



Alaska's Hunter Information & Training Program News

ADF&G
HIT PROGRAM
Winter 2013

Coordinator's Update - Jerry Soukup

I hope everyone had a restful Holiday Season and that you spent some quality time with family and friends. We enjoyed seeing many of you at our planning meetings held around the state from Oct-Dec. Your input and feedback were important to us as we developed plans for 2013. Our statewide schedule, which includes all traditional and online offerings for the year, is now available for the world to see. Be sure to pass the word on to any of your friends that need a class. Please advise them to sign up early and not to wait until hunting or permit application time to expect to easily find a class opening.

Also keep in mind, that this statewide schedule is a living document and you can add a class in your area at any time. Be sure to plan ahead (30 days minimum) so student materials, training firearms and field kits can be sent. Also allow enough lead time to advertise for the course. Even if you are offering a field day for only a few online students, it still needs to be posted on our website. You'd be amazed at how far other students are willing to travel to complete a course or field day. And if you are in more remote areas of the state, just call or email Gail Volt to add any of your classes for the coming year. I challenge those who have not taught for a year or two, to reestablish your "active" status. Even the smallest, rural village should offer at least one basic hunter education class each year. Alaska does not have mandatory requirements for hunter education statewide, yet I would argue that every area of the state needs firearms awareness and safety training for our young children. Take the initiative to be that volunteer that makes a difference in your community. I'm anticipating an increased interest in our classes as new gun owners search out training. The most recent school shooting has stirred up much controversy. Even the NRA has stated that they are ready to offer meaningful contributions to prevent any future massacres. There is also new pressure for changes in gun laws. In recent trips to a few local sporting stores, it was no surprise to see long lines of customers waiting to purchase a firearm, in reaction to possible, future restrictions. In hearing some of the conversations between customers and store clerks, I could sense that a number of those buyers were new to firearm ownership. After seeing some of them handle the firearms in the store, it was clearly apparent that they would benefit from our Basic Hunter Education course or any of the NRA or private firearms training classes now available. It's not only new hunters taking our class but many novice students as well.

You can see from the charts below that 2012 was a successful year with more than 3,500 students receiving training from you, our dedicated core of volunteers. In total effort, you have provided more than 6,300 hours in preparation, classroom time, field course, live-fire, and testing. This is an amazing effort from a dedicated group interested in sharing your knowledge and experience. The HIT Program and State of Alaska sincerely thank each of you for your continued support.

2012 Summary of Classes

Discipline	Classes	Enroll	Pass	Fail	Incomplete
Bowhunter	90	992	966	25	1
Hunter Ed	159	2380	2222	64	94
Muzzleloader	21	161	159	2	0
Totals	270	3533	3347	91	95

Volunteer Instructor Hours

Discipline	Preparation	Classroom	Field	Live Fire	Tot Hours
Bowhunter	292	453	76	427	1248
Hunter Ed	1510	1749	590	839	4688
Muzzleloader	67	179	8	146	400
Totals	1869	2381	674	1412	6336

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Administrative Reminders:

- Now is a great time of the year to let me know if you need any items: lesson plans, shirt, training items, HIT mailing envelopes, etc.
- **LAST CHANCE!** 2012 Instructor of the Year nomination forms are due to HIT by January 10th.
- If you need a course schedule for your area to post at local stores let me know and I can mail you a couple.
- I have pre-punched, laminated instructor answer keys to aid in your test grading. If you would like one, please call or send an email.
- Steering Group meets here in Anchorage, Feb 1-2, 2013. Contact your representative with any agenda items.

Gail 267-2187



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International Hunter Education Association, (IHEA)-USA's Newly Formed Instructor Advisory Committee

Carl Edmiston has been named to the new IHEA-USA, Instructor Advisory Committee. The committee is broken down into four quadrants of the country, which are northeast, southeast, mid-west, and the western US, with two individuals for each area. Carl and John Roybal, from CO are assigned the western quadrant.

This committee has been established to help bring new ideas in the advancement of Hunter Education, nationwide, by communicating issues and suggestions to the Board of Directors of IHEA-USA. All members of the committee are volunteer instructors. The committee will function much like our own HIT Steering Group here in AK only at the IHEA level. The Advisory Committee members (Carl for AK) will be contacting administrators and volunteer instructors to gain insight and to receive suggestions on improving Hunter Education. Currently the committee is in the initial stages of looking at several projects. It has been charged with looking for ways to create more interstate and multi-state interactions of HE instructors, adding more training aid availability for HE instructors, building more training resources in the current IHEA website, and expanding individual IHEA membership with increased benefits and instructor discounts.

In the future you might be hearing from Carl or if you would like to contact him, e-mail him at carledmi@ptialaska.net

Welcome to our New Instructors!

Basic Hunter Ed

Anchorage: Philip Asay, John Calder, Jason Koelling, and Patrick Sullivan

Sterling: Caprice Stoner

Dillingham: Angelo Brito & Bronson Brito

Eagle River: Joe Tate

Juneau: Rick Merritt

Kenai: Justin Horton

Ketchikan: Ted Schenck

Kodiak: Janet Johnson

Mat-Su Valley: Butch & Jennifer Ehmann, and Ron Robertson

Sitka: Jacob Abbott

Valdez: Jacob Hamilton

Fairbanks: Lyle Shelnut

Bowhunter:

Anchorage: Cody Jacobson

Galena: Robert Nunley

Ketchikan: Jeff Shoemaker

Petersburg: Ted Sandhofer

Sitka: Todd Heinger

Muzzleloader:

Eagle River: Art Braendel

Kodiak: Steve Steffensen and Steve Tidwell

Online Update:

The statistics appear to show that our Online Course delivery option, is continuing to grow in popularity. If you look at the last three years, the percentage of students being fully certified via an online course has remained stable or increased. Here are the percentages broken down by discipline:

Basic Hunter Education:

2010 - 14%, 2011 - 20%, 2012 - 25%

Bowhunter Education:

2010 - 61%, 2011 - 72%, 2012 - 73%

Muzzleloader Education:

2010 - 32%, 2011 - 29%, 2012 - 34%

The mandatory Field Day portion of these online classes are very important, so please ensure that all classroom lecture and hands-on training activities are presented to all students.

JOE NAVA—Retires from HIT Program

June 13, 2012 marked 38 years since Joe Nava (Fairbanks) received his Alaska Hunter Ed Instructor's Card. Prior to that date, he taught the NRA Hunter Safety Course for about 11 years. Joe's knowledge and expertise were also put to good use by Jack Alexander (former HE Coordinator), as they travelled the state together, training new volunteer instructors.

Joe, along with many interior volunteers, made the NRA's Youth Hunter Education Challenge, (YHEC) a success in Alaska. His leadership and determination were key in turning an idea into a popular competitive event for youth each summer.

Joe will continue teaching a variety of popular NRA courses, where he cannot keep up with the demand. He hopes to spend a bit more time outside the classroom enjoying more hunting, fishing, shooting, and camping. We owe Joe our thanks and appreciation for serving Alaskans for nearly five decades!



HIT Steering Group

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JUNEAU EMPIRE

Fall 2012

About 200 sixth-graders at Floyd Dryden Middle School are participating this week in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game's Hunters' Education and Firearms Safety Program. The program teaches adolescents how to safely handle and shoot rifles, as well as hunting ethics, conservation and management, navigation and other outdoor skills.

But longtime organizer Ken Coate stressed that teaching kids to become outdoorsmen is not the aim of the program. "We aren't here to create little hunters," Coate said. "We're here to teach firearm safety, firearm handling, how to treat a firearm with respect, how to keep a kid from getting in trouble with a firearm — and everything else is a side benefit."

Floyd Dryden Principal Tom Milliron made a similar point in a letter to parents. "Some students may not plan to hunt or may not be interested in outdoor activities," the Oct. 8 letter stated, "however firearm safety and outdoor safety are essential skills for kids growing up in Southeast Alaska. Students who live in homes without firearms are often exposed to firearms in their friends' homes. They need to understand safe and appropriate behavior in these situations."



Students who complete the Floyd Dryden Outdoor Skills program, as Milliron called it in his letter, will receive a hunter education card recognized in all 50 states, issued by the ADF&G. After a mandatory four hours spent learning firearms handling and safety in the classroom, participating sixth-grade students head out to the range for additional instruction — including live-firing, under careful supervision, .22-caliber rifles. At the Juneau Hunter Education Facility and Indoor Shooting Range, one randomly selected group of students practices shooting with air rifles, while the other students use gunpowder-fired rifles, Range Manager Frank Zmuda said. "We use the same caliber on both firearms, so that they get a similar experience, and the only difference is the propellant," explained Zmuda. "One is powder and one is gas."

Zmuda said staff at the range brief the kids on safety, while additional volunteers supervise them to make sure they are safe. "We try to get one per student, but ... no less than one per two students, so there is an adult immediately in the vicinity to make sure no unsafe acts occur," Zmuda said. Students also learn how to use a map and compass, when it is improper to take a shot while hunting and other skills at the JHEF.

On Tuesday morning, Commissioner Mike Hanley of the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development and Michael Lesmann, special staff assistant to Gov. Sean Parnell, were among special guests who spoke to several classes of students at Floyd Dryden about the program. Lesmann told students they are fortunate to take a more comprehensive program than the one he took in his home state of North Dakota, while Hanley said he got his hunter education card with his son, calling it a "great opportunity" and "probably the best thing I did." "You guys are fortunate," said Hanley to one class. "Not a lot of kids have this opportunity. I'm excited for you." Rep. Cathy Muñoz, R-Juneau, who represents the Mendenhall Valley in the Alaska House of Representatives, spoke to the students as well. "We live in a land very closely tied to the outdoors, and our culture is very much tied to the hunting and outdoor recreation lifestyle, so this opportunity to learn about safety in the out-of-doors is really tremendous," Muñoz told another class. "It's a skill that you'll carry with you for the rest of your life."

Coate thanked Hanley, Lesmann and Muñoz for their support of the program. In one classroom of students, he remarked, "Without the Commissioner's support, this class would not happen. Without the Governor's support, this class wouldn't happen. Without legislative support, this class doesn't happen." The program is hosted by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Program 4-H Outdoor Skills Club, Coate said. He said he has also been involved with efforts to bring the curriculum to other middle schools across Alaska, including in outlying Southeast Alaska communities like Angoon and Yakutat. "My dream is that every sixth-grader in the state has firearms safety and hunter education at the sixth-grade level," said Coate. He said he wants to prevent gun accidents, adding that when a firearms-related mishap occurs, "It's not the gun's fault. It's the people's fault." "That's right," Muñoz agreed.

But after 12 years of coordinating Floyd Dryden's annual course and six years of the same at Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School, Coate said it is time to pass the torch to a group of younger volunteers. "This program's been in place," said Coate, who is retired. "It's got enough people to make it work." Hunters' Ed will come to Dzantik'i Heeni early next March. Coate said he will be out of town at the time, though he invited others to volunteer as instructors for the program.



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PWS Duck Hunt *by Rick Merizon* *ADF&G Small Game Biologist*

Instructor's Corner

With the stroke of a canoe paddle I left a day that had real promise of being one of the best days of duck hunting and entered a day that would change the path of my life. Some of us may have already had days like this and have hopefully lived to tell about it; this is the story of my fateful day.

Living, recreating, and hunting is why most of us chose to live in Alaska. For me, I am a passionate duck hunter, sea kayaker, and outdoor enthusiast. In mid-October my brother-in-law Michael and his son Beck traveled to Alaska to join me on a duck hunting trip in Prince William Sound. We packed all of the necessary gear for a comfortable 3 night stay at a remote public use cabin including warm clothing, plenty of food, a beamy 18' canoe for moving about, VHF radio, SPOT personal locator beacon, and a rented satellite telephone. On the final full day of our trip the three of us had enjoyed a great morning hunt and were taking a midday break at the cabin. Michael was a proud father and I a proud uncle watching 11-year old Beck surgically extract goldeneye from the sky one after the other as they flew past the point near our cabin. Michael and I jumped into the canoe to retrieve his final duck before heading out for an afternoon shoot.

At approximately 3:10pm I reached for the downed bird from the bow of the canoe with my paddle. The weather was very calm, no wind, clear skies with an air temperature of 35F and water temperature of 37F. What followed became a struggle for our very survival. The next conscience memory I have is realizing I was in the water next to an upside down canoe. I looked at Michael near the stern and Beck only 70-80 yards from us on the shore and tried to absorb what had just happened. 'This stuff doesn't happen to me, this happens to other people, faceless people on the news...not me' were my initial, selfish thoughts.

We attempted to swim to the nearest point of land approximately 70-80 yards away. However, it became obvious that the incoming tide was pushing us through the narrow channel we were in and deeper into the adjacent lagoon. The nearest point of land slowly but persistently became an impossible dream. At approximately 3:20pm with arms that felt like tree trunks, and hands that had thoroughly given up to the cold we decided to use the tide to our advantage and swim to the far shore of the lagoon, one quarter mile away. While trying not to hyperventilate from the crippling cold, Michael and I yelled to Beck on the shore to get the satellite telephone and call 911. We struggled and attempted to verbally reinforce motivation in each other, the whole time rapidly losing the battle with our own bodies.

The last memory I have is of being nearly 50 yards from the shore for which we were swimming. I had completely given up on my hands, arms, and shoulders. My legs were becoming so lethargic it was excruciating to kick. Although a calm and dark peace crept up on me and offered a blanket of delirium. At 5:45pm, Mike Bender with Lazy Otter Charters, the U. S. Coast Guard cutter Long Island, and a U. S. Coast Guard helicopter from Kodiak arrived virtually simultaneously. After nearly 60 minutes in the water, Michael and I had gotten to shore, emptied the boat of water, and attempted to paddle back to the cabin. However, first responders found us deeper into the lagoon paddling away from the cabin. Not only were we both beyond helping ourselves but we were frozen to the seats of the canoe, paddles frozen to our hands, and pants frozen to our legs. Severe hypothermia had not only set in but had completely halted our ability to move. Once inside the heated cabin of Mike Bender's boat he rushed us the 35 miles back to Whittier where an ambulance transported us to an Anchorage hospital. Beck was transported from the cabin to Whittier with the help of the U. S. Coast Guard.

There is one thing that saved our lives, a means of communication and someone capable of exercising it. Had we not had a satellite telephone and had Beck not used it, this would not be a first person account of the adventure. This, like so many Alaska "survival" stories is not meant to scare people away from recreating, hunting, and exploring the most remote corners of our great state..at least I sure hope it doesn't! I also hope it doesn't keep people from studying, practicing, and living cautiously in the backcountry. As Alaskans we have the privilege to live here and enjoy all that it offers.

However, it may underscore the importance of using the glorious modern technology we have. I also challenge every outdoor enthusiast to recognize the risks in the most mundane, routine, and basic tasks while in the bush. I took for granted the risks of paddling a canoe in 37F water and would have thrown those that survived, Beck, my wife, my kids, parents, and siblings, into a dark world of trying to come to terms with a boating fatality. I will be eternally grateful to the dedication, persistence, and skill of Mike Bender, the crew aboard the Qayak Chief, and the U. S. Coast Guard.

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