



Three Fires Trackers
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Three Fires Trackers

The Three Fires Trackers were started back in October of 2008. Dr. Steve Dahlberg of the White Earth Tribal and Community College contacted the White Earth Conservation Law Enforcement Officers and asked how he can help with some of the training available to the department. I asked him to arrange for a Tracking class to help with some of our Search and Rescue efforts. Dr. Dahlberg made the initial contact with Joel Hardin Professional Tracking Services (JHPTS) and arranged our very first Tracking class at Smokey Hills Resort near Osage, MN.

The class consisted of Tribal Conservation Officers from White Earth, Red Lake, Leech Lake and Mille Lacs. Also attending were a few Officers from the White Earth Tribal Police Department. During the weeklong class, the Officers were taught how to see sign. Master Sign Cutter, Joel Hardin was the Instructor for the class, assisted by Sign Cutter, Sharon Ward.

I'm the MN/IA Training Officer for the Great Lakes Training and Standards Board (GLTSB) dedicated to arranging Conservation Officer training for the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society (NAFWS)-Great Lakes Region (IL, IN, MI, MN, OH and WI). It was at one of these Board meetings, in conjunction with the Great Lakes Chief Conservation Officer/Game Warden meeting, that I introduced the group to the importance of tracking as a need for Indian Country. Kevin Willis, Chief CO for Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians in Michigan is also the Chairman for the GLTSB. He asked for White Earth to continue with this training opportunity and make it available to all Tribal Law Enforcement. After talking with Dr. Dahlberg, it was determined that we could possibly have 3 classes a year; 1 in MI, 1 in MN and 1 in WI. We originally started with 3 classes but had to reduce it down to 2 because of budget constraints. So far, we offer the training in MI and MN.

The Three Fires Trackers got their name at one of the MN classes after discussion amongst the students and instructors knowing the importance of tracking to our Conservation duties and training needs. We came up with the name and after several drawings of the logo, we agreed on the one currently being used by our Three Fires Trackers group. Three Fires Trackers is derived from the Council of Three Fires story. Currently, we have tracker members from each of the 3 council tribes; Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi.

As our Three Fires Trackers group grew, we were tasked with being Lead Trackers and Trainers for the JHPTS program. Several of the Three Fires members have attained this designation and carry it proudly throughout the Great Lakes region. As of late, we have a Lead Tracker/Trainer and 2 other Trainers in Minnesota, a Lead Tracker/Trainer and a Trainer in Michigan. We've also trained with Conservation Officer/Game Wardens in WI.





The JHPTS program has 4 training certifications of student learning and demonstrated practical application achievement. (BASIC, APPRENTICE, JOURNEYMAN, SIGNCUTTER)

A student starts out at the NOVICE level, getting an introduction to JHPTS and the tracking training program. Here they'll learn how we define tracking, trackers, tracking skill and what that entails, and our training methodology. They'll learn the history and development of the program and from and how this training methodology was developed. The novice must actually experience seeing what the average person does not see.

After being certified as a BASIC tracker, the student will learn to see sign. This is the first stage of learning to see and recognize the physical evidence of the passage or presence of humans.

The next step in certification is APPRENTICE. This level is well known and respected as the longest, most in-depth section of training. Here the student learns to use tracking techniques including but not limited to; training and mission documentation; obtaining tracking mission or incident critical information; locating Place Last Seen (PLS) or Last Known Place (LKP) and getting the first track started or identifying the totality of a scene and deciding a full examination plan; multiple tracking or examination team operations; elementary crime scenes; evidence location, identification, preservation and presentation; tracking team leader; JHPTS trainer; etc. Students certified at this stage are competent to respond and work independently or with other trained trackers on a wide variety of tracking incidents.

JOURNEYMAN trackers are the third learning stage of the JHPTS program. Here the students achieve operational tracking success. They're certification at this level serves to recognize and recommend their status as fully functional professional trackers. Journeyman trackers will instruct and assist other less trained and less experienced trackers to document and evidence participation in actual missions.

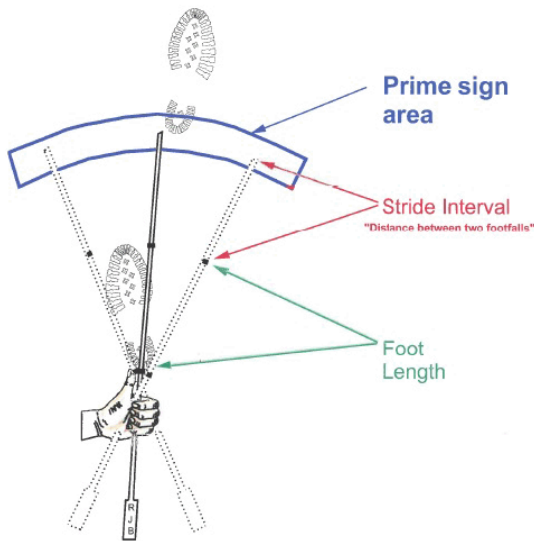
The fourth level of JHPTS certification is SIGN CUTTER. These trackers are a master in all that they know and can demonstrate and articulate to the general public that tracking evidence or sign is something everyone sees but does not recognize. Sign cutters are well respected amongst their peers and have achieved this level of mastery through many years of active involvement and public demonstration of advanced tracking knowledge and skills in successful accomplishment of the broadest spectrum of tracking applications.

As of the writing of this article, White Earth has a Lead Tracker/Trainer at the Level 3 Apprentice certification, a Level 2 Apprentice trainer and a Level 1 Apprentice Trainer. Also, we have 2 Level 1 Basic Trackers. The trainers have been tasked by the JHPTS program to train other people to be effective trackers. Under coordination with the White Earth Tribal and Community College, we offer an In-house training schedule to all that want to learn this skill, free of charge. We mainly train for 4 hours in this class which includes both classroom and field training but we can also offer a 3 day class with evaluations.



The JHPTS-Three Fires Trackers program is a much needed and viable tracking resource that we all need for the proper execution of any Search and Rescue event. Trackers can also be used for evidence recovery, and fugitive apprehension situations. All it takes is to request and accept our training expertise and skill. Put aside your egos and let us do our job as professional trackers. Don't rush in and potentially destroy evidence as you inspect the vehicle or residence in search of evidence that you know of, because most of the time you're standing on it! What people need to understand is, where ever humans stand, walk or run, they're leaving sign evidence.

The Tracking Stick



Tracking Team

