

Hunter Safety/Outdoors Education Conference

York County Fish & Game Association was well represented on Saturday, March 18 at the Hunter Safety/Outdoors Education Instructor conference in Lewiston. Attending were Ron Legeux, Larry Giguere, Margaret Heseltine, Terry Bradish, Ed Stubbs, and a few others whose names escaped me.

The Recreational Safety Division of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife hosted the conference. Recreational Safety Supervisor Mike Sawyer mastered the event and introduced many of the speakers.

Guest Speakers included Eric Nuce, Executive Director of the International Hunter Education Association. Charles Lubelczyk who works with Maine Medical Center studying and tracking diseases spread by ticks and mosquitoes. And DIFW Deputy Commissioner Paul Jacques who beamed at the progress made in fish hatchery upgrades.

Workshops were divided into seminar groups, which allowed instructors to get the updates and information needed to conduct their respective outdoors education classes.

Eric Nuce discussed trends in hunting and hunter education. He offered many interesting ideas that are being tried in different parts of the country to maintain or increase the number of hunters. He also stated 33 states are using a national standard for outdoors education. One of the ideas being tried to increase interest in hunting in Texas is a license deferral program.

"Basically, if someone who isn't a licensed hunter wants to give the sport a try, they contact a licensed hunter and hunt with him or her (one time) without the expense of purchasing a license. They share in the bag as well. What Texas learned from the deferral program was that 1/3 of those participating had never hunted, 1/3 had allowed their licenses to lapse, and 1/3 wanted to give hunting a try but didn't know how."

I'd bet Maine's numbers would be similar if non-hunters were polled, too.

Nuce also touched on hunter ethics nationwide, and how the ethics we as hunters display greatly impacts the future of hunting as a sport and conservation tool.

Charles Lubelczyk offered a great deal of material on tick borne diseases, including Lyme disease, which is a threat in areas containing Deer Ticks. While there are other diseases spread by ticks, Lyme is most prevalent in coastal and southern central Maine; but it is slowly spreading north and westward.

Deer Ticks are most prevalent in early spring and summer, and late summer and fall. Laval stage Deer Ticks during those seasons are very small and often referred to as the size of a pinhead. But adults are about the size of a pencil lead. Adult Deer Ticks are usually solid colored rusty brown or black. They have no markings on their backs.

The ticks we are more likely to see are Wood Ticks, or so-called "Dog Ticks". They are the larger ticks and often have a white or stripe markings on their back. We often find them on our clothing, or you may find them on your floor after they feed and fall from your dog or cat, once they become engorged. While Wood Ticks can transmit disease, they are less likely to carry Lyme. Wood Ticks are usually found in grassy fields or low-brush areas.

Deer ticks thrive in leafy forest habitat, (oak, maple, ash, poplar), and live in leaf litter until they need to feed or during cold months. Neither species of tick prefer dense evergreens, although they can still be found but usually in reduced numbers.

The best prevention from tick exposure is to protect yourself by tucking in pant cuffs (ticks climb upward) and to use bug repellants. Products containing DEET are effective in repelling ticks from your body. Another product is a plant-based material called Permethrin. It is applied directly to clothing and not only repels but kills ticks. Lubelczyk said, "Permethrin does not work on your body. Body oils dilute and break down Permethrin. It is harmless to humans, yet if applied to clothing it will last for several washings."

"If you have to remove a tick from your body, don't squeeze it! Doing so may cause the insect to vomit its stomach contents into the bite site, which can cause infection. Use a tick removal tool or pull the tick out by the base of the head with tweezers. The idea of suffocating ticks by spreading Vaseline on them is ineffective. Ticks only breathe about one breath per minute. They take a long time to suffocate. Pull them off! Ticks that are left on for more than 36 hours are more likely to transmit disease than

those removed within a few hours. However, even the bite site can become red bump similar to a fly bite. People should carefully examine themselves and their children daily. They should also take measures to prevent ticks from infecting pets as well. The cat or dog sleeping on the couch may host ticks that will later crawl onto people." Lubelczyk said.

"The best and proven way to reduce Lyme Disease in any area is to reduce the number of deer in that area. Our studies have consistently shown that occurrence of Lyme increases and decreases with deer population."

Also of concern is a "swath where dead crows were tested positive for West Nile Virus. Those areas included Lebanon, Sanford, Alfred, Lyman, and Waterboro. West Nile is a virus transmitted by mosquitoes, and control of mosquito breeding area is important. Clean your property of old tires, buckets, don't let water collect in wheelbarrows. Deny mosquitoes egg laying habitat (stagnant water on your property). Use repellants, and reduce exposure to mosquitoes in early morning and evening hours when these pests are most active. Elderly, the very young, and those with compromised immune systems are at highest risk from West Nile Virus."

A great deal of material was offered on preventing the spread of invasive plants into Maine's waters. In the past anybody found with plant material on their boat, motor, or trailer was given a verbal or written warning that they could spread unwanted non-native plants from one body of water to another. Beginning this year, anybody found with plant material on their boat, motor, trailer, and anchor line or on the chassis of their vehicle would be summonsed by Wardens. "Invasive water-plants ruin waterways, fishing, swimming, boating, and lower property values." Recreational Safety Officer Lou Haskell said.

One DIFW Recreational Safety Officer lamented, "unfortunately not everybody has to participate in the program. Non motorized watercraft are exempt from the invasive plant sticker program, and it's just not right. Anybody can spread invasive plants on canoes, kayaks, paddles, fishing gear, or paddle boats. But the lack of a sticker will not prevent you from being summonsed if you are found to be transporting any plant material from one body of water to another. And I'm not picking on canoes or kayakers either, I have two motor boats and three canoes, and every one of them should have a plant sticker on them!"

Many members of the audience felt non-residents were a greater threat to spreading invasive plants than residents. "They are exempt from buying the sticker" he opined.

Workshops for outdoor educators included updates for bowhunter instructors and tree stand safety, turkey hunting safety, ATV issues and recommendations, boating safety and paddle sports, and crossbow instructor training.

Beginning this year Crossbows will be legal to hunt with, only during the open firearms season on deer or bear. They will not be allowed during archery deer or archery turkey seasons. To use a crossbow you must have completed a hunter or archery safety class, and will be required to attend a 2-hour crossbow safety class this year. Crossbow safety classes will be held prior to the deer-hunting season.

To learn more about crossbow hunting or to locate safety classes, visit the DIFW web site or the York County Fish & Game website. Information will be forthcoming.

Ed Stubbs lives in Waterboro and is legislative representative for York County Fish & Game Association in Lyman.