



Families Afield

An initiative for the future of hunting

Removing barriers, opening doors, helping young hunters and
their families enjoy sporting traditions together

National Wild Turkey Federation
U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance
National Shooting Sports Foundation



Helping Families Hunt Together

Still dark outside, the clock rings and the hunter rises to greet a new day. Anticipation awakens his soul like a hot cup of coffee. This morning he will watch sunrise over a misty river bottom. Smell the earthy scent of autumn. Listen to wild geese gliding southward on a chill breeze.

But the hunter is not just a witness to nature; he's a participant in it. He envisions deer approaching through fallen leaves. If he has honed his skills, keeps his wits and is lucky, he will provide loved ones with healthful venison. Today he is part of a family-sustaining, safe, hallowed tradition that continues to resonate with support from nearly 80 percent of Americans.

Many hunters, both men and women, long to share the experience with their young daughters and sons, but doing so would constitute a criminal act.

Barriers to Hunting

There are 20 states with laws that prohibit youth from hunting with their fathers and mothers. Age restrictions mean that politics, not parents, decide when youngsters are mature enough to join their families for a deer hunt. Mandatory prerequisite coursework and certification processes add more red tape that prevents the introduction of hunting.

Over time, declining participation will devastate

hunting. Current data show only 25 percent of youth from hunting households are active in the sport. Over the past quarter-century, the total number of hunters has dropped 23 percent. New hunters are not being recruited. Moreover, youth restrictions may compound participation problems as parents who can't legally go with their youngsters give up on hunting, too.

Opening Doors with Families Afield

Leaders at the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance (USSA) are concerned about these laws and their impacts, which span from heartbroken hunters to dramatic economic losses—especially in rural America—to severe cuts in state wildlife and habitat conservation programs. Based on new research analyzing these issues, the three organizations teamed to launch a new hunting apprenticeship initiative, Families Afield.

Families Afield is an education and outreach program to help states eliminate unnecessary barriers into youth hunting. Working with elected representatives, agency officials, hunters and the general public, the founders share a vision of creating opportunities for youth, and helping families enjoy the sporting tradition together.





The Time to Act is Now

There are 30 states with youth- and family-friendly hunting laws, 17 of which have no restrictions on youngsters. Data show these 17 states are leading the way in hunter recruitment, ensuring their hunting heritage lasts long into the future. And the best news is, these young people, when mentored by an adult, are the safest of all hunters—of the 14.7 million hunters active in 2002, only .0001 percent were supervised youth involved in an accident.

Statistics also show the time to welcome more young hunters is now, while there are large numbers of parents who actively hunt and would be willing to introduce their young sons, daughters or other youth, if given the regulatory freedom to do so.

“Adult-supervised young hunters have a proven safety record, and youths who start hunting early in life are more likely to hunt as adults. If we can’t hunt with our kids, we’re missing more than sharing a great tradition with our children and grandchildren—we’re missing a chance to cultivate a lifestyle and passion that our country needs more than ever,” said Rob Keck, CEO of NWT.

“By the time kids are in middle school, they’re already being pulled away by the allure of video

games, organized sports or other activities,” said USSA President Bud Pidgeon. “We want young people to have the choice to participate in hunting. Hunting teaches respect for life and nature, responsibility and accountability.”

Doug Painter, president of NSSF, said, “Hunting is revered in our country’s character and economy. It’s indelibly tied to conservation and is statistically safe. It adds richness to the lives of participants. We shouldn’t allow age restrictions to compromise its future.”

The following digest of youth hunting research outlines the case for allowing hunters to introduce their sons and daughters to this cherished

outdoor lifestyle and American heritage. For additional information, contact Doug Jeanneret of USSA at 614-888-4868; Jonathan Harling of NWT at 1-800-THE-NWTF; or Steve Wagner of NSSF at 203-426-1320.

Youth Participation Rates: Not Keeping Pace

Researchers have found nationally that for every 100 hunters lost, only 69 hunters take their place. An indicator was developed to compare future participation rates in hunting. The indicator is based on proportions of hunters within overall populations of youth versus adults. Dividing the youth hunter percentage by the adult hunter percentage provides a “Hunter Replacement Ratio.”

The lower the ratio, the more drastic the potential decline in hunting. A ratio of 1.0, if maintained over time, suggests that current per capita participation in hunting may be sustained into the future. On the other hand, a ratio of .50 suggests that current levels of hunting participation will be cut in half. Ratios are not meant to be an absolute forecast, only an indicator best used for comparative purposes. (See page 4 for a state-by-state comparison.)

National Hunter Replacement Ratios

Population Ages 6-15	Hunters Ages 6-15	Percent Hunters	Population Ages 16+	Hunters Ages 16+	Percent Hunters	Hunter Replacement Ratio
40,859,000	1,727,000	4.23%	211,872,000	13,039,000	6.15%	.69

Source: National survey of fishing, hunting and wildlife associated recreation.

State-By-State Hunter Replacement Ratios

State	Population Ages 6-15	Hunters Ages 6-15	Percent Hunters	Population Ages 16+	Hunters Ages 16+	Percent Hunters	Hunter Replacement Ratio
Missouri	809,000	92,000	11.37%	4,206,000	413,000	9.82%	1.16
Oklahoma	498,000	51,000	10.24%	2,587,000	241,000	9.32%	1.10
New Hampshire	182,000	11,000	6.04%	954,000	53,000	5.56%	1.09
Rhode Island	144,000	2,000	1.39%	765,000	10,000	1.31%	1.06
Delaware	106,000	3,000	2.83%	599,000	16,000	2.67%	1.06
Arizona	806,000	28,000	3.47%	3,700,000	124,000	3.35%	1.04
Mississippi	438,000	54,000	12.33%	2,111,000	257,000	12.17%	1.01
Alabama	618,000	56,000	9.06%	3,427,000	316,000	9.22%	0.98
West Virginia	233,000	37,000	15.88%	1,447,000	235,000	16.24%	0.98
Indiana	874,000	51,000	5.84%	4,558,000	284,000	6.23%	0.94
Florida	2,159,000	43,000	1.99%	12,171,000	270,000	2.22%	0.90
Illinois	1,833,000	60,000	3.27%	9,244,000	340,000	3.68%	0.89
Maryland	778,000	21,000	2.70%	4,078,000	124,000	3.04%	0.89
Iowa	413,000	33,000	7.99%	2,201,000	203,000	9.22%	0.87
California	5,239,000	46,000	0.88%	25,982,000	277,000	1.07%	0.82
Tennessee	790,000	48,000	6.08%	4,317,000	320,000	7.41%	0.82
Vermont	83,000	10,000	12.05%	479,000	75,000	15.66%	0.77
Georgia	1,224,000	58,000	4.74%	6,096,000	377,000	6.18%	0.77
North Carolina	1,171,000	47,000	4.01%	5,918,000	314,000	5.31%	0.76
Ohio	1,637,000	69,000	4.22%	8,645,000	482,000	5.58%	0.76
Texas	3,276,000	175,000	5.34%	15,445,000	1,126,000	7.29%	0.73
South Dakota	112,000	13,000	11.61%	559,000	90,000	16.10%	0.72
Kansas	392,000	28,000	7.14%	2,017,000	202,000	10.01%	0.71
Colorado	623,000	23,000	3.69%	3,215,000	168,000	5.23%	0.71
Virginia	977,000	38,000	3.89%	5,471,000	309,000	5.65%	0.69
Kentucky	557,000	32,000	5.75%	3,121,000	273,000	8.75%	0.66
Wyoming	71,000	8,000	11.27%	377,000	65,000	17.24%	0.65
Hawaii	160,000	2,000	1.25%	916,000	18,000	1.97%	0.64
South Carolina	553,000	26,000	4.70%	3,080,000	232,000	7.53%	0.62
Pennsylvania	1,656,000	96,000	5.80%	9,303,000	867,000	9.32%	0.62
New Mexico	285,000	15,000	5.26%	1,337,000	114,000	8.53%	0.62
Nebraska	248,000	15,000	6.05%	1,266,000	128,000	10.11%	0.60
Alaska	112,000	11,000	9.82%	454,000	75,000	16.52%	0.59
Utah	384,000	26,000	6.77%	1,554,000	178,000	11.45%	0.59
Minnesota	733,000	68,000	9.28%	3,688,000	582,000	15.78%	0.59
Maine	170,000	12,000	7.06%	1,005,000	123,000	12.24%	0.58
Montana	132,000	18,000	13.64%	699,000	171,000	24.46%	0.56
New York	2,597,000	65,000	2.50%	14,201,000	642,000	4.52%	0.55
New Jersey	1,192,000	13,000	1.09%	6,300,000	125,000	1.98%	0.55
North Dakota	89,000	9,000	10.11%	483,000	92,000	19.05%	0.53
Wisconsin	778,000	60,000	7.71%	4,059,000	591,000	14.56%	0.53
Massachusetts	848,000	7,000	0.83%	4,837,000	78,000	1.61%	0.51
Arkansas	373,000	28,000	7.51%	1,999,000	309,000	15.46%	0.49
Connecticut	478,000	4,000	0.84%	2,536,000	46,000	1.81%	0.46
Washington	869,000	20,000	2.30%	4,516,000	231,000	5.12%	0.45
Louisiana	677,000	27,000	3.99%	3,306,000	314,000	9.50%	0.42
Idaho	206,000	13,000	6.31%	972,000	151,000	15.53%	0.41
Oregon	476,000	15,000	3.15%	2,630,000	235,000	8.94%	0.35
Nevada	302,000	3,000	0.99%	1,454,000	48,000	3.30%	0.30
Michigan	1,498,000	37,000	2.47%	7,587,000	725,000	9.56%	0.26
Totals	40,859,000	1,727,000	4.23%	211,872,000	13,039,000	6.15%	0.69

Source: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation. (2001)

Youth Hunting Restrictions Hurt Recruitment

Researchers categorized states based on how rigorously they restrict youth from hunting. Criteria were weighted heavily on the age at which young people may begin hunting, particularly big game, since that's the main area of growth in hunting today. Also, hunter education requirements were examined with favor given to states that permit parents to introduce their kids to hunting under strict adult supervision before coursework and certification are required.

Category 1: Very Restrictive

These states prohibit introducing youth to all or most hunting, particularly for big game, until age 12 or later. Also, in most cases, youngsters may not experience hunting until they've met hunter education requirements.

Of these states, 80 percent exhibit ratios lower than the national average.

Very Restrictive States	
State	Ratio
Rhode Island	1.06
California	0.82
South Dakota	0.72
Colorado	0.71
Wyoming	0.65
Pennsylvania	0.62
Nebraska	0.60
Utah	0.59
Maine	0.58
Montana	0.56
New York	0.55
New Jersey	0.55
North Dakota	0.53
Wisconsin	0.53
Massachusetts	0.51
Connecticut	0.46
Idaho	0.41
Oregon	0.35
Nevada	0.30
Michigan	0.26
20 States	

Category 2: Somewhat Restrictive

These states prohibit introducing youth to all or most hunting, particularly for big game, until they've met hunter education requirements.

Of these states, 38 percent exhibit ratios lower than the national average.

Somewhat Restrictive States	
State	Ratio
Delaware	1.06
Arizona	1.04
Indiana	0.94
Illinois	0.89
Maryland	0.89
Ohio	0.76
Kansas	0.71
Virginia	0.69
Kentucky	0.66
Hawaii	0.64
South Carolina	0.62
New Mexico	0.62
Minnesota	0.59
13 States	

Category 3: Least Restrictive

These states permit introducing youth to hunting largely at their parents' discretion. Youngsters are allowed to experience restricted hunting under supervision before meeting hunter education requirements.

Of these states, 24 percent exhibit ratios lower than the national average.

Least Restrictive States	
State	Ratio
Missouri	1.16
Oklahoma	1.10
New Hampshire	1.09
Mississippi	1.01
Alabama	0.98
West Virginia	0.98
Florida	0.90
Iowa	0.87
Tennessee	0.82
Georgia	0.77
North Carolina	0.77
Vermont	0.76
Texas	0.73
Alaska	0.59
Arkansas	0.49
Washington	0.45
Louisiana	0.42
17 States	

Hunting is Safe

For decades, hunters and conservation agencies have emphasized firearms safety, and nearly 70,000 adult volunteers continue to help agencies teach basic and advanced courses. Hunting-related shooting incidents have declined by 31 percent over the past 10 years. Even when factoring in all injuries that occur during hunting, such as twisted ankles, cuts, broken bones, etc, hunting is comparatively very safe.

Sports Injuries		
Rank	Sport/Activity	Injuries per 100 Participants
1	Football (Tackle)	18.8
2	Ice Hockey	15.9
3	Boxing	12.7
5	Soccer	9.3
6	Cheerleading	9.0
7	Basketball	7.6
10	Baseball	5.8
14	Football (Touch)	4.4
16	Volleyball	3.1
21	Tennis	2.5
24	Horseback Riding	1.8
25	Aerobics	1.7
28	Roller Hockey	1.3
29	Hunting	1.3
30	Mountain/Rock Climbing	1.2

Source: A Comprehensive Study of Sports Injuries in the U.S. (American Sports Data, Inc., 2002)

Supervised Youth Hunters are Especially Safe

National statistics show that young hunters, particularly those supervised by an attentive parent or other responsible adult, compose a fraction of the hunting-related firearms incidents that occur each year.

Researchers found that most youth hunter incidents occurred in the absence of an adult.

Firearm-Related Hunting Incidents, by Group		
	Total Participantes (14,766,000)	
	Accidents % of Total Participants Involved	Fatalities % of Total Participants Involved
All Hunters	.000052	.000005
Youth Hunters	.000005	.0000008
Supervised Youth Hunters	.0000016	.0000002

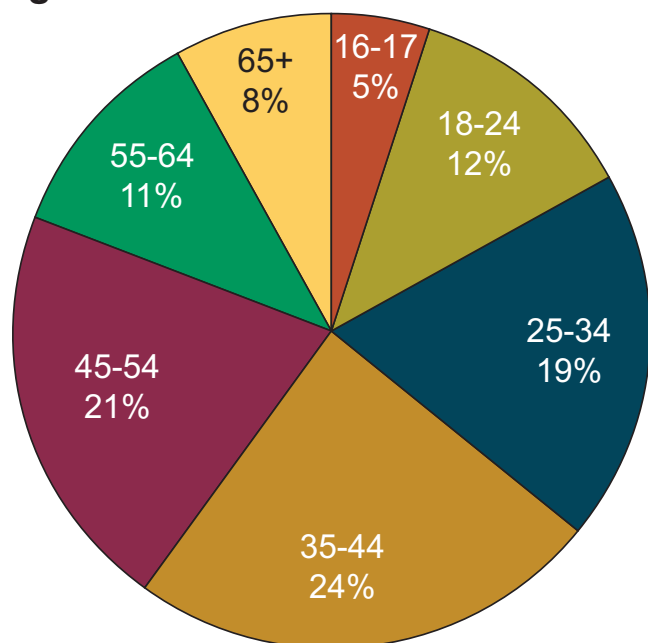
Source: The Hunter Incident Clearinghouse, 2002—A project of the International Hunter Education Association, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Wildlife Restoration Act, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, NWTf, and Silvertip Productions, Ltd.



Demographics Reveal an Opportunity

Most hunters are introduced to hunting by a parent. Currently, hunters ages 25-54—adults likely to have children mature enough to be introduced and mentored in hunting—represent a large proportion, 64 percent, of hunters. With adequate regulatory freedoms, this group of more than 9 million people represents a key to the future of hunting in America.

Age of Adult Hunters



Source: National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation. (2001)

How 'Families Afield' Will Work

Based on this research, the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, National Wild Turkey Federation, and National Shooting Sports Foundation share a strong conviction that parents should be free to decide when their children are mature enough for hunting. Further, we believe youth should have a chance to experience adult-supervised hunts before they are required to attain certification in hunter education coursework.

With these values in mind, "Families Afield" will rely on a variety of state-specific initiatives. States will be selected on need, opportune climate and available resources including volunteer manpower and budget.

Program partners will work with elected representatives, agency officials, hunters and the general public. Specific goals are twofold. First, help each audience understand the benefits of not only permitting, but also actively encouraging, families to hunt together. Second, persuade leaders to re-examine their state's institutional impediments to hunting, inspecting old assumptions through the bright lens of modern statistical facts.

New partners will be enthusiastically welcomed. Conservation groups and hunting organizations are important to broad, steady success over time.

In the end, all Americans who appreciate wildlife and understand conservation have ample reason to support Families Afield. Since hunting fees and excise taxes underwrite most habitat and resource management programs today, falling hunter-based revenues will inevitably erode into a national debate over who, if anyone, will step up to pay the bills for wildlife stewardship.



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