

National Archery in the Schools Program

By Samantha Pedder

PGC Outreach Coordinator

Think of the sound of rain drops bouncing off a tin roof—that's what 100 arrows being launched simultaneously sounds like. On March 9, nearly 500 students caused what sounded like a downpour on the range of the 2012 Pennsylvania State National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) Tournament.

Students from across the state convened on the Pennsylvania State University campus on the tournament day to test their skills against other archers in the state. Anxious archers approached the shooting line, 110 at a time, in five different flights, to shoot competitive scores. When they weren't shooting, archers browsed a "Shooter's Expo," complete with live animals and opportunities to test their skills at a 3-D archery range. After five flights, the scores were tallied and awards were given for the top five archers and top three teams in each division. Team divisions included elementary, middle and high school and individual awards were broken down further, to 4th, 5th and 6th grade, middle and high school. The day was full of excitement and happiness for all—students, coaches, parents, even Game Commission staff. All of this energy was generated because of one program—NASP.

Started in Kentucky in 2002, NASP was designed to offer students the opportunity to explore the sport of archery in a welcoming and safe environment. The program has been successful, presently incorporating schools in 47 states and five different countries, including South Africa and New Zealand. Heralded for its safety record, 9,000 students have participated in NASP courses over the past ten years without one serious incident. While many people would hesitate to hand a youngster a bow for fear of safety concerns, this program has empowered teachers to encourage their students to explore the sport.

In Pennsylvania, NASP was launched in 2005, and in 2010, the Pennsylvania Game Commission adopted the program and has helped it to grow and develop across the state.

Currently, nearly 75 schools are enrolled in the program, with more schools joining all the time. The program attracts elementary, middle and high schools, in public and private school districts, from urban settings such as Pittsburgh to more rural places such as Tower City.

Unlike many other school sports, archery is an activity that any participant can achieve success in despite gender, age or physical fitness. It was because of this universal appeal that the Game Commission became interested in the program.

NASP provides a unique opportunity to introduce archery and, in turn, bowhunting to younger audiences. One of the current challenges facing the sporting community is a lack of younger participants, and this is a fantastic opportunity to cater to that audience. Students learn to shoot bows in school and then seek out opportunities to shoot outside of school to hone their skills and enhance their enjoyment.

Bowhunting is one opportunity that any student can pursue. The program has been incorporated into a recruitment, retention and reactivation plan that the Game Commission is creating to encourage more people, especially youngsters, to see what hunting is all about.

Thanks to several different grants from organizations such as Easton Foundation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Game Commission is able to offer schools half of the funding needed to purchase an entire equipment kit.

An equipment kit consists of twelve Genesis bows, five targets, an arrow curtain, arrows, a repair kit and bowrack. Commercially, this equipment would cost around \$6,000 but through discounts organized by the National NASP organization and the archery industry, schools can purchase these kits for about \$3,000. A free 8-hour course is also offered for any instructor to attend and become a certified Basic Archery Instructor.

With equipment kit in hand and the knowledge to properly instruct their students, teachers implement the curriculum in their classrooms, and often times form a club team after school. These teams then compete at the state tournament, and sometimes even continue on to the national and international tournaments later in the year.

In some states such as Ohio and Kentucky, state tournaments draw thousands of shooters. The Game Commission predicts that the Pennsylvania tournament will reach the 1,000 participant mark—double our 2012 record—in only two or three years. The tournament staff is facing a positive challenge of expanding

Pennsylvania Game News – Volume 83 No. 6 June 2012

the current tournament range format to accommodate as many shooters as possible for the 2013 tournament. We are already working hard to organize an exciting and fun event for all participants. If 100 arrows sound like raindrops, just imagine the sounds of a thunderstorm that 1,000 arrows could create.

Enroll your school in NASP today to experience the ruckus yourself at the 2013 tournament.