

# Clinic teaches children waterfowl hunting



A young duck hunter beams with pride after taking his first duck during the Big Muddy Youth Duck Hunt in Holt County.

The Big Muddy Youth Duck Hunt celebrated its fifth anniversary on opening day of the youth waterfowl season.

Twenty-two kids rotated through five education stations where they were given hands-on training including: duck identification, calling, bird cleaning, and shotgun shooting skills. Protection Division staff and local cooperators served as instructors for these stations.

In the afternoon, sponsors treated youngsters to a guided duck hunt in private duck clubs surrounding Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Twenty-two youngsters harvested 17 ducks.

Holt County agents Anthony Maupin and Jade Wright initiated the event in 2012. Since then, the Big Muddy Youth Duck Hunt has grown into a community event. Numerous volunteers from the Mound City area serve as guides, safety coaches, and instructors. Additionally, duck club

members, local businesses, and organizations provide food, door prizes, and care-package items for the event.

Each participant receives a chance to win prizes including a shotgun, certificates for free waterfowl mounts, guided duck hunts, and various other items related to hunting or fishing. All these items also were provided through donations.

The clinic places a strong emphasis on recruiting young hunters to the sport of duck hunting, kids who would not otherwise have a chance to go. The project gives a priority to youth with a parent deployed in the armed services and to youth through the “Big Brothers/Big Sisters—Mentoring with a Role Model” program. Local kids fill the remaining allotted spots.

This clinic is a “win, win” situation for all involved. At the end of the day it’s hard to tell who had more fun, the guides or the youngsters!

JADE WRIGHT

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trucks, welders, generators, and other items have gone out to Missouri fire departments in need. Without Stephen’s expertise, the equipment center would have missed like-new equipment that Missouri’s rural fire departments can use.

### Employee of the Year

Our division selected Forestry Program Supervisor Rich Blatz as the Forestry Division Employee of the Year for 2016. In addition to his regular workload, his work on four major projects this year demonstrates why he earned this award.

A large part of Rich’s workload this year focused on coordinating with other

Conservation Department divisions to assure compliance with the Endangered Species Act to avoid and minimize impacts to federally listed bats. While this work was a group effort that involved work with federal partners, Rich had to clearly articulate the value of forest management, the process used to determine prescriptions, and the steps taken to comply with best management practices.

The second task consuming Rich’s schedule was the division’s efforts to pursue certification for forest lands under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Rich developed timelines, a white paper highlight certification

pros and cons, and made numerous presentations on the topic. Once the plan was approved by the Conservation Commission, Rich then hired a forest certification manager and began implementation.

Installing Continuous Forest Inventory plots was made challenging by the number of staffing vacancies in the division. Rich was instrumental in advancing a new plan for the regions to re-measure plots. Rich worked swiftly to train new foresters on sampling protocol, operating on site with new foresters to bring them up to speed.

Migrating the old forest inventory program to the

new “Missouri Forest Inventory and Tracking System,” or MoFITS, was planned for completion in FY15. However, a myriad of complications pushed the conversion into FY16. Rich, along with Mike Morris and other employees, deserve credit for not allowing this task to languish.

Rich consistently provides superior customer service to division staff and the agency. Rich’s patient, easy-going approach, and his ability to articulate what we do and why make him an outstanding advocate for the division and the critically important work that we do.