

Quantity or Quality? B.O.W.

BY: **Sue Tabor**
OUTDOOR BEGINNINGS



The Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program is an outdoor educational outreach program which was introduced by the Michigan DNR almost twenty years ago. It is designed to introduce women of all ages to recreational shooting, hunting, fishing, kayaking, camping, hiking, and just about anything else outdoors. For the past three years, it has been my pleasure to serve as the State Coordinator of the BOW program. My job is to find new facilities throughout the state to host BOW events, recruit knowledgeable volunteer instructors to teach women, handle the registration

process, the accounting, the database, promote and market each event, address phone and email inquiries, build relationships with like-minded groups throughout the state and handle every other day-to-day detail that comes up. Breathing is optional. In summary, I am an event planner and my specialty is customer service, and my customers are mostly female.

I love what I do and I believe in the BOW program. I love watching a woman's fear and apprehension vanish when it comes to trying something new, whether it's paddling a kayak, learning how to read a compass, or shooting a shotgun for the first time. The first time "jitters" are quickly replaced with smiles of confidence! That's what the BOW program is really about – building confidence – and inspiring women to get outdoors and enjoy recreation, wildlife, and our natural resources. BOW is a unique non-profit program and women really enjoy it. They feel more comfortable and less intimidated attending a BOW class than many other outdoor educational programs, because they are learning with other women, in a relaxed, non-competitive environment. They love the smaller group setting and the individual attention the BOW program provides.

In the past few years, the DNR has really stepped up the marketing for the BOW program, and as a result, more women are just now finding out about it. Nearly 70% of all women who registered for a BOW class this year were brand new to the program. It stands to reason that those women will tell their family, friends and co-workers about their BOW experience and invite them to participate too. Nearly all of the women, who have attended a BOW Discovery Weekend in the past, invite someone new to come along with them the following year. It feels like the BOW program is really starting to take off and the potential to do more, and attract more women to participate is really exciting!

I was thinking about the future of the BOW program recently, while driving home from a beginning archery



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class. Ten women attended the class. Ten wasn't my biggest BOW class, nor was it the smallest, but I've never been one to focus on the numbers. To me, the quantity in the class is not as important, as the quality of the class. Lately it seems there are some at the DNR, who do not view the success of the BOW program the same way I do. They are hung up with total numbers-the total quantity of women per year, who register for the classes we offer isn't where they think it should be. They don't believe the BOW program is attracting enough women. They expect 1000's to be participating and they are seriously questioning whether we should keep the program around any longer.

I constantly struggle with what classes I can put out there to attract more women to participate in the BOW program and discover the outdoors. I too, wish I could find a way to attract 1000's, instead of a few here, a few there. The challenge with many BOW classes and events is that in order to ensure and maintain the quality women have come to expect from the BOW program, I can only accommodate so many participants at one time. For safety reasons, our shooting classes are limited to the number of shooting lanes we can have operating at the same time, depending on the facility. I also have to take into consideration the number of one-on-one volunteer certified instructors I have available. My number one priority is safety, and then I attempt to coordinate the class so each woman receives the individual attention she needs to feel safe and comfortable, in order to learn how to properly handle a firearm. The same goes with archery. I try to avoid having women wait in long lines to take their turn. I try to keep things moving and send each participant home feeling confident, excited about their new activity they just learned how to do, and wanting to come back

again, and bring someone new with them the next time. Another example is our charter fishing excursions, which have become wildly popular and always overflow. But they too are limited in size. I can only gather so many Charter Captains together on one given day during their busiest fishing seasons and most boats will only accommodate 5 or 6 people comfortably.

Ten women in an archery class is a pretty insignificant number, when you are charged with attracting 1000's. What is significant, and what the decision makers don't seem to understand, is that the BOW program has changed many women's lives. But it doesn't work in big numbers at a time. It works one woman at a time. It's easy to count to 1000, or 100, or even 10. What I question is . . . why are we even counting at all?

How can we possibly count the unique experience each woman who participates in the BOW program takes home with her, and shares with her family, her children, and friends? How do you measure the excitement and confidence she feels, when she learns how to stay safe in the woods while camping or hiking, releases a fish safely from a hook back into the water, fires that arrow into the target bulls-eye, or busts a clay target for the first time with a shotgun?

How do I begin to count the smiles, and yes, even the tears, I've personally stood by and witnessed,



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as a woman's fear turns into joy and she discovers something about herself she never knew existed? How do you put a number on the confidence she now has to step outside and enjoy a new outdoor activity on her own? How do I measure the new friendships made between women at a BOW event?

How do I turn the words of thanks, and the countless letters and e-mails I receive from women after a BOW event, describing how the program has changed their lives . . . how proud their families are . . . into a number?

Happy Outdoors – Sue Tabor

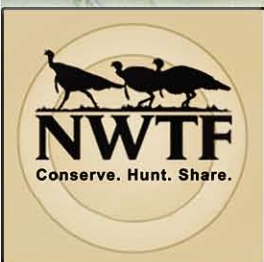


Sue Tabor



EDITORS NOTES & OPINIONS Robert Golda EDITOR/HIKING MICHIGAN NEWSLETTER

Since the writing of this article by Sue Tabor, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources has discontinued the BOW (Becoming an Outdoors Women) program in Michigan. This 20 year tradition will no longer be available to the Women of Michigan. WHY? Please ask that question of Chief Ron Olsen, the head of the Parks & Rec. division at our state DNR. Mr. Olsen is in charge of this program, as well as the unsuccessful "Conquering Recreation 101" program. Mr. Olsen would have you believe that the Conquering Recreation 101 program is a Federally awarded state program. But in reality, Mr. Olsen sits on the Board that selected his program to get an award. The Women of the state of Michigan deserve much better than this. and Mr. Olsen works for the people of Michigan. Let him know he needs to reinstate the BOW program and remove the failure in the Conquering Recreation 101 program. Keep a failure and get rid of a success? That's just bad management. Rumor says there maybe a single BOW program to be held in the U.P. of Michigan, by Volunteers only. This would be something to just keep accreditation going and nothing like the real thing. Contact Mr. Olsen at: DNR-ParksAndRecreation@michigan.gov



Sue will continue to plan special outings just for women, as a volunteer with the National Wild Turkey Federation's Women In The Outdoors program. To stay in touch with Sue, please follow her- Outdoor Beginnings blog at: www.outdoorbeginnings.wordpress.com

Sue Tabor's Blog is focused on the outdoors for Women in Michigan. As well as her adventures, there are many links to outdoor groups and organizations here in Michigan.

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"Discover the Outdoors in you"
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