

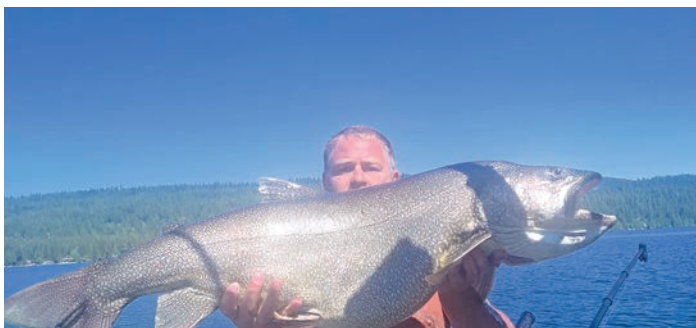
WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING

SEPTEMBER 2025 **NEWS**



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Aaron Goettsche of Stansbury Park, Utah hoists a 42-inch Lake Trout from Payette Lake to clinch a new catch-and-release state record. Photo courtesy IDFG <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Payette Lake Produces New State Record Lake Trout

Photo courtesy IDFG <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Aaron Goettsche is no stranger to monster lake trout. An avid angler, fishing rod maker, and longtime veteran on Utah's/Wyoming's famous Flaming Gorge Reservoir — a world-renowned fishery known for producing lake trout over 30 pounds and occasional giants up to 60 — Aaron knows what a trophy looks like.

But in recent years, another lake has stolen his heart: Payette Lake in McCall, Idaho.

Aaron has spent the past three years chasing lake trout in Payette Lake, steadily dialing in the fishery and landing some incredible catches along the way. Then, on June 19, 2025, while trolling solo in the morning in about 80 feet of water, he caught the fish of a lifetime — just barely beating the standing catch-and-release record set by Dylan Smith in 2018.

Aaron's 42-inch lunker earned him the new Idaho state record for catch-and-release lake trout, solidifying Payette Lake as a legitimate trophy water once again.

A Rebounding Trophy Fishery

Though Payette Lake has produced big lake trout for over 30 years, things weren't always so rosy. In the early 2000s, biologists noticed signs of trouble. Lake trout were getting thin from poor prey available, and the kokanee numbers — their main prey food item — were dropping quickly.

"It wasn't uncommon to catch a 30-inch fish that looked like a snake," said Jordan Messner, Regional Fisheries Manager for Idaho Fish and Game in McCall.

With the lake out of balance, Fish and Game launched a major plan to boost kokanee numbers while improving the quality of the lake trout population.

The Recovery Plan: Kokanee + Suppression = Restore Balance

In 2018, Idaho Fish and Game biologists started a two-pronged approach:

1. Stock more kokanee — to rebuild the prey base
2. Suppress smaller lake trout — to reduce competition and predation on kokanee

The suppression program targets lake trout under 27 inches to remove them from the lake. So far, over 3,000 lake trout have been removed since 2018. The goal is to reduce the lake trout population to reduce competition and increase kokanee survival. With fewer mouths to feed, the remaining lake trout should be healthier and grow faster.

"We're thinning out the juvenile lake trout so the ones that survive have more food — and they grow big," said Messner. At the same time, biologists are working hard to stock more kokanee in the lake.

Ongoing monitoring confirms the success of the strategy: average relative weight (a measure of how "fat" a fish is) has steadily improved since the program began.

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A Fishery on the Rise

Anglers are noticing the improvements in both the kokanee and lake trout fishing. In June 2023, biologists caught and released a 54-pound lake trout, just 3 pounds shy of the Idaho state weight record! That means another record is likely just around the corner.

Want to Catch One? Here's How

If you're dreaming of record-breaking lake trout, it's time to get serious about your gear and tactics. Here's some tips for targeting these deep water predators:

Technique: Trolling or jigging near the bottom are the go-to methods.

Depth: Focus on 35–80 feet, where lake trout tend to hold tight to structure.

Locations: Target underwater ridges, drop-offs, and boulder piles.

Bait: Mimic kokanee. Use realistic lures, tipped jigs, and scent — lake trout can be selective, especially when food is abundant.

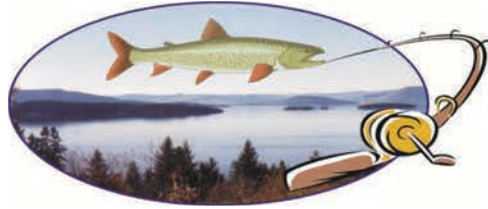
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Fish one day or several days-every fish gives you a chance to catch a tagged lake trout, receive bonus \$, and/or win in the lottery drawings!

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

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

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

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

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Nutrition For Hunters

By Stefan Wilson

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Dieting and nutrition fads are all the rage right now. Whether it is gluten-free, paleo, or any other of the multitude of dieting trends right now, many seem to understand the direct correlation between diet and health. While some people need a special diet because of health issues or specific intolerances, everyone needs to be mindful of what they are eating.

How should hunters approach nutrition? Is there a certain diet that is best for those who hunt in the backcountry? No, not necessarily. There is not a single diet that will meet everyone's needs; however, there are some general principles that will allow hunters to reach their full potential. Additionally, there are some specifics when it comes to nutrition for training. When hiking the terrain of the backcountry, understanding what these are will really help you as a hunter reach your full potential and recover quickly.

Nutrition Basics

There was a time when I thought I understood nutrition pretty well. I was wrong. Nutrition is a complex science that people dedicate their lives to researching and understanding. Yet, there are some fundamental basics that everyone — especially hunters — should understand when it comes to nutrition.

Everyone needs to understand what a calorie is and know the difference between fats, carbohydrates and proteins. You should also be aware of the different ways in which your body requires all three (that's right... your body requires all of these).

Calories

Calories are essentially a measure of the fuel that you receive from food and burn during activity. Without getting too technical, you burn a certain amount of calories in a typical day (anywhere from 1,500 to 3,000 depending on activity). When you are very active, this number goes up; when you are inactive, the number goes down. When you take in more calories than you burn, you gain weight; when you take in less calories than you burn, you lose weight. If you take in too few calories, your body goes into starvation mode: brain function reduces, energy levels go down, and lots of bad things start happening. The goal is to take in enough calories to properly fuel your body without overloading it.

Fats



Peanut butter on tortilla for hunting. Photo credit Brady Miller

Repeat after me: "Good fats are good; bad fats are bad." Fat is not a bad thing. It is not fat that makes you fat; poor eating and lack of discipline does that. Yes, trans fats, saturated fats and copious amounts of cholesterol are not good for you, but poly- and mono-unsaturated fats are very good for you. Additionally, fatty acids such as Omega-3 are crucial. Fats and fatty acids are necessary for proper organ function and joint health. Fats are required for assimilation of nutrients (getting nutrients where they need to go so that they are used properly). If you were to completely eliminate all fats from your diet, you could not properly absorb vitamins, proteins or amino acids. You need fat. Just make sure it is good fat.

Good Sources of Fats Are:

- Nuts: peanuts, almonds, cashews, etc.
- Seeds
- Fish
- Avocados
- Dark chocolate
- Eggs
- Olive oil
- Coconuts/coconut oil
- Yogurt

(continued on page 36)

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Get Organized With Hunting Gear Checklists

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

Checklists are a valuable tool when preparing for any type of hunting adventure. As hunters, we find ourselves keeping track of a myriad of details. Lists are one way to help make sure none of those details slip through the cracks.

Whether you're preparing for a specific trip or just keeping a list of your gear repair/replacement priorities for the upcoming season, start making those lists now. When hunting season suddenly rolls around, you won't feel like you're behind the curve.

As you make checklists and prepare for the upcoming seasons, here are a few ideas to keep in mind...

Checklists for Everything

On my computer at home, I keep a folder with all of my hunting checklists – and there's a list for everything. To help me find what I'm looking for when I begin preparing for a new trip, I've organized my lists into some basic subfolders: car camping trips, backpacking trips, horseback trips, etc.

When I draw that awesome elk tag in New Mexico this year (fingers crossed) and start preparing for the hunt, all I have to do is find a previous list from a similar hunt to use as a starting point. That saves a great deal of time when organizing gear for a new trip. Whether I'll be backpacking or camping at the truck, I probably have a previous checklist to work from.

In addition to checklists for gear on each trip, I will often make a checklist for the menu and necessary groceries. Whether that's packing simple lunches and freeze dried meals for a backpacking trip, or a more elaborate menu for a fixed base camp, creating a menu ensures that I have enough calories to sustain me on a rigorous hunt, without massively over-packing on food.

Finally, I've also found it helpful to keep a running list of any hunting gear items that need to be purchased, repaired or replaced. In a perfect world, I'd love to purchase that new tent that I've wanted, a new pair of Kenetrek boots, replace an old sleeping bag and maybe even spring for that new rifle I've had my eyes on. But in the spirit of sticking to my budget in any given season, I keep a prioritized list of all those needs (and wants). This helps ensure that the most critical needs are met first. (continued on next page)



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Get Organized With Hunting Gear Checklists

(continued from page 5)

Pay Attention to Weight and Space

One of the most valuable reasons for making checklists well in advance of any hunting trip, is that it allows you to gauge weight and space. This is a critical factor for backpacking expeditions. It's also helpful on trips where you'll be traveling by floatplane or horseback. If your outfitter or bush plane pilot has given you a specific weight limit, it's best to dial in your system now and not wait until the last few weeks leading up to your hunt.

Creating a list now will let you know the exact weight of your backpack or duffel bag. With everything accounted for, you can make any necessary adjustments and feel totally confident that you're ready for the trip...

Stay Organized for Quick Packing

One thing that can make your checklists even more efficient is a great system for gear organization. When your hunting gear is spread out or difficult to find, going through your checklist may not be as easy as it sounds. With that in mind, consider creating dedicated storage for all of your gear in clearly labeled containers to keep everything in one place while idle.

For example, you might keep a day trip bin and a backcountry bin. I keep a shelf of small bins for all of those little accessories that tend to get lost – I have one for headlamps, flashlights and spare batteries, another for survival and first aid supplies, one for all of my reed and diaphragm calls, and another for my game bags and kill kit accessories.



Photos credit Ryan McSparran courtesy www.caribougear.com

However you choose to organize your hunting and camping gear, stick to the system. That way, when you're going through your checklist for a specific trip, you can simply run through each bin and pick the items you need.

After a trip, when your gear is clean and dried, make sure it gets back into the appropriate bin. This makes packing for the next trip a whole lot easier.

Tips for Shaving Pounds

On multi-day backpacking trips, of course it's important to keep your pack as light as possible. Keep in mind that weight will gradually shed as your food supply diminishes. If you plan to move every day and keep camp on your back, a lightweight system is critical. Hiking in to a fixed camp location gives you more flexibility, because you can ditch the weight of your sleep system, cook system and all but your daily ration of food. Hang the remainder of your food supply away from camp when you leave to hunt for the day.

Your sleep system will account for a good deal of weight on backpacking trips. Therefore, minimizing the weight of your tent, plus a high quality down sleeping bag and lightweight pad can make a big difference.

A lightweight tarp or tipi style tent can easily drop several pounds off your shelter. The Seek Outside Silex is a very roomy solo tent that weighs just over a pound. The Seek Outside Cimarron weighs a little more than three pounds with the stakes and pole, and can easily sleep three hunters – or two people with a wood stove and lots of gear. Even the larger Seek Outside Redcliff is light enough for backpacking. With stakes and pole it weighs just a shade over five pounds. It can comfortably sleep four hunters, or three with a wood stove and is tall enough to stand up in.

Another heavy part of your hunting kit to consider is your optics. Depending on the hunt, this can be a tough call. You can ditch the spotting scope and maybe even the tripod and still be effective with only binoculars. It really depends on your preference, the species and the location you're hunting.

For example, on an archery elk hunt in country that's mostly heavy timber, you can probably get away with 8x binoculars and no spotting scope or tripod. But on an open-country hunt for mule deer, those needs would be totally different. Personally, it's much easier for me to lose the spotting scope if weight is an issue. But I hate to leave my tripod behind. Using binoculars on a tripod makes a world of difference.

Always Save Your Lists

When you finalize the packing list for any trip, always save a digital copy. The next time you're preparing for a similar trip, you can open up the previous list. This makes a much easier starting point. Even if you do the same trip year after year, you'll probably tweak the list and make changes. But starting with the previous year's list will give you a big head start on packing. It will also help you recognize which items are the most helpful, and which unused items you can omit on future trips.

Let Us Know If You Have Questions

If you have questions about gear for an upcoming hunt, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at www.caribougear.com. We'd be happy to provide recommendations for any upcoming hunt.

Turn to page 34 for a sample Gear List.

Don't Overlook Fall Bear Hunting

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Though spring bear season gets a lot of attention, many western states also have a fall bear season that hunters shouldn't overlook. Fall bear hunting is an excellent add-on tag if you are already going to be in the mountains chasing elk, deer or other big game species or a fun standalone tag if you do not have any other plans. It also can be a great tag to grab if you want to join your buddies who have drawn a tag that you didn't. I have even seen people use a fall bear tag as an excuse to be in the mountains hunting a unit they plan on drawing next year to get boots-on-the-ground scouting during a concurrent hunting season. No matter the reason, here are some tips to finding bears in the fall instead of just relying on good old fashion luck.

Where to Start - Before purchasing a bear tag or heading into the mountains, a good amount of e-scouting should be done, especially if you plan on being successful. Even if you are just adding a tag onto a hunt, you need to be aware of any bear populations in the area and decide whether purchasing a tag is worth it, especially if you have to pay nonresident costs. The quickest and easiest way to do this is to use the information available on GOHUNT's Filtering 2.0 bear tab within the state you are interested in to see harvest success for specific units. Select the fall season and toggle the animal's harvest or harvest success, depending on the state. If the state reports a reasonable success rate

or a significant number of bears are being harvested, the tag might be worth it. If the report is not so good, then you might want to look elsewhere or keep that money in your pocket.

Where to Look - Whether it is spring or fall, bears love to hang out in hard-to-reach areas. Typically, it is suggested to look deep and steep if you want to find higher bear populations. From my experience, they love to be back in difficult drainages. Black bears usually stay far away from human interaction, so I find it quite common to see them in drainages and basins with no trails. Using the terrain steepness is the best and, quite possibly, only way to find bears since you need to glass into hillsides with good food sources and some water access. You may be wondering what bears eat in the fall and how to find these areas.

Finding the Best Fall Food - Similar to the spring, the fall has bears mainly concentrating on food. They need to get their fat reserves up if they will make it through the winter and live another year. As you know, bears are omnivores and will eat anything from birds to mammals to fish to plants to insects. The fall is a good time for bears because other hunters focus on harvesting deer and elk and leave the carcasses with some meat scraps in the mountains. This is a tricky thing to hone in on, so sticking with the more stable food sources will help you more than trying to find old carcass piles to hunt over. A more stable food source that bears will seek out and hold onto is berries and nuts. To bears, berries and nuts are easy food sources that can help them pack on the pounds before their winter slumber.

(continued on page 25)



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Hunting Essentials: How To Pick The Right Gear For A Successful Hunt

By Lane Colyer

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Success on a hunt requires more than just having reliable gear — and the right gear can significantly enhance both your success and comfort in the field. Essential items like durable boots, high-quality optics, and versatile clothing are crucial for hunters to understand and prepare before heading out on a hunt. Let's explore the must-have hunting gear that will ensure you're well-prepared for your adventure. Whether you're a beginner deer hunter or in pursuit of an elk in the West, this gear list will outline must-have items for your hunt.

Clothing for hunts



Lorenzo is using the GOHUNT Approach Hoodie on a backpack elk hunt. Photo credit Cam Henderson

Whether you're sitting in a deer blind or covering mountain miles in search of deer and elk, clothing is essential for ensuring you are comfortable and safe on the hunt. Below, we explore the considerations when putting together a layering system that works for your hunt.

Baselayers

Also known as “next-to-skin” layers, baselayers are critical for different purposes throughout the year. In early season or during active hunting conditions, baselayers can serve as your only garment during parts of the day, so it is important to ensure you have the correct weight and moisture-wicking properties. Additionally, pick a color or camouflage that will work in your hunting environment. Baselayers will generally come in two types of materials: merino wool or synthetic. A merino wool baselayer is ideal for hunting in cold weather due to its superior insulation and moisture-wicking properties, keeping you warm and dry. In contrast, a synthetic baselayer is better suited for high-intensity hunting activities in varying temperatures, as it dries quickly and is highly breathable. For extended trips in wet conditions, merino wool offers natural odor resistance while synthetics excel in durability and quick drying times.

[Shop baselayers](#)

Mid-layer

You will find a variety of fills, fabrics and styles that serve as a mid-layer, and chances are good that you already have something in your closet that works just fine. The point of a mid-layer is to layer over top of your baselayer for additional insulation.

The mid-layer can be shed when hiking or during the daytime as temperatures rise. It's important to understand the hunting style and minimum possible temperatures as you plan this layer for your hunt. We recommend synthetic-fill jackets, grid fleece or soft shell layers as a mid-layer. These generally offer the right mix of breathability, insulation and the ability to fit over a baselayer and underneath a rain or insulation layer. Synthetic jacket materials are woven with a looser weave than down jackets, meaning they allow more moisture and heat to escape while you're hiking.

Depending on the hunt and environment, some may divide the mid-layer into a separate “active” layer and an “insulation” layer.

[Shop mid-layers](#)

Insulation

An insulation layer may or may not be required for your hunt, depending on time of year. The mountains can be substantially colder than the lower elevation temperature at nearby towns, so we recommend you err on the side of caution when planning insulation. During cold hunts, static insulation is critical to ensuring you can retain body heat when you're not moving. Many hunters opt for a high-fill goose down jacket because of the warmth-to-weight ratio. These jackets often pack down smaller than a Nalgene bottle, and can weigh less than a pound, making them a no-brainer to bring if you think it may be cold on the hunt.

[Shop insulation jackets](#)

[Shop insulation bottoms](#)

Rain gear

Keep an eye on the forecast before your hunt, and don't shy away from throwing a rain jacket and pants in your pack as a precaution. Rain gear can come in insulated or uninsulated options, but if you're prepared with the layers above you may only need an outer shell for rain protection. Even if temperatures are warm, a light rain can not only drench your clothing, but also the vegetation around you (and therefore your pants, boots and socks). We see rain gear as a “must-have” so you don't compromise your layering system and, therefore, your body's ability to thermoregulate.

[Shop rain gear](#)

Accessories to consider



Photo credit Gaga Heath

Hat / beanie

Pack a ball cap style hat to protect your face and eyes from sun during the day. Pack a beanie for cold mornings and evenings and as a way to stay warm when you stop throughout the day.

Gloves

Gloves are recommended on any hunt to protect your hands and keep them warm while glassing, setting up camp, or during cold days.

[Shop hats and gloves](#)

Boot gaiters

An often-forgotten garment, boot gaiters are a protective layer that run over your pants, from your knees to the top of your boots. Gaiters keep snow, rain and debris out of your boots and keep water from seeping into your boots.

Selecting the right footwear for a hunt

Footwear can make or break a hunt, and we recommend buying hunting boots well in advance of your hunt to break them in and understand how your foot responds to hiking in them. Boots come in varying levels of stiffness and hunters need to choose a stiffness based on preference and the terrain you'll be hunting. Flatter hunts or hunts with less physical activity can opt for a less stiff, more malleable boot. For long hunts or hunts in steep and rocky terrain, hunters should opt for a stiffer boot that offers more support of your foot.

[Read about the GOHUNT stiffness scale here](#)

Insulated vs. uninsulated boots

Whether you're at the altar or at full draw — you don't want to get cold feet. Jokes aside, this is an area that's important to get right ahead of time. Boots can range from uninsulated all the way to 1600+ grams of insulation — and more isn't always better. Having too much insulation during an early season or even an active midseason (October) hunt can have an adverse effect of overheating and causing your feet to sweat and blister.

If you're sitting in a deer stand or planning on being still for long periods of time in cold weather, consider a 1600 gram insulation boot... (continued next page)



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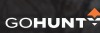
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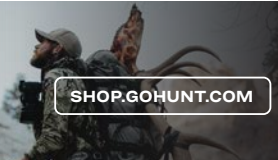


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Hunting Essentials: How To Pick The Right Gear For A Successful Hunt

(continued from page 9)

Leather vs. synthetic boots

Hunting boots can be finished in either leather or synthetic materials — both of which have pros and cons. Leather will generally be a more durable and long-lasting boot and can also give a more guaranteed waterproofing due to having fewer seams. Synthetic boots are typically lighter and more breathable, and can either be waterproof or not waterproof. Look for boots with a Gore-Tex (or similar) membrane that is both waterproof and breathable.

Socks

Don't overlook the benefit of a high-quality hunting sock. Like boots, socks come in a variety of materials and weights. Lots of western hunters opt for a merino sock like the Darn Tough 2011 Boot Midweight Hunting Sock that offers a blend of moisture-wicking properties and cushion to prevent blisters.

[Shop footwear](#)

Hunting maps

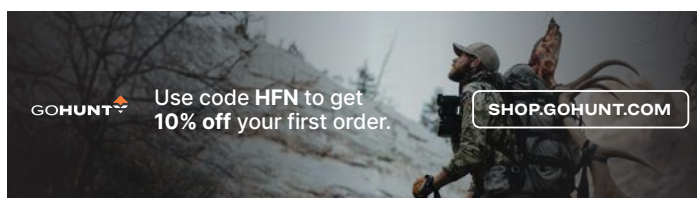


Using GOHUNT Maps in the field on a hunt. Photo credit Nate Nebel

Digital mapping has been one of the biggest technological advances in hunting in the past 10 years.

Smartphones now use a phone's built-in GPS to provide location, imagery and navigational tools anywhere in the world (even without cell service). The GOHUNT App is a hunting-specific app that provides satellite and topographic imagery, color-coded land ownership maps, waypoints, and a variety of other invaluable tools for hunters.

[Learn more about
GOHUNT Maps](#)



Hunting backpacks



Trail Kreitzer packing out a mule deer with a Mystery Ranch Metcalf 55 backpack. Photo credit Luke Dusenbury

Hunting packs are essential for carrying gear, supplies, and game meat, providing both organization and support while carrying heavy loads. Many hunting packs feature a robust frame that can separate from the bag, allowing for additional storage and the ability to carry meat securely and keep it tight to your body. This modular design enhances versatility, enabling hunters to adjust the pack according to their needs during the hunt.

[Shop backpacks](#)

Here are some items to keep in your pack at all times:

Game bags

A sturdy, reusable game bag set helps keep meat clean and dry at the surface, and allows everything to stay organized for the pack out.

[Shop game bags](#)

Knife

A knife and sharpener are important to keep in your pack at all times. Knives are used when breaking down game in the field, but also in a variety of other situations.

[Shop knives](#)

Water and food

Depending on the duration of your hunt, needs can vary. Day hunters can get away with water and a sack lunch while multi-day hunters need to consider water purification and a food list that will last multiple days.

[Shop food and nutrition](#)

Headlamp

It's better to have a headlamp and not need it, rather than need one and not have it. Nowadays, hunters can choose between a traditional battery-powered headlamp and a rechargeable headlamp. The main "pro" of a battery-powered headlamp is that if the headlamp dies, a backup set of batteries can be popped in and you're back on the trail.

However, rechargeable batteries have come a long way and offer strong runtimes and brighter lighting. If using a rechargeable headlamp, we recommend having a backup power bank and charging cord.

[Shop headlamps](#)

Fire starter

Every hunting pack should have a reliable fire starter in it in case of emergency. Bic lighters stored in a Ziplock bag are fine for most situations; however, in variable mountain conditions, consider something like Pyro Putty and an arc lighter to ensure you can start a fire when it's wet outside.

Weapon

This goes without saying — make sure your rifle, bow, muzzleloader or shotgun is with you if you plan on filling your tag. Before you go, consider how many arrows or bullets you need to pack as well as any cleaning or care supplies that will be helpful while afield.

Optic setups for hunting

Binoculars

Most hunters should opt to carry binoculars while in the field. Even inexpensive binoculars can give hunters a huge advantage for spotting game or identifying the quality of game you're seeing. Binoculars can range from less than \$100 to over \$3,000.

If you do not have a pair of hunting binoculars, we recommend starting with something like a 10x42 (10 = magnification power, 42 = diameter of objective lens in millimeters) binocular. [Learn more about everything there is to know about binoculars here.](#) As you increase in price, binoculars can have more magnification or a higher quality glass, which are clearer and perform better at dawn and dusk when animals are most likely to move. Additionally, some high-end binoculars also have a built-in rangefinder.

[Shop binoculars](#)

Rangefinder

Rangefinders are not required for every hunting application, but are very useful to gauge the distance of an animal and execute a proper shot. Bowhunters can rely on rangefinders to set the right pin and compensate for angle either from a treestand or if hunting in uneven terrain. A hunter using a rifle will see substantial bullet drop past 300 yards and you will see tremendous accuracy gains if you're able to accurately range an animal.

[Shop rangefinders](#)

(continued on next page)



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Hunting Essentials: How To Pick The Right Gear For A Successful Hunt

(continued from page 11)

Spotting scope

A spotting scope is also not required, but can be useful for spotting and analyzing game across canyons or at a distance. When choosing a spotting scope, consider size and weight if you'll be carrying it during mountain hunts. Spotting scopes can come with angled or straight eyepieces. [Read more about the considerations here.](#) Spotting scopes are paired with a tripod in order to make them stable.

[Shop spotting scopes](#)

Tripod

Tripods can serve a variety of purposes, but are most commonly used to stabilize spotting scopes and binoculars or to provide a solid rest while shooting. Tripods come in a variety of sizes. You need to consider whether you prefer to stand or sit while using a tripod. The height and stability of a tripod factor into the weight, so you need to consider what weight tripod you're willing to carry away from the truck.

[Shop tripods](#)

If you have questions about the glassing, optic setups, tripod, or further explanations, please feel free to contact Cody Nelson at optics@gohunt.com or give him a call at 702-847-8747.

Hunting accessories

These are some other items that should be considered when putting your gear list together for a hunt. Your hunting style, terrain and duration of the hunt should determine whether these items make it into your pack or not.

Satellite communication device

If you'll be hunting in an area that has minimal or no cell service, a satellite communication device can be a great option to share your location or to check in with a loved one. On multiple occasions, I have used a satellite device to recruit help packing an animal out — and I am glad to have it. I personally use the Zoleo Satellite Communicator, which uses bluetooth to pair to your phone and send messages through the Zoleo App.

Trekking poles

Don't knock trekking poles until you try them. Trekking poles help distribute weight more evenly, reducing strain on the legs and back, especially when carrying heavy packs. Additionally, they can improve overall endurance by providing additional support during long hikes and steep ascents, making it easier to navigate challenging landscapes. The GOHUNT Carbon Cork Trekking Poles are a great lightweight and sturdy option.

Binocular harness

Over the last decade, binocular harnesses have become a staple for most western hunters. These chest packs keep binoculars tight to your chest and available whenever you need them. They also typically have additional pockets to store calls and wind checkers, and can be accessorized to hold pistols, bear spray, rangefinders and other items.

[Shop bino harnesses](#)

Orange vest



Glassing for late-season elk in the GOHUNT Pumpkin Patch Vest. Photo credit Gaga Heath

Don't overlook regulations in your state as many require 400 square inches of blaze orange as a safety protocol. Ditch the gas station vest and grab a GOHUNT Pumpkin Patch Vest that has insulated pockets, a tree stand yoke and adjustable cinch straps. Or you can elect for the GOHUNT Vest Western for a trimmed down version.



Photo credit Nate Nebel

In conclusion

This is not meant to be an exhaustive packing list, but meant to outline the considerations when you're planning your next hunt. For more in-depth gear lists or to see what some of the GOHUNT staff is packing on our adventures, visit our gear lists page

[Gear lists page](#)

As tempting as it can be to pack for every situation, we encourage you to think critically about where you'll be hunting and what weather you're expecting and continue to refine your gear list as you spend more time afield.

September Tactic: Grunt A Buck

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

A few years ago in September Taylor Fitzpatrick traveled to the Milk River in Montana to bowhunt with our friend Luke Strommen. The then 19-year-old Taylor climbed into his tree stand super early one morning, about 3:30. The air felt great, 42 degrees cool, and the full moon hung in the sky like a big pie.

Taylor began seeing deer in the moon glow, moving back to their beds for the day. A 10-pointer that would score 155" walked beneath his stand and got him fired up. The sun came up hours later and he kept seeing deer. A buck with hard, fresh antlers cut across a corner of a distant alfalfa field. Taylor raised his call and floated some loud grunts.

"The buck looked up and walked to me on a string," Taylor said.

Taylor did what any good bowhunter would do—drilled the animal through the boiler room at 20 yards. The 130" buck ran back out into the alfalfa and tipped over dead. Here, the story gets interesting.

Taylor watched as another P&Y buck approached the dead 10-point, fuzzed up, pawed and roughed up the fallen animal, poked him in the belly and tried to flip him over!

Luke has a theory. Right after velvet-stripping time bucks feel a jolt of testosterone, and they get aggressive for a few days as they try to sort things out in the buck hierarchy (they've been buddies all summer but now begin to get antsy and less tolerant of each other). Taylor was hunting smack in the middle of this "sorting out" time. Luke figures the buck responded to those grunts and attacked the dead buck to show his dominance.



<https://youtu.be/nKHd7HA8PeI?si=sF-HEm8JrRVXZk9t>

The episode proves another thing: Carry a grunt call from September through January, and don't be afraid to use it any time, any day.

A few grunts will never spook a buck, and you never know when a buck will like what he hears and come closer to your stand.

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Photos courtesy Daiwa at <https://daiwa.us> and Traditions Media at <https://traditionsmedia.com>

Meticulous Minnow Bait

Daiwa <https://daiwa.us>
Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

Minnow baits are one of the more recent bait-styles trying to keep ahead of a fish's learning curve. Characteristics include baitfish silhouettes; mix of authentic and agitating patterns; and seductively nonchalant motion.

Fact is, though, fish – bass in particular – have seen this same old movie before. In fact, if you can imagine, some fish will completely turn tail on a run-of-the-mill minnow bait. Subsequently, to win back their interest, contemporary minnow bait design demands improved genuineness. And that's precisely what the Japanese lure architects achieved in the new Last Ace 45 and Last Ace 75 – subtle and anatomically accurate soft plastics that can be rigged in abundant ways.



LAST ACE 75 (SPARKLING WAKASAGI)



LAST ACE 45 (SPARKLING WAKASAGI)

Composition-wise, the Last Ace 45 and 75's saltless formula produces a durable lure that's supple enough to create lifelike action on a slow roll or fast retrieve. Diverse and detailed colorways enhance the lures attractiveness, while its pronounced 3D eyes provide realism and an easily identifiable target for bass. Its enhanced cosmetics are finished with accurate and textured fins.

Speaking of color, uniquely, the Last Ace 45 and 75 sport a naturalistic "slime coat" spray-coat with a clear overcoat. The combination yields a natural depth-of-field appearance that emulates real baitfish.

Last Ace 45

At only 1.8-inches, the petite Last Ace 45 resembles the juvenile baitfish often seen seasonally in clouds of fins and scales – baitfish like shiners, smelt, and shad. Moreover, it's sized like the darters and gobies that bass often vacuum off the bottom.

Panfish are on the menu, too. The Last Ace 45 is right-sized for keeper crappies, bream, and white bass.

Effective rigging techniques include weightless and nose hooked, dropshotting, swimming on a jighead, strolling, and hover as you would with forward-facing sonar (FFS).

Last Ace 75

The 3-inch Last Ace 75 appeals to adult fish of all stripes, including largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleyes, and even saltwater species.

Effective rigging techniques mimic the Last Ace 45, to include weightless and nose hooked, dropshotting, swimming on a jighead, strolling, and hover as you would with forward-facing sonar (FFS).



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Ever Green Last Ace 45 and 75 FEATURES and SPECIFICATIONS:

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- Freshwater and inshore applications
- Tracks straight with slow and fast retrieves
- Slow-sinking
- Pronounced 3D eyes
- Shaped and accurate fins
- Saltless, supple, and durable body composition
- Natural "slime coat" spray-coat with a clear overcoat

SIZE:

Last Ace 45 (1.7") and Last Ace 75 (3")

COLORS:

Trick Shad, Sparkling Wakasagi, Natural Shad, KO Ayu, Bait Fish, Reservoir Fry, and Iris

MSRP \$12.99 (6 Pack)

For Daiwa's latest color catalog and/or information on Daiwa dealers in your area, call Daiwa's Customer Service Department at 562-375-6800 or e-mail inquiries to: CSR@Daiwa.com. The URL for Daiwa's web site is daiwa.us



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Photos courtesy Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

Fall Glide Bait Walleyes

Northland® Fishing Tackle Pitchin' Puppet takes an aggressive stance, snap jiggin' up fall walleyes!

Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

It's an eatery out there. Any angler worth a salt knows that walleyes kick it in a higher gear come autumn. For one, water temperatures sink into their preferred range, from 70-ish degrees down to the mid 50's, which translates into increased activity. To that, there's the age-old belief that walleyes "fatten-up" for the looming winter months. Fact or fiction, what's proven autumn after autumn is that fall walleyes aren't bashful about striking bigger and sometimes faster moving fare.

The good news is that Northland Fishing Tackle makes that lure and dubs it the Pitchin' Puppet.

The Pitchin' Puppet features a lead frame with an over-molded resin exterior and fin, giving it a lifelike translucent baitfish appearance with exceptional durability. When jigged, snapped, or ripped, the Pitchin' Puppet darts and rolls to trigger strikes. A wide-gap rear hook – and absence of a front nose hook – make this lure perfect for darting across the bottom, and the split-ring connected treble hook keeps fish pinned all the way back to the boat.



Pitchin' Puppet (Green Perch)

A Master of Puppets

Lauded guide and fish whisperer, Brian "Bro" Brosdahl, marks Labor Day Weekend by laying a pre-rigged Pitchin' Puppet combo on the deck, which he'll feature through the end of October. He often opens with a Pitchin' Puppet, too, before ever getting near his baitwell of shiners.

"The Pitchin' Puppet is a fantastic search bait, covering a lot of water super-fast," said Bro. "They cast a long way with their aerodynamic dart shape, even cutting the wind. And when it hits the water, the bait dives fast to the bottom." He also says you can glide the Pitchin' Puppet on its way to the bottom by just sweeping the rod tip.

Once on the bottom – hard surfaces like gravel and rock – Bro gives it a couple rips to garner attention. Sometimes, that's all it takes, a willing walleye taking the initial offering. Otherwise, he simply hops it back to the boat, employing pops instead of powerful rips.

Bro also hails the lure's construction and superb finishes throughout the series. "There are so many color choices," said Bro. "You have match-the-hatch patterns like Green Perch and Silver Racecar way out to attention-grabbers like Sneeze and Purple Wonder." He went on to note the bait's strong and clear poly shell that protects those precious colors, as well as scarily sharp tail hook and belly treble hook.



Old School Puppetry

Bro has been fishing glide baits for walleyes since word spread after Kim "Chief" Papineau took 2nd place fishing heavy glide baits in open-water at a 2001 In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail (PMT) tournament on the Detroit River. Unable to keep his winning ice-bait tactic a secret given the bumper boats, Chief's walleye lure hack spread like wildfire, Ron and Al Lindner eventually taking the technique into a whole new realm.

"I had glide baits in my ice fishing box and started playing with them in open-water pretty early on," says Brosdahl. "They've put tons of fish in the boat for me and my clients over the years. However, the problem has always been that front nose hook, which tends to foul-hook as many fish as it catches, and frequently snags everything from rocks to wood to weeds. The original glide baits on the market were not designed for casting; they were designed for vertical jigging. Northland's Pitchin' Puppet solved all those issues."

Fellow Puppeteer

Mille Lacs Lake guide, Brad Hawthorne, helped prototype the Northland Pitchin' Puppet and has put countless hours on the odometer chasing marble eyes around the Big Pond (Mille Lacs).

"The technology is awesome," says Hawthorne. "The encasing—whatever they're calling it—is the most durable finish I've ever seen on a glide bait."



You might get a few scratches working it through the rocks, but get it wet, and it goes right back to normal," noted Hawthorne.

He says the bait is designed to be "ripped and ripped and ripped some more. It's a fast-thinking deal to get in front of fish."

The other thing he likes about the Pitchin' Puppet design is it eliminates having

cut off nose hooks from three-hook glide bait designs.

"You can catch fish on just about any glide bait on the market, but they lack a well-designed hooking system. That's what took us the longest with this design. We knew it needed a perfect rear hook, something with a wide gap to pierce meat and bone and keep fish pinned. Fact is, your glide bait standards were designed for ice, not casting or pitching. If everyone was being honest, they'd admit that one out of three walleyes are snagged on a traditional minnow-style glide bait. Not the case with the Pitchin' Puppet; fish inhale this lure."

For Hawthorne, he says working the Pitchin' Puppet is a "rinse and repeat kind of thing." "I like to set the bow-mount trolling motor to .8 to 1 mph and pitch the bait out 60 to 70 feet behind the boat and just sit, pop, and snap jig it," shared Hawthorne.

Hawthorne also likes the bait for running rocks. "Without the nose hook you don't get snagged nearly as often as with most glide bait designs. So, I've replaced all the glide baits in my boat with Pitchin' Puppets. It's not unheard of to fish four or five different bottom substrates on a given day, everything from rock, sand, to mud. Now I don't have to clip the front hook off to do my job and make things easier for clients. It comes right out of the package ready-to-fish."

Brilliant Forward-Facing Sonar Returns

As more and more anglers invest in forward-facing sonar to chase \$9.99/lb. fillets, it's worth mentioning that the Pitchin' Puppet has an incredible forward-facing sonar signature.

"The bait shows up like a beam of light on forward-facing sonar," said Hawthorne. "There's no mistaking that you're throwing a brand-new bait with a much-improved sonar return. It really lights up."

Pitchin' Puppet Features:

- Over-molded resin body and tail that's extremely durable
- Baitfish profile
- Wide-gap rear hook for better hooking percentages
- Cast and retrieve or vertically jig to create a darting action like a dying minnow
- 15 Colors
- SIZES: 2" (5/16 oz.), 2-3/8" (5/8 oz.), 2-3/4" (1 oz.)

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The Ghost Of Fishing's Future

Mad Scientist Tackle <https://madscientist.technology> and Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

When it comes to versatility for fishing situations and species, it's hard to beat lipless rattlebaits. From shallow to deep, the angler can control what the bait's doing and exactly how to fish it for maximum results. Largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, spotted bass, walleyes, pike, lake trout, wipers, stripers, and even inshore species—the rattlebait is the Swiss Army Knife of lures, catching about everything with fins, scales, and an appetite.

Meet the Mad Scientist Tackle Ghost Shad and elevate your rattlebait game.



GHOST SHAD (Green/Holographic Basecoat)

Besides its forage-matching shad profile, agitating action, and raucous rattle, the Ghost Shad features Mad Scientist Tackle's exclusive and advanced APEX Vision coatings, which include seven colors: red, blue, green, gold, pink, and natural for the highest possible visibility in the visible, UV and infrared light spectrums. Plus, holographic scale patterns help with the reflectivity and baitfish-mimicking to produce a rattlebait that summons bites unlike any that have come before it.

“From crankin’ green bass or smallies, pitching walleyes, to vertical jigging for lake trout, and more, the Ghost Shad is just a producer.

It's been used side by side with other rattlebaits and just plain outperforms thanks to its APEX Vision coating,” said Mad Scientist Tackle Sales Director and hardcore angler, Patrick Kalmerton.

“If want to cover water, it's hard to beat the Ghost Shad. It's a power fishing wonder. And the Ghost Shad not only looks good to fish in all water clarities – its built-in rattle chamber attracts them from afar, too. The visual and audible properties combine into something special.”



Kalmerton added: “With bass anglers, pink is popular, as are blue and green, which reflect like baitfish and young-of-the-year scales. We’ve had great results on bass with those colors. Plus, to match the hatch of fall-spawning cisco (tullibee), walleye and pike anglers have had extremely positive results on natural.”

Kalmerton concluded: “If you’re putting together that survival kit tackle box with baits that just produce fish, you’re going to want to include the Mad Scientist Tackle Ghost Shad.”

Ghost Shad FEATURES:

- Hyper-realistic design for relentless strikes
- Built-in rattle chamber for maximum attraction
- Versatile for all fishing techniques and environments
- Equipped with razor-sharp, high-carbon steel hooks
- Available in a variety of APEX Vision colors
- Built tough to handle the fiercest fights

MSRP: \$8.99

Purchase at <https://madscientist.technology>.

50 Bowhunting Deer Tips

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

As a rule, hang 3 to 5 tree stands for every 100 acres of timber you hunt. Spread those stands to cover major food sources and travel corridors, and to have options for different winds.

If you've got 100 acres but only 25 of those acres are conducive to getting to and from stands quietly and hidden from downwind, do your bowhunting in those 25 acres.

If you try to force your way into tough terrains or spots where the wind is hardly ever right, you'll blow out deer and ruin your chances.

Clip your release to the string, close your eyes, draw your bow and anchor. Open your eyes and you should be able to see a pin clearly through the peep without moving your bow or anchor point. If not, let down and adjust peep as needed.

Trouble seeing through your peep in low light? Try switching to a larger 1/4-inch peep, which lets in more light and increases your field of view.

To reduce torque and shoot better, hold your bow arm straight out, then bend it slightly to unlock the elbow. Tip your wrist slightly up. Relax your fingers around the bow's grip.

"Amazing how 2 doe decoys can be more convincing than one," says my friend Matt Cheever, a seasoned archer from Indiana. "One weekend last fall I set two decoys near a creek and saw deer all day both days. I shot a doe for the freezer."

Once you've chosen a tree for a stand, back up 50 to 70 yards, bend and look up from a deer's perspective to see which height and angle provide the best backdrop and cover in the tree.

I hang my stands 17 to 20 feet high. At that height, when a deer is broadside 20 to 35 yards away, you'll see plenty of lungs and have a good shooting angle.

"Over the years I've come to hang my tree stands higher and higher," says Nick Mundt of the Bone Collector crew. "I feel like the higher I get the better I am above a deer's line of sight. A high stand helps carry my scent over a buck that might come in on a bad wind."

Whitetail hunters heading West listen up. "On a mule deer rack, look for big fronts and deep backs," says Brian Beisher, Wyoming native who has guided bowhunters for decades. "Good fronts on a 4x4 buck will be 10 inches or deeper. Big backs will fork low, and the G-3 is generally longer than the G-4."



Author Mike Hanback. Photo courtesy Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

"I practice with my quiver on when still-hunting mule deer," says Nick Mundt. "Your arrows are with you and ready for a quick follow-up shot if needed."

"In a tree stand, I take the quiver off since a second shot at a whitetail is rarely an option," says Mundt. "No quiver means less bulk."

Once deer season opens, shoot one arrow tipped with a broadhead each day. You're lucky to get one shot at a buck. The mental benefits of one-shot practice will help you make your one shot count.

Shoot more on off days to stay sharp.

Always try to shoot at a whitetail that is relaxed and calm. An alert, fidgety doe or buck is twice as likely as a calm deer to drop and whirl, or "jump the string."

Biologist and bowhunter Grant Woods studied thousands of videos of bow shots and concluded that deer with their heads down drop more often than deer with heads up. "With its head down, a doe or buck can easily drop its front end, then throw its head up as it wheels and bolts," he says.

Old advice is still good advice: Aim at the lower third of a deer's vital zone. Deer drops, you get middle or high lungs. Deer does not drop, arrow pierces lower lungs and heart.

When a buck walks directly beneath your tree stand, draw. Most of the time the animal will turn right or left within 30 yards and give you a tight quartering-away shot or maybe even a broadside.

A 5-year study in Maryland found that mechanical broadheads were more accurate than fixed blades. Hunters using mechanicals killed 94.3% of the deer they shot at versus 89.4% of those shooting fixed blades. These were proficient archers who kept their shots close, average of 17.6 yards. **Lesson:** Regardless of broadhead choice, closer is better for whitetails.

(continued on page 29)



Photo courtesy TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>

Mastering Early-Season Elk Hunting: Strategies For Success

TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>

Early-season elk hunting has its own unique opportunities and challenges but can be one of the most rewarding hunts of the year.

Lots of hunters focus on chasing bugling bulls during the rut, which is an awesome experience. But hunting before the peak season can provide a less pressured environment and the chance to target elk before they move into more secluded areas. Here are a few tips for finding early-season success in the elk woods this fall.

Laying the Groundwork

Scouting is crucial. Start with e-scouting using tools like onX to analyze elevation, timber coverage, recent burns, and access points. Keep an eye out for areas that offer a mix of dense timber and open spaces. These are ideal habitats where you can locate elk by glassing them up.

Once you've found an area you like, focus on finding dark timber on north-facing slopes. Elk often bed in these areas during the day. Fresh burns are also great spots to check out, as the new vegetation growth is great browse for elk.

Early-Season Tactics: Hunting Wallows

One favorite early-season strategy is hunting near wallows. Wallows are muddy, wet spots where bulls coat themselves in mud and urine. It's sort of a pre-rut ritual meant to attract cows. These areas become active a few weeks before cows come into estrus, making late August and early September a prime time for wallow hunting.

Hunting a wallow lets you control the setup, yardage, and shot opportunity. The best times to hunt these areas is in the early morning and late evening when bulls are most active. Make sure to get set up with a favorable wind. Use the terrain to your advantage

and position yourself so the bull has to approach close enough for a shot. Sometimes it even helps to incorporate a little raking into your sit. Raking is basically mimicking the sound of a bull scraping his antlers against trees. During certain times in the early season, it can be incredibly effective in luring a bull into range.

Calling Strategies: Keep it Simple

Speaking of raking, when it comes to calling, keep your approach simple. Light location bugles followed by raking can often provoke a response from a nearby bull without giving away your position.

Knowing when and how to call is more important than the specific sounds you make. During the early season, reading elk behavior is key. Aggressive calling might work on a dominant bull, while a more reserved approach may be necessary for a bull that's less responsive. You've got to understand the bull if you want to coax him into feeling compelled to investigate.

Field Dressing and Meat Care

Field dressing shouldn't be overlooked when planning an early-season elk hunt. Often temps can be high, meaning getting the meat cooled quickly is paramount. Many elk hunters prefer the gutless method when they harvest an elk. It allows you to get the skin off quickly and remove the quarters without opening the body cavity. It can help cool the meat faster, reducing the risk of spoilage.

Make sure you also prepare your work area by clearing debris and organizing your tools. Elk are big animals and it's easy to get meat dirty or lose knives as you get to work. Once the elk is down, get the hide off as quickly as possible and start breaking down the animal, working methodically from one side to the other. If temps are high, consider cutting muscle groups around the bone to allow the meat to cool more effectively. There's a lot of heat stored in those hip joints especially.

Patience and Preparation Pay Off

If you're going to be successful in the early season, you'll need to plan carefully, while being patient and willing to adapt. For those willing to put in the work, this can be the best time to take that giant.

By focusing on thorough scouting, strategic wallow hunting, simple but effective calling, and careful field dressing and meat care, you can maximize your chances of success. The early season is here. It's time to get after it!

Happy hunting!

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How To Move An Elk: Strategies For The Pack Out

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

After harvesting an elk, walking up to an animal of that size can be intimidating, especially if you are a long way from the truck. They are truly big animals. Moving it from Point A to Point B is going to be a challenge. Plus, the challenge isn't just moving the animal – it's doing so in a way that gives you the highest yield of excellent wild game meat and keeping that meat in great condition. As we said in our previous article on meat care, gamey taste is often the result of preventable mistakes being made in the field.

Whether you're with friends or solo, it helps to have a game plan and some possible strategies in mind. When that animal is on the ground and the clock is ticking, it's easy to feel pressured. Early in the season, we might feel pressured by warm temperatures. Later in the season we might feel pressured by oncoming darkness. No matter the situation, be confident in your game plan. Slow down, be careful and do it right.

There's not one best strategy for packing out an elk. Every situation is going to be a little different. The distance from the road, the time of day, the weather and the terrain will all need to be considered.

Here are a few of our go-to strategies for moving an elk...

BONE IN OR BONE OUT?

When at all possible, we like to leave meat on the bone. It offers a few distinct advantages. Bone-in meat is simply easier to deal with. The bone provides structure, making it easier to load and carry. But bone-in meat is also better for meat care. Boneless meat will have more surface area. This requires you to do more trimming at home and may result in a bit lower yield. Additionally, leaving meat on the bone through the rigor mortis process is beneficial.

This usually takes 24 to 48 hours. Removing the bones prior to rigor mortis will cause muscle contraction known as 'shortening'. This can lead to tougher meat. If the meat is allowed to go through rigor and then relax on the bone, it minimizes shortening, helping keep the meat more tender. And finally, boneless meat will be the first to spoil. Boneless meat tends to form a dense mass in a game bag. There are a few steps you can take to help cool boneless meat – but it's something to be aware of.

Of course there are situations when boning out meat makes perfect sense. When you're a long ways from the trailhead, every pound matters. This is especially true when you're hunting solo. In these circumstances, the pros of boneless meat outweigh the cons – literally.

Since boned out meat spoils faster than bone-in meat, there are a few things you should do to help slow down that process. First, use game bags that are designed for boneless meat. The Caribou Gear Carnivore pack was designed exactly for that purpose. The long, tube-like shape of these bags helps keep the loose meat from balling up at the bottom. This promotes cooling and it also makes it easier to carry on your back. Also, periodically try and work the meat around in the bags to help cool meat that's at the center of the mass. The faster you can cool that core temperature, the more time you have to pack it out and the better it will taste.

PROTECT THE MEAT

When moving an elk any distance, it's critical to keep the meat protected. You're going through all this effort to pack out a large animal; you want to keep as much as you can in great condition for the table.

There are three major factors that go into protecting wild game meat:

Keep it Clean

The first and perhaps the most obvious part of protecting the meat is to keep it clean. As you're removing the hide, try and keep hair off the meat as much as possible. Do your best to keep the meat out of pooling blood.

(continued on page 38)

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Tips For Using FWP's Block Management Program

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

The Block Management Program is a tremendous benefit for hunters and for Montana's economy. Across the state, block management helps to provide hunters access to nearly 7 million acres of private, state and federal lands. Hunting and outdoor recreation also contributes billions annually to the state's economy.

Many hunters have come to rely on block management, but FWP staff still encounter misconceptions about how it works. With that in mind, the agency offers some suggestions that may help hunters better utilize the program.

Access not about big bucks

Bea Sturtz, block management administrative assistant in Region 7, said the most common misconception is the type of information that she can provide to hunters.

"They assume that because we're with Fish, Wildlife & Parks, we're going to know where the big ones [bucks] are, but it has nothing to do with that. We're just here to help people find access to private lands, and I think that gets lost," she said.

As long as hunters have realistic expectations about what the program can do and are willing to put in the time, Sturtz is confident that they can have a very satisfying experience.

Hunters choose where to go

Some hunters say they will go wherever the staff sends them, Sturtz said, "but it's up to the hunter to decide where they're going to hunt because it's such a big area."

The staff may ask people where they want to base their hunt, how far they are willing to travel and how much they want to walk. And they do call landowners throughout the season, in part to direct hunters toward better opportunities and to disperse people.

Big parcels not always better

Hunters tend to want large parcels of land to hunt, but sometimes landowners limit access within those block management areas. Also, hunters may be overlooking opportunities elsewhere. "They need to know not to avoid those smaller areas, because sometimes they can be a hidden gem," Sturtz said.

Permission isn't automatic

Access programs can vary from state to state, and Sturtz cautions hunters that access here is not automatic. "You still have to make that step to get permission," she said. FWP provides hunters with contact information for landowners, and then it's up to hunters to make arrangements. There are two ways to gain permission to hunt: Type 1 BMAs allow a hunter to sign in at a box on site, and Type 2 BMAs require permission from the landowner or a representative.

Even then, access is not a guarantee if the landowner is booked or has certain stipulations.

Don't wait 'til the last minute to ask

Hunters are encouraged to line up permission as far in advance as possible. Farmers and ranchers don't always appreciate receiving last-minute calls asking for permission to hunt. These are busy people, and their down time is important. Calling the night before or the morning of your hunt or calling at hours that may not be convenient may not make landowners as receptive as if you had called well in advance and showed preparation. Ideally, you should ask about the best time to contact them for future communications.

If you do end up having to contact someone on short notice, be respectful if they can't accommodate you; this is a heavily utilized program.

Have a backup plan

Sturtz recommends always having a backup plan because a lot of BMAs book up pretty quickly, particularly when game populations are faring well in those areas. It never hurts to get a contact number for a second-choice area, just in case the first choice doesn't pan out.

Remember common courtesy

Hunters are asked not to book more than one BMA per day. Sturtz also reminds them to call and cancel a reservation if they fill their tag or change plans, so the landowner doesn't have to turn other people away. Another tip is to call only at the time designated by the landowner, and to remember time zone differences.

It's about relationships

Landowners tell staff that they appreciate hunters who don't take access for granted, are grateful for the opportunity and take the time to build a relationship with them, even if it's mostly by phone. Some think they get a better group of hunters through the program because visitors have to call first.

In some cases, landowners and hunters form bonds that last for years, Sturtz said. "The program has been around a long time now. You're looking at 30 years of history that they may have established with a family."

Do your homework

Block management offers hunters a lot of opportunities, "but it's still just one tool for access, and hunters have to do their homework," Sturtz said.

"You can still use public land, and you can still knock on a door," she added.

Keep an eye on weather conditions

In late summer and early fall, fire danger can be a top concern. Be aware that BMAs in areas with very dry conditions and high fire danger may choose to delay hunting access until conditions improve. Those that still allow access do so with the expectation that hunters use the utmost caution with campfires and avoid driving off road. There may be fire restrictions in place in some counties that ban fires and other activities.

To see if there are restrictions in place in an area you plan to hunt, visit:
fwp.mt.gov/news/current-closures-restrictions.

Similarly, if there have been heavy rains, be mindful of leaving ruts and stay on designated roads or trails.

Get a Block Management Access Guide

One thing hunters can do to prepare is order the Block Management Access Guide in advance, which is available in print and online in mid-August. The guide lists participating landowners across the state, along with what types of game their land typically supports. Sturtz said the Hunt Planner on FWP's website <https://fwp.mt.gov> is also a good tool. The Hunt Planner combines updated maps with hunting regulations and statistics. Maps are available online in mid-August but are removed in January.

Don't Overlook Fall Bear Hunting

(continued from page 7)

When they find an area with a lot of these, they may stay for days or weeks on end. If you are solely hunting bears or adding on this tag, keep an eye out as you are hiking for these food sources and bear scat. If you find a berry-covered hillside with bear scat, it is probably a great area to glass that evening and mornings to come. After all, it does not make sense to overlook a side hill with no berries or nuts if there are areas in the basin with these food sources. A bear's day revolves nearly entirely around food.

When to Hunt Them Though bears can be active any time of day, they do not usually find themselves out in the sun during midday. During this time, they primarily will forage in dense timber where they are safe from hunting pressure and the hot sun.

If there is high hunting pressure in the area, bears may turn primarily nocturnal, which means the best time to see them out and about will be at dusk and dawn. Depending on the elevation, snowfall, temperature and food supply, you may see bears still out and about into late November. Still, typically all bears are in hibernation by Dec. 1 — if not earlier. The bears that live at higher elevations will hibernate first, followed by the lower elevation.

The spring might be the most popular time to hunt black bears; however, the fall is a great time to chase them as well. Some states only have a fall season which means that it is the only time to hunt bears. Before you buy a tag, do some research on GOHUNT, do some e-scouting to find hard-to-reach trailless basins and then look for active food sources. Dusk and dawn are the best times of day to spot bears though it is possible to catch them in the open, moving from place to place at any time. Bears can be creatures of habit, especially if there is a good food source, so find the food and you will find the bears this fall.

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Photo credit Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

Should You Bowhunt Whitetails In The Morning In September?

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

For those of you who are getting ready to bowhunt whitetails in September...

In my travels over many years, I have run into quite a few bowhunters who do not and will not hunt the mornings during an archery season that opens in September. Their thinking is actually pretty sound.

First, it's less risky and easiest to hang and access tree stands near crop fields and plots in the afternoons. In morning darkness, it's tough to sneak back to stands near a bedding area without bumping deer that are already home and tucked in after a night of feeding. Why risk spooking a buck in the predawn when your odds are better of seeing him and getting a shot in the afternoon?

Most of the anti-morning folks I know are landowners and/or well-off folks with plenty of private ground to hunt and plenty of free time to hunt it. They are good, dedicated bowhunters who have the luxury to go most every day during a 3-month season. They figure, "Why push it when I can wait weeks or a month for cooler weather and the rut when bucks will move better?"

Well, I don't have that kind of flexibility, and most of you don't either. We hunt when we can, and we need to maximize our time in a stand.

Hunting the mornings and afternoons will literally double our chances of success.

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How Deer Move in Early Fall

In a study in Oklahoma, researchers fitted bucks with GPS collars and monitored their movements.

The scientists found that in late summer and into early fall before the onset of the pre-rut, bucks stick to home ranges of only 300 to 400 acres on average. Inside there, the deer exhibit a complex maze of travel, taking many short-distance trips and frequently circling, backtracking and changing directions as they move to and from feeding areas and back to bed in nearby woods and thickets.

Use that science to open up a good morning option. Drive to your hunting property one day soon around lunchtime, when deer are inactive and bedded. Pull up your spot on an app like onX, study the lay of the land, pinpoint fields and plots where deer will likely come to feed, and then retreat to bedding areas back in the nearby cover.

Spray your boots and clothes heavily with scent killer, and pack a portable tree stand on your back. Get the wind in your favor and sneak slowly and carefully toward a travel corridor between where you suspect deer feed and bed.

Remember the science: A buck is likely living within 400 acres or so of there, and moving short, choppy distances each day.

Look closely for fresh rubs, tracks and overturned leaves and dirt.

Upon spotting the first cluster of hot sign, stop right there! If you probe any deeper now, you're almost sure to bump deer.

Start looking around on the fringe of this core area for a terrain feature (ditch, water crossing, etc.) on which to set a tree stand. Hang a portable stand as quietly as you can. If you find a straight tree and can use a climber, all the better.

Get your stand set, drop a pin and get the heck out of there. As you sneak out, note and flag the easiest and quietest path to return to the stand in the dark.

Next morning, if the wind is right, slip in the back door to your stand at least an hour before dawn.

Hunting on the fringe of a buck's core area, you have at least a fighting chance of him (or another buck) wandering within bow range as he circles or backtracks enroute to his bedding area.

While other folks are sleeping in and waiting for the afternoon hunt, you might just score big at sunup.

Boone And Crockett Club Launches Heritage Of The Hunt Podcast

Boone And Crockett Club <https://www.boone-crockett.org>

The Boone and Crockett Club announced that it has launched a podcast to provide a new look at the organization's history and shine a spotlight on fair chase hunting, conservation policy, outdoor education, and much more. The Boone and Crockett Club's Heritage of the Hunt podcast's Episode 1 that was recently released takes an inside look at the 32nd Big Game Awards featuring an interview with B&C director of big game records Kyle Lehr, B&C's Records of North American Big Game committee chair Mike Opitz, and chairman of the 32nd Awards Judges Panel Pat McKenzie. Episode 2 was released on Thursday July 24th and spotlights Into High Country's Jason Matzinger just two days before his movie Selective makes its national television premiere on the Sportsman Channel. The Heritage of the Hunt podcast is available on all podcast platforms.

"The Boone and Crockett Club has been at the center of hunting and wildlife conservation since we were founded by Theodore Roosevelt 138 years ago. We have so many stories about our members and issues we've been involved with in the past, but we also have so much we are actively involved in that we want to let people know about," said Club CEO Tony

Schoonen who is featured in Episode 0 that provides an overview of the Club's history and outlines the vision for the podcast. "We are excited to launch a podcast that offers us a new platform to share our story with an even broader audience."

Designed in a shorter format—most episodes will be 30 to 45 minutes long—the Boone and Crockett Club's Heritage of the Hunt podcast will include broad content relevant to hunters and those passionate about the great outdoors. The primary podcast will focus on interviews with members, industry leaders, scientists, policy makers, and more who will shine a light on a wide range of topics. In addition, subchannels of the podcast will include Roosevelt Ranch Radio featuring the Club's outdoor education and conservation efforts at the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch near Dupuyer, Montana. Other areas will focus on voices of fair chase, beyond the score and big game records stories, member spotlights, impact series readings, and much more. Produced by Trout Stream Studios, the podcast will feature high quality audio and video with in studio, remote, and "roving" interviews.

"The Boone and Crockett Club' Heritage of the Hunt podcast will be a fantastic opportunity for us to enhance our content," Schoonen concluded. "We hope that people will share episodes with their friends and family and help us spread our conservation and fair chase ethics messaging far and wide."

[Listen Now](#)

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Kellogg Man Convicted Of Felony For Illegally Killing And Wasting A Trophy Bull Moose...

Idaho Department Of Fish & Game <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Quick thinking and responsible action by hunters helped lead to a felony conviction in a serious wildlife crime in North Idaho.

Thanks to a tip submitted through the Citizens Against Poaching hotline, a Kellogg man has been convicted of a felony for the unlawful killing, possession and wasting of a bull moose near Wolf Lodge Saddle in Kootenai County.



Photo courtesy IDFG <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

On Nov. 6, 2024, Raymond A. Black illegally shot and killed a trophy-class bull moose with a high-powered rifle while it stood in the middle of a U.S. Forest Service road. Black did not have a moose tag.

Moose are a once-in-a-lifetime species in Idaho, meaning hunters who are successful in drawing a tag and harvesting a moose are only allowed to do so once in their lifetime.

After killing the moose, Black attempted to load the carcass into his vehicle but became stuck in the snow. He hiked out to get help, where he was picked up by two hunters.

The hunters found his story suspicious and noted inconsistencies in what he told them. Importantly, they also recorded Black's license plate and quickly submitted the information through the CAP hotline.

After Black returned to his vehicle and got it unstuck, he fled—leaving the entire moose to waste.

Through the license plate information provided by the witnesses and follow-up investigation, Idaho Fish and Game conservation officers executed a search warrant at Black's residence and seized the rifle used in the crime along with other evidence.

Black pleaded guilty to a felony charge of unlawful killing, possession or wasting of wildlife. In Idaho, the unlawful killing of wildlife with a single or combined reimbursable damage amount exceeding \$1,000 is classified as a felony. Bull moose are classified as trophy species under Idaho code and carry a \$10,000 reimbursable damage assessment.

On July 8, 2025, Black was sentenced in Kootenai County District Court to:

\$1,500.00 in fines

\$10,000.00 in restitution

\$250.00 in meat processing fees

\$245.50 in court costs

Six months incarceration in county jail

Three years of supervised probation as a condition of a suspended prison sentence.

Lifetime revocation of hunting and trapping privileges in Idaho.

Through the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact, the lifetime revocation will apply in all participating member states, meaning Black will lose hunting and trapping privileges in all US states, except Hawaii.

Fish and Game extends its appreciation to the Kootenai County Prosecutor's Office for its efforts in successfully prosecuting the case.

Fish and Game is especially grateful to the individuals who reported the crime. Their prompt and responsible actions played a crucial role in holding the violator accountable and helped in protecting Idaho's treasured wildlife resources.

Anyone who observes or has information about a wildlife crime is encouraged to call the Citizens Against Poaching hotline at 1-800-632-5999, or report online.

Cash rewards are available for credible tips that lead to charges in a wildlife crime.

Information can also be reported directly to the Panhandle Regional Office at (208) 769-1414.

50 Bowhunting Deer Tips

(continued from page 19)

If you use a containment rest like the Whisker Biscuit, focus on solid shooting form and follow through. With this type rest, there is long contact with an arrow from shaft to fletching. Any breakdown in shooting form or follow through can affect arrow flight and accuracy.

"I want a broadhead that flies like my field points," says Nick Mundt. "For me, that's the G5 Deadmeat. This head shoots almost exactly like my field points out to 100 yards."

"When practicing, think of different scenarios, such as shooting through a gap in trees or over a limb," says Mundt. "Visualizing and practicing tough shots will help when a buck comes in."

A Tennessee study found that whitetail bucks rub heavy in 2 terrains—valleys and secondary points, or fingers of timber that drop off ridges. The more brush and saplings in these funnels, the more rubs you'll find there.

One afternoon in Illinois: Warm and wind 20 mph. "I wasn't planning on going," says bowhunter Gary Sulcer, "but I went anyhow." He'd been in his stand minutes when a buck walked into arrow range. The main-frame 8-pointer scored 160.

Lesson: You only have so many days to hunt, go when you can, no matter the conditions.

A good pre-rut stand is downwind of a well-trampled doe trail. Bucks troll nose-down on such a trail, trying to sniff out the first hot gals.

Good pre-rut trick: Set two wicks doused with tarsal scent on either side of your stand or blind. A rowdy buck might smell what he thinks is an intruder and come in.

"We've analyzed tens of thousands of cam images, and our data clearly show one terrain where mature bucks move best: the intersection of two or more drainages and/or fingers of timber deep in the woods."—Whitetail biologist Mickey Hellickson

In Indiana, bowhunter Brent Ireland got one cam picture of a double-drop giant. He hung a stand on the ridge near his camera and killed the 199-inch beast two days later. **Lesson:** Get one image of a monster on his feet in daylight, move in and hunt him.

Blowing a sequence of 10 to 12 grunts on a tube is most realistic.

Position a tree stand or blind so the sun rises or sets behind you. You'll not only see better, but have an extra 10 minutes of shooting light at dawn or dusk. (continued on page 31)

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Photos credit Nathan Slovatzki courtesy GOHUNT.com

Quick And Easy Way To Make Delicious Elk Tacos

By Nathan Slovatzki

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Everyone loves tacos. They are good in the middle of winter, the heat of summer and even on a hunting trip in the backcountry. They're not only extremely tasty, but tacos are one of the quickest ways to cook your hard earned wild game meat. The elk can be cooked in a multitude of different ways, but I like to keep it simple when using elk meat in tacos due to the amount of other amazing ingredients. That being said, it really isn't necessary to make a marinade and soak your meat overnight. Hope you enjoy this recipe!

Minutes to prepare: ~ 15

Minutes to cook: ~ 15

Number of servings: ~ 4

Ingredients:

Elk taco ingredients

1 tablespoon Extra Virgin Olive Oil
To taste Kosher salt
To taste Freshly ground black pepper
Shredded Head of lettuce
Small block Grated cheese
1 package Corn tortillas

Guacamole ingredients

3 Ripe avocados
1/2 Serrano pepper
1 tablespoon White onion
3 tablespoons Cilantro
1/2 Lime
1/2 Lemon
To taste Kosher salt

Salsa ingredients

2 Ripe tomatoes
1/2 Serrano pepper
1 tablespoon White onion
3 tablespoons Cilantro
1/2 Lime
To taste Kosher salt

Directions:

Step 1

Make the guacamole

Pit avocados and remove the skin.

Next place the avocado into a bowl and mash with a potato masher. Leave the avocado a little chunky.

Next mince the serrano pepper and white onion. Then chop the cilantro. After the mincing, place all of the remaining ingredients from the guacamole section into a bowl and mix well.

Step 2

Make the salsa

Cut the tomatoes into small cubes and use some of the extra diced serrano pepper, white onion and cilantro and place them in a bowl.

Add some of the lime or lemon juice and mix well.

Step 3

Cut the elk meat into medium sized dices. Roughly 1/2" thick or smaller.

Step 4

Now heat the Extra Virgin Olive Oil in a pan on high heat until the oil is smoking hot. Then season the elk meat.

Add the meat and cook for a couple minutes until the meat is well browned. Do NOT overcook the meat. The elk meat should be medium rare to medium when done. The key here is hot and fast.

While the meat is cooking, heat the corn tortillas in a dry pan or directly over a burner flame. Keep the tortillas on the burner until they are a little charred and hot.

Next, shred the lettuce.

Step 6

Finally, place cooked elk meat on a tortilla.



Add a small amount of guacamole, salsa, cheese and shredded lettuce in each tortilla.

Quick and easy elk tacos
Serve and enjoy!

50 Bowhunting Deer Tips

(continued from page 29)

Mule deer strategy #1: At sunup, glass a buck group as it moves off a feed field and works toward a bedding area. Watch them for 30 minutes or 3 hours, however long it takes for them to bed for the day on a hillside or in a copse of trees.

Mule deer strategy #2: Take off and stalk, quickly at first. Use draws and hills for cover, but sneak where you can peek over and keep an eye on the bucks. For the last 200 yards, look for a depression, maybe only a foot deep, and get in it and crawl. Swaying grass or sage above the ditch should give you enough cover to inch in tight for a bowshot.

A North Carolina State study found that during a full moon whitetails don't move much in the morning, but they are active from midday on. Focus on the afternoons.

"Break line" where pines/cedars and hardwoods come together. Bucks walk, browse, rub and scrape on the lines.

Oak ridge 100 yards off a crop field. Deer eat acorns and browse in ridge thickets morning and midday. Especially good afternoon spot, as bucks love to stage on a ridge.

A narrow creek or river crossing funnels many of the deer that move through your woodlot.

Brushy and/or tree-lined fencerow. Deer cling to the structure when traveling from fields to woods.

Screw broadheads into the 4 or arrows you'll tote in your quiver. Shoot every one into a block target. Two will fly a little smoother than the rest. Mark those shafts 1 and 2 with a Sharpie and hunt with one of them.

Don't let thermals blow up a mule deer stalk. Vertical currents are strongest on east- and south-facing slopes on a sunny day. Sneak the upper reaches of a hillside morning through midday so that warm, rising air will carry your scent up and away from deer.

Texas researchers tracked a deer herd and watched them take 241,000 bites from 137 different plants! **Takeaway:** Whitetails are voracious eaters, don't focus all your efforts on one or two major food sources. Hidden natural forbs and browse tucked in the woods are killer spots to shoot a big buck.

Check your bow string and serving. If it's nicked, frayed or stretched, replace it.

"String stretch" can impact your draw length, peep position and anchoring.

Pros at Hoyt archery say to pack extra nocks, d-loop material, Allen wrenches, lighter, super-glue and tape in an emergency repair kit.

Always carry an extra release. If you drop your primary release from a tree stand, sit tight and switch to your backup.

An old-timer taught me this: Stuff a pocket with gravel. After climbing into a tree stand in an oak forest, pull out stones and drop them every few minutes. Sounds like fresh acorns plopping down, music to a deer's ears. Flick gravels in all directions for added effect.

The two days after a cold front rolls through your area and drops the temperature 25 to 35 degrees are prime. The sudden chill will kick does and bucks to move and feed before it warms back up.

Ridges and bottoms where you find the most acorns now are where you'll find the most scrapes in mid-October.

A farmer cuts his corn in late September or October... The sudden change in habitat will jar deer and force them to move widely for a few days as they seek out new core areas in nearby woodlots. Hang stands in those woods and you'll see deer.

Find a cluster of big, shiny rubs on a ridge or in a creek bottom within 100 yards of a crop field and you've found a corner of a big deer's core area. Hang a stand and hunt in the vicinity into late October.

Finally, it's the moment of truth. Bury a sight pin on a tiny patch of hair on a buck's vitals. Bury it there to keep your head down and in the shot.

Release the arrow and watch the fletching disappear into the spot. Keep your bow arm straight and follow through. This is where you are most apt to mess up!

Fight the urge to drop your bow arm and jerk your head to see if you got him. Focus on following through and you'll get him.



Photos courtesy Jay Anglin and Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

Not Just Another Gear Maintenance Story

By Jay Anglin Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

There has never been a time when waterfowl hunters had gear options this good. Waterfowl specific gear is available in every category you can think of, and while some items are nothing more than a modern twist of the tried-and-true, others are truly innovative. Duck and goose decoys for the most part fall into the latter category.

Today's manufacturing techniques blend the most resilient materials and ultra-realistic paint schemes with species-specific, varied body profiles. The days of pushing the entire catalog of duck and goose decoys through two or three molds are over as contemporary waterfowl hunters expect the best when hunting increasingly wary waterfowl.

Given the logistics and settings required to successfully hunt ducks and geese, it's safe to say no other group of hunters is as tough on gear as waterfowl hunters. Decades of real time testing done by hunters who give their gear a thorough whuppin' is indispensable for product development.

While modern decoys are worth every penny, these critical waterfowl hunting tools still face an extremely punishing existence.

Like anything else, a little preventative care and maintenance, as well as occasional repairs, will keep decoys in A-team condition.

Most hunters can relate to the annual end of season rite of announcing to themselves they'll deal with decoy issues before next season. However, all too often, decoys end up shoved in the shed or trailer never to see the light of day until a day or two before said season opener. Are you that guy? I know all too often I am that guy, and pretty much all my hunting buddies are, too – some of the time anyway. One thing is certain, though, decoys aren't going to fix themselves and summertime presents a great opportunity to address decoy issues. So, let's get to work!

Decoy Lines and Anchors

Without question, decoy lines and anchors are the most problematic element of your floater spread.

It really doesn't matter what your preference is style-wise, it's a good bet plenty of your decoys could use attention in this regard. Lines vary from crummy poly braids to fat plastic. Whether you prefer "Texas rigs" or conventional lines that require winding around the keel or body of the decoy, some options are better than others for a given task, so choose wisely. It's common to be faced with anchor lines that are too short or anchors that are too light, so think versatility when rigging decoys.



While Texas rigs are the least versatile setup, they are the easiest to fix and require less maintenance than other styles. Nonetheless, each line should be checked annually for problems such as slipping crimps, damaged swivels and clasps, and of course line length and integrity. Fix and replace as needed. Also, if you have a hodgepodge of different styles (they vary greatly) do yourself a favor – pick your favorite configuration and swap them out for the "oddballs". This will make setup and pickup easier, and storage a lot easier, too.

Conventional lines are very prone to rot and break over time, and failure often occurs in the field. Chasing decoys floating away because the line snapped while setting the "greatest decoy spread ever" is not ideal. Inspect and test knots and line strength (...pull hard!), and change lines as needed every couple of seasons. If they are severely tangled, cut them off and start over.

Anchor style is a very debatable topic, and which anchors you use may be a matter of whatever was handed down to you or what your mentor preferred, but that doesn't necessarily assure they are perfect for your needs. Some anchors are better than others for different applications. Do your decoys end up dragging two pounds of weeds up every time? Do they slide across the hard bottom because they have no grip? Do they stay put on the decoy well when stowed? If you haven't already, consider which anchor style is best suited to your needs and switch your go-to spread to them.



Snow goose decoys are especially susceptible to soiling, and while real snow geese do get dirty, decoy spreads have much better visibility and appeal to high-flying birds when decoys are clean and pop at a distance. A pressure washer can be used to clean decoys, but it's risky as excessive water pressure may blow off paint or flocking.

Start with a soft brush and warm, soapy water and get to work. This is one of the more laborious decoy maintenance tasks, but honestly it should be standard operating procedure to give decoys thorough cleanup prior to opening day and continue to clean as necessary during the season for best results.

Repairing Full-Bodies and Floaters

Readily available, cheap RTV silicone is perfect for patching shot holes, and if you're having trouble tracking down leaks, drill a hole in the top of the decoy near the tail and add water. Check for leaks and use a magic marker to note the location and extent, then flip the decoy over and drain the water out until it's completely empty. A good adhesive such as windshield urethane or 3M 5200 does a great job of filling in major gashes or dealing with structural issues, such as a dislocated keel or broken head. Don't forget to patch any holes you drilled. Do yourself a favor and wear nitrile gloves for all of this, too, and keep some mineral spirits handy to clean up messes.

Full body decoys are often crushed under the weight of dozens of decoys and it's a bit of a miracle they hold up as well as they do. Besides dented bodies, stakes and bases often end up getting bent. Fortunately, it's easy to pop bodies back into shape and tune stakes and bases for the correct posture, which not only looks more realistic, but also promotes proper decoy motion as designed.



Inspect/Paint

Once the decoys are clean, assess any parts that need repairing, including keels, heads, feet and stake bungees (retune stakes as needed). Heads can be glued (or even screwed and sealed) with the same black windshield urethane or 3M 5200 mentioned above. Flocked heads are notorious for becoming ragged and a quick midseason freshen-up for Canada goose decoys is to hit the flocked areas with UV resistant flat or even satin black spray paint (be sure to mask off adjacent non-black areas).

This is by no means a proper fix, but it works in a pinch, and while re-flocking always seems like a legit option, a quick "spray up" and reassignment to the B-team to make room for brand new, factory flocked decoys is by far and away the best option!

Newer decoys are molded with flexible materials that won't crack or split and are marked flawlessly with ultrarealistic paint, but nothing is immune from excessive abuse. Use species color-matched UV resistant decoy paints to touch up worn areas and chips, then lightly coat the entire decoy with UV resistant matte clear spray. This will not only protect paint, but also reinvigorate decoys with some extra pop without excessive shine.

Fixing decoys may seem like a major task, but it doesn't take a lot of time or money to keep your investment in tip top shape. And, to be perfectly honest, it's kinda fun to bring banged-up decoys back to life!



Makeover Rehab

Full-bodies and floaters alike endure a notoriously challenging existence. Full-body decoys are thrown around, slammed and stacked into trailers and floaters are shellacked with mud and duckweed then slammed into the bottom of a boat or a blind, and both styles of decoys are regularly shot at close range when birds land in the decoys. Heads can break and paint often become filthy and chipped.

Get Organized With Hunting Gear Checklists

(continued from page 6)

Rifle Season Base Camp Hunt

Packing List

Shared Group Gear

- ☐ Seek Outside Redcliff Tent
- ☐ Large Titanium Wood Stove
- ☐ Camp Kitchen Bin
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Trash bags
- ☐ Lantern
- ☐ Camp Stove
- ☐ Propane
- ☐ Camp Table
- ☐ Camp Tarp
- ☐ Water Jug
- ☐ Cooler with Frozen Jugs
- ☐ Gravity Water Filter
- ☐ Camp Chairs

Clothes

- ☐ Merino Boxers
- ☐ Merino Socks
- ☐ Mid-Weight Long Undies
- ☐ Thermal Long Underwear
- ☐ Lightweight shirt
- ☐ Mid-Weight shirt
- ☐ Hunting Pants (x2)
- ☐ Mid-Weight Jacket
- ☐ Down Vest
- ☐ Down Jacket
- ☐ Rain Pants
- ☐ Rain Jacket
- ☐ Orange Beanie
- ☐ Orange Hat
- ☐ Orange Vest
- ☐ Neck gaiter
- ☐ Light Merino Gloves
- ☐ Mid-Weight Gloves
- ☐ Cold Weather Gloves
- ☐ Uninsulated boots
- ☐ Insulated Boots
- ☐ Pac Boots
- ☐ Gaiters
- ☐ Muck Boots (for Camp)
- ☐ Extra Camp Clothes
- ☐ Sleeping Clothes

Personal Gear

- ☐ Sleeping Bag
- ☐ Sleeping Pad
- ☐ Pillow
- ☐ Cot
- ☐ Binoculars
- ☐ Rangefinder
- ☐ Multi Tool
- ☐ Daypack
- ☐ Windicator
- ☐ Headlamp
- ☐ Backup headlamp
- ☐ Toilet Paper
- ☐ Camera
- ☐ Solar Panel
- ☐ Battery Pack
- ☐ Toiletries
- ☐ Wet wipes
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Watch

In The Daypack

- ☐ Kill Kit
- ☐ First Aid/Emergency Kit
- ☐ Hunter's Tarp
- ☐ Paracord
- ☐ Trekking Poles
- ☐ Tripod
- ☐ Tripod Heads
- ☐ Bino Adapter
- ☐ Backpacking Stove
- ☐ Stove Fuel
- ☐ Instant Coffee
- ☐ Nalgene Water Bottles
- ☐ Lighters
- ☐ InReach
- ☐ Toilet Paper

Rifle Gear

- ☐ Rifle
- ☐ Ammo
- ☐ Cleaning Kit

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Nutrition For Hunters

(continued from page 4)

Carbohydrates



Carbohydrates in the backcountry. Photo credit Brady Miller

Carbohydrates essentially come in two forms (simple and complex) and are responsible for nutrient absorption (getting nutrients from your stomach into your bloodstream). Simple carbs are those that absorb quickly like sugars and flour. Complex carbs digest slower and usually contain fiber. Simple carbs cause insulin levels to spike and cause your body to go into storage mode: holding onto fats and converting them to fat stores for use later. Complex carbs help insulin levels remain steady and help you go longer without feeling hungry. You should always try to minimize simple carb intake with two exceptions: (1) immediately after a workout or other physical activity. The spike in insulin allows you to absorb and use protein and other nutrients so simple carbs immediately after physical exertion, when coupled with vitamins and protein, are a good thing; and (2) fruit. Fruit is loaded with simple carbs because of the natural sugars, but it is also loaded with vitamins and nutrients that sugars help you to absorb. You should get plenty of complex carbs as these are good for digestive health and efficient absorption of nutrients.

Good Sources for Carbohydrates Include:

- Oatmeal
- Multi-grain breads
- Granola
- Vegetables
- Brown rice
- Quinoa

Proteins

Protein is the building block of muscle fiber. Without protein, your muscles cannot rebuild. Hunters are engaging in activity that requires muscle strength and endurance (carrying a pack, climbing steep hills and mountains, etc.), which means that hunters need more protein than those who participate in other outdoor activities. However, you cannot only eat protein and nothing else. Without carbs, you cannot absorb protein.

Without fat, the protein will not get to your muscles. Protein must be consumed in conjunction with fats and carbs in order to maximize recovery and muscle rebuilding. Protein digests quickly so if you have a protein rich meal that does not also consist of fats and carbs, you will be hungry relatively soon.

Foods That Are Rich in Protein Include:

- Meats
- Nuts: peanuts, almonds, cashews, etc.
- Mushrooms
- Greek yogurt
- Milk
- Beans

A Note about Vitamins

Vitamins are crucial for every aspect of your health and it is difficult to get the full array of vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients in just your food alone. A multivitamin is a great addition to your diet to make sure that you are filling in all the nutritional gaps. You must understand, however, that you cannot eat like garbage, take a multivitamin and think that is all you need to be nutritionally balanced. Multivitamins are supplemental to a proper diet, not a replacement for it.

Nutritional Formulas

Now that we have a basic understanding of some of the fundamental elements of nutrition, here is some more technical information. First, it is important to understand how many calories are in each gram of protein, carbohydrate and fat. Here is how each one breaks down:

Nutrient	Calories
Protein	4 calories per gram
Carbohydrates	4 calories per gram
Fats	9 calories per gram

For someone who is active, the proper ratio of proteins, carbs and fats that are consumed on a daily basis should be determined based on the following formula: 1 gm protein/lb of body weight; 2 gms carbs/lb of body weight; and 0.2 gms fat/lb of body weight.

Here is a real life example: I weigh 170 lbs. Based on the above formula, I should be consuming 170g of protein, 340g of carbs and 34g of fat daily. That means that I should be taking in roughly 2,346 calories per day. Yet, when activity increases or decreases, my caloric intake should also increase or decrease accordingly.

Calories per Gram

For hunters, calorie per gram is an essential formula that you must know. This formula tells you how many calories (fuel) are in each gram (weight) that you are consuming. Why is this so important? If you are packing your food in your hunting pack, weight is one of the most important factors you can consider. If your food has a low calorie to gram ratio (low fuel, high weight), your pack will be needlessly heavy because you will have to bring more food to get the right amount of calories.

Caloric Intake While Hunting



Photo credit Brady Miller

When you are hunting, you are also burning a ton of calories. Sheep hunters can expect to burn anywhere from 8,000 to 11,000 calories per day! Western elk and deer hunters can expect to burn between 6,000 to 9,000 calories (or more) per day. To be blunt, there is no way you can keep up with your eating. You need to eat foods that are high in carbs and fats while also having some protein so that your caloric intake is high, your food sticks with you longer and your body is getting the nutrients it needs. A great rule of thumb is to bring food that provides at least 100 calories per ounce of weight.

Some Great Snacks to Have Handy While Hunting Are Those That Are Both High Fat and High Carb Like:

- Trail mix
- Jerky - either venison or beef (not a lot of carbs, but good fats and some protein)
- Pro Bars
- Builder Protein bars
- Reese's peanut butter cups
- Snickers
- Granola

Hydration



Photo credit Brady Miller

No discussion of nutrition would be complete without talking about hydration. Water is the absolute most important thing you can put into your body. Without being properly hydrated, your other nutrition efforts are in vain. Also, without proper hydration, mental clarity, focus, proper organ function and memory all start to deteriorate.

Many people get themselves into trouble in the backcountry because they let their hydration slip and then they get disoriented, confused and lost. You should be drinking 64 oz of water at a minimum every day and that number should go up at least another 50% while you are in the backcountry due to the increased exertion and time outside.

Water may be heavy, but it will also save your life. When it comes to hydration, water is essential, but some other nutrients can aid in hydrating and recovering faster. Amino acids, sodium and potassium are all lost during perspiration.

Replenishing these along with water will improve recovery (I like to use Wilderness Athlete's Hydrate and Recovery formula as it was formulated specifically for those in the outdoors who need to replenish hydration levels quickly). Try to avoid the excess amounts of sugar found in many commercial sports drinks as they improve taste but serve no functional benefit beyond what is needed to absorb nutrients.

Focus on the Basics

It is hard to cover everything you should know about nutrition in one article. If you follow the information in this article, you will be well on your way to performing better, recovering faster and succeeding more. While nutrition and hydration are not as flashy as other forms of training and preparation, they make up the cornerstone on which everything else that we do is built. Eat right, train hard, drink water and hunt hard.

A vertical advertisement for GOHUNT. At the top is the GOHUNT logo with an orange diamond icon. Below it is a photo of a hunter in camouflage gear, wearing a hat and carrying a large backpack, standing next to a large antler trophy. Text on the right side of the photo reads "FIELD TESTED BY HUNTERS FOR HUNTERS". At the bottom, there is a call to action: "Use code HFN to get 10% off your first order." followed by a button that says "SHOP.GOHUNT.COM". At the very bottom, in small text, it says "Exclusions apply on select brands and discontinued items."



Photo credit Zach Lazzari and Ryan McSparran courtesy Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

How To Move An Elk: Strategies For The Pack Out

(continued from page 22)

Any meat that's soaked in blood is at a higher risk of spoilage. And of course keep any other bodily fluids off the meat. As you remove each quarter, place it as quickly as you can into a clean game bag and lay it on a clean surface like the Hunter's Tarp while you continue working.

Cool it Down

Next, find ways to cool the meat quickly. This looks different in every situation, depending on the landscape and the weather.

At the very least, prop the quarters up so that they are leaning together like a tipi. This is better than laying flat on the ground, as air can circulate around them.

Alternatively, you can lay them over logs. If possible, use branches or sticks to create a lattice so that air can flow under the meat. Or, if there are nearby branches, tie a piece of paracord around the knee joint and hang the quarters, for convenience we pre make paracord lashings. No matter which method you use, keep the meat in the shade. If necessary, hang a tarp to help shade the meat.

Keep it Dry

Finally, protecting the meat means keeping it dry. Wet game bags won't breathe properly and will prevent the meat from forming a dry glaze on the outside, which is ideal. Wet meat is also a breeding ground for bacteria. To assist in retarding bacteria growth and keeping insects off the meat use game bag spray. The best possible scenario for your hard-earned wild game is to keep it clean, cool and dry. If you're working in the snow, lay a Hunters Tarp on the ground to keep the meat from getting wet. If you need to hang the meat overnight or for any extended period of time, suspend the tarp over the meat to protect it from the sun, rain and snow.

MOVE IT AWAY FROM THE KILL SITE BEARS - BIRDS AND COYOTES

If you'll be making multiple trips to pack out the meat, we'd recommend first shuttling the meat away from the kill site. Scavengers will soon arrive at the gut pile and unused portions of the carcass.

If the edible portions of meat are hanging at least hundred yards away in game bags, there's less chance that an animal will bother with them.

Moving the meat to an alternative spot provides a couple of other advantages as well. It allows you to pick a strategic location that is cool and shady. This buys you more time to get the job done. Plus, it moves the whole load one step closer to your vehicle.

MAKING UP LOADS

When it's time to shoulder that first load back to the truck, how do you decide how you're going to split everything up? There's no right or wrong way to do it. The two elk hindquarters could be two loads in themselves. Then, a front quarter and backstraps could be taken together while the final front shoulder could be paired with the antlers.

There are many different ways you can slice it. Your decision may depend on your own physical abilities, the distance and the terrain.

Remember this, however: it's not worth risking an injury at this point in your hunt. Better to keep the loads manageable than to overdo it and hurt yourself or trash your legs on the first trip. Particularly in steep or nasty terrain – limiting each load to a reasonable weight may help keep your legs in better shape, even if it takes another round trip or two.

MAKE SHUTTLE TRIPS

When there's a long distance between you and the trailhead, one strategy you might consider is to shuttle the meat in shorter bursts, rather than making one long trip to the truck and another long round trip back.

For example, if you're four miles from the road, take a load about two miles and find a good spot to hang it. Then, go back for the other loads. Continue running these shuttles until you're finished.

Breaking the pack out into short trips doesn't change the overall distance. But it gives you more frequent breaks. This aids recovery and helps prevent burning out your legs.

While you're making those two-mile walks back to the meat cache with an empty pack, take advantage of this recovery time to eat a snack and drink plenty of water. Especially when you're at altitude, staying fueled and hydrated is a key to keeping your muscles happy.

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