

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING

AUGUST 2025 **NEWS**



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Breaking Another Bait Barrier

DAIWA's new 2025 LASER IMPACT® Switch Hitter™ pulls together classic lure behaviors, resulting in a multifaceted, multispecies fish missile.

Noel Vick Traditions Media noel@traditionsmedia.com

Mostly, lures fit into nifty little categories. There are jigs, spoons, crankbaits, and so on. From time to time, however, a new bait drops that can't be so easily pigeonholed, but works like witchcraft, nonetheless.

That's what DAIWA has in their new 2025 LASER IMPACT® Switch Hitter™ 85S.



LASER IMPACT Switch Hitter 85S (RED HEAD)

It's sleek but muscular 3 ¾-inch baitfish silhouette says jerkbait, aka twitchbait, but its effective range and locomotion shatter those categorical norms. "The LASER IMPACT Switch Hitter's performance is something altogether new, and based on testing and feedback, something fish have been craving," said DAIWA Field Marketing Manager, Chris Martin.

We call it a 'tail-sliding' action," Martin continued, referring to the lure's amplified action. "You don't have to work the Switch Hitter as rapidly, because as you twitch the bait, the tail inherently follows the direction of the head, but as it slows down, the tail moves naturally to the other side and readies to dart again."



Recommended for Lake Trout Daiwa Switch Hitter Max Laser

So that's the twitch of it. But don't dare categorize the LASER IMPACT Switch Hitter as a garden-variety floater or slow-sinker – it's neither.

"Purposefully, it falls faster than your average sinking twitchbait, which lends the opportunity to fish the Switch Hitter at a variety of depths," said Martin...

Perfectly balanced, the LASER IMPACT Switch Hitter holds optimal position regardless of how deep you fish it. "It stays upright and stable while shimmying its way down," noted Martin. "No cartwheeling or twisting."

And that shimmying, that fluttering, is visually amplified with DAIWA's landmark LASER IMPACT technology, which captures and rebroadcasts light like none other.

At the epicenter of LASER IMPACT are three-dimensional, pyramid-shaped polyhedrons embedded within the lure's body – a polyhedron is a three-dimensional geometric shape with flat faces, straight edges, and vertices. The assembly is engineered to reflect light in multiple directions, not just a single plane, creating a natural and highly realistic visual effect that closely resembles the flash and flicker of live baitfish.

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The LASER IMPACT prism captures and reflects light in a full 360-degree pattern, too, making the bait visible from all directions, significantly increasing its drawing power over the two-dimensional foils found in most lures.

The combination of the pyramid-shaped polyhedrons and a built-in mirror reflector inside the lure results in intense, high-brightness flashes. These flashes can be seen from a distance and are also effective at attracting fish even in deep, shaded, and nighttime environments, as well as in stained and murky water. Even the slightest amount of light activates the LASER IMPACT prism.

More on techniques...Balanced jigs, like the Rapala Jigging Rap, have been popularized for casting and aggressively snapping off the bottom to trigger walleyes, perch, and bottom-ranging bass. (continued on page 38)

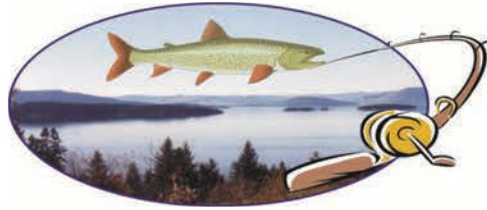
2025 Fall Mack Days on Flathead Lake

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Cash and Prizes-bonus amounts, lottery prizes, tagged fish

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(1)-\$10,000 & (3) \$5,000 & (5) \$1000 + over (9,000) \$500-\$100 Tagged Lake Trout



Thursday-September 4th to Sunday-November 2nd

(Contest may end earlier if total harvest exceeds the payout limit-prior notice will be given)

Fish one day or several days-every fish gives you a chance to catch a tagged lake trout, receive bonus \$, and/or win in the lottery drawings!

Bonus \$ amounts (Mon-Sun) **increase as your total goes up**-bonus amounts and tagged fish amounts are estimated-anglers who enter 11 or more lake trout receive bonuses-examples: 11-30 lake trout entries- \$45, 31-50-\$88, 51-75-\$150, 76-100-\$205,205-225-\$518, 301-325-\$813 on up. No pooling of fish is allowed. Lake trout are to be entered the same day as caught. See bonus chart at www.mackdays.com

Friday- Sunday-competitive Mack Days-lottery prizes, tagged fish, and bonuses-ends Sat 11/1
Top ten angler prizes: Pick your best 18 days/26 possible-Friday-Sunday-11th place-20th based on totals. Check out pick up sites on the website or turn in at Blue Bay from 11 till ½ hr. before sunset

Monday-Thursday- 9:00 am to 5:00 pm deadline to turn in fish at Blue Bay – 4-\$50, 2-\$100, 4-\$250 lottery drawings plus bonus dollars -33 days-totaled with Fri-Sun totals at the end of the event

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 2nd –SEPARATE DAY ALL ENTRIES IN BY 3:00-only AT BLUE BAY
All prizes & lottery drawings will be done on Sunday morning 11/3 and posted for awards ceremony at 3:00. Cash Drawings for Sunday will be-\$400, \$350, \$300, \$200, \$150, \$100--Ladies-\$100, 70 & Over \$100. Largest lake trout under 30" \$100-1st \$75-2nd & \$50-3rd totals count for bonus awards
All it takes is one ticket (one for every lake trout under 30") to win a lottery drawing

Lottery drawings **\$2,000- \$400** all lottery drawings & prizes end Saturday 11/1

Top twenty angler prizes **\$950-\$200 totals**

Top lady anglers **\$300, \$200, \$100**-by total fish entered

Smallest lake trout **\$250**-(2 prizes) Largest lake trout **\$500**

Youth anglers- (17-13) 1st- **\$200**, 2nd-\$150, 3rd-\$75 (12 & under)-1st-\$100, 2nd-\$75, 3rd-\$50

Weekend Prizes-4-\$100 & \$200 per weekend-9 weekends

Golden Angler (70 & older)-\$300 & \$200, \$100-determined by total fish entered

Bucket Days-3 days of single/team-heaviest 4-fish 9/19, 10/11, & 10/26

Fish the entire lake-Check in stations and times listed on mackdays.com (subject to change).

Check the rules, prizes, bonuses, check in sites in emails or send an email requesting information

Email entries to cindy.benson@cskt.org with name, mailing address, telephone #, m/f, and age.

Applications are free and available at:

Zimmers Tackle-Pablo

Walmart-Polson

Sportsman's Warehouse-Missoula

FWP-Missoula and Kalispell

Westland Seed-Ronan

Sportsman & Ski Haus-Kalispell

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Ron Niziolek with solo bull elk.
Photos credit Ron Niziolek courtesy of GOHUNT.com

The Pros And Cons Of Elk Hunting Alone

Hunting solo for elk has many challenges

By Ron Niziolek

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

I was completely caught off guard when the bull responded to my bugle. He was close! I had spent the last six hours walking a big loop and was back within a couple miles of my truck when I found this "elky" looking place. I finally had a response after 50 lonesome bugles that afternoon. I nocked an arrow and maneuvered silently around the toe of the slope. The stalk was on. I traveled 30 yards when I saw antler tips bobbing my way behind a screen of low pines. It was a decent-sized bull. I drew my Hoyt when he was at 30 yards, but at 25 yards, he stopped and scanned the forest. I mentally tried to will him into the open for a shot, and after a 20 second stalemate, he resumed walking toward where I last bugled. The 15-yard shot was followed by a 60-yard run and a loud crash. Finally, after nine hard days of hunting, I was done. With 30 minutes of daylight left, I sat and admired him for a few minutes before getting to work, taking photos, skinning and bagging the quarters. It was 10 p.m. when I headed out with the first load. It was a long, but greatly satisfying night.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Hunting Solo

There are a lot of advantages to hunting by yourself. The additional challenge and satisfaction, the ability to hunt how and where you want without any time or communication constraints, and the time to truly be alone for self reflection.



Decisions can be made or changed on the fly and you will not ruin anyone's hunt but your own, however, there can also be disadvantages, including the increased cost for fuel, no one to share the workload, loneliness and fear. Despite what many may say, it is much easier to get up and face a long cold walk in the dark with a hunting buddy than by yourself.

Logistics and Safety

The logistics of attempting a solo hunt might seem daunting, but with some careful planning, a safe and successful hunt is absolutely possible. You may want to consider a few extra days for a solo hunt. Travel may take longer and be more expensive on your own. One of the biggest factors to be aware of is the additional time it will take to pack an elk, or any large animal out of the woods by yourself.

Safety is a major factor while solo hunting, but there are some key steps to make it safe. Before you head out, let your friends and family know where you are going and when to expect to hear from you. Speak with a biologist or warden over the phone and ask about cellphone service. If there is not any, or if it is limited, think about renting a satellite phone or using a Delorme inReach or Spot Satellite Personal Track to send and receive messages.

The Right Mental Attitude

A solo hunter must possess and maintain a positive attitude not just for the chance of a successful outcome, but also to keep yourself in the field. Without a buddy along for company or encouragement, it can be easy to lose focus.



A lack of focus may lead to sleeping in, not hunting in rough weather or worse — giving up and going home empty-handed. I can personally attest to this phenomenon. It happens to the best of us, so be ready to recognize those feelings and hunt hard for as long as you planned for.

Solo Hunting Methods

Stalking

Hunting solo makes the option of spot and stalking bulls or silently chasing bugles a perfect option. This is where your predator instinct can really kick in. It is just you and the animal. You do not have anyone else to think of, communicate with or keep track of. It is an ideal scenario and one that has accounted for the majority of the bulls I have killed.

You can spend hours in the morning stalking a herd without an opportunity or obligation to be anywhere else. Instead of heading back to camp, you can stay in close proximity, keep the wind right and possibly have a chance at an animal during the middle of the day. If not, you are certainly in a good location for the evening hunt.

Calling

Plenty of solo hunters harvest animals by calling and there are a couple of steps that could increase your chance of success. Unlike working with a partner, when you are solo you will be doing it all. Once you hear a bull or get another animal to respond, pinpoint the location and quickly close the gap.

This single step will get you more encounters than anything else. Too many times, people get distracted and call back and forth with a bull from a distance.



Get close and throw out a cow call or two. If you get a response and the bull is within a couple hundred yards, cut him off with an aggressive bugle. It is a good method to anger the bull and make him come in looking for a fight. If you feel he is committed, coming in and you have time, quickly move forward 20 to 30 yards. That way, if he holds up you may still be close enough, and if he commits, his attention will be focused past you.

(continued on page 36)



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Photo credit Steve Alderman courtesy GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

The Best Time For Mule Deer

By Steve Alderman

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Why Do Most Western States Have Their Mule Deer Season in October?

Most western states have the majority of their mule deer seasons in early October, for the simple fact that it is the toughest time of year to hunt them. You can allow more hunters in the field, and you will have lower success rates. Allowing hunting any other time of the year is a death sentence to the mule deer...

Given this information, when is the best time to scout for a mature mule deer buck, and when is your best chance to harvest a buck of a lifetime?

A Month-to-month Mule Deer Comparison

The best time to scout is obviously before your hunt, but the best answer would be in July and August. Mule deer bucks are usually bachelored up this time of year. They are also usually bachelored up with other bucks of the same age structure. Young bucks can either be with the does or with a group of adolescent bucks while the mature bucks seem to hang in their own group or alone.

Their antlers are growing and are somewhat delicate, which again, is to our advantage. The bucks stay out of the heavy cover to help them from injuring their antlers during growth. Their overly fat bodies stick out like a sore thumb this time of year as their coats are in summer mode and are red/orange in color. For these obvious reasons, you can see why this time of year is the best time to scout, but lets take a look at the best times of year to hunt them.

August 15 through August 31

This is one of the best times you could possibly hunt mule deer. The deer are very easy to spot this time of year with their velvet antlers and the reddish tint to their coats. This would be my favorite time to hunt

if it was easier to get tags for this time period.

However, there are a few downfalls to hunting this time of year. The biggest is getting a tag. Unless you're an archer, this is going to be the biggest hurdle for you to overcome, as these hunts are very limited for the rifle hunter. The second and equally as important as acquiring a tag would be the heat. You need to be able to get a deer off the mountain quickly when you harvest it. Third, and only a factor to a few, is the fact that the antlers will still be in velvet. They will be mostly hardened but will be fully encased in that beautiful gold fuzz.



While in velvet, mule deer bucks will throw caution to the side and bed out in the wide open to protect their growing antlers.
Photo credit Steve Alderman

Early season scouting and hunting is the best time to use your glass as deer are more apt to stand up and switch their beds during the heat of the day.



Red summer coats make for easy long-distance spotting of mule deer.
Photo credit Steve Alderman

Couple that with the color of the hide and it makes for easy glassing. This is by far the best opportunity to harvest a mature mule deer. Bachelor groups, red coats, patternable behavior and few hunters make this a recipe for success.

September 1st through September 15th

This is the time when a few more hunts start to open up across the country. Still a great time to harvest that buck of your dreams, but now a few things are starting to change.

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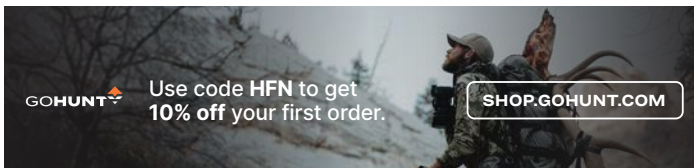
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Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

Backcountry Food: DIY Protein Bars

Try these energy bars, in infinite varieties

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT** GOHUNT.com

We love the convenience and nutrition of Mountain House meals when in backcountry. However, you can get pretty tired of eating the same thing on every hunt or scouting trip.

To add some variety, try making these protein-packed, nutrient-rich bars that can be breakfast or on-the-go fuel in between meals.

Here's the formula, so you can mix and match your favorites, and also not have to eat the exact same bar day after day.

- In a food processor, combine beans, binder, sweet, fruit, flavor enhancers and salt until smooth. Add oats and dry base ingredients: pulse just to combine. Add mix-ins and pulse again just to combine.

- If the consistency seems spreadable, you are good. If it's too dry, add 1/4 cup of water; if it's too runny, add an additional 1/4 cup of the dry base ingredient.

- Grease 13x9 pan with baking spray or rub with 1 tablespoon oil, then spread mixture into pan.

- Bake at 350° F for 15-18 minutes.

Note: You will have the most success if you use unsalted, unsweetened versions of the ingredients, and control the sweetness and saltiness through the sweetener and added salt.

Recipe adapted from No Meat Athlete

Cut into small bars and enjoy. You won't even taste the beans with all the other great-tasting stuff packed into these.

1 lb. can BEANS drained/rinsed (or 1.5 cups cooked)	+	1/2 cup BINDER	+	1/4 cup SWEET	+	1/4 cup FRUIT	+	Optional: 1 tsp FLAVOR ENHANCER	+	1 cup DRY BASE	+	1 cup MIX INS
white beans		peanut butter		maple syrup		applesauce		vanilla extract		combine 2 or more of the following for best results:		raisins
black beans		almond butter		honey		1/2 mashed banana		almond extract	+ 1/4 tsp SALT	protein powder		dried cranberries
pinto beans		mashed avocado		brown rice syrup		chopped dates		lemon extract		brown rice flour		dried apricots
chickpeas		pumpkin puree		agave nectar		crushed pineapple		coconut extract		spelt flour		chopped nuts
adzuki beans		1/2 cup ground flax seed mixed with 1/4 cup water						coffee extract	+ 1.5 cup oats	cocoa (max 1/2 cup)		shredded coconut
								and/or				
								cinnamon		whole-wheat flour		cacao nibs
								instant coffee (for a kick)		buck-wheat flour		dry cereal
								ginger	*use 1/4 or 1/2 tsp of these combined w/another spice			chocolate chips
								nutmeg*				crushed pretzels
								cardamom*				



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Six Essential Tips To Help You Find More Mule Deer

Brady shares some tips to help you find big bucks this fall in new hunting areas, and areas that you might have been looking at for several years by looking at the terrain differently

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

It's no secret... I love mule deer and helping people chase their mule deer dreams.

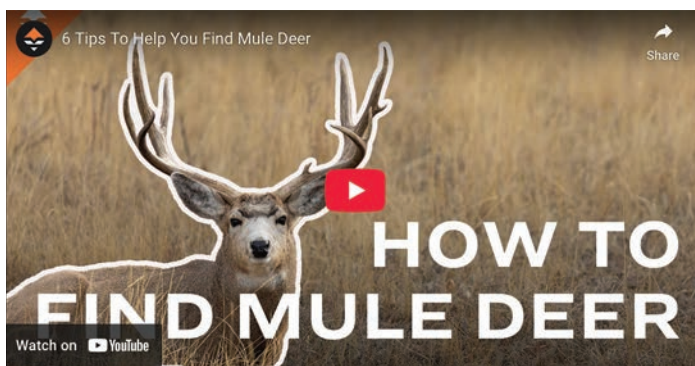
You've heard me say it a lot, but at the end of the day, mule deer hunting is an art and not a true science. You never know to an exact science where mature mule deer bucks will be, but in time, you can learn vital pieces to the puzzle that will help you narrow down the search.

What a mule deer buck does in a daily routine throughout the year is rooted in science (feed, cover, and water). But science can be thrown out the window when you are hunting an old mature buck that has seen years of hunting pressure.

Learn more about how to research mule deer using biology reports here:

<https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/insider/research-your-way-to-big-bucks-with-a-tool-youre-probably-not-using>.

Below is a video where I outline six different strategies that you can use to hone in on finding mule deer this fall. There are a ton of different things I do when finding my next hunting spot, but these six tips should get you lined out this season!



<https://youtu.be/xWBhizvQCNM?si=YX4wktP5KkVImZJI>

Mule deer hunting can be challenging, especially in areas where you've never hunted before.

These six tips will help you narrow down where to focus your efforts when scouting for mule deer in unfamiliar territory.

Remember, mule deer hunting is an art, not a science. While some general principles apply, mule deer are unpredictable, so being adaptable is key.



Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

Tip 1 - Finding the Edge Habitat

Edge habitat is basically that sliver of an area where the heavy timber/cover meets the feed or open patches of vegetation. That is where big bucks like to hang out. Older mature deer, for the most part, are smart, and during those late September to October timeframes, big bucks won't be seen out in the open that much. This is why if you focus on those fringe/edge habitats... it could lead you to find some areas where a big buck will slip up and allow you to put glass on him.

The edge habitat I focus on is again right where the cover meets the open feed, but the edge also extends at least 50 to 100 yards inside the timber too.

That will be where some of the best feed in the timber will be located, and bucks won't have to slip out into the open to feed. While mule deer are more visible in open areas during early seasons, hunting later in the year requires finding these edge habitats to increase your chances of spotting big bucks.

Learn more about GOHUNT maps here:

https://gohunt.com/learn/maps?_gl=1*5diuik*_gcl_au*ODE5ODA5NjkyLjE3NTA5OTE5NjA.*_ga*MTU-1ODE5MTg0Mi4xNzUwOTkxOTYw*_ga_KYD-EQGS9GD*czE3NTE2NTQ3NTMkbzkkZzEkdDE3N-TE2NTQ4ODAkajYwJGwwJGgw

Tip 2 - Isolation

This is all about finding those hard-to-access, hard-to-glass, little hidden pockets that have feed and cover.

There can be big deer anywhere, but from what I have seen, I find more deer if I get away from heavy traffic areas. Sure, you can kill bucks close to roads, trails, or towns, but I'd rather focus my efforts on places that I have to myself or at least places I can try to hunt unpressured bucks. But in saying that, don't overlook places that people might just drive or hike by. It's all about finding different barriers to entry.

Finding remote areas away from human traffic is crucial. While you can find mule deer near roads and trails, hunting in more isolated, harder-to-access areas often means encountering less pressured deer.

(continued on page 36)



Sarah Sprague holds a large black crappie from Spotted Eagle Lake that was used for broodstock. Photo courtesy MFWP <https://fwp.mt.gov>

Miles City Hatchery Works To Rebuild Crappie Populations At Tongue River Reservoir

MFWP <https://fwp.mt.gov>

For approximately 40 years, Tongue River Reservoir (TRR) was known as perhaps the best crappie fishery in Montana.

But recent years have seen a steep decline in the crappie population at TRR.

Natural reproduction is still occurring, indicated by low young-of-the-year (YOY) catch rates, but trend sampling in 2024 showed a new historic low catch rate for all gear types.

The decline is likely due to a combination of many factors over several years, including habitat changes due to higher reservoir levels after rebuilding Tongue River Dam in 1999, changes to annual water management practices discharging water over the spillway, and possibly storage of high-conductivity water from upstream sources (natural and industrial).

"There isn't any one reason for the crappie declines," said FWP Region 7 fisheries manager Mike Backes. "It's clearly a combination of many complex factors over the last 20 years. The habitat in the reservoir changed after the dam was rebuilt and continues to evolve through 2025. The settlement of the MT-WY Water Compact lawsuit in 2018 has also impacted water management practices and resulting habitat on the reservoir."

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has put considerable effort into determining how to boost crappie populations while still providing some angler opportunity.

Backes is optimistic that Region 7 staff have found a partial solution through stocking and management efforts.

This past April, FWP collected nearly 200 adult white and black crappie from Spotted Eagle Lake in Miles City and put them in ponds at the Miles City Hatchery for natural spawning. The YOY crappie they produce will be stocked into TRR in October.

FWP has already seen some success with this method.

This is the third year of efforts to rebuild the once-popular pan fishery at the reservoir.

In 2023 only white crappie broodstock were used, yielding 9,800 YOY for stocking into TRR.

In 2024, both white and black crappie were utilized in 13 hatchery ponds separated by species. When those ponds were drained that fall, fisheries staff were delighted to discover more than 265,000 YOY crappie (214,683 black and 50,824 white). The fish, ranging from 1.5 to 4.5 inches long, were stocked in TRR over a couple of weeks in October.

"I'm not sure what to expect for hatchery production moving forward," Backes said. "I would have been happy with any YOY crappie produced. So, it was quite impressive to see the number of YOY crappies produced in each hatchery pond. Their average size exceeded expectations, and the increased growth of the brood adults that were stocked into the ponds in April was noteworthy."

YOY crappie are extremely sensitive to mortality from being handled, so the hatchery crafted a careful timeline for optimal survival rates.

They cannot be collected until water temperatures fall below 60 degrees, usually in October.

The five-month delay for stocking also makes for larger fish that are less vulnerable to predation and more likely to survive winter.

The larger white crappie broodstock from 2023 and a batch of young crappie from the 2024 spawn were also stocked back into Spotted Eagle to supplement that fishery.

Backes has been very pleased with spawning activity at the small man-made lake.

In 2024 each fyke net contained ample adult crappie plus 100-200 YOY crappie (predominantly whites) that averaged three to four inches long.

There were also two noteworthy-sized black crappie, one at 10 1/8 inches and another at 14 inches, which were released back into Spotted Eagle for future production.

Overall crappie goals for the reservoir are to improve abundances, sustain the popular fishery and bolster the forage base (including crappie) for other predatory species like walleye and northern pike.

4 Ways To More Summer Reservoir Bass

Whitewater <https://www.whitewaterfish.com>
Noel Vick Traditions Media, LLC
noel@traditionsmedia.com

Summer can provide excellent largemouth bass fishing on reservoirs, but you must be versatile. While bedding fish have disbursed there can still be some shallow fish, as well as deep, and lots of places in between. But with today's modern fishing electronics and mapping, the search has become even quicker no matter where you're looking. Here are a few tips from Whitewater B.A.S.S. tournament pro, Wesley Gore, to help you catch more reservoir bass this summer.

Find Shade Lines, Go Old School

Docks, overhanging trees and submerged brush or vegetation are all money areas in summer on reservoirs.

Flipping and pitching will get you bit on baits like Texas-rigged creatures, jig & craw combos, and wacky rigs.

“When I’m fishing ‘old school’ as far as finding shade lines, the biggest thing is figuring out what stage the bass are in.

For example, is there a bream spawn going on, in which case I’d be throwing bream-related baits, like a jig, Pop-R, or a ChatterBait around shade lines.

Up shallow you can look at tree shade lines vs. dock shade lines and they are likely to have bream beds. That means I’m looking in the backs of coves, shallow pockets—those are the places you’re going to want to target to do that,” noted Gore.

“It’s a lot of fun to fish this way and a good way to put fish in the boat that’s more sight-oriented with less use of electronics.”

Go Deep

Another good start for catching summer reservoir bass is investigating deeper structure where water temps are cooler and there’s plenty of oxygen.

Ledges, humps, submerged roadbeds, points and creek channels between 15-30 feet can all produce, areas you can find easily with today’s mapping and fish finder technology.

“Early summer, I always go out and scan the first stopping places bass go after the spawn. I’m looking at 10- to 18-foot points that are coming out of spawning pockets.



B.A.S.S. Elite angler Wesley Gore
Photos courtesy Whitewater <https://www.whitewaterfish.com> and
Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

I’m also looking at the mouths of major creeks and secondary creek points that have the creek channel running by them. Places like this bass will school up and immediately feed after the spawn,” offered Gore.

“A little bit later in the summer I get more target related and look for hard bottom with stumps, brush piles, anything I can pinpoint and target. These are the kinds of areas where bass will live for a few months before they go into the fall migration.”

As far as baits, Gore added: “In these areas I’m going to crank some with a deep-diving crankbait; jig; drop shot; and I use an Ol’ Monster 10.5-inch Texas-rigged plastic worm. Those are the rigs I typically use all summer.”

Early-Morning Topwaters

Time of day can also come into effect. Early mornings often bring on a topwater bite around shallow flats, secondary points, and the backs of coves where active baitfish congregate.

Running areas quickly with your trolling motor and forward-facing sonar can be a great way to target these fish – besides watching for busting bait with the naked eye.

“Depending on what kind of cover is in the reservoir, like if you have grass, you’re going to want to target the back halves of the more major creeks—ones that have water draining into them. The water there is going to be a little bit cooler and more oxygenated, and you’ll want to get back there and target the flats with a frog or a buzzbait around those areas.”

“If you’re in a reservoir with more rocky, transitional areas and less vegetation, you’re going to want to cover water with a Whopper Plopper or ‘Spook and target primary and secondary points in the reservoir creeks where bass set up to take advantage of the low-light period.”

Find Suspended Forage

Summer reservoir bass will often follow baitfish schools around the reservoir, forage that just kind of swims aimlessly around the water column.

Using forward-facing electronics is the best way to tap these fish, typically with a Damiki rig or dropshot if the bait is more oriented toward bottom.

“For me, in the summertime, I notice fish hanging in the major creek channels, their usual path.

I typically start finding them about a quarter of the way in and you can find them almost always to the very back, that last little bit of deep water.

Obviously, wherever you find the bait, that’s where you’re going to find the bass.”

“For me, I’m using forward-facing sonar with a minnow Damiki Rig. It’s hard to beat the combo for bass feeding on suspended bait.”



Looking to catch more reservoir bass this summer?

Give the advice from young ace, Wesley Gore, a shot, and you’ll probably put together a bigger bag!

For Whitewater’s hot summer pick please turn to page 38.

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Photos courtesy Mad Scientist Tackle <https://madscientist.technology>

Transformative Jig Trio

Mad Scientist Tackle offers enhanced take on UV coatings for greater underwater visibility

Mad Scientist Tackle <https://madscientist.technology>
 Noel Vick Traditions Media, LLC
noel@traditionsmedia.com

When it comes to bait delivery systems, it's hard to beat a jig threaded with live bait or soft plastic. You might fish them vertically, pitch or drag 'em – all methods work at times, making jigs a survival kit mainstay.

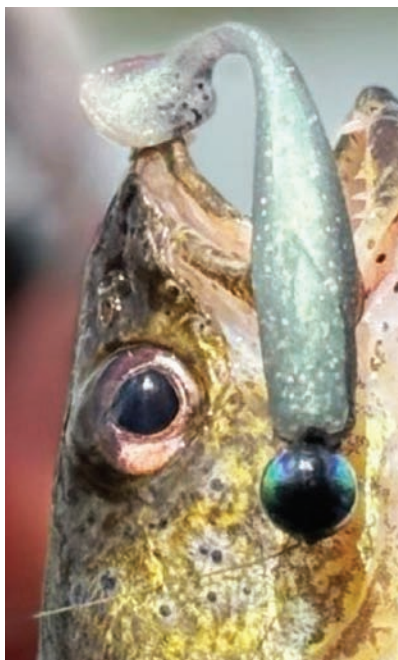
But are all jigs created equal? Mad Scientist Tackle says no.

And when you marvel at one of these disruptive jigs, you'll immediately see the magic right in the air—a rainbow of colors emerges as you spin it around and look at the jig from different directions. The colorways are only boosted when the jig is submerged and fish optics come into play.

Meet Mad Scientist Tackle's jig trifecta, all featuring the innovative company's exclusive coating for greater UV and infrared visibility.

First, you have the all-purpose Round Ball Jig for plastics and larger live bait; then there's the short-shank Live Bait Jig; and lastly, the River Jig.

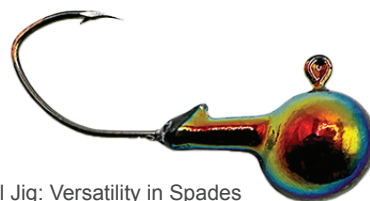
They also have a wicked Ned Head and Forward-Facing Jig, but we'll save those for another discussion...



Although we coat a lot of tackle – from countless crankbaits to topwaters we knew we had to start with baits that serve the wider world of fishing, namely jigs.

Along those lines, we offer the Round Ball, Live Bait, and River Jigs, which cover a lot of what any angler needs in his/her tackle box year 'round," said Mad Scientist Tackle Sales Director, Patrick Kalmerton.

"And these jigs just outproduce the competition with how they're seen by fish in the UV spectrum," continued Kalmerton. "It's amazing. We've heard from a lot of anglers who've switched their jigs over to ours because they simply catch more fish."



Round Ball Jig: Versatility in Spades

The Round Ball Jig is a must-have. Its fundamental and familiar design allows for versatility with various fishing techniques in many environments.

The round shape and weighted head provide excellent casting distance and accuracy, while the hook is strong enough to handle even the most challenging fish.

Threaded with a soft plastic or live bait, and its lifelike appearance mimics the natural movement of prey.

Whether you're targeting bass, trout, walleye, or panfish, Mad Scientist's Round Jig is a reliable and effective option with its durable construction and superior performance.

Take note, too, of the Round Ball Jig's sickle-style hook, which is known for its penetration and fish-holding capabilities. Some of the best live bait hooks on the market use a similar configuration.

Crafted with a black basecoat, its distinctive UV/infrared enhanced coating stands out, no matter which of the six colors you choose from: Red, Blue, Green, Gold, Pink, or Natural.

And there are sizes for every depth, fishing condition, and fish species; the Round Ball Jig is available in 1/32, 1/16, 1/8, 1/4, and 3/8 ounce.



Live Bait Jig: Short-Shank,
Minimal Hardware

Mad Scientist is also proud to offer a short-shank Live Bait Jig, which features a premium hook and comes in realistic color patterns. With its durable construction and versatile design, the Live Bait Jig is another tackle box essential, especially when fishing minnows, leeches or 'crawler hunks.

The brilliant thing about this jig is the abbreviated hook shank, which allows for pinning live bait nice and tight and hiding hardware that might turn fish off. Whether you're vertical jigging, pitching, or sharp-shooting fish with forward-facing sonar, the Mad Scientist Live Bait Jig is another indispensable tool.

Like the Round Ball Jig, the Live Bait Jig is first coated in black, onto which the company's specialty coating is applied. Anglers can choose from Red, Blue, Green, Gold, Pink, or Natural in sizes 1/4-, 1/8-, and 1/16-ounce.



River Jig: Just What The Current Ordered

River Jigs aren't your average lure – they're soon-to-be renegades in your tackle box. Crafted with precision and attitude, these jigs boast a design that's as fierce as it is effective. Sporting lifelike scales, mesmerizing eyes, and finishes that scream "game on," Mad Scientist River Jigs are built tough to handle the roughest underwater brawls. Plus, they're streamlined to cut river current and keep your presentation on or near bottom and in the strike zone.

What sets Mad Scientist's River Jigs apart? It's all in the dance. Engineered to lure in the fiercest predators, these jigs move with a swagger that demands attention. With each flick of your rod, River Jigs strut and shimmy through the water. This tantalizing motion triggers primal instincts in even the wariest fish.

River Jigs aren't just one-trick ponies, either – they're chameleons of the fishing world. Whether you're battling in fast, murky rivers or deep lakes, these jigs rise to the occasion. Perfect for any technique – casting, trolling, vertical jigging, or pitching – Mad Scientist River Jigs adapt to your style and surroundings flawlessly. Their balanced weight distribution guarantees a natural presentation, making them the ultimate solution for walleyes in current. But we've been told they also hammer down on trout, salmon, and stripers, too

(continued on page 36)







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Photos courtesy TUO Gear www.tuogear.com

Understanding Merino Wool Base Layers For Every Season

TUO Gear www.tuogear.com

What are Base Layers?

Base layers play a crucial role in hunting, serving as critical temperature regulators and moisture-wicking barriers. These garments are worn closest to the skin (under your middle layer and outer layers) and are designed to provide comfort in variable weather conditions during the hunting season. Quality base layers are essential for all hunters who want to stay comfortable throughout the entire season.

The primary function of base layers is to regulate a hunter's body temperature. Whenever you hit the woods, proper temperature control is key. Base layers achieve this by trapping warm air close to the body in cold conditions, effectively insulating against the cold. Conversely, in warmer weather, these garments work to wick away moisture from the skin, allowing for rapid evaporation and effective heat dissipation.

Breathability is a crucial factor in choosing base layers for hunting and outdoor activities. Merino wool is the ideal material for base layers because it offers exceptional breathability while keeping the wearer warm in cold temperatures. Merino wool is capable of absorbing large amounts of moisture from the skin without feeling wet or clammy. Furthermore, it allows for enhanced airflow, preventing overheating and facilitating a seamless exchange of heat and moisture. Bottom line: while synthetic fibers have their advantages, merino wool makes the ideal base layer.



Merino is Great for Cold Weather

Merino wool is an ideal choice for hunters in cold weather due to its exceptional ability to regulate body temperature and provide insulation.

When heading out in cold weather, it is crucial to maintain a stable body temperature to stay comfortable and focus on the hunt. Merino wool possesses unique properties that enable it to deliver this benefit.

One of the primary advantages of Merino wool is its natural ability to regulate body temperature. The wool fibers act as insulation layers, trapping air pockets that retain heat close to the body. This insulating effect keeps hunters warm in freezing temperatures, preventing excessive heat loss and providing necessary warmth for extended periods.

In addition to its insulation properties, Merino wool actively regulates body temperature by wicking away moisture from the skin. Perspiration can cause discomfort and rapidly decrease the body temperature. Merino wool's wicking ability draws moisture away from the body, allowing it to evaporate through the fabric, keeping hunters dry and preventing chilling from sweat-soaked clothing.

Merino wool is a superior choice for hunters in cold weather due to its exceptional ability to regulate body temperature. Its insulating properties, moisture-wicking abilities, and breathability work together to regulate body heat, keeping hunters comfortable and focused on their targets.

Merino is Great for Warm Weather

When it comes to warm weather, many people automatically think of lightweight, breathable fabrics like cotton or synthetic base layers. While wool may not immediately come to mind when thinking about how to keep body heat down, it's actually the ideal fabric when temperatures rise.

Merino wool, despite being known for its insulating properties in colder climates, is also a fantastic choice for warm weather due to its unique ability to regulate body temperature. Unlike most synthetic materials, merino wool has natural temperature-regulating capabilities that help keep you comfortable and sweat-free in hot conditions.

One of the main benefits of merino wool is its moisture-wicking properties. Merino fibers are adept at absorbing moisture from the skin and quickly releasing it into the air, allowing for optimal evaporation. This means that even when you perspire, you won't be left with damp and sticky clothing clinging to your skin. Instead, merino wool is great at moisture management, keeping you dry and comfortable on active hunts.

Additionally, merino wool has the ability to absorb and retain water vapor, which further aids in cooling and keeping the body at a comfortable temperature. This makes merino wool ideal for outdoor activities, sports, or simply enjoying a hot day without the discomfort of overheating.

So, next time you're preparing for warm weather, don't overlook merino wool as a great option. Its ability to regulate body temperature and wick away moisture makes it a truly versatile and reliable choice for active hunters seeking to stay cool and comfortable in hot climates.



Scent Control and Odor Resistance

Scent control and odor resistance are critical factors to consider when choosing base layers for hunting. The ability to minimize human scent and prevent odors from being detected by animals can significantly increase the chance of a successful hunt. This is where the natural properties of merino wool come into play.

Merino wool has excellent odor resistance, making it an ideal fabric for hunting base layers. Unlike synthetic materials or cotton, which tend to retain and amplify odors, merino wool has natural antibacterial properties. It wicks away moisture from the skin, preventing the growth of odor-causing bacteria. Consequently, merino wool base layers can be worn multiple times without washing, minimizing the need to carry extra sets of clothing while on hunting trips.

The benefits of odor resistance in merino wool go beyond convenience. By wearing odor-resistant base layers, hunters can reduce their scent profile, making them less detectable to game animals. Animals like deer and elk have a keen sense of smell and can be spooked by the scent of humans. Merino wool's ability to control odors helps hunters blend into their environment and remain undetected.

Scent control and odor resistance are crucial in hunting base layers. Merino wool's natural properties offer several benefits, including the ability to be worn multiple times without washing. By reducing odor, merino wool base layers help hunters stay undetected and increase their chances of a successful hunt.

Merino is Silent and Absorbs Light

Merino wool is highly regarded for its remarkable silent properties and ability to absorb light, making it an ideal choice for hunters.

(continued on page 34)

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How To Find The Best Elk Habitat For Your Next Hunt

By GoHUNT Staff

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

When it comes to elk hunting and finding bulls, some say Trail Kreitzer is one of a kind, and we've even gone so far as to say he is part elk! He's also known for diving into the weeds regarding biology information and how to use that for hunt planning and research.



https://youtu.be/SvTdRxjl_k0?si=4quuQ0jllVdctBeV

In the above video, Trail goes over how to find the best elk hunting habitat for your upcoming hunt and ways to use this information on GOHUNT Maps while e-scouting this year.

Finding the best elk habitat is crucial for a successful hunt. This article explores key strategies that can help hunters locate ideal elk habitats by understanding elk behavior and using digital tools like GOHUNT Maps.

Learn more about GOHUNT Maps here:

https://gohunt.com/learn/maps?_gl=1*hdnjxr*_gcl_au*ODE5O-DA5NjkyLjE3NTA5OTE5NjA.*_ga*MTU1ODE5MTg0Mi4xNzU-wOTkxOTYw*_ga_KYDEQGS9GD*czE3NTE1NzE3Nzckb-zYkZzEkDDE3NTE1NzI4OTgkajJ1JGwwJGgw

The focus is on identifying critical factors such as water, cover, and feed, which are essential for elk survival and can significantly impact hunting outcomes.

Understanding an elk's need for water

Water is one of the most vital factors for elk, especially during the warmer months from spring through fall.

Elk consume up to four gallons per day, particularly in arid regions like Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Nevada and Utah.

Understanding the importance of water sources, such as standing water (ponds, cattle troughs) versus running water (streams, creeks), can be instrumental in locating elk. Standing water is often preferred by elk due to lower predation risks and possibly higher nutritional content, making these areas prime locations for spotting elk.



Photos courtesy GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com

Key points:

- Prioritize standing water over running sources—elk often prefer ponds, seeps, and cattle troughs.
- Consider crepuscular behavior: elk usually visit water sources at dawn and dusk, though in hot climates, midday visits are common.
- Wallows—muddy depressions where bulls coat themselves in scented mud—are hotspots for action, especially during the rut.

Recognizing elk's use of cover



Elk require cover for security and comfort, making the identification of bedding areas crucial during the scouting process. Elk typically choose bedding sites that provide protection from predators and the elements. They prefer shady, dark timber areas with a closed canopy that offers wind protection and cooler temperatures. Understanding the landscape's topography, such as north or northeast-facing slopes, can help hunters identify potential bedding areas during early hunting seasons.

For late-season hunts, elk might shift to south-facing slopes, which provide warmth from sunlight and are often richer in feed due to better sunlight exposure. Using GOHUNT's terrain analysis tool, hunters can highlight these slopes and assess the size and canopy coverage to determine their suitability as elk bedding sites.

Scouting tips:

- Seek North and Northeast facing slopes for early season bedding areas.
- Use GOHUNT Maps to highlight terrain features like benches and flats that indicate preferred bedding locations.
- Bedding zones should span 30–60+ acres with 75–100% canopy coverage for optimal security.

Evaluating feed preferences of elk

Elk are large animals that require a substantial amount of feed, with a daily intake of 12 to 18 pounds of forage. Their diet consists of grasses, forbs, and other vegetation, which varies depending on the season. During the summer and early fall, forbs make up a significant portion of their diet, while grasses become more important as they move into the later months.

Identifying areas with abundant feed is crucial, and hunters should look for open meadows, clear cuts, and burn scars, which are often rich in vegetation. Burn scars, particularly those less than five years old, can be highly productive feeding grounds due to the regrowth of vegetation following a fire.

Top forage types include Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and sandberg bluegrass. Ideal feeding grounds often overlap with open meadows, recent burns, and beetle-kill zones—areas with increased sunlight and surface water.

Elk are generalist feeders, consuming forbs, grasses, shrubs, and even tree bark. Their dietary focus shifts with the seasons:

- Summer: High-protein forbs dominate, crucial for nursing cows and antler-growing bulls.
- Fall: Diet transitions to grasses as forbs dry up.

Edge Habitat: The perfect balance

Elk thrive in mosaics of feeding and bedding areas. Edge habitat—where open meadows meet timber—is ideal for quick access to food and cover.

Elk also favor moderate slopes (15–30%) and features like benches and saddles for bedding. Avoid overly steep terrain (>40%), which elk find challenging.

Leveraging digital tools for effective scouting

Modern mapping tools like GOHUNT Maps offer hunters advanced features to enhance their scouting efforts. Elk hunters would be wise to leverage maps before and during their hunt to maximize success.

GOHUNT's Terrain Analysis Tool can highlight specific landscape features such as north-facing slopes for elk, while GOHUNT's Historical Imagery allows hunters to assess vegetation and water availability over time. Additionally, using the layers available in these tools, hunters can easily identify areas with the right combination of water, cover, and feed, significantly increasing the likelihood of finding elk. (continued on page 36)

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Photos credit Chase Fly courtesy Outdoor Empire at www.outdoorempire.com

Buyer's Guide: How To Choose The Right .308 Rifle

By Chase Fly
Outdoor Empire

www.outdoorempire.com



The .308 Winchester cartridge is one of the oldest and most prolific chamberings for rifles in the United States. It's a reliable caliber that can be used to hunt a wide variety of big game and even many competitive shooters prefer it. With so many options, it can be hard to narrow down your options and choose the right .308 rifle for you.

I had the opportunity to test and compare nine different rifles, all chambered in .308 WIN. You can read our best 308 rifles review here: <https://outdoorempire.com/best-308-rifles-reviewed/> to learn more and see our recommendations. I was fortunate to partner with Ron Spomer on this project. He published several YouTube videos about it.

I learned a lot from Ron that week and wanted to share what I learned about how to select a good rifle, especially if you want to use it for hunting. Read on for help honing in on what to look for in a .308 rifle.

WHY DO YOU WANT A .308 RIFLE?

You don't want to buy an expensive, high-end competition rifle only to dread lugging it through the woods on a hunt. You also don't want to worry if you can trust it to make the shot you need.

Start by considering what you actually want to do with your rifle, then you'll know which features and characteristics to focus on.

Hunting

Hunting rifles are designed to be carried for long distances, function reliably, and hold up to use in extreme outdoor environments. They should generally be lighter and easier to handle than target rifles, and you don't need to fret if that comes at the cost of a little accuracy.

The barrels are typically thinner, so they are more susceptible to point of impact shift due to barrel heating if they are fired rapidly.



I appreciated the relatively light weight of the Tikka T3x Lite when hiking on my 2022 deer hunt.

Typically, .308 hunting rifles will accept only a small number of rounds and many states place a limit of 5 rounds on rifles used for hunting. This results in a rifle that is sleeker, easier to handle, and has fewer moving parts.

Target Shooting

Target .308 rifles, typically heavier and larger than hunting rifles, are built for stability and accuracy with thick, long barrels and heavy, adjustable stocks. Customization options like attachment points and rails allow for accessories such as bipods and high-powered scopes. Their weight, beneficial for reducing recoil and stabilizing sight pictures, is less of an issue in non-maneuverable, long-range shooting scenarios.



Precision .308 rifles designed for target shooting like our Bergara B-14 HMR shown here often have heavier barrels and are more customizable than most hunting rifles.

Tactical-style .308 rifles balance the agility of hunting rifles with the precision of target models. Despite their lightweight design, they don't compromise on accuracy, durability, or adaptability. Suited for a range of applications from professional military use to competition shooting, these rifles maintain effective performance from 30 to over 1,000 yards. Their high cost reflects the advanced technology and top-tier performance demanded by users in challenging, rapid-fire shooting environments.

(continued on page 22)

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Buyer's Guide: How To Choose The Right .308 Rifle

(continued from page 20)

MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

It helps me to really dial in on each main part or quality of a gun, then decide which ones are important to me. For example, some things, like the trigger, aren't particularly critical to me even if they are to someone else. But weight is really important to me because I don't like to lug around more than what's absolutely necessary when I'm deer hunting.

Think about and evaluate the following things that will affect your overall satisfaction with whatever gun you ultimately choose.

Action

The most common action for a .308 caliber rifle is a bolt-action. Hunting rifles and many target-oriented .308 precision rifles have a bolt action. Bolt action .308 rifles are simple to operate and have fewer moving parts than a semi-auto or lever action, which makes them less prone to failure. This reliability makes them the most common type of action for a hunting rifle.

When choosing a .308 bolt-action hunting rifle, consider if it has a 2-lug or 3-lug bolt. This choice impacts bolt lift height, affecting cycling speed and scope clearance. For faster action and compatibility with larger scopes, a 3-lug bolt, like those on the Browning X-Bolt Speed SR and Ruger American, usually offers a lower lift.



An entire ecosystem has been built around the Remington 700 bolt action which is known for being strong and reliable.

A .308 lever-action rifle like a Browning BLR is quicker to cycle than a bolt-action in experienced hands. This is useful for bear hunting or in thick wooded areas. But there's a lot more moving parts which makes them harder to clean and maintain. They can also get mucked up more easily in rain or snow.

If you're into target shooting or hunting coyotes and varmints, the AR-10 platform is a great choice for semi-auto fans, especially since it was designed around the .308 Winchester cartridge. The AR-10 is known for its modularity, ease of use, low recoil,

and accuracy. But, remember, laws vary — in some states, the AR-10 can be restricted or even illegal, and it might not be lawful for hunting. Always check local laws before buying.

Barrel

More and more hunters want a threaded barrel these days and I'm one of them. It's nice to have the option, for now or later, to add a suppressor or a muzzle brake which can help reduce recoil and even improve accuracy. I definitely found that to be true when I added a suppressor to my X-Bolt Speed SR.

Free-floated barrels are generally more desirable for a lightweight hunting rifle with a synthetic stock or for a heavy target rifle like the Bergara B-14 HMR or Savage 110 Tactical. Like we saw on the Remington 700 SPS, flexible plastic stocks with a rifle bedded to them doesn't do any favors to accuracy. It should either be free-floated, or fully bedded to a stiff stock.

Barrel length might not matter a whole lot for most hunting purposes, and if it has a threaded muzzle a suppressor can give you some added length if you want it. Long barrels can be great for target shooting, but a nuisance when you're brush busting through the deer woods.



Carbon fiber wrapped barrels like this one on the Springfield 2020 Waypoint we tested help stiffen the thinner-than-usual steel barrel underneath.

Sporter weight barrels are typically fine for hunting rifles whereas thicker heavier barrels are often desirable for target guns. Gun makers often try to shed some weight by fluting a barrel, which is great. Carbon fiber-wrapped barrels are another attempt to shed weight and maintain stiffness, but they drive the price up quite a bit.

For hunting you also want a corrosion-resistant barrel. Some older blued barrels can rust through the finish whereas newer guns with cerakote or other fancy finishes like the ArmorTough used on the NULA Model 20. A stainless steel or carbon fiber barrel will do the trick too.

Stock

A flat-bottomed forestock, found on rifles like the Savage AccuStock and Bergara B-14 HMR, is great for stable bench shooting. It's also favored by some long-range hunters.

However, traditional hunting stocks, with their curved forends, are easier to carry and use in various field shooting positions. Rifles like the Tikka T3x aim for a balance between these styles. Your preference might depend on how you plan to use your .308.

Hunting rifle butt stocks are usually straight and slender, but adjustable stocks are gaining popularity for their customizability in length of pull and comb height. This is particularly useful for different sized shooters or when using high-mounted target scopes.



Adjustable stocks like on our Bergara B-14 HMR are especially appreciated by target and long range shooters.

Materials also matter. Synthetic stocks are light and weather-resistant, while wood stocks require more care. Stiff molded polymer stocks like on the Bergara B-14 HMR can add significant weight compared to an ultralight carbon fiber stock like on the NULA.

When choosing, consider how the rifle feels when shouldered. Try it out in a gun store before purchasing if you can. And check for a good recoil pad to ease the kick.

Trigger

Those who enjoy customizing their setup may appreciate an adjustable trigger. Most hunters tend to stick with the factory-set trigger pull weight (usually about 3 pounds) and don't necessarily need to scrutinize that feature too much when making their purchasing decision.

Safety

A lot of hunters, including Ron Spomer and I, like a bolt that locks with the safety on. It prevents accidentally lifting or pulling back the bolt while moving through thick brush, which can be a safety issue or cause unintentional ejection of your round. So, if you like the sound of that, look for a rifle with either a 3-position safety or a 2-position safety that locks the bolt.

The downside of a locked bolt is that you must take the gun off safe to remove a round from the chamber – something you do often when moving or before getting back into a truck. I really like the Browning X-Bolt because even though it has a bolt-locking 2-position safety, it also has that bolt release button that lets you eject a round without taking the gun off safe.

(continued on next page)

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Buyer's Guide: How To Choose The Right .308 Rifle

(continued from page 23)

Target shooters may not get too picky about a bolt-locking safety.

Weight

If you're often hiking or navigating rough terrain when you hunt, you'll likely appreciate less weight, especially if backpacking. Spending more money on a rifle with a lightweight carbon fiber stock and carbon fiber-wrapped barrel might be worth it to you in these instances. For stand hunting, spending extra for a lighter rifle isn't really necessary.



Generally speaking, carbon fiber stocks are lighter than synthetic plastic or polymer stocks, which are lighter than wood stocks.

A traditional .308 bolt-action hunting rifle weighs 7-8 pounds without an optic. A lightweight rifle weighs around 6 pounds. That NULA Model 20 may just be the lightest .308 rifle you'll find at a hair over 5 pounds. The Tikka, Ruger, and Browning from this review are also very lightweight, which was a main reason we selected them as some of the best .308 hunting rifles.

Target and long-range shooters, whose primary objective is precision, probably don't need to worry about weight and may even prefer a heavy rifle that won't move as much when dialed in on a target from a bench rest. Though, something like that Springfield Waypoint rather attractive to long-range mountain hunters because it's a precision .308 rifle that weighs relatively little.

Also keep in mind that any optic or scope you put on your rifle can add considerable weight. It doesn't make a lot of sense to pay for a super light hunting rifle only to slap a behemoth target scope with a 34mm tube and a 54mm objective lens on top.

Accuracy

Accuracy matters for any .308 rifle, but it ought to matter more to a target shooter than a hunter. When hunting, your objective is to hit the vital organ zone of a big game animal which can be the size of a dinner plate or larger. That gives you some leeway and allows you to favor things like weight and reliability more than a precision target shooter might.

Lucky for us, almost all modern .308 rifles are plenty accurate for hunting, even for around \$500 like that Ruger American Predator. There are many highly accurate .308 rifles to please the target shooters too.

Price

Most rifles are sold at prices below the Manufacturer Suggested Retail Price (MSRP) by retailers such as sporting goods stores and gun shops. I recall paying the listed MSRP for only two of the eight rifles I acquired for our best 308 rifles review. I bought the others at lower prices. So shop around if possible.

Any .308 rifle under \$1,000 is a very reasonable, if not budget-friendly, price. The least expensive .308 rifles start around \$400, but I paid \$530 for my Ruger American Predator and it offers a ton of value for that amount. Mid-range .308 rifles will cost roughly \$1,000-\$2,000 and anything over that I would consider high-end. But don't get me wrong, you could spend several thousand dollars on a tricked out competition, custom, or precision rifle.

Ammunition

When choosing a .308 rifle, it's better to consider ammo types after selecting your gun. Think about your intended use and the bullet weights that suit your purpose. This will help you find a gun that pairs well with what you expect to shoot.

In our experience shooting 3 different types of ammo through 9 different .308 rifles for our best 308 rifles review, the 150 grain bullets seemed to produce the best accuracy overall. So that's where I'd start experimenting with a new .308 rifle. If you think 180 grain bullets are too light for what you want to hunt, you might need to explore other calibers because that's about where .308 Winchester ammo tops out.

POPULAR .308 BRANDS

If you're looking to buy a .308 rifle, the brand probably isn't the most important thing to look for, but you do want a dependable brand with a good reputation. Here are a few manufacturers that have been making quality .308 rifles for a long time. This is far from a comprehensive list, so don't limit yourself just to these.

Winchester

The Winchester Arms Company has been active in America since 1866. Winchester introduced the .308 Winchester caliber cartridge with the bolt action Model 70 rifle and the semi-automatic Model 100 rifle. The Model 70 is still one of the best .308 hunting rifles today. Winchester rifles retain their reputation for quality and craftsmanship.

Ruger

Ruger offers a number of .308 rifle models, from budget hunting combos to fine hunting rifles to tactical rifle setups. Recently, they have been a fierce competitor in the budget rifle field with the introduction of their

Ruger American series.

These rifles produce accuracy that is difficult to beat in the budget firearms game.



A quality .308 rifle doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg, as proven by this Ruger American Predator.

HISTORY OF THE .308 WINCHESTER CARTRIDGE

Introduced in 1952, the .308 Winchester is one of the most popular rifle cartridges not only in America, but worldwide.

At the time of its introduction, developments in powder technology allowed it very similar power and ballistics to the .30-06 Remington. All in a short action package!

Two years later, the .308 WIN was adopted by NATO as the 7.62X51mm NATO. The difference between these cartridges and their interchangeability has been a subject of much debate in the gun community.

In truth, there are only very minor differences between the two cartridges.

They are just exacerbated by differences in testing methods between civilian and military standards.

Overall, the .308 Winchester has a slightly shorter chamber specification as well as thinner case walls. SAAMI (Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute) considers the two cartridges safe to interchange. Just be aware it can lead to issues.

The .308 Winchester is considered a highly versatile and capable cartridge. Its intermediate length enabled it to be adapted to bolt-action, semi-automatic, lever action, and other types of firearms easily.

The cartridge is considered powerful enough to humanely kill almost any large game in North America. It even has competent ballistics for shooting out to 1,000 yards and potentially beyond. These characteristics have made the .308 highly popular for sporting, hunting, and tactical purposes.



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4 Mixed Drinks To Make You The Deer Camp Hero

By Vortex Optics
www.vortexoptics.com

THE PERFECT COCKTAILS FOR TOASTING A SUCCESSFUL HUNT.

Hunting season is the perfect time to get together with friends and family.

Whether it's telling big buck tales around a campfire, or paired with backstraps hot off the grill, these four recipes will have you toasting fall. (No Pumpkin Spice included ...).

Wisconsin Drinkin' Water

Nothing adds finesse to that buck you shot last year like this bit of perfection from the heart of Wisconsin. From the Old Fashion capital of the world comes a classic served at deer camps and supper clubs across the badger state.

INGREDIENTS:

2 oz. brandy
1 orange slice
2 maraschino cherries
1 tsp. sugar
3-4 dashes of bitters
Lemon lime soda
Ice

DIRECTIONS:

In your Vortex® mug muddle orange, cherries, sugar, and bitters.
Add brandy and ice.
Top with soda.
Stir. Sip. Be happy.

Blackberry Thorn Bourbon Smash

Sweet up front with a little poke of bourbon, our Blackberry Bourbon Smash is the kind of iced drink that'll warm you up. Perfect for campfires, getting a game of euchre going, and toasting a successful hunt.

INGREDIENTS:

5 blackberries
4 mint leaves
1/2 tsp. sugar
2 oz. bourbon
1/4 of lemon, juiced 1/2
8 oz. seltzer (about a cup)

DIRECTIONS:

Put ice in your Vortex® mug.
Add berries, mint, and sugar to a shaker or pint glass.
Mash the berries, muddle the mint.
Add bourbon and lemon juice and shake or stir to combine.
Pour into mug and add seltzer.
Stir. Sip. Sigh.

Ol' Uncle Todd

The perfect lubrication to get that uncle with all the stories rolling, our take on the Hot Toddy is a crowd-pleaser.

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup boiling water
1 shot whiskey
2 tsps. honey
1/4 of lemon, juiced
3-4 cloves (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

Boil the water. Pour into your Vortex® mug.
Add remaining ingredients.
Stir until honey dissolves.
Sip. Smile. Put your feet up.

Chonky Donkey Cranberry Mule

This Mule's bringing something extra to your sipping sesh, namely the Wisconsin state fruit in all its tart glory. One tip for the best flavor: Stir or shake with care to make sure your ginger beer stays bubbly.

INGREDIENTS:

4 oz. of cranberry juice
4 oz. of ginger beer
2 oz. of vodka
1 lime half, juiced
Ice Cubes

DIRECTIONS:

Put ice in your Vortex® mug.
Add the juice, soda, vodka, and lime juice to a shaker or large glass.
Lightly stir or shake.
Pour. Sip. Chill.

Why Synthetic Game Bags Are The Future Of Meat Care

By Ted Ramirez

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

There's a certain silence you earn after a successful harvest in the high country. The kind of silence that only comes after sweat-soaked miles, busted boot soles, and the kind of solitude you don't find on any map. But once the shot rings out and the animal is down, the real work begins.

And the tool that matters most isn't your rifle or your optics—it's your meat care system.

Why Synthetic Game Bags Are the New Standard

1. Breathability and Airflow Matter More Than You Think

Meat doesn't just need to be protected—it needs to breathe. The old-school canvas traps moisture, which breeds bacteria. That's how you ruin a hard-earned harvest. Caribou Gear's synthetic fabric keeps airflow steady while keeping bugs and debris out.

2. Durability Without the Bulk

Weight matters. Every ounce adds up when your pack is pushing triple digits. These bags are not only lighter than traditional options, but they hold up to the rocks, horns, and harsh pulls through alpine terrain.

3. Reusable, Reliable, and Field-Tested

I don't believe in gear that's good for one trip. The right bag should last you season after season. Caribou Gear bags are washable and built to be reused without compromising performance. That's what I call stewardship—and it's just good ethics.

Field Truth: You Can't Afford to Guess on Meat Care

Backcountry hunting isn't Instagram. It's blisters, steep ridges, and pushing through with respect for the animal you've harvested. If you lose that meat to spoilage, you've wasted the most sacred part of the hunt.

The right game bag is your insurance policy. It's your respect made visible. And it should work as hard as you do.

Final Thoughts from the Field

If I had to pick one piece of gear that changed how I hunt over the last decade, it wouldn't be a scope, a new caliber, or a GPS. It'd be synthetic game bags. Lightweight. Durable. Designed by people who hunt for the right reasons.

Caribou Gear didn't just get it right—they redefined the standard.

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Don't Forget These 7 Things Before Hunting Season

By Ryan McSparran
Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

At the time of this article, archery antelope seasons are opening and the other western big game archery seasons are just around the corner. It's time to pack up your gear and make those final preparations for the season!

In the final days and weeks leading up to a western big game hunt, use checklists and packing lists to stay organized and give you peace of mind that you're not forgetting anything.

In the business of preparing to leave for a trip, some little things are easy to overlook but can have big consequences in the field. **Here are 7 things not to forget before hunting season begins:**

1. Wash and Re-Treat Rain Gear and Boots

It can be a good idea to wash and re-waterproof your rain gear and boots at the beginning and end of each season.

Rain gear with a waterproof, breathable membrane like Gore-Tex has a Durable Water Repellent (DWR) finish on the face fabric. This is what helps water bead and roll off, allowing the membrane to work properly. Dirt, moisture, busting through brush and being stuffed in and out of a backpack will wear away at that DWR coating.

Before the season, wash and re-treat your rain gear to renew that DWR finish. Products like Nikwax make this easy to do in your washing machine at home. Start by washing the items in a detergent that's safe for technical outerwear. I use Nikwax Tech Wash. Next, wash them in a DWR treatment like the Nikwax TX Direct.

In addition to your rain gear, this is also the time to wax or re-waterproof your hunting boots. We use Kenetrek Boot Wax on our boots to re-waterproof and condition the leather.

Whichever products you use, be sure to carefully follow the instructions to get the best results, so that your rain gear and boots will function like new.



Photo credit Ryan McSparran

2. Re-Stock First Aid and Emergency Kit

When was the last time you did a careful inventory of your first aid and emergency kit? After last season, you may need to replace items that were used. Additionally, you may need to replace items that have expired.

Check things like band-aids, blister pads, fire starters and other common things that you may have used up on your last trip. Before you head into the field this fall, make sure your first aid and emergency supplies are ready for anything.

3. Test GPS and Satellite Communication Devices

If you use a Garmin InReach or any similar type of GPS or satellite communication device, take the time to update these devices and most importantly, test them before leaving home.

You don't want to get out in the field, only to discover that your device needs a software update or otherwise isn't working. As a part of your pre-hunt checklist, plug your device in to check for software updates. The Garmin InReach and most other devices also have a test function to make sure it's sending and receiving messages.

4. Replace Rangefinder Batteries

It's a simple thing, but it's easy to forget. And your rangefinder is a critical piece of equipment on both archery and rifle hunts. Before this season, stick a new battery in your rangefinder and you won't have to worry about it later.

5. Test Water Filters

Water filtration systems are a major lifeline in the backcountry. Filters can get clogged and eventually, they just need to be replaced. Before your hunts this year, get out your filtration system and test it at home. Make sure the water is flowing at a normal rate. If it's slow, clogged or even if it has just been a couple of years since you replaced it, order a new filter or cartridge now so that you'll have it before your hunt.

6. Update Apps and Download Maps

OnX Hunt and other mapping systems on your smartphone need regular software updates. Check for those before you leave on your trip. I've learned that one the hard way.

Two years ago, I arrived at camp for a late season elk hunt. When I tried to open up my mapping application, it said that it required an update. Without cell service, I wasn't able to download the new update and couldn't use the app. Fortunately I had another map application that I could use. But that's a mistake I won't make again.

On your pre-season checklist, make a note to update your apps and download any maps for offline use.

7. Double Check Season Dates, Units and Regulations

Before leaving on any hunt, take the time to review state hunting regulations. When you pack your hunting license, review the dates and unit or units where the license is valid.

On a hunt several years ago, one of the hunters in our group grabbed his license out of his desk drawer at home and packed it for the hunt. When a game and fish officer checked our licenses at camp, he realized he had accidentally grabbed last year's license! Fortunately, the officer let him go with a warning, and our friend had to drive several hours home to grab his valid license.

Complicated hunting regulations and varying seasons, units and dates are common with western hunting. Don't get caught making an avoidable mistake. Be sure and review all of those details before your trip.

Reach Out With Any Hunting Gear Questions

From all of us here at Caribou Gear, we'd like to wish you a safe and fun hunting season. Please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions on our game bags or other hunting gear. Check out the equipment we carry in our online store at www.caribougear.com and get ready for a great hunting season!



Deer Rifle Sight-In Tips

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog
www.bigdeerblog.com

Don't get so wrapped up in shooting and practicing with your bow this spring and summer that you put off sighting-in and shooting your rifle and muzzleloader.

A few random thoughts on that:

I think the old-school way is still the best way. Sight your .270, 6.5, .30-06 or whatever to print the target's bulls-eye two inches high at 100 yards, which will put you dead-on or thereabouts out to 200 to 250 yards, depending on caliber and load. You'll shoot 95% of your bucks inside that range anyhow.

Sight-in your rifle/scope/load for the tightest 3-shot groups you can get, but if you get 2-inch groups, that is fine for deer hunting. Most modern rifles and factory loads will ground shots well inside 2 inches.

I zero a .50-caliber muzzleloader the same way. You hear a lot of talk about long-range shooting with fancy new black-powder firearms and loads, but I hold my shots at bucks within 125 yards, and inside 100 is best. Again, most of the whitetails you shoot will be that close.

Don't just sight-in your firearm and put it up. Find the time to practice at least 5 more times before gun season opens this November or December.

If I inadvertently drop or bang my gun, I check it right away and readjust zero if necessary. Usually it's fine and holds zero, but I always check.

When deer season finally comes, it never hurts to go to a range and fire a practice shot or two every few weeks throughout the season.

Sometimes a gremlin sneaks in and causes your gun/scope combo to shoot a few inches off. It's generally not enough to cause you to miss your dream buck, but why take that chance.



Bill and his fine spike bull on the snowy Colorado Mountain road.
Photo credit Tom Cooper

Best Liver Ever

By Tom Cooper

For several months, while still working part of the time in Missoula, brother Bill was working every other week in Spokane preparing for an eventual job transfer. Needless to say his work schedule was impacting his Montana hunting season. Since this hunt might be his only trip to Helena, we were both hoping for the best. He arrived the evening before our hunt. As luck would have it, snow was forecast for most of the night. We planned to hunt in district 335, which in the early 90's was open for any bull (spikes or brow-tined).

Colorado Mountain Elk

After breakfast of scrambled eggs and small filets from a deer backstrap taken the previous season, we drove to Colorado Mountain southwest of Helena. There, an old road trace climbed steadily to the mountain's crest where the concrete foundation mounts for a long-gone fire observation tower are still visible. Since Colorado Mountain lies within the boundary of a no-motorized area, the road was and still is walk-in only. We wanted to be well up the mountain by daylight and had arrived early. Plus the two inches of fresh snow in Helena had grown to 6-7 inches where we parked, and we were to find, it was over 10 inches near the mountain top.

We followed the road about a half-mile up a small canyon. There we split up with Bill hunting the west side of the ridge and I hunted the east side. We planned to return to the ridgeline road an hour later. After an hour, we were both back on the snowy road. Neither of us had seen elk or fresh tracks. We decided to continue our east-west tactic for another hour, which should take us to the top. I didn't get very far before encountering elk tracks. The further I went, the more tracks I discovered. Turns out Bill was doing the same thing on his side. Apparently, a large number of elk were headed up-country. As I climbed back to the road to coordinate our next step, there was a shot a little higher, on the west side; it was Bill.

60 Elk, One Spike

Bill tells the story this way. After splitting up, he continued to find more and more tracks. He estimated 20-30 elk on his side of the mountain. Coincidentally, I estimated about the same on my side. Anyway he didn't return to the road, because he smelled elk and knew he was really close. Less than 75 yards from the top, he heard brush breaking on his right where there was a mix of small Douglas Fir and Lodgepole pine trees. One of the trees was shaking. Taking 4-5 careful steps, he saw a spike bull rubbing his antlers, totally unaware Bill was 35 yards away. He shot his elk in the neck, and he dropped. When I arrived a few minutes later, Bill was tagging his elk. Since it was less than 75 yards to the road, we decided to drag the bull down to the road, hang him in a tree, and remove the entrails. Dragging was a lot tougher in deep snow than anticipated, but we made it to the road.

After gutting the elk and lowering him to the ground, we used two ropes to start our downhill drag on the road. We only made 10 yards before our slim, trim spike turned into a snowplow; to continue our drag, we had to push two feet of pretty wet snow out of the way. Every 10 yards we had to repeat the process. Quickly we decided dragging was too time-consuming (and too much work). So we rehung our spike in another tree, where Bill would skin him, remove the shoulders and hind quarters, and make him packable on a game cart. I hiked back to our vehicle for my cart. A little over an hour later, I returned with it. Bill had boned and bagged both shoulders, so we carried the bagged meat, including backstraps and tenderloins, tied to our hunting packs. We took turns steering the cart loaded with both hind quarters, and the head, downhill to the truck. In thirty minutes we were in the parking area. It was a great hunting day.



Bill at the bottom of the mountain with the head and hind quarters on the game cart. Photo credit Tom Cooper

Deep Creek Whitetail Deer

After the Colorado Mountain hunting adventure, we spent a day cleaning and trimming elk meat, which we packed in coolers with ice until we could cut, grind, and wrap everything for our freezers. Next, we drove to Missoula to hunt Whitetail deer. Though Bill and his family lived in Lolo, we stayed in Missoula with my father-in-law (known to family and friends as "Toad"). We intended to hunt west of Missoula and not south toward the Bitterroot Valley.

After a breakfast of scrambled eggs and sausage, we drove west along the Clark Fork River toward Deep Creek. We parked a mile up the canyon, and walked a logging road (uphill of course) for half a mile, where we intended to drop into a smaller side canyon and make a loop back toward our vehicle.

Shoot the Doe

Bill had drawn a doe tag for the area and we decided he should fill it at the first opportunity. We had buck tags as well. Because it was a cloudy morning, we couldn't see much in the timber until well after legal shooting time. We stopped where we intended to split up. While discussing our plan, a deer appeared 75 yards away. We agreed it was a doe and there wasn't a fawn. As Bill was about to shoot, a second deer jumped from the timber and ran past, on the far side of the doe; it stopped with its head behind a tree. Bill asked if it was a buck. Between the early morning gloom and the shadows in the small opening surrounded by timber, I wasn't sure and responded with a weak "maybe". Bang and both deer were gone.


I asked "which one did you shoot?" Bill's answer was "the second one, the one in front." I don't recall seeing either deer hunch up at his shot. After a moment of contemplation, Bill said he thought the second deer was a buck, but not very big. And besides, he had a doe tag too. We waited several minutes without seeing or hearing anything, then walked to where we last saw both deer. The 5 x 5 buck was dead five yards into the timber. After retrieving our vehicle, we processed Bill's deer and returned to Missoula. Although it was a real short hunt, it was another great hunting day.

Toad's Liver Recipe

Toad cooked the fresh elk liver we brought from Colorado Mountain.

His recipe called for a combination of onions and water during a two-hour cooking process. As I remember it, he used a large heavy-duty frying pan. He expected to add water 3 or 4 times during the two hours, plus add a few extra onion slices each time. The liver was cut 3/8 - 1/2 inch thick and rolled in flour at least twice before Toad thought it suitable for his fry pan, which was sizzling hot initially.

Admittedly I recall (vaguely) a bottle of Canadian whiskey, so I wasn't always watching the liver. However, I don't believe the recipe actually required whiskey. At the conclusion of our meal, it was unanimous: "Best Liver Ever." And, as I said earlier, it was a great hunting day.



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Gear Review-Vortex Optics It's no secret that we use Vortex Optics exclusively and have for many years. With their wide product selection, their superior quality, commitment to customer service and unlimited, unconditional, lifetime warranty they are our go to for optics. We have never been disappointed in any of our Vortex Optics gear.

These are some of the Vortex Optics that we use and recommend.



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When every millisecond and millimeter matter, the Viper® PST™ Gen II delivers dependable precision trusted by competitors and MIL/LE professionals. Crisp turret adjustments. Striking clarity at every magnification. Fully loaded with features for serious tactical performance, Viper® PST™ Gen II is your next step in mastering precision shooting—because when it matters most, nothing less will do. I have used this for long range hunting and found it to be exceptional.



VIPER® HD 10X50 Binoculars

Viper® HD delivers outstanding clarity, rugged durability, and the versatility to keep up with hunters who embrace the tough, unpredictable conditions lasting memories are made from. With sharp resolution that brings every detail into focus and a lightweight, ergonomic build that won't wear you down, Viper® HD gives you the upper hand—keeping you ready to glass longer and move farther without missing a thing. Through rain, snow or fog, we have found these binoculars to be spot on when hunting deer elk, and antelope.



VIPER® HD 3000 Rangefinder HCD Corrected Shoot-To Range Reticle

Built to help you excel no matter the hunting challenge, the Viper® HD 3000 delivers outstanding versatility, ranging speed, and capability. Whether you're locking in on bugling elk across a distant meadow or ranging a rutting buck moving fast through thick timber, the Viper® HD 3000 puts you in control. Lightweight and built tough, it doesn't just adapt—it ensures you execute every shot with lethal precision, taking your place at the top of the food chain. Quite a few of our hunting buddies are using the Viper® HD 3000 Rangefinder and highly recommend it. It's reliable and a solid choice at a great price.



RAZOR® HD LHT™ 3-15X42 Riflescope HSR-5i (MOA) Reticle | 30mm Tube

From the mountains to open country, the Razor® HD LHT™ is the precision rifle scope you need to make distant shots feel easy. Stunning HD clarity and enhanced contrast reveal every detail, from counting kickers on a buck in dark timber or locking onto a tuft of shoulder hair over the vitals of an elk. Lightweight yet rugged, with push-button illumination and a rock-solid zero system, this top-of-the-line optic gives you the edge in the moments that matter most. I am looking forward to using this scope this hunting season. Recommended by Remi Warren.



RAZOR® HD 4000 Rangefinder HCD Corrected Shoot-To Range Reticle

When the game comes down to inches the window of opportunity is small, the Razor® HD 4000 delivers the ranging data you need to make your first shot count. Its advanced modes adapt to any field conditions, providing consistent, repeatable performance when you can't afford to miss. Compact and rugged. Capable of ranging reflective targets out to 4,000 yards. It's designed for serious hunters and shooters who demand performance that will never let them down. We've used the Razor® HD 4000 Rangefinder since it first came out. It gives a quick and reliable read when in the field.

See these and all of the other fine Vortex Optics products at www.vortexoptics.com.

Understanding Merino Wool Base Layers For Every Season

(continued from page 17)

These unique qualities set merino wool apart from other synthetic fabrics commonly used in outdoor gear.

When it comes to silence, merino wool is unbeatable. Unlike synthetic materials or regular wool, merino wool does not produce any rustling or swishing sounds when in motion. This is due to its extremely fine fibers, which are tightly woven together. This results in a fabric that is whisper-quiet and allows wearers to move stealthily through their surroundings without giving away their position.

Furthermore, merino wool excels at absorbing light. Its fibers have a natural crimp, which creates countless tiny air pockets within the fabric. This structure enables merino wool to trap and absorb light, preventing any reflective glare or shine that could potentially alert nearby wildlife or wary prey.



TUO Gear Base Layers

There are many companies that offer merino base layer options, but not all are made from quality materials. TUO Gear offers a high-end variety of different merino base layers aimed at specific conditions.

The Kinetic 150 layers are perfect for hot weather hunts, as they wick moisture away well and don't cause hunters to overheat. The 150 layer is also handy to layer under other merino options for when you start to see cool weather conditions. The 200-weight Zip-T, for example, is a great base layer shirt that fits nicely over the 150-weight, allowing hunters to find the perfect comfort level to suit their needs.

TUO's heavyweight base layers are made up of their 250-weight merino wool lineup. This heavyweight layer is ideal for the coldest weather and can be layered over TUO's other lightweight base layers for those late-season hunts.

Fabric durability can be a factor when it comes to merino layers. Merino has a tendency to stretch and tear when not paired with a spandex blend. However, TUO Gear's unique wool blend allows for a fabric that has the beneficial properties of wool without being so fragile. This blend of merino is great at regulating your core body temperature while being a durable material.

TUO Gear makes high-quality merino base layers in an effective camo pattern that fit a wide range of body types and personal preferences, allowing hunters to spend time in the field in a wide temperature range.

Merino is Critical

By investing in high-quality fabric made from merino, you can guarantee the breathability, and insulation required to stay comfortable in warm or cold weather conditions. Merino offers maximum comfort for high-intensity activities, like extended trips in the backcountry or low-intensity hunts in colder temperatures. Check out TUO's line-up of high-quality base layers made from natural materials and maintain proper body heat this hunting season at www.tuogear.com.

The Best Time For Mule Deer

(continued from page 6)

The reddish orange coats are changing to the grey, brown coats of fall and winter. Their antler pedicles are drying up, the blood is finishing the calcification process, and by the end of this time period, most have stripped their golden fuzz for the more popular chocolate-brown hard horn.



First of September mule deer shed their velvet and summer coats and also become harder to spot. Photo credit Steve Alderman

This time of year signals transition for the bucks. They are stripping their velvet, sparring and strengthening their necks for the upcoming rut. They are still somewhat patternable as they often stick to their summer patterns of the last couple months.

It's getting harder to spot them for a number of reasons this time of year. The color of their coats helps them blend into the background, and they are starting to venture into thicker cover to bed. It's best to have found your buck prior to his coat changing and the shedding of the velvet. The bucks are still spending

time up on their feet during daylight hours, but that time is lessening as the days get shorter.

September 16th through September 30th

Hopefully, you have found your buck by now and have been following him for weeks or more. Scouting is about at its hardest now as the bucks become nocturnal and their coats are in full fall and winter mode, making it very hard to spot them.

They are still in their summer patterns, but may have moved from one basin to another in search of the most palatable or high-in-protein foliage they can find. Mature bucks know what it takes to survive and are constantly looking for the most nutritious food to carry them through the winter. As one basin or foliage dries up, they are off to the next food source. This is a battle you will fight the entire scouting season. They usually don't move far after the middle of July. Their summer range is typically within a two-mile radius -- and that is water, feed and bed. On many occasions, in the high country, it is even smaller than that.

Hunting a mature buck this time of the year is the second hardest two-week period, especially if you haven't found your buck prior to this. The upside to this time of year is the coats are in my opinion the prettiest they will be. Full winter color with a thin undercoat make for some of the most beautiful mounts.

October 1st through October 15th

If you haven't scouted by now, you must really enjoy camping and hiking. **This is by far the most difficult time to harvest a mature mule deer.** If you don't have one patterned, you are almost shooting in the dark. You will need to catch your deer the first 30 minutes, and if you're lucky, the last thirty minutes of legal shooting light, and more often than not they won't get up until dark to feed out of the bedding area.

This two-week period is by far the hardest time to find and harvest a mature mule deer. Fortunately for me, I have harvested three 200-inch deer during this time period. The secret to my success was the scouting and patterning. If it wasn't for scouting, I might have shot one of these bucks, but definitely not the other two. Two were harvested on the first day in which I hunted and the other was on the eleventh day of the hunt and was a backup buck.



...Opening day at 8:00 a.m. with a 213" buck on the ground. Success was due to watching this buck for two months prior to the opening of season. Photo credit Steve Alderman

Bucks are very nocturnal this time of year, and seem to bury themselves in the thickest brush they can inhabit. You can still find and harvest big deer this time of year, but you are going to have to concentrate on their bedding areas. Moving slow and glassing is the best technique to use; you are hoping to see him before he sees you. If you are continually harvesting great bucks this time of year, my hat is off to you, because I know the dedication it takes.

October 15th through October 31st

Hunting a big ol' cagey mule deer starts to get a little easier now. They are becoming a little amorous with the ladies. Checking for hot does at night, and if you are lucky enough you can catch a mature buck in the daylight hours before he peels off from the girls and heads to his bed.



This buck was caught opening morning checking does on the 15th of October. My preparation put me in the right spot at the right time. Photo credit Steve Alderman

During the last week of October, the pre-rut is in full swing. Bucks can be seen spending a little more time out during the daylight hours roaming for girls. This is my favorite time to hunt an old bruiser. I usually start seeing signs of the rut around the 20th of October. The earliest doe I have seen being bred was on the 27th of October.

November 1st through November 30th

The pre-rut is really kicking and bucks are very vulnerable at this time. Some females have already been bred, and the bucks are cruising looking for more females. This time can also be frustrating. While you get to see lots of deer and some great rutting action, big bucks will up and vanish. They will find a hot doe and hang with her until she is ready to breed. It used to be: find the does and you would find the bucks -- but this is not the case anymore. Sure, they are checking the does, but once they find her, they drive her away from the herd to avoid any competition from other suitors. This is the easiest time for the average hunter to kill a giant deer. It is easy to understand why game departments try to have the majority of the rifle hunts during the first part of October. The bucks are holding tight in the thick stuff, conserving their energy for the upcoming rut and winter. However, you can still be successful this time of year, and your best friend will always be your pre-season scouting. If you are looking to see more deer, try hunting earlier or later.

Learn more and join at GOHUNT.com.

Transformative Jig Trio

(continued from page 15)

There's no room for compromise with Mad Scientist River Jigs. Armed with high-carbon steel hooks sharper than a razor's edge, these jigs ensure there's no escape. Corrosion-resistant and battle-tested, they keep your prize catch locked until photo time.

Available in a spectrum of sizes and colors (Red, Blue, Green, Gold, Pink, Natural, and Cisco), you can customize your arsenal to match the vibe of the waters. Whether you're drawn to subtle, natural hues or crave attention-grabbing patterns, there's a River Jig to suit every taste and environment, including 3/8-, 1/2, and 3/4-ounce sizes.

But don't just take our word for it – Mad Scientist Tackle River Jigs have rave reviews from diehard enthusiasts worldwide who've testified to their effectiveness and reliability, cementing River Jigs as a moving water weapon.

Shop online at <https://madscientist.technology>.



The Pros And Cons Of Elk Hunting Alone

(continued from page 5)

Ready for Success

Once that arrow hits home and the bull is on the ground, a whole new challenge begins. You must mentally and physically be ready to take your own photographs, break down the bull for packing and then pack several hundred pounds of meat out of some rough country. This could happen late in the afternoon or evening after a long brutal day.

Are you physically capable of doing the tasks necessary to get that elk to the truck? Physical and mental preparation cannot be stressed enough, but the satisfaction of going it alone and making it happen is a feeling like no other.

Learn more and join at [GOHUNT.com](https://gohunt.com).

How To Find The Best Elk Habitat For Your Next Hunt

(continued from page 19)

Wrapping up about elk habitat

Successfully locating elk requires a comprehensive understanding of their habitat needs, particularly water, cover, and feed. By combining this knowledge with the use of advanced mapping tools, hunters can strategically identify and scout the best areas for elk hunting. Whether preparing for an early or late-season hunt, these strategies can help ensure that hunters are well-equipped to find and harvest elk effectively.

Learn more about GOHUNT and Insider here:
<https://www.gohunt.com/learn/insider>.

Six Essential Tips To Help You Find More Mule Deer

(continued from page 10)

Deer in these remote locations behave more naturally, allowing you to hunt them on their terms. Look for basins and ridges that are far from roads and trails. Although these areas might be more physically challenging to reach, they often hold bigger and more relaxed bucks that haven't been disturbed by human activity.

Tip 3 - Looking at all the details on satellite imagery

This tip is actually very important. I like to look at all the terrain in the entire unit in using maps in 3D. It might seem simple, but the process can take a very long time. I like to pan around and look at every ridge, every patch of timber, and every corner of the unit. I want to get as familiar with the unit as the details on the back of my hand.

I want to be zoomed in close on 3D satellite imagery during this process because I don't want to miss out on any of the intricate details of that unit and how the terrain looks during this stage of my e-scouting. If I find something during this stage that interests me, I'll drop a waypoint. This process can take days or even a full week in the evening to accomplish.

Thoroughly studying the terrain is a vital step in planning your hunt. Use tools like GOHUNT Maps to zoom in on ridgelines, basins, and slopes to get a detailed view of the landscape. Knowing how the terrain lies—such as the direction and steepness of slopes—can help you predict where deer might be. Mule deer tend to favor specific types of terrain based on their needs for food, water, and security. Spend time dropping waypoints on areas that look promising, such as secluded ridges or pockets with good cover, and use this information to refine your hunt plan.

Tip 4 - Finding glassing areas

This is probably one of the most important parts of doing some e-scouting research before you head into the field.

It might seem like a very easy step... “just find high points and mark glassing spots,” but it is way, way more in-depth than that. Not all glassing spots are created equal, and not all glassing spots allow you to see the best terrain.

Besides marking glassing points, I like to mark secondary glassing points along a ridge system.

As the morning shadows start to move, I want to move as well and glass an area from a different angle. Sometimes, that involves climbing up the mountain higher; sometimes, that means dropping elevations.

Finding the right glassing points is essential for locating mule deer, but it's important to be flexible.

Identify spots where you can glass a large area, but also look for opportunities to move around to different vantage points.

Deer can often bed in hard-to-see spots, so shifting your position can help you spot bucks that were hidden earlier in the day.

Plan your glassing points ahead of time by marking them on a map, and always have multiple spots in mind to increase your chances of success.

Why also mark more waypoints?

You just never know if the terrain will be favorable enough to really glass from that spot, which is why I really like to zoom in on the satellite imagery to pick apart the vegetation and tree cover for my glassing waypoints for mule deer.

Tip 5 - Not worrying too much about water

Depending on the place you're hunting mule deer in the West, water might be important (especially desert hunts), and locating water sources could put you in that spot to take a buck.

Unlike hunting elk, you don't always need to focus heavily on finding water sources.

When hunting mountain bucks, I'm not so much concerned about finding water for bucks; rather, I'm mainly focused on finding water that I will use on the hunt and possibly how I can use the lack of water to my advantage.

Lack of water in a mountain range means long hikes to get water, so knowing how to use that to your advantage can put you in places where people just don't enjoy hunting. This is not really a huge tip, but I still felt like it was important to mention briefly.

Tip 6 - Use Terrain analysis & elevation band tools when e-scouting



If you want to know how I use this tool (extrapolating previous waypoints and hunting intel), be sure to check out the article linked below as I go into the weeds on ways you can use this tool to find mature bucks.

See how I use the Terrain Analysis tool for mule deer: <https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/maps/analyzing-terrain-when-e-scouting-to-find-better-mule-deer-hunting-areas>

Also, along with the Terrain Analysis Tool, there is a lot of value that can be found by using Elevation Bands. You can key in on the habitat that mule deer use during certain times of the year with this tool, and you can also layer stack with public land, migration layers, and the Terrain Analysis tool to really hone in on your next hunting spot.

Understanding how to use Terrain Analysis Tool on GOHUNT Maps can help you pinpoint areas where mule deer are likely to be. Mule deer prefer different elevations and terrain features depending on the season. For example, in the early season, they might be higher in open country, while in late-season hunts, they may move down to timbered, more sheltered areas. Use the Terrain Analysis Tool to look at slope, elevation, and aspect, and apply the knowledge you've gained from previous hunts to new areas. Historical data about past mule deer kills can be especially helpful in identifying patterns.

In conclusion

These six tips will help you get a head start in locating mule deer in areas you've never hunted before. By focusing on edge habitats, finding isolated areas, thoroughly analyzing terrain, and being flexible in your glassing and scouting strategies, you'll increase your chances of success. For even more detailed strategies and insights, be sure to explore resources like mule deer biology reports and maps, which can give you a deeper understanding of deer behavior and habitat.

With preparation, persistence, and adaptability, your next mule deer hunt can be a success.

Learn more or join at [GOHUNT.com](https://www.gohunt.com).

Breaking Another Bait Barrier

(continued from page 2)

DAIWA's LASER IMPACT Switch Hitter adds another dimension to the technique. "While a balanced jig will swing and hastily glide back to the bottom, the Switch Hitter, after a hearty snap, will flutter back to the bottom while holding its horizontal posture and kicking color and light everywhere," explained Martin. "And, because it drops slower than a conventional balanced jig, fish have that extra second or two to strike."

Snap jigging with a twitchbait? Now that's pretty cool.

Casting power is another hallmark of the LASER IMPACT Switch Hitter. Its compact aerodynamic body and precision weighting combine to create a surface-to-sea missile. It casts fast and heavy and straight as a blow dart, no tumbling. The Switch Hitter also slices wind like an Aogami knife, making the athletic bait a prolific weapon for surf casters as well.



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4 Ways To More Summer Reservoir Bass

Whitewater's Hot Summer Pick

(continued from page 13)



Lightweight Tech Hoodie (Vintage Duck Camo)

Whether you're casting lines at a hidden pond or chasing trophies on a bucket-list fishing trip, the Lightweight Tech Hoodie in Whitewater's new Vintage Duck Camo is built to go wherever the water takes you. Crafted from a breathable, 100% polyester stretch fabric, it offers an athletic fit and all-day comfort. With built-in UPF 50 sun protection and advanced anti-microbial technology, this hoodie delivers ultra high moisture-wicking and odor control so you stay fresh, dry, and protected no matter how long you're on the water.

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2025 Crosstrek Wilderness Crystal White Pearl shown with optional accessories. Take a video tour here: <https://www.subaru.com/vehicles/crosstrek/gallery.html>