

# WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING NEWS

MARCH 2026



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# Flathead Lake Fishing Guide

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks <https://fwp.mt.gov>

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) cooperatively manage Flathead Lake under the Flathead Lake and River Fisheries Co-management Plan. The plan seeks to increase and protect native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout to at least secure levels, while providing a recreational fishery with harvest based on nonnative fish...

As an angler, you are key to the plan's success. In the co-management plan, recreational harvest is a major tool for managing the fish populations of Flathead Lake, especially in reducing the number of smaller lake trout (less than the slot limit of 30 inches). In addition, CSKT and FWP encourage anglers to harvest yellow perch and lake whitefish, each of which have very liberal bag limits. Controlling these nonnative fish will benefit native trout. These species are delicious when prepared properly...

Before you go fishing, please remember to pick up current copies of the state and tribes' fishing regulations. These booklets contain specific bag limits for each species, information on fish identification, and tips for properly releasing native trout you might catch.

## FISHING FOR LAKE TROUT

Lake trout (or mackinaw) are primarily fish eaters. They prefer colder water and are usually found near the bottom although they can be found at all depths when the water is cold. Generally fish 30'-100' deep for smaller (2-5lb.) lakers and over 100' deep for larger lake trout but expect lots of mixing of sizes. Generally, look for areas that will concentrate bait fish such as points, sloping areas of large rubble, or flats adjacent to drop-offs or steep slopes.

Expansive flats may not hold many fish. A fish finder helps locate likely spots and may locate schools of bait fish or lake trout but lake trout can hold so tight to the bottom most fish finders won't show them. Lake trout prefer dim light so the best fishing is dawn to mid-morning with generally slow fishing at mid day and sometimes fishing picks up in the evening. Lake trout are generally easy to catch but they move a lot and action can turn on and off. If you're not catching fish and can't see them on the finder move to a new location. If you think the fish are there, try different lures and colors and vary your techniques.

Lake trout up to 5 pounds eat lots of Mysis shrimp and can be delicious fried, baked, barbecued, or smoked. Fish from 5-10 pounds are much oilier and are best if skinned, trimmed, and cooked to allow juices to drain away. Macs over 10 pounds are very oily...

### A. Vertical Jigging

This technique has really revolutionized lake trout fishing since it is simple, productive, and requires little gear. A medium weight spinning or baitcasting outfit with 10-lb. test line will work. Drop the lure to the bottom, reel up about a foot and jig the lure up sharply 1-3 feet and then let it free fall back. Jig every 10-20 seconds. Set the hook hard when you feel a tap or jerk. Often the fish will hit as the lure is dropping so if the line stays slack as the jig is sinking, reel up and strike.

Leadhead jigs with plastic "grub" or "Mr. Twister" style bodies are effective and inexpensive. Use 1/2 oz. to 2 oz. jigheads, going to larger heads as you fish deeper. Use 3" bodies for 3-5 lb. macs and go to 5" or larger bodies if you just want big fish. White, chartreuse, and glo-in-the dark are popular colors. You'll increase bites if you tip the jig with a piece of fish (sucker, Northern pike minnow, or perch) or use scents. Salmonids (trout, salmon, whitefish) are illegal as bait.

Jigging spoons can also be very effective. Leadagators, Trilobites, Nordics, Crippled Herring, Kastmasters, and Buzz Bombs will all work. White, chartreuse or green, light blue, or glow are popular colors. Scents or tipping with a small piece of fish may help.

Woods Bay, Yellow Bay, Blue Bay, and West Shore State Park are reasonably sheltered spots with deep water close to the ramp for smaller boats. Other productive jigging areas are the river mouth, Conrad Point, Painted Rocks/Cedar Island, Wildhorse Island, the Narrows, Finley Point, and Gravel Bay.



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# 2026 Spring Mack Days on Flathead Lake

Sponsored by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

Cash and Prizes-several ways to win-bonus, lottery drawings, etc. plus

(1)-\$10,000 & (3) \$5,000 & (5) \$1000 + over (9,000) \$500-\$100 tagged lake trout-

(See the rules page for changes in 30" & over tagged lake trout)



**Thursday-March 12<sup>th</sup> to Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>**

9 weeks of lake trout fishing

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

If total catch exceeds our budget for 2026 -we reserve the right to end the event earlier than May 9<sup>th</sup>

All it takes is one ticket (one for every lake trout under 30") to win a lottery drawing

**Friday- Sunday**-competitive Mack Days-lottery prizes, tagged fish, and bonuses-ends Fri-May 8<sup>th</sup>  
May 9<sup>th</sup> is a separate day—see below

Top ten angler prizes: based on your best 18 days/26 possible-Friday-Sunday-11<sup>th</sup> place-20th based on totals. Check out pick up sites on the website or turn in at Blue Bay till 9PM or ½ hr. after sunset- whichever comes first-if there is no one present use the fish drop box-instructions will be posted.

**20 lottery drawings \$2,000-\$600-all lottery drawings & prizes end Fri- May 8<sup>th</sup> -Sat separate prize day**

**Top twenty angler prizes \$950-\$200—if you are in the Top twenty you do not qualify for Ladies, Youth or 70 & Over awards unless you choose that prize**

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

**Smallest lake trout \$250-(2 prizes) Largest lake trout-\$500—see rules page for changes**

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

**Weekend Prizes-2@\$100 & 1@\$200 per weekend-9 weekends-\$3,600**

**Golden Angler (70 & older)-1<sup>st</sup>-\$300 & 2<sup>nd</sup>-\$200-determined by total fish entered**

**Weekday Prizes (Mon-Thurs)-6-\$250, 2-\$200, & 2-\$100 drawings**

*All fish are to be turned in the same day as caught*

**Monday-Thursday**- up until ½ hr after sunset to turn in fish to staff at Blue Bay or if staff is not present-- leave them in a fish drop box with your name and # of fish —instructions will be posted.

**2-\$100, 2-\$200, 6-\$250 lottery drawings plus bonus dollars -33 days-totaled with Fri-Sun totals at the end of the event**

**Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>—SEPARATE DAY ALL ENTRIES IN BY 3:00-only AT BLUE BAY**

**All prizes & lottery drawings will be done on Saturday morning May 9<sup>th</sup> and posted for awards ceremony at 3:00. Cash Drawings for Saturday will be-\$400, \$350, \$300- totals count for bonus awards and will be posted at the awards ceremony.**

**Bonus \$ amounts (Mon-Sun) increase as your total goes up**-bonus amounts and tagged fish amounts are estimated-anglers who enter 11 or more lake trout receive bonuses-examples: 11-30 lake trout entries- \$47, 31-50-\$92, 51-75-\$158, 76-100-\$221, ....201-225-\$615, 301-325-\$1,017 & on up. No pooling of fish is allowed. Lake trout are to be entered the same day as caught.

**Fish the entire lake**-Check in stations and times on the website (subject to change). CSKT has a special Flathead Lake fishing license for the south half of Flathead Lake. Check the rules, prizes, bonuses, check in sites at [www.mackdays.com](http://www.mackdays.com) or send an email requesting information. Entry page is under the events tab or email: [cindy.benson@cskt.org](mailto:cindy.benson@cskt.org): with your name, address, telephone #, age, male or female

**Applications will be available:**

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CSKT NRD Offices-Polson

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Fish Camp-Kalispell

Sportsman & Ski Haus-Kalispell

Bob Ward & Sons-Missoula

Snappys Sports Senter-Kalispell

Bretz RV & Marine-Missoula

Westland Seed-Ronan

Sanctioned by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

# Five Gear Essentials For Spring Bear Hunting

By Lane Colyer

Originally published at **GOHUNT** GOHUNT.com

## Gear essentials for spring bear hunting that will make your hunt that much better

...Across the West, spring black bear tags are relatively easy to get and present opportunities to get out and have a great adventure. A lot of hunters use bear season to get out and test new gear, put their glass to work and enjoy the sights and sounds of springtime. Deer and elk can often be spotted out feeding on open hillsides, making for eventful days glassing. Most of the same gear you use during fall big game hunts can be used during spring bear hunts, but make sure you've got a few of these key pieces to let you stay out longer and be more comfortable.

### 1. Solid Colored Clothing



Solid-colored clothes are a great spring bear option to help notice when you have ticks on you. Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

When the weather warms up and the snow starts to melt, bears aren't the only animal that wakes up and starts moving. Ticks are commonly found during springtime activities sitting on the tops of the grass. While moving across hillsides or down logging roads, bear hunters often will pick up ticks on their boots and pant legs. For this reason alone, we recommend wearing solid-colored clothing so ticks can easily be spotted and pulled off your clothing. Since bears rely on their noses much more than their eyes, camouflage clothing is not necessary.

### 2. Binocular Attachment and Tripod



Binoculars mounted on a tripod for all-day glassing.  
Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

Finding bears is a waiting game. Many successful bear hunters will tell you to find a good looking spot and stay there. Glassing for bears is generally done with binoculars because they provide the widest field of view so you can spot movement as they move through the vegetation. The combination of time spent glassing and the need for stability makes a binocular adapter and tripod a gamechanger for finding bears. We're particularly excited about the Tricer Bino Adapter as a 2 oz. Arca-Swiss compatible option that fits most binos. Other options include the quick release Vortex bino adapter as well as the Aziak bino clamp for rangefinding binoculars without a thread in the front.

### 3. Glassing Stool or Glassing Pad



Glassing stool for getting off the ground to glass in comfort.  
Photo credit Luke Dusenbury courtesy of GOHUNT.com

Long days of glassing for bears can wear your back out quickly. That, combined with the aforementioned challenge of keeping ticks off you, warrant a lightweight stool or at least a glassing pad. Sitting up off the ground makes for easier glassing with a tripod and allows hunters to stay out longer and be more comfortable. The Hillsound BTR Stool (12.6 oz) and Big Agnes Skyline UL Stool (1 lb 2 oz.) are both lightweight options that you'll barely notice in your pack, but will be glad to have them. These stools also pack down small enough to take up minimal space in your pack.

### 4. Rechargeable Headlamp and Power Bank



Bright headlamp for those long hikes back to camp.  
Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

Many bear hunters find success in the evenings with bears being most active in the early morning and right before dark. This rule has its exceptions, but with a lot of bears getting shot before it gets dark, it's important to be able to safely recover a bear and get back to your truck.

(continued on page 21)



Mark Boardman - *Brand Experience Manager*  
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# Commission Changes To Address Hunting Pressure, Mule Deer Numbers

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

**O**n Dec. 4, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission set the Montana hunting regulations for 2026 and 2027. In doing so, it made a variety of changes to address concerns about nonresident hunting pressure and mule deer numbers.

“The commission’s action were a culmination of a lengthy process that started this past summer with public meetings around the state,” said Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Director Christy Clark.

“Both the commission and FWP heard a lot of input from hunters, landowners and the public. This input was critical in the final regulations that were approved.”

**It’s important for hunters to be aware of the changes when planning for next hunting season.**

“It’s true, some of these changes will reduce revenue coming to FWP from license sales, but when it comes down to it, this is about protecting the resource, not revenue,” Clark said.

## Hunting pressure

During the past several hunting seasons, FWP staff and Fish and Wildlife Commissioners have heard growing concern and frustration with hunting pressure from nonresident hunters, particularly in eastern Montana.

The commission approved an amendment to the regulations that would cap the sale of a particular nonresident deer license. This cap would essentially cut the number of these licenses available to nonresidents by about 2,500.



Photo credit twilife | depositphotos.com

“The reason that I brought this forward was to start discussion,” said Commission Chair Lesley Robinson during the Dec. 4 commission meeting. “And something has to be done. We have a lot of overcrowding.”

## Mule deer

Mule deer declines, particularly in eastern Montana has been a concern for the public, the commission and FWP. During its meeting the commission made an effort to address some of these concerns. First, in 2026 and 2027 most mule deer B licenses will be valid only on private land. The commission also reduced the total number of deer licenses a resident can hold from eight to three.

These changes follows changes the 2023 Legislature made, which reduced the number of deer B licenses a nonresident could hold to one, although nonresident holding a combo license may possess two deer B licenses.

Additionally, in 2024 FWP reduced the mule deer B licenses down to the minimum number within the quota set by the Commission in Region 7, which was 1,000 tags. FWP has also reduced the number of deer B licenses available in other regions, especially Region 6.

The number of deer B license sold by FWP in 2024 were the lowest since 2016. This reduction in deer B licenses is a direct response to declining mule deer numbers.

## Other commission actions

### General:

The archery regulations were changed to remove the let off for hunting bows. Prior to this, the let-off was a maximum of 80 percent.

### Antelope:

The quota of 900-20 licenses (archery antelope) was increase from the FWP proposal of 5,100 to 5,600, but Region 3 was removed from this bundle and placed in its own pool with 500 licenses.

### Bighorn sheep

Three quotas were adopted for these licenses: 250-20 any ram: 1; 680-30 adult ewe: 1; 680-31 adult ewe: 1.

Adjustments to bighorn sheep hunting district 250 to remove the geographical boundary that was described as “valid in portion of HD south of Nez Perce Road and West Fork Road.” This change made the sheep license valid throughout the entire hunting district.

All bighorn sheep hunting districts that are currently designated as either-sex were changed to any ram for all limited opportunity drawings.

## Black bear



Photo credit petrahanek | depositphotos.com

The archery black bear fall sub-quota was retained in all black bear units with harvest quotas, but the archery sub-quota percentage allowed increased from 20 to 30 percent of the total fall quota.

Hunters may purchase and accrue bonus points for any limited black bear permits.

Hound hunting season was extended to June 15 to coincide with the end of hound training season.

In Region 2, the boundary where hound hunting is allowed was changed to mirror the occupied grizzly bear polygon.

## Mountain lion

The winter season dates were changed to Dec. 1 to May 25.

Mountain lion hunting with hounds is prohibited in occupied grizzly bear habitat after April 14.

A single license is all that is required to hunt mountain lions in open areas and the special limited and unlimited licenses were eliminated as recommended by FWP. Quotas will be established in June.

## Deer and Elk

The quota of the 799-20 elk license was increased from 280 to 325. A second antlerless elk B license will be available to any holder of an elk permit in hunting districts 702, 704, or 705, subject to the same restrictions in time, open areas, and limitations associated with the permit.

All Region 1 elk B licenses will only be valid on private land.

Eliminate all antlerless elk archery opportunity in Region 1.

All other hunting regulations were approved as proposed by FWP.

For more information please visit the Fish and Wildlife Commission page for the Dec. 4 meeting here: <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/commission/december-2025-meeting>.

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# The Truth About Spring Bear Hunting

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT** GOHUNT.com

You know it's springtime when the weather finally breaks and the sportsmen and women can finally get outside to enjoy hunting and fishing again. Whether we're shed hunting for elk or deer antlers, chasing those early morning gobblers, or fishing for wild trout in the icy cold mountain waters, we are still enjoying the great outdoors and everything Mother Nature has to offer.

There is one hunting season that seems to get easily overlooked by hunters for a variety of reasons but is every bit as exciting as those sheds, gobblers or brook trout. What season am I talking about? Well, spring bear season, of course.

Until recently, spring bear season seemed overly complicated with the chances of getting a bear nearly impossible; however, the truth is that the chances for success during your first year are really high.

You can figure out excellent spots and see bears nearly every day. You can do this hunt on a limited budget and this hunt is my most enjoyable and stress-free hunt of the year. With some preparation, time off, and a good long-range rifle, spring bear season can be something you look forward to every year.

**In my opinion, the best states to hunt for spring black bears are Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.**

Yes, there are a lot more western states that allow you to hunt black bears in the spring, but, let's face it: you have a limited amount of time, so why not go where the bear numbers are highest. You may be wondering why bear numbers are so high in these states. Well, that's because these states have some of the nastiest, steepest, thickest country that exists in the United States and bears thrive in this environment.

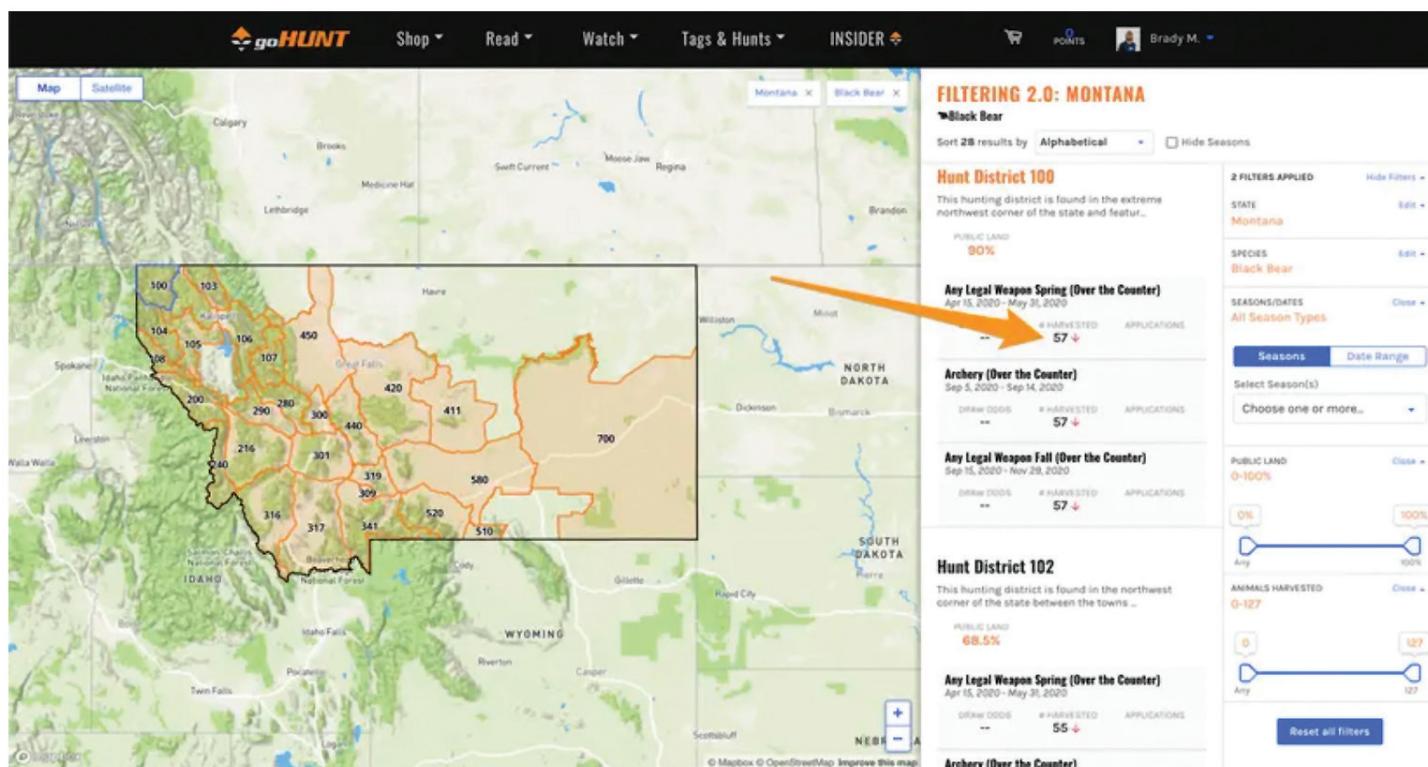
Idaho, Montana and Wyoming have over-the-counter (OTC) bear tags for specific units. Wyoming is the only one out of these states with a specific quota of bears that can be harvested in each specific unit and this information is available daily.

Hunters can strategically use goHUNT to see what units offer OTC spring bear tags and how many bears are harvested annually.

Honestly, if you go bear hunting in any of these areas and hunt hard you will have a good opportunity of seeing a bear and getting close enough for a shot during a five-day hunt.

Once you pick a state, get an INSIDER membership and cut some major time out of your scouting. Most people are very familiar with the benefits of using goHUNT's INSIDER platform for determining where to spend their mule deer or elk points; however, the information compiled on other species like black bears is top-notch.

Learn about GOHUNT's INSIDER membership and join here: <https://www.gohunt.com/memberships>.



Screenshot from GOHUNT's Filtering 2.0 showing the number of bears harvested in Montana.

**On the GOHUNT INSIDER platform on Filtering, you can simply search Idaho, Montana, Wyoming or any other state by OTC Spring Back Bear Season, then search by number of bears killed and you'll see the top bear harvest units.**

This information coupled with the amount of public land can allow you to pick a unit where you find bears and have a chance at killing one — usually within less than 10 minutes of research on GOHUNT's site. It honestly doesn't get any easier than that and as an INSIDER member myself, I would highly recommend it.

Once you have a unit or two picked out in the state of your choice, you should make some calls to the local forest service rangers, game wardens, and other local officials to determine when the bears typically come out of hibernation, what roads will be open during the spring season due to snow closures, and confirm that there are good bear numbers there.

Typically, these local officials are very aware of the bear density in their area because of camper, hiker and backpacker reports. If they say there are a lot of bear sightings and the GOHUNT harvest numbers are good, then it is time to start some online satellite scouting.

#### Online Scouting

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of where, when and how, it's important to talk about bears' spring behavior.

In the springtime, bears naturally come out of hibernation between March and June, depending on the snow line and weather. Every year will be different; however, you can bet that the lower in elevation a bear is hibernating, then the sooner they will typically awake. As soon as a bear wakes up from their winter slumber, they immediately seek out food.

The easiest food for these omnivorous mammals to get are new blossoms, flowers, berries, tree buds, bugs, grubs and anything in between.

Bears tend to live and hibernate in the dense forest, but usually after waking from their hibernation, they are drawn to any open hillside facing south. These southern hillsides typically have the snow melted off by the time a bear wakes and has already turned green and lush with small plants and buzzing with bug activity. Surprisingly, at high elevations, plant life tends to sprout and bloom at an increased speed compared to lower elevation plant life, which actually leads to a greater amount of protein for a bear to consume. Keeping all of this in mind, it is time to begin your online scouting and plan out some spots to sit for your hunt.

(continued on next page)



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# The Truth About Spring Bear Hunting

(continued from page 9)

Online scouting can be super beneficial during spring bear season in order to drastically increase your odds of spotting and harvesting a bear. Start by finding a reliable satellite imagery website with up-to-date images within the last five years. Google Earth or maps provided on state websites are excellent resources. Then, search within dense forest a mile or two from trails and roads and mark any open parks, two to five- year-old burns, avalanche shoots, controlled logging areas or obvious logging roads that are grown up and green. The next step is to see if there is a place to spot and shoot from within a decent distance from the bear feeding habitat. These potential shooting points can be either across, above or below the location where a bear may appear while hunting. If there is not a shooting area within my rifle's range, then the spot is not a good one. Personally, I determine this by using Google Earth and using the measurement tool to see how far the potential shot would be. With practice and good ammo, an average rifle today can shoot out to 400 yards give or take. A long-range rifle can shoot much farther — even up to 600 to 700 yards for a skilled marksman. However, while scouting and hunting, it is important to be honest with yourself about your rifle and your skill. It does you no good to hike back off the trail multiple miles and see a bear that is 2,000 yards away across a valley and not be able to take the shot or get any closer. It is equally as bad to attempt to take a shot that is too far for you or your rifle and end up wounding one of these animals.

In my experience scouting, for every 20 perfect bear spots, I find in a unit only one has an opening to shoot from that I can make with my rifle. Keeping that in mind, if a spot is not perfect, move on and find another.

Places like Idaho, Montana and Wyoming seem to have endless open south facing areas if you look closely. It's also important to note the elevation of the spots you are scouting and planning to hunt. I like to pick multiple hunting spots for every 1,000' in elevation change from 7,000' to 12,000'. Depending on when you are hunting and what the winter was like that year, bears can come out of hibernation at different times of the spring, putting them in open areas at different times. The last thing you want is to come out to Idaho and plan to hunt bears at 10,000' to find out that they are all under 3' of snow still in the middle of May.

After you have found some good spots and entered them into your GPS, take some days off of work and go after some bears. Bears are typically out and about at first and last light so you need to be at your shooting point for the first few hours of the morning and the last few hours of the day. Other than that, the rest of the day is yours to plan, which is why I feel that bear hunting is way less stressful than other hunts that keep you on your feet and pushing all day long.

Plan for a morning and evening hunt and maybe some fishing during the middle of the day. If you are deep in bivy camping, days can be long so bring a hunting buddy or two along to help pass the time and to help you pack out when you finally pull the trigger.

**During the spring, bears can habitually feed in the same area for a few days to weeks in a row so I would typically give a specific spot one to two sits before moving on to a different hunting spot.**

This also keeps your morale up and allows you to see more beautiful spring country. If you are successful and harvest a bear, make sure to have a plan to get it out. Though sometimes it gets a bad reputation, bear meat is actually quite good, especially if made into some sausage.

## Bear Safety

It should go without saying; however, it is important to note that bears are predators and can be very dangerous to any humans entering their habitat. By themselves, black bears typically will run away from humans at their first smell or confirmed sighting of us, but that is not always the case. If you startle a bear or come across one with cubs, they can easily have a fight mentality.

When it comes to black bears, the National Park Service recommends you DO NOT PLAY DEAD. They recommend that you fight the bear back by kicking or punching the bear in the muzzle.

Once the bear backs off and goes out of sight, vacate the area immediately. Many of the prime bear hunting areas in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming also have grizzly bears. Though the grizzly numbers are fewer than black bears, they are less likely to run away from you as they feel they are the dominant predator. If attacked by a grizzly bear, the National Parks Service recommends you leave. Do not drop your hiking pack in order to protect your back, then lay on your stomach and spread your arms and legs to prevent the bear from flipping you off your back and PLAY DEAD. Hopefully, the grizzly bear will lose interest and leave; however, if the attack continues and the bear is not losing interest, fight back as hard as you can and hit the bear with anything you have.

In general, bear attacks are rare; however, they do happen so don't be afraid to talk out loud on your way in to your morning spot until you get close, carry bear spray, firearms or a quick access knife. When camping, store your food away from your camp suspended in the air between two trees. Bears can climb trees so putting it up in the air, leaning on a tree will only delay the inevitable. Pack in food that doesn't smell through the packaging and clean up after you eat.

Bears are incredible animals and hunting them can be the biggest excitement of your year, but be sure to do it safely...

Good luck this spring!

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# Gourmet Panko Trout Recipe

By Hailey Malepeai  
IDFG  
<https://idfg.idaho.gov>



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

Catching trout is a favorite Idaho pastime, and a great way to provide healthy protein to your dinner table.

Here's an easy recipe to make your wild-caught trout a gourmet meal!

## Ingredients:

**Idaho trout**  
½ cup flour  
1 cup panko  
1 whisked egg  
1 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. pepper  
½ stick of butter  
Garlic  
Choice of herbs  
Lemon  
Chopped pecans (optional)

**Step 1:** Catch trout.

**Step 2:** Mix a ½ stick of softened butter with a 1 clove of minced garlic and your choice of herb. For this recipe I used herbs I had in the fridge: chopped parsley, zest from my lemon, cilantro, and thyme.

**Step 3:** Next mix the flour, salt, and pepper in one bowl. In a second bowl whisk your egg for the egg wash, and in the third bowl add your panko. If you choose, you can also add chopped pecans to your panko bowl for an extra nutty-sweet flavor.

**Step 4:** Dip your fish in the flour, salt, and pepper bowl.

**Step 5:** Dip your fish in the egg wash.

**Step 6:** Dip your fish in the panko.

**Step 7:** Fry your fish in the garlic & herb butter. Turn fish over until both sides are crispy.

**Step 8:** Finish your fish by placing in the oven at 350 degrees for 10 minutes.

**Step 9:** Serve with a lemon wedge and your choice of sides, or serve with crackers to make a delicious appetizer!

**Step 10:** Enjoy!



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

## Henry's Lake Angler Hoists New State Record Trout Out Of Ice

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

Henry's Lake — one of Idaho's most popular trophy trout spots — is well-known for holding some impressive Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Most anglers that wind up atop the Idaho state record fish leaderboards do so out of pure luck. But Robert Gregory's story goes a little different.

Yellowstone cutthroat trout aren't your run-of-the-mill trout. They are one of Idaho's three native subspecies of cutthroat trout and are found almost exclusively in the Snake River basin above Shoshone Falls and in the Yellowstone River basin. That means anglers can only find them in southern and eastern Idaho, parts of Wyoming and Montana, and tiny bits of Nevada and Utah.

One such place is Henry's Lake — one of Idaho's most popular trophy trout spots, well-known for holding some impressive Yellowstone cutthroat trout — which is precisely where Robert and his buddies set out for on Dec. 31.

Henry's Lake is one of Idaho's first bodies of water to freeze over during the winter, giving anglers an early-season, idyllic hardwater fishing experience. Robert admitted that landing a scale-tipping cutthroat trout was atop the day's goals.

"My college buddies and I got up early went ice fishing at Henry's Lake with a goal of catching a state record cutthroat trout, if possible," he said.

After little success that morning, Robert decided to switch up their game plan and hit shallower water. The bites were instant.

The fish in question? A 19-inch, 3.08-pound Yellowstone cutthroat trout, which...might not constitute a "toad." But in the words of Lee Corso: Not so fast.

Yes, a 3-pound trout may not be huge, but the mere act of even catching a Yellowstone cutthroat is a bucket list for many anglers. Plus, there just aren't that many places where you can legally harvest Yellowstone cutthroat trout, making it a bit more challenging. Henry's Lake is an exception in that the cutthroat trout population is robust and also supported by a hatchery program, so harvest opportunity is available.



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

## Spring Walleye Action With The Rumble Shad

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

Northland Fishing Tackle® has made a splash in the premium crankbait category with the Rumble balsawood crankbait series designed by Northland chief bait designer Jarmo Rapala-and fishing is better with balsa. Looking forward to the spring walleye bite, Northland is proud to offer anglers the Rumble Shad, a mid-running crankbait available in three sizes with varying diving depths. You'll quickly discover walleyes and other species find the lure's unique roll and tight action simply irresistible!

The #5 dives 5' to 12'; the #7 dives 8' to 16'; and the #8 dives 14' to 21'. All are formed of balsa wood through the unique Heat Compression Molding (HCM) process and feature a welded through wire construction from the tie eye to the tail. Designed to imitate shad, perch, and bluegills, the bait features a tight action, whether cast and retrieved or trolled behind the boat.

The Rumble Shad is available in 15 custom artisan colors, from match-the-hatch patterns to vibrant custom paint themes. The Rumble Shad also features premium short shank treble hooks and an oval split ring on the line tie.

**Northland pro Nick Lindner comments:** "For me, the Rumble Shad has been a key bait in the springtime period. The #5-the smallest Rumble Shad in the lineup-is a good choice and it's great for casting or trolling. It's so good in the spring because of the classic balsa shad configuration that matches the size of the predominant walleye forage in the spring. The Rumble Shad has a subtle action-the wiggle is tight. My favorite applications are right after the Walleye Opener."

**Lindner continues:** "You can cast it up onto shallow rocks or sand flats, or alternately, during the first week or two of the season when everybody's just dragging jigs and minnows on the bottom. With the Rumble Shad, you can cover water faster and find active walleye pods. It's really a great tool in that situation."

Speaking to the vast array of 15 color options, Lindner sticks with more natural patterns on clear bodies of water. "On darker stained waters like in reservoirs and river systems," he says in contrast, "I gravitate to any of the color options with pink in them. That's been a go-to for me. The color Sneeze, too, has been a real producer." **Lindner continues:** "I watch the size of the predominant walleye forage throughout the season, starting with the diminutive #5 and moving bigger as the young-of-the-year forage grows in size, which will signal moving bigger in the Rumble Shad lineup."

**Northland Team Pro Jason Mitchell adds:** "It's been an absolute phenomenon in cold water-both pitching and trolling. The Rumble Shad has a nice stall and flutter when you work the rod and stop it. It has a better dive curve than similar-sized and shaped baits due to its thinner bill. For me, it's been a great slower cold-water bait that just catches walleyes. I think it's going to be a great bait this spring for pitching, especially early-season river walleye fishing around wingdams, current breaks, rocks, and rip rap."

**Mitchell continues:** "The Rumble Shad just has a nice tight and delicate action that tempts walleyes to bite. On the troll, pull it 1.2, 1.3, 1.5 mph and it just comes alive. And when you stop it, the bait backs up and flutters nicely and then doesn't take much to get it going."

**Northland pro Joel Nelson chimes in:** "In the spring I will troll the bait earlier than most walleye fishermen tend to-like the smaller #5 that dives 5' to 12'. I remember opening up the season on Minnesota's Red Lake when everybody was jigging; the action was slow and the water was cold. People are slip-bobbering and we're trolling figure 8's around them catching fish on the Rumble Shad, just smoking the walleyes. These people could not get bit for whatever reason, but pulling a smaller shad-shaped crankbait was just incredible and we had a three man limit of fish in twenty minutes. So, my recommendation is to fish Rumble Shads early in the season."

"Then you've got the mid- to late-summer period trolling the quintessential last hour of light before dark, pulling them along the weedline and you're going to catch everything: walleyes, pike, bass, and even big, slab crappies. In the fall, the big sizes are what I turn with big wind patterns on a bunch of lakes. If the wind starts howling you go out on that second or third day and cast the bigger size Rumble Shads out on top of the structure and you crank them down into the rocks, and if you get wedged, just pop the bait out and give it some line and big walleyes will take it."

**Northland pro Brian "Bro" Brosdahl adds:** "The Rumble Shad has a unique tight wobble that walleyes rush in to eat. In testing, I did a lot of pitching and retrieving, and had everything follow and strike. There are great match-the-hatch colors and wicked colorful patterns...For the quartet of walleye specialists spring can't come soon enough to break out the Rumble Shad on their favorite waters."

Visit your favorite Northland Fishing Tackle dealer and stock up now before the pegs are empty or shop at [www.northlandtackle.com](https://www.northlandtackle.com).

# Slow And Easy Fishing For Spring Walleye

By Jason Mitchell

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

**W**hen fishing for spring walleye, less is more. The most productive techniques are often simple and subtle. On natural lakes, in particular, we often find fish shallow, relating to the shoreline. Good locations might include protected shallow bays or shallow gravel and sand flats that warm up relatively quickly during the spring. On many bodies of water, water clarity is often generally clear and as the water warms up, the water tends to stain up. The exception would be strong runoff or wind.

Clearwater that hasn't had a chance to warm up requires some adjustments to consistently catch fish.

We often find some of the largest fish in less than five feet of water during this time frame but water clarity can narrow the windows of opportunity.

When the sun is out early in the season, we often find big fish in shallow water even though the water is clear enough to distinguish the bottom and these fish can be extremely difficult with no overcast or wind. The fish are still often active but are hard to approach. The sweet spot is often just past the depth where you can physically see the bottom for numbers of fish. Some prime opportunities however often occur much shallow after dark or during sunrise or sunset.

When the water is still cold and relatively clear, we seem to catch much more fish by using a monofilament line.

Monofilament disappears in the water better than braid and for many of these presentations; I avoid using fluorocarbon because the sinking characteristics speed up the presentation too fast. The biggest advantage of using monofilament for these presentations might be the stretch and subtleness of the line which seems to subdue and soften the swimming motion on the jig. The jig seems to have more fluid, and does nothing to swim and glide through the water which really seems to trigger these fish.

The nuts and bolts of this presentation are making long casts across these shallow flats and simply swimming the jig. Very few hops or pops, just cast and reel slowly. If you start ticking the bottom, you are reeling too slowly. You want the jig to just glide along just off the bottom. Traditional jig combinations include the classic Fire-Ball Jig tipped with either a minnow, half crawler, or leech and these combinations have caught a tremendous number of walleyes but the long casts often tear bait off. Many anglers have started to switch over to soft plastics or gone back to classic bucktail or marabou dressings.

The most effective walleye fishing tackle for me, over the past handful of years has been the Northland Mimic Minnow which has a pointed jig head that swims and tracks through the water nicely. The body is long with a paddle that makes a nice thump as it is retrieved through the water. If the fish won't hit the Mimic Minnow or bump the bait short, I have had good luck with the Trigger X soft plastics. These synthetic water-soluble baits are really soft and have a deadly action and the scent really seems to help in cold water.

Years ago, many walleye anglers cut their teeth on bucktail and marabou jigs but over the years, some anglers begin to forget how effective these dressings can be on a jig.

Plastics today are scented and have more action and really replaced hair or marabou but some anglers are going back to the traditional dressings.

Both bucktail hair and marabou are much more subtle in the water. The action is minute and the jig basically glides through the water in a straight line but this lack of vibration and flash can be extremely deadly early in the season.

This is basically a do-nothing jig that looks like a minnow swimming in a straight line and often, that is exactly what a walleye wants early in the season.

Later in the season, we pop and snap these jigs back to the boat but I encourage you to try the simple cast and slow reel technique with jigs in conjunction with plastics, hair, and marabou.

So often in the spring, less is more. Slow and steady retrieves across shallow water early in the year often account for several trophy fish for us each year.

## Editors Note:

The author Jason Mitchell earned a legendary reputation as a guide on North Dakota's Devils Lake before hosting the popular television show, Jason Mitchell Outdoors.

Jason Mitchell Outdoors Television is a regionally broadcast television show available throughout the Midwest on Bally Sports North and Midwest, and MIDCO Sports Net covering North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, and Missouri.

All episodes can also be found on YouTube. Learn more at <https://www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com>.

# Flathead Lake Fishing Guide

(continued from page 2)

## TROLLING

### A. Flatlining

You can readily catch lake trout by trolling lures near the surface in April-June and October-November. Troll 3/8 oz. or larger spoons such as Krocodies in silver/red or gold/red or minnow-imitation plugs such as Rebels or Rapalas in black/silver, black/gold or fluorescent orange. You can also troll plugs that will dive to 10'-20'. Drop the lure 100'-200' behind the boat and troll parallel to the shore 50-100 yards out in 30'-200' of water. Steeper shore-lines such as most of the east shore, Conrad Point to Painted Rocks, Wildhorse Island and around the Narrows are good spots. Concentrate on spawning areas in the fall (points with rock or cobble) such as major points, Wildhorse Island, or around the Narrows.

### B. Lead-Core

Lead-core outfits such as those used for kokanee can also be used on lake trout down to 50' deep or more. Fish the same lures and locations as flatlining with 3-8 colors out. This is particularly good as lakers move deeper in summer.

### C. Diving Planers and 3-way Rigs

Diving Planers are tied inline 4-6 feet ahead of the lure. They can dive 30-50 feet but will trip when a fish hits to allow a better fight. An angler can also tie up a rig with a 3-way swivel. The mainline ties to one swivel with a 4'-6' leader off the opposite swivel to a lure. Tie a short leader off the bottom swivel to a banana sinker (2-12 oz.). Depending on the line, speed, lure, and sinker weight you can fish down to 100 feet or more.

**D. Downriggers** Downriggers will cost \$100-\$500 but they allow you to fish at precise depths and into very deep water. They also allow you to fish with fairly light gear since the line releases from the heavy downrigger cable and ball when a fish hits. Used with a good fish finder you can target concentrations of fish and prime locations and precisely place your lure. The most common downrigger lure is a squid and dodger or flasher although a variety of lures can be used. Generally, place the squid 2 1/2 dodger lengths behind the dodger and drop the lures 10-50 feet behind the downrigger release. Use an 8" or larger dodger. Silver and chartreuse are popular dodger colors and white, chartreuse, blue, and glow are popular squid colors. Scent or a piece of cut fish on the squid can help. Generally fish near the bottom but don't be afraid to fish mid depths, particularly near the thermocline (40'-60') in summer, or wherever you see the fish on the finder. If you're not catching fish vary the boat speed and vary the distance back from the downrigger release.

**E. Steel Line** This method requires a heavier rod with a roller tip, and a large reel such as a Penn 49L with 1,000 feet or more of single strand or braided steel line in 20-40 lb. test. With this method you drag a lure (usually a Flatfish or Kwikfish) along the bottom. (continued on page 38)



2026 Vexus DVX20s

Mercury 300XL Pro XS, Mercury 15ELPT Pro Kicker  
Vexus Tandem Axle Custom Trailer

Options: Two Tone Deck and Hull Stripe, DVX Victor Package (Intensive Care Livewell System w/ Oxygenator, High Density Polyethylene Pad On Center Rod Box, CoastKey Digital Ignition, Airwave Pedestals), Digital Ignition, Dual Pro On Board Charger 15x4, Humminbird Xplore 12 MSI, Humminbird Xplore 10 CHO, Minnkota Ulterra Quest 115/DSC/72" 36v, TM Plug, Quick Release Bracket, Mercury System Monitor Gauge Upgrade, Manual Setback, 54" Rear Handrails, Bow Handrails, Stereo System, Bike Seat, Deluxe Boat Cover.



2026 Lund 2075 Fisherman

Mercury 200XL Pro XS DTS, Mercury 15ELPT Pro Kicker  
Shoreland'r Tandem Axle Trailer

Options: Digital Throttle/Shift, Smartcraft Gauge Upgrade, Drotto, Bow Step Ladder, Suspension Pilot Chairs, 1 Additional Proride Seat, 6 Sportrak Brackets w/ Rod Holders, Fishing/Trolling Package, Kicker Stereo, Fire Ext., Bow Stem Protector, Washdown System, Aquatraction Weatherboard Protection, Travel Cover, 4 Bank On Board Charger, Complete Sport Top w/ Drop Fishing Curtain, Humminbird Xplore 9 MSI, Humminbird Xplore 9 MSI CHO, Minnkota Terrova 112/MDI/WR-72", Transom Saver, All Batteries.



2025 Lund 1650 Angler Sport

Mercury 60ELPT, Shoreland'r Bunk Trailer

Options: Analog Gauges, Spare Tire, Load Guides, 4- Sportrak Brackets w/ Ram Rod Holders, Tilt Steering Upgrade w/ Seat Slider, Fire Ext., Wireless Phone Charger, Kicker Stereo, Auto Bilge Pump Option, Lund Ruler, Additional 6.5 Gallon Fuel Tank, 2 Step Strap Ladder, 3 Bank Onboard Charger, Travel Cover, Sport Top w/ Walkway Curtain, Humminbird Helix 7 MDI, Minnkota Powerdrive 70/DSC/FP-60", 24V Upgrade, Transom Saver, All Batteries.

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The late-season bull elk I recently took in Arizona with the Mathews ARC. Photo credit Chris Neville

## An In-Depth Review Of The Brand New 2026 Mathews ARC Hunting Bow

By Trail Kreitzer

Originally published at **GOHUNT** GOHUNT.com

**A deep dive bow review of the brand new 2026 Mathews ARC**



Photo credit Justin Waack

When it comes to hunting bows, there's a variety of features that you might be chasing. Some bowhunters are more interested in speed, while others may be more focused on how smoothly it draws, how quiet and dead in the hand it might be, or perhaps how well it aims and delivers an accurate arrow at extended yardage. Many bowhunters are looking for a bow that is as lightweight as possible, and that is a major deciding factor in purchasing. It's easy to say that every flagship bow on the market delivers all of those, but the reality is that depending on what you value most, there are some bows that fit your style better than others.

As a western big game bowhunter with my specs, I would suggest that my priorities in a hunting bow would look something like this: tunability (holds a tune), accuracy, speed, smooth draw, quiet on the shot, vibration, and overall weight. Now, tunability and accuracy are somewhat related, and could be interchanged, but the point is that a bow that is easy to tune and holds its tune is also often an accurate bow. There are other specs of a bow that I think produce a more accurate bow, which I will touch on, but the tuneability of a bow and how accurate the bow is are closely related. With that, I'll dive into why I think the 2026 Mathews Archery ARC 34 is quickly becoming my favorite bow I've ever owned. I've spent a few months with this bow, both at the range and in the field, and here's the full breakdown.

### Design & Adjustability of the Mathews ARC



Photo credit Justin Waack

The Arc 34 is 34 inches axle-to-axle (ATA). That's the longest axle-to-axis hunting bow that Mathews has had in their hunting lineup in a number of years. Previously, one of the best hunting bows I have owned was the Halon X, which was 35" ATA. That bow seemed so easy for me to shoot well, which I believe was largely due to the overall length. The analogy of holding a yardstick or a broom handle in the middle with your bow hand is often used, and I'll use it again because I think it translates well. A yardstick can be rotated relatively easily in your bowhand from left to right, while a broom handle is much harder to manipulate. The added length, being farther from your grip, makes it harder to move, i.e., it resists torque. This is precisely why, if you were to attend a pro-level shoot of any kind, you'll see those professionals toeing the line with bows that are mostly 36" to 40" in ATA. If a shorter bow were more accurate, you can bet the pros would be using them. That said, hunting isn't target shooting and has its own demands. In hunting situations, you have to carry the bow and shoot it in real-world environments where there is often vegetation, a variety of angles, and sometimes you have to manipulate your form to get into a position to shoot. Over the years, I think that somewhere between 33" - 35" is the range that works best for me, and the ARC 34" lands right in the sweetspot. It's long enough that it provides an incredibly stable hold, while being short enough that I haven't had it get in the way while I am stalking or moving through western landscapes. Would it be the best choice for folks who hunt from a treestand or in a ground blind? It probably would not be, but for antelope, mule deer, elk, and most other western big game, I believe it's the best of both worlds.

I already noted that accuracy and tunability are closely related, so let's look at the features of the ARC that make it so easy to tune and shoot.

For starters, the Limb Shift Technology makes tuning extremely easy. The limb shift tech allows you to micro-adjust limb position without a press by turning an Allen key in the limb tip axle. This corrects your left/right arrow flight by shifting the limb in or out to adjust cam lean. In essence, you set your rest at approximately 13/16's, shoot the arrow through paper, and can turn the internal axle screw(s) left or right to correct the arrow flight to tune out your left or right paper tears.

(continued on page 18)

# Significant Donation Will Cover Entry Fees For Boone And Crockett Club Records Program

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

A long-time Lifetime Associate and benefactor to conservation has provided the Boone and Crockett Club the opportunity to waive entry processing fees into the organization's Records program. Thanks to the generous donation, the Boone and Crockett Club announced today that the usual \$40 entry fee will not be charged this year for entries received after January 1, 2026. The vision of the donation is to reduce a potential barrier to submitting an entry allowing for more records data to be added to the already more than 64,000 records from the last century of hunting conservation.

The Boone and Crockett Club has been measuring antlers, horns, skulls, and tusks of North American big game since 1895, with the original vision of creating a record of what was thought to be the vanishing wildlife in the country. The organization's Records of North American Big Game was first published in 1932 and, now in its 15th edition, serves as a vital record of biological, spatial, and harvest data and trends from hunter-taken and picked up big game species. The records dataset is based on the principle that the existence of mature, male specimens is an indicator of overall population and habitat health.

"The Boone and Crockett Club's Records program is an incredible dataset that allows wildlife managers to evaluate herd and habitat health and to learn more about the big game species in their state. However, we recognize that not all hunters harvesting an eligible animal will enter it into the Club's Record Program for various reasons, and anecdotal evidence suggests the entry fee may be the most prevalent entry barrier," commented Boone and Crockett Chief Executive Officer Tony Schoonen. "Thanks to this gift we hope to determine if this is the case by increasing the number of animals entered into the Records database to add even more value to the science-based management of North American wildlife."

All entries received as of January 1, 2026, will not pay an entry fee—instead if they choose, hunters can direct a voluntary donation that will be dedicated to the Records program. The benefactor and the Boone and Crockett Club hope that this will encourage even more hunters to have their animal scored using the standardized measuring system...

The Boone and Crockett Club's more than 1,600 Official Measurers have been notified of the entry fee waiver and any entries submitted in early January 2026, before this announcement was made, will be contacted by the Boone and Crockett Club.

Learn more at <https://www.boone-crockett.org>.



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# An In-Depth Review Of The Brand New 2026 Mathews ARC Hunting Bow

(continued from page 16)

One thing I really like about the limb shift feature is that it's micro-tunable and I don't have to rely on moving my rest alone, or at all. I've used the limb shift feature to paper tune, then bare shaft tune, and even tune my broadheads at distance to get what I feel is an incredibly precise tune on the bow. It's also a major time saver due to the fact that a press is not required.

Draw length is arguably the most critical factor in how accurately you will shoot any given bow. In addition, draw weight and holding weight also contribute to your accuracy. If you are over-bowed it can be hard to draw and hold steady, and depending on your shooting style you may require a bit of extra holding weight to pull against to steady your aim. The ARC bows utilize the Switchweight X mods. The mods are available in a variety of draw lengths in half inch increments from 26.5" to 32". The SWX mods are also available in two let-off options, 85% and 80%. The 85% mods obviously allow the bowhunter to hold less weight at full draw, which can be helpful in a hunting situation where you might have to remain at full draw before an animal offers you a shot.

My preference has been the 80% lower let-off, because I tend to pull into the shot, and the added poundage at full draw helps steady my pin as I pull. The SWX mods also allow you to change draw weights by switching them out. You can choose from 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, and even 80-pound draw mods. This feature is nice because you never have to unscrew the limb bolts to lower the poundage. You choose the mods for your desired draw weight and leave the limb bolts turned all the way in where they are the most efficient. One final note on the SWX mods and ARC 34; the bow is long enough ATA that I think it will be a great cross-over hunting and target bow for a lot of people. For about \$69, you can buy a set of 60-pound mods, which are common for target archery and go back and forth for hunting and target archery.

The new ARC bows do have a new cam, called the SWX-2. The new cam feels very similar to me to last year's Lift X 33. It's a smooth drawing bow, with no notable humps or drops into the back wall. I really like the draw cycle of the new cam. The SWX-2 cam does have a new parameter weight that further reduces felt recoil and retains speed. I loved the feel of the SWX cam on the Lift and Lift X, the SWX-2 cam improves upon those while still providing a smooth drawing experience, even at higher poundage.

Overall, the tuning features make the ARC relatively easy to tune and work on. Do I wish that I could manipulate the draw length in  $\frac{1}{4}$ " increments or have some mechanism to more easily adjust the cam sync? Yes, I do, but those would also come at a cost of less efficiency.

The cam sync can take some time to adjust to perfection in some cases, and the draw length might need to be adjusted by twisting/untwisting cables or the string if you land between a whole number and a half, but it's very manageable. When I put the time into setting the bow to my exact liking, I will say that it seems to hold a tune well.

## Mathews ARC bow specs

### Mathews ARC 30

Brace Height: 6"  
IBO Rating: Up to 348 fps  
Axe To Axe: 30"  
Draw Weight: 55, 60, 65, 70, 75 & 80  
Draw Lengths: 25" to 30.5"  
Let-Off: 80 or 85%  
Physical Weight: 3.99 lbs  
Cam: SWX-2  
MSRP: \$1,459.00

### Mathews ARC 34

Brace Height: 6.5"  
IBO Rating: Up to 343 fps  
Axe To Axe: 34"  
Draw Weight: 55, 60, 65, 70, 75 & 80  
Draw Lengths: 26.5" to 32"  
Let-Off: 80 or 85%  
Physical Weight: 4.3 lbs  
Cam: SWX-2  
MSRP: \$1,569.00

## Riser

When I pulled the ARC 34 out of the box for the first time, I noticed that the riser looked different from last year's Lift X. The ARC riser has reinforced sections at the top and bottom, which add rigidity where it matters. The physical weight of the ARC is about 4.3 lbs, while the Lift X 33 was 4.26 lbs. So Mathews has made the ARC 34 longer and more rigid where needed, while adding only 0.04 lb to the overall weight. As a backpack bowhunter, it's a dream come true. It's more stable in the hand, a bit faster, as quiet, and weighs almost the exact same as last year's bow. Also, one last note on the riser, Mathews has machined the Silent Connect System into the riser of the ARC bows. This system allows treestand hunters to easily loop a rope over that portion of the riser to hoist it and lower it from their stand. It's not a complete game changer for most western big game hunters, but you never know when I might hang a treestand to hunt elk or muleys over a wallow, and it's a nice perk to have it already incorporated into the riser.

The ARC continues to incorporate the bridgelock design for dovetail sights, Mathews stabilizers, and it also has the machined dovetail receiver for rests like the Mathews Archery QAD Ultra Rest HDX or even the new Hamskea R7. The Bridgelock sight receiver makes your entire system more streamlined, balanced, and lighter weight. I've grown to really like the Bridgelock system for both sights and stabilizers. They're easier to remove while traveling or hiking, and they provide a more secure, solid mounting system.

## Noise & Vibration

Mathews has continued down the path of producing a quieter bow with less recoil year after year. The ARC has a new limb cup design that reduces weight, adds stability, and with a redesigned limb assembly, the ARC creates a perfectly parallel limb path that decreases shot vibration and increases efficiency.

They still utilize a harmonic dampener in the bottom portion of the riser, as well as their bridgelock stabilizers, should you decide to purchase those along with the bow. Those harmonic dampers soak up sound and vibration. The ARC limbs continue with the rubber dampener that is seated between each set of limbs. The rubber dampener between each limb further kills sound and post-shot vibration. In addition, the ARC has a rubber string stop that prevents the string from excessive follow-through and oscillation. Just the parallel design of the limbs alone cancels a lot of vibration after the shot.

In all, the ARC is as quiet in my opinion as the Lift X, and that bow was the quietest bow I'd ever owned. For me, there may be ever so slightly more feedback than the Lift X 33 with the ARC 34, but it's still one of the most dead in the hand shooting bows on the market. Mathews has sound and post shot vibration figured out, the ARC is truly a pleasure and a lot of fun to shoot. The ARC is the quietest bow on the market compared to other models.

## Accuracy of the Mathews ARC

What makes a bow accurate? That is somewhat of a loaded question, because the reality is that the

person holding it is most likely the biggest factor, but the ARC 34 does have some features that I think can help you be more accurate, no matter your skill level. For starters, the ATA length and wide limb platform provides a very stable platform. Secondly, the ARC is easy to tune for fantastic arrow flight, and the draw weight, let-off, and draw length is easy to tune to each individual bowhunter via the interchangeable mods. The string angle also offers a comfortable anchor, where I haven't had to duck my head into the string to find my anchor point. The 6.5" brace height is a good mix of being long enough that it's forgiving for a hunting bow, but it also helps to generate more power stroke and feet per second (FPS). Truly, the ARC 34 is an easy bow to shoot. Some bows I have owned in the past just felt like I had to work harder to aim and release an accurate arrow; this isn't one of them. The ARC 34 aims and holds easier than others I've owned, and there really isn't anything more enjoyable than your arrow hitting directly behind the pin.

## Speed of the bow in feet per second

I won't spend a ton of time here, but the IBO of the ARC 34 is up to 343 FPS. That's tested with a 30" draw length, 70# draw weight, and a 350-grain arrow, with next to nothing on the string. Those specs aren't realistic for a hunting bow. While I haven't tested a variety of arrow weights, I can report that with my bow completely set up with a peep, tied in nocking points, and a D-loop, I am consistently getting 287 FPS with a 480-grain finished arrow.

(continued on next page)

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# An In-Depth Review Of The Brand New 2026 Mathews ARC Hunting Bow

(continued from page 19)

My personal specs for my ARC 34 are 30.25" Draw Length and 70.4 pounds. That 287 FPS number is in my personal wheelhouse for what I am looking for in a hunting arrow. It's fast enough that my pin gaps are relatively tight and I can still reach out to 100-plus yards for practice. The fact that I am able to achieve that with a 480-grain arrow is impressive to say the least. That provides me approximately 87.81 foot-pounds of kinetic energy, which is more than enough to hunt almost any animal in the world. I witnessed firsthand the penetration potential of a late-season bull elk last month in Arizona, and I was thrilled with the results.

## Accessories

Along with the new ARC bows, Mathews has released some accessories that I think are worth discussing. Most western bowhunters are shooting a back bar at this point, and for 2026, Mathews has improved their backbar bracket. The new version, called the Integrated Bridge-Lock V-Bar, slides through the back of the riser, and you thread a tension screw through the riser to secure the backbar bracket just inside the riser. This is a small change, but it does secure the bracket much better than the previous model, which was always something that I had to regularly check to make sure it was in the same position and bolted down well. The new bracket is also lighter. It's one less thing I have to think about going forward.



Mathews Archery Angled Bridge Lock Stabilizer photo courtesy GOHUNT.com

I already noted that I like the Mathews Bridgelock stabilizers, but prior to this year, they were only available in straight mount versions. New for this year, Mathews is making Bridgelock stabilizers in 10", 12", and 15" lengths that have a 7-degree down angle called the Angled Bridge-Lock Stabilizer. They can still be mounted and shot in a straight configuration, but the notch in the bottom of the new bars allows you to drop the angle of the bar in the riser if you'd like. Some people like an angled down front stabilizer. It can help to level out quicker, reduce wobble, or simply offers a more steady aim for some.

I've tried both, and for my style, I seem to prefer the straight mount, but I'm also not one to stop tinkering to see if some small change might help the bow be more accurate. I do appreciate the option on the new stabilizers.

Lastly, the ARC is available in several color combinations. They offer solid-colored risers and limbs in black, earth, Green Ambush, grey, and the new Kodiak Brown. They also offer camo versions in multiple patterns if that's your flavor. You can even get custom orders with one riser color and different colored limbs. Match grade string and cables can also be ordered in custom colors. Everyone has their personal preference, but a few combos I really like are the Earth riser with Green Ambush or black limbs. The grey with black limbs looks sharp, as does the black riser with the earth color limbs. The bow I got has the new brown riser and black limbs. I think when I pair it with white strings and buckskin or brown serving, it's going to look incredible, and let's be honest...a cool-looking bow is just more fun to shoot.

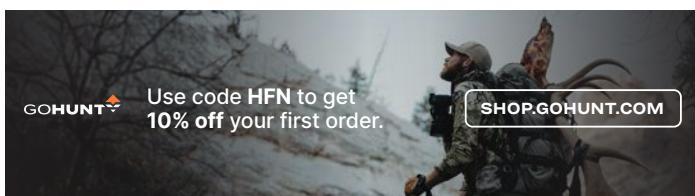
## Conclusion

I know, every year we hear that the newly released bow is the best one ever. I'm certain I've said it, and I'm going to say it again, sorry! I think the Mathews Archery ARC 34 is the best hunting bow I've ever owned.

Is it the best bow for you? It's hard to say, but I would suggest you get to a local pro shop and shoot one if you are in the market for a new bow. For me, a 34" inch ATA bow that is as fast, tunable, quiet, accurate, and fun to shoot hasn't existed before now. It's a really nice bow, and every time I pick it up to take a trip to my local range to shoot, it puts a smile on my face. The MSRP for the ARC 34 is \$1,569 which admittedly is not cheap, but if shooting a bow and arrow and adventure bowhunting is something you live for....it's completely worth it.

If you're ever in Las Vegas, be sure to stop by our hunting store at 6630 Arroyo Springs St #1200. We recently opened our own bow shop, and we have plenty of Mathews ARC bows for you to shoot and purchase, or shop online for all things hunting at <https://shop.gohunt.com>.

Use code HFN to get 10% off your first order.



To learn more about GOHUNT and become an insider visit: <https://gohunt.com/user/register?plan=insider>.

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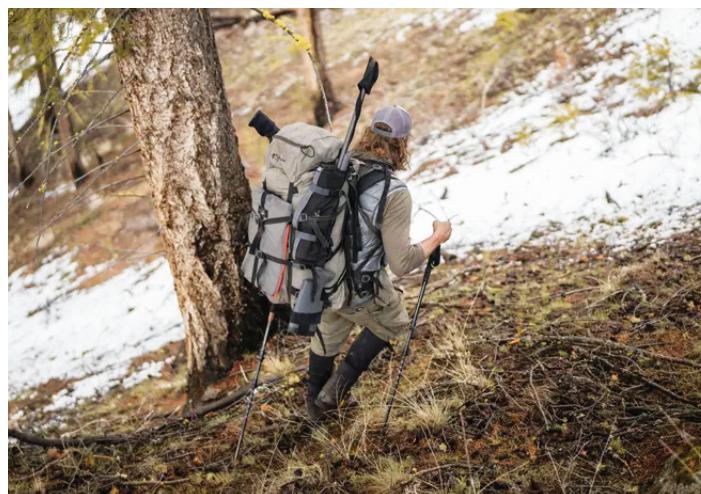
# Five Gear Essentials For Spring Bear Hunting

(continued from page 4)

We recommend always carrying a lightweight power bank that holds enough power to recharge your phone and headlamp. An iPhone requires roughly 3,000 milliamp hours (mAh) while most rechargeable headlamps take about 3,000 mAh to fully charge. A power bank like the Goal Zero Flip 24 weighs in at only 4.6 oz. and backs 6,700 mAh of power. Around the GOHUNT office, we've been using the PEAX Backcountry Duo Headlamp, which has a brightness of a whopping 1,000 lumens while also being able to run for up to 69 hours at a decreased brightness.

Rechargeable headlamps are not required, but if you're using a headlamp that runs on AAA batteries, we recommend putting in fresh batteries before heading out and packing at least one set of replacement batteries.

## 5. Trekking Poles For Hunting



Trekking poles; the four-wheel drive of backcountry hiking.  
Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy of GOHUNT.com

Bear hunting can be rather leisurely up until it's time to recover and pack out a bear — especially early in the season when the steep, south facing slopes are the first areas on the mountain where snow melts off and green chutes of grass begin to show. The steep areas may be an easy spot to find and get a cross canyon shot off on a bear, but can be challenging to recover and pack bears out of. Factor in inclement weather or snowmelt running off these hillsides and you'll see a need for something to help keep you upright. Trekking poles are often overlooked by bear hunters using trails or logging roads to navigate, but should be in your pack to help get a bear out of a steep and deep canyon and back to level ground.

Learn more about GOHUNT INSIDER or join at  
<https://gohunt.com/memberships>.

# Landowners May Now Apply For 2026 Hunting Access Programs

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

Landowners interested in allowing public hunting access on their property or providing access through private land to public land, may now apply for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 2026 hunting access programs.

Applications and program information are available for several landowner options, including Block Management, Block Management Access Corridors, Elk Hunting Access Agreements, Public Access Land Agreements and Unlocking Public Lands. For more information, contact a local FWP regional office or visit [fwp.mt.gov/hunt/landownerprograms](https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/landownerprograms).

Landowners proposing access routes through private land to landlocked or difficult-to-access public lands must apply by March 15. Application deadlines for landowners allowing public hunting access on private lands are May 1 for Elk Hunting Access Agreements and June 1 for Block Management.

FWP offers multiple tools to assist landowners with managing public access on or through their property. In all FWP access programs, landowners retain control by setting the rules and conditions for when, where and how the public may use enrolled lands.

All landowners participating in FWP access programs receive liability protection in accordance with 70-16-302, MCA...

An advertisement for GOHUNT. It features a hunter in camouflage gear and a cap, standing in a snowy, mountainous environment. The hunter is holding a trekking pole in one hand and has a large backpack on. A set of large, curved antlers is mounted on a stand to the right of the hunter. The GOHUNT logo is at the top, and a text box on the right says "FIELD TESTED BY HUNTERS FOR HUNTERS". At the bottom, there is a promotional offer: "Use code HFN to get 10% off your first order." and a button "SHOP.GOHUNT.COM". A small note at the bottom right says "Exclusions apply on select brands and discontinued items.".



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

## The Coyote Bowl

By Jay Anglin

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

Coyotes are highly vocal and territorial, and consequently they are very responsive to calls. In addition, food is often hard to come by, which forces these otherwise nocturnal predators to move about during daylight hours in search of food. These factors are a big advantage to the hunter come late winter.

There are potential caveats, however, not the least of which are weather conditions. In some areas, coyotes will have been pressured for months by hunters, and the coyote's ability to avoid humans is uncanny. In Native American folklore coyotes are often referred to as the "Trickster" or "God's Dog" due to their cunning, and sometimes mischievous nature. It's a charming way of saying they're extremely intelligent, and if you leave anything to chance, you're not going to be pushing the rifle's safety off very often. TUO Pro Trey Douglas knows coyotes and how to hunt them successfully. He primarily focuses on the Midwest and Western states, and he recently shared some of his hard-earned wisdom.



Photo credit slowmotiongli | depositphotos.com

### WEATHER

My favorite conditions are cold days...say teens to low 30s, and light wind, preferably either a crosswind or directly in my face for my stands. This way, they must either get to the downwind side or behind to catch human scent. If the wind is light enough, it can swirl and even change directions, so keeping an eye on the wind direction and speed is very important. Bad conditions would be blowing hard, and/or unbearable cold, as the coyotes will typically just lie down and wait-it-out.

### SIGN

If you have snow, you can look for tracks on your way in. This gives you a good idea if there are coyotes in the area, but you have to be careful not to put too much confidence in those tracks. What I mean is, if you see tracks – whether they're fresh or not – doesn't always mean coyotes are there at that time. On the other hand, if you don't see tracks, it doesn't necessarily mean that there aren't coyotes around. Just keep this in mind.

### SET

When sitting down before even starting the first vocalization, I try to visualize where I think the coyotes are going to approach from by taking the terrain, wind, and weather into consideration. My preferred ideal range for a coyote is anywhere from 250 yards and in. While I can shoot past 250 yards, I like being able to draw them close and avoid worrying about windage.

### CALLING

I mainly use an e-caller, but always have handheld, open reed calls with me for backup if the caller dies – which happens too often (lol), or when I need to switch things up.

When it comes to calling this time of year, I like to go with more howls than normal and even use more female howls than male as it can draw the males in looking to pair up.

If the regular go-to sequence isn't working, I try different sounds that I may not typically use for a couple of different reasons. For example, other hunters may have called in the area recently, which can educate them quickly. In addition, a little switch up of sounds to one that I would usually think "would never call one in" could be the exact thing that a coyote is waiting for to fully commit. I avoid getting stuck in the same calling routine if it's not working on a given day.

### NUMBERS

The number of coyotes you can expect to see this time of the year varies. However, if the weather is cold and the wind is mild, you can expect to see anywhere from 3 to 10 coyotes. Cold is a big factor, as coyotes that are not necessarily looking to pair up, but instead are out looking for food and your calling is presenting a free meal. But of course, there will very likely still be other coyotes running around looking to pair up and with the right sounds, you can coax them into range as well.

## THE IRON

My favorite rifle for coyote hunting is a custom 22-250 with a unique paint job that looks like the TUO Verse pattern, and I always have a bipod mounted to the rifle. As far as ammo goes, I use a Nosler 55 grain Ballistic Tip, and my dad and I custom load our rounds for that and a couple of other guns, so we can control the consistency and know all the specs on all of them.

## CLOTHING



### CLEMENT Puffy Jacket FEATURES:

During cold hunts in January and February warmth and mobility are important. I try to go minimalist to reduce bulk while remaining comfortable. For my bottoms I go with TUO's AMP Pants under the Clime Pants. On top, I'll wear the Kinetic Merino 350 Hoodie under the Clement Puffy Jacket. Depending on the severity of the cold, I will wear the Molten Heated Vest over the 350 hoodie and under the Clement Puffy Jacket. This combination offers excellent warmth while remaining comfortable with plenty of mobility. It's very versatile in every sense, including the Verse camouflage pattern that works in such a wide range of habitats.

- 100% 20D nylon shell
- Paralite™ Lightweight Breathable Insulation (80g body, 60g sleeves)
- DWR treatment helps shed moisture and resist stains
- Highly wind-resistant to help cut down harsh gusts
- Internal zipper inside left lower pocket converts to a stuff sack for easy packing, carrying, and storage
- Can be worn alone or as a layering piece when temps drop
- Adjustable high neck hood for extra protection in colder temperatures
- Three zippered pockets (2 waist, 1 chest) for secure storage
- Articulated elbows for improved fit and mobility
- Adjustable waist to lock in heat and keep moisture out
- SIZES: S – 3XL
- COLORS: Verse Camo and Lichen

MSRP \$229.99

An advertisement for Skinner Sights LLC. It features a close-up of a rifle with a red and black stock and gold-colored sights. The text reads: "Skinner® Sights LLC", "MACHINED FROM SOLID BARSTOCK", "STURDY SIGHTS", "Rifle cases &amp; more for your rifles", "PLEASE SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION", "WWW.SKINNERSIGHTS.COM", and "P.O. Box 1810, St. Ignatius, MT. 59865". There is also a "MADE IN U.S.A. PRODUCT" logo.



### AMP Puff Pant FEATURES: Clime Pant FEATURES:

- Shell – 100% Nylon Woven Ripstop, C0 DWR, UPF 50+
- Lining – 100% Nylon Ripstop, Polygiene StayFresh and Odor Crunch
- Insulation – Paralite 60 GSM
- 2 front invisible zipper hand pockets
- Invisible zipper for the CF fly
- Full-length side seam zippers
- Elastic waistband with internal drawcord that can be tied on the outside or inside of the waistband
- Rib knit bottom hem at lower back leg
- SIZES: S – 3XL
- COLORS: Deadfall and Storm
- 93% polyester, 7% spandex
- 278 gram fabric weight
- 4-way stretch fabric for increased mobility/comfort in any terrain
- Polygiene StayFresh™ helps reduce odor from bacteria. OdorCrunch™ captures and inhibits odors
- Super DWR treatment for water and stain resistance
- Articulated knees & inner thigh gusset for improved fit/mobility
- Side seam vent zips with mesh lining for temperature regulation
- 2 waist pockets, 2 zippered cargo pockets, 2 zippered back pockets, 1 right-side knife pocket
- 34" inseam
- SIZES: 30 – 42
- COLORS: Verse Camo, Deadfall and Brome

MSRP \$219.99

MSRP \$149.99



Photos by Ethan Stubbs courtesy TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>

## Rocky Mountain Way

By Jay Anglin

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

**H**igh country hunting expert, TUO ambassador, and television host Kurt Belding offers advice on hunting Merriam's wild turkeys.

It's doubtful any other game species compels hunters to travel around the country with such vigor as the wild turkey, and then do it in such a relatively short period of time. Depending on the location, wild turkey seasons stretch from March through early-June, and for many hunters, hearing the rattling gobble of mature tom during breeding season is worthy of multiple road trips.

There are five subspecies of wild turkey in the US, including the Osceola, Eastern, Rio Grande, Merriam's, and Gould's. Some turkey hunters may even attempt one of the various "slams," which entails tagging a specific combination of subspecies and registering them with the NWTF.

And one of the more unique of the bunch is the Merriam's wild turkey.



Merriam's are found at higher elevations throughout the Mountain West, often where Ponderosa pine is interspersed with meadowy openings. Merriam's are hearty birds living on the edge of survivability during harsh winters, but somehow, they manage to make it through. They feed on a variety of seeds, berries, and insects during warmer months, but throughout winter, Ponderosa pine seeds are critical for survival.

While many turkey seasons are coming to an end, plenty of states offer seasons that run to the end of May, and even June in a few instances. Where Merriam's can be hunted, the month of May is prime time and there really is nothing like harvesting a white-tipped Merriam's gobbler in a setting that looks more like elk country than the typical place where wild turkey flourish.

Western Obsession TV host and TUO Pro, Kurt Belding, may be known for hunting mountain big game such as the majestic Rocky Mountain elk, but he has also spent quite a bit of time chasing wild turkey, including the wily Merriam's of the west.

"I grew up in Nebraska hunting Rios and you may find them in some of the creek bottoms in the mountainous regions, but the mountain birds are Merriam's," said Belding who now resides in Colorado.

Many turkey hunters are familiar with the widespread eastern and Rio Grande subspecies – and there are many similarities between them and the Merriam's, but there are also notable differences in behavior, and of course coloration.



While roughly the same size as the Eastern and Rio Grande, Merriam's are easily recognized for their striking, white tail tips, and light buff tips on their tail coverts. Merriam's have less pronounced barring on their lighter colored wing primaries than the other two sub-species as well as shorter spurs and beards on average. While they are often vocal, the Merriam's gobble is considered the weakest in terms of volume and intensity.

"The calls are very similar, and the language doesn't really change that much either," explained Belding. "I feel one of the most notable differences between Rios, Easterns, and Merriam's is they are on the move a lot, and I'm talking mountain turkey hunting. There aren't creek bottoms and ag fields, you're in the foothills, you're in the deep mountains, and as soon as they hit the ground they are on the move. They want to get somewhere – they have a destination in mind."

"Merriam's aren't going to just mill around the same area as the other subspecies often do. Instead of hunting from a blind or remaining set up on a given spot, this is more of a run and gun style hunting strategy. I'm locating and trying to get in front of them where I think they're headed. Maybe I'll use a decoy, maybe I won't," he added.

Merriam's are known to be very responsive to hen vocalizations, which makes them especially attractive to turkey hunters, and though it isn't flat ground, their preferred habitat isn't difficult to find.

"I like box calls to locate, but when working a bird, I use a mouth call so I can remain hands free."

Typically, Merriam's are going to avoid difficult terrain when possible, so deep bottoms and steep hills are not ideal. Gobblers will often look for ridges to move along, which allows them to see and hear both sides and make moves quicker," he explained. "Elevation-wise, you're in the foothills, not alpine. In my opinion, what makes the Merriam's more difficult is the terrain and elevation where they live, and the fact they are constantly on the move."

Hunting Merriam's has some similarities to hunting big game in the mountains – the terrain and physical exertion required, for example. While the quarry may not be nearly as iconic as, say, bull elk, overall, the method is similar.



Blending in wearing TUO Aptitude Softshell Jacket and TUO Aptitude Softshell Pant

"You're making sure the birds can't see where the call is coming from as they approach, because if he can, it's likely he's going to get hung up, which is the same case with elk. There is comparable gear required – I'm using calls, the camo setup is similar, and I use a daypack, because when I'm out there turkey hunting, I'm often running and gunning all day," Belding explained.

(continued on page 27)



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Photo courtesy Vortex Optics <https://vortexoptics.com>

## Stacking The Odds: How To Hunt Smarter (Not Harder) For Mature Whitetail Deer

By Justin Hollandsworth Whitetail Addictions Manager  
<https://www.youtube.com/@LoneWolfCustomGear/featured>  
From Vortex Optics <https://vortexoptics.com>

If there's one thing I've learned after decades chasing mature whitetails, it's this—being in the woods more doesn't always mean you're hunting better. In fact, too much time in the wrong tree can do more harm than good, especially if you're like me and hunting smaller pieces of property where every sit counts.

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It took me a while to learn that. I used to think more stand time meant more chances. But the older I got—and the more mistakes I made—the more I realized this game is all about stacking the odds in your favor. It's not about hunting harder, it's about hunting smarter. You've got to pay attention to these details: weather, moon, trail cam intel, glassing intel, and old fashion boots on the ground. That's what separates the guys who consistently punch tags on big deer from the ones who just hope to get lucky.

### LET THE CONDITIONS DICTATE YOUR HUNT

When it comes to whitetail movement, nothing influences deer like the weather. A cold front in October or November is about as good as it gets. I've had entire seasons turn around in 24 hours just because temps dropped ten to twenty degrees.

Deer don't like to move when it's hot and still. Neither do we. Give me a north or west wind behind a cold front, and I'm burning boot leather. I don't care if it's October or November, if the conditions line up, I'm going in.

The key is knowing when to dive in and when to wait. If your best stand is in a tight bedding area or staging zone and you blow it out on a dead day, you may have just burned that spot for a week or more—maybe the season.

### THE MOON DOES MATTER (TO A POINT)

Now, I'm not a moon junkie, but I do pay attention to it. Over the years I've noticed a pattern: around the full moon, I see better movement midday. Around the new moon, early morning movement tends to pick up. It's not gospel, but if you're balancing hunting with family or work, it helps knowing which days might give you a little more edge.

More than anything, the moon helps me plan when to hunt and how to hunt. If I see a good weather system lining up with a favorable moon phase, I'm taking that time off work or adjusting my plan. Again, it's all about stacking those odds.

### LET YOUR CAMERAS DO THE WORK

Trail cameras have changed the game. Whether you're running cell cams or swapping cards, the intel you gather is gold—if you know how to read it. But here's the thing: too many guys rely on them as the only scouting tool. You've still got to know the land, the bedding areas, the travel routes, and most importantly—how not to pressure the spot.

If you're getting daylight pics of a good buck, don't rush in just to sit the wrong wind. Wait until everything aligns. Your cameras are a tool, not a green light. Let them show you the pattern, then make your move.

And if you're not getting photos of a shooter, that doesn't mean he's not there. It might just mean you're not in the right spot yet. That's where old-fashioned woodsmanship still matters. You've got to know how to read fresh sign, understand the terrain, and adapt.

# Rocky Mountain Way

(continued from page 25)

## The Benefits of Blending

Belding emphasizes the importance of full camo coverage and TUO's Verse camo has proven to be extremely useful in a wide range of environments and during multiple seasons.

"The turkey's main defense is their incredible eyesight, so you don't want a lot of skin showing or be moving around. Camo from head to toe is important, so I also wear TUO's gloves and the balaclava mask. The merino wool base, softshell jacket, and Clime Pant are also perfect. This combination is great for running and gunning style hunting and TUO's Verse camo does the rest. I've used it all over the place from turkey hunting to mountain goat hunting in Alaska, and it fits in pretty much everywhere – I'm a big fan of Verse," Belding said.

While Merriam's wild turkey have been introduced in some regions, the best concentrations are typically associated with the foothills of large mountain ranges. Thankfully, the states where Merriam's are plentiful offer lengthy seasons and over the counter tags. If you haven't quite finished scratching the spring turkey hunting itch, you have an entire month to give the Merriam's a try.

## HUNT LESS. KILL MORE.

I know it sounds backwards, but the best thing you can do to improve your success is hunt less. Or better yet, hunt with more purpose. On small farms, it's critical. You can't afford to educate the deer. Every time you step foot in that woods, you're leaving scent, disturbing bedding areas, and potentially teaching that mature buck he's being hunted! It's hard, especially when you're fired up and want to be in the game. But discipline kills bucks. Let those other hunters pressure the deer. You just sit back, gather intel, and wait for that one window where it all lines up.

## FINAL THOUGHT

Being a whitetail addict means you're always thinking about the next hunt, the next deer, the next cold front. But don't fall into the trap of overhunting or relying on hope. Use every tool available—weather forecasts, moon data, trail cams—and don't be afraid to sit out until it's time to strike. Because when it's right... it's right. And if you've done your homework, you'll be there when it happens.

**Summary:** Whitetail Addictions is a group of men and women with normal day jobs, from all walks of life, feeding their addiction to chase down mature whitetail bucks. Hardcore archery hunters whose lives have been consumed by the chase and yet continue to want more. Self-filming every step of the way, they eat, sleep, and breath whitetails, and are do-it-yourselfers.

**Follow along with Whitetail Addictions on YouTube at:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/@LoneWolfCustomGear/featured>

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The Swiss Army knife of our product line. Our windproof, water-resistant Aptitude Softshell Jacket is crafted with a 3-piece high-collar that features underarm and sleeve panels to provide increased mobility and stretch. The jacket boasts a durable and silent polyester and spandex blended outer fabric with fleece grid lining for warmth and comfort. A built-in Lycra stretch cuff with thumbholes secures a tailored fit. Additionally, DWR treatment helps shed off moisture and stains, as well as 4-way stretch for mobility, fit, and function. Polygiene StayFresh™ and OdorCrunch™ technology help reduce bacteria and inhibit odors MSRP \$199.99

## TUO Aptitude Softshell Pant

Experience ultimate comfort and convenience with these durable and quiet softshell pants. The 94.5% polyester and 5.5% spandex material offer a 4-way stretch for unmatched mobility and a perfect fit. With six zippered pockets, including a knife pocket, you can conveniently store all your essentials. The abrasion-resistant knee overlays provide added durability, while the articulated knees offer an improved fit and mobility. The fleece grid lining and AeroGuard™ Windproof membrane keep you warm and protected from harsh winds. The Polygiene StayFresh™ and OdorCrunch™ technology help reduce bacteria and inhibit odors, making these pants perfect for long-term wear. A DWR treatment helps shed moisture and stains.

MSRP \$199.99



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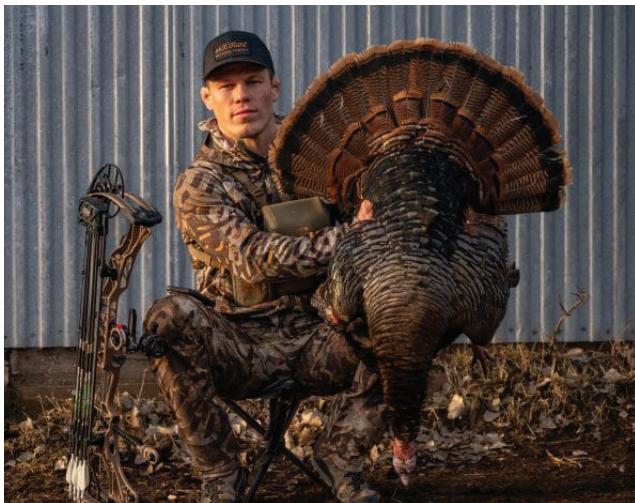
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Author Kelby Hawkins. Photo courtesy Kelby Hawkins and TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>

## Under The Roost

By Kelby Hawkins

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

**T**his hunt affirmed a turkey hunting tactic that has allowed me to tag out on opening morning the past few years and that is: Find the roost and get setup close.”

The work week had just concluded on a Friday afternoon, and I was headed out of town with two things on my mind: 1st find turkeys and 2nd find their roost.

Turkey opener was less than 12 hours away, and I had done very minimal turkey scouting leading up to this point. Though, I knew that if I could put some birds to sleep, my chances would be high in the morning.

After navigating a few public hunting areas and other hunters planning to hunt opening morning just as I was, my hunting game plan was looking meek.

With a stroke of luck, I was able to locate a good group of birds on some private ground that wasn't being watched by other hunters. With the assistance of OnX, the landowner's home was located, and permission was granted. The old man said “kill them all” which put a grin on my face, knowing I only had one tag to fill.

I rushed out just before dark to put these birds to bed and ensure that my game plan was bulletproof. Hopes were high going into opener...

My alarm woke me at 3:00am and I jolted up with excitement, knowing it was going to be a special morning in the turkey woods.

The weather called for high winds and this pleased me, as I knew it would allow me to get very close to the roost. With a full moon shining down and the wind howling, I was able to set up within 100 yards of the roost. Set up in my ground blind, I had my jake and hen decoy just 15 yards away.

As sunrise crept closer, I found myself counting the dark figures up in the cottonwoods and grinned with excitement as I reached forty. I was astonished by the number of birds merely right on top of me.

As legal shooting time arrived, turkeys started piling down onto the ground just out in front of me. For a moment, I thought I was waterfowl hunting due to the number of birds gliding down to alight just before me.

After spending time behind my camera, capturing and enjoying being face-to-face with so many turkeys, I decided it was time to fill my tag.

I had a pair of mature toms walking back towards my decoys, which had already taken a severe beating by another group of toms, and they gave me an easy 20 yard shot. My SEVR broadhead gave this tom the quickest and most humane death he could ever receive.

I couldn't help but sit for another half hour and soak in one of the craziest turkey hunts I'd ever been on. Easily the most turkeys I'd ever been surrounded by, I knew this hunt would be a tough one to top. I was amazed with how my weekend had switched from lots of uncertainty to getting into a spot that allowed me to have an experience such as this.

This hunt affirmed a turkey hunting tactic that has allowed me to tag out on opening morning the past few years and that is: Find the roost and get setup close.

### Gear List

#### **TUO Kinetic Merino 250 Hoodie – Verse Camo**

The comfiest piece of clothing that I own. No matter what I'm hunting, the merino hoodie is on me as either a base layer or outer layer.

#### **TUO Aptitude Softshell Jacket – Verse Camo**

Moisture wicking and windproof. A must-have outer layer for those cool spring mornings.

#### **TUO Clime Pant – Verse Camo**

My go-to pant no matter what I'm hunting. Comfortable and sexy.

#### **TUO Softshell Gloves**

Keep the paws warm, that wind can be chilly.

#### **Lacrosse Ursa ES GTX Boots**

I've been running these boots intensively since last summer. I've put tons of miles on them and they still look barely used. Sleek design and super comfortable.

Shop online for your TUO turkey hunting gear at <https://www.tuogear.com>.

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### VIPER® SHOTGUN ENCLOSED MICRO RED DOT

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Photos courtesy Kawdy Outfitters [www.kawdyoutfitters.com](http://www.kawdyoutfitters.com)

## 3 Off Season Rifle Shooting Tips

Kawdy Outfitters [www.kawdyoutfitters.com](http://www.kawdyoutfitters.com)

As soon as one hunting season ends, the next one begins - because when it comes to your shooting practice, there should be no "off season".

During these winter months, you'll probably spend time on license draw applications and making hunt plans for next year. As you carve out time for the hunt planning process, make sure your shooting practice is a part of it.

Those hunts in the future will approach incredibly fast. Maintaining a regular shooting practice schedule throughout the winter will elevate your skills and have you prepared well ahead of the hunting seasons.

Practicing in the off season is about much more than sighting in a rifle. You are building critical confidence, extending your range and training to really be a shooter. This means you will instinctively drop in position and know exactly where your shot will land when it counts. There is no better feeling than approaching a shot with the experience that removes second guessing or uncertainty.

### 1. Monthly Minimum Range Visit

At a minimum, a monthly visit to the range will keep you centered and on target. Increasing the frequency of your shooting trips will however really stand to improve your game. Take the time to become intimate with your rifle and how it handles.

Find the best rounds through practice and get yourself dialed on extremely tight groupings at the outer edge of your comfortable range.

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**POLARIS**

After you have that normal shooting range producing consistent groupings, jump out to longer range shots just for fun. You may not need to use this skill while hunting, but knowing where you can place a shot at long distances is comforting.

## 2. Dry Firing Rifles

Making regular range visits is not always possible, but you can build some serious confidence through visualization and dry firing practice. The process involves shooting without any ammunition.

Anytime you begin a session of dry practice, double and triple check that your rifle is not loaded. Even so, always aim into a safe setting as a safety measure. Dry practice against a real target like a decoy is ideal. You can also simply hang a photo of a big game animal to help with the visualization and shot placement.

Focus on your shooting positions and setup just like you would in the field. Pay close attention to breathing and shot placement. Pull the trigger normally and visualize the shot being on target.

Spend twenty minutes visualizing shot scenarios while getting yourself positioned and setup on a target. Do this once or twice a week and you will really develop and build confidence for the field.

## 3. Sign Up For A Class

One of the best ways to improve your shooting skills during the off season, is to sign up for a shooting class. No matter your experience level, anyone can (and should) continue to hone their skills.

Wherever you live, there's probably a class somewhere near you, taught by expert firearm instructors. Or, you might even consider attending a multi-day shooting class in the west, where practicing in real hunting scenarios can put skills into practice. Either way, round up a few friends and have fun with it.



## Contact Us With Questions

Kawdy Outfitters offers remote hunts in northern British Columbia for moose, mountain caribou, mountain goat and stone sheep. To learn more, please explore our website at [www.kawdyoutfitters.com](http://www.kawdyoutfitters.com).

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## Reminder: Say Thanks To Landowners Who Offered Hunting Access

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

With the beginning of the new license year on March 1, hunters have until Feb. 28 to use the Thank a Landowner web portal:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/hunt/thank-a-landowner> to express gratitude to landowners who allowed hunting access on their land this season.

FWP collects these submissions and mails the letters and photos to all landowners who were identified.

So far, nearly 400 hunters have submitted a thank you note to private landowners through the portal.

The portal is part of the It's Up To Us campaign to promote ethical hunting and help improve relationships between hunters and landowners.

This campaign is an annual effort with FWP and several partner organizations to encourage hunters to take the initiative to promote good hunter ethics and behavior, particularly on private lands.

The It's Up To Us webpage:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/ItsUpToUs> also features tips on ethical hunting and links to informative video content and the Thank a Landowner portal.

The page also features access to the Hunter Landowner Stewardship Project:

<https://fwp.mt.gov/education/hunter/hunterLandowner> and links to campaign partners.

Visit Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks website at <https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply> for:

Hunting Licenses

Fishing Licenses

Conservation License

State Parks Permits

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Outfitter & Commercial



Photos courtesy Scentlok <https://www.scentlok.com> and Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

## Sharing The Warmth



Scentlok Adds Women's Sizes To The Quintessential Late Season Alpha Elite Jacket And Bib

There are certain things you don't mess with. For people who know their way around the kitchen, that includes the countertop KitchenAid blender. Some minor alterations over the years, but essentially the same 'ol reliable. Anglers might call out the Zara Spook or original Dardevle spoon as products to leave well enough alone. And as firearm enthusiasts, we gotta tip our Stormy Cromer to the Daisy Red Rider.

**In whitetail world, that same reasoning applies to ScentLok's Alpha Elite Jacket and Bib. Well, but for one exception – the iconic hunting gear manufacturer is introducing new women's sizes...**

For years, the Alpha Elite Jacket and Bib have been built around a legacy of being waterproof, insulated, odor-adsorbing and designed to keep hunters warm and undetected in cold, wet conditions. Mic drop...

The Alpha Elite's outer shell is a quiet, brushed polyester tricot with DryLok™ waterproof and breathable membrane designed for late-season hunting conditions, including rain, snow, and wind, with full seam sealing to prevent leaks.

DryLok™ is ScentLok's proprietary waterproof and windproof membrane technology that provides a breathable barrier, which lets excess heat and moisture escape while blocking water and wind from getting to your skin.

The next level of technology is ScentLok's famous Carbon Alloy®, which combines treated carbon, activated carbon, and zeolite to absorb odors emitted by your body. Carbon Alloy utilizes natural coconut shell carbon, as it has the largest internal surface area of any carbon on earth. This massive surface area promotes the adsorption of the broadest scent molecule range. It innately secures these molecules and holds them until you reactivate your gear in a household dryer.

Alpha Elite's third leg of technology is zoned Thinsulate® insulation. 3M's pioneering insulation employs ultra-fine fibers, which allow for a higher density while remaining breathable and retaining warmth even when wet. Thinsulate absorbs less than 1% of its weight in water, outperforming down in damp conditions, and overall, delivering superb warmth without bulk.

ScentLok zoned the insulation to favor more heat in the core and increased mobility in the extremities. The Alpha Elite Jacket sports 150g in the body and 100g in the sleeves and hood. The bib features 150g Thinsulate throughout. Both have warm and comfortable core liners composed of 175g fleece.

**This fabric and insulation combo suits all-day treestand use in temps down into the 20s°F worn with proper base- and midlayers.**

Key features specific to the Alpha Elite Jacket are its removable hood and potpourri of pockets. The hood's removability caters to midlayers that sport hoods, so you're not doubling-up, as well as the folks who just care to wear one. The hood is fully adjustable with a bonded bill for rain protection, too.

**The Alpha Elite Jacket offers a dozen pockets, including eight on the exterior: two chest, two hand warmers, and four around the waist. Internally, you'll find two zippered chest pockets and couple lower ones for quick dumps.**

Special bib features include ladder-style suspenders and hip-length zippers. They adjust with ease and secure firmly in place, aided by a silicone grip that holds on your shoulders.

The side zippers provide easy and instant on and off with boots in play.

Lastly, the total pocket package raises by five, the bib offering two waist, two cargo, and one on the backside.



#### Women's Alpha Elite Bib FEATURES

- Carbon Alloy® technology for odor adsorption
- DryLok® breathable waterproof/windproof membrane helps protect you from the harsh elements
- 150g Thinsulate™ insulation for warmth and comfort
- DWR treated to repel moisture
- Brushed tricot outer with a 175g fleece core lining
- Five pocket design for storage (2 waist, 2 cargo, 1 back)
- Comfort ladder suspenders for easy, secure adjustments with silicone grip for stability
- Hip-length leg zippers for easy on/off in the field
- SIZES: Women's S – 2XL
- PATTERNS: Mossy Oak Terra Gila

MSRP \$349.99



#### Women's Alpha Elite Jacket FEATURES:

- Carbon Alloy® technology for odor adsorption
- DryLok® breathable waterproof/windproof membrane helps protect you from the harsh elements
- Thinsulate™ insulation for warmth and comfort (150g in the body, 100g in the sleeves & hood)
- DWR treated to repel moisture
- Brushed tricot outer with a 175g fleece core lining
- Adjustable hood with a bonded bill for rain protection
- Comfort cuffs with zippers for a snug fit
- 12 total pockets for storage and warmth
- 8 exterior (2 chest, 2 handwarmer, & 4 waist) & 4 interior pockets (2 lower dump & 2 zippered chest)
- Removable hood provides versatility when needed
- Safety harness port
- SIZES: Women's S – 2XL
- PATTERNS: Mossy Oak Terra Gila

MSRP \$349.99

#### ABOUT NEXUS OUTDOORS

Nexus Outdoors is a leading worldwide designer, marketer and distributor of performance, hunting and casual odor-controlling apparel, footwear and equipment under the ScentLok Technologies®, OZ®, Blocker Outdoors®, Whitewater and Tree Spider® brands. It also owns American Range Systems, manufacturer and distributor of the world's strongest and safest bullet traps. Nexus Outdoors is the only company with access to all scent-controlling technologies, including their patented Carbon Alloy™ and Cold Fusion Catalyst™ technologies, which provide superior success in the field. ScentLok and Blocker Outdoors are pioneers in the hunting industry, which many credit with creating a market focused on superior scent control to get closer to big game.

# When The Tag Goes Unfilled: Lessons From Colorado's Second Season

By Ted Ramirez

Caribou Outdoor Equipment Co. <https://www.caribougear.com>

## The Hunt That Tests You

There's something about Colorado's second rifle season that humbles even the most prepared hunter. The mountains look different this time of year — not green and alive like in early archery, nor buried in snow like the late hunts, but caught somewhere in between. Yellow aspens give way to empty branches, frost paints the meadows, and elk tracks tell stories older than any of us.

This year, our crew hit the trailheads like many others — tags in our pockets, high hopes, and that quiet conviction that maybe, just maybe, this would be the season we punched the tag. Public land, open sky, long miles. No shortcuts.

We didn't fill the tag.  
But we filled something else.

### The Public Land Reality

Public land hunting in Colorado is a paradox of abundance and challenge. There's more access than almost anywhere in the West, yet the animals move like ghosts. Every ridge seems to promise sign, every draw looks "elky," but it takes patience — and humility — to realize that sometimes the elk win.



Photos courtesy <https://www.caribougear.com>

We glassed for hours each morning as the sun crept over the ridges. The chill in the air made every breath visible, our rifles resting on our packs, eyes searching for that one flicker of tan against the timber. Midday hikes revealed only old rubs and frozen wallows. Evenings ended with quiet silhouettes of mule deer grazing on distant hillsides, reminding us that we weren't alone — just out-timed.

Failure, if you can call it that, feels different in wild country. It isn't defeat; it's perspective.

### The Mountain Teaches

The mountain doesn't care about your brand of boots, your rifle caliber, or your gear list. What it does care about is how you show up — your patience, your ethics, and your respect for the land.

**The second season in Colorado is a test of endurance more than anything:**

- Mornings are bitter cold.
- Afternoons grow deceptively warm.
- Evenings vanish before you're ready.

Each day feels shorter, yet somehow more demanding. You hike farther, think deeper, and begin to understand that hunting isn't always about harvest — it's about alignment. It's aligning yourself with a rhythm that existed long before us, and will continue long after.

We didn't notch a tag, but we notched memories that sharpened our discipline: how to glass longer, how to stay quieter, how to accept the silence between bugles.

### Camp Life: Where Stories Outweigh Success

At camp, we built small fires, brewed coffee thick enough to stand a spoon in, and watched steam rise from boiling water into the cold air.

### Basecamp becomes a classroom.

It's where you learn that hunting partners matter as much as elk sightings, and that shared hardship forges better stories than shared victories.

When the day's hiking ended and the packs hit the ground, we'd talk strategy under the stars.

Some nights it was laughter — recalling missed opportunities, fogged optics, or the mule deer that materialized out of nowhere at 40 yards.

Other nights it was silence — the kind where the fire crackles and everyone stares into the flames, knowing tomorrow brings another chance.

Those are the moments that shape hunters more than any harvest photo ever could.

### Gear That Keeps You in the Fight

Even on hunts where the tags go unfilled, the right gear defines the experience. It's the barrier between comfort and misery, between staying on the mountain or heading home early.

## Caribou Gear® Rifle Shield™



Snow, dust, and condensation are the silent killers of rifle reliability. The Rifle Shield™ Cover kept our actions clean and optics dry through days of variable weather — from frosty mornings to dusty afternoon hikes. When you're miles from the truck, dependability matters.

## Hunter's Tarp®

We used the Hunter's Tarp® for everything: sitting glassing knobs, covering gear during light snow, and prepping meals on clean ground. It's simple, rugged, and ready — the way all good hunting gear should be.

## Koyukon® Duffels & Dry Bags

Public land hunting is as much about logistics as it is about pursuit. Keeping gear dry during unpredictable weather was crucial. Koyukon® Duffels gave us that peace of mind.

## Caribou Gear® Game Bags

Even though we didn't get to fill them this year, we carried our Game Bags with pride. They're more than bags — they're a promise. A commitment to ethics, cleanliness, and respect for the animal. Because when success does come, being ready defines your professionalism as a hunter.

## The Philosophy of the Unfilled Tag

It's easy to measure a hunt by the weight in your pack. But some of the best hunts — the ones that stay with you — are measured differently.

They're measured by the sunrise that painted the ridges orange and gold. By the bull elk bugle you heard in the dark timber that froze you in your tracks. By the knowledge that you earned every mile, even if no tag was punched.

Every unfilled tag is an invitation — an invitation to reflect, refine, and return stronger.

(continued next page)

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# When The Tag Goes Unfilled: Lessons From Colorado's Second Season

(continued from page 35)

## Public Land: The Great Equalizer



There's something uniquely American about public land. It belongs to all of us — every hunter, hiker, and dreamer who looks toward the mountains and feels that magnetic pull. Hunting public land demands humility, grit, and patience. It's where the odds are never guaranteed, but the reward is always earned.

You compete not against other hunters, but against your own limits — fatigue, doubt, and time. You learn that fair chase isn't about easy outcomes; it's about honest effort.

And in that effort lies something sacred. Something worth protecting, year after year.

### What We Take Away

We left Colorado without meat in the freezer, but with lessons worth far more:

- That failure sharpens focus.
- That partnership outlasts frustration.
- That gratitude transforms disappointment into growth.

Hunting isn't a transaction — it's a relationship. A relationship with the land, the weather, the wildlife, and the people who share the fire beside you.

When the next season comes — and it will — we'll be back. Maybe we'll fill the tag next time. Maybe we won't. But we'll walk the same ridges, breathe that same mountain air, and feel the same quiet satisfaction of simply being part of it all.

### Final Thoughts: Why We Hunt

We hunt not to kill — but to belong. To measure ourselves against the wilderness and remember what simplicity feels like. We hunt to preserve tradition, to feed our families, to teach our children that food has meaning and that wild places deserve our respect.

So yes, we came home empty-handed this season. But we came home full-hearted. And in the end, that's the kind of success no tag or trophy could ever replace.

Learn more at [www.caribougear.com](http://www.caribougear.com)

36 | Hunting & Fishing News

# Boone And Crockett Club Touts New Funding For Big Game Migration Habitat Conservation

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

The Boone and Crockett Club cheered the infusion of new funds available for big game migration habitat conservation and restoration announced today as part of the Make America Beautiful Again Commission. To support this core sportsmen's priority, almost \$8 million has been added to the \$2 million in base funds available this year through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for their Western Big Game Seasonal Habitat and Migration Corridors Fund. Private and tribal funding is also included in the total.

Projects funded by the program improve habitat in priority areas identified by state wildlife agencies to address the needs of big game species as they travel to and stopover in their summer and winter range habitats.

"The migration corridors program began in 2018 as a proof-of-concept for a few species of big game. Having continued ever since, it has now proved the concept," said Simon Roosevelt, Executive Vice President of Conservation at the Boone and Crockett Club. "The Trump administration, Secretary Burgum and Director Nesvik in particular, has recognized this and we look forward to further expansion of this invaluable effort. More species, and more areas — especially in summer ranges — need to benefit from this work."

Big game such as elk, mule deer, and pronghorn are iconic species in the West, providing important hunting and recreational opportunities and contributing a vital source of protein for western ecosystems. The success of their movements requires quality habitat along the migration routes and seasonal habitat they depend upon. Since Secretary's Order 3362 was signed in 2018, there have been seven rounds of NFWF grants awarding \$21.6 million across 86 projects, leveraging \$67.2 million in matching contributions to generate a total conservation impact of more than \$88.9 million. These projects have protected private land through conservation easements with willing landowners, addressed barriers through road crossings and wildlife-friendly fencing, and restored hundreds of thousands of acres of habitat.

**The nearly \$10 million available for the 2026 funding cycle will be the most for a single round since the program began.**

"The renewed attention to this program and significant influx of funding will enable state agencies, tribes, hunting groups, and other partners to expand the results and scope of the program," Roosevelt continued.

(continued on page 38)

# RMEF And Partners Work To Open Or Improve Access To Nearly 145,000 Acres In 2025

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



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

During a year when public land took center stage in discussions from legislative floors and courtrooms to hunting camps and social media pages, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation supported 10 land conservation and access projects in 2025 that, when complete, will open or improve public access to nearly 145,000 acres in 11 states. Working cooperatively with private and public partners, RMEF added acres to public land and established points of entry to existing public properties that were landlocked by private land or difficult to access.

Support from Access Elk Country sponsors throughout 2025 helped RMEF continue to expand public access to big game habitat. RMEF thanks presenting sponsor onX Hunt and sponsors ALPS OutdoorZ, Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's, Davis Tent, Fiocchi, Kenetrek, Kimber, Warne Scope Mounts and Yamaha for their commitment to fostering additional opportunities to access and recreate on public land.

"RMEF works to increase public access so that hunters, anglers and other outdoor enthusiasts have more places to enjoy the activities and landscapes that define their passions," said Kyle Weaver, RMEF president and CEO. "Each year, our land projects produce tangible results—more or better access—and Access Elk Country sponsors, along with conservation-minded landowners, devoted members and dedicated volunteers, are important partners in achieving those successes."

2025 RMEF-supported land conservation and access projects include:

**Black River; Cheboygan and Montmorency counties, Michigan**—acquisition by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Little Traverse Conservancy that adds 8,850 acres to the Pigeon River Country State Forest

**Cumberland Forest**—Highlands; Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Wise counties, Virginia—conservation easement transfer from The Nature Conservancy to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources that will open or improve access to 65,000 acres

**Fox Peak—Keiser; Mendocino County, California**—15-acre acquisition led by the Mendocino Land Trust that ensures future access to nearly 5,600 acres of land to be managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), adjacent to RMEF's landscape-scale Eel River Peninsula Conservation Project

**Hobble Creek; Lincoln County, Wyoming**—permanent road access easement held by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department that enhances access to more than 16,000 acres of moose, mule deer and elk habitat managed by the U.S. Forest Service and BLM

**Metolius Winter Range; Jefferson County, Oregon**—300-acre acquisition by Portland General Electric, Oregon Wildlife Foundation and the Confederated Tribe of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation that improves access to the Deschutes National Forest, Crooked River National Grassland and other land open to public use

**Pico Mountain; Daggett County, Utah**—1,600-acre acquisition by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, forming the Cook Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and improving access to nearly 3,900 acres of surrounding Utah School and Institutional Trust Administration property now open to the public

**South-Central Montana**—50-plus-acre acquisition by RMEF that will open access to an additional 2,700 landlocked state and federal lands

**Tex Creek V; Bonneville County, Idaho**—acquisition by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game that adds 280 acres to the 35,218-acre Tex Creek WMA, an important winter range for migrating elk

**Tualatin Mountain Forest; Multnomah County, Oregon**—3,110-acre acquisition by the Trust for Public Land and Oregon State University to provide public access and serve as a university research forest

**Windermere Hills; Elko County, Nevada**—23,000-acre conservation easement to be managed by RMEF and access easement to be held by the Nevada Department of Wildlife that will provide public access to 43,000 acres as well as conserve a vital migration corridor for the state's second largest mule deer herd

## About the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Now in its fifth decade of Conserving America's Big Game,™ RMEF will extend its impact on habitat and public land access to 10 million acres by 2030. RMEF conserves and enhances habitat for elk and all big game, opens and improves access for hunting and other outdoor recreation, conducts science-based wildlife research and ensures the future of our hunting heritage through advocacy, outreach and education. Members, volunteers and supporters nationwide help RMEF further its mission. Find out more and join the movement at [rmef.org](https://www.rmef.org) or 800-CALL-ELK.

# Flathead Lake Fishing Guide

(continued from page 15)

It takes 800 feet or more of line to reach bottom in 100 feet of water. This used to be the main method to fish for lake trout and it's still one of the best ways to catch big trout but it's physically demanding and requires some expertise. T-50 Flatfish are the most popular although the smaller M-2's also work. Popular colors are blue/white, red/white, perch finish, or frog. Use similar sizes and colors in Kwikfish. To work, the lure has to be skipping on the bottom. Expect to hang up occasionally. These heavy rigs don't give fish under 10 pounds much chance to fight. Usually look for mud/sand/small cobble bottom flats near slope changes or points. The Mid-lake Bar from Angel Point to Cedar Island, Mac Alley south of Wildhorse, and flats near any major points can be good spots...

**SHORE FISHING** Lake trout can be readily caught from shore in May-June and October-November when the water is cool and they're in shallow to look for food (spring) or to spawn (fall). Generally look for steep to moderately sloping bottoms with lots of rubble. Good spots in the fall have been Wayfarers and West Shore State Parks, Polson City Docks, and the bridge in Polson. You can stillfish cutbait (fish) or worms on the bottom or cast 1/4 oz. to 1 oz. lures or jigs. Count down before starting your retrieve so the lure is near bottom. Use silver/red or gold/red lures. You'll lose lures so use inexpensive ones. Most lakers will be 2-4 pounds but you may catch a larger one, particularly in fall.

**CAUTION:** Be sure to study identifying characteristics of lake trout and bull trout. For a short course on trout identification and biology, log on to <https://fwp.mt.gov/fish/regulations/bull-trout...> All bull trout caught on Flathead Lake must be immediately released...All cutthroat trout caught in Flathead Lake must be immediately released.

## FISHING FOR LAKE WHITEFISH

Lake whitefish have grown greatly in popularity in recent years as anglers have discovered how to catch these tasty, hard-fighting fish. Try them and find they're very different from their cousins, the mountain whitefish. Whitefish usually hit as the lure/jig is dropping or right as it hits the end of the line or bottom. It is important to fish within inches of the bottom, occasionally bumping bottom. We recommend a light action rod and 4-6 pound test line to detect the subtle hits and get the most sport out of these hard fighters. Everyone is still learning about the fishery so don't be afraid to experiment on times, locations, and techniques.

Lake whitefish are hard fighting fish with white, mild-tasting meat. They average about 2 1/2 lbs. but can run over 5 lbs. They eat zooplankton, snails, aquatic insects, and small fish. They are the most abundant gamefish in the lake although no one has figured out how to catch them consistently. They are found throughout the lake, usually near bottom in 30'-150' of water. In Flathead Lake, look for whitefish in 20'-60' of water over sand and gravel bars

and off points. They can be caught in 100'-150' of water but it's trickier. In general, you'll need to be anchored or drifting very slowly. The most popular lures are a Kastmaster spoon or a leadhead jig with a 1 1/2"-2" Mr. Twister or Fuzzygrub body. Other popular lures are Crippled Herring, Swedish Pimple, Rattlesnakie, Krocotile Trilobite, and Leadagator. Start with 1/4 ounce lures and go to larger sizes as needed. The best colors imitate yellow perch. Chartreuse is the most popular color and green, silver, yellow, and gold can also work. Usually plain lures will work but occasionally a scent or a few maggots will help. A new method is a lure at the end of the line with a red or whitefish fly (Lake Mary Ronan Special) tipped with maggots tied 18" above. Short jigging motions are the best. The whitefish usually hit when the lure hits the end of the line. Be alert for a single, soft tap. Experiment. Try jigging continuously to a few second pause and bumping the bottom occasionally to bouncing it on the bottom. Early morning hours are generally the best.

**River Mouth Delta:** April, May, July, August.

**Main Lake:** February, March, July, August, October, November. Popular spots are Woods Bay, Gravel Bay, Finley Point, the Narrows, Big Arm Bay, Wildhorse Island, and Peaceful Bay.

**Polson Bridge:** October, November...

**Flathead River:** The whitefish run starts mid-September, peaks mid-October to mid-November, and lasts into January. Good numbers of fish are found from the Stillwater River to Blankenship Bridge with the Old Steel Bridge and Highway 35 Bridge at Kalispell and the U.S. 2 Bridge at Columbia Falls the most popular holes. Look for fish in side eddies with little or no current, 6'-15' of water and a sand or fine gravel bottom. The standard lure is a 1/4 ounce jighead with a 1 1/2"-2" chartreuse Mr. Twister or 1" Berkely Microcraw. It is critical that you hop the jig across the bottom and lift (jig) the instant the lure hits the bottom. You'll feel a very light tap or the fish will just be there when you jig...

## Boone And Crockett Club Touts New Funding for Big Game Migration Habitat Conservation

(continued from page 36)

In addition, the Boone and Crockett Club is looking forward to more conservation leadership through the Make America Beautiful Again (MABA) Commission.

Roosevelt concluded, "Making stewardship of our natural resources the means of driving economic growth ensures the satisfaction of needs today and in the future. Access, voluntary conservation, faster agency action, and species recovery all encourage momentum for Theodore Roosevelt's vision that conservation is a national priority. The MABA commission's direction moves all agencies toward many more objectives like migration habitat, and we look forward to working with the Administration to achieve these goals."

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