

HUNTERS NETWORK OF WISCONSIN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

www.huntersnetwork.org

Promoting Hunter Recruitment and Retention

Hunters make essential contributions to Wisconsin, supporting habitat protection, wildlife management, and conservation education through their actions, organizations, and license sales. In 2006, a poll showed that 77% of the American public approved of hunting, but despite this, the number of hunters in the U.S. has fallen. Broad social changes, such

“Over 600 organizations in Wisconsin work to preserve and promote the state’s hunting heritage.”

as urbanization, an aging population, and competing time commitments, have contributed to this trend, resulting in decreased hunter recruitment and retention. However, one of the biggest problems facing hunting today is the lack of social support available to both beginning and experienced hunters.

Wisconsin has over 600 hunting organizations dedicated to reversing the decline in outdoor recreation. These organizations play important roles in preserving and promoting hunting in the state by supporting and recognizing experienced hunters and by engaging new hunters and providing them with skills, education, and camaraderie. Research shows the following actions, whether undertaken by individuals or organizations, are key elements in preserving Wisconsin’s hunting heritage.

Strategies for Preserving Wisconsin’s Hunting Heritage

IT TAKES A HUNTER TO MAKE A HUNTER

Almost all lifelong hunters talk about having a role model who helped them become a hunter. Most hunters enter the sport through one of two mentored experiences: almost 80% come in through hunting families at young ages and nearly another 20% are introduced to hunting during their early twenties by co-workers and friends or through marriage into a hunting family. Offering to take a newcomer out in

the field may be the single biggest contribution that a hunter can make to our hunting heritage. Learning to hunt takes time, new skills, and equipment: without a mentor, the experience is out of reach for some. By mentoring only once a year – or even every few years – seasonal hunters can ensure that newcomers are learning the techniques and values that are necessary for the continuing the hunting tradition.

SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES TO GO BEYOND TECHNICAL SKILLS

Hunting programs have often focused on providing technical skills, but passing on the beliefs and qualities associated with hunting culture are equally important. By emphasizing the valuable contributions hunters make to the environment and the economy, and the benefits of family time, the harvest of healthy meat, and time spent in the outdoors, new hunters will start to see that they are part of a unique and important culture. Mentors can play a role by helping new hunters understand they are part of an important legacy.

PROVIDE ONGOING SOCIAL SUPPORT

In the future, hunting organizations will welcome non-hunting family members and students into their programs since these individuals can become or remain supportive of hunting and hunters in their community. Non-hunting friends and family contribute to hunting culture by providing the support (childcare, land access, information, equipment loans) that is necessary for hunters to go out. It may be as important to educate non-hunters as it is to educate hunters. Programs that offer alternate educational events on such topics as the importance of providing land access, game butchering, and game cooking allow supportive family members and friends to participate in the camaraderie of hunting.

KNOW WHY PEOPLE HUNT

Hunters go afield for a variety of reasons, such as enjoyment of outdoor recreation, being close to nature, camaraderie with friends and family, exercise, harvesting game, and developing skills. People who have multiple reasons for going out are more likely to continue hunting. Recognizing that new hunters may start with different motivations as compared with experienced hunters will make it easier to engage in conversations with potential

participants about trying out hunting. Talk about and respect all the different reasons why hunters go out.

EMPHASIZE HEALTH BENEFITS OF BEING OUTDOORS

Along with the traditional reasons to hunt, more and more emphasis is being placed on the mental and physical benefits of being outdoors. Research has shown a link between being outside and stress reduction. Other studies have promoted outdoor experiences as a way for children to battle obesity, Attention Deficit Disorder, and depression. Emphasizing closeness to nature will make hunting more appealing to those who are looking for an outdoors experience. Discuss the healthy benefits of hunting with newcomers, including exercise, stress relief, and increased concentration.

FOCUS ON FAMILY TOGETHERNESS

Hunters introduced to the sport by family members hunt more frequently and are more likely to be avid hunters throughout their life when compared to hunters initiated in some other way. In the future, educational workshops and recognition banquets will need to include the entire family and incorporate family values to be effective. Consider giving awards and recognition to families that hunt and promote the sport together.

PROMOTE THE UNIQUE CULTURE AND VALUES

Hunting is more than a hobby or sport; it is a lifestyle. Becoming a hunter involves more than just using a weapon and harvesting game. Becoming a hunter means that the individual starts to view themselves as a hunter and develops a hunting identity that values nature, technical skills, time with family and friends, and giving back to the community. This requires a supportive

group of initiators, companions, and mentors; opportunities to go out in the field; and instructors who share their values, techniques, and methods. Successful organizations will recognize the many ways that hunters give back to their communities through land protection, wildlife management, donations of meat to food pantries, and volunteering..

WELCOME NON-TRADITIONAL HUNTERS

Hunting has largely been seen as a sport for white, rural males, but as the United States becomes more diverse, the development of programs that connect different ethnic groups, age groups, and genders to hunting resources will be necessary. Wisconsin already has one of the most diverse hunting populations in the nation, and it is important to recognize the different ways that different groups become involved. For example, most female hunters are introduced to hunting by their husbands or fathers. Educational hunting programs for women will also include spouses and children, as women often view hunting as a way to spend quality time with family members in the outdoors.

SHARE THE HARVEST

Eating game together is a good way to get both hunters and non-hunters involved in the hunt, but it also has health benefits. A diet that includes wild game such as venison and game birds is typically low in saturated fat while high in polyunsaturated fat (good fat), protein, fiber and calcium. Share game meat and your favorite recipes with people who might be interested in hunting. Recognizing that game meat is healthy and delicious may motivate a non-hunter to begin hunting.



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FOCUS ON HUNTERS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONSERVATION

Hunting is deeply woven into the Wisconsin economic fabric. In 2006, Wisconsin had 697,215 resident hunters who spent nearly \$1.4 billion in the state: \$600 million went directly in to the state economy, 25,298 jobs were supported, and more than \$197 million went to state and local taxes. These are major economic contributions to the state and should be recognized as such. Educate newcomers so they know the money spent on licenses and equipment goes back into their communities - creating jobs, providing tax revenue, funding education programs, and protecting natural resources. §

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The Hunters' Network of Wisconsin is dedicated to helping hunting and wildlife conservation organizations recruit and retain new hunters in order to maintain Wisconsin's hunting heritage along with the social, environmental and economic benefits it provides.

We use online technology to provide new hunters, mentors, and youth with resources and information about mentored hunting and provide a forum in which new hunters and their mentors can share their hunting experiences and connect with others who share their interests in hunting. HNW is a partnership between the University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. For more information, contact info@huntersnetwork.org or visit www.huntersnetwork.org.

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