

Texas hunting accidents drop to record low

The number of Texas hunting accidents in 2010 declined to the lowest since statistical records began in 1966, according to a new report by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The number of people injured in hunting accidents in Texas fell from 29 in 2009 to 25 in 2010, although fatalities increased from three to four during the same period.

More important than the annual dips and peaks, however, is the long-term trend continues to track downward.

"The statistics show hunting is safe and getting safer in Texas," said Terry Erwin, TPWD hunter education coordinator. "And we do believe that is directly related to hunter education."

The steady decline in the number of accidents tracks the growing number of people who take hunter educa-

tion in Texas. In 1972, 2,119 people were certified in hunter education. In 2010, more than 3,000 volunteer hunter education instructors trained nearly 42,000 hunters across the state.

The state's worst year on record for hunting accidents was 1968, when 105 accidents were reported, including 37 fatalities. In 1988, hunter education became mandatory in Texas for anyone born on or after Sept. 2, 1971.

According to Erwin, most accidents are preventable if hunters follow basic safety principles like those taught in hunter education courses.

"You know you're not going to stop accidents altogether," he said. "But you're going to help people build knowledge and skills to avoid accidents. It's things like the '10 Commandments of Shooting Safety,' the very

basic safety principles that are promoted a whole lot more now than 30 or even 20 years ago."

Erwin said the significant factors behind most hunting accidents have not changed much in recent years. "Swinging on game outside a safe fire zone remains the number one cause of hunting accidents in Texas," he noted.

This happens when a person points a firearm at another hunter while following a moving target, such as a flying game bird. Hunter education teaches people to set up safe zones of fire where a gun can be safely pointed whether the target is moving or stationary.

Careless firearm handling remains another primary factor in many accidents.

"Careless handling incidents almost always involve three factors: pointing a loaded firearm muzzle at yourself or someone else with the safety off and with your finger inside the trigger guard," Erwin explained.



Tom Dean of Robert Lee caught this nice stringer of Speckled Trout at Port O'Connor, Texas, in August 2011.

Hunter education courses teach ways to safely handle firearms, including how to carry them in the field and pass them from one person to another.

Although hunter education in Texas is not mandatory for those born before Sept. 1, 1971, it is encouraged for even the most seasoned shooters and hunters and is a requirement of anyone hunt-

ing in some states.

Texans have several options available for fulfilling hunter education requirements, including the traditional two-day, 10-hour classroom environment, two free online courses or two optional fee-associated online courses. For more information and to find a hunter education course near you, visit <http://www.tpwd.>

(Continued on page 15)

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