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JAKES Field Day Teaches Youths Ethics, Outdoor Skills

By James Roll

One of the most important things Idaho's game wardens do has nothing to do with tracking down poachers or enforcing bag limits; it is about instilling ethics and enthusiasm for outdoor enjoyment in Idaho youths.

On Saturday, August 13, a group of about 150 youths and adults took part in a day of field events, co-sponsored by Idaho Fish and Game conservation officers, the National Wild Turkey Federation and the Camas Prairie Bowmen Archery Club.



Grangeville Conservation Officer Larry Willmott instructs a young lad in shooting a .22-caliber rifle.

This third annual event is part of a youth program started by the turkey federation and is geared to help "Juniors Acquire Knowledge, Ethics and Sportsmanship" – or JAKES for short. JAKES Conservation Field Days for youths 13 and younger are held across North America.

Participants in the Grangeville JAKES field-day learned about hunting, survival skills and many other conservation-related topics. The youths enjoyed such stations as Critter craft, hides and horns identification, survival skills, .22-caliber shooting, as well as archery and turkey hunting.

But the highlight for most of the participants was the station where they had to "call-in" a moving turkey target. The days events also included bird hunting, field dressing and hunting

dog demonstration by the Flying B Ranch in Kamiah.

Grangeville businesses donated lunch for the participants.

The Idaho Fish and Game turkey program is a success story enjoyed by new and experienced hunters across the state. Much of that success is the result of the active volunteers from the National Wild Turkey Federation. The federation is a national nonprofit conservation organization that works with wildlife agencies to restore wild turkey populations.

This cooperative venture also extends to involving youths in the sport of turkey hunting. Volunteers and local Idaho conservation officers take area youths on mentored turkey hunting trips to reinforce the classroom lessons learned in hunter education classes.

The JAKES field-day program gives youths the chance to explore their outdoor world through fun youth-only events.

Turkey federation volunteer Cathy Warford kept volunteers and Fish and Game officers on track.

Conservation officers Larry Willmott, Mark Hill, Chad Wippermen, Roy Kinner and George Fischer, Fish and Game hunter education instructors and community volunteers helped make the day a success. The local conservation officers are already working with volunteers for next year's JAKES day.

IDFG photos



Conservation officer George Fischer explains a shotgun pattern on a turkey target.

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Idaho Conservation Officers are Often ‘the Only Law for Miles’

By Evin Oneale

Like many other things, the Idaho conservation officer’s role has changed dramatically during the past 50 years.

Understanding why requires a look back to when the times and an officer’s duties were simpler.

Before 1938, Idaho fish and game statutes were enforced by state game wardens – political appointees who served at the pleasure of the governor.

In 1938, a referendum established the Idaho Fish and Game Commission, which removed Fish and Game employees from direct political control and made possible a professional resource agency focused on its mission of preserving and perpetuating fish and wildlife resources.

Statutes written to accomplish this were enforceable by Fish and Game employees. Over the years, the agency’s enforcement responsibilities grew to include boating regulations, water resources and state lands statutes, and livestock rustling laws.

Conservation officers handled most of this activity, in addition to enforcing fish and game laws and collecting scientific data. They learned on the job, with little formal training except firearm instruction alongside local sheriff or police personnel. They also assisted local, state and federal law-enforcement personnel upon demand, even though they had no arrest authority until the late 1970s.

“Our duties were becoming more complex with time,” said Chuck Garey, a retired regional conservation officer. “We recognized that to perform these additional duties well, some formal training was a must.”

When the Idaho Peace Officer Standards and Training academy opened

In the late 1970s, the Idaho Conservation Officers Association, the Idaho Sheriffs Association and many other law enforcement officials lobbied the state legislature to grant peace officer status to Fish and Game conservation officers. Convinced of the need, the Legislature passed the measure in 1978.

Today conservation officers are highly-trained professionals.

Officer-trainee and enforcement technicians must successfully complete POST academy instruction and field training while working alongside veteran conservation officers.

In addition, trainees study fish and game statutes, commission rules, officer safety, public relations, enforcement situations and Fish and Game policy. Veteran officers evaluate each technician for 10 weeks to determine whether he or she will be hired as a conservation officer.

Training continues throughout officers’ careers. All attend 12 to 16 hours of specialized courses twice each year. They must qualify with their sidearm every six months; those who routinely carry shotguns or rifles must qualify with these weapons every 12 months.

Because Fish and Game officers spend most of their time enforcing fish and game laws, the role they play in law enforcement is often overlooked.

As certified peace officers, Fish and Game conservation officers are charged with enforcing all Idaho laws and protecting the public. The addition of 112 law-enforcement personnel comes at no additional cost to Idaho taxpayers.

“Hunters and anglers pay our salaries by purchasing licenses and tags, but all Idahoans benefit from our presence,” former conservation officer Tom Pokalski said. “In many places, we’re the only law for miles.”



DCO George Fischer patrols the backcountry near the Seven Devils.

IDFG photo

in 1970, “POST” certification became mandatory for all conservation officers.

As an outgrowth of academy training, Fish and Game employees wrote the first official firearm policy in the mid-1970s.

Conservation officers began a move to secure peace officer status – they were already doing the work.

“The lack of peace officer standing left us unprotected,” Garey said. “For instance, if someone struck a conservation officer, the attacker couldn’t be charged with assaulting an officer.”

The practice of allowing conservation officers to serve arrest or search warrants was receiving increased scrutiny, though it had been routine for nearly 40 years.

Another argument for granting peace officer status was that in smaller communities, conservation officers were often called on to assist local law enforcement officials. In remote areas, conservation officers were the only “law enforcement” personnel available, a situation that continues to exist in many portions of the state.



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The Twelve Most Common Hunting and Fishing Violations:

Idaho Fish and Game’s 112 conservation officers each patrol as much as 1,000 square miles.

They spend much of their time checking in with hunters and anglers, most of whom comply with the complex hunting and fishing regulations. But a few don’t. Here’s a list of the most common violations the officers find in the field.

1. Possession and transportation of big game without evidence of gender – evidence of gender must be naturally attached to the carcass or largest portion of meat if boned.

2. Possession and transportation without proxy statement – a proxy statement is required to transport wildlife taken by another person.

3. Failure to properly validate and attach tag to big game. Tag must be validated and attached to the carcass immediately following a kill.

4. Failure to stop and report at a check station. All hunters and anglers, whether successful or not, must stop and report at each check station they encounter during their travel to and from their designated hunting location.

5. Shooting from or across a public highway right of way. This is a public



Idaho Fish and Game conservation officers check hunters returning from their hunting trips. *IDFG photo*

safety issue for both the shooter and people traveling on the highway.

6. Hunting or fishing in a closed season. It is the hunter’s or angler’s responsibility to know season opening and closing dates.

7. Wrong class license. A hunter or angler is required to purchase and possess the correct class of license.

8. Transfer of license or tag to another. Party hunting or killing an animal for somebody else to put their tag on is illegal.

9. Buying a license or tags while hunting, fishing or trapping privileges are revoked. Idaho is a member of the Wildlife Violator Compact and a revocation in any member state may result in loss of privileges in all member states.

10. Fishing without a license or without a license in possession.

11. Fishing with barbed hooks in a barbless area.

12. Fishing with two poles without a two pole permit.

Idaho Fish and Game Policy

Idaho wildlife management policy is set by seven volunteer commissioners. The Idaho Fish and Game Commission’s policy decisions are based on research and recommendations by the professional staff of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, and with input from the governor’s office, the state Legislature, hunters, anglers and the public.

Hundreds of Wildlife Enforcement Officers to Gather in Idaho

About 800 wildlife enforcement officers from across the continent are expected to descend on Boise in the summer of 2013.

From July 14 through 20, the Idaho Conservation Officers Association will host the 2013 North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association conference, “Rivers to Ridges: NAWEOA Family Rendezvous,” at the Grove Hotel in downtown Boise.

The North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association is an 8,000-member organization of wildlife and fisheries enforcement officers from across North America. Sixteen officers from the United States and Canada, including three officers from Idaho, formed the association at a meeting in Great Falls, Montana, in 1980. NAWEOA was the first to solicit members from all over North America.

More information will become available as the date approaches.



Poachers Take a Toll on Wildlife; Hunters Can Help

In September of 2010, George B. Kelley of Albion killed this wild cow elk during the closed season in Unit 55, near his family's domestic elk farm.

Conservation officers Doug Meyer and Chad Wippermann investigated the case after citizens turned the poachers in. After arriving on scene, the officers discovered the elk with a freshly punched ear tag in the elk's ear, making it appear to be a domestic elk. Multiple citations were issued.

This case may have gone unnoticed if it weren't for a few concerned citizens who care about Idaho's wildlife.

After a plea agreement with the prosecutor both George B. Kelley and George M. Kelley plead guilty to hunting without a tag and paid \$475 each in court costs and fines.



IDFG photos



In March of 2011, Oakley residents reported suspicious activity near Oakley, when they heard shooting from a nearby road and then witnessed a group of deer running away from the scene.

An investigation by Meyer, Wippermann and Cassia County Sheriff's deputies revealed that a group of New Zealand visitors poached a mule deer doe during the closed season, cut the back straps off and left the rest to waste on the hillside.

Three defendants pleaded guilty and were sentenced in Cassia County court. Each defendant paid more than \$300 in fines.



This buck mule deer (at right) was poached with a shotgun near Oakley, in October 2010.

Wippermann recovered steel shot pellets from the head and neck of the deer.

A witness saw several individuals attempting to load the deer into a dark green truck, but they left the deer and fled the scene after seeing the witness approaching.

No suspects have been reported in this case.

Fish and Game estimates that for every animal taken legally, another is taken illegally in Idaho. Some studies in other states put the toll of poaching at 25 to 60 percent of total annual mortality.

Hunters can help reduce the impact of poaching on wildlife populations by reporting suspicious activity. To report wildlife crimes or suspected crimes, call the Citizens Against Poaching Hotline at 1-800-632-5999. Callers may remain anonymous and may be eligible for a reward.

