

Recommended Reading

Chapter 12



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1. Hunter Education Independent Study Guide
2. *A Sand County Almanac* Aldo Leopold Oxford University Press, 1989
3. *Inherit the Hunt: A Journey into the Heart of American Hunting* Jim Posewitz Falcon Publishing, 1999
4. *Heartsblood: Hunting, Spirituality, and Wildness in America* David Peterson Island Press, 2000
5. *Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting* Jim Posewitz Falcon Publishing, 1994
6. *Bloodties: Nature, Culture, and the Hunt* Ted Kerasote Kodansha International, 1994
7. *A Hunter's Road: A Journey With Gun and Dog Across the American Uplands* Jim Fergus May be out-of-print
8. *Out Home* John Madson May be out-of-print
9. *Ishi and Elvis* Jim Hamm The Lyons Press, 1997

Recruiting Sportsmen



In plain language, if numbers of hunters and fishermen decline, the group will lose their influence in society at large.

If the future of hunting and fishing in the U.S. depends on attracting new participants, these outdoor sports may be on shaky ground. Long-term trends show that, percentage-wise, fewer Americans -- particularly youngsters -- are taking up hunting and fishing. Also, of those who do, their frequency of getting outdoors is dropping. In other words, they are less avid about these sports than their forebears.

Implications of these trends are scary. In plain language, if numbers of hunters and fishermen decline, these groups will lose their influence in society at large, and management agencies won't collect enough license and tax revenues to run their programs. The long-term result will be diminished game and fish resources and less opportunity to enjoy them.

This is why Bruce Matthews feels more effort should be made to recruit newcomers into outdoor sports, and he knows how to do it. Matthews is a faculty member in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. A year ago he set about learning why people take up hunting or fishing, or fail to. His findings shed light on what must be done to bolster the ranks of outdoor participants.

"The opportunity to hunt and fish depends on the availability of places to go," Matthews begins. "By and large, there are fewer places available, particularly for hunters. More landowners are posting or leasing their property. More rural land is being converted to subdivisions and shopping malls. Every new development eats away at the land base for hunting, especially.

"Also, our social structure has changed greatly in the last couple of generations. We've moved away from a rural lifestyle that fosters hunting and fishing as traditional activities. Now, urban dwellers, and especially children, have a host of other, more accessible activities competing for their time."

Nevertheless, based on research he conducted or reviewed, Matthews has devised a five-point program for recruiting new hunters and fishermen for long term participation in these sports.

"The first step is having a threshold experience, that first positive introduction to hunting or fishing that makes beginners say, 'Yeah, I really want to do that. That's cool.' There are a lot of programs out there that provide this opportunity: Fishing derbies, hunting or fishing clinics, National Hunting and Fishing Day programs, etc. These activities do a good job of gaining beginners' initial interest."

Matthews continues, "The next requirement is more perplexing. Beginning hunters or fishermen must have access to equipment. They must know what they need, then how to obtain it without making expensive purchases. This is a major problem in urban areas. Hunting and fishing equipment is no longer in the closets or garages of many families. That equipment has to be available to beginners until they make the commitment to take up hunting and fishing and buy their own equipment.

"Third, they must have access to the resource, somewhere to go. There must be places where a beginning hunter can shoot squirrels or rabbits or where a beginning fisherman can catch bluegills or catfish. These places must exist, and people must know they exist. Somebody's got to tell them about these places.

"Fourth, a beginner must have a guide or somebody to help him learn to hunt or fish, somebody who knows the ropes and who is willing to spend time with him and encourage him. We call this an apprentice/mentor relationship."

Matthews explains that a research project in New York learned that many boys and girls who attended hunter education classes never bought a hunting license after completion of their course. "Here you had kids who were interested enough in hunting to take the class, but then they never took up the sport, and we decided to learn why.

"The reason was, they didn't have anybody to take them. They didn't have an adult who could teach them and foster their interest. Having that apprentice/mentor relationship in place is critical to turning a beginner's interest in hunting or fishing into a long-term pursuit. Also, having a mentor can solve the requirements for equipment and places to go."

The fifth requirement on Matthews' list is social support. "The social structure -- the community, if you will -- must accept hunting and fishing as appropriate activities. 'Let's go fishing instead of down to the mall.' This support comes from peers, family members, surrogate family members and other people who are important in the beginners' lives."

Matthews admits that meeting all these requirements is a tall order, but he feels it can be done on a broad scale.

He believes that public agencies and private industry must expand their efforts to create threshold hunting and fishing experiences, to provide access to places and equipment, and to encourage veteran sportsmen to share their time in apprentice/mentor programs.

Beyond this point, sportsmen must foster an image of good stewardship, high ethical standards and fun. Matthews notes, "It's important to recognize what's uncool, and avoid those practices. For example, kids don't want to be associated with people who wear 'Happiness is a Large Gut Pile' T-shirts. It's important for hunters and fishermen to present an image that kids want to be like."

Matthews concludes that veteran hunters and fishermen bear the ultimate responsibility for recruiting newcomers into their sports. "If we don't maintain or increase the number of hunters or anglers, in a few years we're not going to have enough folks around who care about the resource. Hunting and fishing fosters people who care about conservation and environmental stewardship, so this is why it's important to develop a new generation.

"Any hunter or fisherman could do this with a family member or a boy or girl down the street. It takes an acceptance of responsibility and a commitment of time and resources. But I think people who become a mentor will tell you the rewards of sharing the outdoors with a beginner far outweigh the costs. It's a good thing to do, and it's the right thing to do, both for the individual and for our natural resources.

-Wade Bourne www.outdoorsite.com

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