

WILDLIFE

Landowners help shape the next generation of hunters

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Oklahomans are fortunate to have an abundance of wildlife and communities across the state with interest and support for wildlife conservation and outdoor

recreation. Introducing our youth to hunting and the great outdoors is one way to support wildlife conservation and has produced some of the most rewarding experiences in my life. I look

forward to taking youth hunting every year during the Noble Academy sponsored youth doe hunt.

Many of Oklahoma's youth miss out on opportunities to hunt because they don't have access to property. Teaching youth about wildlife, conservation and management practices is important, and offering memorable hunting experiences is how we create the next generation of hunters.

Oklahoma landowners may

be able to play a larger role in the development of the next generation of hunters through the Oklahoma Private Lands Youth Hunt program. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), in partnership with private landowners across the state, offers deer hunting opportunities each year to youth ages 12 to 17 selected through a random drawing that typically takes place in August. This year, hunters had the opportunity to participate in one of

four bonus antlerless deer hunts on private lands in Carter, Love, Ellis and Johnston counties.

Each of these four hunts offers a little different experience, but all have proven to be a great opportunity for youth to experience the outdoors and a thrilling hunt with a parent or guardian. Each year, the youth who participate in the hunts boast about the skills of their guides (offered in some hunts), stories shared around a campfire, target practice and the unforgettable hunts they had.

Landowners who offer these youth hunting opportunities benefit from white-tailed deer population management through doe harvest. They also receive tremendous satisfaction in knowing that a beginning hunter is learning the skills and ethics of hunting and could potentially harvest their first deer because of this opportunity. These landowners are proud to help create the next generation of hunters.

Landowners who continue to provide these opportunities look forward to the hunts every year. Collectively, these landowners have made deer hunting possible for 49 youth who may not have otherwise had the opportunity. The program regularly has more than 200 applicants and will likely continue to grow, so there is a significant amount of youth left out each year.

The four hunts have proven to be a huge success and have paved the way for other landowners to step forward. Landowners interested in providing additional opportunities for youth to hunt through the Private Lands Youth Hunt program should contact ODWC. Some landowners enjoy the time to share hunting stories with the young hunters over lunch, but a landowner's only responsibility in the program is to provide them with an opportunity

to hunt. It is exciting to see that there are so many youth interested in hunting, but unfortunately there aren't enough opportunities for everyone. ■