

the Backwoods Blaxican

BY DANTE ZÚÑIGA-WEST

WHO GOT GAME?

Why so few African-American hunters?

I recently took a short drive north to interview Donny Adair, president of the Afro-American Hunting Association. Adair is a Pacific Northwest outdoorsman who's hunted everything from burly southern whitetail deer to the wild turkeys of Eugene. The former UO student and current Portland resident had a lot to say about his mission to promote hunting and outdoor pastimes among the African-American community.

We know from the Fish and Wildlife Services Stats that only 2 percent of Afro-Americans in the country hunt. How many hunters of color do you think exist in the Pacific Northwest?

I think we are undercounted. There aren't a lot of us, but I think we are undercounted for sure. There are more here than you would think, but it's not like the South where there are black hunting clubs. We are more spread out here.

Why aren't there more African-American hunters in the U.S.?

Some of the reasons include the urban setting most people of color grow up in. And the fact that there is less land ownership among us — 'cause a lot of hunters hunt on land that is theirs or land that belongs to their families — but also the media constantly associating us with violence, firearms and crime. At this point, a lot of black folks are scared of firearms and want nothing to do with it because of that association. The economic factor is also part of it. You have to have a car or a truck, you gotta have your guns, your ammunition, the licenses, the tags. I mean, if you're not a middle-class person it's pretty hard.



AAHA PRESIDENT DONNY ADAIR (CENTER) WITH SONS DONNELL (RIGHT) AND KENNY AFTER A SUCCESSFUL DUCK HUNT

Would you say that hunting is a privilege at this point in our society?

Yes. It is definitely a privilege. A lot of times, our people can't afford to do it. It's hard for a lot of people to get past the economic factor.

What can we do to increase the participation of Afro-Americans and other minorities in hunting and the outdoors?

First of all, depict us in the outdoors. If you look in an outdoors magazine, the only brother in it is some guy on a Viagra ad. I mean, really. When people ask me that question, about how we can increase participation of people of color in hunting, I tell them: Depict us in the outdoors. They don't.

Another thing we can do is adopt programs at the state and local level to introduce people of color to the sport, similar to the programs that have been set up to introduce women and youth.

Do you think people of color are wary or apprehensive of enlisting the help of such programs?

Yes. Sometimes we are our own worst enemy. We have to meet people where they are. When an outfitter or guide says to you, "Sure, we'd love to have more *colored* guys get in on things with us," don't get upset, just educate that man. We have to work with outfitters, guides and mentor programs. No one is going to do this for us; we have to go out and do this ourselves. And I'm OK with that. I don't want anyone to give us a handout. I just want them to open the door.

What responses have you noticed from white hunters in the Northwest with regard to your cause and what you're doing?

The everyday ordinary hunter is OK with it; but I haven't encountered a lot of enthusiasm for inclusion. The issue for some people is that they don't even want to talk about race. And that is totally normal and natural for them as white people who were raised not to judge people by the color of their skin. But how do you know whether or not you are treating someone in an offensive manner if you don't know anything about them and their culture? But they don't want to talk about it. I find a lot of people are OK

with what I am trying to share, but nobody has jumped out to say, "Man, let's help you recruit more," or, "Man, we need more articles written about this." Again, we are going to have to do this ourselves, recruit more and write more about it.

Have you met many outdoors writers of color writing articles of such nature?

No I have not. I have had a sports editor in Pittsburg write about people of color getting involved in the outdoors, but he was white. The only black writers I know of who've written about this kind of stuff are myself and my son Donnell.

What do you think about hunting around the Eugene area?

The hunting around Eugene is good. Man, the turkeys are about to overrun that place. I've been on two emergency turkey hunts there already this year through the emergency hunt program.

What would you say to people of color looking to get into hunting or the outdoor pastimes?

Find a mentor or partner you can grow with. Read all you can. Go to seminars. Book guided trips when you can afford it, but mostly try to develop some partnerships. And as you get older, think about buying your own property.

Dante Zúñiga-West is an Afro-Latino writer and outdoorsman known to some as "The Backwoods Blaxican." He grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles and now makes his home in Oregon. His fiction has been published in various literary journals. His novel Rumble Young Man Rumble is awaiting publication in 2014, on Black Coffee Press.

EVENTS CALENDAR

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EVENTS

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