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OUTDOOR RECREATION *Guide* 2025



 PENNYSAVER


Achieving a Goal

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

For the fall of 2024, I set a goal for myself to shoot a deer using a handload that I put together for one of my rifles. It was my first year of reloading and I was admittedly a bit nervous of getting started. I had won a Mossberg Patriot in .308 Winchester with a Vortex Crossfire scope at an NWTF event right before the pandemic. When I decided that 2020 was going to be the year to use it to deer hunt, I had a hard time finding ammunition that was inexpensive

thanks to the pandemic. When I finally found some, it didn't really shoot that well. I later found out the scope rings had been overtightened and the internals of the scope had broke. Luckily, Vortex has a lifetime warranty and they replaced the scope with no questions asked. Fast forward a few more years, the NY background check on ammunition purchases is implemented in September of 2023. I had been curious about hand loading

ammunition as a few people I hunt with already loaded their own rounds and the background check thing pushed me over the edge. You can buy all of the components to load your own ammunition without a background check. You do need to present your ID to buy powder and sign a log book but that's the only hurdle besides occasional product unavailability. A quick Facebook marketplace search and I found a guy selling an entire reloading setup that was more or less



ready to start loading. I used Christmas and my birthday to ask for the few things I needed to load for the calibers that I owned, or to upgrade a couple of the tools in the collection. On Columbus Day weekend, I took Timmy, the youth hunter I have been mentoring, on the Youth Deer Hunt and he harvested a mature doe first thing Saturday morning. So on Columbus Day, I headed to the range to perform a ladder test on some .308 ammunition I had loaded. I had 3 rounds loaded at each powder charge with a max charge just under what the reloading manual said was the maximum charge. I shot each set of 3 rounds while letting the barrel cool down between sets of 3. The

charge with the tightest group was what I picked and then I loaded 15 more rounds of that bullet and charge combination. I have since listened to some podcasts that say 3-shot groups can be pretty misleading and that larger sample sizes (i.e. groups) should be shot to better understand the accuracy of a particular handload. Regardless, that was the load I settled on for the season. On opening day of regular season, on the way to our ground blind for the afternoon sit, Timmy was able to shoot and drop a doe that was already out feeding in the food plot. We quickly got into the blind and let things calm down. Probably about an hour before sunset, Timmy said he

saw a deer to our left coming into the field. I got my binoculars on it and it was another doe. I got my rifle up and used the window opening of the blind as a rest. I dialed the zoom on the scope to the maximum before blating to get her to stop at 100 yards. When she did, I squeezed the trigger and watched her run off out of the field. The shot felt good but her reaction was very nondescript so it made me start to doubt my shot. With one deer for sure, and possibly a second, we got out of the blind before sunset and went to try to find blood from my shot. It took a few minutes to get lined back up with where the deer was standing in relation to the blind, but once I got it, I spotted blood a few feet away in the grass. We started to follow the blood and after a few yards, Timmy said he could see an eye reflecting from our headlamps. The doe had made it maybe 20 yards after the shot, which was a high double-lung shot. Timmy and I high-fived knowing that meant we both had shot deer on opening day. It also meant that I had achieved my goal of shooting a deer with a handload.

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NY DEC Regulations to Keep Hunters Safe

New York is one of the safest states in the nation for deer and bear hunting. Regulations have been established to help ensure that strong safety record continues, and to reduce the likelihood for hunting-related shooting incidents. Under these regulations deer and bear hunters are:

1.Required to wear fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink clothing while hunting with a firearm. Any person who is accompanying someone hunting deer or bear with a firearm must also wear fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink clothing. The clothing must be:

- a minimum of two hundred fifty square inches of solid fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink material worn above the waist and visible from all directions; or
- a minimum of two hundred fifty square inches of patterned fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink consisting of no less than fifty percent fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink worn above the waist and visible from all directions;
- or
- a hat or cap with no less than fifty percent of the exterior consisting of solid fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink material and visible from all directions.

2. Only allowed to hunt deer and bear from 30 minutes before sunrise until 30 minutes after sunset. These hunting hours help ensure there is enough natural light for hunters to effectively identify their target and what’s beyond it before taking a shot, while maximizing opportunities for hunters to harvest deer and bear during the times of day when these species are most active. Refer to the sunrise-sunset table on the last page of the annual Hunting and Trapping Regulations Guide to determine the exact legal hunting hours for where you hunt. Learn more about the basics of hunting safety by visiting DEC’s Hunter Education Program webpage. Regulations for Tagging, Transporting, and Reporting Harvested Deer and

Bear: Harvested deer and bear are in a hunter’s legal possession only when they are tagged, transported, and reported appropriately. To maintain legal possession of a harvested deer or bear, hunters must:

1. Tag the harvested deer or bear with an appropriate, completed, and legible carcass tag. Follow the below steps to ensure your harvested deer or bear is legally tagged.

Step 1. Get your paper tags from a license-issuing agent or print them from the PDF sent to your email upon purchase of your hunting license.

Step 2. Cut the appropriate tag from the sheet of paper. Ensure you select the proper tag for the species and season you are hunting in.

Step 3. Fill in the tag with the required

harvest information and sign it using ink that won’t erase. The month and date of harvest must be marked in ink on the carcass tag.

Step 4. Place the tag in a weatherproof case or bag.

Step 5. Attach the weatherproof case or bag to the animal, keeping the tag visible. You do not need to attach the tag to the carcass while it is being dragged or physically carried from the place of kill to a camp, home, or point where transportation is available. Attach the carcass tag immediately upon arriving at one of these locations.

Step 6. Keep the tag attached to the carcass until it is cut up and prepared for consumption.

Step 7. Report your harvest within seven days. DEC considers unreported deer and bear to be illegally taken. Hunters in possession of illegally taken deer and bear are subject to penalty.

2. Transport the harvested deer or bear appropriately. Harvested and tagged deer and bear may be transported either inside or outside a vehicle by the hunter who harvested the animal, or in their attendance. Follow the below requirements to ensure your harvested

deer or bear is legally transported.

If someone other than the hunter who harvested the deer or bear is transporting the animal, create and attach an additional tag to the carcass that includes the names, addresses, and signatures of the hunter and person(s) transporting the carcass. The tag may be handwritten in ink or typed on any paper. All portions of deer or bear meat being transported must be individually tagged with the name, address, hunting license number, date that the portions were cut, and the signature of the hunter who harvested the deer or bear. Packaged or boxed portions of venison only require one tag and must be labeled “venison” on the outside of the box. If someone other than the hunter is transporting the portions, create and attach an additional tag to each portion that includes the names, addresses, and signatures of the hunter and person(s) transporting the

portions.

A deer carcass with head removed can be transported as described above, but evidence of the sex of the deer must be intact. Additionally, create and attach a tag to the carcass that includes the name and address of the taxidermist where the head was sent. Heads of male deer may be transported to a taxidermist. Create and attach a tag to the head that includes the hunter’s address, signature, hunting license number, number of points on each antler and the name and address of the taxidermist where the head is being sent. The head of a doe with antlers that are at least 3 inches in length can also be removed for mounting and transported following these same procedures. Hunters who take a deer or bear in remote areas may wish to bone it out and pack out the meat. This is lawful, but you must retain the carcass tag with the boned-out meat.

- Information from the NY DEC

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Evening Sun Outdoor
Chenango Columnist
Eric Davis

One of the most common stories you hear when you ask someone how they got into hunting, is how they hunted

If you aren't a bow hunter or if the October lull has hit, a trip out carrying your bird gun can be a good switch up.

squirrels or rabbits as a kid. Small game hunting can be a great 'blast from the past' if you haven't gone in awhile and a great

way to introduce new hunters to the sport. There typically are two ways to look at small game hunting, before or after deer season. Squirrel season is one of the first seasons to open, starting on September 1, each year. This allows you to get out into the woods while the weather is still pretty reasonable. Warm weather lets you take youth hunters who might not want to hunt in the extreme cold of winter. Thinning out the squirrels around

your favorite tree stand can be beneficial later during deer season while supplying some meat for delicious stew. Early squirrel hunting can be a little tricky due to heavy leaf cover on the trees that haven't even begun to think of falling off. Typically a shotgun loaded with #5 or 6 shot will suffice as it has large enough pellets to penetrate through the leaves with enough kinetic energy to remain lethal. Once the leaves start to fall and the tree tops are more open, a .22 rifle with a scope – or iron sight if your eyes are still good – will allow you to shoot a little farther and more accurately. A single projectile means you won't find random pieces of shot in the meat later. When hunting squirrels, pay close attention to your back drop when getting ready to shoot. Especially when a squirrel is up in the

crown of a tree. Once October 1, rolls around, rabbit, ruffed grouse, and pheasant seasons open. Rabbit hunting can be tricky without snow on the ground, unless you have a dog that is trained. Ruffed grouse offer a similar problem but only because their preferred method of escape is to run instead of flying. Ruffed grouse tend to stick around young, conifer-dominated forests. This is why they would rather duck underneath everything rather than try to maneuver through the low tree limbs. A dog that can track them down faster than a person can walk will keep them from running too far before deciding that flying might be a better route. You still need to keep up with the dog the best you can and be ready for a quick, small shot window. The Department of Environmental Conservation stocks pheasants on public access lands,

primarily state-owned property such as State Forests or Wildlife Management Areas. You can typically get a list of what properties are going to have pheasants released right from the NYSDEC website. Again, a dog is extremely useful to sniff out the birds on the ground. However, a group of hunters spaced apart walking through an overgrown field can kick up any pheasants in the field. If you aren't a bow hunter or if the October lull has hit, a trip out carrying your bird gun can be a good switch up. While you certainly can small game hunt during deer season, use extreme caution and wear a lot of hunter orange. Wearing orange while small game hunting is a smart idea no matter what other seasons are open as well. Being able to wander through the woods without being as careful about your noise and scent as you were during deer season can be relieving. It also is a great way to do a little post-season scouting, especially when there

is snow on the ground. Not only can you see deer tracks so you can try to figure out if you should move a tree stand, but the animals you are hunting are more visible against a white backdrop. A sunny day after a fresh snow storm typically brings rabbits out from their thick hiding places to the outer edges, so they can soak up the sunlight. Sneaking along the south side of a thicket can be rewarding. On cloudy days you can team up with a couple friends and drive the same thick areas as you would during deer season except you don't want to have sitters on the far end. Make a line of hunters about 20-30 yards apart, enough so that you can see each other, and walk slowly through the thick cover, making sure to walk right on top of the thickest, nastiest patches to kick out any rabbits that might be hiding. With the season coming to an end on Feb. 28, it should be noted that these tips mentioned for small game hunting should be pocketed for future hunting seasons. As always, know your target and what's beyond it and wear blaze orange.

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Doing all the rights things can still go wrong

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

It was the Sunday of Columbus Day weekend and I had elected not to bow hunt in the afternoon so I could get some projects done around the house that I had been putting off. Just a couple minutes before six o'clock my phone rang and it was my brother-in-law. I knew the reason he was calling before I

The shot was lethal, the coyotes just happened to find the deer before we could.

answered. "I just shot a buck" were the first words he said. After that he asked if I could come down and help him track it. I gathered my spotlight, headlamp, and license before heading out. I got to his house around 6:30. As I walked up to the house, he emerged from the edge of the yard on his way back. I asked the standard questions of how far was the shot, could you see where you hit him, and what did he do after getting hit? After waiting a little longer at the house, we headed up to the stand where he shot from. Once there I asked to go to where the deer was standing when he shot. I tied a piece of flagging tape up as reference. We followed the direction the deer took after

being hit and found some blood after 10 yards or so. The blood was a rich red, no bubbles to show a lung shot but no stomach contents to indicate a gut shot. We continued to follow the blood trail and after 75 yards or so, we found the arrow on the ground thanks to the lighted nock. We carefully inspected the arrow and kept on tracking as the arrow was

covered in blood, meaning it had worked its way through the body cavity of the deer. As expected, the blood

trail got better as the arrow was no longer plugging the wound channel. However, after another 50 yards the trail started to get lighter. As I was inspecting the blood on the edge of an ATV trail, my brother-in-law had gone forward some to look for the next blood when the deer got up and bounded

off. I marked the trail edge with more flagging and we backed out for the night. Monday morning, we picked up at the last blood. After looking around the downed tree where the deer had taken off from, we found where it had been bedded down. The buck had headed out into a large goldenrod field. Remembering where it sounded like he headed, we looked out in the goldenrod and found some more blood. We followed spotty blood (if you have ever tracked a deer through goldenrod you know how tough it is) for another 50 yards before it began to really peter out. Knowing the general direction he was headed from the previous blood, we slowly worked that way. We had pretty much given up and had left a voicemail with someone who has a tracking dog when we found a tiny spot of blood that gave us a final bearing on the path he took.



We had almost walked out of the goldenrod when I noticed a trail going from an apple tree out into the alfalfa field bordering the goldenrod. I went over to the trail, looked in the field, and spotted something on the ground. After another two steps, I realized it was a deer but it was beat up. My first thought was that it was a deer that had been hit by a car and made it that far from the road (about 100 yards) but I noticed that the deer had antlers. After shouting that I had found it, we convened at the carcass. The deer had been discovered and fed on by coyotes. Both hindquarters had been chewed as well as the body cavity. Before moving the

carcass, we located the exit hole and I grabbed a stick to check out the shot angle. The stick passed less than an inch behind both lungs and had put a triangular hole in the liver. The shot was lethal, the coyotes just

happened to find the deer before we could. It just goes to show that you can do the right things, like backing out after jumping a wounded deer and waiting until the morning just to have something bad happen like coyotes finding the carcass.

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Another calling tactic that can work is to challenge the dominant hen in a flock. The flock has a pecking order just like the bachelor group does, with one hen being the alpha. If you call aggressively at her, she may respond with her own excited yelps and cackles. Generally, I try to mimic what I hear from the live bird that way I don't get too aggressive and cause her to take the flock the opposite direction. One hunting technique that deserves to be in its own category is fall turkey hunting with dogs. It is legal to use dogs to fall turkey hunt in New York, as well as dozens or other states. The approach is somewhat simple but complex all the while. You go out with your dog to get on the scent of a flock of birds, set the dog off and the dog breaks up the flock. You then get the dog and pick a spot to sit and call. Since the birds want to be back together, you call like one of them and hope they reconvene within range of you. This is a technique that still requires you to have a good idea of where the turkeys are at a given time so you can get the dog onto fresh scent.

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Muzzleloader Basics

Evening Sun Outdoor
Chenango Columnist
Eric Davis



In the Southern Zone of the state in terms of big game hunting, muzzleloader season runs for 8 days immediately following

As the component that does the flying and impacting on the game, the bullet you choose can be important.

regular gun season. Now there is a Holiday Deer Hunt that is from December 26 through January 1 where hunters can use muzzleloaders. These seasons are short but can be excellent hunting. The buck I have mounted on my wall was shot during muzzleloader season. Muzzleloaders of today have come a long way from the percussion cap and flintlocks styles used by early settlers in America. Some hunters still use the older style muzzleloaders, but modern in-lines are by far the best sellers. The ability to remove the breech plug and have a

straight shot to clean the barrel make in-lines much easier to clean and therefore less likely to rust and pit from not removing all the burnt powder. This makes in-lines more likely to stay accurate longer and not need to be replaced as soon. When buying a muzzleloader, think about how you plan to hunt with it. If you plan on taking shots that are 50 yards and under only, you can probably get by using open sights. For longer shots, a scope is the way to go. Almost every new muzzleloader comes drilled and tapped to have a scope base mounted on it. That includes those with open sights, so you could always add a scope later if you decide you want to. When it comes time to shoot a muzzleloader there are three components that make the shot work; powder, primer, and bullet. There are multiple options for each of these components.

You can purchase either loose powder or powder that is pre-formed into pellets or sticks. Loose powder requires that you measure the powder to get the charge you want before putting it into the barrel. Loose powder allows for more precise powder charges and can lead to better performance if a shooter is able to test different charges to see what shoots the best in their muzzleloader. Pelletized powder comes in standard charge sizes that allow for quick loading without using a measure or funnel. The drawback to pelletized powder is that the pellets can be slightly different in weight that can result in less consistent accuracy. For the most part though, the difference is not great enough to affect the accuracy of a muzzleloader out to 100 yards. Another consideration when deciding what powder to use is the ease of cleaning. All powder is corrosive once it has been fired, but some

powders take longer to dirty up a barrel. Do some research either online or by talking to other hunters to see what they recommend. Most current in-line muzzleloaders use a 209 primer. The 209 primer was originally used in shotgun shells but has been found to provide the optimal spark for ignition in modern muzzleloaders. Some companies even market 209 primers that are specific for use in muzzleloaders and with certain muzzleloading powders. There now are a couple of muzzleloaders that use a powder and primer combination that is loaded in the breech and only the projectile

is loaded down the barrel. As the component that does the flying and impacting on the game, the bullet you choose can be important. There are two main styles of muzzleloading bullet (or projectile) available. The first is the sabot. This uses a conical bullet that slips into a plastic sleeve with four petals that is then loaded into the barrel. The plastic sleeve engages the rifling on the inside of the barrel and causes the bullet inside to spin. When fired, once the sabot leaves the barrel, the petals on the sleeve open and the bullet keeps flying independent of the

sleeve. The sabot provides excellent accuracy but takes longer to load into the barrel. The second bullet option is a conical bullet with a gas seal around the base. The seal on the bullet engages the rifling when the muzzleloader is fired to create spin. This style of bullet can be less accurate than a sabot but is easier and faster to load because there is no sleeve to put the bullet in before putting in the barrel to load it. So, if you find yourself in the market for a new muzzleloader, remember that modern muzzleloaders aren't like your grandfather's muzzleloader.

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Family Heirlooms: In the Field or in the Safe?

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis

Hunting is often a multigeneration activity where parents, children, and sometimes grandparents all participate together. With the passing of the older generations, the younger generations take possession of some of their things.

The nostalgia of knowing how long something has been in the family or the knowing the stories involving it adds greatly to the value of possessing it. However, sometimes you need to ask yourself if it's better to leave it at home.

With the loss of my father as a teenager, I inherited a lot of things that were his. Some I got right away like the tools in the garage and others I would get a little further down the road. That Christmas, my grandfather (my dad's dad) gave me a Mossberg 500 shotgun that had been my dad's when he was a teenager. It was in a camo soft gun case and had a bird barrel and a slug barrel. In the years following, I got my mom to buy a newer bird barrel that had screw-in chokes so I could put a super full choke in it to turkey hunt and began waterfowl hunting with it as well. When I turned 16 and could deer hunt, I put the slug barrel on and headed to my friend's dairy farm. As I walked to my position on a drive, I jumped a doe by their pond and when she stopped at 50 yards I managed to miss her 3 shots in a row with the iron sights (my first lesson in always shooting your gun before the season). After that happened, a new rifled barrel with a scope on it was added to my Christmas list. With the new barrels on my dad's shotgun, I shot my first turkey, duck, goose, and white-tailed deer buck. After a day of pounding away at geese in the March resident goose season, I was cleaning the shotgun when I noticed some cracks where the receiver attached to the wood stock. As I looked them over, I realized

that the stock would need to be replaced to be able to keep using the shotgun safely. Since I had started spending a lot of time hunting waterfowl in nasty weather, I decided a synthetic stock would be the smart option. While the shotgun looks different, it still functions so that I can carry the same shotgun my dad did. As Schuyler County was changed to allow rifles for deer hunting I purchased a rifle and I have upgraded to a semi-automatic shotgun for bird hunting, I decided to put my dad's shotgun in my gun cabinet. I have recently looked into wooden stocks and think I can get one in the same color shade so I can restore the gun to look the same way it did when I got it over 20 years ago.

Sometimes the item isn't as big as a firearm, but it still reminds us of the person who gave it to us. When I started deer hunting, I carried a Buck folding knife that was my dad's in my vest. One day I walked to a treestand through a big brush lot and when I got to the stand, I noticed the knife had fallen out of my vest. I was devastated to say the least. I spent days and nights thinking about it. The following spring, my friend told me that when his older brother was out looking for shed antlers, he found a knife near the stand by the brush lot. When I asked to see it because I thought it was my dad's knife, he remembered me saying I had dropped it during the fall. It was my dad's knife and when I brought it home I decided it was time to keep it at home and to get another knife to carry while I was hunting.

So if you have a family keepsake for the outdoors, from a firearm to clothing, ask yourself if you should keep using it or if it would be better as something you see at home as a reminder of who gave it to you.



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Catch the Cruise

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis

In mid- to late October, whitetail bucks start to think about the first doe that comes into heat. When the day length gets short enough, it triggers a response where they know a doe must be starting to come into estrous. In hopes of being the first buck to find her, bucks will start to roam trying to get the scent of that doe. This search is often referred to as cruising, as the bucks are just covering as much ground as they can while checking out the common doe hangouts. Cruising might only last a few days, but those are some of the best times to catch a mature buck making a mistake.

Cruising bucks can be susceptible to calling. As they search high and low for that doe, they may cross into another buck’s territory. So, if you see a buck that is cruising, grunting at him may make him think another buck has come into his territory and is stealing his doe. Blind calling can also work during the cruise. Rattling antlers that sound like a couple of bucks trying to decide who is in charge can draw in a crowd to witness it and potentially want to be the next one in the fight.

Using a doe-in-heat urine can bring a buck in on a string when used properly. Put the urine on a wick and drag the wick behind you as you walk to your stand or blind. Try to drag it across as many deer trails as you

can on your way in. Plan your approach so the wind is not carrying scent from your stand to the scent trail you create. Once you get close to your stand, decide what path you want the deer to take as it comes in. Then walk that route with the drag, ending at a place where you have a clear shooting lane. Hang the wick on a branch and add some more urine to it. Be prepared as does may also follow the scent trail. The first deer I shot with a bow was a doe that follow a scent drag to my setup.

If you prefer to keep a more hands-off approach by skipping the use of lures or calls, hunt food sources. Bucks will be trying to pack on some last-minute fat reserves before the rut is fully here. So, think carbohydrates when thinking of the food. Hard mast such as acorns or agriculture leftovers like corn or soybeans will attract deer as the temperatures start to drop. Set up on the downwind side of the feeding areas and you might catch a buck trying to slip in and smell out a hot doe before going out to feed himself.

Whether you call, use scent, both, or none, remember to pay attention to the details of your hunt and what you might see. Deer look back to see other deer that are following them, so be ready as the next deer coming could be the buck your after. Remember to wait to move or draw

until the deer’s vision is obstructed by something, such as a branch or some leaves.



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Passing the Torch

In the fall of 2003, I took the Hunter Education course the same week that my father lost a two-year battle with cancer. In the following years, I bounced around learning to hunt from a few different people I knew. In 2007, I started waterfowl hunting with a friend in the grade below me. We spent almost every weekend in the swamp trying to shoot ducks. I ended up getting invited to hunt at a winery during deer season with him by Mike, an assistant soccer coach of mine, whose family owns the winery. Since then, I have shot the following animals at the winery: my first buck with a shotgun, first deer with a bow, first deer with a muzzleloader, first deer with a rifle, first tom turkey, and a lot of firsts of different species of ducks.

When I moved to Chenango County when I started graduate school, I was fortunate to have a college housemate who lives in Greene who was willing to let me join his hunting group. Shortly after moving, I became the local NWTf chapter president thanks to my experience helping at the Watkins Glen chapter banquets with Mike, my hunting mentor. The chapter was only a year old and being the newest chapter, got the only weekend on the calendar where there wasn't a fundraiser already scheduled, the youth hunt weekend in April. After a couple of years of this, I fought to move the banquet to February so that we could participate in taking youth hunters out on this weekend that was dedicated to just that. My next conundrum was finding a youth hunter to take. We all were in our late 20s and early 30s, so the few kids anyone had were well under the age of 12. I found out that ECO Brett Armstrong had been holding a mentored youth turkey hunt for a few years so I got ahold of him and told him I wanted to help. Through the NWTf

Superfund, I could get money to help put on the hunt in addition to being a mentor to a hunter. So for a few years, I did just that. I would find a second mentor to help me for the hunt and we would take a youth hunter out for one or both days of the youth weekend.

Right before the pandemic of 2020 hit, I took the Hunter Education Instructor training and became an apprentice instructor. However, the pandemic put a damper on being an instructor by halting all in-person classes. Around the same time, I became the state chapter president of the NWTf. This cut into my free time by a lot and also has inhibited my pursuit of becoming a full-fledged Hunter Education Instructor.

However, in the early spring of 2023 I was asked to help teach a Hunter Education course to a church group along with the NWTf state chapter treasurer, who is a seasoned instructor. We taught the course to a small group and it was great time. At the end of the course, a pair of brothers asked about turkey hunting that spring since they knew we were NWTf volunteers. I took their information and got them signed up for the youth hunt.

When the youth hunt came and I got to talk to their parents more, I learned that the boys wanted to learn to hunt but didn't have anyone to take them. I couldn't help but think that this was what I had been waiting for since I was a teen. Being able to help someone get into hunting the way I had been taught by a non-family member.

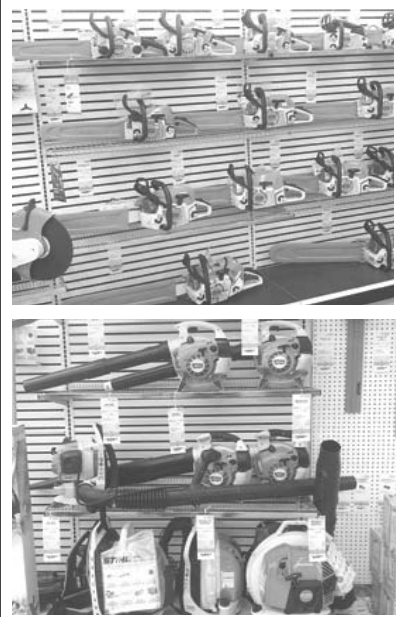
That year, I took the older brother both days of the youth turkey hunt. He missed a Jake on Saturday and a tom on Sunday. But hey, that's part of learning how to hunt. Then during the regular season I took both brothers together once and then the younger brother the last weekend. In the fall, I took the younger brother on the youth deer hunt where we had a split second encounter but couldn't get him on the deer fast enough to shoot. Myself and a friend alternated taking them out during regular gun season, and the younger brother was able to shoot his first deer on the last day of the season. Then last year (2024), I took the younger brother to the winery on the youth hunt and he shot a mature doe about 45 minutes after sunrise. Then on opening day of gun season, we returned to the winery and he shot another doe in the afternoon. This spring he shot his first turkey on the youth hunt and proceeded to tag out on Mother's Day. At this point, he's hooked on hunting and I can't help but smile thinking about his excitement after shooting the deer and turkeys.

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Outdoors Recreation Stages

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis



When someone takes the Hunter Education Course in New York, they learn about the 5 stages of hunter development. The stages cover the typical transition a hunter goes through and they do not necessarily go through the stages in the same order as other hunters do. The five stages can easily be used to describe fishermen or women also.

The shooting stage typically is first. The focus of the hunter is to get shots off without a real focus on the quality of the shot. Due to being “trigger happy,” the

hunter can make bad shots that aren’t lethal to game or can be dangerous to other hunters. Hunters in this stage move out of it quickly with the help of experienced mentors and putting in some time on the target range. For fishing, I would replace the word shooting with casting. The focus is on fishing as many places as possible and can lead to making casts that end up in trees or over powerlines.

The limiting-out stage happens when the hunters uses limiting out as their measure of hunt success. A hunt that results in less than a limit of game is considered a failure. Due to the focus on harvesting a limit, hunters in this stage also can take dangerous shots that put other hunters in potential harm. Again, experienced mentors can help hunters grow out of this stage. This stage can be seen in fishing with anglers wanting to catch their limit of fish. In fishing, this could include keeping fish that are below the legal keeping size to make the total catch appear bigger and/or better.

When a hunter is selective and judges their success by the quality of the

animal instead of quantity, this is called the trophy stage. The hunter will pass up animals that aren’t deemed to be a trophy. Most of the time in hunting, this will apply to big game hunting. Waterfowl hunters aiming to harvest beautiful drake ducks can also be called trophy hunters. There are plenty of fishermen that are on the hunt for the fish of a lifetime.

The method stage is when a hunter puts more focus on the technique over the quality or quantity of game harvested. For big game hunting, this could mean using archery or black powder equipment for the first time. It could also mean trying to track a deer in fresh snow. For small game hunters, it may be hunting with a dog for the first time. For fishermen, it could be trying to catch a trout on a fly rod or catching bass on a weedless frog in the lily pads. The size of the fish or number of fish doesn’t matter if it is caught using that specific method.

The last stage is the sportsman stage. In this stage, success is measured by the entire experience of the hunt. It includes an appreciation for the animal hunted, the technique used, and the companionship of other hunters. In this stage, a hunt can be called successful without any animals being harvested. In fishing, spending the day with friends on the lake may be considered a success without any fish being caught.

I would say that hunters can be in different stages at the same time, particularly if they are trying different types of hunting (small game, waterfowl, big game). I know that I am at least. With my compound bow I pass up smaller bucks in hopes of seeing a bigger buck (trophy stage). During firearms season, I focus more on filling the freezer with venison (limiting-out stage). My waterfowl hunting has come to focus on hunting with good friends and maybe harvesting some ducks (sportsman stage).

When it comes to fishing, I am at a hybrid stage between trophy stage and method stage. Due to my allergy when consuming fish, I don’t try to catch fish to put on my dinner plate. So instead, I try to focus on technique and catching bigger fish that I release anyway. My next adventure is going to be fly fishing. I took a fly rod and a couple boxes of flies from my grandfather’s house after he passed last year with the goal of learning how to use them. No matter what stage or stages you may be in, the key is to get outside and enjoy yourself. And don’t forget to invite someone new to come with you!

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