than that we had been seeing very few deer.

Sign was everywhere, but they could hear us coming from hundreds of yards away. I won't speak for Erik, but I was getting pretty frustrated.

On day four I changed a couple things in my routine. Two comments were made the night before that caused me to change my patterns. First, were comments made by the boat crew that there was no reason to carry the VHF radio I had along for emergencies because they'd only hear it from the beach. Second, were comments that we really didn't need binoculars for the short distances deer were seen at. Being tired of carrying the extra weight, I left the binoculars behind and left the VHF radio on the beach. Along with the VHF radio I left my arctic clothing that I carried in a dry bag for emergency purposes.

After sorting our gear out on the beach, we had a brief talk and decided that we would keep our talking to a minimum and walk very slowly for that day. Neither of us was wearing any type of bright clothing, much less hunter orange. Neither of us discussed any sort of plan if we lost sight of each other.

Within a few hours we had become separated. I'd been steadily working my way up some steep terrain and I believed that Erik was somewhere below me. I'd been following some big buck tracks and they were fresh. Periodically I'd catch a glimpse of the deer out ahead of me. I never spooked him and continued to follow his tracks. At some point I decided to take a break in the sun. I'd been working hard and was about to quit climbing the mountain I was on. After a power bar and water, I convinced myself that I would regret it forever if I didn't finish the climb. I gathered my gear and quietly crept into the dark woods. There was very little snow in the deep woods and I usually would pick up the buck's tracks when I reached an opening. As I entered the woods I heard crunching off to my left. My brain automatically assumed it was Erik because I'd yet to hear a deer making a crunching noise. Dead ahead of me I caught a glimpse of movement.

That glimpse of movement was Erik waving his brown hat to get my attention. I saw it as a deer's tail waving across the white patch on the rump. His outstretched fingers, encased in brown leather gloves looked like antlers. I quietly stepped behind the spruce tree I had just come around and shed my pack. I extended my walking stick that had a shooting saddle on top, mounted my rifle and looked up the hill into the darkness. I had the scope power turned up too far, so I relaxed and lowered it to 3x. I looked back up the hill, located what I thought was a deer's rump, looked a little right and saw what looked like the antlers of a deer grazing. I could clearly see the top hump of the deer's shoulder; I lowered half way down, settled my breath and fired the shot.

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(continued) It Could Never Happen to Me

In an instant both of our lives changed forever. Immediately after the recoil I couldn't see anything in my scope anymore and for a moment I felt that excitement of a shot well fired.

That moment was short lived. Erik cried out that I'd shot him. I looked left, because that's where I thought he was, and shouted that I'd shot a deer. I honestly thought he was screwing with me until he slid down the slope into a patch of light. I honestly don't know what happened next, but I do remember removing the round I'd automatically jacked into the chamber after the shot. I put the rifle down and quickly ran up the hill a few steps. At that moment I'm sure Erik and I were communicating, but I don't recall what was said. I do know that the relief of him talking to me brought me out of the panic. I quickly turned heel, realizing my med kit was in my pack. I grabbed it and headed up hill. In my earlier life as an EMT I'd treated three GSW's and only one had survived.

I cannot describe the relief I felt when I arrived to see a relatively minor wound on Erik's shoulder. Don't get me wrong, a 30-06 to the top of the shoulder is a major deal, but it wasn't as major as I'd seen. I buried my shame and a flood of other emotions and went into medic mode. I carry several appropriate GSW bandages in my kit and an Israeli compression bandage did the job nicely.

I can't recall the order of our conversation, but I know we talked about the severity of the wound. One thing that I'll never forget though, is Erik telling me that in no way would this ever affect our friendship. No kinder words were ever uttered by a man to another man.

Once bandaged, we made a plan to head to the beach. I carried all the gear and Erik made his way on his own. Unfortunately, even wounded, Erik is a speedy dude. At one point I lost him and that caused me more panic. Once again we didn't communicate well enough. It all worked out as he was at the beach digging into my emergency bag for the radio. Luck was on our side and the crew of the boat heard our calls.



The boat crew was extremely professional and they began communicating with the U.S. Coast Guard for an evacuation. Erik was evacuated to a hospital in Anchorage and was released that night.

I spent the night on the boat waiting for our scheduled departure the next morning. I sat in my small room in the dark trying to reconcile what happened. Even after Erik described his hat and glove waving, I still could not see him in my mind. I still saw a deer and I still see a deer to this day.

Coast guard picking Erik up

I learned some valuable lessons that day. I had been a hypocrite by teaching people in my hunter education classes to wear hunter orange in the field, yet I hadn't bothered. Nor did I encourage my hunting partner to wear it.

I chose to be lazy and leave the weight of my binoculars behind. I allowed myself to be swayed by others to forget the value of binoculars in the field. Had I been wearing them, I most likely would have been able to identify my target in the dark woods.

I let my pride and competitiveness get in the way of my good judgment. I've always been a competitive person. Hunting should not be a competitive endeavor, but it's pretty tough to watch everyone else harvest deer and not be able to do so yourself. The frustration led me to see what I wanted to see. I was convinced I was seeing a deer and I was convinced I was taking a 100% for-sure shot. My brain would not allow any other thoughts into my analysis.

I have spent the months since this incident trying to educate myself on the tricks the human mind can play when we desire to see something so much that it becomes reality to us; even when the image is completely wrong. I hope to learn more and share that with others in the future.

On November 18th, 2015 I negligently shot one of my best friends and one of the finest human beings I know. I make no excuses. I made an error that I thought would never happen to me, and that's precisely why it happened to me.

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Never in a Million Years

Erik Burney

On November 18th, 2015, my hunting partner and dear friend shot me in a terrible case of mistaken identity. I'm going to share what happened from my perspective, along with our analysis of what we did wrong, emphasis on we. Yes, he shot me, but we both made mistakes and this incident follows a fairly common pattern with mishaps—it was the result of a series of small errors that individually were not serious enough to raise any red flags and alter our decision making.

We were on the last day of a four day hunt and we'd seen few deer and shot only one--a button buck. Over the previous three days we spent too much time walking and talking together. With the deer rut in full swing we had expected the hunting to be far easier, so for this last day we decided to separate more and move slower. We were feeling pressure to put some meat on the ground. On this morning the sun came into view at 10:22am. I know because I stopped to take a picture as the sun crested the jagged horizon formed by mountain range that runs along Montague's north-south spine. The day was beautiful—clear, calm, and about 25 degrees.

After snapping a few pictures I looked to see my partner 150-yards away to the east of me crossing an open park on a northbound line to the south face of a steep, flat-topped hill covered in mature timber. I was at the western edge of the same park and began climbing northwest towards an open saddle about 400-yards away. After glassing from the saddle, I turned east towards the top of the hill. I was heading up the east face of the hill as my partner headed up the south face. As I began my climb we'd been out of sight of each other for ten minutes or so. When I got to the top I veered left and followed a narrow deer trail along the north rim of the hill. When I'd worked my way about half way up, I turned south. The timber was heavy enough that there was little to no snow on the hilltop, just frozen sphagnum moss covering everything and it took only a couple of minutes to pick my way across.



What I was wearing, minus the bandana, when I was shot

Standing on the south rim facing the sun I was struck by how pretty the scene was. I dropped off the crest and descended a few yards to get a better angle for taking pictures. After snapping a couple photos I was interrupted by the sound of movement off to my right at my level. I slipped my phone in my pocket and brought my binos up trying to make out some part of a deer. I looked and looked but saw nothing so I moved downhill a bit more to get a better angle. Still nothing.

Then, about a minute later I again heard movement off to my right but this time well downhill and again I scanned with my binos. This time I found the face of my partner looking up at me through a lane in the brush. He was about 60 yards west of me and another 30 yards downslope. Seeing him I relaxed and had the thought I'd make my way down to him and we'd have lunch, but first I tried getting his attention. I did not consider yelling out because I didn't want to spook any deer that might be playing cat and mouse with us on this hill so I waved at him and could see his facial expression well enough to tell that he wasn't recognizing me. Then I pulled my hat off so he could see my full face and waved some more. My rifle sling began to slip off my shoulder and I stopped to adjust it. As I turned and waved at him again, it happened.

What I'm about to describe happened in a fraction of a second but it seemed like slow motion--this effect is known as Temporal Distortion and it happens because your brain records what your eyes see much faster than your consciousness can process it. I saw the muzzle flash followed by the air rippling from sonic waves in front of the bullet. I felt the "fwizzzz" of the bullet passing over my left thumb just as it hit me with a sharp, heavy smack. Lastly, I heard the boom of the shot. I was essentially looking down the barrel when the trigger was pulled and saw it all because I was relaxed and not anticipating it. I watched my friend shoot me and never saw him shoulder his rifle or prepare to shoot. It never entered my mind that I could be confused with a deer. Never in a million years did I ever think something like this would ever happen to me, I was a conscientious hunter and part of that was being choosy about who I hunted with.

I somehow stayed on my feet and in a voice that was half yell, half terrified shriek cried out "Oh ****, _____ you just shot me!" Without hesitation my partner yelled back, "**No I didn't! I just shot a deer!**"

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(continued) Never in a Million Years

THIS IS IMPORTANT. Even as I cried out that he shot me, my partner was convinced he'd been shooting at a deer. For a second he thought I was playing with him. I yelled back, "NO YOU DIDN'T!! YOU SHOT ME!!" I slumped back against the steep hillside and into a patch of full sunlight. It was then that he finally saw me for me. He reacted immediately and raced up to me with his medical kit.



30-caliber gunshot wound

Fortunately, he had once been an EMT and had treated gunshot wounds before. He had a gunshot dressing in his pack and within five or six minutes of being shot my wound was dressed and the bleeding controlled. From this point I had to walk about a mile back to the beach and our emergency duffel stashed in the brush near where we were dropped off. I dug the marine radio out of the duffel, hailed the boat, and set in motion my eventual helicopter ride to the emergency room.

It was an emotional moment for us both. Here we were, a couple of manly men, both with lots of experience in the Alaskan backcountry, suddenly dealing with a situation neither of us ever believed could happen to us. But it did, and here's why:

#1. Hunter Orange

I wasn't wearing anything bright. My green and brown clothing contributed to the optical illusion that turned me into a deer. Hunter orange is not required in Alaska but it's a good idea, especially in the dark woods. If I'd been wearing hunter orange I probably wouldn't have been shot.

#2. Communication

At the moment he pulled the trigger my partner thought I was 400-500 yards off to his left. If we would've met to discuss our intended plans prior to leaving each other's sight my partner would have known I was on the hill above him and I probably wouldn't have been shot.

#3. Binoculars

Long considered an essential piece of gear, binoculars allow you to distinguish what's actually there from what you think is there. How many times have you seen an animal in the distance only to have your binos reveal a stump, or a bush, or a rock? We were only 70-yards apart, if my partner hadn't left his binoculars behind that morning I probably wouldn't have been shot.

#4. Pressure to Succeed

This is a contributor to many mishaps not just hunting related and we men are especially vulnerable. It was the last day of a fairly expensive "meat" hunt, and between us we had only shot one small deer. We both felt pressure to kill at least one deer each and that narrowed my partner's focus and inhibited his ability to see what was actually there instead of what he wanted to see. Had my partner not felt pressured to hurry up and put meat on the ground I probably wouldn't have been shot.

#5. Failure to Verify the Target

You might be wondering why this isn't number 1 since it is the ultimate safety check. If he'd verified his target I absolutely wouldn't have been shot...except that he did verify his target. He was convinced, beyond a shadow of a doubt, I was a deer and so he shot with confidence. That he was wrong is another issue. This was not a case of shooting at movement or some other gross negligence. My partner looked at me through a rifle scope for about 30 seconds before shooting. He never saw me for me and if any of the above mentioned things had been done he probably would have seen me and I wouldn't have been shot.

The man who shot me remains my good friend. He is careful and conscientious and yet, despite that and all his years in the woods and on the range, he made a terrible mistake because his mind played a trick on him. Between the thick woods, my dull clothing, the angle of the hill, and the way the light struck the scene he was convinced he was looking at a deer. All of the cues he was relying on told him what he saw had to be a deer. When I took off my hat to expose my pale face he saw a deer's white rump <insert buttface joke here>, and when I waved at him with outstretched fingers he saw antlers.

The bottom line, and the thing I want you to take away from this, is if my friend could make this mistake, so could you.

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Welcome to Our New Instructors

Hunter Education:

Copper Center: Josh Heinbaugh, Patti Miller

Dillingham: Jeff Hicks

Fairbanks: Michael Bradley

Ft Wainwright: Ryan Hastings

Glennallen: Lauren D'Ascanio, Jesse Hankins, Heidi Hatcher, Alysia White, Tom White

Bowhunter Education:

Anchorage: Scott Graziano

Copper Center: Josh Heinbaugh

Dillingham: Neil Barten, Tom Beasley, Eric Hanson, Jeff Hicks

Eagle River: Harold Hoang

Glennallen: Lauren D'Ascanio, Heidi Hatcher, Alysia White, Tom White

Homer: Joe Brewer

JBER: Jerry Billings

King Salmon: Dave Crowley, Christina Peterson

Palmer: Chris Alderman

Wasilla: Steve Gustin, Rick Tuohy

We are always looking to recruit new volunteer instructors. If you know of anyone interested, have them visit the website (www.huntereducation.alaska.gov) and fill out the application. Once we receive their application we'll contact them about attending instructor training. The HIT Program covers travel costs to attend the training or if there are enough interested instructors in an area we'll send HIT Staff to conduct a training.

Beaver Trapping Clinic in Fairbanks



Interest in trapping is historically high in the Interior and our Fairbanks HIT staff was able to offer an introductory Beaver Trapping Clinic in late March. We were fortunate that a number of factors lined up to make this a fun and successful session before

ice conditions deteriorated.

We had eight participants sign up for the two-evening class and our location was made to order with a beaver colony having set up a lodge last summer on Noyes Slough less than 100 yards from the entrance to the Hunter Education facility!

During the class we taught the basic natural history, biology, and feeding habits of beaver, plus legalities, safety, trapping equipment, techniques, meat and gland salvage and fur handling practices.

The weather was great and almost too warm, as we demonstrated both snare and Conibear trap setting having each of the students setting a snare on the birch bait pole and assisting with chipping out a second hole in the ice. We joked about their effort versus current market value of a beaver pelt but they persevered and stayed an extra hour to get it done. With two sets in for the night, all left with high hopes for the trap check on the second evening.

Everyone arrived on the second night of class with the anticipation enjoyed by a kid on Christmas morning and they weren't disappointed. We pulled a prime 47 pound beaver out of the snare set that they had all worked on and the smiles and the photo session afterwards definitely made it a memorable event for all!

We finished the clinic with the students going home with a pile of trapping loot and drew raffle tickets for the beaver hide, meat, and glands. Completion was none too soon, as the slough flooded two days afterwards!

-Bob Hunter, Northern Region Coordinator



HIT Steering Group

Rick Sterling (Interior) alaskawindfall@alaska.net

Steve Shiell (Rural Alaska) sshiell@pwscc.edu

Paul Houser (Southcentral) houserfam9@yahoo.com

Martha Peck (Southcentral) martha.a.peck@gmail.com

Bruce Bowler (Southeast) cozylog@alaska.net

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Instructor Notes

Crossbow Education-NEW for 2018

In March, the Board of Game adopted the following regulation:

“Beginning July 1, 2018, crossbow certification will be required for all big game hunters using crossbows, and the certification card must be carried with them while hunting in the field.”

The HIT Program has been tasked with developing and implementing the Alaska crossbow certification course. We plan to include information from our hunter education course, bowhunter education course, and the North American Crossbow Federation. Here is a timeline for how we plan to progress with this task:

- 2016-Work with Kalkomey (current online course provider) to develop an online crossbow education course.
- 2017 (first half)-Develop an online field day that will include a shooting proficiency and a blood trailing exercise. Create an Instructor Teaching Manual.
- 2017 (second half)-Train HIT staff and volunteer instructors who are interested in being crossbow education instructors.
- 2018-Online course is available to the public. Offer crossbow education field days starting in the spring. Regulation goes into effect on July 1, 2018.

If you are interested in helping to develop the Alaska crossbow certification course, please contact Gina (267-2196 or ginamaria.smith@alaska.gov). In 2017 we will also be asking all certified instructors if they are interested in receiving training to teach the Alaska crossbow education certification course.

Volunteer Timesheet Update

Thank you for filling out and submitting the Volunteer Timesheets with the rest of your class paperwork. To give you an idea of how many hours have been volunteered so far in 2016, and the amount that this is worth for funding purposes:

1,946 volunteer hours (Jan-May) x \$41.5/hr = \$80,759 x 3 = **\$242,277 Federal Aid**

A couple of errors that we've noticed that will need to be corrected in the future:

- **Instructors need to sign each line in the table where they've entered a date and hours in the table (ie-Taught 1 day=1 signature, Taught 2 days=2 signatures)**
- **If you are a Lead Instructor for a class, please sign the rest of your co-instructor's timesheets on the bottom line provided. Do not sign your own timesheet at the bottom, the HIT Program Coordinator will sign there.**
- **Don't forget to total all of your volunteer hours.**
- **Please write out your full mailing address, including the city and zip code**

HIT Staff Contact Information

Anchorage

Gina Smith 267-2196

Kirk Lingofelt 267-2534

Marc Much 267-2241

Gail Volt 267-2187

Fax: 267-2323

Fairbanks

Bob Hunter 459-7375

Tom Halverson 459-7211

Fax: 459-7332

Juneau

Jeff Jemison 586-4101

Fax: 586-4107



What a view for a bowhunter education proficiency shoot in Prudhoe Bay in early May. Thanks Jimmy Johnson!

Alaska Volunteer Hunter
Education Instructor
Association (AVHEIA)
Jim Low 378-5897
akjimlow@mac.com