

Meeting Date: July 23

Agenda Item No. 14

Agenda Item: Report about IDFG Mandatory Education and other IDFG Hosted/Participating Events during COVID-19 and Future Outlook

Bureau Chief Approval: ES

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Background: Mandatory Education - Response to COVID-19 orders by the State of Idaho and local governments beginning in March resulted in IDFG significantly modifying delivery of Hunter Education to an online-only platform with the field day waived. Previously, the online option still required an instructor-led field day for certification. All instructor-led classes, including Trapper Education and Wolf Trapper Education were cancelled.

The online course takes approximately 4-6 hours to complete and students have one year to complete the course. The online content is identical to the instructor-led student manual and includes the same videos and graphics. Students take a quiz at the end of each unit and complete a final exam at the end of course. The online course follows the International Hunter Education Association content standards.

The online course does not include Idaho specific rules and regulations, an in-person practical and field day exam, or specific Idaho wildlife identification. Online students do not receive the instructor-led student packet which includes pertinent information such as the CWD brochure. Students can take the online course at their own pace and convenience.

During the current online-only delivery of Hunter Education with a waived field day, there has been a substantive increase in the number of students taking the online course and becoming certified. During the period January 1-June 16, 2020, we recorded 10,670 Hunter Ed certifications, a 109% increase over 2019. The table below illustrates the dramatic increase in students taking online-only hunter education with the field day waived. Staff will evaluate how many of these students recruit as hunting license holders.

Comparison of Hunter Education Course Completions

Month	Year: 2019	Year: 2020
March	318	1,598
April	337	3,085
May	332	2,969
June	269	1,605

Online Bowhunter Education certifications increased by 39% (1,007) over 2019 for this same time period. However, the number of students during spring, 2020 may have also been influenced by the online provider offering a 50% discount for Hunter Education students who also wanted to take the bowhunter education class online.

Staff is working on protocols to reinstate instructor-led Trapper Education and Wolf Trapper Education that are consistent with state and local health orders; about 120 students were “in the queue” when classes were cancelled. We are planning to reduce the length of these classes to be able to offer both Trapper Ed and Wolf Trapper Ed on the same day to reduce classroom contact time. Class size will be considerably reduced to ensure social distance and there will be restricted opportunity for “hands-on” training to reduce any sharing of equipment.

Future Outlook: Because of uncertainty about instructor capacity, availability of locations for classes, and status of Idaho COVID-19 protocols, staff is planning to continue the current Hunter Education model (online-only with field day waived) through at least the remainder of 2020. We will continue to evaluate requests for instructor-led classes to determine if conditions warrant resuming some instructor-led classes later this fall. We plan to pilot an instructor-led Trapper Ed and Wolf Trapper Ed class at the end of July or the beginning of August to gauge student interest and feasibility of our protocols to meet health orders.

Non-Mandatory Education: IDFG offers and participates in a wide range of educational topics and opportunities. Examples include our Fishing Trailer events to provide fishing opportunity and training, Project Wild classes to teach teachers about wildlife to incorporate lessons into the classroom, public presentations about Idaho wildlife resources, tours at Nature Centers and other IDFG locations, and large scale events with partners such as Hunting University in Southeast Idaho. As a COVID-19 response, these in-person education events have generally been cancelled. For example, IDFG cancelled its Free Fishing Day Events and also did not contribute to partner events. Regions are evaluating on a case-by-case basis whether to participate in community events such as fairs.

Future Outlook: It is unlikely that IDFG will host any fishing trailer events through the remainder of 2020. The MK Nature Center has re-opened its building for public viewing and has some small-scale education classes and tours scheduled and Regions will continue to evaluate feasibility and necessity of resuming educational events, particularly once the State advances out of Stage 4.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues: This information briefing is to update Commission about statutory and non-statutory education and department events. A noted policy consideration is whether to integrate delivery of online only Hunter Education with a waived field day as a standard component of the IDFG program and not solely as a COVID-19 response.

Public Involvement Process: No specific process is underway at this time but stakeholders and partners, particularly Hunter Ed instructors, would likely have an opinion about major change to our Hunter Education delivery.

Staff Recommendation: Consider feasibility of integrating current online Hunter Education model as part of IDFG's standard program and evaluate if there is any difference in license purchase between students who certified under an online-only with a waived field day platform or students who experienced an online or instructor led platform that included a field day. Continue to adapt programs in response to COVID-19 protocols to enable public education and engagement.

Justification: Appropriate to review status of programs.