

MDC and Partners Host Big Muddy Duck Hunt

Many waterfowl hunters recall the first time they saw ducks gliding over a marsh. Perhaps the same memory is formed for the 22 youngsters that the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and partners introduced to waterfowl hunting on Oct. 22. The fifth annual Big Muddy Duck Hunt in Holt County gave youth ages 11 to 15 a chance to learn basic waterfowl hunting skills and experience a guided hunt.

“We’re trying to reach out to kids who normally wouldn’t get to waterfowl hunt in this kind of environment,” said Conservation Agent Jade Wright, who co-founded the annual youth hunt along with fellow Holt County Agent Anthony Maupin.

The environment is marshes with blinds at various private waterfowl hunting clubs in the Missouri River bottoms of Holt County. The Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, MDC’s Bob Brown and Nodaway Valley conservation areas, plus the Missouri River, draw waterfowl into the area.

Wright and Maupin noticed years ago that blinds at the private hunting clubs were not being utilized during the waterfowl youth hunt weekend, which this year was Oct. 22-23. So they approached the hunting clubs about holding a youth hunt. The hunting clubs offered blinds, funds or volunteers. Now, the annual hunt has evolved into a non-profit corporation that accepts donations from organizations and businesses, such as civic groups in the Mound City community serving lunch. MDC is the organizing partner.

The day-long event starts with training taught primarily by conservation agents. A first stop for youths is a station about duck identification, hunting regulations and hunting opportunities on public lands, such as MDC conservation areas. The youths are then given lessons in duck calling, hunting strategies, waterfowl biology and using decoys. Instructors demonstrate how to prepare harvested ducks for cooking. Then the youths are given basic instruction in shooting, including firearm safety, followed by training shooting at clay pigeon targets that simulates shooting in a hunting blind.

“A lot of these kids we’re reaching out to, they’ve never held a shotgun,” Wright said.

In late afternoon, the youths head to the marshes to hunt with volunteers serving as guides. They get a chance to try out duck calls and shotguns in a true hunt, with a lot of support.

“We encourage the parents to tag along,” Wright said. “We have a lot of parents who get to be there and see their kids harvest ducks.”

The youths harvested 17 ducks this year. That’s not a bad tally, he said, as duck numbers vary early in the season according to weather. All the youths saw ducks on the wing and most fired shots.

Each participant is also given items useful for hunting, such as a blind bag for carrying gear, duck calls, and camouflage face masks. There are also door prizes, and every youth gets a door prize. One lucky youth wins a shotgun as a door prize. Donations from partners make the prizes possible.

The Big Muddy Duck Hunt can accommodate 25 participants ages 11 to 15. All activities are free. Organizers offer 10 slots for general sign-up, while another 15 slots are reserved for

partner organizations that have youth outreach programs. Youths may only participate one year. For more information or to register for the 2017 Big Muddy Duck Hunt, visit <http://bigmuddyduckhunt.org>.

For information about other MDC conservation education and waterfowl hunting programs in Missouri, visit <http://mdc.mo.gov>