

**REQUEST FOR
LOWERING OF ALLOWABLE AGE LIMITS FOR YOUTH HUNTERS
IN THE PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR**

Submitted to:

**Honourable Terry French, Minister
Department of Environment and Conservation**

And

**Honourable Derrick Dalley, Minister
Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation**

Submitted By:

Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation

And

Newfoundland and Labrador Outfitters Association

March 09, 2012

SUMMARY

Discussions with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, both at the administrative level and at the political level, about the established age limits for hunting within the province have been ongoing sporadically for a number of years, by a number of outdoor organizations.

The driving concern behind the outdoors groups are varied but consistent in their intent - to create an environment which will allow, and indeed encourage the participation of a higher percentage of our youth in this long-standing element of our culture.

It is no surprise that the number of youth participating in hunting activity was, and in some cases is on the decline, not only in our province, but in nearly every jurisdiction in North America. **The distinction though, is that, with few if any exceptions, other North American jurisdictions have long ago come to this realization and have instituted the necessary changes in law, and in other approaches with the aim to impede, if not reverse this trend.** This realization and resultant action is clearly imbedded in the Summary Research Data per Appendix "A" to this report.

Hunting is a "long established" and proven highly effective tool of Wildlife Managers. In our province, the average age of the hunter is skyrocketing, and as mentioned previously, the number of "hunter" recruits is abysmally low. Inherent in this combination of factors is an impending challenge for Wildlife Managers and politicians alike - Without the **balance** in "target" wildlife populations made possible through regulated hunting, various wildlife species will continually cycle from being a public benefit to being a public curse as their numbers go through the natural swings. One only has to reflect on the current dilemma with the harp seal population.

In addition to its benefit as an effective wildlife management tool, hunting, especially for youth, holds the potential benefit as being a medium for character-building through encouraging the acts of planning, socializing, organizing, cooperating, and communicating, and in addition, can contribute to a healthier life-style through physical exercise and healthy table fare.

In readying for the writing of this report, considerable effort was expended in determining the menu of actions taken by other jurisdictions in trying to offset the declining numbers of hunters. From this research it was clear that the respective jurisdictions took very seriously the imperatives of public safety, and individual hunter safety. Resulting from these considerations of public safety and hunter safety a number of realistic and reasonable pre-conditions for youth participation in hunting were assessed and mandated as part of the overall “YOUTH HUNTER” program in various jurisdictions.

We, the sponsors of this report firmly believe that our government should follow the paths taken by many other jurisdictions and lower the age limits, with pre-set conditions, at which the youth of our province can participate directly in hunting in accordance with the following guidelines: Small Game – Minimum Age 12 years; Big Game – Minimum Age 14 years. **Youth hunters in the prescribed age groups MUST successfully complete a Hunter Safety Course, including firearms safe handling and storage, and firearms competency, and MUST be accompanied in immediate proximity by an experienced adult hunter/mentor.**

There is no “equal value” substitute for the wisdom and hunting ethics passed on to a young hunter from an ethical hunting elder.

The people of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador participate in outdoor activities, including hunting, and especially hunting, to a greater extent than does people in any other province of Canada. Yet, the youth of our province are more restricted than their counterparts in any other province of Canada in their access to hunting.

According to data from the 2011 Statistics Canada census, there are currently 21709 youth in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the age group 12 years to 15 years, all of whom are prevented from hunting even small game because of current age restrictions contained in our Wildlife Act. Within the age group 16 years to 17 years there are a further 11369 youth who are ineligible to participate directly in big game hunting also because of the age restrictions contained in our Wildlife Act. Consider the realities of this for our youth against the backdrop of what their counterparts in the same age groups are permitted to do in nearly every other Canadian jurisdiction. For example, a 12 year old youth from our province, accompanied by an adult/mentor, can travel to Prince Edward Island and legally hunt Geese. In our province he/she at the same age is only allowed to “tag along” or sit and watch. Again, a 14 year old youth from our province can travel to the province of Nova Scotia with an adult/mentor and legally hunt whitetail deer. The same youth, in this province, can only tag along with his mom or dad on a big game hunt, and watch. Surely, we can all see that this does nothing to enhance the enjoyment of hunting for neither youth nor their parents/guardians, nor does it do anything to encourage participation. These discriminatory regulations are most likely a silent barrier and a “turn off” to even the considerations of becoming involved in hunting.

When considering the idea of age limits for hunters the concern for overall public safety and the safety of the individual hunter must be paramount. Other jurisdictions, when considering the idea of lower hunter age limits, gave due consideration to the safety issue and accordingly mandated and implemented a

menu of prescriptive actions and regulations accordingly. The approaches taken ensured that it was possible for youth hunters who met the age limit requirements to have reasonable access to whatever resources were needed to assist them in meeting the mandated safety and hunting capability requirements.

In an effort to determine the successes of the safety related prescriptions of the various jurisdictions with hunting age limits lower than those of our province we gained information/data from an organization named "Families Afield". This organization is an affiliate of the US National Shooting Sports Foundation. We were hopeful that an equivalent Canadian organization existed, and possessed similar data relevant to the Canadian hunting scene. Unfortunately this isn't the case. We therefore concluded, reasonably we believe, that the data from the US based Families Afield organization would be a useable proxy for what we could expect in our environment as a result of implementing our suggested changes to our Wildlife Act. In addition, it is most likely that had the lowering of hunting ages in other Canadian jurisdictions been linked to an increase in the hunting accident rate the many news agencies and enforcement agencies would have unearthed such a statistic and would have reported on it at great length. However, no such reporting has occurred, and most likely, no increase in hunting accident rates have occurred either.

With regards to the data from the Families Afield organization, it clearly shows that the accident rates for hunting and other shooting sports is unquestionably, and vastly, lower than those of the many other sporting endeavors available to today's youth.

When the idea of reducing the allowable hunting age is being discussed, the idea often becomes confused with allowing ownership of firearms by a younger age group - this isn't the case. Regulations pertaining to ownership and/or possession of firearms is a federal jurisdiction and is covered under the Firearms Act of Canada. In order to accommodate the suggested changes to the Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Act, youth hunters in the suggested age

groups in this province, and associated firearms owners as guardians/mentors are obligated to conform to/with the appropriate regulations as defined in the Firearms Act of Canada.

Currently, the Wildlife Act of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador restricts the hunting of small game to those individuals of age 16 years and older, and restricts the hunting of big game to those individuals of age 18 years and older – possession of appropriate hunting licenses and meeting other requirements assumed. In both of these age groups, hunters are permitted to hunt alone if they so choose, having successfully passed the Hunter Safety Course et al, but not necessarily having had any prior hunting experience nor mentoring.

What our organizations are proposing are changes to our provincial Wildlife Act that would allow:- youth hunters, both residents and those from outside the province in the age group 12 years to 15 years, having met the hunter safety requirements et al, and accompanied by an adult hunter/mentor in close proximity, to hunt small game; and, youth hunters, both residents and those from outside the province in the age group 14 years to 17 years having met the hunter safety requirements et al, and accompanied by an adult hunter//mentor in close proximity, to hunt big game.

The following data from the Statistics Canada 2011 census (Ages in year 2012) shows the number of individuals currently within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador who could potentially directly benefit from the suggested changes:

12 years old	5379
13 years old	5333
14 years old	5419
15 years old	5578
16 years old	5648
17 years old	5721

Please note that the research materials upon which this report has been prepared have been included with the original copy of the report which has been submitted to Honorable Terry French, Minister, Department of Environment and Conservation.

Suggested changes to the Wildlife Act of the province allowing our youth access to hunting at an earlier age, MUST be coordinated with the development and delivery of necessary Hunter Safety Training, including safe firearms handling and storage, and a firearms competency provision, and other hunting related topics. There currently is a Hunter Safety program, and firearms safety program in place for adults, but with a notable shortcoming – demonstrated shooting competency. This, obviously, is a shortcoming that needs to be overcome in any firearms training program for youth having little or no prior exposure to firearms usage. We believe that a youth hunter program including features such as firearms safe handling and storage; firearms competency; wildlife conservation, wildlife regulations, hunting ethics, etc should form part of a new program jointly developed and jointly delivered by the Department of Environment and Conservation and The Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation and affiliates. Such a program can most likely best be delivered through the personnel and facilities of the NL Wildlife Federation and affiliates with an appropriate level of funding and other support from the Department of Environment and Conservation.

In Conclusion, The Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation and The Newfoundland and Labrador Outfitters Association, have researched the issue of lower age limits for hunting within various jurisdictions in North America. Having done so we have determined that the youth of this province are unduly restricted in their access to the noble activity of hunting as a result of “behind the times” age requirements as described in the Wildlife Act of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Accordingly, we collectively are recommending,

and wholeheartedly supporting changes, as previously identified, to the Wildlife Act of our province so as to align our provincial youth hunting age requirements with those of other North American jurisdictions and thereby open the door to our youth hunters at an earlier and perhaps, more adaptive time in their lives.

This request may reflect the first time that the named sponsors have, as a collective, requested these changes. It isn't the first time, though, that these changes have been requested. It is time now for our government to pay heed to this request. After all, it is our youth who are losing the opportunities. We must ask ourselves why "THEY" are being treated differently by their government than the youth of other Canadian provinces are being treated by "THEIR" respective governments. Clearly, it is time to make changes.

We respectfully ask that our organizations be kept abreast of our government's considerations of this request. We are always available for discussion/consultations and to lend assistance, and can be individually reached in accordance with the following contact information:

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15 Conran Street, St. John's, NL. A1E 5L8
E-mail:RBouzan.fmc@nf.sympatico.ca

Ronald Hicks, President, NL Outfitters Association: Ph: 489-3017
41 Bouzan Street, Grand Falls/Windsor, NL. A2A 2W7
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APPENDIX "A"

(see page following)

Provincial/ State Jurisdiction	Minimum Age Requirement		Guardian Required		Guardian Minimum Age	Firearms Safety Course Required		Hunter Safety Course Required		
	Canadian	Small Game	Big Game	Yes	No		Yes	No	Yes	No
Br. Columbia	10	10	X		Not specified	unknown			X	
Alberta	12	12	X		18	X			X	
Saskatchewan	12	12	X		18	unknown			unknown	
Manitoba	12	12	X		18	X			X	
Ontario	12	12	X		18	X			X	
Quebec	12	12	X		18	X				X
New Brunswick	14	16	X		19	X			X	
Nova Scotia	12	16	X		Exp. Hunter	X			X	
P. E. Island	12	N/A	X		18	X			X	
NF & Labrador	16	18			X	N/A	X		X	
United States										
Alabama	None	None	X		Exp. Hunter	X			X	
Maine	10	10	X		18		X		X	
Pennsylvania	12	12	X		18	X			X	
Minnesota	None	10	X		Parent/Equiv	X			X	
Tennessee	None	None	X		21	X			X	
Nw Hampshire	None	None	X		18		X			X
Missouri	6	6	X		18	X			X	
Washington	None	None			X	N/A	X		X	
Vermont	None	None			X	N/A		X	X	

Please note that it is recommended that the respective jurisdictional contacts, as submitted only to the Minister of Environment and Conservation, be further queried on various nuances of youth hunter requirements; on content of Hunter Safety and Firearms Safety Courses; and, on the skill level and/or experience level of Guardians.

