

# THE NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION, NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS FOUNDATION AND THE U.S. SPORTSMEN'S ALLIANCE IS COMMITTED TO **FAMILIES AFIELD** BECAUSE:



## Ensuring hunting traditions are strong well into the future is important to millions of Americans

- Hunting is one of the safest recreational activities enjoyed by families in the United States, bringing nearly 20 million men, women and youth together to spend quality time in the outdoors.
- Mentored youth hunters are the safest afield.
- Surveys show nearly 80 percent of Americans support hunting.
- Hunters pump more than \$30 billion dollars into the American economy each year. Many of those dollars support rural communities throughout America as hunters spend dollars on food, hotels, gas and other related travel expenditures.
- About a million jobs in America are supported by hunters.
- America's recreational hunters and shooters have paid more than \$5 billion in excise taxes since 1937 to support wildlife conservation and education.
- In the last 40 years, hunters have spent \$13.4 billion dollars purchasing hunting licenses, tags and permits, which has accounted for a significant percentage of funding for state wildlife agencies.

## Studies show that hunter numbers are declining

- For every 100 hunters that are lost, only 69 take their place.

- If hunter numbers continue to fall, economic projections indicate license dollars for wildlife agencies could drop by 25 percent by 2025.
  - This decline is also projected to cause a 24 percent drop in revenues for the hunting industry.
- ### One way to recruit more hunters is to focus on youth

- 80 percent of hunters indicate their first hunting experience occurred when they were young.
- A new study, the Youth Hunting Report, indicates that state laws and regulations that restrict youth hunting hamper recruitment efforts.
  - The 31 states that have no age minimum have a 20 percent higher recruitment rate than states with an age minimum.
  - Twenty of those states permit a mentor to introduce hunting before the novice must complete a hunter education course. Those states' recruitment statistics are 25 percent higher than states with a minimum hunting age.
- The Families Afield Program seeks to educate the general public, elected officials and sportsmen about the need to eliminate barriers to youth hunting.
- Families Afield Partners, the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Federation and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, have launched a campaign to work with local sportsmen to enact state legislation or regulations to achieve that goal.

## Mentored youth hunters are the safest afield

- The Youth Hunting Report, which was peer reviewed for statistical validity by Triad research, shows youth hunters are the safest hunters in the woods when accompanied by an adult.
- States that allow parents to decide when their sons and daughters can begin hunting have better safety records than states with restrictions.
  - Incident rates are 10 percent higher in the 19 states where the government sets a minimum hunting age.

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## TIPS TO ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO YOUTH HUNTING

- Families Afield legislation seeks to remove the barriers that prevent hunters from passing on hunting traditions by allowing parents to decide when their sons and daughters are ready to begin hunting.
- Permitting parents to decide when youth are ready to hunt is a new concept in states with age minimums, so it is natural that legislators, state wildlife agencies, hunter education volunteers and sportsmen would be cautious in their approach.

### Remember, More Restrictions = Fewer Hunters

- Because restrictions ultimately are barriers to new hunters, anything added to the model legislation should be absolutely necessary and factually based.

Here are examples of restrictions that are unnecessary and decrease the effectiveness of sharing our heritage with new hunters:

**Reducing age minimums** – While reducing the hunting age may seem like a step in the right direction, it ignores the fact that parents are better able to determine when their sons and daughters are ready to hunt.

- Mentored youth hunters are the safest hunters afield. And recruitment numbers will increase much more when the government trusts parents.
- In addition, a minimum age in a Families Afield bill will very likely become a negative focal point of the entire effort.
  - Instead of persuading key parties that letting parents

make the decision will result in more safe hunters, we'll be justifying whether a ten-year-old is capable of hunting safely. That is why age should not be a part of a Families Afield issue.

**Restricting access to big game** – We suggest that parents decide when youth can hunt big and small game. In the past, hunters were introduced to hunting beginning with small game (rabbits, squirrels). However, the majority of today's sportsmen are big game hunters and small game hunting is on the decline. From a safety standpoint, there is no reason to prevent young people from experiencing all types of hunting. And from a recruiting standpoint, there are many more potential mentors in the ranks of big game hunters.

**Limiting the amount of time a new hunter can be an apprentice** – Our goal is to create new hunters and thus, we recommend not limiting apprentice periods. Limited mentoring periods may prevent new hunters from true learning and from adopting a hunting lifestyle because of a lack of positive experiences. If the mentor is primarily a turkey hunter, then the apprentice will likely get to hunt only turkeys, and then perhaps for only a day or two. Bad weather and a host of other factors could ruin a one-time hunting experience. A one-time experience is not mentoring; it is exposure. Studies have shown effective mentoring does not occur from a single experience.

**Requiring one gun between the mentor and apprentice** – This decision also should be left to parents. For younger apprentice hunters, the mentor may indeed decide to keep a tighter leash. For older apprentices, or those who have had some experience, the mentor may decide to carry a gun also. The important point is that parents should be the ones to make that decision. Remember, we want to encourage hunters to mentor. For those with limited time to hunt, making them give up their hunting opportunity may severely decrease the ranks of mentors.





- The key is planning. The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) and the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance (USSA) have many resources to help sportsmen work to eliminate barriers to youth hunting. Getting these organizations involved at the earliest point greatly increases your chance for success.
- Most work should be done behind the scenes with sportsmen's organizations before going public with legislation. This planning time is important to educate and inform sportsmen's groups and others with a vested interest about Families Afield. The USSA, NWTF and NSSF will work with state sportsmen's organizations to plan the entire effort.
- Families Afield is a new concept to hunters in states that have had a minimum hunting age for many years. They need to be prepared for a legislative or regulatory campaign. Sportsmen will be an important factor in whether a Families Afield bill passes.
- Getting a bill introduced should only occur after an extensive grass roots campaign is conducted educating sportsmen on the benefit of Families Afield. It's important to develop grassroots support to prevent key players from becoming concerned and watering

## TIPS FOR PASSING FAMILIES AFIELD LEGISLATION OR REGULATIONS

- down or abandoning efforts to open doors for youth hunting.
- The state wildlife agency must be brought into play at a very early point. Their support can make the difference.
- If your state has a sportsmen's caucus, the elected officials that belong to that group may be key in efforts to remove barriers that prevent young people from hunting with an adult mentor.
- There must be open dialogue with the hunter education community. If the state wildlife agency is on board, it can be helpful in this endeavor.

### Families Afield Model Legislation

Families Afield legislation seeks to remove the barriers that prevent hunters from passing on hunting traditions.

- There are four key principles behind Families Afield bills.
  - Parents know best when their sons and daughters are ready to begin hunting.
  - Permitting people to learn and experience hunting first hand from a mentor before taking hunter education results in better recruitment numbers and ultimately more hunter education graduates.
  - Access to big game hunting is

- critical to improving hunting numbers. Big game hunting has the highest participation, therefore the largest number of potential mentors.
- In general, restrictions on hunting result in lower participation. Restrictions should be implemented only if necessary and factually based.

The Families Afield philosophy is to allow parents to decide when youth are ready to hunt.

- This can be achieved through an Apprentice Hunting License Program:
  - An Apprentice License allows any person to hunt before passing a hunter education course as long as the person is under the direct supervision of a licensed hunter.
  - The mentor must be an adult.
  - If the apprentice is under 18 years of age, the mentor must have the consent of a parent or guardian.
  - An apprentice hunter may not hunt unsupervised or obtain a regular hunting license until such time as the person passes a hunter education course.

