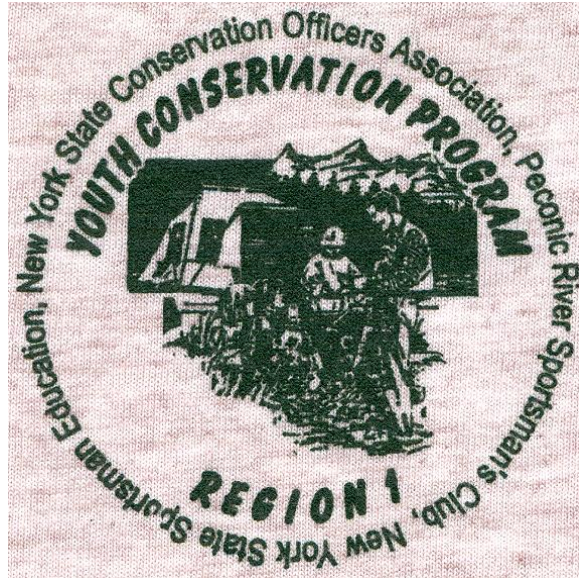


## The Youth Conservation Program



The Youth Conservation Program (YCP) was first organized in 1994 in Region 1 in Suffolk County. Lt. Tim Huss got the idea for the program from the NRA's Youth Hunter Challenge Program. Lt. Huss, representing DLE and the NY Conservation Officers Association, organized a meeting with master instructors from the Region 1 Sportsman Education program and their regional coordinator ECO Arthur Christ to discuss the idea of holding a similar program in Suffolk County. The instructors, Henry Burvenich, Jim Olivant, and Bill Moskowitz liked the idea and literally took off with it. Jim Olivant was also president of the Peconic River Sportsman's Club in Manorville at the time, and assisted in gaining the participation of that organization. Their facilities include several shooting ranges, lots of acreage, a lake, and a large lodge to house the participants.

It was decided that the YCP would consist of a two-day program for 30 youths between the ages of 12 to 15. The first day would consist of classroom instruction utilizing the sportsman education guidelines. The evenings would be filled with extracurricular activities including fly-fishing, retriever demonstrations, decoy carving and wildlife films. The second day the youths would be divided into five teams. Each team would rotate through five venues including orienteering, wildlife identification, .22 rifle shooting, shotgun shooting, and archery. The teams would be scored and prizes awarded. Everyone however would be made to feel like a winner.

The first year was a huge success. The awards program at the end has to be experienced to be fully appreciated. The youths and their parents gather in the great room of the Peconic Club. Food and dessert is served as the organizers prepare score sheets, and greet the dignitaries that have included representatives of Congressmen's offices, state Senators and Assemblymen, assistant Commissioners from DLE, the director of the NYS Division of Youth, county executives, as well as local legislators. The young participants are called up, first as teams where they are awarded prizes for first, second, and third place, and then as individuals as each of them receive a trophy, and their hunter

training certificates. The visiting dignitaries are always on hand to present these items to the kids. It is very proud moments for everyone involved, parents, kids, and visitors and of course the organizers.

The programs success depends upon the assistance of all the organizations involved. Donations have to be solicited in the form of money, prizes, food, etc. The New York Conservation Officers Association provides financial support, hats, and t-shirts. The New York State DEC's Division of Law Enforcement allows the local Environmental Conservation Officers to assist with the program. Sportsman Ed provides the volunteer instructors, and the Peconic Club provides the facilities, and volunteers from their members. It is a successful partnership.

The New York Conservation Officers Association is very proud to have played a significant role in the development of this program and congratulate Captain Tim Huss and the rest of the organizers and volunteers on the tremendous success of this yearly event. Programs like the YCP enhance the image of sportsmen, lending an invaluable quality to the ethics and sportsmanship that hunting deserves. It revives the spirit in all involved to recall the meaning of hunting, reminding us of why it is such a rewarding endeavor.