



Hunter Information & Training Program News

Spring 2026

Coordinator's Corner-Ginamaria Smith

Inside This Issue

Coordinator's Corner	1
Program News	2
New Instructors	3
Instructor Notes	4



First, congratulations to Tom Halverson for receiving a Director's Achievement Award for Wildlife Outreach. Tom demonstrates a high degree of integrity and his genuine enthusiasm for teaching the public about the outdoors, wildlife management, and firearm safety has helped to advance ADF&G's mission statewide. Tom shares his knowledge with hundreds of students each year by teaching school hunter education field days, a variety of Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) classes, and Alaskans Afield classes. His students walk away with usable outdoor skills and the ability to apply them safely. His BOW chainsaw

classes are a local favorite and fill quickly every time! Over the years, Tom has assisted in developing safe Alaskan hunters, improved hunter ethics and responsibility, and passed on valuable traditions to thousands of new outdoor enthusiasts.

Second, the HIT Program has had some big changes in staffing this spring. Maria Bakic, the Statewide Outreach & Education Coordinator left the program in early January and Mike Kelly, the Southeast Regional Coordinator left the program in mid-May. Maria was part of the HIT Program team since 2021 and Mike joined us in 2024. Maria helped increase the number of BOW classes and Alaskans Afield classes offered statewide as



well as increasing the reach of NASP around the state! Mike was an asset to the Juneau middle school hunter ed program and helped ensure hunter ed classes were held across Southeast. Their enthusiasm for teaching will be missed, but luckily they both plan on remaining HIT Program volunteers. We wish them the best of luck in their new endeavors.



Third, as the summer progresses, we will see an uptick in public classes. Your regional coordinators will be reaching out and asking for assistance with instructing all of these classes so that we can meet the need before hunting season. Please respond to these emails whether you can help instruct a class or not. We have lots of new instructors who got trained that we will be pairing up with seasoned instructors and if everyone helps to teach 1-2 classes this summer then we should be all set.

Thank you to everyone who helped with school hunter ed classes this semester and have a great summer! Looking forward to sun, fishing, hiking, and hopefully the end of the snow flurries!



DID YOU KNOW?
The HIT Program
is lucky to have
a multitude of
state and federal
law enforcement
professionals help
instruct hunter ed.



Hunter Information & Training Program News

Spring 2026

Heather Hoyt

New HIT Program Outreach & Education Coordinator

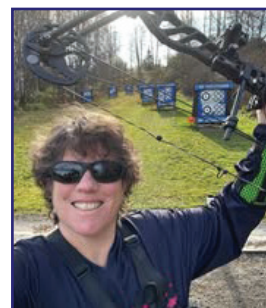


Hello, I'm very excited to be joining the HIT Program! I grew up outside of Boston and moved to Fairbanks when I was 18 to attend UAF in 1991. I moved to Anchorage in 1995 and finally completed my B.S. Biological Sciences through UAA in 2004. I have spent most of my career working in fisheries genetics and more specifically at the ADF&G Gene Conservation Laboratory in Anchorage. I've spent a combined total of 20 years working in the lab. This brings me to my new next adventure – joining the HIT Program! I'm eager to learn and explore something new that will deepen and complement my love of the outdoors, archery, and empowering women.

My wife, Kate, and I spend as many of the summer weekends hiking and camping in and around the Southcentral area. I have a passion for long-distance backpacking and have so far completed over 350 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) along with completing both the Chilkoot and Resurrection Trails twice. My dream is to complete the entire PCT in one year but until then I'll often be found on local trails in Chugach front range.



I am thrilled that this fall, I will be going on my first moose hunt, archery only, in GMU 24A. I struck beginners luck and got a moose tag the first year entering! I will be spending most of this summer shooting arrows, practicing my moose calls, and prepping for my hunt. Thankfully, my close friend of 35 years that is an experienced archery moose hunter will be going with me. I'll keep you posted on how it goes!



Heather can be reached at heather.hoyt@alaska.gov or 907-267-2534.

Hunter Ed School Field Days



Mat-Su Career & Tech
High School

It's been a busy spring semester! After all the teachers who got trained as instructors started helping their students through the coursework, we held over 50 school field days! Thank you to all of our instructors who helped to make these field days a success! We just wanted to share a couple photos of the students.



Palmer High School



Metlakatla



New Stuyahok



IHEA Instructor Resource Site
<https://www.ihea-usa.org/>

HIT Program Site
www.huntereducation.alaska.gov



Hunter Information & Training Program News



Spring 2026

Welcome to Our New Volunteer Instructors

We wish to extend a warm welcome to all new volunteer instructors who have joined us since the publication of our last newsletter. Congratulations and welcome aboard!

Hunter Education:

Akiachak: Zachary Schneider

Anchor Point: Jamie Potvin, Reuben Sherwood

Anchorage: Katie Anderson, Sven Berglund, Boyd Blihovde, Lucas Byker, Marco Christian, Nathan Fitzgerald, David Harper, Raymon Hedges, Ian Kirby, Michael Vallerga

Aniak: Laura Anania, Braden Swanson, Kennedy Werner

Dillingham: Andrew Berkoski, Stanford Culling, Rebecca Duke, Terry Fuller, Eric Marr, Iqugpak

Nanalook: Alison Reynolds, Travis Wren

Eagle River: Kayla Guerrero

Fairbanks: Steven Shannon, Sky Brandt, Belinda Ebel, Elizabeth Jaeschke, Andrew McEwen

Ft. Wainwright: Dakota Lichliter

Girdwood: Leola Rutherford

Golovin: Reymundo Gomez

Juneau: Leslye Gale

Kake: Jacob Aaro

Kodiak: Matthew Delgado, Larry Fisher, James Kenshalo, Bailey O'Reilly

Manokotak: Louisa Gloko, Panteleimon Paul

New Stuyahok: Anastasia Ishnook

Palmer: James Majetich, Sean Niekamp

Port Lions: Malu Benedicto, Ronald Wise

Seward: Regan Schwertfeger

Shishmaref: Daniel Barnett

Sitka: Sydney Carter, Drew Larson, Keith Shelton, Benjamin White

Soldotna: Alexander Schwartz, Robin West

Teller: Reid Jackowick

Togiak: James Active, Sam Gosuk

Tuluksak: Cullen Chandler

Valdez: David Leahy, Dale Mitchell, Jason Shiell

Wasilla: Gabriel Bailey, Jacquelyn Crace-Murray, Robin Cunningham, Anthony Gann, Chelsea Lloyd, Joshua OBrien, Emalyn Schliesing, Masen Smith

Bowhunter Education:

Anchorage: Jonathan Godwin, David Harper

Fairbanks: Bryan Freed

Wasilla: Joseph Betz, Anthony Gann, Joshua OBrien

Muzzleloader Education:

Anchorage: Raymon Hedges, William Steele

Eagle River: Jason Amaro

Soldotna: Alexander Schwartz

Wasilla: Joseph Betz

Willow: Michael Leach

Crossbow Education:

Anchor Point: Thomas Hagberg

Juneau: Michael Kelly

Kodiak: Larry Fisher

Sterling: Ronald Haberman

Wasilla: Joshua OBrien

Willow: Michael Leach

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 all travel costs to attend the training.

Hunter Education instructor trainings

Anchorage — October 2 & 3

Fairbanks — October 9 & 10

Juneau — November 6 & 7

Bowhunter Education instructor trainings

Fairbanks — August 1

Anchorage — September 26

HIT Steering Group Members

Melissa Hendrickson (Interior)
melissamch413@gmail.com

Andy Finke (Rural)
bdaf49@gmail.com

Jason Amaro (Southcentral)
amaro_jason@hotmail.com

Tom Kowalske (Southeast)
thomas.kowalske@alaska.gov

Brock Meredith (Southeast)
brockmeredith@mac.com

Hunter Information & Training Program News



Spring 2026

Instructor Notes



Above & Beyond Recipients

We'd like to recognize the following instructors for going "above and beyond" this year. Thanks to the Alaska Wild Sheep Foundation for providing Cabela's gift certificates to help us recognize our Above & Beyond recipients.

We'll continue to recognize 1-4 extraordinary volunteer instructors each quarter, so please keep an eye out for co-instructors who go "above and beyond" in the next few months and send HIT Program staff an email.



Carmen Daggett (Utqiagvik)

Carmen has been working towards offering a school hunter ed class in Utqiagvik ever since getting certified as a hunter ed instructor in 2018. After giving multiple presentations to the school board and working to incorporate community hunters into the class curriculum, the class was finally approved. In March, 7 students

obtained their hunter ed certifications and another dozen students attended the field day to learn about safe firearm handling.

Paul Frankland (Anchorage)

Since becoming a hunter ed instructor in May 2025, Paul has become a staple instructor in Anchorage. He taught 9 hunter ed classes in 2025 and has taught 5 already in 2026. He also helps teach survival skills at the Outdoor Youth Days Camp and got certified as a shotgun coach and helped coach a shotgun team this spring as part of the Rabbit Creek Youth Shotgun League.



Bryan Freed (Fairbanks)

Bryan became a hunter ed instructor in October 2025 and has already taught 7 classes. He just went through the bowhunter ed instructor training this month and will be a great addition to the bowhunter ed instructor cadre in Fairbanks as well.

Ellen Hannan (Craig)

While Ellen has been our lead instructor for Prince of Wales Island for over 20 years, she really got to put her skills to use this month. Five schools on POW have students ready to attend a field day. Ellen coordinated with the teachers, fellow instructors, and

local RSOs to make a school field day happen for all of these students.



HIT Program Staff Contact Information

Anchorage:

Gina Smith 267-2196

Ben Matthews 267-2373

Luke Metherell 267-2241

Arianne Asay 267-2187

Heather Hoyt 267-2534

Fairbanks:

Tom Halverson 459-7211

Dani Easterling
459-7242

Juneau:

Dan Palicka 586-4101



**Shishmaref students
completing the
proficiency shoot
during their "spring"
hunter ed class**