8.1 **Purpose:** The purpose of this chapter is to explain the process of conducting a big game hunt using a step by step discussion of the process.

8.2 **Before the Hunt:** The week preceding your hunt will have several key items that require prior planning if all is to go smoothly for your hunt. Sit down with your calendar and make a schedule for yourself. Items to accomplish the week before the hunt should include:

   a. **Equipment pick up from the Outreach Coordinator:**
      
      1. Equipment is to be picked up 48 hours from the 1st day of your activity.
      
      2. Please notify the Outreach Coordinator 7 days prior to the day you wish to pick up the equipment. Having an approximate time is very helpful as most weekends there are several hunts going on, and some direction of traffic may be needed.

   b. **Food and provisions:**
      
      1. Check list for quantity and accuracy.
2. Send your lists to the State/Regional Outreach Coordinator. They will often have some supplies left over from other hunts which can be included in your hunt and reduce the cost of a hunt.

3. Shop at discount or club stores if possible.

4. Keep receipts in safe place. You cannot be reimbursed if you do not have a readable receipt.

5. Pre cook meals if possible.

c. **Weather:** Examine weather and general conditions for the hunt. For planning purposes check the weather 5 days in advance, and keep checking as the week progresses. If weather becomes too adverse for travel you will need to cancel, or delay the hunt with as much notice as possible.

d. **Final Landowner contact:** Checking with the landowner the week before the hunt allows you to get any final information you may need such as road conditions, animal movements, or changes in conditions that could affect your plans. This also reminds the landowner that you will be coming the next week.

e. **Final Parent contact:** Always include in your letters to the parents an approximate date that you will be contacting them with final details of the hunt. Create a list of questions to ask each parent. A sample list will be included at the end of this chapter.

8.3 **Day 1 of the hunt:** This is the day you meet your hunters and escort them to the location of the hunt. Do your best to keep to the timeline defined in your Hunt plan. The first time you run a new hunt, you will inevitably run into snags. Keep a written note log of items that you run into, so that you may improve the planning for the next year’s events. If you have questions, do not be afraid to ask an experienced Huntmaster or Senior Huntmaster for their guidance. The following timeline and notes are what you would expect to see on a Big Game hunt. It is important to note every hunt has its own dynamics. If you keep yourself and your assistants focused on the two primary goals of safety and education, everything else will fall into place.
**Day 1: Guide and Assistant Meeting:** Plan to meet with your Guides and assistants at least 30 minutes prior to arrival of the youth and parents. You should have already discussed the hunt with them several times in your pre-hunt coordination with the guides. This is the time to cover the last few details face to face with them. Do not assume everyone knows what is in your head…**Tell them!** Cover the safety, transportation, and logistics of the day. You will have parents show up early to a meeting place, but do not allow their arrival to curtail your meeting with the team. Ask the early arrivals to wait until you finish the meeting, then you can work with the participants. For planning purposes this meeting typically takes fifteen minutes or less. Create a list of topics to cover, and make copies for your assistants. This may seem simple, but it is a lesson learned by Huntmasters of the past. If everyone is on the same page, and knows what to expect and what is expected of them, then the whole hunt runs much smoother.

**Day 1: Meeting the parents and Youth:** By now all the sponsors and youth have arrived at the meeting place. Your first task is to check their forms, licenses, and hunter safety cards. The Registration and Safety Checklist is a guide to covering all the steps of the registration process. Use this Checklist and cover all items on it. You are required to sign the checklist before leaving the meeting point. (See Chapter 12 Forms)
This is an important step! Below is an outline on how you will need to check the paperwork for completeness. It is recommended that you bring along several blank sets of the basic paperwork in case it is forgotten by the parents.

**Step 1. Forms:**

a. **Liability Waiver:** Check waiver for names, and signatures. If the sponsor attending the hunt is not a parent, then the waiver MUST have line eight filled in with the sponsor’s name, and signature of the parent on the form. If this is not done, you must call the parent and get verbal permission. You may take telephonic approval and have another Huntmaster witness and sign the form.

b. **Health History Forms:** There will be a health history form for the youth AND the adult. Many times the parent will not understand this, but it is necessary. It is imperative that these are not only filled out, but that the
Huntmaster review them for any possible health issues. The most common items you will see are asthma, and allergies. If these items show up on your hunt, you now have a risk, and must find a way to mitigate the risk. Mitigating these risks is typically very simple. Your first step is to ask the parent the severity, and if they have brought their medication. In the case of asthma, you need to ask if they have brought their inhaler. If they have severe reactions to food or insect stings, do they have their EpiPen or other medications? You will run into these types of situations, so be prepared. It is also equally important that after reviewing all of them, that you inform your team of any potential issues, and coordinate a single location for the forms in case of an emergency. This location needs to be accessible by any of your hunt team at any time. In other words do not lock them in your car or take them with you into the field. Having a location designated at camp is usually best. Ensure you tell all the assistants and guides where the forms are located in case of an emergency and you are not in the camp. If emergency medical services are needed, you can take the form with you and give it to the medical personnel as it provides some essential medical information quickly.

c. **Photography waiver**: Check for completeness and signatures.

d. **Marksmanship Certification**: We have the youth/novice hunter demonstrate their shooting at the beginning of a hunt. We use this form to encourage the parents to take the youth to the range before the hunt to practice. DO NOT rely on what the parent or youth say about their shooting for a hunt or the fact that the form is signed and complete. A Huntmaster on your team MUST observe this in person before pursuing game. More details on this subject will be covered in the shooting range section.

e. **Reservation checks**: In the Huntmaster package you receive from the Hunter Outreach office will be the hunt acceptance sheet, and the participants check for the reservation. We do NOT charge for hunts. You MUST ask the sponsors if they wish to have the check back or wish to donate it to the program. If the participant wishes to donate the check, you must write the word “**Donation**” in the notes section of the check or the lower left corner of the check. If the sponsor wants to take the check back, please note this on the registration form and gladly return the check. There
should be no pressure to donate to the program. It is very important that checks that are donated be returned with your paperwork promptly after the hunt.

**Step 2. License and Hunter Safety:**

Check the license for completeness, and accuracy. See the following example for license items to check for a Big game hunt. It is better to find errors before the hunt begins so that you can take steps to correct if possible. You cannot allow the hunter to participate unless everything is correct and legal for him/her to hunt. NO exceptions!

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**License Checks**

**BIG GAME LICENSE**

- Correct name on license
- Correct year
- Hunter ED verification if needed. Look for the “V” after the HE card number
- Correct license for area and game being hunted. Check the hunt code!
- Check for signature
*NOTE: Hunter safety must be verified in one of two forms. Either the license must show “verified” on the license by annotating a “V” after the hunter Education number, or the youth hunter must have his Hunter Safety card with him at all times during the hunt. NO exceptions!

**Step 3. Orientation meeting:** After all the paper work has been checked, it is time to hold an orientation meeting. Discuss with the parents and your volunteer group the next location you are traveling to, and the routes you are going to take. Also mention any precautions they may need to take along the way. It is advisable to have the last vehicle in the caravan be a Huntmaster. If there is no or limited cell service en route to the destination, consider two way radio’s. This way if a parent or other vehicle has a problem, you can be notified.

**Day 1. Firing range:**

During your planning phase you should have identified where you are having the youth show proficiency with their firearms. This can be at an official range in the area you will be hunting, or at the property itself. Many land owners have a place set up that you can use at the property you will be hunting. This is an important time for the Huntmaster to view and coach the youth. Having the guides or Huntmasters that will be hunting with the youth also be their mentors at the range is helpful but not necessary. It is, however, necessary that at least one of the Huntmaster team witness the youth hunters fire their weapons to make a determination of how the hunt will proceed. Designating a range safety officer is highly advisable. This person’s job is watching the overall safety while other assistants participate with the youth. Have the safety officer discuss the range rules, and safety procedures before the youth retrieve their firearms from the vehicles. Be sure to inspect all firearms for safe working condition, and that all ammunition is factory loaded. Once the safety checks are complete have the youth participants shoot at
 zero targets at a distance of 100 yards. Use a rest or bench for the first few rounds to verify the zero on the rifle/scope. Then you can move the shooter off of the rest to a field shooting position using shooting sticks or a back pack rest. This session is not a shooting practice session. We do not have time to teach fundamental shooting skills right before a hunt. If the shooter cannot group rounds at 100 yards and in the opinion of the Huntmaster cannot make a humane shot on an animal, use the following guidance.

Allow the shooter to shoot several rounds from a bench or rest position. Note the shooters ability to use fundamental skills, trigger squeeze, open eyes, steady breathing, etc. If the shooter cannot group three rounds in an 8 inch circle from the bench, they are at risk for making a humane shot. Do not shoot more than six rounds with a shooter from the bench.

Move the shooter to a field set, shooting sticks or prone from a backpack rest. Allow the shooter to shoot no more than two rounds. Again, review their accuracy.

**Our maximum distance for shooting a big game animal is 150 yards.** At this distance, the minute of angle is small enough to allow a significant deviation error by the shooter. If the shooter is not able to group rounds at 100 yards, move the allowable distance for a big game animal in to 50 yards or less. It may make the hunt more challenging for the guide but will save looking for or losing a wounded animal.

**Day 1. Arrival at Camp**

Upon arrival at camp the lead Huntmaster should set the pace for the set up of the camp. It is advisable to instruct the participants to leave their gear in their vehicles until advised by the Huntmaster. This is a group activity that will require coordination. As the lead Huntmaster, your major responsibility is to direct the assistants and participants in getting camp ready for the hunt. Use this time as an education tool and set the precedence for the rest of the hunt! Teaching them what it takes to set up a proper camp is a valuable lesson that will not only benefit the youth, but the sponsors as well. Once camp has been established, have the youth and their sponsors retrieve their gear and get settled into camp. All firearms should be left in their vehicles until they are ready to leave camp to hunt.
Day 1. Evening Activities

This section in day one is dependent on your planning. Most Huntmasters use this time for landowner meet and greets, hunter safety review, property rules, hunting regulations, game education, and scouting if allowed.

Day 1. Dinner

Make your meals simple. Pre-cooking your meals helps tremendously when feeding large groups of hungry people. At the end of this chapter you will find an example meal plan for a hunt. Make sure to delegate chores to the youth. Have them help prepare, serve, and clean up at every meal. They need to be involved in every process of the hunt. If possible, invite the landowner to share a meal with the group. The landowners enjoy the time spent with the participants, and it gives them time to talk about their property and the wildlife.

Day 1. “Camp Fire Discussions”

Even if you do not have a place or ability to have a real camp fire, make time to have the participants sit down and talk about their experiences in the field. This is a great time to engage them into conversations about the outdoors. You can also use this time to get a feel for the experience level of the young hunters and their parents.

Conclude Day 1

Be sure to give the participants some personal time before the designated lights out time.

Day 2. Hunting Day 1

The first morning of your hunt is always filled with excitement. Make sure that you have included plenty of time for breakfast, and a last minute safety and orientation meeting. Guides will need to perform a few checks before leaving with their hunter as well. The guides should check for licenses, hunter orange hats, vests (everyone including the guide / Huntmaster must wear orange hats and vests), and that their youth and sponsors are properly equipped for the hunt. If lunch is to be in the field than each guide needs to check that everyone has brought what they
will need. This includes plenty of water or sports drink. If everyone is returning for lunch, then re affirm the times in which the hunting parties should return to camp. Firearms should be double checked at this point as well. The firearms should be checked for obstructions and safe operation. Guides must also check for the correct ammunition. Be sure to stress to the youth and sponsors that the firearms are not to be loaded until the guides have instructed them to do so. Firearms should always be loaded and unloaded in the field, and not at camp.

At the end of your first hunting day, try to include a few minutes of “camp fire” after dinner. Talk and engage the hunters in sharing stories of their day in the field. Use this time to educate them about their experiences. This is also a good time to have the participants write their thank you letters to the land owner.

**Day 3  Hunting Day 2**

The second morning of your hunt should be similar to the first. Make sure guides remember their checks and are clear on the times in which they return to camp. If you have hunters who were successful on day one, assign them camp clean up duties for the morning. All participants need to stay until the end of the hunt. Hunting should end at 11AM on this day so there is plenty of time for the participants and support staff to help pack and return home. Be sure to take group photos before the participants are released from the hunt. There will be times when your hunters harvest an animal late in the morning of hunt day 2, and do not return to camp at the designated time. Make sure to set up a location and communication protocol for these types of situations. Guides need to make every attempt to either be at camp at the designated time, or be at a place to communicate with the lead Huntmaster.

At the end of the hunt, make sure that everyone participates in the camp tear down. Do your absolute best to clean the tents and equipment before storing it back in the hunt trailer. Have everyone do a walk around of the camp area and ensure that it is cleaner than when you arrived. Doing so will help ensure that we are invited back by the landowner. Return any non perishable goods purchased for the hunt to the State/Regional Outreach Coordinator. DO NOT return any perishable or open containers. Once camp is packed and the area is clean, release the participants for their drive home. Once the participants have been released, hold a meeting with
your support staff. Discuss the hunt, and note any items that need attention or improvement for the years following. This is an important step for your hunts in the future.

**After the Hunt:**

After all participants and staff have left the property, please contact the landowner, and the State/Regional Outreach Coordinator for your area and let them know that the hunt is over, that you are off the property, how many animals harvested, and any issue’s that may have come up. Your area coordinator will have a number for you to call and leave messages on the weekend. All equipment and paperwork must be turned in no longer than five (5) working days after the hunt.

**8.4 Field Cooking.**

In the Hunt Planning section we briefly discussed the planning required to cook for large groups of people. Again, you will be responsible for feeding a lot of people. Let’s examine an average Big Game hunt for four youth hunters. If you add four hunters, four parents, five camp staff: You have 13 folks to eat a meal. Add in the landowner and his family and you can quickly grow to twenty (20). Little bit daunting isn’t it! Fortunately, there have been plenty of ideas provided by Huntmasters to cook for large groups over the years. There are several ways to approach cooking for groups like this. The most popular among the Huntmasters is to bring a volunteer whose sole job is to cook for the camp. Having a cook on the team means they can spend the time and have meals ready when they are needed. The second method for saving time and work is the “boil a bag” method. Pre cooking your food before the hunt, and sealing them in vacuum sealed bags works incredibly well. When it comes time for a meal, you boil water in a big pot. Add the food bag, and in thirty minutes or less you have a hot meal ready to serve. No pots and pans to clean, and a lot less work while in the field. Most Huntmasters will serve cereal and ready to eat type meals for breakfast, and “box” lunches for lunch. These kinds of serve yourself items make life easier during a hunt. Be sure to provide adequate water, juice, and other fluids as well. Once you decide on a method, and on a menu, look to places like Sam’s Club, Big Lots, Wal-Mart, etc to purchase your food. You will have a budget for the hunt so you should try to stretch it as best possible. A 10% variance is allowed in your purchase. If
you need assistance, contact your State/Regional Outreach Coordinator, they may be able to purchase your supplies and have them available for pickup.

*NOTE: You will want to confirm with the sponsors of your youth hunters if there are any food allergy issue’s before you make your meal plan

The following is a sample one day menu. Remember to keep things simple!

**Example Hunt meal:**

1. **Breakfast**
   - Continental Breakfast
   - Coffee and Juice
   - Hot chocolate

2. **Lunch**
   - Sandwiches
   - Chips
   - Cookies / Snack bars
   - Soda / Juice / Water

3. **Dinner**
   - Chili Dogs
   - Chips
   - Soda/Water
   - Cookies / Snack bars