



Final Report

Submitted to the Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund

September 12, 2017

Project Outline Goal and Objectives

The goal of the Water'n Woods Weekend is to provide a hands-on, interactive, outdoor program which allows youth to obtain their Canadian Firearms Safety and Hunter's Education courses and develop skills that will help them become responsible and ethical young hunters. The objective is to create an environment for youth which allow them to understand and retain the information more easily and create a comprehensive, enjoyable learning environment, while being exposed to firearms/outdoor safety, basic camping and survival skills. The program is designed to take place over 3 days and 2 nights. Each day filled with hands on activities related to wildlife habitat, conservation and firearms safety.

Outline of Work Completed

Initial discussion with primary stakeholders and grant application to the NS Habitat Conservation Fund took place late December 2016.

First meeting between the Women That Hunt and Hants West Wildlife Association was held on Sunday February 5th 2017 at 2:00 PM at Hnatiuk's Hunting and Fishing in Lantz. Initial plans were developed dates were established and camp ground and range were secured. We decided on 24 youth for registration and everyone left with a to do list which involved securing volunteers, sourcing supplies, insurance and making initial contact with Safety Services Nova Scotia to create online registration specific to this event.

Many emails between both organizations, DNR and Safety Services Nova Scotia transpired to expedite weekend details. Confirmation of funding was received which meant implementation of plans could start.

Through email correspondence, tentative program schedule and layout was reviewed and approved. DNR registration instructions were created and registration officially opened on the website and social media sites June 21st, 2017.

On Thursday June 29th, the Women That Hunt met in person with the Hants West Wildlife Association at Hnatiuk's Hunting and Fishing in Lantz. It was confirmed that we would break up into 6 groups of 4, each group with a team leader (WTH) for the weekend. The Firearms Safety Course would run Friday at the Hants West Facility. Hants West Certified Instructors would implement the course, assisted by WTH. Saturday would be station rotation and Stanley Range for Hunter's Safety. Sunday, we would return to Falmouth facility to finish the remainder of the Hunter's Safety course and write the test. Sunday afternoon we would host the NS Trapper's Association and execute a blood trailing exercise.

Enrollment was quick and closed by July 10th 2017. A family meet and greet was set for Sunday July 23rd at the Hants West Wildlife Association Facility in Falmouth. Registrants arrived with parents, a review of the weekend was reviewed. Liability and other waivers were signed. Q&A session addressed any concerns, health, food etc. An information sheet was provided to all parents which included contact phone numbers, camping arrangements and team leaders.

Smaller internal meetings transpired within the WTH group to finalize food prep and equipment. Concerns were raised of imminent weather conditions as heavy rains were expected. It was decided that the event would take place regardless of rain. Extra supplies were required to better equip the group for uncontrollable elements.

Thursday August 17th a select group arrived at the camp site for set up and prep. Food Trailer, other Trailer and tents were all set up.

Friday August 18th, registration took place at 8:00 AM. Youth were broken into their groups and team leaders transported youth to the Falmouth facility. The day was spent at the facility where the firearms course was conducted. Lunch was brought on site by WTH. Practical and test ended approximately 6 PM. All involved return to the camp ground for corn bowl, BBQ and Man Tracker game.

Saturday August 19th, team leaders transported their teams to the Stanley range and area at 9:00 AM. Groups rotated through a station rotation hourly. Stations involved archery, water fowl, rifle range, crossbow, bear bait and tree stand, skeet and theory. Weather was relentless but despite the conditions the youth remained positive and completed all the stations. Plans changed for supper because of the weather, so all involved reported to the Falmouth facility where were ate and socialized indoors. To our surprise members of Fur and Feather Outfitters, who hosted the waterfowl station presented all the youth with hats and magazines and one lucky youth won a 12-gauge shotgun. We returned to the camp ground around 8:00 PM. Youth and organizers socialized under the group tent area.

Sunday August 20th groups were transported to Falmouth facility by 9:00 AM. Hunter's Education course was completed, test was written and all youth returned to campground by 1:00 PM. Lunch was provided and graduation ceremony was performed. Youth were divided into two groups, half going with the Trappers Association and the other participating in the blood trailing exercise. After 75 minutes, groups switched. While youth were participating in stations WTH and crew disabled tents, cleaned campground and packed. Kids were all picked up by parents by 4:30 PM, provided completion certificates and contact information to activate licenses. All remaining organizers departed campground by 5:00 PM.

The days to follow all gear and kit were unloaded, sorted, returned and/or stored. Results, pictures and comments were posted to social media sites. HUB Now and Truro Daily news were contacted and sent pictures regarding the event.

Results

24 youth who attended the Water'n Woods Weekend successfully completed their Canadian Firearms Safety course and their Hunter's Education course. The goal and objectives laid out in the initial outline of the program we successfully met.

Assessment, Achievements and Lessons learned

Preparation and planning for this event was extensive but well worth the effort. We recognized early on that there needed to be a strong emphasis on control so having small groups and team leaders not only provided a structured element of supervision but created opportunity for relationship development.

The facility, campground and range worked out very well for access and location. We would utilize these facilities again.

Considering the scope of the event we did not have many issues, and despite the heavy rain all tents and beds remained dry and the weekend events were all still performable. In hind sight, we faced a worst-case scenario situation. Moving forward we know to hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

We were successful in performing all meals and meeting the requirements of difficult dietary needs. The WTH had an assigned kitchen crew which made meals consistent, timely and delicious.

The layout of the weekend worked well and with minimal adjustments will serve as a successful template for years to come.

We were truly fortunate to have worked with some amazing groups and volunteers. The professionalism and etiquette was exceptional.

Recommendations

Hosting 24 youth was an ambitious endeavor. We would consider it again however we would implement a screening process during registration. This year registration was open to whom ever wanted to participate. We recognized early there is a difference between a youth wanting to be there and their parents wanting them to be there. Thoughts of a short video and a reference letter will aid in ensuring the youth that participate are serious.

A few youths that enrolled for the weekend already had their Firearms Course and were only enrolled in the Hunters Education portion. We stated that they would have to take the course again as a refresher but would not be required to write the test. Moving forward we would not make it a requirement. We recognize that it is possible for kids to just arrive for the Hunter's Safety portion as the schedule clearly separates the two courses.

As interactive as the course was, we would take steps towards making it more interactive. Kids learn differently and after taking an entire group of kids through the program there are definite areas that can be manipulated better to suit their learning needs.

Games and entertainment were organized for evenings however we realize this time may need to be more structured especially when most youth are between the ages of 12 and 14.

We initially started out with youth camping in larger groups. We recognized immediately this would not benefit sleeping standards and purchased emergency tents to break them up into smaller groups and rectify the situation.

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