The Future of Deer Hunting

Quality Deer Management Association
Mentored Hunting Program
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Hunters play a crucial role in our nation’s social and economic well being. They provide a free ecological service by managing deer and other wildlife while contributing $87 billion annually to our economy and creating almost 600,000 jobs. However, hunter numbers have declined and youth recruitment is not keeping pace. Across the United States, we only recruit 87 hunters for every 100 we lose. Sadly, few states recruit as many hunters as they lose. Studies confirm that many youth have an interest in wildlife and hunting but lack the opportunity to act upon that interest. Fortunately, the QDMA Mentored Hunting Program provides a framework to help mentors and interested youth or other first-time hunters have successful experiences.

The QDMA Mentored Hunting Program is designed to increase the number of youth and first-time hunters, not just to take more youth hunting. It also builds the foundation for these hunters to become better stewards of our natural resources and better ambassadors for hunting. The QDMA Mentored Hunting Program incorporates multiple steps over several months, and is therefore expected to be far more effective than traditional “one-time” events designed to expose newcomers to hunting. Not only will this program teach students about the importance of hunting, it will also provide them with a greater understanding of hunting’s role in sustainable management our natural resources. The program includes the following eight steps:

**Step One** exposes students to the program, provides background information on QDMA and hunting, and allows the mentor and student to bond.

**Step Two** develops basic woodsmanship skills, those commonly lacking among today’s beginning hunters, while building a framework to become a successful and knowledgeable hunter.

**Steps Three & Four** teach hunter ethics and education, and sporting arm safety and proficiency.

**Step Five** involves small game hunting because it enhances woodsmanship skills, reinforces sporting arm use and safety, lacks the pressure of a big game hunt, and is generally more exciting for beginning hunters.

**Step Six** teaches deer biology, behavior, ecology, deer anatomy, shot placement and Quality Deer Management concepts.

**Step Seven** involves deer hunting while the mentor reinforces safety, shot selection, management concepts and hunter ethics.

**Step Eight** celebrates the hunt, recognizes the student as a “hunter” and serves as his/her rite of passage into the hunting community.
**QUALITY DEER MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION**

QDMA is among the fastest-growing conservation organizations in the nation, with nearly 50,000 members in all 50 states and several foreign countries. A network of nearly 200 QDMA Branches in over 30 states actively promotes QDM and QDMA in their areas and holds educational and social events to unite like-minded sportsmen and women in this common goal.

QDMA’s primary focus has always been on education, research and on-the-ground management. Today, thousands of hunters and millions of acres of public and private lands are managed under QDM guidelines. QDMA also partners with federal and state wildlife agencies, forest products companies, conservation organizations and other groups to increase support for QDM. QDMA also was the first whitetail organization to join the Chronic Wasting Disease Alliance and is a proud supporter of numerous deer research projects. QDMA supports numerous worthy organizations like Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry, the Paralyzed Veterans Association and the Catch-A-Dream Foundation. QDMA is the only whitetail organization ever to receive the prestigious “Group Achievement Award” from The Wildlife Society – the parent body of nearly 10,000 wildlife professionals in North America.

In early 2006, QDMA launched its REACH program. REACH is an innovative national education and outreach program that encompasses QDMA’s core mission elements under one program. REACH is the acronym for Research, Educate, Advocate, Certify and Hunt. REACH goals include:

- **Research** – Design, coordinate, and fund practical research projects that increase our understanding of whitetail biology, ecology, management, hunting, diseases and human dimensions.

- **Educate** – Expand existing educational activities for QDMA members and the public while pursuing new delivery methods such at television, DVD’s and web-based learning modules.

- **Advocate** – Increase involvement in all aspects of whitetail hunting and management at the local, state, federal and international levels while strengthening ties with members, conservation organizations, wildlife agencies and other key stakeholder groups.

- **Certify** – Offer individual and property QDM certification programs that allow members to maximize their understanding of deer biology, management and habitat improvement and to receive recognition for creating a showcase QDM property.

- **Hunt** – Develop and implement programs such as QDMA’s Rack Pack and/or Mentored Hunting Program that educate and recruit future hunters while helping secure the future of our hunting heritage.

Many challenges face deer hunters and managers today. Whitetail populations have skyrocketed in some areas, hunter numbers have declined, hunter attitudes have changed, society’s respect for deer has declined, and diseases have threatened some herds. The QDMA has faced each new challenge head-on and will continue to do so while remaining the most influential and effective whitetail conservation organization in the world. Through Rack Rack, the QDMA Mentored Hunting Program is our strategy to increase hunter recruitment rates and secure the future of our hunting heritage.
**HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL MENTOR**

**What is a Mentor?**

When most of us recall our childhood, we can point to an adult other than our parents/guardians who helped us out. Being a mentor is about being that person who spends time with a youth. The volunteer helps the youth experience new opportunities and activities that he/she might not have encountered before. For the purposes of this program, a mentor is a person who helps a youth or other first-time hunter develop into a knowledgeable and competent hunter. The mentor also helps the student develop an understanding and appreciation for the role of hunters and hunting in wildlife management to build the foundation for these hunters to become better stewards of our natural resources and better ambassadors for hunting.

**What is a Student?**

For purposes of this program a student can be a son, daughter, family member, neighbor, youth, or even an adult first-time hunter in the community. The point is that this individual, young or old, has had little or no opportunity to be taught about hunting.

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**Your Role as a Mentor**

A GOOD MENTOR...
- Has FUN!
- Listens well
- Communicates on the student’s level
- Provides leadership
- Is a positive role model
- Is on time for meetings
- Is committed and willing to face unexpected hurdles
- Reinforces the successes of the student

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**Best Practices for Mentors (if you are not the student’s parent/guardian)**

1. When planning an outing, always discuss the outing and obtain permission from the student’s parent/guardian.
2. Always remember to have honest communication with parents/guardians about outings. Always tell the parent or guardian when you will be picking up and dropping off the student.
3. When picking up the student for an outing, always remember to pick them up at the door. When dropping the student off after an outing, walk them to the door and make sure the parent/guardian is home.
4. Always obtain the appropriate parent/guardian permission before making plans to take the student anywhere. Do not rely on the student to communicate your plans to their parent/guardian. Always be sure you have heard verbal approval of your plans and always confirm your plan a day in advance as a reminder to the student and their parent/guardian.
5. In case of a medical emergency, take the student directly to the hospital. Call the parent/guardian and the family physician as soon as possible.
6. It is recommended to plan at least one separate outing per step.

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This mentor’s guide details the eight steps in the QDMA Mentored Hunting Program

Information in BLACK provides information about a current step or parts of a step

Information in BLUE provides specific items to be accomplished during a step

Information in RED provides links to websites for suggested readings about a step

**Value of Hunting** statements are included with each step and should be taught to students

These are quotes from the National Shooting Sports Foundation informational booklet, *The Hunter and Conservation*. You can find it here: www.nssf.org/lit/HunterConservation10.pdf
**STEP 1**  
**PROGRAM INTRODUCTION AND BONDING**

This step introduces the mentor and student to QDMA’s Youth program, the Rack Pack ([RACKPACK.QDMA.COM](http://RACKPACK.QDMA.COM)) and defines what their obligations are and what they can expect from the program. It also allows the mentor to get a good feel for the student’s level of interest, knowledge and past participation experience. These three items will allow for proper planning of initial activities in Step 2.

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**Value of Hunting**

Today millions of Americans are interested in conservation and wildlife, but those who oppose hunting may not be aware that hunters are the largest contributors to conservation, paying for programs that benefit all Americans and wildlife.

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**Plan and Partake in Bonding / Learning Activities**

**EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:**
- attending sportsmen’s shows
- sharing magazine articles
- visiting sporting goods stores
- watching hunting or outdoor TV shows or DVD’s
- watch videos on QDMA.com
- visiting environmental education centers
- tour hunting property(s)
- attending QDMA Branch meetings, etc.
- visiting bow ranges
- Rack Pack website Rackpack.QDMA.com
- Attend Rack pack events

The International Hunter Education Association’s website ([IHEA.COM](http://IHEA.COM)) has a wealth of useful information for mentors and students in the QDMA Mentored Hunting Program. Each step of this program contains suggested readings for the mentor and student and many of them are from the IHEA website. The following information is a table of contents for the 17 sections on the IHEA website and is provided to show the concepts included with each suggested reading.

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**INTRODUCTION TO HUNTER EDUCATION**

[Introduction](https://homestudy.ihea.com)

**TABLE OF CONTENTS: HOME STUDY.IHEA.COM**

**INTRODUCTION** 4 pages
Welcome | About This Course | How To Take This Course | Tools to Help You Take This Course

**ABOUT HUNTING** 9 pages
Start | Why People Hunt | Relaxation | Learning About Nature | Being in Nature | Adventure and Heritage | Developing Skills and Fitness | Interacting with Animals | Frequently Asked Questions

**ABOUT HUNTER EDUCATION** 8 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Purpose | Importance | Funding | Requirements | Safe and Getting Safer | Final Quiz
MODERN FIREARMS 52 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Evolution | Types of Firearms | Basic Firearm Actions | Final Quiz

AMMUNITION 26 pages
Start | What You Should Know | How Guns Fire | Cartridges | Shells | Choosing Type and Size | Handling | Trajectory | Final Quiz

FIREARM SAFETY 11 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Safety Rules | Accepting a Firearm | Unloading and Loading Firearms | Safety Mechanisms | Cleaning Firearms | Storage | Final Quiz

SHOOTING SKILLS 38 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Marksmanship | Shooting Positions | Rifle Marksmanship | Shotgun Marksmanship | Practice Pays | Where to Shoot | Ranges | Safety Equipment | Final Quiz

HUNTING SAFETY 19 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Field Carries | Preventing Falls | Crossing Obstacles | Zones of Fire | Safe / Unsafe Shots | Alcohol and Drugs | Blaze Orange | Final Quiz

SPECIAL CONCERNS 42 pages
Start | Treestands | ATV’s and Snowmobiles | Water | Turkey | Dogs | Pack Animals | Final Quiz

ADVANCED HUNTING TECHNIQUES 45 pages
Start | Bowhunting | Muzzleloaders | Handguns | Final Quiz

HUNTING SKILLS 35 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Preparing | Scouting | Hunting Plan | Checklist | Techniques | Picking Shots | Final Quiz

AFTER THE SHOT 32 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Tracking | Game Care | Field Dressing | Wingshooting | Final Quiz

OUTDOOR SKILLS AND SAFETY 60 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Basic Skills | Survival | Hunter Health | Advanced Skills | Final Quiz

HUNTER RESPONSIBILITY / ETHICS 27 pages
Start | What You Should Learn | Responsibility and Respect | Fair Chase | Laws | Final Quiz

WILDLIFE 27 pages
Start | What You Should Know | Wildlife | Habitat | Populations | Tools | Role of Hunting | Final Quiz

WILDLIFE ID 11 pages + 146 optional pages
Start | What You Should Know | Finding Wildlife | Game or Non-Game | Techniques | Signs | Distribution | Warning for Hunters | Final Quiz | Over 100 Wildlife Fact Sheets

OPPORTUNITIES 3 pages
Start | Organizations | U.S. Hunter Education Offices | Canadian Hunter Education Offices

• Suggested reading for Step 1
STEP 2
DEVELOP WOODSMANSHIP SKILLS

This step is extremely important as it provides the knowledge and skills most lacking by many of today’s new/beginning hunters. This step teaches the skills that provide the framework to be successful at Steps 5 and 7 and to develop an appreciation and understanding of hunting.

Value of Hunting
An overabundance of any one species can cause a shortage of food and an increase in the spread of diseases. Hunters help to regulate and maintain wildlife while not affecting future populations.

• Teach animal and plant species identification
  Trees - http://www.arborday.org
  TREES ID - http://www.fwvt.edu/dendro/forsite/idtree.htm

• Take student to the field and teach basic woodsmanship skills

THESE CAN BE LOW-PRESSURE LEARNING ACTIVITIES CENTERED AROUND:
• hiking
• scouting
• shed antler hunting
• easy habitat development projects
• bird watching

• Locate and identify animal sign
  EXAMPLES OF ANIMAL SIGN INCLUDE:
• deer scrapes and rubs
• turkey scratching
• hair deposits
• scat
• tracks
• bird or squirrel nests
• animal beds and trails
• wildlife foods, etc.

• Discuss the significance of each item identified
  ANIMAL SIGN, TRACKS, ETC - http://www.natureskills.com

• Locate and identify trees and shrubs that provide food and cover for wildlife:
  HABITAT IMPROVEMENT - http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/habitat-improvement

• Document your experiences with a camera. The student can use some of these pictures in a journal.
STEP 3

FORMAL HUNTER SAFETY, ETHICS AND EDUCATION CLASS

This step exposes the student to formal sporting arm (firearm and/or archery) and treestand safety training and hunter ethics and education.

Value of Hunting

The American hunter has made every effort to instill and enforce organized wildlife conservation.

INTERNATIONAL HUNTER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION’S BASIC SAFETY RULES

Safe handling of firearms begins with the four basic rules listed below. An easy way to remember these rules is to ACTT responsibly around firearms. ACTT stands for:

1. Assume every gun to be loaded - Consider any firearm you have not just unloaded to be loaded and treat it accordingly.
2. Control the muzzle–point guns in a safe direction - You must decide what the safest available muzzle direction is and keep your firearm pointed in that direction. Never point a firearm at yourself or others.
3. Trigger Finger–keep your finger off the trigger until ready to fire - The natural instinct when picking up a firearm is to put your finger in the trigger guard. DON’T! This could cause an accidental discharge if the gun is loaded.
4. Target–be sure of your target and beyond - Never point your firearm at something you do not intend to shoot. Make sure you positively identify what you are shooting at and know what lies in front of and beyond it. Do not use telescopic sights as a substitute for binoculars when identifying persons, animals or objects.

To help you remember these four basic rules, think of ACTT.

ASSUME IT IS LOADED - CONTROL THE MUZZLE - TRIGGER FINGER - TARGET AND BEYOND

It is the mentor’s responsibility to ensure the student is legal to hunt. Some students will have already completed a hunter education course, and some students will be too young to take a hunter education course (e.g., many states without lower age limits allow youth to hunt under adult supervision until a certain age, generally 12 or 16 years, then they must complete a hunter education course and obtain a hunting license. Other states with Families Afield programs allow youth to participate at ages too young to take their state’s hunter education program).

• Arrange to have the student take a hunter education course if he/she has not taken one and is eligible to take one.

International Hunter Education Association – http://www.ihea-usa.org

We encourage you to take the course with the student to facilitate follow-up discussions and reinforce covered materials.

• If the student has already completed a hunter education course, review hunter, treestand and sporting arm safety and hunter ethics.

• If the student is too young to take a hunter education course, teach hunter, treestand and sporting arm safety and hunter ethics.

• Suggested readings for Step 3

Special Concerns - http://homestudy.ihea.com/concerns/index.htm
**Step 4**

**Shooting Experience and Marksmanship**

This step reinforces sporting arm and/or archery safety skills and develops shooting competence.

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**Value of Hunting**

State fish and game departments help to maintain and improve wildlife habitats with help from management specialists and the strong support of hunters.

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- **Review firearm safety rules**
  

- **Provide and partake in shooting opportunities with the student**
  
  

- **At the range, review firearm safety rules prior to shooting**
  
  These experiences should be designed to develop safety skills and shooting competence

**These experiences can be at a:**

- rifle range
- archery range
- sportsmen’s club
- private landowner’s range
- sporting clays range, etc.

This step is a precursor to the first hunting session in Step 5.

This step should include as many sessions as necessary for the student to be safe, comfortable and proficient with the firearm/archery equipment.

- **Provide eye and ear protection for the student**

  The student should have the opportunity to initially shoot a 0.22 (or other rimfire) rifle and also the sporting arm(s) he/she will be using in Steps 5 and 7.
**STEP 5**

**SMALL GAME HUNTING**

This step allows the student to use the knowledge and training he/she acquired in Steps 2-4 and go small game hunting.

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### Value of Hunting

Sportsmen and women have historically funded the majority of the conservation effort.

- **Review species identification**
  

- **Teach and/or review animal behavior and hunting techniques**
  
  This will prepare the student for what he/she will encounter while hunting
  
  
  

- **Review sporting arm safety**
  

- **Prepare for the hunt**
  
  HUNTER'S CHECKLIST - [http://homestudy.ihea.com/hunttingskills/15a_checklist.htm](http://homestudy.ihea.com/hunttingskills/15a_checklist.htm)
  
  DEER HUNTING - [http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/deer-hunting](http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/deer-hunting)

- **Take the student small game hunting**
  
  Take a camera and document all aspects of the experience such as sitting in the blind or on stand or the student in the field.

  QDMA strongly encourages small game as the initial hunting experience.

  **SMALL GAME HUNTING:**
  
  - develops woodsmanship skills
  
  - reinforces firearm safety instruction
  
  - lacks the pressure of a big game hunt
  
  - typically provides a lot of action
  
  - is generally more fun for the beginning hunter

  Recommended species include squirrels, rabbits and upland game birds

  The first hunt in Step 5 should be a low pressure affair

- **Stay within arm’s reach of the student at all times**
  
  This placement allows the mentor to answer questions and redirect any unsafe action.
  
  - assist with animal identification
  
  - assist with animal location after a shot is fired

- **Review Steps 2-4 after the first small game hunt using examples of situations that occurred during the hunt**
  
  The student will likely have a better grasp of his/her knowledge and training on future small game hunts.
STEP 5

- **Teach proper field care of harvested game**
  

- **Teach method(s) to prepare harvested game for the table**
  
  *Wildlife Recipes* - http://www.wildliferecipes.net

- **Take the student hunting as many times as possible to continue providing experiences and prepare them for their first deer hunt in Step 7**

  We recommend a minimum of two or three outings. Hopefully the student will have harvested at least one species. This will allow the student to feel successful, and allow the mentor to teach the proper field care and table preparation of harvested game.
DEER BIOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT TRAINING

This step teaches deer biology, behavior, ecology, anatomy, shot placement and Quality Deer Management (QDM) concepts to students who have completed most or all of Steps 1-5 and are preparing for their first deer hunt in Step 7.

Value of Hunting

The money spent on license fees and excise taxes are the best way that sportsmen and women contribute to wildlife conservation.

A sound understanding of basic deer biology and management concepts is critical to becoming a knowledgeable and competent deer hunter.

• Teach the basics of deer biology, behavior, ecology, shot placement and QDM concepts
  
  Youth Involvement in QDM and Rack Pack - http://Rackpack.QDMA.com
  Habitat Management - http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/habitat-improvement
  Food Plots - http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/food-plots

• Teach the basics of hunting strategies and techniques
  
  Special Concerns - http://homestudy.ihea.com/concerns/index.htm
  Deer Hunting - http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/deer-hunting
  How to Blood Trail a Deer - http://www.qdma.com/articles/how-to-blood-trail-a-deer

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

• hunting strategies
• hunting techniques
• scent control
• understanding the wind
• hanging a treestand
• setting up a ground blind
• understanding movement patterns

• Teach animal anatomy and shot placement using Cyber Deer - available from QDMA by calling (800) 209-3337 or ordering at QDMA.com

• Teach basic deer recovery
  
  How To Blood Tail a Deer - http://QDMA.com/articles/How-to-blood-trail-a-deer

The QDMA recommends you complete this step before proceeding to Step 7. You may also obtain some of this training at QDMA Branch events.

• Check QDMA.com for a listing of QDMA Branch and/or Rack Pack events in your area.

• Suggested reading for step 6:
  
  A Basic Guide to Quality Deer Management - available for $2.50 from QDMA by calling (800) 209-3337 or ordering at QDMA.com
STEP 7
DEER HUNTING

This step allows the student to use the knowledge and training he/she acquired in Steps 2-6 and go deer hunting.

Value of Hunting
The purchase of hunting and sporting equipment brings over $560 million each year to state wildlife and fishery projects.

• Review species identification

• Review animal behavior and hunting techniques
  This will prepare the student for what he/she will encounter while hunting
  Deer Hunting - http://www.qdma.com/articles/archive/category/deer-hunting

• Review sporting arm safety

• Prepare for the hunt

• Take the student deer hunting
  Take a camera and document all aspects of the experience such as sitting in the blind or on stand or the student in the field.
  The mentor and student may choose to partake in a practice deer hunt prior to an actual deer hunt. Please send photos and documentation to our Youth Program Manager.

If you choose a practice hunt:

• the mentor and student should do everything exactly the same as they would on a deer hunt except
  the student can carry a camera or stick instead of a firearm or bow

• the student can practice the skills he/she learned in Steps 2-6, combined with the increased pressure
  and excitement of hunting deer

• it can occur prior to or during deer season. Preseason and off days (such as Sundays in some states)
  may be the best for practice sessions. You can also practice deer hunting during Step 5

The hunt should have as high of a probability of success as possible. The student should have the opportunity to harvest any deer (including a young buck).

• Stay within arm’s reach of the student at all times
  THIS PLACEMENT ALLOWS THE MENTOR TO:
  • redirect any unsafe action
  • answer questions
  • assist with animal identification
  • assist with animal location after a shot is fired
The emphasis of the hunt should be on deer identification, reading deer sign and other skills learned during Steps 2-6. If the student harvests a deer, handle the situation with sensitivity and respect for the animal.

- **Teach proper field care of harvested game**  

- **Teach method(s) to prepare harvested game for the table**  
  Wildlife Recipes - http://www.wildliferecipes.net

- **Make the student aware of potential venison donation opportunities**  
  Venison Donation - http://www.FHFH.org

**EXAMPLES INCLUDE:**
- local food banks
- venison donation coalitions
- families in need, etc

- **Take the student hunting as many times as possible to continue providing learning experiences**

We recommend a minimum of two or three outings. Ideally the student can hunt during the rut and experience morning, afternoon and evening sessions. Hopefully the student will have harvested at least one deer; however, the student doesn’t need to harvest a deer in order to complete this step. Be sure to emphasize that to the student. This will allow the student to feel successful, and allow the mentor to teach the proper field care and table preparation of harvested game.
STEP 8
CELEBRATE THE HUNT

This step celebrates the hunt(s), recognizes the student as a “hunter” and serves as his/her rite of passage into the hunting community.

Value of Hunting

When hunters contribute to preserve wetlands, they’re also preserving every other species that share that same habitat.

• Publicly acknowledge the hunt(s)
A game dinner is a great place to acknowledge the student as a “hunter” and allow him/her to tell their hunting stories.

A game dinner is also a great place to acknowledge the student as a “provider” if he/she donated some of their meat to the dinner or to an area food bank or other individual.

A photo in the local paper is also a great way to acknowledge the student as a “hunter”.

The mentor can create a slide show of experiences and “present” it to the student’s family and friends.

• Check www.QDMA.com for a list of QDMA Branch and/or Rack Pack events in your area
A local QDMA Branch may be hosting a game dinner for other mentors and students and can include you and your student. If a public game dinner is not possible, then a mentor-student dinner celebrating the hunt should occur (be sure to include the student’s parents/guardians).

Deer contests celebrating antlers or size are strongly discouraged.

• Provide certificate to student for successfully completing the program and becoming a hunter (included and available at QDMA.COM)
The “on-stage” public acknowledgement of the student serves as a rite of passage into the hunting community.
# Checklist for 8 Steps

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This certificate is presented to

In Recognition of your Completion of the Quality Deer Management Association's
Mentored Hunting Program

SIGNED

DATE