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Title: Using Social Networking to Reach New Hunters

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A new initiative called the Hunters Network of Wisconsin aims to understand how social networking technology may be used to promote hunter recruitment and retention in Wisconsin.

The percentage of hunters in Wisconsin and nationwide has been declining over past decades due to broad societal changes, such as urbanization, an aging population, competing time commitments and lack of a social support.

This decline has been of concern to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which is sponsoring the project. Money spent by hunters on licenses goes back into their communities, funding conservation education programs and protecting natural resources. Hunting is also a significant part of the state’s wildlife management strategy to reduce problems such as agricultural damage, vehicle collisions, forestry damage and the spread of disease. Additionally, hunting is an important part of Wisconsin’s economy. The state's approximately 700,000 hunters spend nearly $1.4 billion in the state, supporting over 25,000 jobs and contributing more than $197 million in state and local taxes.

Wisconsin has over 600 hunting organizations focused on reversing the decline in outdoor recreation. The Hunters’ Network of Wisconsin is working with these groups to research ways to build community around the issue of hunter recruitment and retention, facilitating networking between organizations, and sharing best practices for hosting successful Learn to Hunt Programs.
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"The Hunters Network of Wisconsin is targeting people who are interested in hunting but have not been raised in families that hunt," said Bret Shaw, environmental communication specialist for the University of Wisconsin-Extension and assistant professor of life sciences communication at UW-Madison. "Many people, particularly young people, are heavy users of social networking technologies, and this may be an important way to inform them about hunter education opportunities in their local communities and connect with others who are interested in hunting," said Shaw, who is leading the initiative.

The Hunters Network of Wisconsin is a partnership of the UW-Extension, the Department of Life Sciences Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. It is supported by the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, a federal program that funds wildlife conservation programs with an excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition.

For more information on the Hunters Network of Wisconsin, visit http://www.huntersnetwork.org