

# Pat McVay

1920–



**K**alispell's Pat McVay taught hunter education in Montana before Montana had hunter education.

In the early 1950s, when he began a 34-year career in the Civil Service with 27 years at Hungry Horse Dam, McVay conducted junior shooting and hunter safety programs in the hamlet of Hungry Horse.

There he'd discuss with anyone who'd listen the need for a law to establish a full-fledged hunter safety and education program in Montana.

Among the listeners was Mel Ruder, the legendary editor of Hungry Horse News.

On a cold January night in 1957, Ruder phoned McVay. The Montana Legislature had finally made hunter education the law of the land.

Three days later, Pat sent in paperwork to Montana Fish & Game for his students to be certified under the new law, thus becoming Montana's first Hunter Education Instructor.

Nearly 60 years later, Pat McVay, 96, is still at it, teaching the course at his ranch east of Kalispell. Pat's list of Montana hunter education milestones include teaching the state's first hunter education course; the first in-the-field instruction course; and first to conduct live-firing of .22 rifles, shotguns, and large bore rifles. In a touching story published in 2010, John Fraley, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' hunter education program manager in Kalispell,

told the Flathead Beacon that Pat "teaches a homey, old-fashioned type of class," Fraley said. "He's funny and witty and he loves his students and they kind of return that."

Pat brings a Montana authenticity to his teaching. The setting, for starters, is his ranch home along the brooding Swan Mountains, where students are surrounded by an interesting assortment of animal mounts, pelts, firearms, and curiosities Pat's collected over the years.

By the end of the class, his students are so enthralled with their education on firearm safety and wildlife conservation and history, that they openly seek to adopt Pat and his love of hunting.

And adults similarly gravitate to Pat, Fraley told the Beacon. "He connects [with] people so closely – it's hard to explain."

Pat has touched the lives of more than 1,600 students over a six-decade-long volunteer career training the Flathead Valley's budding hunter-conservationists. And he's created a statewide institution. Today, 1,600 active hunter safety and education instructors teach about 10,000 students each year.

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