

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING

OCTOBER 2025

NEWS



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Photos courtesy Joel Nelson, Tom Huynh and Northland Fishing Tackle
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Tungsten Jigs & Forward Facing Sonar

By Joel Nelson

Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

Each year or two, new baits and fish-catching concepts are introduced to anglers everywhere. Most are riffs on older, existing baits, or a quick wrinkle on a well-known technique. While “there is nothing new under the sun” could be a quote called into play here, the tungsten spin on jighead material is more than just a recycled lure design. More appropriately, the qualities and characteristics of tungsten itself are finding new praise for their use in jighead design because of what they bring to the table.

With any research, you’ll learn that tungsten is a much denser metal than lead. That gives anglers a much larger weight-to-size ratio, enabling them to present a reduced-profile jig that’s the same weight as lead in comparison. That density also transmits feeling via the line, through the rod, and back to an angler with great sensitivity, offering anglers who value that feel above all else a distinct advantage.

Simply said, they offer anglers more information, faster fall rate, and a more natural looking offering.

Professional Advice

Increasingly, these angler observations are making their way to the tournament weigh-in table as well, with some of the first adoption of tungsten happening in tourney circles first. Enter Tom Huynh, Northland Tackle Pro, hailing from Moorhead, MN and owner of some serious hardware from recent tournament successes. Tom fishes the MWT and AIM tournament series with his partner Nate Wolske, who for the last two years have been reigning AIM MN state champions, team of the year, and even AIM national champs. That’s about as successful as it gets in a short amount of time, especially in walleye tournaments with so many talented anglers.

Huynh says, “I started in bass fishing, and the walleye tournaments are somewhat new to me.” Huynh and partner are catching on quickly, utilizing techniques often seen in bass circles. “We throw a lot of bass plastics to walleyes. While every bass in the system has seen these a hundred times, we’re finding that the walleyes haven’t,” says Tom. Huynh fishes pretty aggressively for walleyes then, just as many bass anglers who pepper the bank, making cast after cast. “We’re finding that many of these walleyes aren’t just aggressive, but they’re curious, swimming pretty good distance just to check something out,” says Huynh.

A Tungsten Approach

For Huynh, tungsten hasn’t become a full replacement for lead by any means, but increasingly, he’s finding more and more applications for tungsten jigs. “I don’t see myself using as much lead anymore because of all the advantages of tungsten,” says Tom. “Profile can mean everything, and my goal is to present a bait to the fish with the least amount of hardware possible.



That’s possible now with a jig that’s appropriately heavy but not bulky,” says Huynh. “The jig is just a vehicle to get my bait where it needs to be.”

There’s more to love for Huynh than just the profile advantages. “I really love that speed too,” says Tom. “For me, if I’m looking to fish fast, I remember testing 1/8 oz. Northland Tungsten that had the same fall rate as an 1/4 oz. ballhead lead jig.” Most people don’t realize that with the Northland tungsten, fall rate is increased via the jighead material, but also the design. Huynh says, “The Northland tungsten is pill-shaped, so it fishes even more quickly for its size than even other tungsten. I can fish quick, or if I want a slower fall rate, I can just drop down a size to reduce my profile even more.”

(continued on page 15)

2025 Fall Mack Days on Flathead Lake

Sponsored by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

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

More Entries per angler=Higher Payout for that angler

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



Thursday-September 4th to Sunday-November 2nd

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Applications are free and available at:

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Walmart-Polson

Sportsman's Warehouse-Missoula

FWP-Missoula and Kalispell

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Lost In The Backcountry?

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

You may have heard a story about a hunter or hiker who went out into backcountry and never came back. It's scary, but true: every year, people die, become severely injured or simply disappear on backcountry hunts. Even the most experienced backcountry hunters can get lost, and when that happens, you have to know what to do. I spend about 100 days in the backcountry every year and have been in some treacherous situations. Below are 15 tactics that have been helpful to me on my backcountry hunts.

Prepare for the Worst

No one ever plans to get lost. Anticipate the unexpected. This includes bringing the right gear, advance planning your route, packing a wireless device to communicate with the civilized world and even leaving your footprints behind.

Paper Can save You



Photo credit Brady Miller GOHUNT.com

Let a friend or family member know where you intend to go on your hunt and give them a paper map with your intended route highlighted. Also leave a copy of this map in your vehicle when you park. If you do get lost, rescuers can break into your vehicle and look for clues about where you are. Take a paper map yourself. Unlike a GPS unit, paper doesn't run out of power or depend

on batteries. Also bring some blank paper with you on a backcountry hunt to leave notes for potential rescuers if you do get lost.

Overshare Location Information

Hunters are known for being secretive about their location. But keep your family in the loop. If your plans change, let someone know. Even a text or voicemail with updated location information about your hunt can later save your life. Satellite messengers and personal locator beacons (PLBs) will also aid potential rescue efforts.

Know How to Use a Compass

Basic navigation skills can get you out of a sticky situation. Be able to read a topo map and use a compass. A GPS may fail or run out of batteries, but an old-school magnetic compass will keep going no matter what.

Bring along Survival Necessities

Along with hunt essentials like a first-aid kit, water, fire-starters and warm layers, bring along some paper, a pencil or pen, a small flashlight and emergency food (like energy bars). Also pack a space blanket, it is a lightweight way to ensure you can stay warm throughout a chilly night.

Make Boot Prints for Trackers

If you're going deep into backcountry or plan to be gone over 10 days, it may be worth it to create a copy of your boot treads to help a search and rescue team if you get lost. Step on a piece of medium weight tin foil to make a clear impression of your boots; this works best on a carpeted area. BeFoundAlive.com recommends leaving a copy of your prints with two different responsible individuals (they can go with your paper map and route information); we'd say to leave one in your vehicle too to cover all the bases.

You Are Lost. Now What?

Sometimes hunters get so focused on a buck they're tracking that they stop paying attention to their surroundings. Other times they assume that since they're hunting with a buddy or a group they don't need to worry about getting lost. Getting lost can happen to even the most experienced hunter and most times it catches you unawares.

Touch a Tree

Or a rock, or anything stable. You need a moment to breathe and calm down. Count to 10 and drink some water. Panicking will only make things worse.

Get Your Bearings

Figure out which way is north and you might be able to find a landmark you noticed earlier on your hunt. Use a compass for a quick orientation; if you don't have your standard compass on you, most GPS units have one built in. Other ways to find north: orient yourself by the direction of the sunset or by the stars. You can also find north by looking at the moss on the side of a tree — it only grows on the north side.

Admit to Being Lost as Soon as Possible

The sooner you call for help the better. Hunters who continue wandering on for hours in denial about being

lost just make an eventual rescue attempt more complicated. We say if you can't figure out where you are after trying to get your bearings for an hour, it's time to call in some help.

Follow the Stop Protocol

Developed by the Emergency Response Institute of Olympia, Washington, S-T-O-P stands for Stop, Think, Observe and Plan.

Stop: Touch that tree or rock, and then take stock of your surroundings.

Think: Use a map, look for landmarks. Think back to last place you were certain of your location. If you're in the snow, can you retrace your tracks? Don't move yet.

Observe: Use all your senses and take stock of what you have in your pack and pockets.

Plan: Now it's time to figure out your plan. If you're with another hunter, talk through all possibilities together before moving. If alone, try talking out loud as a way to sort through your thoughts. Be cautious, ensure your immediate safety, and then figure out protection, rescue, water and food (in that order).

Get up to Get down

If there are multiple hours before sunset, sometimes it's worth it to try and find a road or trail. These are usually downhill. First climb up high on a ridge, rock or hill to see if an overview of the area allows you to recognize anything. You might be able to see a way out. If you do decide to try walking downhill, leave a marker for anyone who may come looking for you.

A piece of paper with directions stuck on a tree or visible and weighed down with a rock is perfect.

What to Do While Waiting for Rescue

You've sent an SOS through your satellite device. Now stay right where you are and use the following to help out your rescue team:

Stay Put and Stay Warm

While waiting, make sure to cover yourself to stay warm. The early stages of hypothermia affect your brain and judgment, so don't move even if you get chilled and think that sounds like a good idea. Getting even more lost now helps nothing.

Avoid Camping by Water

Find a water source by looking for deciduous trees like aspens. If you must spend the night, sleep away from rushing water. The sound will likely mute the voice of any rescuers calling for you.

Get on a Ridge

Stay up high and you will be visible to aircraft. Camp on a ridge, not in a basin, since it will be easier to see you. You'll also be able to signal anyone that happens to be flying by.

Signal for Visibility

Most states require you to wear blaze orange when on a rifle hunt. If you are lost, attach your blaze orange vest, shirt, etc. to your pack to be visible. You could also attach it up high like a flag, but don't take any risks climbing trees or scaling a sheer rock face.



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Wild Game Processing Part 1: Equipment & Getting Started

By Ryan McSparran

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

There's no better way to enjoy the meat from a wild game harvest than to process it yourself. Processing wild game at home gives you ultimate flexibility in how you use that meat and it saves a great deal of cost. Plus there's the satisfaction in knowing that you saw the entire process through from field to table.

When you get home from a hunt, staring at a cooler full of big game quarters and parts can seem intimidating. At this point in the process, it probably doesn't look very appetizing. The temptation to offload this chore to a processor is understandable. However, it's much easier than you think! Once you get started, you might be surprised how simple it is to clean, cut and package it.

In this first part in our wild game processing series, we'll cover the basics for getting started – how to prepare, how much time to budget for processing an animal, and the recommended equipment and supplies for getting started...

GOOD RESULTS BEGIN IN THE FIELD

Here at Caribou Gear, we're passionate about bringing home the best possible wild game meat. That effort begins as soon as an animal is on the ground. If something tastes gamey, don't blame the deer. We've heard it all. "They eat too much sage," and a variety of other excuses. Age can certainly affect an animal's tenderness. But if the meat is gamey or has a bad flavor, something went wrong between harvest and freezer.

We've already covered the subject of meat care in the field, so we won't repeat it all here.

See this previous article for some tips.

Just keep in mind that the road to quality table fare begins immediately upon harvest.

Here are the main points to remember: get the hide off immediately, keep it clean and use quality breathable game bags, allow air to circulate, get the core temperature down as soon as possible, and then keep it dry and cool until you can process it.

We sometimes hear folks say that they don't use game bags because they leave the hide on. Sure, the hide keeps the meat very clean. But it also insulates the meat, even in cold weather. Then you'll be processing clean but crappy meat. So what's the point? Get that hide off and get the meat in game bags. Keep it dry and let it cool with plenty of air circulation. Do that, and what comes next will be much more enjoyable.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES IT TAKE?

There's no doubt that processing a big game animal can be a bit time consuming. When you're already pressing your luck with time off work to go on a hunt, it's understandable that dropping your meat off at a processor might seem like an easy option. But whenever it's possible, schedule an extra day or two at the end of your hunt to take care of the meat.

The time it will take you to process an animal depends on a few things. First, it depends on the size of the animal. An antelope or small whitetail doe might only take a few hours. Cutting and packaging a large bull elk can easily span a couple of days.

Second, it depends on how much help you have. When processing an elk, it sure helps to have a friend or two alongside you. This will make the process go much faster. While one person cleans and breaks down the quarters, another person can be wrapping and labeling steaks and roasts, while a third person could be running the grinder.

Time Saving Tip: One trick I'll use to save time, particularly when I'm working by myself, is to set aside all the meat that's destined for the grinder. Cube it into grinder-sized chunks and then freezer-wrap or vacuum seal it into roughly 5-pound packages. I'll put these packages in the freezer and save them for later. Then during the off-season when I have more time, I'll get them out of the freezer and make batches of burger or sausage. If you're short on time, the grinding can easily wait until later.

Finally, how long it takes to process an animal will depend on your equipment. A high quality meat grinder that can do upwards of five pounds per minute, sharp knives and a few other tools can help speed up the process. Which brings us to the next point...

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

In order to process your own meat at home, there are a few "must-have" items and then a few items that are helpful but not necessary. We'd recommend that you begin with only the essential items so that you can invest in high quality equipment. Then, it's easy to add those nice-to-have items later on.

Knives & Cutting Board

The first and perhaps most important thing you can buy is high quality knives and a big cutting board. This filet and deboning set from Knives of Alaska is our go-to set of blades for breaking down big game.



Then, get yourself a nice big cutting board. Your spouse or roommates probably wouldn't appreciate you cutting with sharp knives right on the kitchen counter. A cutting board that's around 16"x 20" will do for just about any task.

Clean Cutting Tip: One way to make sure you end up with great tasting wild game is to put only clean meat on your cutting board. Before you drop that big hindquarter on your cutting board, first rinse the surface of the meat with a solution of cold water and vinegar and then pat it dry. If your meat is hanging in a garage or somewhere you don't mind getting the floor messy, you can do it right there. Otherwise, you can do it in a very clean kitchen sink. Just take a bowl of cold water and a little distilled white vinegar and use a clean rag to wipe down the surface of the meat. Remove hair, dirt, grass or anything else that's stuck on. The water-vinegar solution is a naturally anti-bacterial and it will clean the surface without leaving any taste. Once the surface of the meat is clean, you can drop it on the cutting board and get to work.

Working Surface

The next thing you'll need is a big enough surface. If you have enough counter space at home, a kitchen counter works just fine. Just bring in one quarter at a time from the garage, cooler, or wherever the meat is stored.

If you don't have enough working space in the kitchen, it's easy enough to set up a table in the garage or wherever you have space. Wherever you decide to work, just make sure you have a plan to thoroughly clean up afterwards. Otherwise your spouse may not fully appreciate you having brought home the bacon.

Meat Lugs

The next thing that we'd consider a must-have item is a set of heavy-duty plastic tubs or meat lugs. As you're working through each piece of meat on the cutting board, you need a place to put it. I like having at least two clean tubs in front of me while I'm working. Having three tubs is nice. Trimmed steaks and roasts go into one. And all the trim and burger meat goes into the other. When I finish each quarter of the animal, I then pause to wrap or vacuum seal the finished products before moving on to the next quarter.

Freezer Paper, Etc.

The last things you'll absolutely need are some freezer paper, tape to seal it and a sharpie to label it. With a great knife, a cutting board, a few meat tubs and these items, you can break down any big game animal on your own.

(continued on page 36)



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How To Choose Your First Riflescope For Hunting

Vortex Optics www.vortexoptics.com

New hunters face a slew of big gear decisions before they even hit the field, and choosing the best riflescope can be one of the most confusing. From settling on the right magnification to deciding on a reticle, the options seem endless. (Need help figuring out which riflescope reticle to use for hunting? This blog is for you <https://vortexoptics.com/blog/whats-the-best-riflescope-reticle-for-hunting.html>. For more on riflescope magnifications, check out this blog <https://vortexoptics.com/blog/what-riflescope-magnification-should-you-get.html>.)

Lucky for you, with a good idea of what you want to hunt and where, choosing a riflescope can be simple. Let's get started. (This is a brief overview of some of our hunting riflescope lines, and it's aimed at new hunters. If you already have some idea about what riflescope you need, or you want to jump right into riflescope recommendations, try our Optics Finder Tool <https://opticsfinder.vortexoptics.com/preprod/categories>.)



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When you've chosen a riflescope, remember that you'll also need rings to mount it to your rifle. We highly recommend buying the best rings you can afford, and it's important to budget for rings when looking at riflescopes. We offer a comprehensive line of rings perfect for your hunt, and your budget. If you need help choosing rings, check out this blog <https://vortexoptics.com/blog/what-rings-and-mounts-do-i-need.html>. And, if you need help mounting your riflescope, we've got you covered.



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My biggest buck to date, a 204" mule deer that I took on a late-season hunt. Photo credit Brady Miller GOHUNT.com

How To Find Mule Deer Bucks During The November Rut: 8 Tactics For Success

By Brady Miller

Originally published at GOHUNT.GOHUNT.com

Eight tips for a successful mule deer rut hunt. As November rolls in, it's prime time for hunting mule deer during the rut. There are a ton of different tactics for hunting the rut/late season, but here are eight of the ones that can exponentially increase your success.

1. Get away from the crowds

I feel it's best to find a way to get away from the crowds, so avoid easy-to-access spots where people will hunt out of their trucks or ATVs.

Barriers of entry are huge for this. If there is a trailhead and surrounding the trailhead is a bunch of terrain that is harder to hike in, most people are probably going to avoid that area and hike further in along the trail. But you can use this to your advantage and possibly hunt some closer areas that are not fun to get into.

It's no secret that many hunters will be out during the rut, so finding ways to avoid hunting pressure is key. You don't need to trek deep into the backcountry per se, but avoid heavily trafficked areas. Many hunters stick close to roads, so pushing further into areas others may overlook increases your chances of finding mature bucks. Also, if you have the ability to camp away from roads with a tipi and lightweight tent stove, that can greatly put you in a position to take a mature buck.

Use other hunters to your advantage—observe where they're glassing and hunt from different angles to avoid direct competition.

2. Find the does, and you'll find the bucks

Love is in the air in the mule deer world during November in most western states. So if you find the does, eventually, bucks will show up. You could sit on doe groups and wait, or another great strategy is to run around and keep checking out all the doe groups you can find so you have backup plans.

(continued on page 34)

Hunt Safe With These 10 Survival Tips When Hunting Big Game

Idaho Dept. Fish And Game
<https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Hunters can take precautions and prepare for an unexpected situation in the woods.

Every hunting season, hunters get lost in the woods, and while most escape no worse than tired, chilled, and hungry, the hazards of being lost in Idaho's woods shouldn't be underestimated.

Hunters can take precautions and prepare for unexpected situations in the woods.

Know the area you're hunting

Always be conscious of your surroundings, prominent points, river or creek drainages, and occasionally turn around and look behind you so you will remember what it looks like when you're coming back. If you're on a trail, don't hesitate to put a temporary marker at intersections. Things can look different on your return—especially if you return in the dark.

Don't rely solely on electronics

Devices like GPS, cell phones, and two-way radios are handy, but dead batteries and other malfunctions render them useless. A map and compass are less likely to fail, but you also have to know how to use them.

Tell someone your plans and set a check-in time

Often hunters are out longer than expected, especially when they are pursuing big game animals far from a road. You may want to set an absolute deadline and have someone who can alert the authorities if you haven't returned, or contacted someone by that time. Same goes for your hunting partner. Hunters often get separated, so set up a rendezvous time and place and decide in advance when a third party will seek help if you or your partners do not return in time.

Watch for extreme weather changes

You're more likely to get lost or turned around in poor visibility when it's raining, foggy, or snowing, which are also conditions when it's potentially more hazardous to be lost in the woods. Cold, wet weather can mean the difference between an uncomfortable situation and a life-threatening one.

Remember even on clear days temperatures can change dramatically. A warm, sunny afternoon can quickly drop to subfreezing after dark, and daily temperature swings of 30 to 40 degrees are fairly common during fall.

Dress for, or carry clothes, for the worst weather you're likely to encounter

It's also common to quickly go from warm and sunny to raining or snowing. Dressing in layers is a good

way to account for weather changes, and wearing a daypack means you can stash clothes when they're not in use and keep them handy when you need them.

Here's more about properly dressing for hunting season.

<https://idfg.idaho.gov/press/hunting-doesnt-just-happen-mountainsit-starts-your-closet>

Avoid cotton clothing, which is comfortable when dry, but provides no warmth when wet. Modern, synthetic fabrics will insulate—even when damp or wet—and will typically dry faster when they get wet. They are more comfortable in nearly all conditions than cotton.

Wool is also better than cotton, and modern merino wool is itch-free and comfortable in a wide range of temperatures.

Be prepared to build a fire

Whether it's matches, a lighter, or other device, carry a fire starter that's weatherproof; it's good to have a backup. Know how to start a fire in all weather conditions, but remember cold weather doesn't end fire season, so never leave a fire that's not completely extinguished.

Bring a flash light or headlamp and extra batteries

They're valuable for navigating in early mornings or after dark and keep you from getting lost, as well as just being handy for a variety of purposes.

If you get lost, warmth, shelter and water should be your priorities

You can go days without food, but staying warm and hydrated are critical to your survival. You're not going to starve if you're out longer than anticipated, but it's never a bad idea to carry extra food with you. Commercial survival kits provide most of the essentials, but many are overkill, so don't carry more than you will likely need.

Think about exactly what you would want for an extended stay in the woods and keep those items with you at all times. If you get lost, admit it to yourself and prepare to spend the night out. Build a fire for warmth and set up shelter. Wandering around will make it harder for search and rescue personnel to find you. It also fuels your anxiety, preventing you from thinking clearly and making good decisions.

Don't forget your vehicle and ATV

Have your vehicle ready for the backcountry and prepared for minor breakdowns, such as flat tires or dead batteries. A separate survival kit for your vehicle is a good idea.

Keep a dry set of clothes in your vehicle

This isn't necessarily a survival matter, but being soggy and wet can range from uncomfortable to miserable. Changing into warm, dry clothes for the drive back to home or to camp is a big bonus for a small amount of effort.



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

Former Catch-And-Release State Record Holder Gets Dethroned.... By His Wife

Idaho Dept. Fish And Game
<https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Homedale angler Brandi Holt's 44-inch Flathead catfish edges out her husband's prior record by two inches.

Friendly competition among outdoorsy couples can come in many ways, shapes, and forms—who shot the biggest buck last year; who limited out first on doves; who cooked the better camp meal; and last but not least, who caught the bigger fish.

Recently, one couple—the Holts—got to experience this firsthand.

Couples who fish together stay together, I like to say. But on Aug. 2, that theory got put to the test. Brandi and Jared Holt of Homedale were hucking bait out into the Snake River late that night when Brandi's rod tip suddenly bowed towards the water.

As soon as she started cranking on the reel, she felt the unmistakable feeling of a large river monster fighting on the end of the line.

Brandi managed to haul the giant flathead catfish aboard the boat where her husband Jared anxiously rolled out the tape measure.

You see, since Sept. 20, 2020, Jared Holt had held the catch-and-release state record for the same exact species Brandi was now putting next to the tape. You can see photos and read about Jared Holt's 42-inch long flathead catfish here: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/blog/2020/09/homedale-anglers-sets-new-catch-and-release-catfish-record>.

But the angling gods were smiling upon Brandi that night as the tape measure—stretched nose to tail—read 44 inches.

Brandi Holt's flathead catfish now stands as the official catch-and-release state record, dethroning her husband's 42-inch cat.

"I was hesitant to even submit the record," Holt said.

"My husband puts in so much time and effort all year trying to beat his own personal best, and it was really his encouragement that convinced me to go ahead and send it in."

Flathead catfish can be found in the Snake River and associated reservoirs in southwest Idaho.

They are typically found in the Snake River between C.J. Strike and Brownlee reservoirs, but their numbers are higher in the river sections closer to Brownlee Reservoir.

They can also be found occasionally in lower reaches of tributaries like the Weiser and Payette rivers.

While they are not as common as channel catfish, they can reach some surprising sizes, making them a great trophy opportunity.

Idaho's largest flathead catfish was caught in 1994 from Brownlee Reservoir, weighing in at 58.4 pounds and stretching to 48 inches.

To learn about fishing in the state of Idaho visit: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/fish>.

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Fall Fishing: Don't Let Great Fishing Months Slip Away

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

There are a lot of good reasons to fish when the leaves turn red and gold.

Yeah, we get it. You've been fishing for months, and hopefully, you're having a great time and catching some fish. Then fall comes along, the guns come out, and the rods get stashed. Considering hunting seasons tend to be relatively short compared to fishing season, it makes sense.

But if you're not a hunter, or you can squeeze a fishing trip into your fall, it's not only worth your time, it could be some of the best fishing of the year.

Don't let the cooler air temps fool you

Martin Koenig, Idaho Fish and Game's Sportfishing Program Coordinator, points out that while we're grabbing our sweatshirts and jackets, there's a lag time before fish feel that cooler weather due to "thermal momentum," which essentially means it takes longer to cool water than air.

Also, cooler water will do many fish some good after the summer heat made them lethargic and slower to feed. Many bodies of water, whether still water or rivers and streams, are coming back into prime temperatures for fish to get active again.

Koenig also noted that fish behavior is heavily influenced by both water temperatures and the amount of daylight. As the water cools and days become shorter, fish know winter is coming and food will soon be in short supply, so they start feeding aggressively in preparation for the long winter.

The stocking trucks return

Fish and Game stocks catchable trout year round, but hatchery managers shift their stocking efforts away from lower elevation ponds and reservoirs during summer months when temperatures are too hot for trout.

When that water cools, the trucks return, so a fall fishing trip might be as close as a neighborhood pond or local lake or reservoir. (continued on page 35)

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Fishing For Fall Perch!

Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

As a fisherman, “Fall” and “Big Fish” often run together as this time of the year can yield some of the biggest fish of the year. As leaves change colors, perch and walleyes dominate the minds of many anglers not sitting in tree stands or duck blinds here in South Dakota. While some are searching for that trophy walleye, tasty perch fillets are on the minds of others.

Dropping temperatures drive perch to concentrate on feeding in preparation for the upcoming winter season. While large schools can provide countless action, often the biggest perch roam in small schools or simply in a solitary fashion. Locating these nomadic behemoths can be the greatest determining factor in success. A methodical, detailed, and often aggressive approach is key to having a successful day on the water.

Common fall perch holding areas are basins void of structure. Relying heavily on my Humminbird Electronics (Mega Side-Imaging) aids in uncovering the most productive water which usually is done first when getting on the water. Trolling crankbaits can also be a great locating tool. Small shad-shaped baits trolled 2-4 feet off the bottom will uncover the most aggressive perch that are willing to chase a bait high in the water column. Whether found on electronics or caught on a crankbait, marking these active fish immediately is important allowing for easy return with a combination of jigging rods and slip bobbers.

Perch can be very indecisive in what they prefer. Being prepared with a variety of rigged rods will save valuable time on the water. An arsenal of rigged baits ranging from small spoons to horizontal jigs to plain hooks under slip bobbers will assist in combatting their often-changing bait preference.

Perch are naturally inquisitive so initially dropping a noisy/flashing spoon like a Northland Tackle Buck-Shot Spoon or Forage Spoon will keep their curiosity peaked. Catching perch can sometimes turn into an activity of speed to catch as many before the school moves on. When laws allow multiple lines, like here in South Dakota, a simple plain hook and a split-shot under a Northland Tackle Lite-Bite Slip Bobber can produce some of the biggest perch. Spreading these bobber rods out around the boat allows anglers a good chance to catch some of the biggest less aggressive Jumbos and visually see school movements.

Small minnows, nightcrawlers, spikes/wax worms are all perch favorites and should be rotated regularly when the action slows. Pay close attention to how the bait is rigged, perch will let their preference be known so it can be easily replicated. Without a doubt, perch are detail-oriented and can turn finicky and neutral quickly. Light jig rods can benefit in light biters and even a traditional ice rod can push success and heighten the experience.

Perch are naturally roaming by nature, maintaining their interest is important. Before moving to the next spot, simply letting your motor run for a minute can easily call the school back. Stay aggressive and be prepared to make small calculated moves as small as 25-50 yards to stay with a school.



Perch is far from a “winter only” species providing great fall angling action. Cool temperatures coupled with an all-day bite make it a prime season to get family and friends on the water. Once located, grab your ice tackle, some light rods, and get ready to experience a fast-paced angling experience. Who does not enjoy seeing a bobber go down and instantaneously setting the hook on a JUMBO PERCH?

Be safe and good luck on the water this fall!

Tungsten Jigs & Forward Facing Sonar

(continued from page 2)

As for what Huynh threads on the business end of the hook, much of it is plastic. "In bass circles, there's a pile of different soft plastic variations. It's nice to be able to go through a number of iterations with these fish and really see what actions they prefer," says Huynh. Among his favorites are the Northland Impulse Smelt. "It's one of my favorites, mostly because of how versatile it is. I can fish it quick to get reaction strikes or shake it slow to really entice a bite," says Tom.

There are times too when live bait is a staple and very necessary, especially when fish are a bit more neutral. Yet, Huynh doesn't always carry live bait for the reasons you'd think. "I have bait in my livewell for about half of the tournaments I fish, but I'm not always using it to catch my entire bag," explains Huynh. "So often, I can see fish on forward facing sonar, but I need to confirm that these are actually walleyes. There are days when I catch pike, bass, and a host of other species on plastics that aren't walleyes, and sometimes live-bait is there to confirm that what I'm looking at is really a walleye, even if it's not always the best way to catch the biggest and most fish in a school."

Tungsten & Forward Facing Sonar Advantage

With the density of tungsten being greater than lead, it's reasonable to assume that any type of sonar return would come back with more intensity. "The difference is slight, but noticeable, especially in weeds," says Huynh. "There's lots of walleyes in the weeds for many of the tournaments I fish. The trick is getting them out of there," says Tom. "Sorting through fish and a less prominent return I see from standing weeds, then trying to find a jig inside of that, it can be tough. I'm looking for the best return I can get to see everything in detail."

Most times, Huynh is looking for a reaction bite when making short pitches to walleyes living in weedy environments. "I can see that bait well, often up to 40 feet or so, but usually I'm pitching 20 feet or closer," says Tom. "I always start with plastics just to see if I can get bigger fish to go, that and plastics hold up pretty well in weed cover compared to live bait." Huynh uses the Northland Tungsten Jig for pitching plastics, but switches to the Tungsten Short Shank Jig when slinging live bait. "I like that longer shank to put a hook point back further in plastics, unless I'm fishing a really finesse swimbait or Impulse Smelt. Then, for the smaller sizes I use the Northland Short Shank Jig too," says Tom.

Of course, forward facing sonar for Huynh isn't just a catching tool, it's a learning opportunity. "Coming from the bass world, throwing a bait, letting it settle down a few seconds on bottom, then burning it back to the boat, it's all making better sense. We're learning that up to 90% of our time can be wasted retrieving a bait, as walleyes typically eat it on the drop or moments after bait hits bottom," says Huynh.

(continued on page 38)





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Author Tom Cooper. Photos credit Tana Cooper.

How Many Times?

By Tom Cooper

Let's start with the first time. I was sighting in my old Remington 30.06, and an older four-power Redfield scope. This probably occurred in the late 1960s.

Dad said be extra careful when shooting in the prone position. So I was careful. However, the blood running down my nose dripped steadily, suggesting I was not careful enough. I don't recall the wound being very serious. Possibly I just healed better 60 years ago. Maybe there was a really small scar, but that's about all. I also remember Dad saying most hunters had scars between their eyes. At that point in my life, I probably thought my new scar made me a hunter.

Second Incident

The second time it was the same 30.06, with a new six power scope, and it was already sighted in, so I was ready for hunting season (early 1990's).

We had moved our hunting camp from 6,500 feet to 4,500 feet; leaving a foot of snow behind. We decided the elk must be lower, there weren't any above 6,000 feet.

Right at legal shooting light, a hunting partner and I spotted several elk, including a young bull. Turned out he was a 3 x 2. This was back in the days when any bull was legal.

We agreed we should move as close as possible to a huge deadfall (maybe 100 yards away) between us and the elk (maybe 250 yards away). To me, that meant sneak downhill toward the deadfall, and if necessary crawl the last few yards, then we could use the dead tree for a rest and shoot our bull.

However, after four steps and a very loud bang in my right ear, I dropped to the ground, and looked around to watch my partner empty his rifle shooting off-hand. All the elk, including the bull, were running in different directions.

I spotted the bull as he ran into a patch of thick timber on the ridge below me. He did not appear to be wounded. As I recall, I walked directly to the spot where the bull entered the timber. There was obvious blood in the tracks. So now I was following a pretty good blood trail.

When I could see daylight through the trees on the outer edge of the timber, I couldn't see any elk on the opposite hillside. I was afraid our wounded bull had cleared the ridge in front of me. But then, there he was still in the timber, not 75 yards away, slowly walking away from me.

I assumed if he made it across the opening, we would be lucky to catch up again.

At this point I didn't know where my partner was; he should have been above me on the open ridgeline, but wasn't.

I tried to lean on a close tree for a rest, but the reach was too far. I snugged the stock against my shoulder, pushing against several branches until I felt considerable resistance and decided I had a solid rest.

So, with the crosshair on the bull's left shoulder, I fired a round. He stopped, and turned toward me.

For some reason, suddenly it was a lot darker and hard to see the bull. I ejected the empty for a second shot, but couldn't see my scope. I mean, could not see anything but blur. While I was looking at blur, the bull dropped.

Casually wiping my hand across my forehead, I remember thinking the lens on my scope must have shattered. But the blur was on my eyes. A warm liquid was running down my cheek. When I looked down, the snow was red, and strangely my glasses were on the ground. I wondered how and why this was all happening. It turns out I was just adding to my hunter's scar.

Third Incident

The third event occurred while shooting a scoped 45 caliber muzzleloader during a late season hunt with my brother, Bill. The scope mount had always been questionable, because the mounts blocked an

exhaust port, and debris blew into your face from the remaining port when the gun was fired (sometimes, I flinched a little). And this time, I really flinched, jerking the trigger. Somehow the anticipated debris reaction caused me to choke up more on the stock, which of course was also wrong. I asked Bill how bad the cut was; he looked and said not bad, maybe half an inch long. So he applied two or possibly three band aids, and I lived to shoot again. ***Remember the important point is I filled my late season doe tag.*** After butchering our deer we proceeded to Bill's home in Lolo where we cleaned my wound and applied fresh band aids. I had my first look at the wound and it was a pretty short half inch. But, my hunter's scar was growing.

Fourth Incident

The fourth event involved our new 50 caliber muzzle-loader (Bill and I purchased jointly) and one of our well-used four-power Redfield scopes.

Again, it was a late season hunt with plenty of snow. We had been hunting with the charged muzzleloader for two days in wet snow, so we decided to empty the weapon, clean it that evening at Bill's house, and reload for tomorrow.

I leaned across a small 4-5 inch diameter dead tree, but I couldn't hold steady on the logged-off stump I intended to smack with a 50 caliber slug. So, I snugged the gun closer to my shoulder (seems to be a pattern for me). Now I was steady.



Two of the culprits. Found the old Redfield scope way back in my hunting closet. This muzzleloader/scope is credited with one of my "between the eyes" events.

There was a bang and a large smoke cloud, then I felt pain on my forehead.

I looked down, there was red snow at my feet. I asked Bill how bad it was because when I touched the wound, it seemed like more than an inch. Bill responded, not too bad, at most 1-2 inches.

Oh my God, do I need stitches?

Without hesitation, he said we should bandage it and drive to an urgent care in Missoula. I don't recall how many stitches, maybe four. Now, I really had a hunter's scar.

Fifth Incident

The fifth event, or as I now refer to it, the "last" event involved the Swedish Husqvarna (Vapenfabriks) 30.06 ultra light my Dad hunted with for 20 years, and had given to me a few years earlier.

I mounted my now "old" six power scope on the ultra light.

Obviously, I had sighted it in and used it for hunting for a couple years preceding this event, without incident.

On this day, I drove to BLM property north of Helena; there was no wind or rain/snow, and I was shooting at 100 yards with sandbags on blankets on the hood of my vehicle.

There was no reason to choke up a little extra, however apparently I did.

It wasn't much of a cut, but like most face/head wounds it bled for a bit.

I was disappointed there wasn't any snow to turn red. Just one lonely band aid easily covered the wound and stopped the bleeding. It's doubtful my hunter's scar grew much from this incident.

Now, What Have I Learned?

I know that when I hit my thumb with a hammer, I stop using my hammer for a while, then when I need it, my first thought is "be careful, don't hit your thumb again". But I usually do at some point.

Maybe someday my hunter's scar will catch up with my carpenter's scars, although I really hope not.

Bottom line is:

I still don't know how many times it'll take before I learn to stop hitting my thumb with a hammer, or hitting myself between the eyes with rifle scopes.

Happy and safe hunting this season.

UM And RMEF Launch Unprecedented Center To Advance Hunting And Conservation

RMEF www.rmef.org



Photo courtesy RMEF www.rmef.org

Below is a news release from the University of Montana. RMEF has a long history of supporting programs at the university that focus on hunting, conservation and wildlife research.

The University of Montana and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation are excited to announce the recently formed Center for Hunting and Conservation to advance science, research, education and outreach that will shape the future of land and wildlife management in the United States.

The Center builds on the existing partnership between UM's No. 1 ranked wildlife biology program and RMEF, one of the most effective conservation and hunting advocacy organizations in North America.

“UM and RMEF have a shared goal to ensure the long-term sustainability of America’s hunting-conservation culture and the economic opportunities it creates, not only across our state, but across our great nation,” said UM President Seth Bodnar. “The pressure on our wildlife and natural resources has never been greater, and now is the time to rapidly advance the sound science, education and stakeholder engagement that is needed to protect our hunting culture and outdoor way of life.”

The Center will be the first of its kind in the region, focused primarily on advancing wildlife research and the vital role hunting plays in wildlife management. The Montana Board of Regents established the center as a result of a significant long-term financial commitment from RMEF to UM’s W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation.

“RMEF coined the phrase hunting is conservation, and we are proud to now join UM in the establishment of the Center for Hunting and Conservation,” said RMEF President and CEO Kyle Weaver. “This Center will be the leading authority on hunting, conservation and wildlife management, driven by, and rooted in, sound research and science.”

The Center will have three primary goals.

First, advance science and research at the intersection of hunting and conservation. By bringing together world-class researchers, the Center will expand opportunities to advance effective wildlife management techniques supported by extensive research and data.

Second, provide an expanded platform for UM’s Wild Sustenance Program, a course available to UM students who are novice hunters. Launched in conjunction with RMEF, the Wild Sustenance Program is open to students of all UM majors who wish to pursue knowledge and experience related to the full cycle of hunting and its role in conservation.

Third, engage in broad outreach promoting the best-available science and data on wildlife management and conservation, to include the vital role of hunting. The Center will additionally provide decision makers access to the most recent, accurate and relevant data, resulting in more-informed wildlife management decisions, effective conservation and sustainable hunting opportunities.

Led by a director, the Center also aims to expand UM’s research portfolio, with plans to attract additional research support in the years ahead.

Conservation Victory: Feds To Restore Targeted, Science-based Endangered Species Policy

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation www.rmef.org

In a major win for wildlife conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announced it will pause use of the controversial “blanket 4(d) rule” and initiate steps to rescind it over the next 14 months—a key objective of a lawsuit filed last year by the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

PERC, RMEF and the agency jointly requested a stay of the pending litigation to allow the Service time to rescind the blanket rule that illegally and irrationally treats endangered and threatened species the same, resulting in poor species recovery rates.

Once the blanket rule is rescinded, USFWS would issue regulations tailored to the unique needs of every threatened species, informed by science and the incentives needed for recovery. In the interim, the agency committed to issuing tailored rules for each species listed as threatened rather than apply the blanket 4(d) rule...

Access Flathead Ridge Ranch Private Land With Free Permission Card

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is pleased to announce continued public access to Flathead Ridge Ranch through a free season-long permission card system offering recreationists an opportunity to access over 103,000 acres of private land between Kalispell and Libby.

Effective Sept. 1, all recreationists including hunters and hikers must obtain a free green permission card before accessing Flathead Ridge Ranch property. This requirement helps the landowner and FWP track public use and manage access responsibly.

Flathead Ridge Ranch property map (PDF)

The green permission card must be displayed from the rearview mirror of every recreationist's vehicle while on the property. Only one card per vehicle is required, but each individual's name using the property must be listed on the card.

Recreationists can acquire these permission cards from the FWP office in Kalispell or at sign-in boxes located throughout Flathead Ridge Ranch Block Management Area. These cards serve as proof of permission to access the property and are valid throughout the year.

At the end of the general hunting season, cardholders should fill out the requested information on the permission card, consistent with practices on other Block Management Areas, and return the cards. Cards can be dropped off at one of the 12 sign-in boxes on FRR property, FWP's Kalispell office, or mailed directly to FWP. Each card is pre-stamped on the back, so no postage is necessary. Recreationists who plan to continue accessing the property after the general season may then pick up a new card.

Public cooperation with this process will help FWP and the landowner monitor recreational use and gather important feedback.

Through Montana's Block Management Program, Flathead Ridge Ranch provides free public access to more than 103,000 acres of private land in hunting districts 120 and 103. The Block Management Program is a partnership between FWP and landowners across the state, promoting responsible public access to private lands for a variety of outdoor activities. In total, more than 550,000 acres of private land in northwest Montana is enrolled in the Block Management Program and open to public access for the 2025 hunting season through partnerships with landowners.

"We're very grateful to Flathead Ridge Ranch and all the private landowners across Montana who open their lands to the public through the Block Management Program," said FWP Regional Access Manager Macy Dugan.

Learn more at <https://www.flatheadridgeranch.com>.

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Rifle fit is paramount for accuracy and a positive shooting experience. The less you force and think about during the shooting process, the better you focus on the fundamentals of marksmanship, executing the most accurate shot possible. Refining fit variables to make your firearm an extension of your body, not something you have to fight, will make you a better shooter.

So how do you know if your rifle fits? It's pretty simple really. Are you comfortable and able to achieve natural point of aim - a state where you can get behind the gun, close your eyes for ten seconds, open them, and still be on target? If the answer is yes, you likely have a rifle that fits pretty damn good. If your muscles are tensed, you have trouble getting a full sight picture, are contorting your body and generally working hard to get a sight picture that should come easy, some tweaks to your setup may be in order.

Below are five things to consider or potentially customize every time you buy or set up your next rifle.

LENGTH OF PULL:

Length of pull is critical when it comes to rifle fit. If it's not right, nothing will feel right. Length of pull is measured from the center of the trigger to the center of the recoil pad/butt plate. You can check length of pull a few different ways.

Method #1: With firearm confirmed unloaded/safe, extend your arm, and then bring the rifle back in with the butt resting in the crease of your elbow between your forearm and the base-edge of your bicep. Next, see how easy or hard it is to access the trigger. If you really have to reach to get to it, the length of pull is long. If your finger awkwardly overshoots the trigger, too short.

Method #2: Confirm Rifle is unloaded/safe. With the optic somewhat loose in the rings, and the magnification turned to its highest setting – shoulder the rifle in a standing, natural position. The shooter should observe a full FOV without having to move his or her head from their natural position. Move the optic fore-and-aft while repeating this, until the FOV is perfect for that individual at that natural hold-point. If this is unachievable, you may need to consider a rifle with a different length of pull, or a different mounting solution.

Method #3: With the firearm confirmed unloaded/safe, measure the length of pull on a rifle that feels good and you shoot well. See how it compares to one you are looking at, or are not shooting well. If there is a discrepancy, note it and proceed accordingly.

Once you know your optimal length of pull, you can select an appropriate off-the-rack commercial option, transition to a nonadjustable custom stock, add a spacer, change the recoil pad to one with a different width or select a rifle/stock with adjustable features.

A stock with adjustability can be extremely versatile for achieving optimal rifle fit, particularly when shooting from a variety of positions (prone, off-hand, supported, unsupported, etc.) If you are sharing a rifle or multiple people are using it, adjustability built into the stock, allows it fit just about everyone.

STOCK OPTIONS:

No, not investments – well, unless we're talking investing in accuracy. An aftermarket cheek rest, riser or adjustable stock can make a world of difference. They will refine your cheek weld and head position. Effectively they micro-adjust the comb height and contour of the rifle stock to work with your setup, body and facial structure. These can be as simple as the easy-to-install, economical, and highly effective Bradley Cheek Rest to more elaborate and expensive versions built into custom stocks or integrated into more expensive commercial rifles. Any way you go, these are stock options worth adding to your shooting portfolio.

GET A GRIP:

The palm swell, overall shape, and angle of your grip affects how you hold and secure the rifle into your body. Like many things in shooting, the style of grip best for you is dictated by intended application. What works best for a precision rifle shooter, may not for a hunter anticipating quick shots in tight cover. Put some thought into your grip.

For more info on grip angle check out Vortex Nation Podcast #10 Minute Talk: Bolt Action Grip Styles:

https://youtu.be/tt86d8-ATJI?si=6bx_Jd5wQinTI75L.

RING HEIGHT:

Contrary to your grand pappy's Rem 7600 pump in good ol' 30-06, them fancy peek-under rings may not be the optimal choice. Ring height directly affects cheek weld (how your face contacts the stock). If too high, you will lift your cheek off the comb of the stock to get your sight picture – not ideal. If too low, you'll unnecessarily mash your face into the comb. Nobody likes that. You're looking for something that just feels right - ya know, like mid-90's R&B.

EYE RELIEF:

Another scope-related mounting variable that makes a huge difference is achieving proper eye relief. This is critical for not only avoiding getting scoped (the act of recoil pushing the scope into your brow or forehead, resulting in a painful thump or blood-pouring cut). Getting scoped is painful, embarrassing, and best avoided. Just about any scope will give you a good sight picture on the low end of its zoom range – regardless of its fore and aft position. Crank it up to its maximum magnification and check your sight picture, that's the true test. You should achieve the entire field of view comfortably and effortlessly. If not, slide it in the rings forward or back until you do - then tighten appropriately...

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Why Shooting Level Matters When It Comes To Rifles And What Is Rifle Cant

By Drake Staheli

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

When you are at the shooting range and preparing for your next rifle hunt, you probably won't have to deal with the effects of rifle cant on your shot, especially when you are shooting at closer distances. That's because you're probably shooting from a bench where it is level and comfortable.

I'll be the first to tell you that you will not find that when you are hunting big game animals in the West. They will take you into some steep, gnarly and unforgiving country where most of the time you will not have a close-range and level shot.

When practicing with my rifle, I try to replicate shots that I may encounter while hunting.

Shots may be as close as 50 yards, but could also be as far as 800 yards. When making these farther shots, you must pay more attention to ensure there is no cant.

What is rifle cant?

Rifle cant is the slight tilt of the rifle side to side when aiming at a target.

While such small angles don't seem like they would make a major difference, even the smallest cant in your rifle may cause you to miss the shot on your intended target when distances increase.

Adjusting to the angles of the land may be difficult when trying to line up a shot on your target. This is where we experience rifle cant the most. We may use bipods, packs, rocks, trees or anything else available to get a steady rest to ensure an accurate shot. While these are great, we often forget to check one thing — and that is our rifle cant.



Photos credit Drake Staheli courtesy GOHUNT.com

When shooting on uneven planes, leaning against slanted trees and resting on full packs, we may think that we are level, but most of the time it is hard to see with the naked eye because of the uneven terrain.

How does rifle cant affect your accuracy?

When firing a bullet, multiple elements affect its flight, such as wind, gravity and rifle alignment. When you take a shot with rightward cant, the bullet follows the tilt, causing it to drift off to the right of the intended target. At closer ranges, you will probably not see a huge effect on the actual impact location versus the intended target. However, as you move to farther distances, the effect becomes much greater if your rifle is not level.



<https://youtu.be/AIWzkgWJzsc?si=d2i0FHJLOVlxvpWh>

For instance, in a GOHUNT Labs video, they did a test to see how much the effect of rifle cant will change your impact point from your target at 500 yards. In the video, they tested the variables of 3, 6 and 12.7 degrees of cant.

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Between three shots at 3 degrees of cant at 500 yards, the average distance from the target was 8.42" to the right. At 6 degrees of cant, the average distance from the target was 10.5" to the right. Lastly, at 12.7 degrees of cant, the three shot group was an average of 46" to the right of the target. From this type of visual test, we realize that rifle cant will affect your shot placement in a big way.

What I do to minimize rifle cant when hunting

1. Use scope rings with an integrated bubble



My current rifle setup is a Savage 110 Ultralight (7 PRC) with a Salmon River Solutions picatinny rail, Hawke optics scope and Ruff's Precision Manufacturing Scope Rings. I chose RPM scope rings mostly because the bubble level is built into the rings. Prior to these rings, I had a separate bubble level that just tightened onto my picatinny rail.

While this can work, it is prone to improper torquing onto the rail, and it is just another variable that can come loose or get bumped. One other benefit to the bubble level being integrated into the rings is that they are easily visible when you have the gun shouldered. The bubble level is placed strategically on the bottom of the ring so all it takes to check your cant is a quick glance. Having these features in your scope rings may be the key to capitalizing on the shot of a lifetime.

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(continued on page 33)

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How To Choose Your First Hunting Rifle

Vortex Optics www.vortexoptics.com

Buying your first hunting rifle is incredibly exciting. After all, this is the weapon that will accompany you into the field and fill your freezer. Here's a quick guide that will help you make the best choice for how you hunt.



Photos credit Vortex Optics www.vortexoptics.com

START WITH WHAT AND WHERE.

First, decide what game you'll be hunting the most and where. A hunter targeting whitetail deer in corn fields will likely not need the same rifle as someone chasing elk in high country. (To be clear, many rifles and calibers can easily take both elk and whitetail deer.)

Where you'll be hunting is crucial for several reasons. First, carrying a heavy rifle long distances will be exhausting, so if you're covering ground, a lighter rifle helps. On the flip side, if you're hunting box blinds and not walking long distances, heavier rifles can reduce felt recoil.

[NOTE: Always check your local hunting regulations to ensure your weapon is legal. Specifically, many regions restrict the use of centerfire rifle cartridges (the type of round we'll discuss in this blog) and require either shotgun (sometimes also called a "slug gun") or straightwall hunting only.]



You don't have to empty your bank account to get an effective hunting rifle.

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

When you're budgeting for your rifle you'll need to budget for a riflescope and riflescope rings. It's not as expensive as it sounds: Optics like our Crossfire® HD gives you a feature-rich optic that will save you plenty of cash for ammo...

We recommend spending as much as you can on your rifle, while still leaving yourself a budget for your optics.

Used guns offer another, less expensive choice, but it's buyer beware. If you buy used, it's best to lean on someone with experience. In addition, if you inherit a rifle, having a local gunsmith take a quick look to ensure it's safe and effective is a good idea. (For more on choosing a budget rifle, check out this episode of Cartridge Talks <https://youtu.be/1Xk3lgfZ4iU?si=vosBc8J8VAMC0go8>.)

CHOOSE THE RIGHT CALIBER.

Start narrowing down calibers by considering what you can comfortably shoot. This will take getting to the range, but it's important. Not only will you fire this rifle while hunting, you (should be) shooting it at the range to get more proficient as a marksman. If the recoil is painful, makes it difficult to execute follow up shots, or causes you to develop bad habits like flinching, larger calibers might hurt more than help, especially as you learn to shoot.

Another consideration is ammo availability. More common cartridges (like the .30-06, .308, and more recently the 6.5 Creedmoor) will be easier to find in stores and will have more bullet weights and features for a variety of applications.

Prioritize calibers with low recoil that you can shoot accurately. Shot placement is paramount for quickly dispatching big game, so the biggest bullet isn't necessarily the best bullet. A few calibers that fit the bill and can take deer-sized game with proper shot placement: .243, 6.5 Creedmoor, and .308.



Though there are several rifle actions to choose from, we recommend bolt action for your first rifle.

SO MANY ACTIONS, ONE SIMPLE ANSWER.

If you inherit a gun, or get a hand-me-down from a friend or relative, you might not need to choose your rifle's action. Here's a quick rundown of rifle actions:

- Semi-auto, where the rifle uses energy from a spent round to chamber the next round.
- Pump action, where the shooter pulls a slide back to eject a spent round, then forward to load a new one.
- Break action, which opens to allow each round to be hand-loaded into the chamber.
- Lever action, which uses a lever below the trigger to cycle rounds.

We'll make this one simple: If you have the choice, go with bolt action.

Bolt action rifles use a hand-thrown bolt to cycle spent rounds out, and to load new rounds in. They're renowned for their accuracy, durability, and fool-proof reliability. They're also usually more affordable than other actions.

FIT AND FEEL.

How a gun fits you is just as important as how it fits your hunt. The best advice we can give you is to go to a dealer and handle several different rifles...Try rifles with wood and synthetic stocks. Experiment with heavier and lighter builds...While you can find rifles that fit your needs online, nothing will replace handling the gun to make sure you're comfortable with it.

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How To Remove Rust From A Gun

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

You know you should store all your handguns and rifles in a locked safe, or at least in a cool, dry place, with a dehumidifier running for good measure if there is a hint of moisture (as in a basement). But if you do pull out one of your guns and see a few spots of rust on the barrel or receiver, here's an interesting way to remove it.

From Range 365, which has a collection of great gun videos: The trick...is finding a penny minted before 1982, which were 95 percent copper and 5 percent zinc.

To start you need some light oil (good old 3-in-1 will do just fine), a medium brass-bristle cleaning brush, some paper towels, and your pre-1982 penny.

Pick a spot to start, put some oil on the metal, rub the penny over the area, and wipe clean with a paper towel. Repeat until the rust is gone. Use the brush to scour the rust out of areas with small crevices, like a shotgun rib. The copper in the penny is softer than the steel, so light pressure will wear away the rust without scouring the steel or the remaining bluing.

Done!



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

Everything A Nonresident Hunter Needs To Know About The 2026 Tag Drawing

Idaho Dept. Fish And Game <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Hunters will need to buy a nonresident hunting license in order to draw any 2026 tags...

This move to a draw should be celebrated as a win for nonresident hunters. The new framework replaces the historical first-come, first-served tag sale that occurred online and at license and tag vendors, which frustrated many out-of-state hunters.

Now, the modified nonresident tag framework does have one important caveat: Out-of-state hunters will be required to buy a nonresident hunting license in order to draw any 2026 tags. The sticker price on a nonresident license to hunt is \$185 and is nonrefundable. In other words, if you don't draw, you don't get your money back.

However, once you have your nonresident hunting license in your possession, you will be eligible to put in for a whole slew of tag opportunities, including deer, elk, and pronghorn controlled hunts, or moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat tags. Additionally, you could purchase returned or unsold tags.

Dates every nonresident hunter should write down

- Dec. 5-15, 2025 | Application period for the 2026 tag drawing
- Jan. 2026 (early) | Results available
- Jan. 20 | Deadline for successful applicants to buy their tags
- Feb. 5-15 | Second application period for any tags not drawn or not purchased
- March 2026 (early) | Results announced
- March 20 | Deadline to buy tags

The 2026 Nonresident Supplement and the Big Game Seasons and Rules will be available in October 2025. Hunters should know the deer hunting unit and/or elk zone for the tags for which they want to apply.

The nonresident draw allows up to five hunt choices on an application and up to four hunters can be on one application, but all must have a valid annual hunting license...

Hunters interested in applying for nonresident deer and elk tags in December should check back regularly for more information on the Nonresident Deer/Elk Tag webpage: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/licenses/tag/quotas/nonresident>.

5 Key Techniques For Bowhunting October Elk

By Dave Barnett

Originally published at  GOHUNT.com

For most, October signals a time for elk hunters to hang up their bows and grunt tubes, call it quits, and silently wait for rifle season. Fortunately, some states out west offer archery seasons extending into October that can provide some excellent opportunities. While this can be a great time to be in the woods, hunters will need to change their tactics, especially when targeting mature bulls. Less competition will be found during this month with most of the hunters draining their vacation time on the prime rut periods during September so you'll likely have the woods to yourself.

While the best hunting is undoubtedly found in September, the month of October is not one to pass up. Mature bulls will generally transition into a more predictable feeding and bedding pattern in an attempt to recoup from the last month's activities. Yet, at any time, a cow could come into a late estrus, which can turn a quiet basin into a rutting playground of biblical proportions seemingly overnight.

Does Elk Behavior Change Drastically during October?

In short, yes. The changing of elk behavior during the post rut stages of October can vary greatly depending on the area you may be hunting. For instance, areas on or around large private sections that may hold hundreds of elk will likely see a smaller and less noticeable shift in behavior than the high elevation basin that may hold less than 20 elk.

In general, look for most of the mature bulls to leave the herds and head for more difficult terrain with heavy cover and nearby food and water. This does not mean these bulls are completely finished with any rutting activity but they will likely not hold a harem for the remainder of the year. If a late cow comes into estrus in the area the bulls may simply slip in, steal the cow, breed her and then leave. Most herds will now be dominated by young satellite bulls chalk full of frustration from futile attempts to breed all year and can sometimes be very vulnerable to some pleading cow sounds.

The main thing to remember during this period is that most of the bulls are just plain tired. Nearly a month of constant running, fighting, and hunting pressure can severely drain a bull of much needed energy for the oncoming winter. While they may answer a bugle they will likely be less than enthused about charging in and intimidating the potential imposter than they were two weeks ago.

Below are five strategies that can turn a September full of missed opportunities into an October of life long memories and a punched tag. Keep in mind that these strategies may need to be adapted to the areas you hunt and the herd dynamics of the resident elk.

Five October Elk Strategies to Help Punch Your Tag

1. Be the Stealthy Predator

With most of the bulls in the month of October winding down on their aggressive antics some hunters will opt to forgo the typical calling techniques and simply still hunt in areas of elk activity. For this, I like to look back on sign I had found during my September outings. Elk will generally be found very near to the rutting grounds; they may simply move to a more remote drainage adjacent to the primary hunting grounds. When doing this, I like to get the wind in my face and simply creep through areas that held heavy elk activity during the prime weeks of the rut. Be careful not to move too fast and keep a diligent lookout as elk can be very quiet when they want to. The main areas of interest for me to focus on will include feeding grounds, transition areas, and bedding areas.

Look for major feeding areas such as clearcuts, meadows, or burns and move through these areas at first and last light. While it may be difficult to make a move on elk while they are feeding due to terrain or ground cover, it can be a great time to simply locate elk and make a plan on them from that point.

Usually, the best spot to ambush an elk is in transition areas as they move from feeding to bedding areas or vice versa. Having intimate knowledge on your hunting area as well as how the elk use the terrain can be a huge help here. Look for areas such as saddles or ridge tops where an ambush can be set. These can be especially lethal if elk can be spotted feeding in the morning and hunters can then position themselves for an ambush prior to the elk heading to bed. These tactics can also be used to catch elk leaving bedding areas and heading to feed for the evening.

One of the more riskier, yet still productive tactics of still hunting, would be to move at a snail's pace through known bedding grounds. Obviously, the elk will be more alert in these areas but many elk have been shot from or near their beds.

2. Watch the Weather

Elk are pretty notorious for being big wimps when it comes to early snowfall. Generally speaking, they will be one of first species to drop elevation as most of their feed options will begin to lose nutritional values with the coming of the first freezing temps. By simply monitoring the weather and planning accordingly a trip can go from wandering through areas that used to hold elk to wandering through areas that now hold elk. If you've experienced a recent change in weather and an area once heavy with elk sign is now void of life it's a great time to pull out the maps. While elk can cover a greater distance than humans they will still move across the terrain much like us.

If you were an elk and had to head to lower food sources, whether it be agricultural areas or natural clearings, how would you get there? Generally, the obvious answer would be dropping down through a drainage or following a ridgeline. Study your hunting

area and look for any easy route leading to lower elevations and you will begin to see areas to focus your efforts on.

3. Glassing, Glassing, Glassing

If terrain and cover allows it, glassing can be one of the most effective tactics in finding October elk. For this, I like to look for obvious high points that will allow me to see several areas of interest, mainly including feed and transition areas. Look for large clearcuts and meadows near heavy timber; if you have saddles between these two areas it can be gold. It's important to be in these areas prior to daylight as mature bulls may spend little or no time in the open once the sun begins to light up the eastern sky. Once elk have been located pay special attention to how they move through the area.



As hard as it is, fight the urge to pack up camp and beat feet to the elk in an attempt to cut them off. Generally speaking, if elk are unpressured they will exit the timber in the afternoon very near or exactly where they entered it in the morning. Mark where you last see the elk and you may have a perfect ambush point for when the elk return to feed in the evening. Setting up in these areas and enticing a bull with some light cow calling may also bring them within range.

4. The Second Rut

Elk are very vocal animals nearly year round and, unless they have been recently pressured, October and, even, November elk will often times respond back to light bugling. Just like the rut, finding areas higher in elevation in an effort to broadcast your bugle over the largest area is generally the best bet. If you do find a responsive bull take care not to escalate the situation too quickly. Remember that these bulls have spent a very tiring four weeks of fighting each other and many are just simply fed up with it. Use the elks' behavior and let them control the situation, only ramping up the calling as they do.

While it is short lived, there will often be an October rut spurred on by one or two late cows in a single basin and every bull in there knows this is his last chance. This stage will generally only last a day or two so timing is critical; the action will be intense—sometimes even more so than in September. Again, let the bulls dictate how aggressive you get with your calls. Be fully aware that you may be able to simply bugle your way right into the lap of a bull. Conversely, if the wind is right and the elk are talking consistently, many hunters will simply slip in quietly and wait for an opportunity. This stage is generally impossible to predict and will only be encountered by hunters who happen to be out on these few magical days.

5. Cold Calling

While arguably the most boring way to hunt elk, cold calling can easily be the most effective. For this, you simply move into an area that's heavy in elk sign and create your own scene of elk activity through calls. Now, there is a lot more to this than simply finding some tracks and calling. Location should be of your main concern, followed by the types of calls you are broadcasting as well as the ever important wind. I like to look for areas that are convenient for elk to come into, but will provide them with enough security to appear within range. The biggest mistake I see here is most hunters set up in areas where they can see the elk approaching from a longer distance. Remember, if the elk can't see another elk, they likely won't come in. Instead, set up in areas that allow some visibility, but still have enough cover to entice the bull's imagination. Terrain features like saddles or well worn trails can be excellent areas to focus on. Avoid very steep or difficult to traverse terrain and keep in mind that elk will generally try to approach from your downwind side. I like to focus mostly on cow calls during October as most bulls are generally uninterested in fighting other bulls and primarily interested in finding that last hot cow.

Parting Thoughts

The best advice here is to simply "think like an elk." What would you do in this situation? Fighting the mental battle of giving up after a long September can lead to some incredible hunting in October. Let the bulls dictate your next move but be ready for anything as the post rut season can provide many surprises and some of the best days in the elk woods.

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

Vietnamese Noodle Salad With BBQ Elk Recipe

By Hailey Malepeai
Hailey's Wild Kitchen
www.haileyswildkitchen.com
Courtesy IDFG
<https://idfg.idaho.gov>

This recipe is courtesy of Hailey Malepeai from Hailey's Wild Kitchen. Hailey is a lifelong Idahoan, hunter, angler, and chef focused on wild game and local ingredients.

I don't know if anyone else is like this but eating the "choicest cuts" of elk is always the hardest for our family.

The reward of hunting, packing out the meat, and butchering makes us feel that we need to do something "special" whenever we eat elk backstraps, steaks, or tenderloin.

With the nagging feeling that we should be enjoying the elk tenderloin in our freezer, we decided to cook a favorite Asian noodle dish. We invited friends who would appreciate the unique nature of this meal and the work that went into it – beyond the simple act of cooking.

I do know this, for hunters cooking a special meal from wild game is another layer that adds to the experience of a hunt and a way to honor the animal that provided it.

INGREDIENTS:

1 package of vermicelli rice noodles

4 carrots, sliced thin

1 cucumber, sliced thin

3 green onions, sliced thin

1/2 head cabbage or lettuce, sliced thin

Handful of herbs: basil, mint, CILANTRO!

Sesame oil, drizzle

Grilled protein, elk but can use beef, venison, chicken, tofu or keep it veggie only

Optional: spring rolls or egg rolls

Nuac Cham Dressing Recipe:

4 tbs fish sauce

4 tbs brown sugar

3 tbs rice vinegar

1 juicy lime or 2 if not so juicy

1/2 cup warm water

3 cloves garlic, grated

1 carrot, grated

sliced chilis if you're feeling spicy

Elk Marinade:

Store-bought teriyaki marinades like Yoshida works great. For this, we used:

1/2 cup soy sauce

2 tbs fish sauce

2 tbs rice vinegar

1 tbs sesame oil

1 tbs brown sugar

1 tsp pepper

1 tsp garlic powder

1 tsp onion powder

1 tsb ginger powder

DIRECTIONS:

Marinate your elk in your favorite Asian marinade overnight. Grill your elk to medium-rare (or desired wellness) and let rest. Soak the rice noodles in hot water for 15 minutes. Once softened, drain in a colander and drizzle with a little sesame oil so they don't stick together (they will if you don't drizzle them with some sort of oil). Toss well and pour into a large serving bowl. Top with veggies, herbs, grilled meat, and egg rolls.

For the dressing: combine all ingredients in a bowl and stir well to dissolve the sugar. Cover and refrigerate before serving. Drizzle liberally on the salad. Great for dunking egg rolls, too!

The Winning Recipe From GOHUNT'S Wild Game Chili Cook-Off

By Ben Stoner

Originally published at  GOHUNT.com

Ingredients:

3 lbs ground New Mexico elk (substitute wild game or lean ground beef)
2 tbsp olive oil
1 medium/large onion, diced
5 cloves of garlic, diced
2 bell peppers, diced
6 hatch green chiles, roasted and diced
2 jalapeños, diced
1 habanero, seeded/diced (add more for a good time)
32 oz kidney beans, rinsed and drained
10 oz diced tomatoes and green chiles
24 oz tomato puree
16 oz 505 Southwestern Flame Roasted Green Chile salsa (substitute your preferred salsa)
26 oz beef broth
2 tbsp A1 steak sauce
2 tbsp Worcestershire Sauce
1 tbsp ground cumin
1 tbsp dried basil
1/4 cup Chimayo red chili powder (substitute normal chili powder)
Garlic salt and fresh coarse ground black pepper to taste

Steps:

1. Dice your veggies.



2. In a large Dutch oven, saute the onion and garlic in olive oil.

3. Add your ground meat, peppers, chiles, salt and pepper.



Photos courtesy GOHUNT.com

4. Cook over medium heat until meat is browned and vegetables are tender.

5. Drain.

6. Stir in remaining ingredients.



7. Bring to a boil.

8. Reduce heat; simmer uncovered until chili reaches desired thickness (I simmer for three to four hours).

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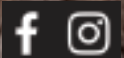
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Photos credit Jay Anglin

Waterfowl Prep: 10 Preseason Tips

By Jay Anglin **HARDCORE** www.hardcorewaterfowl.com
Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

Early Canada goose and teal seasons are imminent (a few states have already opened resident only Canada goose seasons), so it's time to check your waterfowl hunting kit – shotguns, boats, decoys, and blind bags, if you haven't already. Following are ten go-time tips for hunters who are giddy for the most wonderful time of year!

ONE: Clean that filthy gun. Okay, okay, some hunters are good about gun maintenance, and the irons are tended to and spick and span right after the hunt – possibly stored much like a valuable archeological relic. Then there are the rest of us. Tear them down and get them ready for game day. This includes checking for magazine plugs and making sure said shotgun has the appropriate choke tube installed (remember you threw it in the corner of the closet the day after turkey season...).

Bonus Tip: Do. Not. Over-lubricate.

TWO: Check blind bags. This includes emptying them out and potentially a good wipe down of the interior. Oatmeal Cream Pies do not taste the same after being stored in the garage for six months – restock as necessary. But, more importantly, be sure it contains a headlamp, extra batteries, bug spray, backup calls... pretty much anything you may need should be in there.

Bonus Tip: Make a fully charged backup smartphone battery pack charger/cord a permanent blind bag item.



THREE: Do yourself a favor and wash your preferred hunting clothes. This includes sweatshirts, jackets, wader pants, etc. You may think you washed them after last season, but you probably didn't.

Bonus Tip: Wash hunting clothes yourself to impress your mom or partner.



FOUR: Waders are often tossed into a corner or hung from the rafters in the garage after being used. Rarely washed or given a darn about, waders are likely the most ignored thing waterfowl hunters own, which is silly, considering how important they are for comfort.

You can send warrantied waders in for repair, but I always figure nobody owes me or my abused waders anything and do it myself.

First, check for leaks and seal with Aquaseal – larger problems may require an actual patch of material over the issue, which can also be done with the assistant of Aquaseal.

Hose the insides out and then spray the interiors (including deep into the boots) down with antimicrobial spray.

Bonus Tip: Purchase a wader dryer and use it religiously throughout the season and re-spray with antimicrobial spray as necessary.

FIVE: Be sure to take a serious look at your decoys and consider giving them a good scrubbing, and also address anchor/anchor-line issues, patch holes, touch up paint, and fix or replace torn decoy bags. This is also a great time to “get real” about replacing b-teamers for good. New decoys are just better. Always.

Bonus Tip: For additional info on decoy maintenance check out this article:

Hardcore Decoy Maintenance:

<https://www.hardcorewaterfowl.com/not-just-another-gear-maintenance-story/>.

SIX: Go shoot! Yup, take your favorite shotguns out and get revved up at a clays range. Shooting “clay pigeons” behind grandpa’s barn is fine, but nothing replicates real time shooting scenarios better than a sporting clays range, or at the very least a skeet range. Do this after thoroughly cleaning your gun so it cycles efficiently, then tidy up as necessary. Don’t forget to adjust the choke appropriately and have the plug in the magazine prior to opening day.

Bonus Tip: Wear hunting clothes like what you’ll wear on the hunt to maximize real-time hunting conditions.

Bonus Tip 2: Pattern those new fancy designer loads you bought, so you know if they will perform well with your shotgun, and adjust accordingly.

SEVEN: Vehicle and trailer maintenance is often an on-the-fly endeavor because hunters wait until stuff breaks before they address it. How about some preventative maintenance. Check your trailer bearings thoroughly. If there is any question at all regarding their integrity, which is often hinted by a leaky rear seal, change the bearings and seals, or better yet, just swap the entire hub assembly out. For that matter, check your vehicle’s hub bearings, too. Unless you’ve roasted a trailer hub and smoked a spindle at o’dark thirty on your way to the boat ramp or field, you’ll have a hard time understanding how much it sucks. Same with the truck, check them or have them checked prior to the season.

Grease trailer hubs as necessary with the best heavy-duty grease rated for marine applications.

Don’t over-grease...which is very likely the #1 reason for trailer bearing issues.

Bonus Tip: Check your trailer tires pressure, and for cracks and excessive wear – air-up or replace as necessary.

EIGHT: If you have a retriever, be sure to do some easy, pre-season tune-up sessions, including both land and water retrieves. It’s never too late for a quick session but be sure to keep it light and fun.

Also, it’s common for retrievers to freak out a little on opening day and sometimes the excitement leads to mistakes or less than ideal handling situations.

Try not to freak out, they are in their glory, too, and the excitement is almost too much to handle. This is especially the case with younger dogs.

Bonus Tip: Run drills with the same retriever stands and dog blinds you use while hunting to maximize realism. It may seem trivial, but the fact is it’s a lot easier for a retriever to get back into character when they are refamiliarized with normal hunting gear.

(continued on page 38)

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Photo courtesy TUO Gear www.tuogear.com

Hunting Whitetails In Mid October

TUO Gear www.tuogear.com

Mastering the October Lull

As mid-October rolls in, lots of whitetail guys and gals find themselves in what's often referred to as the "October Lull." Deer, especially mature bucks, shift their patterns during this time, making it feel like the action has slowed down to a crawl. But seasoned whitetailers know that the October Lull is more myth than reality. Bucks are still moving. They're just moving differently. Adapting to this change is critical. Here's how to approach this transitional period with strategy and patience.

1. Understanding October Shifts in Behavior

Mid-October brings changes in food availability and cover. Early-season food sources like beans are dwindling, and acorns are becoming more scattered, causing whitetails to shift their focus. Bucks begin to feel the coming rut, making them restless but not yet fully committed to chasing does.

This is a time when mature bucks start to move more frequently, albeit often in subtle ways. They may shift their core areas slightly to adapt to new food sources or pressure from hunters who hunted their early-season bedding areas.

In many cases, bucks shift their activity to less-pressured zones and often become more nocturnal. Your goal is to find where they're feeding and bedding now, hug in tight, and capitalize on these movement patterns.

2. Focus on Food Sources and Transitional Zones

By mid-October, acorns and natural browse are key food sources. Look for white oak trees if possible, as they tend to be preferred by deer. Bucks will move through these areas in search of food, especially along the edges of thick cover, which serves as both a food source and a secure bedding area.

Mid-October bucks are known for utilizing transitional zones; those edges where fields meet woods, or thickets meet more open timber.

These zones offer both cover and access to varied food options, making them prime spots to intercept a buck moving in daylight. Setting up in these transitional areas is critical.

3. Timing and Weather: Patience Pays Off

A cold front can be a game-changer in mid-October, especially if it's the first one. Sudden temperature drops can trigger daytime movement, as deer instinctively begin feeding more heavily in preparation for colder months. Monitor the forecast closely, and if you see a cold front moving in, plan to be in your stand.

We've also found success hunting bucks headed to freshen up scrapes after a rain. The best spots are those that have multiple trails converging with a large scrape near the hub. Often you'll also find smaller additional scrapes nearby.

4. Light Calling: Less is More

Aggressive calling may spook bucks in mid-October, as they're not quite ready for a rut battle. However, subtle grunts can be effective. Try a few light grunts to pique a buck's curiosity. If you're hunting close to a bedding area or along a food route, a couple of soft calls can encourage a hesitant buck to investigate the source. But remember, restraint is key. Too much noise can easily drive mature bucks out of your area altogether.

5. Mind the Pressure: Go Deep or Stay Close

By mid-October, bucks have been pressured from the early season, and many become wary of the areas near trails and easy access points. Consider going deeper into the woods or focusing on harder-to-reach spots where pressure is lower. Sometimes, a buck will retreat to a more secure location but stay relatively close to his core area, moving only when he feels it's safe.

Alternatively, if you're on a smaller property where going deep isn't an option, consider minimizing your impact by limiting your trips to high-potential times and practicing extreme scent control.

6. Prepare for Quick Adjustments

Mid-October requires a more adaptable approach than other times of the season. Take advantage of trail cameras by checking them sparingly and during midday to avoid spooking deer. Study recent photos closely, as bucks may start showing up at different times.

If a buck is consistently appearing near dusk, it may be worth a move closer to his suspected bedding area. Conversely, if they're showing up later in the evening, you may need to adjust your entry routes and stands to avoid being detected.

The October shift can be challenging, but it's a prime time for a prepared, adaptable deer hunter to find success. By focusing on food sources, transitional zones, and low-pressure areas, and by staying alert for weather patterns, you'll set yourself up to outsmart even the wariest of whitetails this October.

Mountain Gear That Hunts Everywhere

(continued from page 23)

"None of us want complicated buying decisions, but hunters definitely want to be lead down a path," explained TUO president, Aaron Amber. "The first layer is next to the skin, then an insulating mid-layer if needed, and the last part is the protective layer. Our pledge is to educate the consumer and help them make quick buying decisions when selecting a system that fits their needs."

Amber continued, "We thought about fabric first. Lightweight fabrics that have good durability and stretch, because one of the most important things to TUO is mobility. Then we thought about the patterns, how we cut and sew them, and how we shape everything to make sure it fits great."

While most TUO gear is available in functional solid colors, according to Amber, the third thing that defines the brand is the camo, and the company's proprietary Verse pattern turned out even better than the TUO team had dreamed.

"Effective camo disrupts the human shape. We really nailed it with this camo pattern. The feedback we are getting from guides and avid hunters is incredible," he revealed.

We named it Verse because we wanted a versatile pattern that applies to many different terrains, as opposed to forcing hunters to choose between specific patterns to match the terrain they are hunting.



Photo credit TUO Gear www.tuogear.com

With Verse, you can work your way up from the plains to the sub-alpine zones, then alpine, and eventually above the tree line. Verse camo acclimates to all those terrains. It even looks great in tree stands. I've seen them all in action and there has never been a camo pattern that works this well in so many conditions."

There's no mistaking this camouflage pattern. It is bold in both form and function, bringing a remarkable set of capabilities for a discerning goal-minded hunter. The range of use for Verse extends to just about anywhere in North America, minimizing limitations... TUO's simplicity of assortment is "narrow and very purposeful" as Amber put it. Think of this system as more of a tool kit that allows you to take what fits your needs during early seasons in August, all the way through late season gun hunts. TUO gear is meticulously designed to ensure you have the necessary layers at the exact moment you need them.

Shop online at www.tuogear.com.

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POLARIS

How To Find Mule Deer Bucks During The November Rut: 8 Tactics For Success

(continued from page 10)

Note: take your glass and look at areas around where the does are at. A lot of the time, you might catch a buck bedded in some cover near the does. Even during the rut, some bucks still like to be a little secretive when it comes to showing themselves in the open.

Back in 2018, every morning I would check on a group of does and only small bucks were with them. It wasn't until later in the hunt that a true giant finally showed up, and I was able to capitalize on my biggest buck to date. So checking on that group of does each day paid off in a huge way.

During the rut, bucks are actively seeking does. If you find groups of does, bucks are likely nearby. However, large bucks may not always be in plain sight with the does; they often hang back in nearby terrain, especially early in the rut.

Don't be discouraged if you don't see bucks immediately. Keep an eye on doe groups and return to the same area as the rut progresses. Bucks may appear later in the season, or even within the same day, as they cover long distances searching for hot does.

3. Optics are king during the mule deer rut

Glassing is essential during the mule deer rut, and with colder, harsher conditions, you'll need to be diligent with your optics. Bucks will often bed in areas sheltered from the wind or in thick cover, so glassing from multiple angles is crucial.

Use your binoculars in the early morning and transition to a spotting scope during midday when bucks are more likely to be bedded in shaded areas. Focus on glassing small pockets of terrain that others may overlook—these often hold mature deer.

Glass and glass some more

You can't hunt bucks you can't see. So always utilize your optics and try to dig up a buck that might still be hanging out in thick timber or brush. Put yourself in an area where you can cover a lot of the country, especially near areas that some people might not want to hunt in due to thick terrain or lack of roads. The more time you spend behind your optics, the greater the chance you will pick up deer and learn where the deer like to hang out during the rut.

Also, if there is snow on the ground, I really like to glass up tracks and then try to see what direction they are headed. Then, I will either use my 16 power ZULU6 HDX Image Stabilized binoculars or my Swarovski BTX and 115mm spotting scope, and dissect the timber or brush to find bedded deer. Or I will hike closer and try to ambush the area by finding a spot to look into it from higher up and be

close to the action. That will put you within striking distance and allow you to potentially find hidden pockets that might have been tough to glass from further away.

4. Cover country

Covering ground is important, whether glassing from different vantage points or using roads to your advantage. In some states, driving and glassing from a vehicle is a legitimate tactic, especially in more open country. So, even though I stress getting away from the crowds, you can still use roads and long-distance glassing to your advantage.

Be willing to explore less obvious areas close to roads. Many hunters overlook small pockets of habitat near roadways, but these areas can hold deer, during the mule deer rut, especially when the rest of the landscape is heavily pressured.

5. Stay mentally tough

Late-season hunts can be physically and mentally demanding. Cold, snowy conditions combined with long hours of glassing can wear you down. However, mental toughness is key to staying in the game.

The rut provides brief windows of opportunity, and being prepared to seize those moments can make the difference between success and failure. Stay motivated, even if you haven't seen any action for hours—bucks can show up at any time, and persistence often pays off.

6. Research backwards

It is well known that on later-season hunts under ideal conditions, you should seek out migration corridors, as that is where deer will start moving once heavy snowfall blankets the mountains or the hint of the rut hits the air.

But what happens if you look at those migrations routes backward? What do you see? If you take note of a migration route, you'll see that they start from a higher elevation and move downward. So, if you happen to have a chance at mild weather, you can use this to your advantage and hunt above the "typical" migration corridor.

What do mature deer do if they sense pressure from hunters and, at the same time, have all their nutritional requirements at higher elevations? They head to those so-called "unusual places." What I mean by this is if mature mule deer sense pressure from hunters in late October and early November, why would they want to move to lower elevations where there are more hunters, more commotion, and an increased chance that they will get shot? If higher elevations still have the nutritional requirements as well as safety, then a giant buck will not risk moving into the firing range. This is what I believe also happened on my 2018 Colorado hunt. So, I never let "elevation" determine where I will focus my efforts. I will always search for bucks at higher elevations which some people might avoid due to cold temperatures or difficulty accessing with a truck or ATV.

Searching out all the zones where a buck could be will eventually put you in the spot with the most deer activity.

Also, a key part in this stage, is again using hunter pressure to your advantage. If you see large groups of hunters in one area, that is a great opportunity to move to areas on the fringe. This is where deer are going to get pushed into.

Lots of hunters might be hunting in a spot due to easy access so you just need to start figuring out ways to out-hunt other hunters.

7. Hunt near public/private land borders

If you are in a mountain area, the later in the season, the greater the chance that deer have started to migrate down, and that means they might start to congregate on private lands.

So a great strategy is to focus on some of the public lands near private to either catch bucks coming off private or moving to a private land spot. This tactic can be kind of frustrating at times, as it could be a game of patience. But with patience can come success!

Even if the area you are hunting doesn't have a ton of high elevations, hunting near private land can still be a great tactic.

You'd be surprised at how many people avoid the small accessible sections of public land near big sections of private because they feel that all the deer might just get sucked into private.

Private lands are also deer sanctuaries because deer there start to know they are safe. But it's the rut, and you just never know if a buck will come into the area and push a bunch of deer back to public land.

8. Think outside the box

I've always said that if you want to be more successful at mule deer hunting, you need to think outside the box. Sometimes, getting away from people might involve grabbing a tent and a stove and backpacking out. A lot of people aren't going to want to do that.

You've probably heard me say it before, but if you always do what 95% of the hunters do, then you will have success like 95% of the hunters do. If you want to take a buck that maybe 5% or less of the hunters take, then you need to think outside the box and do what other hunters aren't willing to do.

A solid plan and a great mindset will put you in the right position for success on a big rutting mule deer.

Conclusion: Mastering the mule deer rut

Mule deer hunting during the rut requires a combination of patience, persistence, and strategy. You'll increase your chances of success by getting away from the crowds, focusing on doe groups, utilizing optics, covering lots of ground, and staying mentally tough. Mule deer rut hunts are a special time of year, so enjoy every moment and make the most of the opportunity!

Fall Fishing: Don't Let Great Fishing Months Slip Away

(continued from page 13)

Many local ponds are back on the stocking rotation and offer a great fall opportunity close to home. Check Fish and Game's fish stocking webpage to get current information.

Different seasons, different addresses

Before you grab your rod and run off to where you were smacking fish in the spring or summer, remember fish are migratory, particularly those in larger lakes and reservoirs. Cooling weather will push many bass and panfish offshore, and you'll need to adjust your tactics to where they are, not where they used to be.

"They're found in different places, and that's the biggest thing for anglers to remember," Koenig said.

For bass and panfish, a quick rule of thumb is deeper and in more open water, not along those convenient shorelines, bays, coves, etc. This is where good electronics can pay big dividends.

But cooling water also means trout will come up more shallow, so bank anglers and trollers alike will see more success fishing closer to the surface than during the heat of summer.

Different locations also include fish in rivers. Many trout streams are low and clear, which means trout may be spooky and lurking in deeper, or more protected waters. Even though you're fishing, be a hunter. Be on the lookout for prime water and be stealthy so you don't spook fish before your first cast. If the fish aren't there, or not biting, move on to the next spot.

Fishing during the rut? What?

Fall fishing is a great time to intercept aggressive fish as they approach spawning seasons. Species like brown trout, lake trout, and brook trout all spawn in the fall, which means some of the largest trout are likely to be the most aggressive and available than in other seasons.

"It's like hunting big bucks during the rut," Koenig said. "Fall may be your best chance to see a trophy brown trout, brook trout or aggressive steelhead."

A well-placed streamer or lure can provoke a savage strike followed by a battle with a trophy fish.

Another fall spawner is whitefish, which school up and seem to love colder temperatures. They can be found feeding in deep runs and pools of larger trout streams and provide some fun fishing action for fly anglers and on light spinning rods.

And don't forget the king of fall fishing

Like stampeding horses, ocean-fresh steelhead are returning to Idaho, and the run peaks in the fall.

(continued on page 38)



Photo credit Ryan McSparran courtesy www.caribougear.com

Wild Game Processing Part 1: Equipment & Getting Started

(continued from page 7)

Meat Grinder

In order of importance, the next thing you'll probably want to invest in is a high quality meat grinder. Don't cheap out and save up for a good one. You'll be glad you did. The frustration of a sub-par grinder isn't worth the headaches. Plan to spend about \$400 or more. I use a grinder that's .5 horsepower and grinds 4-6 lbs. per minute. It grinds meat as fast as I can load it into the tray. With a high quality grinder, grinding your own burger or sausage is easy and fun to do. Along with your grinder, purchase a stack of poly bags and a bag sealer. This will make it easy to store your ground meat in consistent 1 lb. packages. Most grinders should include a funnel for stuffing these bags.

Grinding Tips: When you have meat ready for the grinder, don't run it through the grinder if it's completely thawed. Instead, stick it in the freezer for 30 minutes to an hour until it's firm – not frozen solid, but just on the verge of becoming firm. Your grinder will operate much more smoothly with partially frozen chunks of meat and the texture of your ground meat will be much better. If you plan to double-grind the meat (usually a good idea) put the tub of single-ground meat back in the freezer for a half hour before you grind it again. Again, this will keep the meat from becoming mushy. Your grinder will operate more smoothly and the resulting texture will be improved.

Another tip is to add a little cold water to each batch of ground meat. Most sausage recipes call for a splash of water. But even in wild game burger, a little water will improve the moisture content and texture. Try adding a few tablespoons of cold water for each pound of meat, or roughly a cup for every five pounds.

Kitchen Scale

It's not essential, but a rather inexpensive item that can be very helpful is a kitchen scale. A scale can help you wrap steaks and roasts into somewhat consistently sized packages for easy use later on. For example, for my family of four people I cut and wrap most of my roasts or steaks into 2 lb. packages. I'll also save a few larger 4 lb. roasts for bigger parties and special occasions.

Packaging Tip: When packaging meat, whether it's vacuum sealed, wrapped in freezer paper or ground meat stored in poly bags, take the time to label everything.

On each package, I write the species and the specific cut of meat. I also write the state or location it was taken so that I can keep track of which is which. This also helps me keep track so that I'm using the oldest meat first.

Finally, I use my kitchen scale to weigh each package and label the weight on each one before I put it in the freezer. I find this to be very helpful later on. If I have six people coming over for dinner, I can then quickly grab an appropriately sized roast or package(s) of meat for whatever recipe I'm making.

Vacuum Sealer

It's certainly not a must-have item, but eventually you may want to invest in a quality vacuum sealer. Again, these can be expensive. But it sure is useful. In addition to packaging meat, I use my vacuum sealer for marinating, sous vide cooking, prepping meals for hunting trips, and much more. If you aren't able to invest in a vacuum sealer right away, don't worry. Freezer paper will work just fine. When using freezer paper, just be sure you squeeze any air out of the package as you wrap the meat, and seal it as tightly as possible to keep your wild game fresh in the freezer. Exposure to air is what will eventually cause freezer burn.

Sausage Stuffer

Finally, if you consistently make your own ground meat or sausage, it would eventually be helpful to invest in a sausage stuffer. Most meat grinders will come with stuffing attachments. These work okay, but a dedicated sausage stuffer is much easier to use. It can be used for stuffing cased sausages or for putting ground meat or bulk sausage into poly storage bags. Again, you can use the stuffing attachment on your grinder – but as soon as you use a separate stuffer, you'll realize what you've been missing.

CONTACT US WITH QUESTIONS

If you have questions about meat care, field care or processing at home, please call us at 303-798-5824 or visit our website at www.caribougear.com.

We hope you get to enjoy processing some delicious wild game meat this year!

Big Deer's 2025 Moon And Rut Hunting Guide

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com



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

2025 rutting moon phases: Full November 5...last quarter November 11...new November 19...first quarter November 27

As I have said time and again on the blog and on BIG DEER TV, I am neither a scientist nor an astronomer. But I am a whitetail hunter and have been doing it for 50 years, more than 30 of those professionally. I'm also a moon fanatic. Over the years I figure I've spent more than 1,000 days in a deer stand in November, during every imaginable moon phase, and all the waxing and waning days.

My journal notes and personal observations indicate there is something to the November moon and how it impacts the movements of rutting whitetails.

My 2025 predictions:

I like the way this November's moon sets up. For starters it exposes the first days of the seeking phase of the pre-rut, when bucks start to expand their range and prowls for the first hot does. Halloween into the first week of November is a good time to bowhunt in any season. This year, with the moon waxing toward full—91% visible on November 1 to 100% bright on November 5—the hunting should be especially good. If you hunt the first week of November, keep in mind that deer movement will be best near food sources in the afternoons. If a cold front sweeps into your hunt area that week, better yet.

On or around the full moon week of Nov. 5-10, the best buck movement will shift to the mornings. While it flies in the face of what many scientists and hunters believe, I love hunting a full moon in early November because in my experience, the deer are apt to rut hard all day. You're apt to see a shooter on his feet at 8:00 a.m....11:00 a.m....2:00 p.m....any day this week, so hang on stand as long as you can.



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For hunt vacation-planning purposes:

If the land you'll hunt has crop fields and food plots and light pressure, I'd suggest you hunt the first 5 days of November. Hunt stands near the feed and focus on the afternoons.

A stand on a slightly elevated ridge 100-200 yards off a corn or bean field would be a hotspot either afternoon or morning.

If the land is mostly woods with mast and greenery for deer food, think about hunting a little later, say November 5-12. Historically, if you check the record books, these are the very best days in any year to kill a monster buck.

Set your stands back in the woods along trails and travel funnels—especially those with smoking-fresh scrapes—and hunt bucks seeking to hook up with does near bedding areas in the mornings.

Again, if you can hack it, stay on a deep-cover stand all day. I expect some giants to fall from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. during the big moon November 5-10, maybe till as late as the 17th this year as the moon turns anew.

Buck movement and rutting activity will vary some according to local conditions and weather, but for the very best chance to shoot a giant I say hunt sometime in the Nov. 2-12 window.

You still have a decent shot into the new moon of November 17-18, though in most places the best rut will begin to gradually slow down.

If at all possible hunt ground with minimal or no pressure, which I know is difficult.

But even moderate human pressure can turn mature bucks nocturnal and blow up your moon opportunity.

Hunt hard and safe, and good luck, may 2025 be your year of the big one!

Waterfowl Prep: 10 Preseason Tips

(continued from page 31)

NINE: Be sure your licensing is all in order.

This includes not only obtaining a Federal Waterfowl Stamp but also signing it – assuming you have a hard copy. While electronic stamps are now available, they're not transferable so problem solved. Also, be sure you have your HIP# for each state you hunt in. Be sure it's either listed on your electronic or printed copy and if not, you have it written down or saved in your smartphone memos. You'll get a ticket for either of these mistakes if you get checked.

Bonus Tip: Create a folder in your smartphone with all your licenses and permits, so when asked, you're organized. The CO has better things to do than wait for you to sort through 800 screenshots of funny memes and photos of "short" bass you thought were worthy of a photo.

TEN: Touch base with private landowners including any you lease from. This ensures there are no surprises and gives them opportunity to let you know if anything has changed as far as areas to avoid or new neighbors who may be an issue. Also, if you hunt public land, be sure you're up to speed on the latest rules and regs of a given property. Most of the time this is available online, but occasionally, updates fall through the cracks, so a call to the property headquarters, or a better yet, a visit can save you a lot of headaches. Also, both landowners and property managers/biologists appreciate it when hunters are fully invested in preparation and obtaining information.

Bonus Tip: While they rarely take advantage of it, property owners appreciate it when hunters ask them if they need help with anything around the farm, etc. Gifts are fine and good, but nothing will ever trump sweat equity when they need another set of hands while working on something.

Fall Fishing: Don't Let Great Fishing Months Slip Away

(continued from page 35)

Steelhead runs have been below-average in recent years, but forecasts and dam counts are showing higher numbers of steelhead coming to Idaho, especially in the Clearwater River.

If enough fish return to Hells Canyon Dam, you can also expect some steelhead to be trucked to the Boise River, which typically starts in early November. Stay tuned to Fish and Game's website for details.

Don't overlook panfish and bass

We know, the best part of fishing for those fish is fast action on a warm, sunny day when sunscreen is as important as having the right bait. But crappie, bluegill, perch and bass feed much later in the season than most people realize. In fact, most never stop feeding, and even largemouth bass are occasionally caught by

Tungsten Jigs & Forward Facing Sonar

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That doesn't mean they always eat or eat with regularity, even when you drop it on their noggin.

"Last year, we went 2-3 days without catching a single fish at the championship on Lake Superior," says Huynh. "We had to cycle through nearly 30 plastic baits, each with a different profile and action, just to find what the fish were willing to eat." Winning combinations can often take patience to cycle through, but having a tungsten jig as the base portion of the bait enables anglers to fish with the most natural profile and stay out of the way of the bait as best as possible. "That was a maddening experience," mentions Huynh, "but it's often what it takes to unlock the bite."

Huynh finds fish with forward facing sonar outside of the weeds too, often choosing to look around near popular trolling places.

"We frequently show up to big trolling areas, where 20+ boats are pulling baits around."

These open water suspended fish can be great targets for that same approach too," says Huynh.

"Smaller profiles work well here, especially to still get the bait down in deeper water while keeping it realistic for walleyes cruising and suspended." The same can be said for river fishing, where the smaller profile is useful, but the pill-shaped design cuts through water better.

"In open water or current situations, the design of the jig gets that bait where it needs to be and keeps it there," says Huynh. "The forward facing sonar doesn't lie, we see these fish reacting really well to the baits."

ice anglers. Don't plan your outing around that, but the point is, if you can locate fish in the fall and get a bait, lure or fly in front of them, you stand a reasonable chance of hooking a fish. And as any ice angler will confirm, cold water doesn't bother perch.

And now for the fine print

Like all fishing, fall fishing can be unpredictable. While all the above is true, a serious cold snap, a big storm, or a blustery day are all possibilities and can put a damper on fishing. To be fair, that applies to spring as well, but in the fall it can feel much more abrupt when sunny and 70 turns to 30s and 40s and spitting snow and rain. But don't get discouraged by some gray weather. Some of the best fall fishing can happen on those rainy days, when fish feel safer in low, clear water.

Beware of low water, both in rivers and lakes, ponds and reservoirs. That lovely open water you fished in the spring may be much lower, which can make boat ramps problematic and present navigation hazards. Check conditions before you go.

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