

Lewisville Lake Partnership Provides Unique Outdoor Experience for Disabled Youth

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For the last two years, park rangers at Lewisville Lake in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex have partnered with three local chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to conduct a whitetail deer hunt that offers a unique opportunity for youth hunters. Lewisville Lake is surrounded by urban sprawl, with USACE property surrounding the lake making up the majority of the remaining wildlife habitat in the area.

On the downstream side of the Lewisville Lake Dam is a hidden wildlife gem. It is a 2,400 acre parcel of USACE property known as the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area, or LLELA. This property is leased to a consortium comprised of the University of North Texas, the City of Lewisville and the Lewisville Independent School District for research, public outreach/education, and habitat restoration. Once a year, USACE works with these partners to host a disabled youth deer hunt for youth between the age of 13-18 with physical disabilities.

The partnership goes back prior to the hunt. USACE, NWTf, and TPWD have been partnering together to improve hunter access points at Ray Roberts Lake, which is managed by the Lewisville Lake Office, as well as



Youth hunters participating in the Wheelin' Jakes Youth Deer Hunt at Lewisville Lake show off their harvest at deer camp this past fall.

wildlife habitat within hunting areas for several years. It was during that time that the special hunt becoming a reality. Working with representatives from TPWD and three local NWTf chapters including the Kaufman County Double Beards Chapter, the Cross Timbers Chapter, and the Cottonwood Creek Chapter, the groups collaborated with USACE on the event which has become known as the "Lewisville Lake Wheelin' Youth Deer Hunt".

Since the start of the event in 2018, TPWD and NWTf have communicated well with USACE. They take pride in



Staff from the USACE Lewisville Lake Project Office partnered with representatives from three local National Wild Turkey Federation chapters and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to host a special deer hunt for five physically challenged youth.

what they do and have made the hunt run smoothly. The event is spread across a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in December. On Friday the youth hunters, partners, and volunteers meet at the Lewisville Lake office for a pre-hunt safety briefing, snacks, and a meet-and-greet. A safety briefing is followed by familiarization of the firearms at a designated shooting range. On Friday evening the guides and the youth hunters proceed to the blinds to begin the hunt. Each hunter is allowed to harvest a buck and two does. The volunteers anxiously await the hunters arrival back at camp to see if anyone was successful. If so, the NWTF volunteers help skin and quarter the meat for the youth hunters. Once pictures have been taken and stories exchanged, a large dinner awaits as everyone gathers by the campfire.

On Saturday the hunt participants enjoy a catered breakfast and lunch provided by a local Chick-fil-A restaurant. Saturday includes a morning and evening hunt for the youth hunters. Great food, family, and friends share stories and enjoy the camaraderie of deer camp between sessions. Guides lead the hunters out to the blinds on Sunday morning for the final morning of the hunt. After the hunt, USACE staff and



Volunteers from three north Texas chapters of the NWTF received a national partnership award at the NWTF national convention. Pictured from left to right are Tim Webster, Lauri White, Chris Womack, Tammy Womack, and Dean Castillo.

volunteers from TPWD and NWTF assist with clean-up. During the entirety of the event the volunteers put the focus on the kids and make every one feel special.

In February 2020, the three NWTF chapters involved in the event were recognized and received a national award for their efforts with the youth hunt and the partnership they created with USACE. The Lewisville Lake Office looks forward to many years ahead of partnering and working with this group to continue providing a unique outdoor experience for physically-challenged youth hunters.



Did you know that USACE has a national MOU with NWTF?

Visit the NRM Gateway NWTF webpage <https://corpslakes.erc.dren.mil/partners/national.cfm?Partner=nwtf>

to see more examples of partnership projects with NWTF and use the MOU to reach out to your local chapter for potential projects.