

4-H Western Heritage Shooting Rules for 2024 National Competition

Utah 4-H is pleased to host the National 4-H Western Heritage Conference again in 2024. Upon consultation with other states, the classes and age divisions for the Invitational Shoot are modified in an attempt to provide a multi-state compatible structure to 4-H Western Heritage shooting events. States have differences in beginning 4-H age, different calendar dates for determining “4-H age”, different age divisions, etc. This is an attempt to provide classes and divisions that should be suitable for most states.

Three Age Divisions for competition:

We recognize the ages below according to your state age determination. Some states determine 4-H age as of October 1 of the current 4-H year (October 1, 2023). Therefore, beginning members must be 8 years old on or before October 1, 2023 (turning 9 years old within the current 4-H year). If your state has a different date of determination, you may be classified incorrectly, and will need to contact Blake Clark at blake.clark@usu.edu so that the necessary adjustment can be made.

- Junior (9-11) - will shoot rimfire rifle only (course will require 2 rifles)
- Intermediate (11-13 years old) – 4 guns: rimfire rifle, 2 rimfire revolvers, & shotgun (Preferably .410, but not required)
- Senior (14-18 years old) – 4 guns: 1 rifle, 2 revolvers & 1 shotgun
(Two equipment classes)
 - Rimfire Class
 - Central-fire class

Note: 11-year old’s must indicate during registration if shooting 4 guns or rimfire rifle only. Your choice **must comply with your state policy!**

The National competition will be composed of 3 events:

- Western Heritage Shooting
- Western Heritage Knowledge – Written Quiz
- Persona Presentation/Interview

Every competitor is expected to participate in all three sections. Competitors will be ranked in each section and appropriate recognition given for each. The 4-H Western Heritage Champion (Top Hand) will be decided by an aggregate score of all 3 sections. Shooting - 50%; Western Heritage Knowledge – 25%; Persona Interview – 25%.

Spirit of the Game

Members are to fully participate in what the project asks. Participants should not look for ways to create an advantage out of what is or is not stated as a rule or shooting procedure. It’s not about “gamesmanship” but rather sportsmanship. Good attitude, courtesy, honesty, demonstrating respect toward competitors and range officials, graciousness in winning or losing ... are all components of the Spirit of the Game. Remember the cowboy code. Character and integrity are remembered much longer than scores.

4-H WESTERN HERITAGE SHOOTING

Rifle and revolvers must all be either rimfire or central-fire. A competitor cannot mix rimfire and central-fire firearms during the national competition.

FIREARMS

1. The Western Heritage shooting event requires competitors to safely operate and fire as many as 3 different firearms: a revolver, a rifle, and a shotgun, depending on age division.
2. The firearms must be original or reproductions of those used in the time period of 1860-1900 or near facsimiles.
3. Firearms similar to period guns may be allowed. Modern models allowed will be named specifically. If not named specifically, approval by the match director will be required before a participant may compete.

Rifle

4. Rifles must be chambered in a traditional handgun caliber; and should be capable of firing 10 rounds.
5. May be lever action or slide action (pump action) with exposed hammers. Bolt action and semi-automatic rifles are not allowed.
6. May be .22 rimfire or central-fire depending on age division.
7. Sights must be open iron sights or tang sights. Scopes, optics, or glowing or color sights of any kind are not allowed.
8. Action smoothing jobs are permitted, but "short stroke" modifications (factory or custom) are not allowed.
9. Modern era firearms permitted include, but is not limited to:
 - a. Lever - Henry (both Rimfire & central-fire), Winchester 9422, Marlin 39A.
 - b. Any pump action with exposed hammer in pistol caliber.
10. Modern era firearms **NOT** permitted include, but is not limited to:
 - a. The Browning BL22 does not qualify due to the trigger travelling with the lever and a short stroke action.

Revolver

11. Any original or reproduction single action revolver or double action revolver that is capable of firing single-action; and having six (6) chambers and is period correct is allowed.
12. .22 rimfire or traditional central-fire pistol caliber is permitted.
13. Open sights required. Colored or glowing sights are prohibited.
14. Modern era single-action revolvers with 6 chambers are permitted, including the various models from Sturm & Ruger.

Shotgun

15. 12 gauge and smaller.
16. Shotguns should be capable of firing 2 shots.
17. Any side-by-side double barrel shotgun without automatic ejectors is allowed. Over/under shotguns are not permissible.
18. Lever action shotguns (Winchester 1887 or replica) or pump shotguns with external hammers are permitted; but no more than 2 shells may be loaded at a single time.

Black Powder Firearms

19. Black powder percussion “cap and ball” revolvers are not permitted in regular competitions but may be used for instructional purposes – when supervised by a 4-H certified muzzle loading instructor.

Special Use

20. Other firearms, such as single-shot rifles, double-action pocket pistols, etc. may be used for “side” matches or special activities; but will not be part of the official competition.

AMMUNITION

The following ammunition will be provided by match officials: .22LR, .38 Special, .45 Colt, 12 gauge, 20 gauge and .410 shotgun. Any other ammunition required must be provided by the competitor; and must meet the following guidelines.

Rifle & Revolver:

1. Caliber – Most traditional handgun calibers from .22 rimfire to .45 Colt.
2. Bullet - Lead or soft lead alloy bullets only.
3. Velocity -
Central-fire
 - a. Handgun – 1000 fps or less
 - b. Rifle – 1300 fps or lessRimfire:
 - a. Standard velocity (1150 fps or less)
 - b. 40 grain, lead round nose bullet

Shotgun:

Equivalent of 12 gauge “light target” loads or 20 gauge “target” loads

1. 2 ¾” only (2 ½” in .410)
2. Shot: 7 ½ or smaller; 1 1/8oz. maximum (12 gauge) - 7/8 oz. (20 gauge) – lead only
3. Velocity – 1200 fps or less

Other

- Powder – Smokeless or black powder in cartridge or shot shell is permitted.
- Only factory loaded ammunition is allowed in 4-H competition. No Reloads allowed in competition.
- Most major brands of ammunition have “Cowboy” loads available that meet these requirements.

Loading Blocks – For safety reasons, the use of a loading block or leather/canvas ammo strips for rifle/revolver ammo is required. Montana will have several blocks available for use, but not enough to cover everyone. PLEASE work with your leaders and bring loading blocks or strips. Load the exact number of cartridges needed when you come to the loading table. If using your own factory ammunition, please label the boxes with your name and close the box after loading.

COURSE OF FIRE - Western Heritage Shooting

- A minimum of 6 stages and maximum of 10 stages will be shot. Each stage will require the use of revolver, rifle, and shotgun. (JUNIORS - Rifle only). 10 stages are planned for 2022.
- Five shots for each revolver and 10 for rifle may be required. A one-shot rifle reload maybe required on the clock if a bonus target is offered. Those shooting .22 Rimfire will load the additional rifle shot at the loading table prior to shooting the stage. The bonus target round must be expended during the stage.
- Reloading the shotgun may be necessary, depending upon the stage.

PROCEDURE

- Before competition begins, participants must submit to a central check-in with match officials for all firearms and ammunition. Firearms and ammunition will be inspected and approved.
- Course of fire will be explained to the group of competitors before each stage. Competitors should ask questions then. Course of fire must be followed exactly, or the competitor will be penalized.
- Firearms will be loaded at the Loading Table under the supervision of the loading officer.
- All firearms (rifle, revolver, and shotgun) will be pre-staged at the designated area by the competitor and a ranger officer.
- Although range officials may assist the competitor in the pre-staging of the firearms, final positioning of the firearm is the responsibility of the competitor.
- Competitor and the safety officer/timer will advance to the beginning firing point.
- When competitor and range officer are both ready, competitor will “shout out” the designated phrase for that stage.
- After the phrase shout-out the timing mechanism will be activated. After a momentary delay, the timer will beep, indicating START.
- At the START beep, the competitor will pick up the first firearm and begin the course of fire.
- He/she then advances to each firing point at his/her own pace.
- Competitor must follow and shoot the course as explained.
- At the final shot the time will be recorded.
- There is a 5 second time penalty for each “miss” and a 10 second penalty for minor safety violations and a procedural error. Only one procedural is counted per stage. All misses and safety violations are counted.
- Firearms will be taken to the unloading table and will be un-loaded under supervision of a range officer until made safe.
- Times for each stage will be added together for a cumulative time.
- Fastest cumulative time through all stages is declared the winner.

CLOTHING

Each competitor must dress in period appropriate clothing. Competitors are to dress in period clothing during the match. In addition to the western shooting match, there will be a Persona Interview where period clothing is worn. The Persona Interview contributes 25% of the score for the overall Top Hand of the conference. Participants are to be in their period outfit at the final awards presentation.

Minimum requirements:

- Some kind of “period” head cover; cowboy hat, bowlers, sombreros, civil war type hat, bonnet, etc. Note: During the shooting competition, participants may compete without head cover.
- Long pants or period correct dress/skirt.
- Long-sleeved shirt or blouse; button-down or pullover “long John” style shirts are permissible.
- Leather boot or period shoe. (lace-up boots are acceptable)
- No tee-shirts, no athletic shoes, no baseball caps, no camo.
- Failure to meet these minimums may result in disqualification.

Other Accouterments:

- Holsters & cartridge belts may be worn, but NO firearm or any facsimile of a firearm may be in the holster or live ammunition in the belt or anywhere on the person.
- Nylon or plastic belts and holsters are not permitted; nor is the use of Velcro.
- Every attempt should be made to use ammo boxes, carry bags, and other equipment that would be typical of the era of 1860-1900.

SAFETY

1. SAFETY IS ALWAYS THE PRIMARY CONSIDERATION. Any violations of accepted safety rules are grounds for immediate disqualification. NO WARNING REQUIRED!
2. Safety Meeting: All competitors and coaches must attend the mandatory safety meeting given by the Chief Range Officer before the competition begins. If not at the safety meeting, you will not be allowed to participate.
3. Eye Protection: Shooting glasses or equivalent prescription glasses are required for all shooting events. All persons on the firing line or in the spectator area are required to have eye protection, including coaches, range personnel, audience members, and competitors.
4. Ear Protection: Hearing protection is required of all persons on or near the ranges and spectator area.
5. Cased Requirement: All firearms must be in a case until uncased at the check-in prior to the event. Firearms are uncased only when brought to the check-in table for inspection and approval.
6. All firearms will be cased when moving from stage to stage and the procedure will be explained at the mandatory Safety Meeting.
7. Ammunition dummy rounds may be carried on the gun belt. Dummy central-fire rounds must have no primer. The holster with dummy rounds may be worn to the check-in, as the firearms will be cased. Dummy rounds will be inspected and approved at check-in.
8. Knives are permissible and may be carried as part of the period outfit. The knife must remain in the sheath at all times, or folded closed, unless requested by, or permission is granted by, a range official or judge.
9. Muzzle Control: Competitors must maintain control of their muzzles at all times. Firearms must be carried in the muzzle up position whenever uncased on the range. Violation of this rule may result in a warning, disqualification from a stage, or disqualification from a match.
10. No fanning or twirling of a firearm at any time.
11. Firearms must remain unloaded at all times unless on the loading table or at firing line.

12. Audio headphones or earpieces and cell phones are not permitted on the firing line or the field. Once an individual or team is called to compete, earpieces or headphones must be removed and remain off during the competition. Spectators should also be sensitive and turn off ringtones when near the competition.
13. Range officials have the right to check all firearms, ammunition, accessories and other equipment prior to, or during, the competition to determine that it meets qualifications and/or if it is safe.

MATCH RULES & PROCEDURES

1. All loading, staging, and unloading of firearms, as detailed in other sections of these rules, will be under the supervision of range officials; and only at the designated loading and/or unloading tables.
2. Those with special needs may request assistance and responsible accommodations will be made.
3. To speed the process, range officer may assist in staging. If assisted, it is still the sole responsibility of the competitor to make sure firearms are staged as they desire.
4. All firearms will be staged with trigger over a solid surface when staged horizontal. Staging a firearm with the trigger off the surface is prohibited.
5. Rifles will be staged horizontally as directed, with muzzles pointed in a safe direction. The magazine is loaded, action closed, hammer down, and chamber empty.
6. Rifles are re-staged after completing the firing sequence, with the action open and empty, with barrels pointed safely down range.
7. Once a rifle is cocked, either the round under the hammer must be expended or the action opened in order for the rifle to be returned to a safe condition.
8. Rifles are carried with muzzles up and muzzles above the head.
9. Revolvers are staged lying on their side with muzzles pointed down range with 5 rounds in the cylinder and the hammer down on an empty chamber.
10. Revolvers are re-staged, after shooting, with hammer down on a spent case or empty chamber at the conclusion of the shooting string.
11. Once a revolver is cocked, the round under the hammer must be expended in order for it to be returned to a safe condition – except in the case of a cease fire.
12. Revolvers are carried for staging by grasping around the frame and cylinder with muzzle up and above the chin. Revolvers are not carried by the grip or with a finger in the trigger guard.
13. Shotguns are staged with magazine and chamber(s) empty with safety on or hammers down; and are loaded on the clock. Shells/hulls must be removed from the gun before restaging the firearm at the conclusion of the shotgun firing sequence. Any live shotgun shells must be removed from the gun and with no penalty.
14. Running with a firearm, loaded or unloaded, is prohibited at all times. There is no running or walking with a loaded or unloaded firearm during the shooting phase of a stage. Shooting position adjustment is permitted with one pivot foot planted.
15. All shooting with a particular firearm must be completed and the firearm re-staged before the competitor moves on to the next part of the stage. The competitor may return to the rifle for a final bonus shot if the scenario dictates.
16. No cocked or loaded firearm is allowed to leave the competitors hand except in the case of a malfunction or ceasefire where it is transferred to the range officer with muzzle pointed down range.

17. De-cocking a revolver, rifle, or external hammer shotgun may NOT be done with a live round under the hammer. De-cocking may not be done to avoid a penalty if cocked at the wrong time or position. The penalty for de-cocking is a Stage Disqualification. If hammer is cocked when a cease fire is called, the lever of the rifle must be opened, or the action of a shotgun must be opened or the range officer will assist in making the revolver safe.
18. Revolvers will be operated in single-action mode with a two-handed grip with neither hand in front of the cylinder. The competitor will grip with the strong hand and cock the revolver with their weak hand.
19. The revolver is not cocked until pointed safely down range and the competitor is engaged in shooting the stage.
20. A dropped firearm – loaded or unloaded – ends the stage for that competitor (stage disqualification). An adult range officer or helper will recover the dropped the gun, examine it, clear it, and take it to the unloading table. A second drop anytime during a match requires match disqualification.
21. Ammunition dropped in the course of loading or reloading (shotgun) OR ejected from any firearm during the course of fire is considered “dead” and may not be recovered until the competitor completes the stage and the firearms are delivered to the unloading table. Dropped shotgun rounds are replaced from the loading block, ammo box, or other area as allowed by the stage description and not counted as a miss. If a live round is ejected from a rifle, it is considered dead and is counted as a miss.
22. All knockdown targets (shotgun, rifle, and revolver) must fall over to be considered a hit. Special consideration may be allowed to competitors using .22 caliber – at the discretion of the range officer.
23. If a knock down target(s) falls before the competitor engages that target(s), the competitor must expend the designated round in the area the target occupied when standing. It is not a miss.
24. All shotgun targets that a stage requires to be knocked down, must be re-engaged until down.

LOADING PROCEDURE

Revolvers: All revolvers will be loaded in the traditional manner, i.e. “load 1, skip 1, load 4, fully cock hammer & then lower onto the empty chamber”, regardless of model or brand. Because of recessed chambers, .22 caliber revolvers are to have the 1st chamber loaded marked in some way as a visual indicator of proper loading procedure. When loading is completed, the marked chamber will be the first chamber exposed to the right of the top strap; helping assure the empty chamber is under the hammer. If a revolver is loaded with cartridges out of position, the loading table supervisor will correct the cylinder by rotating the empty chamber under the hammer.

- Intermediate Division - The loading table supervisor will help load revolvers for Intermediates
- Senior Division - Seniors will load revolvers, taking care to not let the hammer slip when lowering onto the empty chamber. Keep muzzle pointed down range!

Rifles: Rifles are loaded with the action closed, chamber empty, and hammer down.

- Junior Division – The loading table supervisor will help load the rifle.
- Intermediate & Senior – Competitors will load their own rifle.

Shotgun: Competitors load the shotgun during the shooting sequence/stage without assistance. Shotguns are staged with hammer down (if external hammer), action open

with chambers and magazine empty; and with safety “on” if equipped with a manual safety. External hammers on side-by-side shotguns are not cocked until breech is closed. Shotgun ammo will be placed near the staged shotgun in an ammo box, loading block, bucket, or other container. No ammo is loaded from the competitor’s person.

UNLOADING PROCEDURE

- The unloading table supervisor must inspect all firearms before they can be declared safe and removed from the table.
- All rifles and pump or lever action shotguns must have their action cycled for the inspecting official.
- All revolvers will have cylinder rotated for inspection by the unloading table official.
- Shotguns may remain open and empty at the staging location once inspected by the Range Officer, but only if the next competitor is using the same shotgun.

CEASE FIRE PROCEDURE

- Whenever the command “cease fire” is given, all competitors will immediately place their firearms down in a safe position with actions open, chambers clear, and/or hammer down on an empty chamber or spent case. De-cocking a rifle or shotgun with a live round in the chamber is not allowed. The Range Officer or another adult will assist when necessary.
- If a revolver is cocked when the “cease fire” is called the competitor will keep their finger out of the trigger guard, keep the muzzle in a safe direction, and allow the Range Officer to assist them in making it safe by taking it from the hand of the competitor while positioning their thumb between the hammer and the frame of the pistol.

SCORING AND TIMING

4-H Western Heritage Shooting is a timed event and is scored in seconds beginning at the sound of the first beep from the range officer’s hand-held timer and ending at the sound of the last shot. A five (5) second penalty is added to the competitor’s time for each missed shot during any given stage. A ten (10) second penalty is added for unintentional mistakes termed “procedurals” and for minor safety violations. The recorded elapsed time, plus penalties, of each stage are added together for a final score. Final scores are used to rank competitors from the quickest time to the longest time.

Misses – a miss is defined as the failure of the competitor to strike the intended target with a bullet or pellet from the appropriate type of firearm or not knocking over a knockdown target. An example of this would be simply missing a rifle target while engaging with a rifle and failing to hit a knockdown type of target with enough force to knock it down (except if the stage does not require shooting until it falls). Each miss results in a five (5) second penalty.

- Ejecting a live round is considered a miss. See Reshoots section if the round is faulty.

Procedural Penalty – a procedural is an unintended mistake where a competitor fails to shoot the stage the way it was designed to be shot. Examples of procedurals would include firing at a pistol target with a rifle, not following the course pattern as the range officer described (firing a sweep in an improper sequence), or failure to complete any portion of the stage. Procedurals result in a ten (10) second penalty and only one (1) can be assessed per stage.

- *****Please Read Carefully***** If a competitor does not fully cycle a lever action rifle resulting in a live round being ejected from the firearm and re-engages the target intended for the ejected round, the competitor will not have a round available for the 10th target. In this case, both a miss and a procedural will be assessed due to a live round being ejected and not having ammunition left in the rifle to hit the last target in the sequence.
- Failure to place guns or ammunition at the designated position(s) is the fault of the competitor and scored as a procedural unless the competitor is able to correct the situation, unassisted, while in the process of completing the stage under time. No firearm can be relocated once the timer sounds to begin the stage.

Minor Safety Violation – A safety violation is considered minor when the incident does not put anyone in direct or immediate danger. Examples of minor safety violations include the failure to leave a rifle action open at the end of its use during a stage, the failure to restage a sidearm at the end of a shooting string, or a live round is left in a firearm. Minor Safety Violations result in a ten (10) second penalty per occurrence at each stage. A Range Officer may issue a warning in the place of a 10 second penalty at their discretion as long as this decision is consistent.

Major Safety Violation – A safety violation is considered major when the incident endangers any person at the event. Major Safety Violations include an accidental discharge that impacts anywhere other than downrange, breaking the 170-degree safety line, allowing the muzzle of the firearm to sweep anyone in the audience or on the range, dropping a gun, or any other occurrence that has the potential for personal injury. The penalty for a Major Safety Violation is disqualification from the stage or match at the discretion of the 4-H range officer present at that stage. With proper training and practice, major safety violations will be rare or nonexistent in 4-H Western Heritage Shooting. It is the responsibility of the adult range officer to shadow the 4-H member during the course of fire in order to be in the physical position to prevent any safety violations.

Intentional Procedural – An Intentional Procedural occurs when a competitor purposely or intentionally disregards the stage instructions in order to obtain a competitive advantage. This may occur when a competitor feels they could take a penalty and still shoot a faster time than if they followed the proper procedure. This is considered a violation of the Spirit of the Game and 30 seconds is added to a competitor's time in addition to other penalties.

Appeals – If the competitor believes a ruling is in error, the 4-H member alone (not parent or leader) may politely appeal the decision to the group of trained 4-H shooting sports leaders present before moving to the next stage. The group's decision will be based solely on the rules and is final regardless of the size of the group. Any appeals made after the posse moves to the next stage will not be considered valid.

Reshoots - This rule is in place because most 4-H programs share firearms and ammunition among many competitors. Therefore, equipment can become extremely fouled or worn. Reshoots may be awarded for ammunition or firearm malfunctions if the problem is out of the control of the competitor. Any misloaded firearm by the loading table supervisor will constitute a reshoot. If there is a range failure (failure of props, timer, or the range officers) beyond the competitor's control, a reshoot may also be granted. On a reshoot, the competitor starts over clean with no misses, but carries

accrued safety and procedural penalties forward. A decision to allow a reshoot is decided by the range officer after the competitor completes the stage.

A FINAL WORD

These rules are provided for consistency and fairness to all competitors. These rules do not vary drastically from the rules used throughout the year at your practice shoots or state contests. The strictness of firearm authenticity is about the only change some clubs may find different than their club rules. Some local clubs use non-period correct firearms to get a program started. National rules require a higher standard to maintain the historical component of the project at a multi-state level. This is not done to disqualify any 4-H member. There are state and nationally owned firearms available to competitors so that no Western Heritage 4-H member is turned away from the national contest.