



MDC Hunter Education Annual Summary 2020

Introduction

Happy January, team! I'm excited to be bringing you the inaugural MDC Hunter Education Annual Summary. This will give us an opportunity to reflect on the successes and opportunities for growth of the Hunter Education program during the previous calendar year, and an opportunity to prepare for the year ahead of us. I suppose it's fitting that our first Summary is that of 2020. But even in the face of unprecedented struggle, the story needing told is one of extraordinary effort and resilience on the part of staff and volunteers. Let's dive in.

Year-in-Review

As you all know, we lost several months of progress when programs were cancelled due to COVID-19. The shutdown couldn't have come at a worse time – the middle of March, leading up to spring turkey season. One of the first challenges we faced was that managed hunt regulations require hunter education certification regardless of the age of the participant. With the help of Permits staff, we identified youth hunters who were drawn for managed hunts who did not have hunter education certification and were unable to obtain it due to cancelled skills sessions. Administration issued one-time waivers for those hunters to be able to participate in the spring 2020 managed turkey hunts.

Since most schools were closed, we also missed out on almost an entire semester of the program being taught as part of in-school curriculum. Even so, our 2020 in-school skills sessions totaled 244 classes in 150 unique schools, totaling 4,291 students certified. This is only a 17% decrease in classes from 2019

(294) and a 14% decrease in unique schools from 2019 (174). These in-school classes totaled 46% of our total skills sessions and 57% of our total in-person certifications. Given the circumstances, this is a win!

Skills Sessions	# of School Classes	School Sessions as % of Total	Unique Schools	# of Students in Schools	School Certifications as % of Total
Statewide	244	46%	150	4,291	57%
Central	25	39%	13	320	37%
Kansas City	27	31%	17	431	44%
Northeast	21	57%	15	347	64%
Northwest	40	61%	26	517	65%
Ozark	14	35%	11	254	48%
Southeast	15	31%	8	235	40%
Southwest	75	68%	46	1748	78%
St. Louis	27	36%	14	439	44%

Figure 1. Data for skills sessions in schools by region.

Figure 1 shows us that our hunter education footprint in schools varies wildly. I encourage everyone to join me in looking for new, innovative ways to increase our school participation.

Our statewide total number of skills sessions was 527, a 12% decrease from 2019 (596). These skills sessions resulted in a total number of in-person certifications of 7,512 individuals – a decrease of 24% from 2019 (9,810).

Skills by Year	# Events	# Passed
2020	527	7,512
2019	596	9,810
2018	603	10,010

Figure 2. Skills sessions and in-person certifications by year.

The breakdown by region loosely follows what we would expect when considering population in those areas, with the notable exception of Southwest Region's numbers which reflect school participation.

Skills Sessions	# Events	# Passed	# Failed	# No Show
Statewide	527	7,512	271	572
Central	65	859	10	87
Kansas City	86	971	25	114
Northeast	37	543	50	26
Northwest	66	794	17	31
Ozark	40	533	2	24
Southwest	48	587	11	70
Southwest	110	2,228	140	138
St. Louis	75	997	16	82

Figure 3. Total events and participant numbers by region.

During 2020, the Education Branch worked closely with the Communications Branch to inform the public that, due to COVID-19, skills sessions would be limited and those that were scheduled would have reduced capacity. The goal of this outreach was to 1) remind eligible citizens that there was an online option, and 2) to remind those who qualified for exemptions that they were eligible to hunt without hunter education certification. Although I can't *prove* that this outreach had a direct effect, our online certification numbers were very strong. HuntOnline completions (age 16 and up) totaled 16,304 – an increase of 25% over 2019 (13,094). This was the highest number of online completions since its inception in 2017, beating the four-year average by 16%. As of the end of 2020, 56,378 Missouri citizens have been certified through the all-online option.

This brings the total 2020 hunter education certifications to 23,816 – an increase of over 4% from 2019 (22,821). For perspective, the 20-year average number of certifications (2001 - 2020) is 25,212. Our highest year during that span being 2002 (32,288) and our lowest year being 2016 (19,141). At the completion of our 64th year of our program, we have totaled 1,334,771 certifications.

None of this would be possible without the help of our dedicated volunteers. While we know that the

number is much higher, 153 instructors claimed a total of 4,175 hours in the Volunteer Management system for skills and classroom sessions during 2020. Compliance with required hour entry remains one of the program's most significant hurdles.

What's Ahead?

The data evaluation that went into this Summary is one of my favorite aspects of the job. I enjoy looking at the program from different angles, identifying trends, brainstorming ideas with peers, and developing plans based on the data. One reason why I wanted to create this document was to share the data and gather your input!

The Hunter Education Committee will meet in 2021 to discuss curriculum adjustments, ordering new student manuals, needed changes to the Instructor Manual, new options for the online format, volunteer instructor hurdles, and other issues that may arise. If you have input about the program that you believe needs to be reviewed, please reach out to me.

Conclusion

You all played a valuable role in bringing this program to Missourians in 2020. Thank you for remaining patient through unprecedented obstacles, persevering, and having an incredible year. If I can be of service to you, do not hesitate to ask. Let's have a great 2021!



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