



Mentoring for **HUNTING'S FUTURE**

The future of hunting depends on the tried-and-true method of experienced hunters taking the time and interest to mentor novices, many of whom are becoming increasingly disconnected from nature.

Written by Walter "Deet" James

When I began hunting almost four decades ago at age 12, computers were the purview only of organizations such as IBM and NASA, not a readily accessible tool and entertainment source for people of all ages. When we played, we played outside. Telephone conversations occurred in the home, not in the car, because "roaming" was limited by the length of the coiled wires that attached phones to the wall.

Hunting was a natural pastime appreciated by most, if not all, the residents of my Pennsylvania hometown. Schools and business were closed on the Monday opener of the two-week buck season, and very few hunters planned on returning to either the following Tuesday morning. Seeing dead deer on vehicle hoods was accepted, expected and provided the motivation for those who didn't get a deer to hunt at least one more day.

Back then, hunting and the outdoors were a big part of the culture. Now, research indicates that adults and children alike are becoming increasingly disconnected from our natural world. Many of today's youth are not experiencing nature naturally. Instead, much of what they learn about the outdoors comes from school or television. Richard Louv, in his book "Last Child in the Woods," fluently exposes the disconnection between young people and nature, coining the phrase "Nature-Deficit Disorder." Some things need to be felt, touched and experienced firsthand.



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A lot of focus is placed on youth hunts, conservation field days and related outdoor family events designed to introduce children to hunting. These events are excellent starters for developing interest in the outdoors, but only mentoring can provide the long-term commitment and support needed to develop passionate, lifelong hunters.

My uncle Bill introduced me and my brother to hunting and fishing. I didn't realize it back then, but Uncle Bill was slowly building an outdoor foundation in his nephews that would last a lifetime. My brother and I were seeing all kinds of wildlife and everything nature had to offer. It was not a movie or a video game that provided the background, it was Uncle Bill and the outdoors.

Uncle Bill was married and had three children of his own who were too young to hunt at the time. He had a job and family responsibilities, yet still he made time to take my brother and me hunting. Several years later, my uncle changed jobs and had to move away. However, the hunting seed was planted, nourished well, and left to grow in my brother and me. And that it did. We developed a hunting identity and became part of the hunting culture.

Those early hunts were some of the greatest experiences of my life—hunts that were successful whether the game bag was filled or not. Stories of the day's events filled the air on the journeys home and continued long into the night. The post-hunt evening was spent contemplating future hunts as the wonderful smell of Hoppes' No. 9 cleaning solvent wafted through our home.

Even if we are unable to go hunting ourselves at times, we can share the great stories we've accumulated over the years with anyone willing to listen. Sharing our hunting stories with others can also be a mentoring experience that could inspire someone to go hunting themselves or at least to develop a deeper respect for those who do hunt.

I particularly remember one bear hunt during the mid-1990s. It was a cold, overcast November morning with 6 inches of snow on the ground. As usual, I was anxious to get on my stand as fast as possible. En route, I came across an aging hunter stopped along a trail deep in the hollow I was traversing. The gentleman carried a well-worn lever action rifle that had obviously seen many a hunting season.

We shared a greeting and he asked where I was headed. I pointed straight up the ridge and he smiled, saying, "I remember those days." He began to tell me of past hunts, and went on naming places and wildlife he saw during those long-ago hunts. I was so mesmerized by his tales that my rush to get on my stand was over. We chatted for some time and I walked away much better for the experience.

Hoarding Alone or Sustaining Together?

As we grew into adulthood, my brother continued to hunt in the company of others, enjoying the camaraderie of the hunt. Camaraderie is a much-cherished aspect of the hunting culture for many. It can be the glue that keeps hunters engaged in the activity.

I tended to be a loner, intentionally seeking seclusion in the woods. I'm not alone in my quest for tranquility. Hunting can provide an incredible experience for anyone seeking solitude from a world of crowds and technology. On many forays, I have thought that if only I could erase the distant traffic sound or the occasional overhead plane, then I would truly have a little bit of heaven on earth to myself.

Although the allure of solitude is great, so is the desire to leave an inheritance of some kind to future generations. I remember many

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FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Although fewer hunters are actually spending more money as compared to those in past years, the continual downward trend of hunters could impact future conservation and wildlife management initiatives. In fact, the value of the contributions that North Carolina hunters make towards wildlife management and conservation cannot be overlooked. Recent surveys indicate that North Carolina hunters contributed \$431 million to the state's economy in 2006 in the form of hunting-related expenditures. Nationally, hunter expenditures are nearly \$23 billion.

The funding provided by hunters represents the backbone of science-based wildlife management and conservation as we know it. Therefore, if the number of hunters continues to decline, so will funding for conservation.

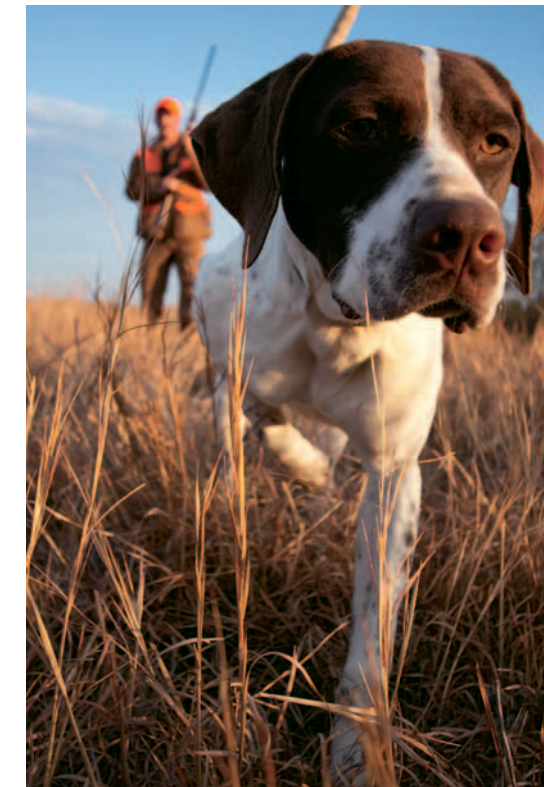
hunts where I watched a spectacular sunrise or sunset, or took a fine turkey, deer, rabbit or squirrel. I also remember embracing snow, sleet or rain and thinking, *I hope there never comes a day when someone cannot enjoy what I'm enjoying right at this moment.* That contemplation alone is reason enough to not selfishly hoard my passion into oblivion. No matter how overwhelming the quest for solitude in nature, it is not worth the price of losing the hunting tradition.

I have come to realize that my desire for woodland tranquility is not going to contribute to hunting's future. Nor will it contribute to my giving back to hunting and the

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Visit www.ncwildlife.org to purchase hunting licenses, schedule a hunter education course, view maps of game lands, read hunting regulations, find species information and much more.

in the outdoors still cherished. Overall, however, hunter recruitment and retention is different today, and the need for hunting mentors is even more crucial than ever.

Food and Land

As our society becomes increasingly high-tech, we continue to become ever more disconnected from the natural world, down to what we eat. Food is something that comes in advertisement-laden packages. In some minds, Chicken McNuggets are barely meat at all. They are simply very tasty morsels of unknown origin with little connection to an actual chicken—or perhaps our society prefers to see it that way sometimes. Hamburgers come from Burger King and milk comes from a bottle. The cow is rarely thought of as being part of the transaction.

Food purchased with a dollar can often be valued as the same. It is much easier to dispose of or waste food connected to currency than food that must be first killed by the individual before consumption. Wildlife taken as food through the tradition of hunting becomes almost sacred. The American Indians honored wild game because it provided them the sustenance that was necessary to their survival. Fresh meat was greatly appreciated, and the creator was honored in a spiritual ceremony. Even today, many hunters believe that wasting game is not an option, living by the mantra, “If you kill it, you eat it or you don’t hunt it.”

Just as we are increasingly distant from our food sources, we are continually restricted to smaller and smaller blocks of land. Despite that, hunters still find places to hunt each and every season, whether on public or private land. There are more than 2 million acres of publicly accessible hunting property in the Game Lands Program in North Carolina, and not all are being utilized fully. In short, hunting opportunities abound here. All one needs to do is a little preseason scouting and mapping to see what is there.

Time to Take Action

The legitimate excuses are real; research continues to tell us that. Old age, lack of time and lack of access are hunting impediments that will not change or go away. They are simply facts in the continually changing world in which we live. However, a simple fact also remains that there are enough passionate hunters today who have the ability to make a

precious memories it provided me. Moreover, what legacy can be passed on unless through a gift to someone else? What if my Uncle Bill had enjoyed the same pursuit of solitude in the woods as I did for so many years and had not shared it with his young nephews?

Hunter education teaches us, along with many other important things, that hunters evolve. Bob Norton’s book “The Hunter: Developmental Stages and Ethics” details five distinct developmental stages of hunters. The stages, from novice hunter to veteran outdoorsman, include 1) shooter, 2) limiting out, 3) trophy hunting, 4) method hunting and 5) sportsman. Not all hunters pass through all of the stages, nor do they all reach the final stage.

In the sportsman stage, hunters reach a point where there is a heightened appreciation for nature and wildlife. In the sportsman stage the experience and process, rather than just the taking of game animals, becomes the essence. More importantly, the need to share and pass down the experience and tradition with other hunting companions is sought after and therefore becomes the ultimate goal. Similarly, hunters who reach the sportsman stage usually do so because the understanding gained in nature through the hunting experience is so powerful and valued, that not sharing it seems almost selfish by comparison. If hunting is to survive into the future in our modern world of disconnection, dedicated hunters cannot afford to isolate themselves into oblivion.

For families that continue to be passionate about hunting, none of the commitment and sacrifice of educating young hunters has changed. Young hunters are still recruited, firearms passed down and memories of times

significant difference by sharing the heritage they love. In fact, if every hunter in North Carolina were to take at least one person hunting who has not hunted before, they would contribute greatly to the hunting culture.

I have always been a hunter, and I’ve come to learn that I can be a mentor too. I owe it to the culture of hunting for all that it has given me over the many years. More importantly, I also owe it to Uncle Bill. Despite all the demands of life, he took the time to share his passion of hunting with my brother and me.

Reflect back on the person who introduced you to hunting. If hunting really matters to you, become a hunting mentor and share the tradition in the coming seasons. There is no better way to say thanks. ♦

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IF HUNTING CEASED TO EXIST IN THE U.S.

Additional 50,000 injuries annually from wildlife-auto collisions

\$1.45 billion in health care and disease control costs for rabies alone

Up to \$9.3 billion in taxpayer money to control deer

Up to \$265 million in taxpayer money to control furbearers (\$32 million for beavers alone)

Over \$3 billion annually in damages to crops and livestock

\$972 million annually in damages to homes

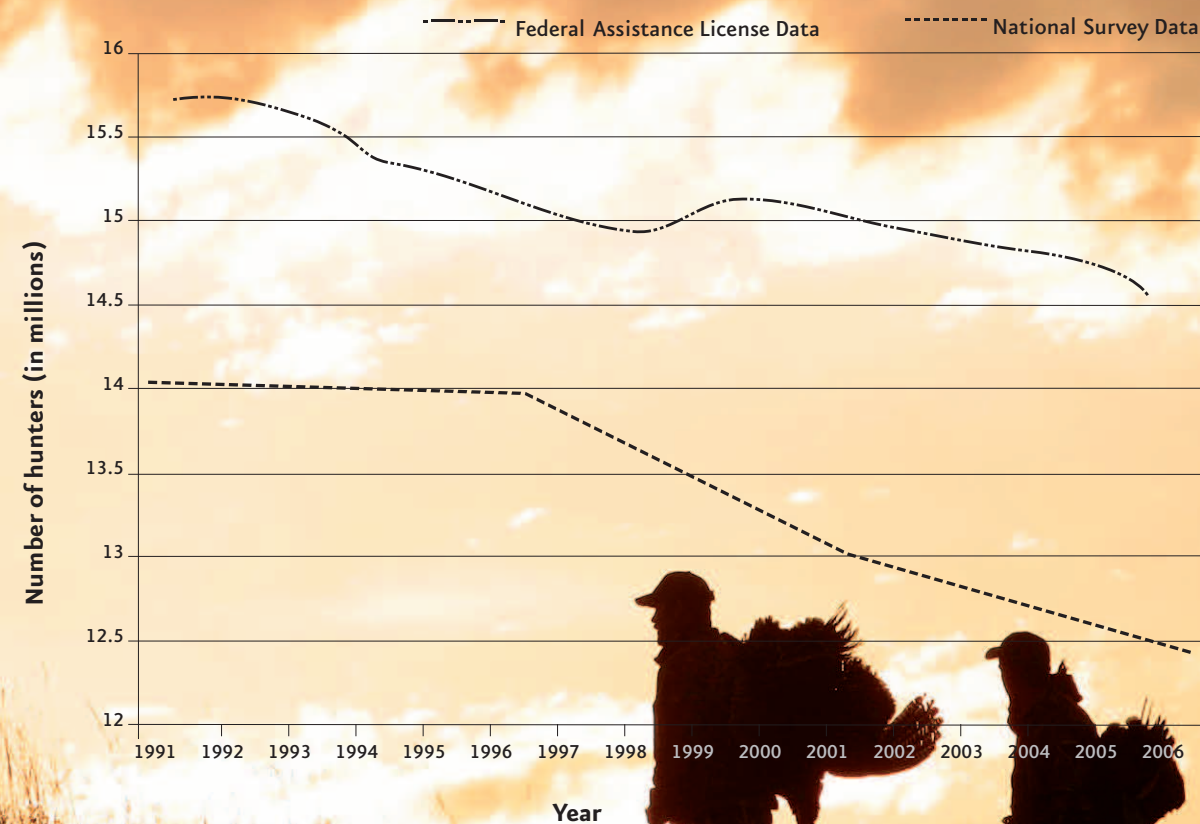
Source: “Potential Costs of Losing Hunting and Trapping as Wildlife Management Methods,” International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 2005.



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NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION

TRENDS IN HUNTING PARTICIPATION 1991-2006



Sources: USFWS / US Census 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007; USFWS 2007