

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING

DECEMBER 2025

NEWS



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Photo courtesy Oregon Department Of Fish & Wildlife <https://myodfw.com>

Sturgeon Fishing

Oregon Department Of Fish & Wildlife <https://myodfw.com>

The white sturgeon is one of Oregon's most iconic and distinctive fish species with a lineage dating back to the age of the dinosaurs...

Reaching a length of 8 feet or more, white sturgeon are a great challenge for Oregon anglers of all experience levels. They relocate unexpectedly, change their bait preferences and fight hard regardless of whether you hook them in a deep pool or a tidal flat. They are even more challenging for the public agencies that manage them.

The law of supply and demand applies to the delicious meat of these prehistoric fish, not the ability to legally pursue them purely for sport. If you just want to catch a sturgeon and perhaps snap a quick pic of it in the water before you release it, opportunity is abundant.

The white sturgeon is widespread in Oregon, ranging from the ocean to the Willamette River and up the Columbia and Snake River. Lots of places in the Willamette and Columbia offer year-round catch-and-release fishing. Always check the regulations to make sure you have the right paperwork (license, combined angling tag and Columbia River Endorsement) and which locations are open.

As with much fishing, a boat comes in handy for pursuing these giants. As they are often found in deep swirling waters, safety is paramount. When in doubt, go with a more experienced captain before you take your own boat out.

Bank anglers also catch their share, using heavy line and weights big enough to hold bait on the bottom. You need stout gear just to cast and manage your bait, let alone fight a fish bigger than you are.

Bait can be almost anything you could find on the bottom of the river, estuary or bay: herring, smelt, clams, sand shrimp and squid have tempted many a sturgeon to bite. It is not difficult to find good bait and a spot open to catch and release.

If you want to eat one of these delicious fish, the plot thickens considerably. This is where supply and demand come into play for fishery managers. The word has been out for many, many years, sturgeon meat is excellent when smoked or prepared any number of other ways for the table. So, the supply of people wanting to eat them has long outstripped the supply.

But why would the meat of such a widespread fish be in short supply? For starters, they are slow to mature. A sturgeon can live to be 100 years old, which is great. However, they reach sexual maturity as late as about 25 years old or about 6 feet long. They spawn every 2-8 years. Many other gamefish begin to reproduce far younger, spawning annually, leading to more juvenile fish and higher bag limits.

Even sturgeon that have reached the age of reproduction don't always find favorable spawning conditions. As broadcast spawners, they depend on the right water velocity, temperature and turbidity, which doesn't always occur. If females are too stressed, they may fail to spawn, reabsorb the eggs and then wait 3-5 years before attempting again.

Sea lions have had an impact too, by taking advantage of manmade pinch points. These marine mammals are known to target salmon and steelhead near fish ladders on the Willamette and Columbia rivers. They are also known to eat sturgeon. And while ODFW has lethally removed some of these predators from the rivers, federal law keeps that limited.

Fishery managers in Oregon have long used "retention" seasons to offer some opportunity for anglers to take a sturgeon home. These include limited days, low bag limits and restrictive size categories for keepers. This is all in the name of conserving the species while allowing some level of harvest for the table. In recent years, due to population issues, the only retention opportunity in the Columbia has been early in the year and in areas upstream of Bonneville Dam.

Even with all the caveats, the high demand to retain sturgeon has led to seasons stopping unexpectedly when quotas are reached early. This in turn has led to frustration for some sturgeon anglers who missed out completely because they were not on the water early enough in the season. Retention seasons on the Columbia upstream of Bonneville have traditionally opened on January 1, which means many sturgeon anglers have the day off and can help bring in the catch quota swiftly.

...ODFW and WDFW fishery managers are developing new approaches to season structures to spread out retention opportunity beyond so people can get there closest to opening day. Starting in 2026, sturgeon anglers should not expect the traditional New Years Day opener in all sections of the Columbia upstream of Bonneville.

Challenging to catch and even more challenging to manage, the white sturgeon is one of the iconic fish of the Pacific Northwest. Every angler owes it to themselves to fight one of these behemoths at least once. Eating one is just a bonus on top of the memories of a fight that will last a lifetime.

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"This is a win for anyone who cares about public access to our shared lands," said Randy Newberg, founder of Fresh Tracks and Hunt Talk media. "Our audience cares deeply about the Bullwhacker Allotment as it touts exceptional habitat and opportunities to hunt. It's an area that's both important to protect and for the public to access."

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) also applauded the announcement by American Prairie of its acquisition of Anchor Ranch and the opening of the Bullwhacker Road. "TRCP thanks American Prairie for taking meaningful steps to enhance and secure public access to hunting and fishing," said Ryan Chapin, Montana Field Manager with the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership...

American Prairie is also pleased to announce the acquisition of 1,888 deeded acres adjacent to the south side of Anchor ranch. And in a third and separate transaction in the Cow Creek basin of Blaine County, the organization acquired an additional 5,401 acres, consisting of 1,188 deeded acres and 4,213 leased acres. This property is located in the northern portion of the Breaks and extends American Prairie's shared fence line with the Fort Belknap Indian Community.

These three acquisitions bring American Prairie's total habitat base to 603,657 acres, which comprises 167,070 deeded acres and 436,587 leased public acres.

In addition to providing abundant public access, these properties feature important wildlife habitat for elk, deer and pronghorn, as well as upland birds. It also provides landscape connectivity for wildlife migration through the Monument to the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and north to the Bears Paw and Little Rockies mountain ranges.

American Prairie intends to share a more detailed public access plan in the future to spell out recreational uses on these new deeded acres. As it has done in the past, the organization needs to first take time to familiarize itself with these properties. In addition, on both the Anchor Ranch and the 5,401-acre property with public grazing leases, the ranching families who lease the properties will remain in place, and the land will continue to be used for agricultural production.

"We are really pleased to have the existing lessees stay on the ground where their cattle have been grazing, and we look forward to working with these ranching families," said Fox...While much of American Prairie's habitat base is leased to local livestock producers, nearly all of the 167,070 private acres it manages is open to the public. The nonprofit is one of the largest landowners participating in Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Block Management program for hunters with more than 80,000 acres enrolled. As the organization grows, so do the facilities and recreational opportunities it provides, garnering interest and visitation from people from all over the country. In 2024, American Prairie set a new visitation record for the seventh year in a row with more than 6,600 overnight visitors to its huts and campgrounds, and over 5,000 visitors at its National Discovery Center in Lewistown, Montana.

American Prairie Acquires Anchor Ranch, Opens Bullwhacker Road

American Prairie <https://americanprairie.org>

American Prairie is pleased to announce the acquisition of Anchor Ranch and two additional properties in Blaine County, Montana, marking a major milestone by growing the private and public land leases it manages to more than 600,000 acres.

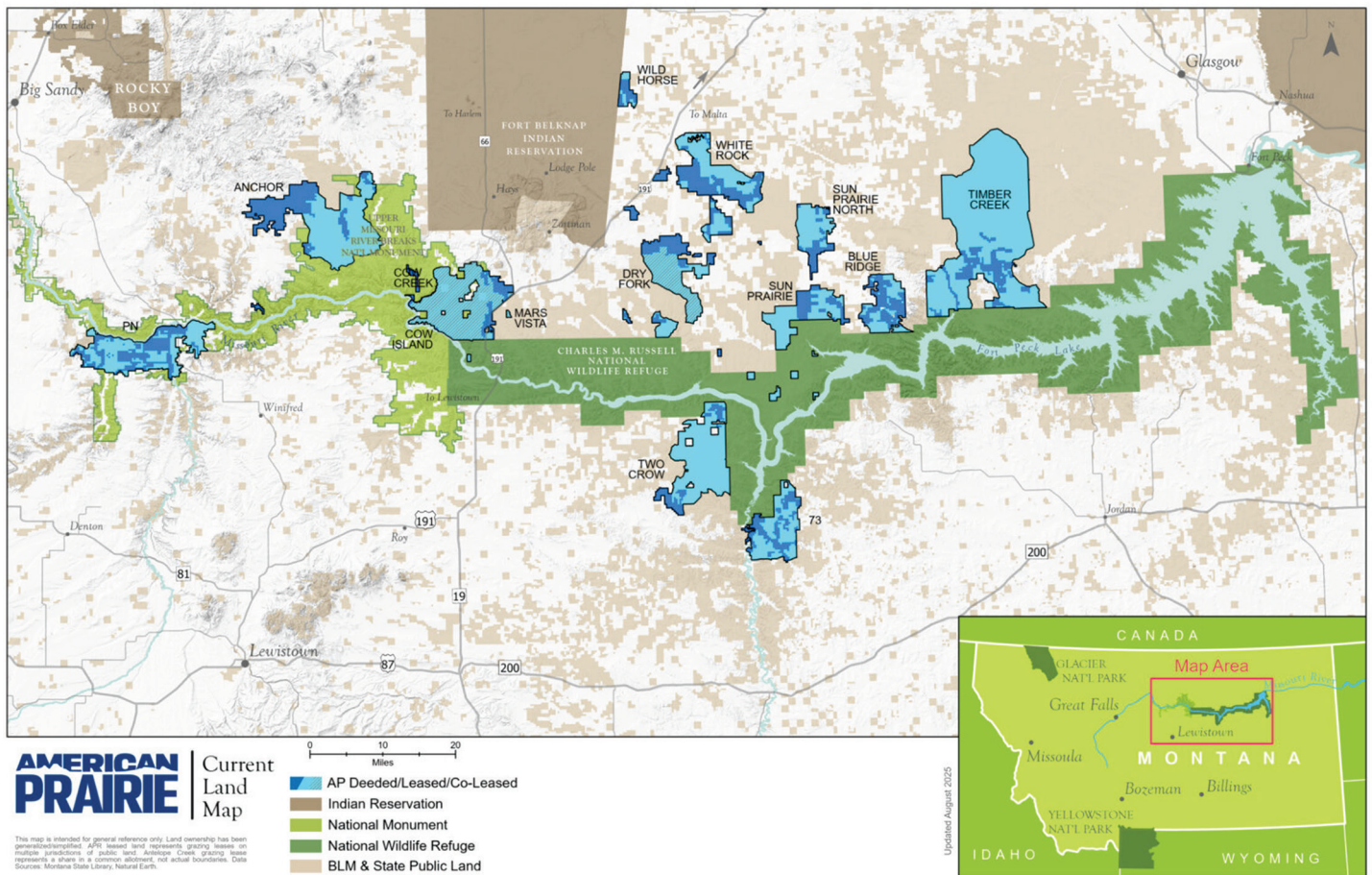
The acquisition of these properties, particularly Anchor Ranch, ensures the permanent protection of critical wildlife habitat and public access in this portion of the Upper Missouri River Breaks. It also represents a powerful win for public access, as American Prairie plans to reopen access to nearly 50,000 acres of public land after years of closure and controversy.

"This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure an important piece of ecologically and culturally significant land," said American Prairie CEO Alison Fox. "But this acquisition is equally important as a way to return public access to the people so they can explore, hunt, and recreate on land that's been off-limits for many years."

Located 69 miles southwest of Havre, Montana, the Anchor totals 67,960 acres, including 22,837 acres of deeded land and 45,123 leased acres, making it the second-largest land purchase in the non-profit's 24-year history, and significantly advancing the organization's mission of prairie ecosystem conservation.

Under American Prairie's ownership, access to a 3.8 mile section of Bullwhacker Road will be opened to the public, providing access to nearly 50,000 acres of public land that's been a point of dispute and lawsuits for years.

"We believe that public lands should be in public hands, and are proud to be able to provide more permanent access to this special area of the Breaks," said Fox. "While we will take some time to develop a comprehensive public access plan for this new property, the previously private stretch of Bullwhacker Road is now officially open to the public."



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Five Reasons You Should Be Coyote Hunting

By Anthony Wright
Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

1. Fawn/Calf Control

Many of us have seen videos on the internet of coyotes taking fawns down and, if you spend enough time hunting or scouting, you'll more than likely see it firsthand. I've seen this a few times just by luck: a couple of times back in my home state of Michigan and another time or two in my current state of Montana. Coyotes can really take a toll on deer populations if they are not managed. Some of the better times to hunt coyotes is when they are most vulnerable and less aware, such as during cattle calving season or late spring/early summer when deer are having their fawns. Most may not think of hunting them during this time since pelt sales aren't the best when they have their spring coats, but if you're going out as a management standpoint, then you can have very high success.

2. Make Some Extra Scratch

When pelts are in their prime and not rubbed or mangey you can make some good coin when you sell them to a local fur trader. I will be honest, though: the fur market is similar to a stock market. When demand is high, prices rise. When there is less demand, well, you get the idea; there's not a lot to make. I will say that it's worth your time to learn how to skin your own coyotes. It is not too hard, but it does take some practice and the less damage to the pelt, the better. Western pelts that are prime and with minimal damage can sometimes yield toward the \$100 mark; however, in my experience, those shot with a medium caliber and decent condition yield closer to the \$50 to \$75 range in a good market. Yet, if you shoot a couple over a weekend, you can offset your gas and travel costs with a little leftover for a beer or two with your hunting buddy!



Author Anthony Wright. Photos courtesy Anthony Wright and GOHUNT.com

3. Practice Your Skills



This may be the biggest benefit for you, the hunter when it comes to hunting these keen coyotes. Even when coyote hunting is slow you have the ability to stay proficient by using your glass, trying to pick apart the terrain, looking for those sneaky coyotes eyeballing your call from the distance. The slow part isn't as fun, though, as when they come cruising into your calls. Coyotes can come from anywhere. I've had them come in from 25 yards out of nowhere to all the way in from over a half a mile. No matter what the scenario is, it will challenge you as a hunter as you get into a range, gun on target, then execute the shot. Just as you would if hunting big game. Also, you have to play the wind heavily as coyotes base their approach solely on their noses. If a coyote smells something they don't like it won't matter how tasty that dying rabbit sounds, they will typically hold up far out of range or you won't see them at all. None the less, you have to act as a predator to hunt a predator effectively.

4. Excitement

There is always a surge of adrenaline when I see a coyote blitzing towards my caller when everything goes as planned. Once you have it happen for the first time you will be addicted, too. You'll also get a good deal of excitement trying to work in a stubborn dog that is interested, but hanging up right out of range. Trying to find the right pitch or sound from your hand call or e-caller can post a challenge, but stay patient and read their mannerisms. You'll learn what sounds they like, what their barks mean, why they vocalize, which, in turn, makes you more successful on your next calling session.

5. Stay Active During The Offseason

Post-holing through the snow on the way to the spot you want to call from is no joke. Or, if you're hunting in the West as I do currently, you may be covering quite a bit of distance on the vast wide-open prairies of public land. This will give you motivation to stay in decent shape while not in a big game hunting season. The more land you cover equals the more sets. The more sets you do equals more potential coyotes called in. More coyotes called in equals more fun! It's your standard win-win-win equation!

Calling coyotes can be a real blast, but don't underestimate them. They are sneaky and, if pressured, highly intelligent. Take some time during your offseason to hit the hills and give it a try!

As Always, Stay Safe and Hunt Hard!

Learn more at GOHUNT.com.

...Winter Stream Fishing Is A Perfect Opportunity To Stay Outdoors And Catch Fish

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

Keepp those off-season fishing mechanics sharp by getting out on your local stream or river this winter.

Ask just about anyone if standing in two feet of 33-degree water while snow somehow finds its way down the back of their base layer sounds like their idea of a good time, and you'll probably get a resounding no. This time of year, it's tempting for anglers to stash the rods and hang up the waders 'til next spring. And that turnkey fireplace beside the 55-inch flat screen doesn't make the decision any easier.

But for those willing to don their thickest neoprene waders, set up shop on an icy riverbank for a few hours and fuss with frozen guides, there are still several opportunities to sharpen one's angling skills, take in Idaho's beautiful winterscape and hook a few fish.

The benefits and strategy of winter stream fishing

There are several benefits to fishing rivers and streams during the coldest part of the year. For starters, you may have the whole stretch of river bank to yourself. For a handful of folks, fishing plays second fiddle to other winter hobbies like fly tying, skiing or making a pot of chili in the slow cooker. It shouldn't be too difficult to find a nice stretch of river where you won't have to worry about summer crowds.

Seek out slow, deep water where trout and whitefish will most likely be holding, expending as little energy as possible. Look for slow pockets or pools where water is barely flowing.

Slow and hungry

Just because fish are moving slower in the winter doesn't mean they're not still looking for an easy meal. Insect hatches are sparse in winter, but that doesn't mean they still aren't around as a food source for slow-moving fish. Fish can be frustratingly picky this time of year, so presentation and food size is vital.

As a general rule of thumb, use smaller bait and flies than you would in spring and summer.

The same goes for tippet. River flows in winter slow down dramatically and tend to be lower and clearer. That means it's even easier for fish to see right through a poorly-executed presentation. It might be wise to downsize your tippet from what you usually run in the spring and summer, such as a 4X to a 5X.

Technique, technique, technique

Once you got your rig set up, it's good to try different techniques that you might not have tried before in the warmer months.

Dead drifting is critical in winter because trout won't chase a fly in cold water. To dead drift, simply let the slow-moving current carry the fly either on the surface (dry fly) or just beneath the surface in the upper column of water (bait, nymphs, midges). If you see dimples on the water, it may be fish feeding on drifting insects, which will likely be tiny midges or mayflies.

Occasionally stream fish will rise for dry flies, such as small midges or olive mayflies, during the winter. But it isn't too common. Instead, save yourself a few extra grams of weight and keep that box of dry flies at home. A small midge emerger or a tiny olive mayfly emerger will be the only surface flies you need.

If fishing for trout or steelhead, try swinging a fly by keeping the fly in the upper part of the water column.

Steelhead and trout will often feed upwards, so a well-placed fly swinging across the upper portion of the water just may catch their eye.

If the fish aren't going for small flies like midges and stoneflies, it may not hurt to lob a streamer out there to test the waters, so to speak. Streamers can look like a big, easy meal when presented slowly, but don't expect trout to vigorously chase them like they do in summer.

Hit the snooze

The only thing sweeter than netting a jumbo fish in the middle of winter is netting a jumbo fish in the middle of winter after 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep... With most winter fisheries, fish won't be getting after it until mid-to late-morning...

See Idaho's Fishing Planner for more at: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/ifwis/fishingplanner/>.



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Leftover Turkey & Dumplings

By Jeremiah Doughty
Vortex Optics
www.vortexoptics.com

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 1/2 cup buttermilk
- 3 tbsp chives, minced
- 1 tbsp olive or avocado oil
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 1 large brown onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 celery stalks chopped
- 1/2 tsp fresh thyme
- 4 cups turkey or chicken broth
- 1/3 cup flour
- Salt & pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup peas, frozen or fresh
- 1 cup fresh corn
- 2 cups leftover turkey, or any other game bird you have

Directions:

Add some oil to your Dutch oven or stockpot over med-high heat. Add celery, carrots, and onion. Cooking and stirring often, you don't want to caramelize them, just letting them sweat and onions become soft.

Add garlic and finish another 1 min, followed by thyme and broth. Keep about 1/3 of the broth set aside.

In a small bowl whisk flour together with 1/3 cup broth until smooth. Add to the pot along with peas, corn, and wild turkey.

Cook uncovered at med/high heat while you work on dumplings.

In bowl whisk flour, baking soda and salt, add egg, buttermilk, and chives, blending until just smooth.

*Don't over mix or your dumplings will be dense.

Using a spoon scoop and drop them into the broth, the doubling should double in while cooking in the delicious broth. So, don't worry about the size.

Cover the pot and cook 20 minutes or until the dumplings are cooked. After 15 minutes you can poke the dumplings with a toothpick to see if they are done. If your pick is clean grab a bowl, serve and enjoy.



Photo credit Jeremiah Doughty
courtesy www.vortexoptics.com



Photo credit Jeremiah Doughty courtesy www.vortexoptics.com

Venison Holiday Roulade With Apple Cranberry Sourdough Stuffing

By Jeremiah Doughty
Vortex Optics www.vortexoptics.com

Looking for something with more wow factor? Serve up this roulade (which is French for "to roll") and bring your venison to a whole new level.

Stuffing Ingredients:

- 2 cups sourdough bread, torn into small pieces
- 5 tbsp melted butter
- 1/2 white onion, minced
- 1 celery stalk, diced finely
- 2 tsp dried sage
- 1 tsp thyme, chopped
- 1 tsp rosemary, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped fine
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 green apple, chopped small
- 1/2 cup dried or fresh cranberries

Steak:

- 1 venison backstrap
- 2 tbsp poultry seasoning

Poultry Seasoning:

- 2 teaspoons ground sage
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground thyme
- 1 teaspoon ground marjoram
- 3 teaspoons ground rosemary
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon fine sea salt

Directions:

-Heat grill, oven, or pellet smoker to 225°.

-Start out by filleting your backstrap to double the size.

-In a skillet add butter and melt, add onions, celery, apples and cranberries, cook 3-5 minutes.

-Add sourdough and mix until sourdough is toasted.

-Pour mixture over strap, leaving a finger size portion on top and bottom empty.

-Roll your straps and wrap in butcher twine to keep from un-rolling.

-Rub meat with poultry seasoning.

-Place in smoker, cook until internal temp reaches 120°.

Raise temp to 400, finish cooking 5-10 minutes until 130°.

Remove steak and let it rest 10 minutes, slice and enjoy.

Venison Stew Recipe

By Jeremiah Doughty

Vortex Optics www.vortexoptics.com

Could anything warm you up more than a rich and savory venison stew?...

Ingredients:

1-pound shoulder meat, cubed 1" pieces
4 large carrots, rough chopped
3 celery ribs, rough chopped
5 cloves garlic, minced
1 yellow onion, rough chopped
2 rosemary springs, leaves only, minced
2 thyme springs, leaves only, minced
3-4 potatoes, rough cut
3oz tomato paste
2 cups red wine
4 cups venison or beef broth
1 cup flour
Olive or Avocado oil
2 tsp cracked pepper
1 tsp sea salt

Directions:

Debone venison shoulder steaks and trim off all fat and silver, cube into 1" pieces.

Mix salt and pepper into flour, toss and coat meat in batches. Let meat sit 1-2 minutes allowing the gluten in the flour to get sticky.

In large pot or Dutch oven add about 3 tbsps of oil over med-high heat.



Photo credit Jeremiah Doughty courtesy www.vortexoptics.com

Add meat in patches, you're just wanting to brown the meat, not cook it fully.

Once cooked remove from heat and set aside.

Pour 1 1/2 cups of wine into skillet, de-glaze pot by scraping with a wooden spoon or spatula. Add onions and cook over medium for 2-3 minutes or until onions are soft.

Add tomato paste and remaining wine, mix well.

Add meat and broth, bring to a boil, reduce heat to med-low and cover. Cook 2 hours.

Check meat tenderness at 2 hours, if still stiff add 30 minutes more until fork tender.

Once meat is tender add veggies and herbs, simmer an additional 1 hour covered.

Remove from heat, serve, and enjoy.

Watch Jeremiah in the kitchen here:
<https://youtu.be/jD76gWBlo9Q?si=5ftKhKKPjge6eWff>.



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See What's Available In The Nonresident Tag Drawing For General Season Deer/Elk Tags In 2026 And How To Apply

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

Idaho will hold its first-ever drawing for nonresident deer/elk tags in December

Nonresident deer and elk hunters interested in applying for general season deer and elk hunts in the first-ever Nonresident Tag Drawing can see what tags are available for 2026 here: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/seasons-rules-big-game-supplemental-proclamation-2026-2.pdf> and apply for those tags in December.

The Nonresident General Deer and Elk tags brochure lists tags for elk, regular deer, and white-tailed deer available by elk zone or hunting unit.

It is to be used as a cross reference with the Idaho Big Game Seasons and Rules brochure found online at: (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/rules/big-game>), which specifies hunt seasons and boundaries, rules, and other information.

Important dates for 2026 nonresident general deer and elk tags

December 5-15, 2025: Application period for Nonresident Tag Drawing (including Disabled American Veterans deer/elk tags)

Results Announcement: Early January 2026

Deadline to Claim Tags (except DAV): Jan. 20, 2026

All hunters will be required to buy a 2026 hunting license valid to hunt big game in order to apply. All hunting license purchases are nonrefundable.

Participating in the nonresident general season deer/elk drawing will not affect a hunter's eligibility to apply for controlled hunts in the spring.

There will be a separate drawing for 500 deer and 300 elk tags for disabled American veterans.

Applying for nonresident, general season deer/elk tags

If you've bought an Idaho hunting, fishing or trapping license in the last 10 years or so, you probably have an account, so log into: https://license.gooutdoorsidaho.com/Licensing/CustomerLookup.aspx?_gl=1*kea9ay*_ga*MTEzMzIxNTM0MC4x-NzYyMDQzNTY4*_ga_SVSTB7KFYD*cze3Njl-wNDM1NjgkbzEkZzEkdDE3NjIwNDQyMjUkajYw-JGwwJGgw with your last name, date of birth and last four digits of your Social Security number. Ensure your user profile is up to date, including your mailing address and email address. Tags purchased will be mailed to the address on your account. Licenses purchased will be emailed along with a transaction confirmation. You will also be notified by email of your results in the tag drawing.

If you're a first-time Idaho hunting license buyer, you need proof of Hunter Education Certification if you were born after 1974. Archery hunters must also prove their archery certification.

Hunters can submit a total of two applications: one for elk and one for deer (except for DAV applicants). Hunters can apply for up to five hunt choices (units/zones) each for deer and elk. Regular deer tags and white-tailed deer tags can be applied for on the same application.

Nonresident group applications may be submitted with up to four hunters in a group, and if one person draws, everyone in the group gets a tag.

Deadline to buy tags

All hunters who draw a deer or elk tag in the Nonresident Tag Drawing must buy it by Jan. 20, 2026. That is an absolute deadline, and any tags not purchased by that date will be forfeited and available in a second application period in February.

Anyone who is successful in the first application period is ineligible to apply for the second Nonresident Tag Drawing for general season deer and elk tags...

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Hunter Casey Brooks with his world record non-typical American elk. Photo courtesy the Pope & Young Club <https://www.pope-young.org>

NEW WORLD RECORD Non-Typical American Elk

The Pope And Young Club <https://www.pope-young.org>

Pope and Young, America's leading bowhunting organization, is proud to announce a new Pope and Young (P&Y) World Record Non-Typical American Elk. A special panel was convened by both the Pope and Young Club and Boone and Crockett Club consisting of experienced measurers from each organization in Lacey, Washington, on October 13th to verify the scoring of this exceptional animal—and it has officially been confirmed as the new Pope and Young World Record. This was the first ever joint special panel with both Pope & Young Club and Boone and Crockett Club convened for a potential World Record for both organizations.

On December 31, 2024, Casey Brooks shot this record-breaking bull in Kittitas County, Washington. The bull has an official score of 478 2/8", surpassing the previous Pope & Young World Record by an astounding 28 6/8". This incredible bull is less than half an inch from the Boone and Crockett World Record, which would be the largest bull ever taken or found in North America, and Casey killed his bull with archery equipment, which was an outstanding accomplishment.

Casey pursued this bull for two years before he was able to get it within bow range. Undeterred, he dedicated himself to the chase, ultimately releasing a well-placed arrow on the final day of 2024...

"From a scoring and verification standpoint, this bull was remarkable in every way," said Roy Grace, Records Chairman for Pope and Young. "The mass, tine length, and overall configuration made it clear early on that we were witnessing something special. It's a true testament to the conservation success of bowhunting and wildlife management..."

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DIY Vs. Guided Hunts: The Cost, Value And Decisions

By Ryan McSparran

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equip. Co. www.caribougear.com

There are many ways to plan any given hunting adventure. Whether you're planning a western big game hunt, an upland bird hunt or anything in between, there are pros and cons to DIY versus guided trips.

Access to local knowledge and equipment, access to private land, access to remote areas via horses or bush plane, time, budget, the satisfaction of doing it yourself, and a host of other factors can go into the decision. Ultimately, it's going to be different for every hunter in every situation.

Personally, I have experienced and can understand both sides on any given hunt. I grew up in a DIY hunting family and I am a proud public lands user. I love the scouting and the planning involved in a DIY hunt.

On the other hand, I've also been a hunting guide for nearly 15 years and had the opportunity to see and experience different outfits from Alaska to Mexico. And now running my own outfitting business, I am painfully aware of the logistics and overhead that go into a guided trip.

In looking at the costs, the value and the decisions that go into DIY versus guided hunting trips, here are a few things to consider.

Time and Budget

Among the first considerations for any hunter is the balance between available time and budget. In fact, I was just recently chatting with one of my guided hunting clients about this very topic. He's a custom log home builder from Ohio. Over the years, he's had the opportunity to embark on several guided elk hunts in Colorado.

The way he explained it, it's simply not worth (and not always possible) taking the time away from work to plan and execute the logistics that go into an elk hunt; especially, the type of remote, wilderness hunt that he enjoys so much. Therefore, going with an outfitter on a guided, horseback trip makes the most sense for him.

For other hunters, the cost of a guided big game hunt is simply out of the question and investing the time into organizing all of those logistics, scouting where and how to hunt an area makes more sense. For each hunter, that balance between time and budget is going to be different.

Keep in mind, that balance between time and budget might change from one type of hunt to another. For example, as a hunting guide here in Colorado, I am well equipped to embark on a DIY elk hunt.



Photos credit Ryan McSparran courtesy www.caribougear.com

But as soon as we start talking about waterfowl, it's a much different story. I don't have the know-how, decoys or anything else. Whereas I may not require a guide for elk, I would definitely consider a guided waterfowl hunt.

Equipment and Resources

Another factor to consider is the required equipment and other resources that it might take to pull off a hunting trip. Sticking with the example of a waterfowl hunt above, I don't have the decoys, trailers or other things it takes to be an effective waterfowl hunter. Nor do I hunt birds often enough to justify those purchases. So for me, it's probably much more effective to join up with a great waterfowl guide when I want that experience.

Other resource considerations might include horses to pack a large animal out of a remote roadless area. Or even the need for bush planes in places like Alaska. Every hunt comes with a different set of requirements. And each hunter should carefully judge whether it's worth investing in those things – or whether it's best to hire someone who already has them.

Legal Requirements

Of course some locations and some big game species require the use of a licensed guide or outfitter. If you want to hunt brown bears, dall sheep in Alaska, mountain caribou in British Columbia, or even the renown Thoroughfare Wilderness in Wyoming, you may need to go with a guide (there are some exceptions).

Depending on the hunts that are on your bucket list, saving up to do a guided hunt might be a requirement.

A Few Thoughts on Guided Hunts

If you are considering a guided hunt, no matter if it's an extended big game expedition or just a day of duck hunting in a pit blind, be sure to carefully consider the value versus the cost and do your homework. If the cost of a hunt seems too good to be true, then it probably is – and the actual value is probably lacking.

From big game to birds, a hard-working and talented outfitter will have excellent staff, equipment, safety measures, food and lodging where applicable, and a host of other critical elements. Choosing a quality outfitter doesn't necessarily mean you'll be more successful. The weather and the wildlife will present their usual challenges. But going with a quality outfit should ensure a safe and enjoyable experience, no matter the hunting conditions.

Guided hunting isn't cheap. Nor would you want it to be. When you consider the cost to keep up equipment, vehicles, hiring quality staff, liability insurance, and so on, the thought of going with a cut-rate outfitter can seem scary. Do your research, speak with references, and remember that it's better to save up for a quality experience, than to throw money away on a lousy trip.

Finally, one of the most important factors in choosing any outfitter is matching the right one to your expectations.

For example, my outfit offers remote wilderness elk hunts on horseback. But I know some outstanding outfitters who offer private land elk hunts in terrain that's much more accessible. One isn't right or wrong. They're just totally different. When it comes to any hunt, start by defining your priorities, your expectations, your physical abilities and your budget. Answering those questions first will help match you with the right experience and find the guided trip that's best for you.



Gear for the Adventure

Whether you're planning a bucket-list guided hunt or your own DIY hunting adventure, we hope you have a safe and memorable trip! Be sure and check out all the great hunting gear that we offer here in the Caribou Gear store. Visit www.caribougear.com.

From JetBoil stove systems to Kenetrek boots, we carry items that we personally use and trust in the field. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to reach out. We'd love to help you feel prepared and ready for your next hunt!

Ryan is the proud owner of Budge's Wilderness Lodge and is proud to be a part of the team at Caribou Gear.

Congratulations to author Tom Cooper and his wife Tana on the birth of their grandson Landon.

Tom has generously shared stories of his hunts, adventures, and hobbies over the years with our readers.



We imagine we will be reading about hunting adventures with Landon some day.



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Northern Minnesota ice fishing guide, Brian "Bro" Brosdahl .
Photos courtesy Northland Fishing Tackle <https://www.northlandtackle.com>

Must Have Tungsten Ice Jig

Northland Fishing Tackle <https://www.northlandtackle.com>

With countless panfish ice jigs on the market today—models from big-name manufacturers to small, garage lure-makers—it can be difficult to know exactly the best jigs to fish.

So, you must look at the track record. Northland has been fashioning jigs that have done one thing well for decades—and that's put more fish in the bucket. Northland has earned brand allegiance over many, many years for the simple fact that, yes, Northland ice baits catch the most fish.

The Tungsten Flat Fry Jig, which hardcore hardwater angler/panfish expert and Northland pro staffer, Joel Nelson, beta-tested throughout the course of last winter. His diagnosis of the new design?

"Honestly, I was kind of unimpressed when I first saw the jig," says Nelson. "It looked basic at first glance, but I soon discovered that it's an entirely new take on panfish tungsten jigs."

"Vertically, its profile is skinny, so it falls faster than typical tungsten panfish jigs, so you can fish it fast. However, the jig hook-shank is long, so you slide on whatever plastic or meat you want. Both factors combine so you can control the rate-of-fall better with the Flat-Fry Jig than other tungsten panfish jigs. For example, if the bite is really finicky and calls for finesse, I'll wad up a bunch of larvae on it—maybe even a plastic, too—and that allows me to slow down the speed and rate-of-fall," continues Nelson.

But Nelson says the same Tungsten Flat Fry design also allows him to hole-hop, or fish fast and aggressively in one spot, and adding a slender microplastic like an Impulse Bloodworm or Mini-Smelt streamlining the entire offering, making it a quick and ultra-responsive bait for triggering (and icing) lots of fish fast.

"Last winter I used Northland's Bro's Bloodworm tail quite a bit on the Tungsten Flat Fry when fish were active. The Bloodworm with its long, thin, slender tail really quivers. Personally, I cut off a bit of the bloodworm to shorten up the presentation for big 'gills and crappies, but you can pretty much leave as-is for perch. Other times I'd use an Impulse Mini-Smelt and one spike. Both methods produced."



In terms of Tungsten Flat Fry jig sizes, Nelson used the smaller of the two models—the 1/28th oz.—for bluegills, opting for the slightly larger 1/16th oz. with #10 hook for crappies and perch.

"The nice thing about the 1/16th oz. Tungsten Flat Fry is the jig hook is the perfect size for crappies, no matter what you're tipping it with. It's not too small, not too large—and has a long hook-shank and ample hook-gap for solidly pinning papermouths to get them topside."

Nelson was also impressed with how well both sizes show up on traditional flashers and forward-facing sonar in either down- or forward-looking modes.

"The Tungsten Flat Fry has a flat top to it—which is where the name comes from—and shows up extremely well on electronics. That's definitely a plus. A lot of times, especially with flashers, it can be hard to get a small jig to show up in your transducer cone. This design eliminates that problem."

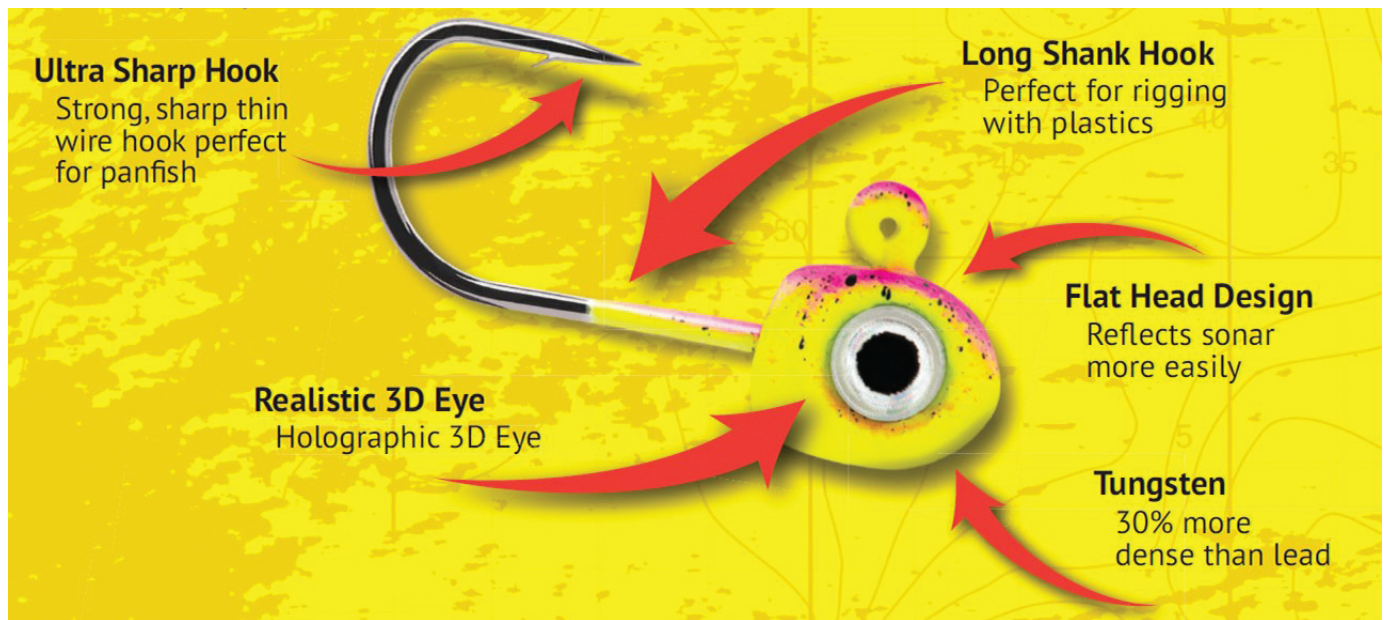
Nelson's color picks?

"Purple Wonder worked awesome for me, as did Ladybug, and other new Super-Glo finishes," offers Nelson.

"Super-Glo Red is also a must-have, and in the stained waters I fish a lot, the Super-Glo Sneeze pattern caught a lot of fish. But I always had Purple Wonder tied on everywhere I went last winter."



Tungsten Flat Fry (Purple Wonder)



Bro Talks: The New Tungsten Flat Fry Jig

Northern Minnesota ice fishing guide, Brian “Bro” Brodahl, also calls them “must-have” panfish tungsten ice fishing jigs for the upcoming hardwater season.

“I fished the Tungsten Flat Fry everywhere last year and caught bluegills, crappies, and perch, including some big ones in tough weather on heavily-fished waters,” says Bro.

“I had some great success last winter combining the Tungsten Flat Fry Jig with the lifelike body of the Impulse® Rigged Mayfly. An Impulse Rigged Mayfly package comes with two pre-rigged lead jig-heads—still great for shallow water—but you also get three additional Impulse® Mayfly bodies. For perch, an Impulse Mayfly and the Tungsten Flat Fry Jig caught a lot of fish for me,” recalls Bro.

But Bro says there were times when meat was required. “It’s pretty standard for ice anglers to dress a jig or spoon with a fathead or crappie minnow head, but I also like to pinch off the tail and use that instead—especially for big panfish. Sometimes that seals the deal.”

Bro’s Winning Super-Glo Patterns

Available in 11 different colors, ice anglers can choose from Glo Red, Glow Chartreuse, Gold (non-glow), Glo White, Fruit Fly (Glow), Tiger Beetle (Glow), Woodtick (Glow), Ladybug (Glow), Wonderbread (Glow), Purple Wonder (Glow), and Sneeze (Glow).

In terms of Tungsten Flat Fry colors, Bro thinks ice anglers should pick out a selection and run through them on the ice, letting the fish reveal their preferences.

“Super-Glo Ladybug was a hit everywhere, with its orange/pink/chartreuse glow and black dots, from big bluegills to crappies and perch. I made sure to always have one tied on a rod or two. Super-Glo Wonderbread caught lots of fish too, and Super-Glo Purple Wonder was a champ on ultra-clear waters,” notes Bro.

Magnified Sonar Returns

“Both the shape and density of the tungsten head show up better than any other jig head I’ve ever seen on sonar—and super large on my MEGA Live. So, for anglers using forward-facing sonar, even in deep waters the tiniest 1/28-ounce Tungsten Flat Fry shows up giant on your screen.”

The Tungsten Flat Fry Jig hangs at a 90-degree angle to imitate minnows or young-of-the-year panfish—favorite forage of perch, bluegill and crappies—a key presentation on pressured waters. Whether dressed with a microplastic, waxworms or spikes, or a small live minnow or minnow-meat, the resulting combo is deadly.

FEATURES:

- 90-degree hook bend
- Jig sits horizontally, mimicking minnows, real, live fry, and small forage
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5 Guns Every Hunter Needs

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

To have a blast shooting targets and hunting every species of game bird and animal across America, you only need 5 firearms.

.22 Long Rifle (LG)

Every man, woman and child on Earth needs a good old .22, whether for plinking paper or potting a mess of squirrels in October. It's the rifle that most of us grew up with. The one you need to get into your kid's hands as soon as he or she is ready to join our shooting fraternity.

Quiet to shoot and with no recoil, a rimfire rifle is the perfect tool for young or new shooters. For those of you who have been hunting awhile, think of a .22 as the perfect understudy for your deer rifle. You can go to the range several times a year and comfortably shoot a scoped .22 rifle all day long to fine-tune your sight picture, breathing, alignment and trigger control. There's no better practice for the upcoming whitetail season, I don't care how experienced you are.

The .22LR has long been the most popular cartridge in America, and today's rimfire rifles are of the best quality yet. No matter your preference or budget, there's a sweet-shooting bolt-action or autoloader for you.

Bolt-Action Deer Rifle

I could write for days about deer rifles, but here I'll simplify things: Any centerfire rifle that shoots a 140- to a 180-grain bullet accurately out to 250-300 yards is a good choice for hunting any species of deer anywhere in North America.

Five calibers you should consider: .270, .308, 7mm-08, .30-06 and 7mm Rem. Mag. There are many more adequate cartridges out there and new rounds popping up every so often, but go with one of the aforementioned and proven 5 and you'll be happy.

I have 3 favorites:

.270: As hunting cartridges go, the .270 is a plenty accurate round with manageable recoil; no question, the less "kick" of a rifle, the better people shoot and hunt with it. While the perfect caliber for whitetails, the .270 with a 140-grain bullet is fine if you get a hankering to go West for mule deer.

7mm-08: Overlooked by too many hunters, this round is accurate, easy-to-shoot and has minimal recoil. The 7mm-08 is an especially good choice for young hunters and women. I use mine to hunt Texas whitetails every year.

If you want more firepower and can handle more recoil, you can't go wrong with the time-proven .30-06. If you choose a bolt-action that fits you well and feels comfortable and snug on your shoulder and cheek, the recoil of an '06 actually isn't that bad.

A thumper for whitetails and muleys; move up to the 180-grain bullet and you can hunt every hoofed mammal in North America, including elk and moose.

While some rifles will shoot better than others right out of the box, any new bolt gun you purchase will be more than accurate enough for deer hunting. All you really need is a rifle/scope/ammo combo that will shoot a 3-shot group that measures 2 inches or less at 100 yards. That's a bar easy to meet, and most .30-06 rifles with good scopes shoot better.

Final thoughts: Barrels on today's hunting rifles are typically 22 or 24 inches, either is fine. Lightweight synthetic stocks are tough, look okay and shed rain. Many rifles come from the factory with trigger pulls of 5 pounds or more. You will shoot better with a crisp-breaking, 3 1/2- to 4-pound trigger. Have a qualified guy at your gun shop measure the trigger and lighten the pull if necessary.

Shotgun

"Bird Gun" is our Southern term for a wood-stocked, lightweight, sweet-handling, 12- or 20-gauge shotgun that is perfect for breaking clay pigeons or shooting a limit of quail, doves or pheasants.

We're talking semi-auto or over/under chambered for 2 3/4-inch shells (typically No. 7 1/2 to 9 shot), with a 24- to 26-inch barrel fitted with chokes tubes. Skeet, Improved Cylinder and Modified are the top tubes you'll need and use.

A bird gun is the cream of the crop of this collection, and will run you \$1,000 to \$2,000 or a bit more. Shop around and check out the used gun rack at your local gun shop. Think of it as a lifelong investment, a gun you can pass along to one of your kids.

Bottom line, you need a fine shotgun to get the most enjoyment out of your wing-shooting, be it for clay pigeons or live feathers.

Either 12- or 20-gauge is okay. If you'll shoot mostly skeet and clays, I'd recommend a 20. If you'll hunt a lot of doves, grouse and heavier pheasants, I'd go with a 12-gauge.

You could screw a Full Choke tube into your bird gun and use it to kill a turkey or a limit of mallards—I've done that a bunch of times—but there is a better choice of gun for that.

Magnum Shotgun

While not a gun you'll shoot every month, you need a heavy-duty 12-gauge magnum for your arsenal. It's the ticket for turkey hunting in the spring, and a workhorse for shooting ducks and geese in fall and winter.

Your choice of pump or semi-auto, chambered for 3- and 3 1/2-inch shotshells and cloaked in camo of course. If you'll hunt mostly waterfowl, go with a 26- or 28-inch barrel. (continued on page 33)

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Waterfowl Season...In Southwest Idaho...Here's What You Need To Know

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

In addition to charging your flapper batteries, tuning your calls, and untangling decoy weights before you head out, you should also be sure to review the Idaho Migratory Game Bird 2025-2026 Seasons & Rules Brochure (https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/migratorygame2025-2026_web.pdf), where you will find a few notable changes compared to last season:

Limit change for pintail: An interim adaptive harvest strategy has been implemented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on an experimental basis, starting this year. What that means for Idaho hunters this season is simple: the daily bag limit is now three (3) pintails of either sex.

A split season for light geese in Southwest Idaho: The first split opens with ducks and Canada geese on Oct. 19 and runs through Dec. 24. The second split starts on Feb. 1 and runs through March 10. Fish and Game surveyed goose hunters in 2024 to learn their preferences, which resulted in new hunt areas and season dates across the state.

Another significant change for Southwest Idaho hunters that you won't find in the regulations (but will see signed on location): Access to the Fort Boise Wildlife Management Area is now open only from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. The same rule also applies at the nearby Roswell Marsh Wildlife Habitat Area. Access outside those hours is prohibited.

Waterfowl hunters can still use parking areas at Fort Boise and Roswell before 5 a.m., and hunters or anglers launching boats from the Fort Boise WMA boat ramp are exempt from the new user hour restrictions. You can read more about the change and why it was necessary here (<https://idfg.idaho.gov/article/waterfowl-hunters-should-be-aware-access-changes-fort-boise-wma-and-roswell-marsh-wma>).

With the season opening on a Sunday this year, hunters are reminded that the portion of the Roswell Marsh Wildlife Habitat Area south of Highway 18 can only be hunted on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays...



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

What can hunters expect for the 2025-2026 waterfowl season?

First, the big picture: Idaho Fish and Game biologists can generally provide an informed outlook for upland game bird and big game hunters at a regional level, but it's harder to get a bead (see what we did there?) on how things might go for local waterfowl hunters before the season. In some cases, the migrations of ducks and geese span continents, and countless variables come into play as they travel between northern breeding habitats and southern wintering grounds.

With that said, Idaho waterfowl hunters can look to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's annual Waterfowl Population Status Report (<https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-09/waterfowl-population-status-report-2025.pdf>) to get an idea of the potential for the 2025-2026 season, paying particular attention to the habitat conditions and population numbers in Alberta, where a good portion of the migrating dabbling ducks that are harvested in Idaho originate. However, local waterfowl abundance (and harvest) is generally dependent upon weather patterns and the timing of the fall and winter migrations.

One thing Idaho waterfowl hunters will certainly have an abundance of is opportunity. Idaho provides the maximum number of huntable days allowed under the federal regulatory framework for migratory bird seasons and routinely surveys hunters to ensure that season dates align with hunter preferences.

Southwest Idaho also offers plentiful public access for waterfowl hunters. That includes four Fish and Game Wildlife Management Areas with notable waterfowl hunting opportunities, dozens of Fish and Game boating access sites on the Snake, Boise and Payette rivers, and the Deer Flat National Wildlife Refuge that is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service...

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Photo credit MFWP

Six Men Charged In Montana Elk Poaching Case

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation <https://www.rmef.org>

Below is a news release from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks...

Six men from Montana and Washington pled guilty in Musselshell County Justice Court to unlawfully killing bull elk and mule deer bucks near Roundup. They have been sentenced to a combined total of \$22,890 in fines and license revocations totaling 28 years.

The investigation began with information provided to Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) wardens by a confidential informant. After an extensive investigation, wardens found that the group of both residents and nonresidents killed several large bull elk in Hunting District 590 without the required elk permit and also killed several large mule deer without hunting licenses. The violations occurred between 2020 and 2024.

During the investigation, Montana wardens worked with wardens in Washington State who seized several mounts of unlawfully killed elk and deer. Montana wardens also seized multiple elk and deer mounts in Montana. In total, 11 mounts were seized as evidence in the investigation, and a total of 34 charges and 13 warnings were issued by FWP wardens.

"We would like to thank the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Billings Police Department and the Musselshell County Attorney's Office for their assistance," said FWP Game Warden Jake Barzen, who was the lead investigator in the case. "But most of all, we thank the public, since like in so many other cases, it was their tips that initially sparked our investigation."

The sentences are:

Ben Valadez—Tri Cities, Wash., \$8,050 in fines and restitution and an 8-year license revocation

Devon Rea—Roundup, Mont., \$4,275 in fines and restitution and a 4-year license revocation

Kyle Steiling—Tri Cities, Wash., \$3,640 in fines and restitution and a 4-year license revocation

Mitch Miller—Roundup, Mont., \$3,050 in fines and restitution and an 8-year license revocation

Noa Valadez—Tri Cities, Wash., \$2,070 in fines and restitution and a 2-year license revocation

Johnny Lopez—Tri Cities, Wash., \$1,805 in fines and restitution and a 2-year license revocation...



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Vortex Optics Gear Review

Now that most hunting seasons are over or almost over for the year, and Christmas is near, it's a good time to reflect on how your optics performed and also a good time to ask Santa for some new gear.

Having used Vortex Optics for fifteen years we can attest to their quality and exceptional customer service. Below are a few of our favorites from Vortex. If you haven't tried Vortex Optics, we encourage you to check them out at www.vortexoptics.com.

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RANGING MODES

Horizontal Component Distance (HCD): Displays the slope angle compensated distance to the target.

Line of Sight (LOS): Displays the actual line of sight range.

SCAN Feature: Displays continuous distance readings while panning across a landscape.

TARGET MODES

Normal Mode: The standard mode providing the target's range with the strongest range result. Recommended for most situations.

First Mode: Displays the closest distance when ranging. Ideal for ranging a smaller target in front of other larger or more reflective objects.

Last Mode: Displays the farthest distance when ranging. Ideal for ranging a specific target behind a group of objects like brush, trees, rocks, etc.

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Anti-reflective coatings on all air-to-glass surfaces provide increased light transmission for greater clarity and low-light performance.

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Provides precise aiming under low-light conditions.

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- 5-25X50 FFP VMR-4 (MOA) RETICLE | 30MM TUBE
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Line of Sight (LOS): Displays the actual line of sight range.

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Extended Laser Range (ELR) Mode: Ideal for ranging targets at extreme distances. A slightly longer response time allows greatly for extended range distances. Best used on a tripod.

(continued next page)

Vortex Optics Gear Review

(continued from page 21)

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Strategic Benefits To Backpack Hunting

By Josh Kirchner

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

I will be the first to admit that backpack hunting has definitely gotten “trendy.” It is now cool to load up your backpack and head into the backcountry for a stretch with a tag in your pocket. Embracing the backcountry life is something that is more sought after than ever. Yet, it’s not all about living through our backcountry dreams. Backpack hunting is in fact a tool, just like any other gear in your loadout. And just like any other piece of gear, we can use backpack hunting to our advantage. There are strategic benefits to living out of a backpack in the dirt that span well beyond our wild romanticizations.

Why Do We Really Backpack Hunt?

Before I get into a few key strategic benefits to backpack hunting, let’s lay out why we do such things in the first place. Personally, I first started backpack hunting in order to beat the crowd. One too many times, I was left disappointed on a hunt due to pressure from other hunters. We’re all in this together, but if I’m being frank, I’d rather not see y’all when I’m out hunting. Hunting trips are something I always looked at to go live in the woods with my dad for a bit and explore the wild. Seeing other hunters is a possibility in the backcountry as well, but it happens to a far lesser degree. Go where most people aren’t and you’ll get away from most people.

Another reason that seems to hold weight across the backcountry hunting community is just the experience. The experience of a backpack hunt is simply different than that of a truck based hunt. I’m not saying one is better than the other, but they do sit in different rooms of the same house. Just going through the motions of a backpack hunt is fulfilling. It feels good making a big hike into camp and getting everything set up. It feels good to wake up a stone’s throw away from a glassing knob, make your coffee and eat within the deafening silence of wilderness. Filled tag or not, the experience is a reward, both mentally and physically.

With all of that, there are some strategic benefits to living in the backcountry. Knowing how to use a tool is far better than just having one in your possession.



Photos credit Josh Kirchner courtesy GOHUNT.com

Camping at the Edge

Time for the meat and potatoes. One of the first ways that comes to mind in terms of strategy with backpack hunting is “camping at the edge.” We’ve established that one of the reasons folks are backpack hunting is to beat the crowd. A large portion of that crowd is day hunters. Folks hiking in and out of areas to hunt day after day. There is a threshold there. One that draws a line in the sand of how far most hunters are hiking to day hunt spots. This is going to vary from state to state, but the idea applies everywhere. In my home state of Arizona, that threshold sits between one to two miles at most. Not that far at all. So, I know if I backpack in just past that threshold, I’ll likely not see anyone.



We don’t always have to “go in deep” to get away from other hunters. I’ve done this for years in Arizona with success. Plus, it gets you more into unpressured animals without a big hike in the morning. A person can essentially start hunting where most stop, which leads me to my next point.

Save Energy

On the surface, the topic of saving energy is likely not top of mind when backpack hunting comes up. Just the term “backpack hunting” sounds like it’s going to take more than a little energy and that’s right — kinda. The fact of the matter is, yes, it does take a good deal of energy packing everything you need miles into a camp. However, once you’re there, you’re there. That’s a whole lot of hiking that you don’t have to do every single morning and evening. Heck, I’ve even camped within a hundred yards of my glassing spot many times. That’s my big hike in the morning: 100 yards. If you’re, say, calling elk, sleeping among them is a tried and true method for staying with them for the coming day.

So, while it might be harder just initially getting to the location, you’ll save energy by just sleeping there. And then there’s that! You’ll get more sleep each night as you won’t have to get up so early to get to that hunting spot on time. You’re already there. Even if you are going to hike for 30 to 60 minutes each morning, think of all the hours you won’t have to hike to reach the same destination by just sleeping back there. Quality rest is important for physical recovery, focus and overall mood.



Make a Loop

Backpack hunting is often looked at as a point A to B and then back to A again type of deal. Meaning that you hike in from your vehicle to your camp, hunt and then head back to your truck at the end of their hunt. This is awesome and I personally do this often. However, it does limit the amount of country you are hunting. What about making a loop and staying mobile until you find what you're looking for? Backpack hunting allows us to do this in remote/roadless country. By mapping out a loop and only staying one or two nights in each location, you're not only going to cover a ton of ground, you'll continuously see new animals. On top of that, you'll be able to cross areas off of your map as well as mark waypoints of where to focus your hunts in the future. This would also be a great way to do a back-country scouting trip before season. Hunters do this driving roads to learn areas all of the time. The same tactic can be applied to remote areas via your legs.

Closing Thoughts

"Trendy" or not, it is undeniable that backpack hunting has its place. There is no better way to hunt simply and efficiently off of the beaten path than sleeping off of said beaten path.

It's not something that always needs to be used and sometimes it doesn't make sense to backpack hunt.

Packing into areas is a commitment and takes time. Sometimes, time is not a luxury folks have. I've been there and in those instances I'll day hunt. It's something I can get at sooner than later when time is of the essence. But let's face it. The more tools we have in our toolkits, the more prepared we'll be for a wide variety of scenarios, which will inevitably put us closer to the success we seek. Backpack hunting is without a doubt one of those tools.

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Shotgun Shot Size And Shells Explained (What To Use When)

By Andrew Jackson
Outdoor Empire
<https://outdoorempire.com>



Photos courtesy Andrew Jackson and <https://outdoorempire.com>

Shotguns are suitable for all sportsmen, from novice hunters to experienced sporting clay shooters. However, it's easy to become overwhelmed when you first head to the gun store and see all the information presented on a box of shells.

I have a box on my desk of Winchester Universal shotshells. Here's the information presented: 20 gauge, 2-3/4 inches, 2-1/2 dr. eq., 1200 velocity, 7/8 oz., 8 shot.

Once you understand what these numbers mean, it's easy to tell that this is a good load for shooting clays, doves, and other small upland birds.

"8 shot" refers to the shot size. The larger the number here the smaller the pellet, so 8 means the pellets are pretty small. "7/8 oz" refers to how many ounces of shot are in the 2-3/4-long shotshell. Both "2-1/2 dr. eq." and "1200 velocity" tell you how fast the shot will travel.

Of all that information, the shot size is the most important. Let's learn why so you'll know how to choose the shotgun shells you need.



We'll explain what all the numbers mean on boxes of shotgun shells like these. (see chart on the next page)



The main components of a shotgun shell: hull (yellow), shot (silver), wad (clear white), gun powder (pink).

SHOTGUN SHELL BASICS EXPLAINED

A shotgun shell, or shotshell, is constructed of multiple components that contain the load you'll shoot at your target when you pull your shotgun's trigger.

A tube called a hull holds everything inside. These are typically plastic with a brass base nowadays, though historically they were also made of plastic or brass.

Inside is the projectile, which is either a metal slug or a large number of metal spheres called shot.

The shot sits atop a wad, which has multiple purposes. A wad cushions the shot from the rapidly expanding gasses that expel the load from your shotgun's barrel.

The wad also prevents all of the shotshell's components from bouncing around and even helps control the pressure curve so firing your shotgun doesn't blow it apart.

Under the wad is the gunpowder, ignited by the shell's primer to give the force necessary for your shot to strike and knock down your target.

Those are the basics of how shotgun shells work.

If you're not loading your shells, then the most critical parts of the shotshell are its gauge, shot size, shot weight, and—to a lesser extent—its velocity.

Gauge

You absolutely must match your ammo's gauge to your shotgun's gauge.

That's because, much like a rifle's caliber, the measurement dictates whether or not the ammo even fits in your gun.

If you have a 12 gauge shotgun (the most common gauge), you must use 12 gauge ammo.

A 10 gauge shell won't fit in your gun's chamber. A 20 gauge shell is too small and may slide forward far enough in your barrel to allow you to load another 12 gauge shell, which will explode your gun if you try to shoot!

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SHOTGUN SHOT SIZE CHART

Shot Size	Shot Type	Diameter	Pellets per Oz	Used For	Targets
12	Dust shot	.05"	2400	Pest control	Rats, snakes, small birds
10	Rat shot or snake shot	.07"	848	Pest control	Rats, snakes, small birds
9	Birdshot	.08"	585	Sport shooting, bird hunting	Clays, doves, quail, small pests
8-1/2	Birdshot	.085"	497	Sport shooting, bird hunting	Clays, doves, quail, small pests
8	Birdshot	.09"	410	Sport shooting, bird hunting	Clays, doves, partridge, quail, snipe, small pests
7-1/2	Birdshot	.095"	350	Sport shooting, bird hunting	Clays, doves, partridge, quail, snipe, rabbits
7	Birdshot	.10"	291	Sport shooting, bird hunting	Clays, doves, grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, rabbits
6	Birdshot	.11"	225	Bird hunting	Doves, grouse, partridge, pheasant, rabbits, squirrel, turkey, small ducks
5	Birdshot	.12"	170	Bird hunting	Grouse, partridge, pheasant, rabbits, squirrels, turkey, small ducks
4	Birdshot	.13"	135	Bird hunting	Geese, grouse, pheasant, rabbits, squirrels, turkey, small ducks
3	Birdshot	.14"	108	Bird hunting	Geese, turkey, all ducks
2	Birdshot	.15"	87	Bird hunting	Geese, turkey, large ducks
1	Birdshot	.16"	72	Bird hunting	Geese, turkey, large ducks
BB	Birdshot	.18"	50	Hunting	Coyote, geese, turkey
BBB	Birdshot	.19"	44	Hunting	Coyote, geese, turkey
T	Birdshot	.20"	36	Hunting	Coyote, geese, turkey
#4	Buckshot	.24"	21	Large game hunting, self defense	Deer, coyote
#3	Buckshot	.25"	18	Large game hunting, self defense	Deer, coyote
#2	Buckshot	.27"	14	Large game hunting, self defense	Deer
#1	Buckshot	.30"	11	Large game hunting, self defense	Deer
0	Buckshot	.32"	9	Large game hunting, self defense	Deer
00	Buckshot	.33"	8	Large game hunting, self defense	Bear, deer, hog
000	Buckshot	.36"	6	Large game hunting, self defense	Bear, deer, hog

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POLARIS

Shotgun Shot Size And Shells Explained (What To Use When)

(continued from page 26)

Past that, though, gauge does not have as much of an effect as some people think it does.

However, larger gauge shotshells have a larger capacity than smaller gauge shotshells. This can be taken up with more shot, a larger wad, and/or more gunpowder.

This means a 12 gauge shotgun can accept a larger variety of load weights than a 20 gauge shotgun.

Bonus: How Gauge Affects Shotgun Shell Effectiveness

A load of an ounce of 8 shot fired at 1,200 fps will hit basically the same whether it's fired from a 12 gauge shotgun, 16 gauge shotgun, or 20 gauge shotgun.

Some people will argue that using a larger barrel diameter (such as 12 gauge) will result in a wider shot cloud, increasing your chances to hit.

Others will argue that the narrower shot cloud from a smaller bore (such as 20 gauge) means you'll put more pellets on target, increasing the damage you do.

In practice, though, the differences are small enough that almost nobody will be able to tell.

Shot Size

Shot size is the second most important factor to consider because it strongly affects what type of targets you can shoot.

The smaller shot has more pellets per ounce. However, each pellet carries less kinetic energy, so the smaller shot won't hit as hard as the larger shot.

Shot size is given by a number or letter. The smaller the number, the larger the pellet, the larger the animal you can shoot.

Shot is divided into two categories: Birdshot and buckshot.

This gives you an idea of what you can hunt with that specific shot size.

Birdshot

Birdshot ranges from 12 shot to 1 shot. Then, to represent pellets larger than 1 shot, you use the letters B, T, and—very rarely—F.

The more letters, the larger the shot size, so the BBB shot is larger than the BB shot.

You can calculate the pellet's nominal diameter for the numbered birdshot sizes by subtracting the number from 0.170".

So, each 8 shot pellet is about 0.090" wide, though manufacturing tolerances mean that the actual size

will deviate slightly.

Extremely small birdshot sizes are often called snake shot, rat shot, or even dust shot. You'll find this type of shot loaded in handgun cartridges or .410 instead of shotshells because they are meant for short-range pest control.

Buckshot

Buckshot only uses numbers, starting at #4 and getting larger from there. Annoyingly, #4 buckshot is larger than 4 birdshot, having a diameter of 0.240" versus 0.130".

Note:

This is why I'm not using "#" before any numbered birdshot. Remember that when talking about shot sizes, people typically say "number four birdshot."

Buckshot sizes larger than #1 start at #0, go on to #00 buck, and so on. Rather than "number zero," call this "ought," "double ought," etc.

Double-ought buckshot is the most common load with a nominal diameter of 0.330".

Shell Length

As you can guess, shell length is the longest measurement of the hull, typically given in inches.

Longer shells have a larger internal capacity and can fit more shot and propellant for longer-ranged, harder-hitting loads.

2-3/4" is the most common shell size and is more than adequate for clay shooting and small game hunting.

3" shells are popular for hunting to get a bit more power for just enough of an edge to turn the occasional miss into a good hit.

3-1/2" shells have also become common for hunting waterfowl and turkeys as they can deliver devastating impacts on large birds at long ranges.

Modern shotguns will have their maximum chamber length stamped on the barrel. You can load a 2-3/4" shell into a shotgun with a 3-1/2" chamber just fine, but the reverse won't fit.

The development of 3-1/2" shotshells effectively obsoleted 10 gauge shotguns, by the way. They both fulfill the same purpose, but a 3-1/2" 12 gauge shotgun is more versatile than a 3" 10 gauge shotgun.

Ounces or Shot Weight

Rather than telling you the number of pellets in a load, shotshell manufacturers give you the weight of the load.

This is partially conventional and partially because the size of each pellet can mean that small shot sizes have hundreds of pellets per ounce.

A heavier shot weight means you'll fire more lead per shot.

This results in hitting your target with more pellets, making heavy loads popular for hunting. You don't want to hit that bird and merely wound it!

However, thanks to Newton's Third Law of Motion, heavier loads will also produce more recoil, so light loads are commonly used for recreational shotgunning.

Velocity

Rather than telling you how many grains of gunpowder are in each shell, ammo manufacturers tell you how fast the load travels in feet per second.

The higher the velocity of your load, the farther the shot cloud will travel before expanding. However, it'll also produce more recoil.

Also, some high-velocity loads will "blow out" in some shotguns, meaning the pattern will open up much faster than you want.

Plus, some trap fields won't allow you to fire loads past a certain maximum velocity.

There's not a huge difference between a velocity of 1,150 fps and 1,250 fps in practice, so you should practice patterning your shotgun to figure out which velocity puts the most pellets on target rather than just going for the fastest load you can find.

Dram Equivalent

"Dr. eq." means "dram equivalent," which is an old way of approximating velocity still used by some shotgunners.

It comes from the days when shotguns were loaded with black powder. Back then, shot and powder weights were measured in drams. 16 drams equal one ounce.

Nowadays, most people don't use drams to measure how much propellant is in a shotshell, especially since smokeless powder isn't equivalent to black powder.

All you really need to know is that the higher the dram equivalency, the higher the velocity of the load if all other weights are equal.

WHEN TO USE WHAT SHOT SIZE

The takeaway from the above information is that shot size is the most important consideration when trying to figure out which shotshell to buy for what animal you're hunting.

However, ask three hunters about the best shot size for any specific animal, and you'll get six different answers.

(continued on page 30)

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Shotgun Shot Size And Shells Explained (What To Use When)

(continued from page 29)

Truthfully, neighboring shot sizes are generally close enough that it doesn't matter which specific size you're using so long as you use one in the right size range.

So, we'll suggest a range of shot sizes for each animal.

However, there is some information to keep in mind.

Since larger pellets carry more kinetic energy, they have more momentum than smaller pellets. This means you can get a longer effective range by increasing the size of your shot.

Conversely, you'll get more pellets by using a smaller shot size, so you'll hit the animal with more projectiles by going with a smaller shot size. This can be advantageous if you get closer to your prey.

So, let's talk about specific animals.

Birdshot

As the name indicates, birdshot is for the birds.

You get many small pellets, which is excellent for ensuring a hit on a small, quick animal.

Waterfowl

Waterfowl refers to birds that spend a lot of time in and around water.

They are typically hunted at medium-to-long range and can be surprisingly tough birds.

This includes coots, geese, swans, mergansers, and many duck species.

Most waterfowl hunters will reach for a medium or large birdshot load. This lets them hit those animals hard despite the range.

The most common waterfowl hunting loads use loads from 3 to 1 shot. Even a 4 shot load will cover almost any duck species, including those pesky geese.

Dedicated geese hunters prefer large shot, from 2 to T.

Small ducks at closer ranges can be hunted with shot sizes down to 6.

Upland Birds

Sometimes called landfowl, this category covers birds hunted on land rather than water.

They are generally smaller and less tough than waterfowl, so you don't have to use as heavy a pellet.

This is good because these birds tend to be more unpredictable in their flight paths so you may want to get the improved hit chance provided by the larger



pellet numbers from using smaller shot.

This covers birds from doves to pheasants and includes chukar, quail, grouse, woodcock, and partridges.

Shot sizes from 7 to 4 are great for hunting most upland birds.

Chukar and pheasants, since they are larger in size, should be hunted with 6 to 4 shot.

Doves and quail, since they are so small, can be hunted with even smaller shot, down to 9 shot, though 8 to 6 is more common.

Turkey

Though technically a landfowl, the size and toughness of a turkey mean they are their own category.

Some hunters will go as heavy as possible when hunting turkey, using BBB or T shots.

However, many hunters have taken turkey with shot as small as 6 shot, so long as you get close and make a good hit.

Shorebirds

Snipe and rails are shorebirds, flirting with the boundary between waterfowl and upland birds.

However, they are quite small birds, so 8 shot is commonly used on them.

Small Mammals

Rabbits and squirrels are sometimes hunted with a shotgun. 6 shot is the sweet spot when hunting these skittish mammals, though some hunters go smaller.

Clays

Your shot choice when shooting clays depends on your discipline, skill level, and handicap.

Generally speaking, the most common clay load uses 8 shot. 7 is also popular.

The argument for 7 shot is that it's more likely to break the clay if you hit it with even a single pellet.

Most sporting shotgunners won't see any difference in scores between 7 and 8, though.

Pests and Snakes

Shot used for pest control is fired at close range, typically around 10 yards or closer, so you don't need heavy pellets to kill the animal.

This category also includes snakes, as the same shot size is often used for defense against rattlesnakes.

Honestly? Whether 10 or 12, shot size doesn't matter. Use whichever is available.

Buckshot

Buckshot is used against medium and large mammals, which are less maneuverable than birds and rodents.

Deer

"Buckshot" gets its name from hunting male deer bucks.

Which buckshot size you should use depends on the size of the deer in your region and how close you can get to the animal.

00 buck is an excellent all-around choice. However, you can use down to #4 buck against small deer at close ranges, such as in forested mountains.

Other Large Game

Depending on local laws, buckshot can also be used against other large mammals, such as boar, bear, and coyote.

With coyote, you can use small buckshot and even large birdshot and still put the animal down. The hard part is getting close enough to the coyote to hit it with a shotgun in the first place.

For bear and boar, though, you want large, heavy-hitting pellets. These can be dangerous animals, so you must ensure a single-shot kill that deals devastating tissue damage and shatters bones.

I wouldn't use anything smaller than 00 buck against these mammals.

For Self Defense

The proper size of buckshot to defend your home is a much-debated topic.

If you don't want to delve deep into this conversation, then 00 buckshot is an extremely common choice for self-defense.

However, with only 9 pellets in the typical 12 gauge shell, it's possible for none of your balls to hit the target.

With smaller shotgun gauges or when over penetration is a factor, you can go down to #4 buck.

Personally, I keep the #2 buck for my 20 gauge in case I ever need to grab it to defend my home. This provides me with eighteen 0.27" pellets per shot.

How Steel Affects Shot Effectiveness

The recommendations given above default to using a lead shot.

Because of its harm to the environment, though, many hunters use alternatives. Some, such as bismuth, are just about as heavy, so you don't have to adjust for the different metal.

Steel, however, is the most common alternative to lead and the most different when it comes to mass.

This means you must use a larger shot size to get the same knockdown power.

A good rule of thumb for adapting to steel is to use shot two sizes larger than you would with lead.

Keep in mind that this adjustment has already been made for you when it comes to waterfowl species, as it is illegal to hunt ducks and geese with lead shot.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT SHOTGUN SHELL



Choosing the right shot size is essential when you want to hunt and knock down your prey in one shot without injuring the animal.

There seems to be an overwhelming variety of choices to make when choosing the right sporting, hunting, or self-defense load.

Thankfully, you don't have to choose the perfect shot size. There's a range to choose from. So if you're hunting, say, pheasants, both number 4 shot and number 6 shot will help you achieve success.

I recommend starting with a shot size about in the middle of the suggested range and then experimenting with larger or smaller shots depending on your results.

Good luck shooting!

Andrew Jackson learned to walk in the mountains and has spent much of his life exploring the outdoors. He is equally at home in the woods, at the range, or on the gunsmithing bench, and loves to build guns almost as much as he enjoys shooting them...



Here's What You Need To Clean Your Rifle

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

Hunting season is over, and now is the time to give your rifle a thorough cleaning.

Gun-Cleaning Gear

To do the job right, you need to secure your rifle horizontally in a vise. A vise attached to a workbench at your house will work fine. Or you can purchase a portable gun vise from a company that specializes in firearms-cleaning accessories.



Photos credit Mike Hanback www.bigdeerblog.com

Spend \$40 or more for a universal gun-cleaning kit, which will include a three-piece bore rod and an assortment of jags, brushes, patches and other accessories for cleaning not only your bolt-action, but also other handguns and long guns that you own.

Also, and this is important, purchase a bore guide, which will protect the bore and action of your rifle by properly aligning the cleaning rod as you work.

You'll need a quality solvent like Hoppe's No. 9 for swabbing the bore, and a gun oil like Break Free CLP (best I've used for preventing rust) for wiping down the exterior of your rifle.

5 Steps to a Shiny Bore

Now use that gear right:

1. With rifle (Unloaded Of Course!) level in a vise, fit the cleaning rod with a jag of the proper caliber, and insert a clean patch into the jag's slot.

Soak the patch in bore solvent.

Run the rod and wet patch through the bore guide and down the barrel, always working from breech to muzzle, the same way a bullet travels.

2. Run a dry patch through the bore and look to see how dirty it is when the patch comes out the muzzle. I'm going out on a limb and saying that patch will be pretty black with carbon because you probably haven't done a deep bore clean in a while.

3. Run one or two more soaked patches through the bore.

Remove the jag, screw on a bronze brush of the correct caliber and soak it in solvent. Push the brush through the bore and out the muzzle, then pull it back until it exits the chamber. Repeat brushing 10 times.

4. Remove brush, go back to the jag and run 2 or 3 more soaked patches through the bore.

Loosen the rifle in the vise, tilt the muzzle slightly down to keep the solvent from running back into the action and re-tighten.

Allow the bore to soak for 30 minutes to an hour.

5. After the soak, run dry patches through the bore until the last patch out is pure white, and the bore is shiny.



5 Guns Every Hunter Needs

(continued from page 16)

While that same barrel will work fine for gobblers, many of today's specialty turkey guns have 21- or 22-inch barrels, which are easier to carry and maneuver in the woods. A variety of choke tubes for either steel or turkey loads are available in any gun you choose.

Handgun

I've been shooting a lot of handguns lately, mostly for the fun of it. But it is not lost on me that crime is surging in many parts of the country. I want to be proficient with a pistol and ready to protect my family and property, and you should be too.

For ease of use and dependability, you can't beat a double-action revolver. Load up, aim at the target and pull the trigger 5 or 6 times until the gun is empty.

There are many makes and sizes of revolvers on the market, from little stub-nose guns to huge "hog legs" like Wayne and Eastwood famously used to save the day in western movies.

Do your research.

For most people, a mid-size revolver with a 5- or 6-inch barrel is about right. Heavy enough to absorb recoil, but light enough to aim and hold steady on target.

Caliber-wise, you can't go wrong with a .38 or .357.

I started out with revolvers and still use them, but these days I do most of my shooting with a semi-auto handgun.

The semi has 3 advantages over the revolver: less recoil, typically a better trigger, and more fun to shoot.

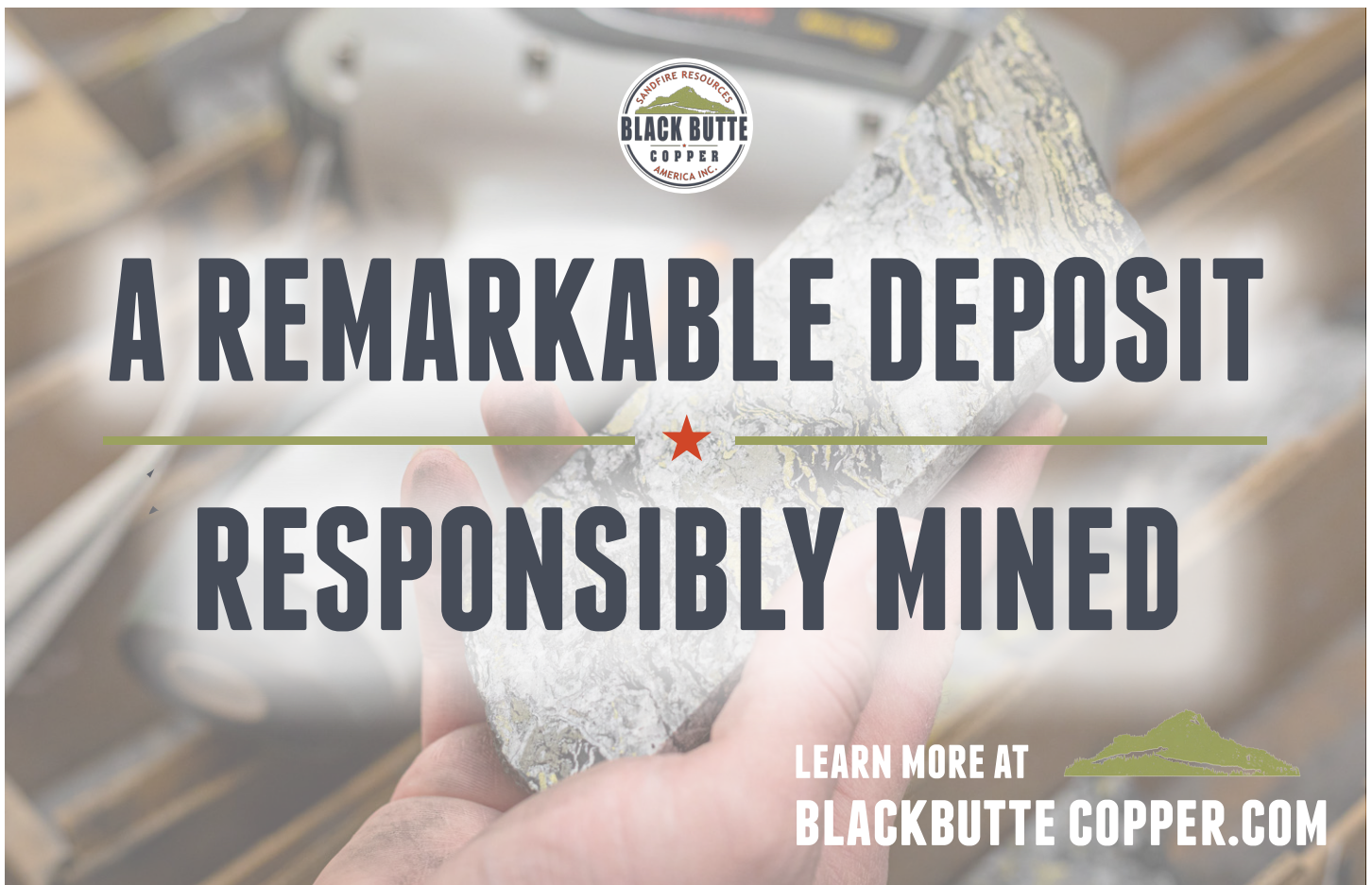
A day at the range, running 10- to 13-shot magazines through a semi-auto, is pure ecstasy for a gun nut like me.

A semi-auto does require more thorough cleanings than a revolver, but I look at that as a good thing. It makes you learn your weapon—how to disassemble it, clean it and reassemble it after every shooting session. You come to know your weapon and feel confident and safe with it.

Again, do your research online and at the gun shop. There are many makes, sizes and calibers of semi-autos to choose from.

A big consideration: Many of these handguns have thumb safeties, while some have no safety. Think about that and go with one you feel most comfortable with.

For most of you, my current arsenal of semi-autos is a good guideline. I shoot a full-size .45 double-stack Glock that measures 7½ from rear of slide to the muzzle. My wife shoots a smaller, lighter version of the same gun in 9mm. There are other calibers, but love the .45 and 9mm!





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The Ultimate Guide: Using GOHUNT's Filters To Uncover Your Next Hunting Opportunity

By Dave Barnett

Originally published at  GOHUNT.com

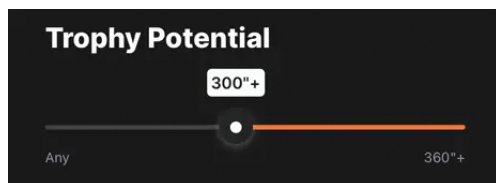
This past year we released our research Filtering options on the GOHUNT mobile app — the same great ones that have been available on the GOHUNT website for years. These filters allow you to quickly and accurately narrow down prospective hunting opportunities based on the parameters that matter most to you: harvest success, public land percentage, draw odds, and much more!

You can use all this to find draw hunts, and even more powerful is using these research filters during the hunting season to narrow down where you should hunt when you have a general season tag that allows you to hunt multiple units.

The research filters and their meanings

Having a good understanding of what the specific hunt research filters are for and how they are used can be the best way to squeeze all of the juice out of Filtering on your Insider account. Below, we will take a deep dive into each of these important data points.

How to use the Trophy Potential filter to narrow down units



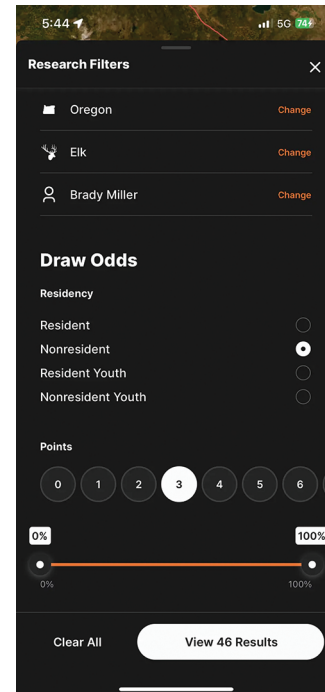
The Trophy Potential filter can give hunters an idea of the general size and potential of animals in an area, but will also allow hunters to remove less prolific units from their lists. Utilizing the filter will remove any units with a trophy potential lower than your designation. For example, I might be interested in heading to Colorado for a mule deer hunt, but I want to maximize my points and only want to come home with a buck at or above 170" Boone and Crockett (B&C). By manipulating the Trophy Potential slider, I can remove all units that are not typically known for producing deer of this caliber.

One common question we get is, "How are the trophy potentials for each unit and species calculated?"

We compile these numbers through a number of avenues, including record book entries, local and external knowledge, and general trends of the units. The Trophy Potentials are not hard numbers. Rather, these should be used as a general guideline when selecting a unit. **Pro tip:** Depending on the type of hunt you are after, you may — or may not — use the Trophy Potential filter.

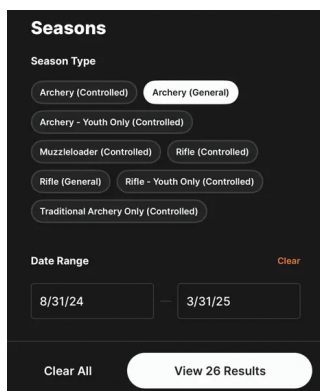
Typically, I'll use the Trophy Potential filter as one of my last ones when looking for opportunity hunts where I'm simply looking to fill a tag. However, when researching hunts that I've spent a few years (or more) building points for, this filter begins to carry a lot more weight. I will generally start my search without using this filter and then slowly introduce it as I narrow my results to my liking.

How you can use the Draw Odds research filter



One of the most used data points on our platform are our draw odds. Draw hunts make up the vast majority of hunting opportunities in the West, and having a good handle on the draw odds for any given hunt will be crucial to the hunter. Knowing your exact odds at any given point level can mean the difference in wasting points on a tag you could have drawn several years ago or applying for hunts that you have zero chance of drawing right from the get go! Within the Draw Odds filter, you can select your residency and input your number of points (if applicable). The app will intuitively then serve you draw odds percentages based upon your residency and point level. Additionally, you can use the Draw Odds filter to further drive down your list. For example, let's say I am researching a Montana elk permit. Montana is a state that never guarantees any tags to applicants — regardless of point level — so I know I am always dealing with random odds. Now, let's say I want to see hunts that I can apply for, but only ones with a 50% or better chance of drawing. I can use the Draw Odds filter to select hunts in the 50-100% range, and now, all hunts with draw odds below 50% will be removed from my list. **Pro tip:** The Draw Odds filter will only be viable for hunts that require the hunter to draw them. When researching over-the-counter (OTC) opportunities, this filter will not affect your search results. **Pro tip:** We also have youth draw odds! Be sure to change your residency to "Resident, Youth" or "Nonresident, Youth" before checking for odds.

Seasons/Dates hunt filter

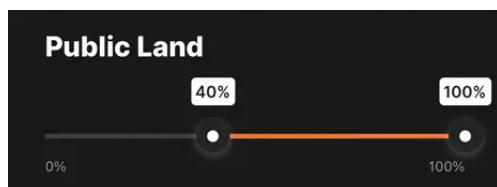


The next filter you will encounter will be the Seasons/Dates filter. This lets you quickly narrow down the list of available hunts by season type, date range — or both!

This is generally one of the first filters I apply and is one I really like. For example, if I want to research archery elk hunts in

Colorado, I can select those weapon types so I do not have to sift through hundreds of rifle and muzzleloader hunts. The dates section also works great if you have a definite time frame to make a hunt happen. For this, simply input the date range, and all hunts available within that range will populate. I can then use the specific season type filters to further narrow this down.

What does the Public Land percentage filter do when researching hunts?



This one is fairly self-explanatory, but it is one of the best filters there is!

The Public Land filter allows you to quickly narrow down units based on the amount of available public land to hunt.

Adjusting this filter will quickly narrow down your hunt choices.

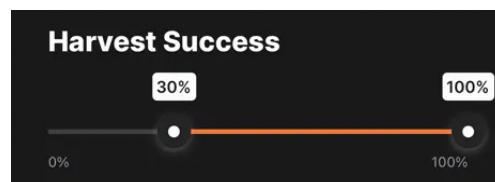
For example, sliding the bottom end of the filter to 70% will narrow your list to only contain units with 70% or greater public land percentage.

Pro tip: I use this filter differently for different hunts. For example, when I am looking for a unit for an archery elk hunt, I want one with a large percentage of public land — say 75% or higher.

However, if I am researching a Colorado third season rifle mule deer hunt, I know that most of the deer will be around private lands that time of the year.

Because of this, I am not so much interested in the percentage of public land, but in what public land is available and where it is in proximity to private lands where I am expecting to attract deer.

How to use the Harvest Success/Animals Harvested filter



This filter is pretty straightforward. Here, you can filter by harvest success in a unit or by the number of animals harvested — whichever data point we are using for the respective state and species you are viewing. This filter can clearly give you an indication of the quality of hunting in the area as well as the type of hunting pressure you might encounter.

Pro tip: I like to use this filter subjectively because the data is, well, subjective. Harvest success is merely an indication of hunter effort. I would encourage anyone reading this to consider why the numbers may be how they are. A low success rate can indicate low animal populations, but it can also indicate that the area is just tough to hunt. Conversely, a high success rate can indicate good populations, but could also be skewed in a unit with a lot of private land and private land hunters. Sometimes, the harvest success of a unit is not directly linked to the quality of hunting present.

To learn more and join visit GOHUNT.com

Images courtesy of GOHUNT.com.





Photos credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

Tips To Keep Your Muzzleloader In Working Order No Matter The Weather

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Muzzleloader hunting tips for any weather condition

Muzzleloader hunts are a blast! But... there is a chance for things to go south if you're not prepared.

Below are several things I have done to ensure my muzzleloader is in working order every day of the hunt, no matter the weather.

Keeping Powder Dry and Not a Giant Mess



Unfortunately, this lesson was hard-learned on my first backcountry muzzleloader hunt. I went to reach into my bag where I kept my powder tubes and I noticed powder everywhere. A few of the tube caps somehow popped off and there was loose powder in the bottom of the bag!

What can go wrong on a hunt will go wrong. It only took one occurrence to learn my lesson. From that day on, any time I was out hunting with a muzzleloader, each powder tube I taped shut with electrical tape.

Along the lines of keeping powder dry, I will also place each sealed powder tube in a ziploc bag.

Create Reference Marks on Your Open Sights



You never know when you might fall or bump your muzzleloader. Having reference marks on your front sight and back sight could save your bacon on a hunt. Once I have the sights dialed in at the range, I will mark several small sections with a silver marker in places as a reference in case something gets bumped.



Tape your ramrod for powder charge reference



Before you head into the field, tape your ramrod (or scratch it up) where the final seating depth of your powder and bullet sits at its packed level. This is essential for safety and accuracy. If you do this method, use the same jag and ramrod at the range that you will use while hunting. That way you know exactly how much you're packing the powder to keep things consistent.

Keep your barrel dry and debris free

I tape my rifle barrels to prevent debris from entering the barrel, and on a muzzleloader, it's even more important to keep as a way to keep things out of the barrel and to keep your powder dry.



With a bigger bullet, comes a larger area for debris or water to get into the barrel. And if you've already loaded powder and a bullet down the barrel, you really want to make sure you keep everything dry.

On the CVA muzzle brake I was using last season, I just put the piece of electrical tape through the first opening on the brake. If you're shooting a different style muzzle brake, you can just wrap it around all the side ports of the brake down the open vent side. And if you shoot with no brake, I still suggest taping the barrel. I prefer electrical tape because I usually have a surplus of it rolling around in my truck and I always pack it in my kill kit.



Another great way to keep your muzzleloader dry is to use a sleeve over the entire weapon. This will help to further protect it from the elements and even when using the sleeve, I still tape the barrel. I use the GOHUNT Gunslicker Protective Cover which I also use while rifle hunting.

Keep bullet tips protected



This might not be that important for some muzzleloader bullets, but bullets with very long tips, it's a great idea to protect them from getting dinged up in my opinion.

I use PowerBelt ELR bullets in my muzzleloader and to protect the polycarbonate tip, I place my bullets in empty powder tubes when I'm in the field. And to further prevent them from shaking around, I will place a little piece of foam at the top of the tube.

On the larger 160 grain magnum Blackhorn powder tubes, I can easily fit two of the ELR bullets per tube. This is also very handy when making a stalk and you need to toss some bullets and powder tubes in your pocket in case you need a backup shot.

Keeping primers dry

No matter what type of ignition system you have on a muzzleloader, keeping your primers dry is also a great thing to be aware of.

I store my CVA Veriflame Adaptors that have primers in them in another one of the empty powder tubes. And just like the tubes I keep my powder in, I will also place electrical tape on the cap.

Stay Organized



All of the items that I need for a muzzleloader I keep in their own "muzzleloader bag." That bag I keep everything organized in is a Stone Glacier Swing Out Pocket. I'll keep my powder funnel, primer tool, powder tubes, bullets, bullet starter, extra electrical tape and primers in this bag.

In conclusion

With muzzleloader season on the horizon... hopefully these tips will help keep your muzzleloader in prime shooting condition for that shot of a lifetime.

There's a bunch of other ways to keep a muzzleloader and all the components in working order on hunts, but these are a few that have helped me out the past few years.

Enjoy your hunt!

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Here's How To Store Your Gear After Hunting Season

By Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog www.bigdeerblog.com

After the last deer hunt of the season in December or January, many of you toss your clothes, pack and other stuff in a heap in a backroom and don't think twice about it for another seven or eight months, until it's time to scout and bow hunt again. I used to do that too, but I'm more organized now. This week I'm spreading out my gear on the basement floor, and giving it a good once over while last season's hunts are still fresh in my mind.

Out with the Old

Did you like the way those pants, shirts and jackets fit and feel? If so, put them in the keeper pile. Did those boots fit well, and keep your feet dry and warm? If not, set them aside and plan on getting a new brand. Was that rain gear whisper quiet, and did it repel the elements? You get the idea. The better your clothing and boots fit and perform, the longer you'll stay on stand each day, and the better you'll hunt this fall.

Wash the clothes you'll keep and wear again in an odor-neutralizing laundry detergent like Scent Killer Gold. Once clean and super dry, fold and store them in scent-free plastic bags. Make a list of any new apparel you need to get.

Now dump your daypack and spread everything on the floor. Throw away trash and any old snacks you forgot about. Check knives and saws. If you gutted a deer last fall, and I hope you did, scrub and wash dried blood and fat from the blade, handle and sheath. Sharpen and re-edge blades now and you'll be way ahead of the game this season.

Throw away any bottle of deer lure you opened, even if you used it only once or twice last season. The instant air hits deer urine, it degrades it. Always buy a fresh doe-in-heat or tarsal before each season.

Here's something you might not think of.

Remove all batteries from flashlights, headlamps, range-finding binocular and all trail cameras to prevent any chance of battery corrosion. Re-arm this gear with fresh batteries when you go back out in six or seven months.

Bow and Gun Storage

All your gear, and most certainly your bows and firearms, should be stored in an area that stays around 70 degrees F year-round, with humidity of 50 to 55 percent.

As long as it has a functioning HVAC system, a storage room in the basement is fine. In the humid Virginia summer months, I also run a portable dehumidifier in my basement gear room to make doubly sure none of my gear gets a hint of mildew or rust.

I like to hang my compound bows on hooks with sights, stabilizers and arrow rests attached.

Many hunters I know store their bows in hard cases. Wax bowstrings liberally to minimize drying and fraying.

Store arrows straight and neatly in a quiver or arrow tube.

Remove broadheads and pack in a broadhead case.

After a thorough bore cleaning, wipe down the action, barrel and all exterior metalwork of every firearm with a light coat of gun oil.

Run a patch dabbed with bore solvent through every barrel to prevent trace rust.

Lock all firearms and ammunition in a gun safe.

At the very least secure guns and ammo in a closet or room that you lock tightly.

Affix trigger locks or cables to all guns for added security and peace of mind.

Organize and store all your keeper gear in a dry place where it will be easy to find when scouting and hunting time rolls around in a few months.

Also, make a list of new gear you'll need for this fall, and then go online to Cabela's or Bass Pro and shop.

You can get some killer deals on deer gear this time of year.



Photo courtesy Mike Hanback www.bigdeerblog.com

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