

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

A dynamic future for 4-H shooting sports programs in Idaho

AT A GLANCE

Teaching the appropriate, ethical and responsible use of firearms and archery equipment is essential to insure the personal safety of youth and enhance the well-being of our communities.

The Situation

For over a century, the 4-H program in Idaho has proactively addressed the educational needs of youth and societal concerns. As our population continues to become more urban, many youth whom a generation or more ago would have learned proper, safe gun handling practices from family members in rural settings, no longer have those opportunities. Without those experiences and training, individuals can fail to learn the necessary skills and tremendous responsibilities that are associated with the appropriate use of firearms and archery equipment.

During the late 1990's and early 2000's, Idaho had begun building interest in 4-H Shooting Sports programs; however, by 2011, we had reached a plateau in youth enrollment. Total project participation across the six disciplines (archery, hunting, muzzleloader, pistol, rifle and shotgun) hovered around 950. Something was needed to jump-start interest and engagement.

Our Response

In the fall of 2015, one of the four new regional 4-H Youth Development educators (Jim Wilson) was assigned the 4-H Shooting Sports coordinator role.



Shooting a round of trap is just one of the many exciting options available to 4-H Shooting Sports members. Photo: Carrie Stark.

After consulting counterparts in surrounding states, several potential limiting factors were identified.

One of the first steps was development of a 4-H Shooting Sports State Plan, to serve as the roadmap for organizational structure and future programming. At the same time a state 4-H Shooting Sports advisory team was established, drawing upon the expertise of more advanced (Level 2) volunteer instructors statewide.

Based on input, three action items rose to the forefront. First was the need for a consistent set of rules to govern competitive events within each of the program discipline areas. Second was the need for more effective communication across the entire program. Third was the need to expand Level 1 instructor training accessibility to all corners of Idaho.

While education and development of critical life skills among youth remain our primary program objective; providing a venue for recreational and consistent competitive events were identified as avenues to motivate increased participation.

As safety is paramount, a certified instructor must always be present for youth to engage in 4-H Shooting Sports activities. Therefore, if we were to reach more youth we needed to expand our instructor base.

Program Outcomes

From 2016-2018, 21 Level 1 instructor trainings were held through all regions of Idaho, resulting in 343 discipline certifications (Note: instructors must be separately certified in each discipline they teach).

Increasing the number of certified instructors opened the door for more youth to enroll and participate. By 2017-2018, we had 1,222 youth enrollments in 4-H Shooting Sports, a 23.5 percent increase over 2014-2015.

Development of a comprehensive set of 4-H Shooting Sports rules was the first step in providing youth a statewide venue to demonstrate their proficiencies. Moving from an archery only state contest in 2016 that involved 21 youth, we have transitioned to a 2018 state contest featuring five disciplines (archery, air rifle, hunting, smallbore rifle and shotgun) with over 100 entries — of which 49 were archery. In just the past two years, seven teams (27 youth) have qualified to represent Idaho at the 4-H Shooting Sports National Championships.

To enhance program communication, steps were taken to create, launch and maintain a comprehensive 4-H Shooting Sports website. This provides a central location for all youth, parents, volunteers and paid

personnel to find the latest information and available resources. The website is located at <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/4h/programs/shooting-sports>.

Periodic blast emails are distributed to all enrolled instructors and county personnel when late-breaking information becomes available.

The Future

By modeling how to conduct multidiscipline shoots, our goal is to vastly expand the number of these educational experiences at the club and county level throughout Idaho. There is a tremendous potential for growth within these local programs. In some states, 4-H Shooting Sports enrollment has exceeded involvement in more traditional 4-H projects such as clothing, foods, horse and livestock.

Each 4-H Shooting Sports instructor is required to complete a 12-hour certification training for each discipline they wish to teach; however, time constraints and geographical boundaries can become issues. In partnership with the National 4-H Shooting Sports Committee, we are working on the development of online LMS modules that would enable prospective instructors to complete the 3-4 hours of youth development and risk management training in advance, enabling them to complete the 8-9 hours of in-person discipline training within a single day.

As we continue to develop innovative methods to grow the 4-H Shooting Sports program in Idaho, our primary mission must always revolve around the safe and appropriate use of firearms and archery equipment. These are simply the tools that enable us to reach our ultimate goal of positive youth development.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jim Wilson, Regional 4-H Youth Development Educator • University of Idaho Extension 4-H Youth Development • 208-292-1401
• jwilson@uidaho.edu

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