

**PROPOSAL 39**

**5 AAC 92.520(a). Closures and restrictions in state game refuges.**

Amend the hunter education requirement for the Unit 1C Mendenhall Wetland State Game Refuge as follows:

*“a hunter for waterfowl on the Mendenhall State Game Refuge must have successfully completed a certified hunter education course, except a hunter who is **under 13 years of age** must be accompanied by an adult, or must have successfully completed a certified hunter education course; before hunting in the refuge,”...*

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** This proposal will address an inadvertent hole in the current rules for youth who want to hunt on the refuge and it will increase a young person’s access to learning about the outdoors and responsible waterfowl hunting. The state provides an exceptional hunters education program through the Juneau School District to all Juneau students in 6th grade. Many young people have parents or other adults in their lives who already hunt on the refuge and they have accompanied these adults since they were very little. Under the current regulations, a 9-year-old can hunt with an adult but when they turn 10, they must be ready to pass the hunters safety course to continue to hunt. This restriction makes no sense, so it’s important to move the hunter education requirements from 10 to 13 because it allows youth to continue to hunt with the responsible adults in their lives and take the hunters education course with their classmates in 6th grade.

As an example, a typical 6th grader will turn 12 during that school year (September 1st through August 30th). By choosing age 13 as the requirement, it means that a youth who turns 12 on September 2nd is not excluded from hunting that coming waterfowl season because they have not taken the hunters education class yet. In speaking with the Juneau School District, the course usually takes place in the spring, therefore 13 is the logical age to correct this issue.

As national organizations like Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, and US Fish and Wildlife Service have found, waterfowl hunter numbers in the US have been on a steady decline for the last several decades (see especially <https://deltawaterfowl.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/03/LoomingCrisis.pdf>). Important efforts are in place to recruit underrepresented groups like women (Becoming an Outdoors Woman) and youth (hunter education courses), and there are efforts to engage with lapsed and new adult hunters, too, but these educational opportunities are not always met with adequate youth-friendly hunting opportunities. Equal access to the Mendenhall Refuge for all youth is very important. This slight adjustment to the regulations will fix this issue.

**PROPOSED BY:** Erich Schaal

(EG-F22-113)

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