

Letter Report

Hunter Education Program

August 2005



Legislative Audit Bureau

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Janice Mueller
State Auditor

August 31, 2005

Senator Carol A. Roessler and
Representative Suzanne Jeskewitz, Co-chairpersons
Joint Legislative Audit Committee
State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin 53702

Dear Senator Roessler and Representative Jeskewitz:

We have completed an evaluation of the Hunter Education Program, which is administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Participation in hunter education is required for anyone who wishes to purchase a hunting license and was born on or after January 1, 1973. In 2004, 3,328 volunteer instructors and 47 wardens, some of whom were paid to teach, provided hunter education to 33,476 students, mostly children.

In fiscal year (FY) 2004-05, DNR spent \$1.2 million to administer the Hunter Education Program. Approximately one-half of these costs were for the salaries and fringe benefits associated with 9.6 full-time equivalent employees who recruit and train volunteer instructors and students and provide administrative program support. The remainder was primarily for course materials and reimbursement of allowable instructor expenses. We identified no serious concern with the instructor reimbursement process.

Although a decline has been perceived in the number of volunteer instructors and students, we found increases in the number of volunteer instructors who taught at least one course, the number of courses held, and the number of students who successfully completed the program from 2000 to 2004. The number of hours DNR staff spent on hunter education also increased substantially in FY 2004-05, but not because additional wardens taught courses on paid time. Instead, more DNR staff time was spent on its public relations efforts and to reimburse volunteer instructors for allowable expenses.

We appreciate the courtesy and cooperation extended to us by DNR and the instructors we contacted during our review.

Sincerely,

Janice Mueller
State Auditor

JM/PS/km

HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Section 29.591, Wis. Stats., requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to provide hunter education and bow hunter education courses. Before 1985, participation in the courses was voluntary for anyone purchasing a hunting license. 1983 Wisconsin Act 420 required anyone born on or after January 1, 1973, to earn a certificate of accomplishment in hunter education before purchasing a hunting license.

To obtain a certificate of accomplishment and be eligible to purchase a hunting license, students must pass both a written examination and a practical examination with a firearm. Although DNR's courses are required to include at least 10 hours of instruction, most are between 15 and 20 hours and include lectures, demonstrations, videos, and exercises. In addition, DNR estimates that approximately one-half of its courses include hands-on instruction in the use of a firearm. DNR also offers the option of meeting hunter education requirements by completing an Internet-based course available through the International Hunter Education Association, which includes homework assignments to be completed on-line, as well as a firearm field examination given by a DNR instructor.

In fiscal year (FY) 2004-05, DNR spent \$1.2 million to administer and provide oversight of the Hunter Education Program. In 2004, 3,328 volunteer instructors and 47 wardens worked with 33,476 students who successfully completed hunter education courses. Courses were generally taught by volunteer instructors; however, in a few instances DNR wardens taught courses while on paid time because of a lack of volunteer instructors in some areas of the state. DNR law enforcement staff assisted with all the courses by presenting information on state hunting requirements, as well as by training new instructors, recruiting students and instructors for the courses, and performing administrative duties associated with program oversight and management. DNR supplies student textbooks, instructor manuals, and teaching supplies. Classroom space and shooting range time are often supplied at no cost by sportsmen's groups and other local community groups.

Fees for hunter education courses have changed over time. Before FY 2001-02, instructors were authorized to charge \$3 per student and to retain half of this fee to cover course-related costs; the remainder was to be returned to DNR. After the 2001-03 Biennial Budget Act eliminated the student fee for hunter education courses, DNR reimbursed instructors up to \$5 per student from its own funds for facility rentals, office supplies, ammunition, targets, and other costs they incurred to offer classes. 2005 Wisconsin Act 25, the 2005-07 Biennial Budget Act, again requires DNR to establish a hunter education course fee. Instructors are to be allowed to retain up to \$5 per student as reimbursement for allowable training costs. DNR officials indicate the fee will likely be \$10, which is the amount charged for other recreational safety courses it offers. The portion of the fee not retained by instructors will be returned to DNR and used to pay other costs of the Hunter Education Program. DNR estimates it will collect \$170,000 annually once the fee is implemented.

A number of concerns have been raised about DNR's hunter education program, including the cost of the courses, course length, and DNR's instructor reimbursement practices. In addition, some have alleged that both the number of students taking courses and the number of volunteer instructors have declined over time, and that DNR wardens have spent more time on paid status teaching the courses. In response to these concerns, and at the request of the co-chairs of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, we:

- analyzed program expenditures and staffing from FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05;
- reviewed DNR’s compliance with instructor reimbursement requirements;
- analyzed changes in the number of instructors teaching courses, courses offered, and students served;
- analyzed changes in DNR staff time associated with the Hunter Education Program;
- reviewed course curricula to determine compliance with state statutes; and
- assessed other indicators of program quality.

In conducting our review, we analyzed program data maintained by DNR, including information from DNR’s time reporting system. We interviewed several hunter education instructors, representatives of the Wisconsin Hunter Education Instructors Association, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

Program Staffing and Expenditures

Total work effort associated with the Hunter Education Program, which includes clerical support, overtime hours, and time spent by limited-term employees, has exceeded 8.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff positions in four of the past five years. As shown in Table 1, the number of DNR staff hours charged to the program declined from FY 2000-01 to FY 2002-03, then increased in both FY 2003-04 and FY 2004-05.

Table 1

Hunter Education Program Staff Positions

Fiscal Year	Number of Hours	Calculated FTE Positions ¹
2000-01	15,216	8.3
2001-02	14,875	8.1
2002-03	14,510	7.9
2003-04	15,395	8.4
2004-05	17,590	9.6

¹ Based on 1,830 working hours per year, which does not include vacation or other leave time.

The Hunter Education Program is supported with both federal and state segregated funds from the Fish and Wildlife Account of the Conservation Fund, which consists primarily of fees paid by hunters and anglers. As shown in Table 2, total program expenditures increased 43.5 percent, from \$837,789 in FY 2000-01 to \$1,201,829 in FY 2004-05. The amount of program costs covered by state funds increased from \$0 in FY 2000-01 to \$248,309 in FY 2004-05.

Table 2

Hunter Education Program Expenditures

Funding Source	FY 2000-01 ¹	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05
Federal Funds	\$837,789	\$835,876	\$926,761	\$824,102	\$ 953,520
State Segregated Funds	0	97,393	53,756	156,091	248,309
Total	\$837,789	\$933,269	\$980,517	\$980,193	\$1,201,829

¹ Does not include all program costs for FY 2000-01, when instructors were allowed to charge students a \$3.00 fee and to retain up to half of the student fee to cover their instruction costs. In subsequent years, instructors were not allowed to charge a fee, and DNR reimbursed instructors using federal funds and Fish and Wildlife Account funds.

Supplies and services—which are primarily course materials such as textbooks, folders, handouts, and other class supplies—account for most of the increase in total program expenditures from FY 2000-01 through FY 2004-05. As shown in Table 3, supplies and services expenditures increased by 54.8 percent, while personnel expenditures increased by 20.8 percent. In FY 2004-05, course materials and other supplies accounted for 50.6 percent of supplies and services costs and 20.3 percent of total costs. Supplies and services costs can vary from year to year because of the timing of bulk purchases. Although costs have generally increased each year, the increase from FY 2003-04 to FY 2004-05 was substantially greater than in prior years because of:

- a \$78,500 increase for course materials such as shooting simulators that use video technology; additional bow hunting course manuals; and plaques, portfolios, and similar items to recognize the efforts of volunteer instructors who have taught for several years;
- a \$43,000 increase in personnel costs related primarily to the additional staff hours charged to the Hunter Education Program;
- a \$28,100 increase in purchasing card expenditures, which increased as the number of program staff using cards increased from 24 in FY 2003-04 to 43 in FY 2004-05; and
- a \$26,700 increase for equipment and office space, which includes the purchase of electronic trap throwers for the advanced hunter education courses and Power Point projectors.

Table 3

Hunter Education Program Expenditures, by Type

	FY 2000-01	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05	Percentage Change
Personnel						
Salaries	\$367,472	\$359,482	\$343,746	\$393,074	\$ 432,152	17.6%
Fringe Benefits	158,377	168,335	162,775	198,982	202,845	28.1
Subtotal	525,849	527,817	506,521	592,056	634,997	20.8
Supplies and Services						
Course Materials and Other Supplies	171,636	204,872	229,569	166,052	244,518	42.5
Postage	33,322	36,170	39,714	35,109	34,554	3.7
Equipment and Office Space	27,427	28,979	26,305	27,743	54,407	98.4
Purchasing Card Expenditures ¹	10,773	13,136	20,223	18,315	46,434	331.0
Travel and Training	10,339	18,954	7,238	18,127	14,840	43.5
Printing	25,842	11,031	50,401	16,047	24,225	(6.3)
Advertising and Promotions	12,563	15,896	15,750	15,750	15,750	25.4
Data Processing Services	9,958	11,790	10,332	14,582	24,432	145.4
Professional Services ²	8,483	20,755	5,285	9,223	18,787	121.5
Other ³	1,597	6,226	4,606	1,482	4,990	212.5
Subtotal	311,940	367,809	409,423	322,430	482,937	54.8
Instructor/Organization Reimbursements	0	37,643	64,573	65,707	83,895	--
Total	\$837,789	\$933,269	\$980,517	\$980,193	\$1,201,829	43.5

¹ Represents expenditures that would have been included in other supplies and services categories if purchasing cards had not been used.

² Includes expenditures for the development of an Internet hunter education course in FY 2001-02. Includes \$5,550 for a study of deer hunting in Wisconsin, including hunter safety issues, and \$3,420 for sign language interpreters in FY 2004-05.

³ This category includes expenditures for miscellaneous services, dues and memberships, and interest paid.

DNR attributes increases in expenditures for professional services, purchasing cards, and data processing services primarily to implementation of background checks for all instructors, expanded use of purchasing cards to purchase program goods and services, and increased data processing costs.

As a result of changes in state law, DNR began reimbursing instructors and organizations for allowable course costs with its own funds beginning in FY 2001-02, rather than having instructors retain course fees for payment. Although hunter education courses are often taught by more than one instructor, reimbursement may be claimed by only one individual, the primary instructor. Reimbursements to instructors and organizations, which pay for items such as facility rental, ammunition, targets, office supplies, firearm cleaning supplies, and safety equipment, increased by 122.9 percent from FY 2001-02 to FY 2004-05 as instructors gained familiarity with programmatic changes in how course costs were paid and improved their ability to seek reimbursement from DNR for all allowable expenses.

In addition to reimbursing individual instructors, DNR also reimburses local organizations that sponsor hunter education courses. As shown in Table 4, the amount reimbursed has increased over the past four years. In FY 2004-05, 289 individual instructors and 40 organizations were reimbursed for claimed costs.

Table 4

Individuals and Organizations Reimbursed¹

	FY 2001-02		FY 2002-03		FY 2003-04		FY 2004-05	
	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount	Number	Amount
Instructors Reimbursed	194	\$28,143	263	\$51,759	243	\$53,393	289	\$65,580
Organizations Reimbursed	38	9,500	43	12,814	31	12,314	40	18,315
Total	232	\$37,643	306	\$64,573	274	\$65,707	329	\$83,895

¹ Reimbursement may be claimed by only one instructor or one organization per course.

In an effort to ensure that DNR has complied with statutory requirements regarding reimbursement of allowable costs, we reviewed 75 claims for reimbursement totaling \$23,179. Our sample was drawn from among the highest-paid claims from FY 2002-03 through FY 2004-05. Of the 75 claims, 26 included total expenses less than or equal to \$5 per student. In each of these 26 cases, DNR reimbursed instructors for the full amount requested, which did not exceed the statutory limit or include claims for unallowable costs.

In the remaining 49 cases, instructors requested reimbursement for expenses that exceeded the \$5 per student limit. In all 49 cases in which instructor claims exceeded statutory limits, DNR appropriately reimbursed the maximum amount allowed under statutes, rather than the amount claimed. However, we found that one instructor had submitted duplicate claims for the same

course and that DNR mistakenly reimbursed the instructor for both claims. We have informed DNR of this error and recommended that it attempt to recover the \$242 overpayment.

We also reviewed instructor claims to determine whether DNR processed the requests in a timely manner. Information was insufficient for us to determine how quickly seven of the claims were processed. DNR processed 64 of the remaining 68 claims within three weeks of receipt. Of the remaining four claims:

- one was processed 50 days after receipt because of administrative error; and
- three were processed more than 150 days after receipt because DNR was waiting for the instructor who submitted all three of these claims to submit the required state reimbursement form.

DNR is drafting an emergency rule to implement the recently approved budget provision reestablishing a fee for students taking hunter education courses and allowing instructors to retain up to \$5 per student. DNR anticipates the fee will be implemented in fall 2005. Consequently, DNR processing times and reimbursement practices will no longer be an issue.

Assessing Program Operations

To address concerns raised regarding program administration and to assess overall program performance, we analyzed trends in:

- the number of volunteer instructors;
- the number of hours that paid DNR staff worked on the Hunter Education Program;
- the availability of courses;
- the length of courses; and
- the extent of training provided to instructors.

Course Instructors

One concern with the hunter education program is the perception that the number of volunteer instructors has declined over time, resulting in more courses being taught by DNR wardens on paid time. According to DNR officials, wardens are required to attend a portion of every course to make a one-hour presentation that includes a review of state hunting requirements, safe use and storage of firearms, and how to contact DNR staff. However, wardens will occasionally teach, or assist in teaching, an entire course on paid time if volunteer instructors are unavailable. In addition, some wardens have also served as volunteer instructors.

To address these concerns, we analyzed changes in the number of volunteer instructors who taught at least one course for each of the past five years, as well as the turnover rate of volunteer instructors. Data on volunteer instructors are collected on a calendar year basis, and 2004 was the most recent year for which data were available during our review. We found that the number of volunteer instructors who taught at least one course increased by 9.7 percent from 2000 through 2004. As shown in Table 5, 3,034 volunteer instructors taught at least one course in 2000, compared to 3,328 in 2004. During this period, the number of instructors teaching only hunter education or only bow hunter education increased by 6.3 percent and 27.9 percent, respectively. The number teaching both courses increased by 39.3 percent.

Table 5

Unduplicated Number of Volunteer Instructors¹

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Taught Hunter Education Course Only	2,706	2,745	2,785	2,758	2,876
Taught Bow Hunter Education Course Only	43	44	47	50	55
Taught Both Courses	285	327	293	367	397
Total	3,034	3,116	3,125	3,175	3,328

¹ Includes those teaching at least one course per year. Does not include wardens, some of whom taught courses on paid time.

Most of the hunter education instructors with whom we spoke indicated they believe a sufficient number of volunteer instructors was available to teach hunter education courses in their areas of the state. We also found that the turnover rate among volunteer instructors was relatively consistent during the period we reviewed, ranging between 13.8 and 15.4 percent each year. Furthermore, there does not appear to be a problem in attracting new instructors to the program. As shown in Table 6, more than one-third of the volunteer instructors who taught at least one course in 2004 had been teaching fewer than five years, and more than one-half had been teaching fewer than ten years. Almost two-thirds of the instructors were between the ages of 40 and 59, and most were men.

Table 6

Volunteer Instructor Profile¹
2004

	Number of Instructors	Percentage of Total
Age		
Under 20	19	0.6%
20 to 29	199	6.0
30 to 39	433	13.0
40 to 49	1,029	30.9
50 to 59	1,059	31.8
60 to 69	437	13.1
70 and Over	125	3.8
Not reported	27	0.8
Total	3,328	100.0%
Years Certified as Instructor		
Fewer than 5 Years	1,206	36.2%
5 to 9 Years	743	22.3
10 to 14 Years	549	16.5
15 to 19 Years	303	9.1
20 to 24 Years	222	6.7
25 to 29 Years	99	3.0
30 to 34 Years	88	2.6
35 Years or More	75	2.3
Not reported	43	1.3
Total	3,328	100.0%
Gender		
Male	3,026	90.9%
Female	270	8.1
Not reported	32	1.0
Total	3,328	100.0%

¹ Includes those teaching at least one course in 2004.

Staff Time

DNR's time management system does not capture information on the number of hours wardens spend teaching hunter education courses for either an entire course or for the required one-hour presentation during a volunteer instructor's course; therefore, we reviewed the best available data to attempt to answer this question. As shown in Table 7, total hours that DNR staff spent on any activity related to the Hunter Education Program increased 15.6 percent from FY 2000-01 to FY 2004-05. However, the number of hours spent on any aspect of hunter and bow hunter education courses—including time related to the recruitment, training, and certification of students and instructors; the required one-hour presentation; and teaching a course when a volunteer instructor was unavailable—decreased by 12.5 percent from FY 2000-01 to FY 2004-05. This is consistent with an increase in the number of volunteer instructors over the past few years. The increase in DNR staff hours spent on the program is primarily the result of additional time spent on public relations and additional time spent to reimburse volunteer instructors for allowable expenses. During the last two months of FY 2003-04, which is when DNR first started tracking time spent on public relations activities, 36 DNR staff recorded an average of 3.8 hours for public relations; in FY 2004-05, this increased to 111 staff recording an average of 9.6 hours for public relations. Officials believe this may be, in part, the result of increased contacts with the public and the media in the aftermath of a Sawyer County shooting incident.

Table 7

DNR Staff Hours for the Hunter Education Program

Activity	FY 2000-01	FY 2001-02	FY 2002-03	FY 2003-04	FY 2004-05 ¹	Percentage Change
Course Activities						
Hunter Education Courses	5,453.8	4,930.3	5,104.5	4,722.8	4,808.2	(11.8)%
Bow Hunter Education Courses	217.0	453.0	129.5	111.0	156.0	(28.1)
Subtotal	5,670.8	5,383.3	5,234.0	4,833.8	4,964.2	(12.5)
Other Activities						
Administration and Supervision of the Hunter Education Program	7,445.2	7,478.0	7,215.7	7,942.0	7,980.3	7.2
Instructor Reimbursement Processing	0.0	0.0	128.0	619.0	1,486.5	--
Hunter Education Public Relations	0.0	0.0	0.0	138.0	1,066.5	--
DNR Staff Training Received	381.0	709.0	745.5	478.5	607.0	59.3
DNR Staff Training Provided	480.3	450.5	463.0	443.5	577.0	20.1
Development of Advanced Hunter Education Courses	230.5	254.0	141.5	337.0	328.5	42.5
Cooperative Work with Other DNR Programs	105.5	67.5	61.0	60.0	259.5	146.0
Field Warden Office Management	223.0	206.5	188.0	283.0	199.5	(10.5)
Shooting Ranges	680.0	326.0	332.8	260.0	120.5	(82.3)
Subtotal	9,545.5	9,491.5	9,275.5	10,561.0	12,625.3	32.3
Total	15,216.3	14,874.8	14,509.5	15,394.8	17,589.5	15.6

¹ The hours of two staff were re-categorized to reflect the time coding practices of prior years, to make comparisons among years possible.

Course Availability and Student Certification

To determine whether course availability and access have changed during the past five years, we analyzed data on the number of hunter education courses offered in different areas of the state, as well as data on the number of students certified in these courses. As shown in Table 8, we found a 2.9 percent increase in the number of courses provided statewide from 2000 to 2004. The largest increase occurred from 2003 to 2004, when the number of courses increased by 29, or by 2.6 percent.

Table 8

Number of Hunter Education Courses

Course Type	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Percentage Change
Hunter	974	972	969	956	986	1.2%
Bow Hunter	126	125	127	147	146	15.9
Total	1,100	1,097	1,096	1,103	1,132	2.9

We found no consistent trend in the number of courses taught by wardens, as shown in Table 9. Most of the changes from year to year reflect the number of courses for which wardens were assistant instructors. In 2004, wardens were primary or assistant instructors for 70 of the 1,132 courses provided.

Table 9

Number of Hunter Education Courses Taught by Wardens¹

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Warden Was the Primary Instructor	21	16	20	26	23
Warden Was the Assistant Instructor	41	53	34	51	47
Total	62	69	54	77	70

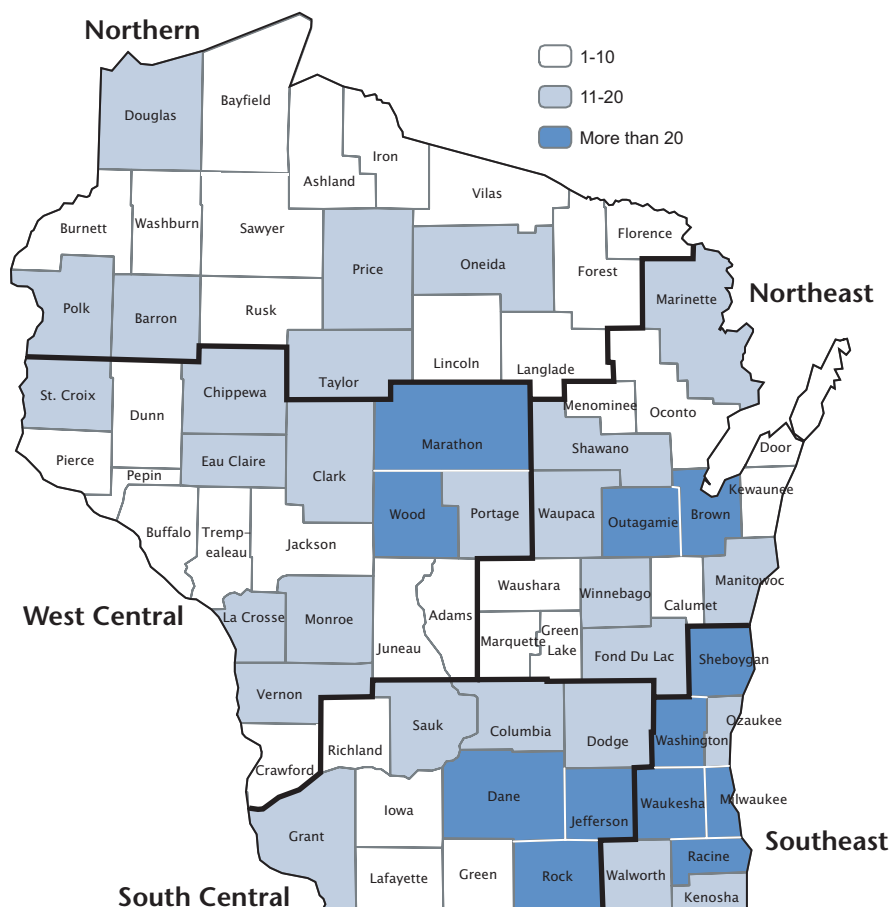
¹ In some instances, more than one warden taught a course.

The extent to which courses were taught by wardens on paid time could not be determined from the data maintained by DNR. However, based on information obtained from a DNR survey of wardens, approximately one-fourth of the warden-taught courses in 2003 and 2004 were taught by wardens on paid time rather than as volunteers. Based on these data, we estimate salary and fringe benefit costs for courses taught by wardens totaled approximately \$10,500 in 2003 and again in 2004.

Section 29.591(1)(a), Wis. Stats., requires that at least one hunter education course be provided in each county or school district, and we found that DNR complied with this requirement over the past five years. As shown in Figure 1, the number of hunter education courses offered among counties varied substantially. For example, in 2004, only one course was held in Menominee County, while more than 20 courses were held in each of 12 other counties. There is no statutory requirement regarding the provision of bow hunter courses in every county. A complete list of the number and types of courses provided in each county in 2004 is presented in the appendix.

Figure 1

**Number of Hunter Education Courses Offered, by County
2004**



The number of courses held in each county varied over time. For example, from 2000 to 2004:

- more courses were held in 28 counties, including 9 of the 18 counties in DNR’s Northern region;
- the same number of courses were held in 17 counties in 2000 and 2004; and
- fewer courses were held in 27 counties, including 11 of the 19 counties in DNR’s West Central region.

As shown in Table 10, the number of hunter education courses increased in four of DNR’s five regions from 2000 to 2004. The only decrease was in the Southeast region. The Northern region had the largest increase in the number of courses offered.

Table 10

Hunter Education Courses by Region¹

DNR Region	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Percentage Change
Northeast	229	225	234	242	244	6.6%
Northern	171	176	180	179	186	8.8
South Central	186	185	195	185	189	1.6
Southeast	241	237	227	224	234	(2.9)
West Central	273	274	260	273	279	2.2
Total	1,100	1,097	1,096	1,103	1,132	2.9

¹ Includes hunter and bow hunter education courses.

DNR does not maintain data on the number of all students who enroll in hunter education courses, only on those who complete a course and are certified. In addition, DNR does not track the number of students certified via the Internet course. However, DNR indicated that nearly all who enroll successfully complete the courses and obtain certification. We found that from 2000 to 2004, the number of certified students increased from 33,140 to 33,476, or by 1.0 percent, as shown in Table 11. The number of certified students taking hunter education courses declined by 280 students, or 0.9 percent, while the number of certified students taking bow hunter education courses increased by 616, or 24.0 percent. It should be noted that with the exception of 2000, the number of certified students taking hunter education courses was greater in 2004 than in any of the prior four years.

Table 11

Number of Students Achieving Certification

Course Type	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Percentage Change
Hunter	30,574	29,653	28,729	28,388	30,294	(0.9)%
Bow Hunter	2,566	2,647	2,754	3,045	3,182	24.0
Total	33,140	32,300	31,483	31,433	33,476	1.0

DNR attributes the increase in the number of certified bow hunter students to changes in how bow hunter courses are offered. Before 1999, hunter and bow hunter courses were offered separately. Students interested in obtaining certification in both areas may have been discouraged from doing so because of the time commitment involved in attending both courses, and because a significant amount of information is duplicated between the courses. Since 1999, some bow hunter courses have been offered as an “add-on” for students already enrolled in a hunter education course. These courses cover only the material unique to bow hunting. DNR believes that as a result, more students have been encouraged to take both courses and the number of students achieving bow hunter certification has increased.

In 2004, the number of instructors per course averaged 5.6, while the number of certified students per course averaged 29.6. These averages have been consistent during the past five years. Not surprisingly, two-thirds of students taking hunter education courses are less than 16 years old. As shown in Table 12, more than one-half of all students who successfully completed hunter education courses in both 2000 and 2004 were either 12 or 13 years old.

Table 12

Age of Certified Students at the Time of Course Completion¹

Age of Students	2000		2004	
	Number	Percentage of Total	Number	Percentage of Total
Under 12	860	2.6%	1,096	3.3%
12 to 13	17,046	51.4	17,124	51.1
14 to 15	4,022	12.1	4,043	12.1
16 to 19	1,903	5.7	1,960	5.8
20 to 29	2,807	8.5	2,899	8.7
30 to 39	2,483	7.5	2,266	6.8
40 to 49	3,153	9.5	2,987	8.9
50 to 59	615	1.9	790	2.4
60 to 69	140	0.4	184	0.5
70 and Over	19	0.1	21	0.1
Unknown	92	0.3	106	0.3
Total	33,140	100.0%	33,476	100.0%

¹ Includes students certified from hunter and bow hunter education courses.

Length and Content of Courses

Another possible measure of program quality considers the length and content of hunter education courses. DNR has indicated that courses must be at least ten hours in length in order for Wisconsin graduates to qualify for reciprocity with other states. Although most courses are 15 to 20 hours long, some are up to 40 hours long. DNR does not encourage long courses because such courses may dissuade some students and their families from enrolling.

We found that the average course length statewide has decreased slightly, from 18.1 hours in 2000 to 17.5 hours in 2004, as shown in Table 13. We also found slight variations among the regions in the average length of courses, ranging from 16.7 hours in the Northeast region to 18.1 hours in the Southeast region.

Table 13

Hourly Average Course Length¹

DNR Region	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Northeast	18.0	17.8	17.0	16.8	16.7
Northern	17.4	17.1	16.2	16.7	16.9
South Central	18.4	18.7	17.9	18.0	18.0
Southeast	18.4	18.6	18.7	18.0	18.1
West Central	18.3	18.2	17.5	17.8	17.6
Statewide Average	18.1	18.1	17.5	17.5	17.5

¹ Includes hunter education and bow hunter education courses.

Regional variations in average course length may have a number of causes, including the number of students enrolled in each course, differences in teaching styles, and optional topics covered. Statutes specify that hunter education courses must provide instruction on the principles of safety in handling firearms, bows and arrows, and associated equipment; the bow hunter course must cover the principles of safety in handling bows and arrows and associated equipment but does not have to provide instruction in handling firearms. In addition, statutes specify that certain topics must be covered in both courses, including:

- the responsibilities of hunters to wildlife, the environment, landowners, and others;
- how to recognize threatened and endangered species that cannot be hunted; and
- the principles of wildlife management and conservation.

We reviewed the manuals used for both courses and found that all of the statutorily required topics were covered. However, DNR does not routinely monitor or evaluate volunteer instructors to ensure that course manuals are used in their entirety.

Instructor Training

Both DNR's requirements for new instructors and the training it provides to existing instructors are potential measures of program quality. DNR policies require that all new instructors:

- be at least 18 years of age;
- be experienced in the safety education program they wish to teach;
- be a graduate of the course they wish to teach; and
- pass a background investigation.

Individuals meeting these requirements can become instructors after they:

- complete an apprenticeship program with an instructor group, which must include assisting in the teaching of two complete courses and a recommendation by the sponsoring certified instructor conducting the course; or
- attend a special one-day training course for new instructors that covers DNR policies and procedures for volunteer instructors, teaching techniques, the importance of following lesson plans, and practical teaching demonstrations.

Although ongoing training for existing instructors is not required, DNR does make training available to veteran instructors. Up to twice per year, DNR offers a training academy that is limited to approximately 50 instructors per session. In addition, wardens provide five to eight training sessions to instructors annually. These sessions generally include information on teaching techniques, hunting incidents, ethics, and other topics as requested by instructors. DNR estimates attendance at these training sessions to total approximately 1,000 instructors annually.

Future Considerations

Recent legislative proposals related to the Hunter Education Program may affect the number of students taking courses in the future and the need for additional instructors. Recent legislative changes reestablishing a fee for the courses will provide additional program revenue and reduce DNR's administrative costs, but may affect the number of individuals taking the courses.

Lowering Wisconsin's Minimum Hunting Age

Current law requires that an individual must have a license in order to hunt, with certain exceptions for those hunting on land they own. In addition, no one under the age of 12 may hunt with a firearm or bow and arrow, and children ages 12 and 13 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian while hunting. A child who has successfully completed a hunter education course can hunt and use firearms without supervision at age 14.

2005 Assembly Bill 586, introduced in August 2005, would allow children as young as ten to hunt if they share a firearm or bow and arrow with a parent, guardian, or designee who has successfully completed a hunter education course and has a hunting license. In addition, the adult must be within arm's reach of the child. DNR indicates that such a proposal would have a minimal effect on the number of 10- and 11-year-old students taking hunter education courses. Courses are already open to students of this age, and the bill would not require 10- or 11-year-olds to successfully complete a course in order to obtain a license. However, DNR officials believe that if such legislation were enacted, it could increase the number of students taking hunter education courses because it would introduce children to hunting at a younger age. If legislation is enacted, DNR will need to closely monitor changes in the number and ages of students enrolling in hunter education courses and ensure that an adequate number of instructors is available to meet any increased demand that may result.

Course Fee

As noted, 2005 Wisconsin Act 25 includes a provision that requires DNR to establish a fee for the hunter education courses and allows instructors to retain up to \$5 per student to defray instructor costs. DNR estimates the fee will generate \$170,000 annually. Although DNR does not anticipate that implementing the fee will reduce the number of students taking the course, some have argued that providing free courses may lead more people who have not hunted in the past to consider taking up the sport. Further, we note that DNR spent \$83,895 in FY 2004-05 for instructor/organization reimbursements. Administrative savings are expected in the future because individual instructors will no longer be reimbursed by DNR staff.

Recommendation

We recommend the Department of Natural Resources report to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee by September 1, 2006 on:

- the amount of revenue generated by hunter education course fees, including both the amount retained by instructors and the amount remitted to DNR;
- the number of instructors that retained a portion of the fees collected; and
- the extent to which student enrollments changed after implementation of the fee.

Appendix

Courses Offered, by County
2004

County	Hunter Education Courses	Bow Hunter Education Courses	Total Courses	Percentage of Total
Adams	2	0	2	0.2%
Ashland	9	0	9	0.8
Barron	18	0	18	1.6
Bayfield	8	1	9	0.8
Brown	31	6	37	3.3
Buffalo	5	1	6	0.5
Burnett	7	2	9	0.8
Calumet	7	0	7	0.6
Chippewa	20	3	23	2.0
Clark	15	4	19	1.7
Columbia	11	0	11	1.0
Crawford	7	1	8	0.7
Dane	38	2	40	3.5
Dodge	18	5	23	2.0
Door	9	2	11	1.0
Douglas	11	3	14	1.2
Dunn	9	0	9	0.8
Eau Claire	18	1	19	1.7
Florence	5	1	6	0.5
Fond du Lac	17	2	19	1.7
Forest	6	1	7	0.6
Grant	14	4	18	1.6
Green	8	0	8	0.7
Green Lake	6	3	9	0.8
Iowa	5	0	5	0.4
Iron	3	0	3	0.3
Jackson	4	0	4	0.4
Jefferson	21	3	24	2.1
Juneau	7	0	7	0.6
Kenosha	12	0	12	1.1
Kewaunee	6	0	6	0.5
La Crosse	13	1	14	1.2
Lafayette	7	0	7	0.6
Langlade	5	3	8	0.7
Lincoln	10	2	12	1.1

County	Hunter Education Courses	Bow Hunter Education Courses	Total Courses	Percentage of Total
Manitowoc	16	1	17	1.5
Marathon	37	7	44	3.9
Marinette	18	1	19	1.7
Marquette	3	1	4	0.4
Menominee	1	0	1	0.1
Milwaukee	39	3	42	3.7
Monroe	12	3	15	1.3
Oconto	10	5	15	1.3
Oneida	11	2	13	1.1
Outagamie	22	6	28	2.5
Ozaukee	15	0	15	1.3
Pepin	5	0	5	0.4
Pierce	10	1	11	1.0
Polk	16	2	18	1.6
Portage	19	5	24	2.1
Price	12	4	16	1.4
Racine	27	2	29	2.6
Richland	4	0	4	0.4
Rock	29	1	30	2.7
Rusk	10	1	11	1.0
St. Croix	12	1	13	1.1
Sauk	19	0	19	1.7
Sawyer	9	0	9	0.8
Shawano	14	6	20	1.8
Sheboygan	23	1	24	2.1
Taylor	12	2	14	1.2
Trempealeau	9	0	9	0.8
Vernon	14	0	14	1.2
Vilas	5	0	5	0.4
Walworth	17	1	18	1.6
Washburn	4	1	5	0.4
Washington	27	2	29	2.6
Waukesha	52	13	65	5.8
Waupaca	16	1	17	1.5
Waushara	6	7	13	1.1
Winnebago	17	4	21	1.9
Wood	22	11	33	2.9
Total	986	146	1,132	100.0%