

Giving kids a jump start on hunting

This year's big game hunting season will be unlike anything Montana hunters have ever experienced. First of all, opening day of the general firearm season will be on a Saturday (October 23) rather than the usual Sunday, providing hunters a full opening weekend of hunting.

Even more significant is Montana's new youth-only early deer season. On the Thursday and Friday (October 21 and 22) before the regular general firearm season opener, legally licensed hunters age 12 to 15 may hunt deer statewide when accompanied in the field by an adult, who may not hunt deer those two days.

The FWP Commission adopted the youth hunt earlier this year to make it easier for young hunters to get their first deer. Hunting can be hard and frustrating. Studies show that young people are more likely to give up on hunting if they don't succeed early on. Having a few days just for themselves before the regular season increases young hunters' odds of harvesting a deer.

The new early hunt falls during the annual Montana Education Association meeting, when kids are out of school. We and other supporters hope parents use this opportunity to make the hunting opener a four-day family event. Because they can't hunt on Thursday and Friday, parents can concentrate on providing advice to their kids on safety, ethics, stalking, and shot placement. (Of course, adults can do that during the regular season, too, but it's a lot easier when they aren't hunting.) Then on Saturday and Sunday, Dad and Mom can go out after their own deer and elk.

Many hunting parents have told us they are excited about this new opportunity. They point out how video games, electronic media, organized sports, and other activities compete for their children's attention. They appreciate that FWP supports hunting families by giving them this additional chance to show their kids the joys of the hunt.

Montana's tradition of providing young hunters and families with extra opportunities began in earnest in 2002 when the FWP Commission first allowed youth age 12 to 15 to hunt a cow elk in

many hunting districts without having to draw an antlerless tag. Then Montana began offering special waterfowl and pheasant hunts before the regular season openers, giving young hunters first crack at the birds. In 2009, the Montana legislature approved the Come Home To Hunt license, which makes it easier for former Montanans living out of state to hunt here with family members. These and other special family-oriented opportunities are explained more fully in the FWP deer, elk, and antelope hunting regulations booklet and on-line at fwp.mt.gov.

Instilling a love of hunting in kids benefits everyone. Enthusiastic young hunters grow up to be dedicated adult hunters, who then



become partners with FWP biologists and private landowners to help manage big game populations. Even more important, hunting is a way for kids to connect with the outdoors. By hunting—and wildlife watching, camping, fishing, and taking part in other outdoors activi-

ties—young Montanans spend time in the natural world, where they learn to value wildlife and wild places.

FWP's support for youth hunting opportunities stems from our mission to provide stewardship for Montana's wildlife. That's a huge job in a state so rich in wildlife, one impossible for biologists and wildlife managers to do alone. But the job gets done, decade after decade, because so many individual Montanans dedicate themselves to helping this department conserve wildlife and its habitat.

One of the best ways the state can create future Montana conservationists is to foster and support the desire of young people to head out to the sage flats or mountain forests, with eyes wide open and a hopeful heart, gun firmly in hand.

—JOE MAURIER, *Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

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IN THE COMMISSION ROOM



Selected recent decisions by the FWP Commission:

- Adapted the 2010 bison quotas with an initial allocation of 44 either-sex licenses and potentially 100 additional cow/calf licenses (if winter weather pushes enough bison out of Yellowstone National Park).
- Approved purchase of two conservation easements north of Hinsdale: a 159-acre easement on the Cottonwood Bend property on the Milk River, and a 460-acre easement on Beaver Creek. Both to be purchased at 40 percent of the appraised fee value (\$175,000–\$195,000 and \$400,000–\$425,000 respectively.)
- Approved FWP coordinating the translocation of up to 20 swift foxes from north-central Montana to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.
- Endorsed developing a collaborative sage-grouse augmentation project with Alberta.