

Montana Supporters of Young Guns:

I represent the Montana sportsmen who support the lowering of the minimum hunting age in Montana. The state of Montana is losing thousands of hunters because many children have already begun to embrace other activities at an earlier age, and they aren't interested in hunting by the age of 12.

"Hunting is becoming a lost tradition in a nation where it once meant food for survival," said Representative Mike Buckingham of South Dakota. "We're losing that next generation of hunters," Buckingham also stated. We're finding that they're being left home, that they're being left in front of the television, the video games, and they're not getting out into the field to experience those activities."

Utilizing the works of Jean Piaget, psychologists have been able to determine the optimal age for child development. Ages 8-12 are known as the exploration stage where the child explores their surroundings, and learn what they like and don't like. By the age of 12, children have a solid base of their own personality; the food, music, art, sports and everything else that defines our personality are fused into our mind. Since the minimum age to hunt is 12, many children never get to explore the benefits of hunting. By the time they are old enough to hunt, it is too late because they already passed the optimal exploration stage.

"Other reports show how children who have had little or no meaningful touch with mom and/or dad, are much more likely to lead a life of crime, substance abuse, unfulfilled sadness, and usually a horrible, tragic early death. To know the remedy for this tragedy, yet fail to respond, is the worse sin of mankind," said Ted Nugent, an avid musician and hunter.

Many factors support lowering the minimum hunting age.

- It gives young people a chance to get outdoors with their parents and experience that joy of hunting at an early age.
- 37 of the 50 states do not have a minimum hunting age.
- The odds of a child dying from a firearm accident is less than the odds of a child dying from a medical mistake.
- The number of hunters has fallen by 2 million people since 1900 while the population of the US has grown 70 million. Growth in population should result in a growth in hunting participants, but hunting laws are restricting newer generations of hunters.

Responsible children and young adults should have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors at an earlier age. The decision should be up to the parent and the child as to whether or not they are ready. As shown above the time has come to look at the facts and realize that something has to be done to protect the future of hunting for all ages of Montanans.

I support legislation that lowers the minimum hunting age to the age of eight.

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