

## It's a way of life': Father, daughter participate in state's youth deer hunt weekend

By SUSAN DOUCET / Monitor staff



*Emma, Abbey, and Adam MacDonald stand outside of their Washington home on Oct. 22, 2015. Photo by Susan Doucet.*

In some households, Saturday mornings are for sleeping in, but not the MacDonald house.

Adam MacDonald and his daughter Emma, 13, went out in the woods by their Washington home before dawn Saturday, where they spent a few hours waiting, hoping to spot deer.

MacDonald, a nearly lifelong hunter, participated in the state's special youth deer hunting weekend with his daughter to pass down his skill to a new generation.

"It lets you introduce your kids to hunting, which is awesome," MacDonald said.

The weekend, a program Fish and Game has offered since 1999, is a special opportunity during deer hunting season for children to try their hand at the sport.

On Saturday and Sunday, an adult with a hunting license was allowed to accompany two children under 16. Children were allowed to shoot deer, but adults were not – a rule that Fish and Game said permits youth to try hunting without the pressures of competing with other hunters.

“The idea is to concentrate your time and attention on coaching your young companion,” the Fish and Game Department advised parents.

“It’s a really nice program because it gives the youth a chance to get out in the woods in the company of an adult mentor,” said Jane Vachon, Fish and Game information programs supervisor. “It’s been very popular.”

The weekend may have been an introduction for many in the state, but this was not the first foray into hunting for the MacDonald girls.

“We spend a lot of time doing it,” Adam MacDonald said from the family’s Washington home. “Our lives do rotate around it.”

Emma, 13, shot her first deer last year during a hunting trip to Pennsylvania.

“It was pretty cool. It was fun,” she said. She spotted the deer before her father, who confirmed it was a doe, and she took her shot, which hit its mark.

“It was awesome,” MacDonald said. “It’s a big deal.”

Emma shoots with a Savage 243 youth model, a rifle identical to the full-sized model, just more compact.

Her sister, Abbey, 11, has not shot a deer before and is undecided about whether that’s something she would like to check off her bucket list.

“I’m not sure if I can actually shoot an animal. I can target practice, and I just don’t know if I want to shoot that gun because it has a lot of force,” Abbey said, citing her sister’s rifle.

Abbey prefers using a bow to a gun – hers is a pink camouflage model – and she’s even more a fan of fishing than hunting. “It doesn’t have as much force,” she said of the bow.

“There’s no point in pushing her if she doesn’t want to do it,” MacDonald said. “I’m very lucky, though. One likes to fish, one likes to hunt. How awesome is that?”

MacDonald, a native of Scotland, began hunting when he was about 8. He moved to New Hampshire in his teens and has been in the central part of the state since then. The importance of hunting permeates the family’s home. On a wall in the kitchen, the

heads of two bucks are mounted: the first buck MacDonald ever shot, a bow kill in Pennsylvania, and his first New Hampshire buck.

His girls first learned to shoot at the same age as their father, around late elementary school. Before the hunt, Emma said she was excited, and was hoping to take her first ever New Hampshire deer. For two days, father and daughter patiently waited, but had no luck.

“That’s the way hunting is sometimes,” MacDonald said, but “it was good, good quality time.”

Last year, according to Fish and Game, youth hunters took 389 deer during the youth weekend. Fish and Game does not have numbers on exactly how many people participate in youth hunting weekend, but the deer recorded give officials an idea.

“Obviously a lot more are hunting. Not everyone gets a deer,” Vachon said. “It’s not about necessarily bringing home the game. Hunting is about being afield, being tuned into the woods and the animal you’re trying to outwit.”

The MacDonalds have 21 acres, room for them to hunt on their own property. Washington, a rural town of about 50 square miles, has about 1,100 residents.

Their land is even intended to enhance deer hunting season. “It’s a yearlong process,” MacDonald said. “It’s a food plot, we call it. You plant specific crops, which this year we did sugar beets and turnips, and it’s about an acres worth, and it feeds the deer, entices the deer to an area.”

Deer hunting season in New Hampshire opens in September and runs through December. There are guidelines about how to hunt deer, though. Archery season opens first, followed by muzzleloader season, which opens Saturday, and firearm season, which begins Nov. 11.

“That’s Christmas Day in the hunting world,” Vachon said of the firearm season.

Fish and Game also holds youth hunting weekends for turkey season in May and waterfowl season in September.

“It’s nice New Hampshire has a lot of opportunities for youth to get involved in,” Vachon said.

MacDonald and Emma went out both days, but Abbey opted out this year. She had a soccer commitment and the girls’ mother, Sheila, stayed back too. But they appreciate the rewards of hunting.

The meat from a deer, which MacDonald cuts up, packages and freezes, can last almost all winter.

“It’s nice to see him come home with a cooler full of meat,” Abbey said, sitting at the family’s kitchen table with her sister and parents.

“It’s a way of life, it really is,” MacDonald said.

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