

# DIVERSITY

IN THE

# OUTDOORS

It's not about being politically correct.  
It's the answer to increasing the number of  
hunters in the USA and preserving our sport.

By Jodi Stemler



**SOME TEND** to focus on the differences of the color of our skin, gender or even what specific outdoor pursuit we prefer. But the best way to increase diverse participation (well, really participation in general) in hunting and fishing is to connect with different communities and invite them to go with us.

Elana Flagg didn't grow up hunting, even though her father and grandfather were hunters. Her father had grown up on a farm in North Carolina and hunting continues to be a passion of his. It wasn't an intentional oversight, more like it never really occurred to her or to her father that she might be interested – and she didn't think to ask him if she could try. Instead he took her brother out with him.

"I didn't think about hunting myself until I moved home to Tennessee," Flagg said. "Even though he'd hunted all his life, my dad had to take a hunter safety course in order to go on a hunt in Colorado and he asked me if I wanted to go with him." ▶▶

ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN HANSEN AND JUSTIN DAVIE



Deer season that year was right before Thanksgiving and her dad handed her a rifle and invited her to go on her first deer hunt. “This was a pretty big deal,” Flagg continued. “What I learned on that first hunt was that I loved sitting in nature, feeling the wind on my face, being still and listening to the wildlife. Hunting forced me to be quiet and patient in nature and it helped me heal through depression.”

She shot two does and two bucks her first year hunting. This year she joined her father, 93-year-old grandfather and her uncles in their annual Colorado elk hunt — she was the only woman in camp — and she shot her first cow elk. Hunting has become her therapy, a peaceful place to connect with the outdoors as well as to her food.

#### BEYOND THE DEFINITIONS

Flagg represents just a tiny fraction of the population: she is a millennial, she’s a woman, she is African American, and she is a hunter. But to her, these descriptions don’t define her as a person or as a hunter — she just wants to get more people involved in hunting and the outdoors.

According to the 2016 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation, 39.5 million people over the age of 16 fished and/or hunted. This is 16 percent of the population of the United States. However, things get a little bleak, considering that of the 16 percent only 4 percent hunted.

The demographics of the hunting community do not mirror the demographics of the general public. The same survey found that 90 percent of hunters are male, 97 percent are white and about 60 percent of hunters are over 45 years old. With the already slippery slope of declining participation, it is helpful to think about why that might be.

One challenge can trace back to the urban/rural divide. It’s much more common to hunt when you live in a rural area where 13 percent of the population hunts, compared to just 3 percent of those in urban areas — clearly a swing when more than 80 percent of the country lives in urban areas. At the same time, nearly 75 percent of African Americans live in urban/suburban communities and the number of other ethnic and racial groups, as well as millennials, living

# SURVEY SAYS?

(WE NEED TO DO A BETTER JOB)

We asked a panel of hunters and anglers a few questions about their experience with bringing others into the hunting and fishing community.

1. How important is it to introduce people from non-traditional communities to hunting?

Very Important



Somewhat Important



Not Important

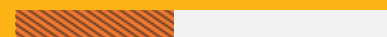


2. In the last five years, have you introduced anyone to hunting?

Yes



No



↑ When we asked who you’ve introduced to hunting, most said family (27 percent) and friends (27 percent); 14 percent said those who had not hunted before. 5 percent brought people who were formerly against hunting, and some brought members of the LGBT and other communities.

3. What is the biggest threat to our hunting tradition?

Land Access



Complicated Regulations



Lack of Advocacy in Culture



Expense



These survey questions were sent to the Outdoor Advisors, an online community of outdoor enthusiasts like you. The advisors provide a forum to give feedback on issues such as conservation, future products as well as the chance to rate TV pilots, preview new apps and offer opinions on the outdoor industry. It is managed by Outdoor Sportsman Group. This helps us create the best content possible and shape the future of outdoor entertainment. Visit [theoutdooradvisors.com](http://theoutdooradvisors.com) to take a short survey, and see if you are eligible to become an Outdoor Advisor.

in cities is also quite high.

Increasingly, the challenge of introducing new hunters trends toward connecting with people who don’t have the family traditions of hunting and who live in more urban areas. These potential new hunters might be black or Asian or Hispanic or women or hipsters — they might look different from traditional expectations of hunters, but if there is an interest there is an opportunity.

#### CULTIVATING AN INTEREST

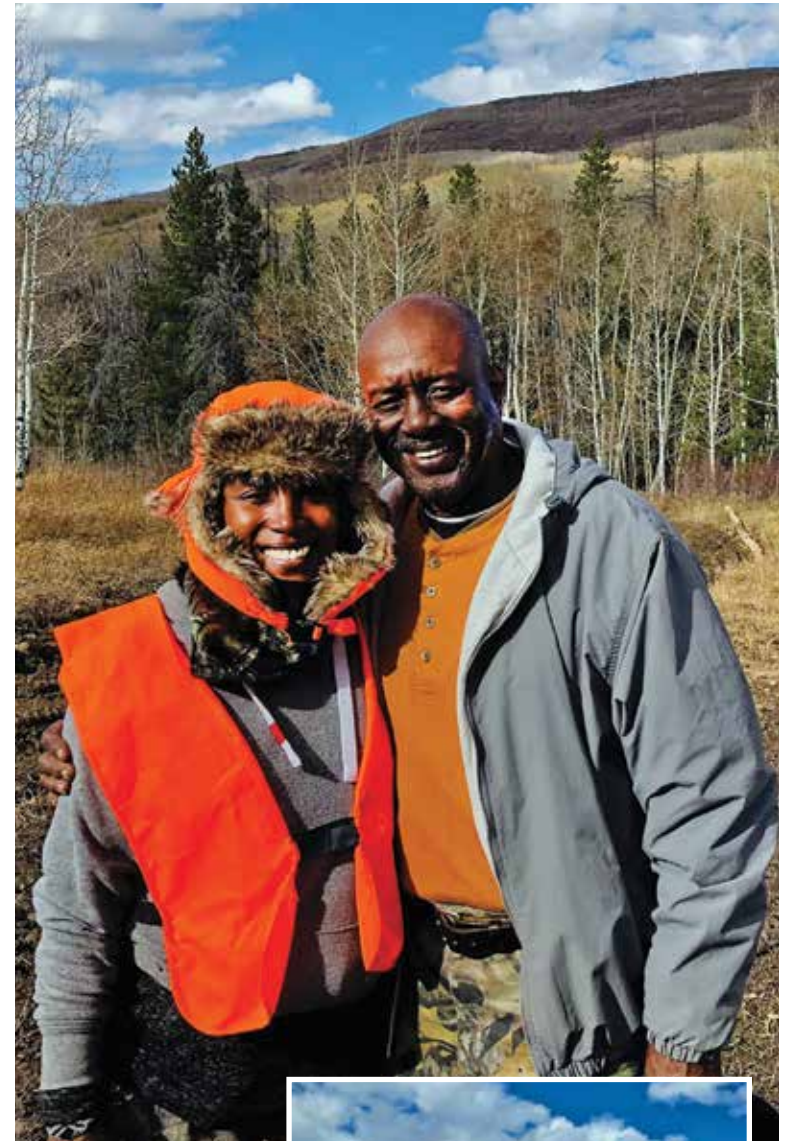
For many people, the first and most important part of starting to hunt is just being asked to go. As a woman who hunts, I was lucky to have a father and grandfather who welcomed girls joining them afield. My husband and I are currently raising a daughter who loves hunting — in part because we always just took her with us.

When I talk to many new hunters, or those who have expressed interest in hunting, most say that no one ever asked them to go — even, like Elana, when members of their family did hunt. Not everyone has an interest but presenting the opportunity is the first big step.

#### JOHANNA’S JOURNEY

There were no guns in Johanna Dart’s household growing up, and her mother never considered hunting. Dart was adopted from South Korea as an infant and raised in a fairly typical suburban environment in Michigan. She never thought much about hunting until her best friend took an interest because of a boyfriend who hunted, and the two women went through hunter education together. Dart went with her friend on her first hunt and enjoyed eating the backstrap from her friend’s doe, but she didn’t go hunting herself. When she was in graduate school at Michigan State, she applied for a summer outdoor-related internship — an internship that turned out to be focused on recruiting new hunters.

After the internship, Dart was invited to participate in Kentucky’s Hunter’s Legacy program and was mentored by another woman through her first hunt — a deer hunt using crossbows. The use of a crossbow helped ease some of her initial concerns and lack of knowledge about firearms; she was mentored by another woman and because they had a lot in common, she was much more comfortable with the entire process. She used her personal experience and the information learned from other hunter recruitment programs to



Elana Flagg (above) with her father Mack Moore Sr. Elana’s uncle Sidney Clark Jr. (at right, on the left) and grandfather Sidney Clark Sr. on an elk hunt in Routt National Forest.



“I brought two coworkers hunting. They became hooked on the peace and quiet and the thrill of their experiences in Mother Nature’s world.”

—Comment from an Outdoor Advisor, responding to question #2

PHOTOGRAPHS BY COREY DAVIS (TOP); MACK MOORE SR. (INSET)



**Shayne Torres (from left), Justin Williams and Yahir Bourdon each bagged a turkey during a hunt with Camp Compass, a year-round outdoors program for middle- and high-school students.**

create Michigan’s Learn to Hunt program.

Dart’s internship and her own personal experience opened the door for a new opportunity – she now works for the National Wild Turkey Federation in Ohio as an R3 (recruitment, retention and reactivation) coordinator. She recognizes that for some, it helps to have someone that they can relate to welcoming them and mentoring them on their hunting journey.

“I admit that there are times when I’ve been uncomfortable — I mean, sometimes I feel like I’m a quadruple minority because of my age, gender, race and experience level,” Dart said. “But honestly, I can be more uncomfortable when someone calls out my ‘otherness’ – it shouldn’t be the way you describe them because it makes that person feel even more like they don’t belong. That’s just one piece of what makes you who you are — we shouldn’t zero in on the one thing that makes us different.”

#### **COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

Sometimes mentoring through an established program can help match interests, backgrounds, races and genders. Providing the “big tent” that reaches out to and welcomes anyone interested in hunting will help to cultivate a more diverse group of

hunters. Dart recently worked with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (BHA) to host an Intro to Hunting class because she knew the organization was successfully targeting a younger audience. She believes that providing these experiences and reaching into different communities can help create awareness and interest.

“We had eight students and two of them were African American,” Dart commented. “One person had driven 300 miles from Cincinnati to participate because he was interested in hunting as part of a sustainable lifestyle. He’d never even shot a gun, but clearly he was seeking out opportunities that this event offered him.”

Flagg is also looking to reach into communities that might be interested in the opportunity to learn to hunt. To do this, she started BlackHunters.org and blogs about her own personal experiences hunting with the hope that it might inspire others to get outdoors. Her goal over the next year is to challenge African American hunters to invite at least one non-hunter into the sport so they can be prepared in time for next season. She started at her family’s Thanksgiving when she connected her cousin’s son with a hunting club to help him get started.

However, one individual stands out as a

“Any chance I get I like to educate people on the importance of hunting and game management. I have introduced my son, neighbors and work associates and have also converted some anti-hunters to the fold.”

—Comment from an Outdoor Advisor, responding to question #2

mentor who has personally connected with inner-city youth from diverse backgrounds to learn about and participate in hunting. In 1994, John Annoni started Camp Compass in the middle school where he teaches in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a community that is predominantly Latino and African American.

Camp Compass is a year-round, after-school program for middle- and high-school students that teaches kids about nature, conservation and hunting skills. Once accepted into the program, kids progress through numerous classroom and outdoor experiences. Annoni also

**“We may be black, white, Hispanic... but when we are outdoors, we are all wearing the same colors,” said John Annoni, (left), founder of Camp Compass, with David Bonilla and Landon Annoni during an Arkansas duck hunt.**



**“Despite living in an area where hunting is considered taboo, I am constantly letting people know that I am a hunter as it is a part of my history, having grown up in western North Carolina.”**

*—Comment from an Outdoor Advisor, responding to question #1*

monitors their academic progress and the kids’ participation in actual hunts is a reward for their continued hard work and success in school. The program’s slogan is “Camouflaging Our Differences.”

Annoni emphasizes that the hunting community needs to recognize that it is diverse already with the many different pursuits — some upland hunt, some use a rifle or a bow, some only hunt for deer — and there’s even tension within these differences. To Annoni, it doesn’t matter what color you are, where you live or what or how you hunt — any R3 effort that isn’t inclusive is going to fail. The important part is simply showing that you care and being part of something bigger.

“In our everyday lives, we may be

black, white, Hispanic or of a different culture, but when we are outdoors, we are all wearing the same colors,” Annoni said. “There is a beauty to this and it must be highlighted again and again. We need to prove to everyone that our outdoor heritage is welcoming.”

Recently, Annoni started working on a project through Cornell University with a broader, nationwide group of independent community-based organizations to provide recommendations on how to effectively work with historically underrepresented or marginalized communities. Local engagement and fully investing within these communities are essential to building the bridges.

This group identified four primary factors — two challenges and two tools — that influence collaborations in diverse communities. The challenge of power and privilege can be addressed in part by trust and transparency, while the challenge of realities and relevance can be met through commitment and collaboration.

But there must be a focused effort to truly understand, connect and engage in different communities; something that can start with simply ensuring that diverse communities can see themselves

represented in outdoor media. World champion duck caller, Antonio “Duckman” Jones says he started hunting when he watched Bo Jackson on Mossy Oak’s Hunting the Country.

“I always tell people that hunt with me ‘Hey man, I’m not hard to miss,’ as in I stick out,” said Jones. “If you can take someone, no matter what race, color, creed or demographic, outside of their normal element and bring them into something that we love and cherish, we absolutely have a fire brewing for doing — and that’s the world of hunting and fishing, anything outdoors. Everybody can talk about taking kids hunting, and taking your own kids hunting. When you start taking kids that are not your own and doing it consistently — then you’re doing something.”

After a Camp Compass trip duck hunting with Jones in Stuttgart, Arkansas, Annoni concluded: “To be able to have a black kid, a Latino kid, a white kid, a black guide, a white mentor, I would challenge people, why don’t we act like Mother Nature for a little bit and not really care about it and let’s just go hunting. We have a lot of growth to do, but all I know is if we continue to show our kids we love them, that issue is going to go away.” ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY VINCENT CHAPMAN