

# WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING

APRIL 2026 **NEWS**



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# Dust Off The Fishing Rod And Plan Your Next Family Fishing Outing This Spring

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

Old man winter has finally hit the bricks, and as the temperatures creep up fish get a little more active and Idaho Fish and Game stocking trucks start delivering more fish across the state.

Maybe ol' Saint Nick delivered a new fishing pole to a kid during Christmas, or your trusty old fishing rod has been stuck in the rafters since last year, but either way, the time is here to get out on the water and try to catch some fish.

Spring fishing is an exceptional opportunity for new or seasoned anglers wanting to get back on the water with their friends or families.

Trout are a favorite quarry in early spring because they remain active year-round, but they perk up as water starts to warm after the cold winter. Fish and Game stocks tens of thousands of trout for anglers every month, and spring and early summer are the busiest time of year for hatchery crews.

But trout aren't the only type of fishing available. Warmwater fishing can bounce back remarkably fast with a streak of warm, sunny weather, and many other species, such as perch, crappie and bluegill, become very active during spring.

A good rule of thumb is fish like warming or stable weather during spring, but fishing tends to fall off when there's a cold spell. With so many fishing opportunities near Idaho's cities and towns, spring is a good chance to check out your local waters.

Not sure where to go fishing? Check out these easily accessible and regularly stocked lakes and ponds around the state.

## Coeur d'Alene Lake & Chain Lakes

If you've never tried your hand at catching a northern pike, maybe this is the year to give it a go. April is a great month to get after them from a boat or the shoreline. At this time of year, pike can be targeted from shore by simply using a bobber and bait. Catch rates typically aren't high in the early spring, but it is certainly when some of the biggest fish get caught. As the water warms, northern pike will more actively chase lures making them well-suited to be targeted from a boat. Pike typically take up residence in shallow bays, so check out the Chain Lakes or any of the shallow bays in Coeur d'Alene Lake to hook up with one this year.

Not into pike fishing? No problem. Coeur d'Alene Lake offers outstanding smallmouth bass fishing in the spring. And any of the 10 Chain Lakes offer good opportunity for bass, bluegill, crappie and even channel catfish in Rose Lake.

## Fernan Lake

Fernan Lake lies only a stone's throw away from Coeur d'Alene city limits, and it offers anglers the chance to catch perch, crappie, bluegill, bass, channel catfish and rainbow trout...As water temperatures warm throughout the spring and into early-summer, fishing for the assorted warmwater fish in the lake gets even better.

To sweeten the pot, docks and boat ramp access are abundant at the east and west ends of the lake and from the road that runs along the north side of the lake. Fernan Lake is a great place to cast spinners or soak bait under a bobber from the shoreline.

## Lowland Lakes & Ponds

The Panhandle is home to plenty of lowland lakes, many of which offer great opportunities for folks looking to fish from the shoreline. Here are a few to consider:

- Post Falls Park Pond (Kootenai County)
- Spicer Pond (Benewah County)
- Shepherd Lake (Bonner County)
- Brush Lake (Boundary County)
- Kelso Lake (Bonner County)
- Round Lake (Bonner County)
- Hauser Lake (Kootenai County)
- Dawson Lake (Boundary County)

Each of these lakes has great access and offers anglers the chance to land a variety of warmwater fish species including largemouth bass, bluegill and yellow perch among others...

(continued on page 36)



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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-20<sup>th</sup> 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:

Zimmers Tackle-Pablo  
Walmart-Polson  
Sportsman's Warehouse-Missoula  
FWP-Missoula and Kalispell  
CSKT NRD Offices-Polson

Telephone: 406-270-3386

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Bretz RV & Marine-Missoula  
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# Red VS Green Dots: What's Better For Hunting?

Vortex Optics <https://vortexoptics.com>

**Red Or Green—It's Not About Picking Sides. It's About Seeing What Could Work Better When Conditions Shift.**

Get three hunters in a room, and the only thing two will agree on is that the third one's doing it wrong. Reticule color's the same story. Some can't imagine running anything but red. Others see green and never look back. You'd think it comes down to hunting conditions. And sometimes it might.

## THE CASE FOR RED



Photos courtesy Vortex Optics [www.vortexoptics.com](http://www.vortexoptics.com)

See a difference? Brush, leaves, light, and shade can change how each color stands out.



A red dot sight has been the go-to for years. And for good reason. It's simple, fast, and proven. Red holds its own in dark timber, deep shade, and early morning light. That's why most run a red dot for turkey hunting: the dot contrasts against green, late-spring foliage, early morning fog, and shady brush.

Late-spring woods are green enough. That's why red often stays visible when the brush can swallow everything else.

If you've got mild astigmatism, red can sometimes bloom, starburst, or smear. Others see it sharp and clean. Either way, red tends to stand out best when light is low or backgrounds are dark.

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## THE CASE FOR GREEN

Then there's green. The green dot sight crowd isn't always chasing a trend. They're chasing visibility. Green light sits at the center of the human visual spectrum, so the eye can often pick it up faster.



Sunrise on open water can burn out red. Green can cut through the glare and stay visible.

That can make a difference when you're shooting in open, high-glare environments—pheasants and doves flying low against a bright sky, snow-covered fields, high-glare duck hunting setups over open water, or sunny, midday turkey hunts in open ground.

Even in fall, when autumn colors peak, green reticles can appear more visible through overlapping colors and dense vegetation. They keep the dot crisp where red might blend.

## THE REAL DIFFERENCE

There's no single winner here. Some eyes find red faster. Others can lock onto green without thinking about it. Light, background, and eyesight can all play a role. What looks great to one hunter might look washed out to another.

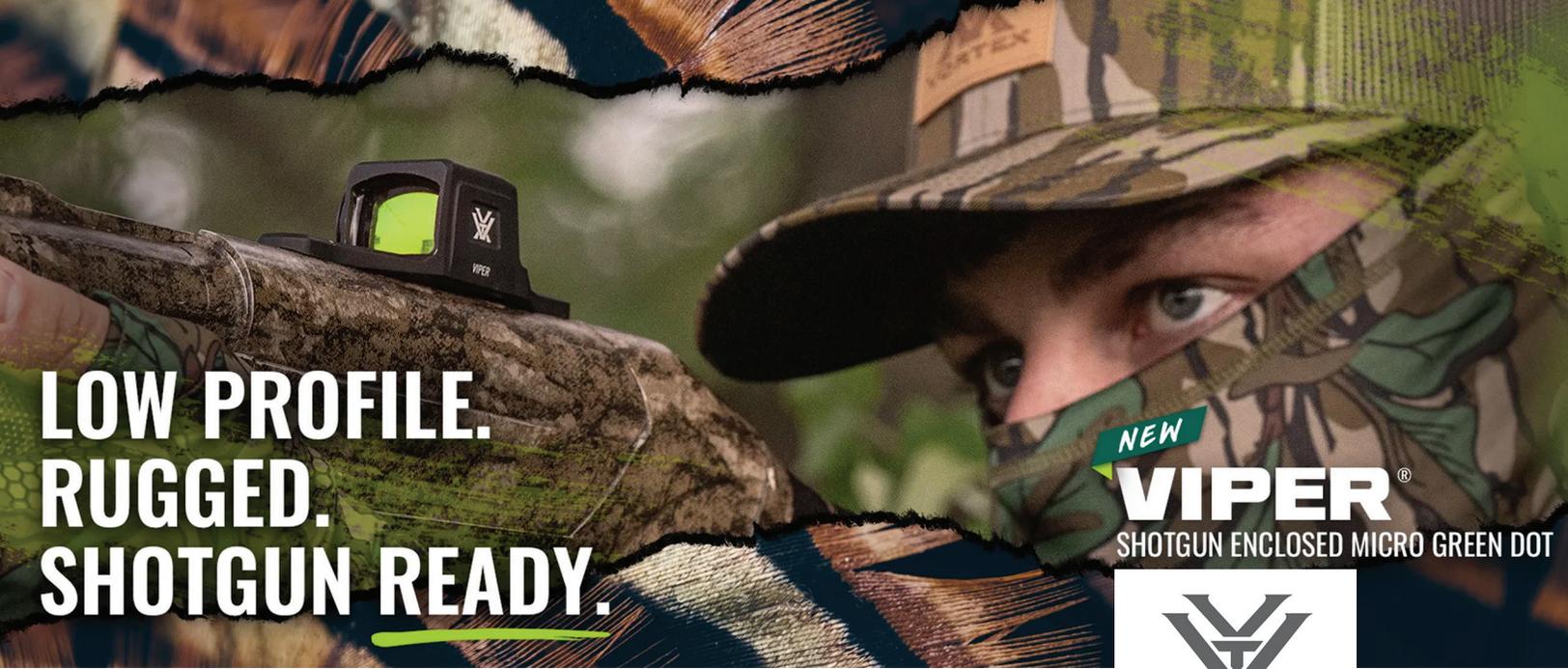
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See more at your local Vortex Optics dealer or shop online at <https://vortexoptics.com>.





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**3 MOA DOT** - Precise point of aim suited for stationary or slow targets.

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# 6 Items Not To Overlook When Packing For A Spring Bear Hunt

By Ryan McSparran

Caribou Outdoor Equipment Co. [www.caribougear.com](http://www.caribougear.com)

The fall big game seasons are still months away. But there's no reason to wait! Spring bear hunting is the perfect opportunity to get into the mountains. States like Montana, Idaho and Wyoming offer over-the-counter licenses for black bear. Grab your hunting gear, purchase a license and go hunting this spring!

Spring bear hunting will require some obvious gear like good optics, a quality backpack and a versatile layering system. But there are a few items that might be easy to overlook as you're packing for a spring bear hunt.

Here are a few things you might want to remember, and why we think they're important:

## 1. Mountain Boots

Some of the best places to look for emerging black bears in the spring are on steep slopes in very rugged terrain. While mountain black bears tend to hibernate on steep, north-facing slopes, the first place you're likely to see them in the spring is on the opposite south side, where green grass and flowers first appear.

When hunting in steep and rugged terrain, one of the first pieces of gear to consider is a pair of quality mountain boots. We'd recommend a tall boot with excellent support and a waterproof/breathable membrane. Our pick on spring hunts is the Kenetrek Mountain Extreme. This boot comes in a 400-gram insulated men's version and women's version. We find this lightly insulated boot to be a perfect fit for spring and fall hunts when the weather is highly variable.



Photos courtesy [www.caribougear.com](http://www.caribougear.com)

These boots are comfortably stiff yet lightweight, making them an ideal boot for steep mountain terrain. We highly recommend a tall boot like this, plus a set of gaiters when hunting in wet spring conditions. This combination will keep your feet dry and comfortable. Finally, don't

forget the importance of high quality socks. The best boots in the world won't function properly with poor socks. Kenetrek's merino-blend socks manage moisture effectively, keeping your feet blister-free and comfortable on long hunts. These socks are available in a medium weight, heavy weight and super heavy weight. Additionally, we recommend carrying a liner sock. This can be a great addition when the weather turns cold or when you need additional padding.

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## 2. Glassing Kit

It's no secret that spring black bear hunting means glassing...lots and lots of glassing. But beyond the binoculars, what else should you bring?

When you're glassing for hours, it's essential to have your binoculars on a tripod. If you're not used to mounting binoculars on a tripod, you might be surprised at the difference it makes. Binocular mounting adapters are available from most optics companies.

Of course higher powered binos like 12s or 15s require a tripod. But even your standard 8x42 or 10x42 binoculars will greatly benefit from being mounted on a tripod. The difference can be so remarkable, you might feel like you're using a new set of binos. Use a tripod with a smooth-panning head, and you'll be much more comfortable for hours behind your binoculars.

Long days on the mountain glassing for black bears will also require some comfort items. Pack a lightweight sitting pad or folding chair. A great ultra-lightweight option is the Therm-a-Rest Z-Seat. If you'll be glassing close to your vehicle, a folding camp chair is a great item to have in the truck.

## 3. Lightweight Stove System

Speaking of comfort items - since you'll be spending hours behind the glass on a spring bear hunt, be sure to pack a lightweight stove system so that you can enjoy warm meals on the mountain.

Your best bet for spotting a bear is to live where the bears are. Plan on being in a glassing position throughout the daylight hours. A lightweight and fuel-efficient JetBoil cook system will help you stay energized and focused during those long days of hunting.

Quick, lightweight meals from Peak Refuel or Mountain House are the perfect pick-me-up. Whether it's a breakfast or a mid-day meal, the extra calories and the hot food will help keep you in the game.

Additionally, pack some of your favorite snacks. A break from the typical backpacking food can lift your spirits. Whether it's Fritos, candy bars, hot chocolate, or your favorite salami, bring whatever it takes to stay comfortable during these long days. The more you can stay focused, the better your chances for success.

## 4. Bullet Wallet

Keep extra ammo quickly accessible with a Caribou Gear Bullet Wallet. Built with Cordura Ballistic fabric, these bullet wallets are designed to securely hold extra rounds while protecting soft and polymer tips.

The Bullet Wallets are available in a 5-round and 10-round versions. For those carrying a sidearm in grizzly country, check out the Bullet Wallet that holds 5 rifle and 10 handgun rounds.



### 5. Hunter's Tarp

The Caribou Gear Hunter's Tarp is the ultimate backcountry hunting companion. At just 4.3 ounces, it's a no-brainer to keep in your pack on any mountain hunt.

The Hunter's Tarp comes with 4 stakes. At 4-feet by 5-feet, it provides a clean surface while you're quartering an animal and is perfect for deboning meat on the ground.

When packing out bear meat and hide, it doesn't have to leave your backpack a bloody mess. The Caribou Gear Hunter's Tarp is no ordinary SilTarp. It is totally waterproof and highly durable. Even under heavy weight, blood will not soak through. Swaddle your meat and/or hide in the Hunter's Tarp to keep your pack clean and blood-free.

When you're not packing meat, the Hunter's Tarp can quickly pitch for an impromptu shelter during a spring snow or thunderstorm. Use a tree, trekking poles or a combination of the two, create a perfect shelter to continue glassing while you wait out a storm. With so many uses and in such a lightweight package, the Hunter's Tarp should be an essential part of every hunter's kit.

### 6. Kill Kit

Black bear meat is excellent, especially from mountain bears. Come prepared to take care of the meat as well as the hide.

Your kill kit starts with good knives. The Randy Newberg Series Knives from Gerber are perfect for skinning and quartering a black bear.

Next, you'll need a quality set of game bags. The Caribou Gear Small Magnum Pack is the right size for a black bear and includes seven game bags: 4 quarter bags, 1 parts bag for loose meat, 1 cape bag for the hide and 1 camp meat bag. If you'd like to go with a lighter weight system, consider the Muley from our High Country Series. This system will fit an entire bone-in quartered black bear and includes five game bags: 4 quarter bags and 1 meat parts bag for loins and other loose meat. If you plan to debone your bear meat in the field, you'll want to use our Carnivore system. With five bags for deboned meat and I.D. tags for each bag, you'll be able to fit the meat from an entire deboned black bear.

Finally, your kill kit isn't complete without plenty of paracord. We also recommend a Hanger system for hanging meat and/or your food at camp. When used along with a micro pulley and carabiner, you've got a system to safely hang food in nearly any situation.

Shop Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Company online at [www.caribougear.com](http://www.caribougear.com).



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Photo credit Lorenzo Sartini courtesy GOHUNT.com

## Broadhead Options For Elk That You Can Trust On Your Hunt

By Trail Kreitzer

Originally published at **GOHUNT** GOHUNT.com

**B**efore I get too deep into it, this isn't an article debating whether mechanical or fixed blade heads are better for elk.

I have killed several elk with both fixed blades and mechanical broadheads, and they are all...still dead. Personally, I have my preferences, but I also have a lot of respect for many other hunters who are wildly successful every year on elk, and their broadhead of choice is different from mine. My recommendation is to shoot a sharp, accurate broadhead and, most importantly, a broadhead that you're confident in. In saying that, I'm sure if you're reading this, you're probably looking for some suggestions because it's not practical to buy and try them all. For that, I can offer personal experience, but it would also be silly if I didn't borrow from the recent study that James Yates put together in conjunction with Easton, Precision Cut Archery, Sound Analytics, and Black Ovis. Check out the results from the broadhead test here: <https://www.precisioncutarchery.com/research/arrow-study-2025/results/broadheads-and-aerodynamic-drag>. Let's look at some good options for elk.

### Sevr Titanium 1.5 Broadhead



Chris Neville with an elk taken with Sevr Titanium 1.5 broadhead. Photo credit Sean Powell courtesy GOHUNT.com

The cutting diameter of the Sevr Titanium 1.5 broadhead is 1.5 inches with a swept back blade cutting angle. In flight, the blades are held within the ferrule by a silicone band near the base of the broadhead. The blades open upon impact, slide back in a rear deploying fashion, and lock and pivot around bone. The pivoting feature works as needed to keep arrows driving straight through

even on steep quartering shots and bone impacts. This feature increases penetration versus regular rear deploy non-pivoting heads. The ferrule is made from machined Grade 5 titanium with a precision ground tip and blades made from .032-inch thick stainless steel. In addition, every broadhead comes with a locking screw that can be inserted into the ferrule to ensure that the blades won't deploy, which allows you to practice with the broadheads without overly dulling the blades.

One of the claims by Sevr is that you get field point accuracy. In saying that, I dove into the recent study I cited earlier to see how this broadhead performed. The Sevr 1.5 tied for second among all broadheads tested in regards to aerodynamics. The Sevr 1.5 was listed as one among four broadheads as the most accurate. The shooting machine consistently shot field tips in two- to three-inch groups at 70 yards, and the Sevr 1.5 shot the same size groups as the field tips, according to the study. So, the claim that this broadhead offers field tip accuracy is as close to truth as it could be, although I would suggest that because there's more exposed surface area, you'll likely see slightly more drop at 80 plus yards than you would get from a field point.

I have successfully used this broadhead several times to kill elk and have had good experiences. When I've made a good shot, the arrow has flown well, penetrated well, and delivered good blood trails. Sevr also makes a 1.75-inch and 2-inch model, and I regularly get asked if those options would be good for elk given the larger cutting diameter. To that point, my preference has been the 1.5-inch because I think it yields better penetration potential. In addition, although anecdotal, it would seem that the shorter ferrule on the 1.5-inch should offer tighter tolerances in terms of strength and straightness. It's available in 100- and 125-grain options directly from Sevr in custom quantities.

### Sevr Titanium 1.5 Hybrid Broadhead

The Sevr 1.5 Hybrid essentially has the same dimensions and functionality of the 1.5-inch, but it has two fixed "bleeder" blades in addition to the rear deploying mechanical blades. The 0.7-inch wide fixed bleeder blades give you a total cut of over 2.2 inches, which is an increase of 46% compared to the standard 1.5-inch. The Hybrid still offers the pivot feature for the expandable blades and, once again, you can use the locking screw to keep those mechanical blades from deploying so that you can practice with them.

In the recent Yates study, the 1.5 Hybrid ranked 10th among the broadheads tested in regards to aerodynamic drag. The Sevr 1.5 Hybrid performed well for accuracy, shooting groups in the 3-inch to 3.5-inch range. Overall, the 1.5 Hybrid ranked among the best in terms of accuracy, and with the added cutting dimensions, it's a great choice, in my opinion, for elk hunting. I've killed an elk with this broadhead, and it performed well. It's available in 100 grain and 125 grain options directly from Sevr in custom quantities.

## G5 T2 Broadhead

The G5 T2 Broadhead is engineered with an expandable two-blade design, offering a 2-inch cutting diameter. The T2 is constructed entirely from steel and features the Socket-Lock retention system, which ensures it will not rattle nor deploy before intended. The T2 has rearward sliding blades, similar to the Sevr heads. While I haven't tried the T2, it's been a broadhead that's interested me and has seemingly done very well for bowhunters I know who have tested it. The study ranks the T2 7th in the aerodynamic test and, although not expressly noted in the accuracy test that I saw, it was stated that all other mechanicals (assuming the T2 in this group) shot groups in the 4-inch to 5-inch range from the shooting machine when tested repeatedly at 70 yards. The T2 is available at most G5 archery dealers, so it's likely that they are readily more available than other heads that are only sold directly.

## Swacker Levi Morgan Signature Series #261 Broadhead

The #261 was engineered with input from Levi Morgan who has certainly killed his fair share of big game animals, including elk. The #261 has a somewhat unique arched blade design that reduces blade resistance after entry. The claim is that the swept back design of the blades retains greater arrow momentum and delivers increased penetration potential. The ferrule is reinforced through a ribbed design that delivers up to 20% greater strength and rigidity. The #261 also includes Swacker's blade lock feature, allowing the expandable blades to be locked in the closed position so hunters can practice with the exact broadhead they'll be using in the field. The #261 is 1-inch in flight and 2-inches after penetration. The ferrule is made from anodized aircraft aluminum with stainless steel .031-inch thick blades. The #261 has two wings that have a sharp cutting edge that serves as the deployment feature as well, folding back as the larger cutting blades are deployed. This design is what most refer to fold back deployment, which historically hasn't been my favorite. While I still believe the #261 will penetrate well, I don't believe that it will penetrate as well as a rear deploying slip back design and I have concerns about not having an entry hole. In the plus column, the #261 did well in the study for both aerodynamics and accuracy. It ranked fourth among tested broadheads for aerodynamics and was listed among the top for accuracy. It shot field tip sized groups from the shooting machine in the 2-inch to 3-inch range. I haven't tested this broadhead, although there's a lot to like about it, including the accuracy and aerodynamics. It's also sold in three packs and is available at major sporting goods stores at a reasonable price. As previously stated, it's also backed by one of the most prolific bowhunters and archers of our time.

I wouldn't suggest that the blade deployment method and the aluminum ferrule is my favorite. Overall, it looks like an interesting option based on the accuracy and it is readily available.

(continued on next page)



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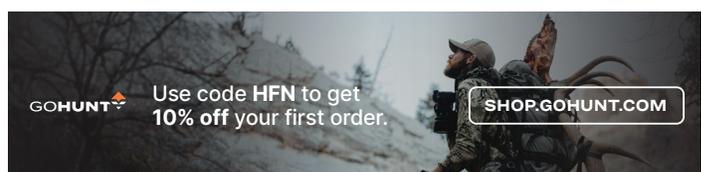
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# Broadhead Options For Elk That You Can Trust On Your Hunt

(continued from page 9)

## Beast Broadheads

The Beast Broadheads broke onto the market last year and have been growing in popularity. More recently, they launched their broadheads in a titanium version as well, which makes them even more enticing. The Beast broadheads are a mechanical head with a unique design and method of blade deployment. They utilize a spring mechanism where the blades are held within the ferrule, but deploy to the rear when the tabs meet just 1.2 pounds of force on either tab. One intriguing thing about the deployment is that there are no rubber or silicone bands or collars required to retain the blades in the ferrule, and you can reengage the blades by pushing them back into position. I commonly get feedback about other mechanical heads opening up while in the quiver during a stalk or hiking, which, in those cases, essentially makes the broadhead useless. The Beast allows you to push the blades back into place. I haven't shot the Beast broadhead while it's open, but I've seen other content where people have shot them and still had good results.



Photo credit Trail Kreitzer courtesy GOHUNT.com

Additionally, the spring within the ferrule allows each blade to yield when contacting bone, which should preserve the forward path of the arrow. The blades have a curved, swept back design and are German Lutz stainless steel. The blades are extremely sharp. As stated above, they offer broadheads in 7075 spacecraft aluminum with a hardened stainless steel tip or the all new titanium version. They also have them available in 100 grain and 125 grain versions in both a 2-inch and 2.3-inch options. The Beast broadheads can't be shot without deploying the blades for practice, but they do include a practice head that closely resembles the shape.

The last piece of information that adds to the case for the beast broadheads is that they did very well in the Yates study. They ranked second in regards to being the most aerodynamic and shot 3-inch to 3.5-inch groups consistently from the shooting machine at 70 yards. The Beast broadheads appear to have a lot of attributes in the "pro" column and, while I haven't killed an elk with one yet, I think it would be a great choice. Beast broadheads can be purchased directly online at their site or possibly at your local pro shop as they are leaking out into third party shops more regularly.

## Evolution Outdoors Hyde & Jekyll Broadhead

The Hyde broadhead has grown in popularity in recent years and is fast becoming one of the best choices for archery elk hunters. It's a hybrid design, with two 3/4-inch total diameter fixed blades and two 2-inch total diameter expandable blades.

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The expandable blades have a curved design that fold back upon impact and are made from 420 stainless steel. Blade thickness for the front blades is .060 inches while the mechanical blades are .030-inch thick. They offer 100 grain heads that have a 7075 aircraft grade aluminum ferrule while the 125- and 150- grain versions are hardened stainless steel. Evolution Outdoors states that they are machined and assembled with tight tolerances in the U.S. You can't shoot the Hyde for practice without dulling the blades, but they do offer practice heads for purchase or if you buy six heads, they'll give you a free practice head. You can buy blades and replace them as well. What makes the Hyde broadhead so intriguing to me is how well it performed in the study. It ranked third in aerodynamics, only behind two other purely mechanical heads. For a hybrid broadhead, it's very impressive in that regard. In the accuracy testing, it shot 4-inch to 5-inch groups.

The other Evolution Outdoors broadhead, the Jekyll, is also worth talking about. The Jekyll is a fixed blade broadhead with four total blades. The front blades have a 3/4-inch cutting diameter while the blades further back on the ferrule are a 1-inch cutting diameter. Front and main blades are robust with a thickness of .060 inches. The Jekyll was the most accurate fixed blade broadhead in testing with groups in the 3-inch range. That's very impressive for a fixed blade head. It was also 4th in aerodynamics among other fixed blade heads, but it was the highest ranked four-blade broadhead in that test. Both the Hyde and Jekyll performed great in the testing that Yates conducted and, while I haven't personally shot them, they're on the short list of broadheads I'm very interested in, and I believe they would make a great elk hunting broadhead.

### Iron Will S Series Broadhead

Iron Will broadheads are among the most highly touted fixed blade broadheads and are commonly placed at the top of the heap for elk hunters. The only real downfall is that they are a bit more expensive and are only sold directly from their website. What makes the Iron Will a good option? It starts with materials. The Iron Will broadheads are engineered to be extremely sharp and retain their edge. They use A2 Tool Steel, commonly used in metal stamping dies to cut other steels, which has an unmatched combination of impact toughness and edge retention. They further cryogenically treat and triple temper to a hardness of 60HRC their blades, producing edges that remain honed. This unmatched edge retention requires less force for a complete pass-through. The ferrule is made from Grade 5 titanium for lighter weight heads and hardened stainless steel for the heavier versions. If you look at an Iron Will broadhead, the tip looks different from others on the market. Their Tanto tip geometry is wider than others. The shape adds rigidity, extra bone splitting strength and reduces surface area for better aerodynamics and accuracy. Iron Will also makes insert systems, which when added to their broadhead and your arrow, make for a very robust, durable combination.

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The S series is a solid broadhead without venting (no holes or gaps in the blades). They can be purchased in a variety of weights, including 100- and 125-grain versions. They can also be purchased as a two-blade option, which they call buff, or in a four-blade version (two larger/two bleeder blades). The diameter of the larger blades is 1-1/16-inch and the bleeder blades add an additional 3/4-inch cut.

Perhaps, the most impressive story with the Iron Will S series head is how aerodynamic and accurate it is for a fixed blade head. It ranked ninth in aerodynamics, but was the second most aerodynamic fixed blade broadhead. Although not expressly called out, it was indicated that it shot groups in the 6.5-inch range from the shooting machine. One final note: because the S series is a solid head with no venting, it's quieter than many other options on the market that are vented. They do make a V (vented) version of their heads as well, which are likely to shoot tighter groups, but would be a bit louder in flight.

### Slick Trick Standard Pro Series Broadhead

The Slick Trick Standard Pro Series Broadhead is a four-blade fixed broadhead with a total cutting diameter of 2 inches due to each blade section offering 1-inch of cutting surface. They offer a super short low profile design to handle the high speed produced by modern compound bows. The blades are unique with two-blade sections that interlock within the ferrule. The blades themselves are made of .035-inch stainless steel Lutz material and are vented for better accuracy. Slick Trick makes both a pro version and a standard version. The pro version has a hardened stainless steel ferrule while the standard version uses what they call Super Steel for the ferrule.



Photo credit Trail Kreitzer  
courtesy GOHUNT.com

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# Broadhead Options For Elk That You Can Trust On Your Hunt

(continued from page 11)

I have used the Slick Trick standard pro broadheads to kill several bulls and they always performed well. To add to my experience, in the study referenced they ranked 17th in aerodynamics and sixth among other true fixed blade heads. They did have slightly better results in terms of accuracy, shooting 5.5-inch to 6-inch groups. While I have had great success with the Slick Trick heads, the only feedback I might offer is that they did seem to be louder in flight. I also didn't regularly get great bloodtrails, but in saying that, I often heard or saw the bull expire.

## QAD Exodus Broadhead

The QAD Exodus broadhead is a three-blade low profile fixed blade head that is designed and manufactured in the U.S. QAD is known for their archery rests, but also brought the Exodus broadhead to market a number of years ago. Since then, it's had a loyal following and generally really good reviews. One interesting take is that QAD matched the overall length of a field tip to the Exodus head. The back of the blades actually sit below the top of your insert. They state that this design increases the accuracy of their heads. The total cutting diameter is 1-1/4-inches. They state that the solid blades are .04-inch stainless steel, making them one of the thickest blades of any head of a similar nature that I'm aware of. The ferrule is also SST material.

In testing the Exodus, it ranked 14th in aerodynamics and shot groups in the 6.5-inch plus range. I've used the Exodus on elk and my experience was good. They were durable, the blades were very sharp and they flew well. In regards to accuracy, I did have to do additional tuning to get them to fly really well. That isn't a bad thing per say, but in my experience, they were not as easy to plug and play as other broadheads I have used. They did penetrate well in my experience. You can buy Exodus heads at almost all pro shops and sporting goods stores and they are very reasonably priced. They are available in both 100- and 125-grain options.

## G5 Montec Broadhead

The G5 Montec broadhead has been around for a number of years and has traditionally been among one of the most popular fixed blade broadheads for elk hunters. It's a three-blade fixed broadhead. One reason I think it's been popular is that the Montec is constructed from a solid piece of steel. There are no removable blades or parts and pieces and people report it being very durable. The Montec can be screwed onto the end of the arrow and shot without any assembly required. G5 states that each Montec is 100% spin tested for great alignment and straightness with your arrow's insert. They also state that each blade has diamond cut sharpness. While you can't replace a dulled blade, G5 does sell sharpeners specifically for their broadheads. Each blade is vented for added accuracy down range.

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# Long Line For Spring Walleye

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

Over the years, an incredibly effective tactic for us is to long line a light jig or split shot rig through shallow water. In states where we could use two rods in particular, we often used the long line rig on the extra rod in the rod holder. There are probably several reasons why this setup works so well at times but I can attest to the fact that I have been outfished several times by the rod holder.

Back in the day, we used to pour our own jigs for this technique as you often wanted a light jig, say an eighth of an ounce or less but many of the smaller jigs had smaller hooks basically for crappie fishing. The smaller hooks just had a lower hooking percentage when combined with a larger minnow or half a crawler and they bent out more with heavy fish and soft lip tissue. We poured our own jigs and used wider gap and larger hooks but...Northland Tackle introduced a 1/32nd ounce Fireball Jig that is the perfect little jig for this described presentation. Most of the time, we like to use 1/32nd ounce or 1/16th ounce jigs but will use jigs as heavy as 1/8th ounce if the wind is pushing us along faster.

The amount of line out depended on boat speed and depth but typically, we are using this method in ten feet of water or less. Typically as well, we are moving somewhat slowly.... Say less than a mile an hour but still using an electric trolling motor or drifting through an area.

We are not sitting still trying to keep the presentation vertical over the fish.

This is a technique where you slowly move through an area and the line is very horizontal.

Because the jigs are so small, you have to let out a considerable amount of line. The jig just kind of drags out there in no man's land. Usually just because of the lift produced by the minnow, the jig never really does touch the bottom but rather just drifts through the water column.

I think the reasons why this rig can be so effective vary but one factor might be the fact that since the jig never touches or drags the bottom, it never gets fouled up with algae or wire grass.

The jig is always clean and another reason is that fish often rise and hold higher in the water column particularly during the spring when the sun comes out.

In clear water with decent visibility, fish that are on the bottom also have no problems gunning down a minnow that is two or three feet above them as well.

Finally, there must be something subtle about the presentation itself that seems to tweak walleyes. This tiny jig tipped with bait long lined behind the boat looks much different than traditional snap, drag, and vertical jigging techniques and traditional live bait rigging.

While small, feather-weight jigs work well, a size four or six VMC bait holder hook with a single split shot placed about two feet above the hook can also work wonders.

Whether I am using a jig or a split shot rig, I like monofilament for this presentation.

The jig just seems to glide and float through the water in a nice fluid and subtle motion. Typically, we are using a six-pound test Bionic Walleye Line combined with a medium light action spinning rod. The best rods for this presentation have a light tip that just loads up when a fish hits. The fish typically hook themselves as the rod loads up and the fish just seem to drag behind.

How much line to let out can vary and is something to experiment with but typically, we let out what feels like a lot of line.

A little trick that helps me is to keep the spinning reel spool filled with line and then measure the amount of spool revealed as you let out the line. Note how much of the spool is revealed... when you catch fish.

We might start out with an eighth of an inch of spool showing and experiment from there. This isn't rocket science but will get you close, a very crude line counter system.

If you get snagged and lose a lot of lines, make the adjustments but this will allow you to repeat a pattern and if you are using the same reels on different rods with the same line, you can repeat the pattern on different rods.

We have used this system with great success on reservoirs, river systems, and natural lakes. Typically in the spring or fall is when this system really shines but this can be deadly whenever you find fish in less than ten feet of water. We started using this setup many years ago as this long lining setup was a nice way to use a second rod, getting the second rod out of the way and away from the boat. This presentation however is so effective at times, I find myself using it even when I can only use one rod. We are typically tipping these jigs or split shot rigs with either a minnow like a fathead, rainbow, or shiner and sometimes use half a crawler.

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>.



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# - Time To Spool Up - High-Percentage Spring Baits

By Mark Fisher

Rapala [https://www.rapala.com/us\\_en/rapala](https://www.rapala.com/us_en/rapala)

For spring multi-species fishing success, don't launch the boat or walk the shore without these four high-percentage baits—lipless crankbaits, spinnerbaits, jerkbaits and swimming grubs.

Each of these baits, this time of year, are very effective and easy to use for bass, walleye and pike, says Mark Fisher, Rapala's Director of Field Promotions. Use them to target points, coves, shoreline cover, emergent vegetation, old weeds and new weeds. "All those things are keys to putting the puzzle together in the springtime and make your fishing successful," he says.

The most productive spots will likely be transition zones between one or more of the lake features above – where submerged vegetation makes way for reeds and bullrushes, for example, where shoreline gravel transitions to larger rock, where the bottom changes from sand to muck or rock.

"In the spring, because of the spawn, you have an idea of where the fish are coming from and where they're going to go," Fisher explains. "As the fish move from deep water to spawning areas, they move up to flats or start moving down shoreline.

"Follow these tips to fish Fisher's top-four high percentage spring baits:

## Rippin' Rap Lipless Crankbaits

Among the first lures Fisher throws for spring bass are Rapala Rippin' Raps. "Multiple-rattle, simple-running, high-performance baits like the Rippin' Rap are perfect for fishing over the tops of new weeds in the spring or along weedline edges, or just simply, just covering flats," Fisher says.

For covering a lot of water quickly and efficiently in the spring, "you can't beat a Rippin' Rap," he says. "Position your boat in deeper water and fancast across spawning flats with a mix of old, decayed vegetation and new-growth vegetation."

Fisher employs a moderate-speed retrieve. "Speed is critical," he says. "You don't want to burn it, because the fish's metabolisms are slow, so you have to slow down your fishing.

"If Fisher makes contact with vegetation during his retrieve, he doesn't shake it off – not at first, anyway. "Rip through it," he advises. "Then after you've reeled the Rippin' Rap back to the boat, check your treble hooks to see if the weeds are green. If they are, keep casting to that area. Most often, where you find the greenest vegetation is where fish will be."

When you hit vegetation in the same area in ensuing casts, "pop your bait forward," Fisher advises. "Oftentimes, even with sluggish fish, that can be the trigger."

Both flashy chrome minnow-like patterns and more subdued natural crayfish patterns, like bone, brown and red, can be effective in the spring. "Experiment and let the fish tell you what they want," Fisher says.

## Terminator T1 Spinnerbaits

Fishing T1 spinnerbaits over submerged vegetation, through weed openings and along weedline edges will also yield spring bass, as well as Northern pike."

Just keeping the bait moving is all you've got to do," Fisher says. "You bump weeds, pop it, get it out of there, keep it going."

For bass, target inside weedlines and clumps of weed growth on the shallow ends of flats, closer to shore. Pike are likely to hit spinnerbaits "anywhere you throw 'em on top of a flat," Fisher says.

Because pike spawn earlier in the spring than bass, by the time bass season opens, pike are already aggressively feeding. Walleyes, which also spawn earlier than bass, will hit spinnerbaits in the spring too. "They're doing the same thing – going to vegetation to rest up and feed," Fisher explains.

In the spring, throw spinnerbaits with a combination of Colorado and willow blades, for both thump and flash. In clearer water, white is the best skirt color. In stained to dirty water, tie on spinnerbaits with white-chartreuse skirts.

## Husky Jerk Jerkbaits

Fisher will often reach for a Husky Jerk when fishing a deep weed edge on the end of a point. One- to three-second pauses between jerks often draws vicious strikes from big bass and northern pike. "Husky Jerks are probably one of the greatest springtime baits, simply because the lure suspends correctly in cold temperatures, and has a really tight roll," Fisher explains. "It's not a very aggressive-action jerkbait, which is perfect for fish that are still pretty sluggish."

Bass, pike and walleyes will all hit Husky Jerks in the spring. For walleyes, downsize your baits and employ a sweep-sweep-pause cadence. "That gives the bait more of a gliding action, which is better for walleyes," Fisher says. For bass and pike, you can fish more aggressively, using a jerk-jerk-pause cadence.

## Trigger X Swimming Grub

An "old classic," a swimming grub is one of the simplest high-percentage smallmouth bass and walleye baits in the spring, Fisher says. "It's a great fish-finding bait and you'll catch as many walleyes as well as, pike and bass, come spring," he says. "It's the slight vibration and the subtle rotation of the tail that gets 'em."

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# What Jig To Fish And When

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

Photo courtesy  
<https://www.northlandtackle.com>

We are programmed to understand that not all lure types are created equal, with different baits serving different needs seasonally for varying species. What about baits in the same class, however? While we grasp the thought that a jerkbait is not the same as a spinnerbait, we tend not to distinguish characteristics in-class, with jigs being no exception. That said, there is a huge number of jig styles, sizes, shapes, and colors, with all sorts of hardware and appendages molded-in or otherwise attached.

I have my favorites, but I thought I would call in the advice of a successful Dakota guide and Northland Tackle Pro Cody Roswick. Cody knows his way around both North and South Dakota, often using jigs to guide his clients to quality fish no matter where the bite takes him, or what technique the day calls for. Like with most guides and pro's I have fished with, small details frequently reap huge dividends, so it pays to pair the right jig to the scenarios you fish.

Here is a quick run-down of some popular styles, and how to go about choosing which variety to use, and when.

**Jigs For Minnows** – These two are an original pairing that has stood the test of time, and Cody fishes them primarily during the early season. With designs like the Fire-Ball Jig that offer a secondary-eye to attach stinger hooks being extremely successful. Having the option to attach that extra treble for short-striking fish can really be handy, even if you start the day without. For larger minnows like shiners, consider this option or other jig types with a long shank that places the business end of the hook further back on the minnow.

**Jigs For Crawlers/Leeches** – For the most part, you have quite a few options here, especially with leeches as provided you hook them in the sucker or just underneath, you will not have to worry too much about the hook holding your bait. With crawlers, however, you will want a keeper at the base of the jig ball itself to retain the bait and prevent it from sliding down the hook shank un-naturally.

**Jigs For Plastics** – As water temperatures warm, live-bait options for walleyes lose favor to plastic imitations, but you will want some different jig designs for fishing them. Cody says, “Wire barbs for keepers will prevent

everything from bluegills to bass pulling at the tail end of the plastic all the way down to the hook bend.” Roswick continues, “Not only does this rip your plastics option of choice, it frequently causes the bait to run un-true.” Premium models that do the best job of avoiding this issue will have dual-barbs or wire-keepers that truly lock the plastic to the base of the jighead.

**Stand Up Jigs** – Use this type of jig style in river areas when trying to drag bottom, or lakes when again trying to trace as close to the substrate as possible. Often, bottom contact can be a crucial part of the presentation, and that is when stand-ups are worth their weight. “These jigs shine in helping fish suck that bait off of the bottom, as the hook points up and back at a 45-degree angle in their face,” mentions Cody.

**Jig/Spinner Combinations** – This group encompasses a number of jigheads from thumper-style models with a swivel and blade beneath them, to a Whistler-style jig with an in-line twin-rotating blade. Both perform similar tasks in creating flash and vibration to attract fish from distance. “This can be important in river systems or natural lakes with limited visibility,” says Cody. “I use them a lot with live bait when fishing vertically, especially deep river systems.”

**Current Cutter – Pill-Shaped Jigheads** – Speaking of rivers, current-cutter-style jigheads have made some strides in recent years, as the pill-shaped and more elongated design simply offers less drag in current. “That allows you to fish lighter, while still getting down to the fish,” says Roswick, a key component to many river situations where current can keep a jig higher in the water column than you want it.

**Floating Jigs** – Of course, one of the best ways to stay near the bottom is to rely on another weighting system other than the jig to keep you pinned there. That makes floating jig head options a mainstay in many anglers' boxes. Present livebait in any manner with confidence, knowing your bait will float just above the snags. Add some current to the mix, and many designs like the Gum-Drop or Phelps-Floater will jog side to side like a crankbait for added action.

**Hair Jigs** – Whether animal hair like bucktail, marabou, or other synthetic materials, these skirted jigs are often tipped with bait and presented both vertically or cast. You will need different weights to satisfy the various depths, but hair is a great way to add bulk, color, and life to an otherwise plain offering. In lakes and rivers, hair jigs do not get as much press as they deserve.

**Weedless Jigs** – Designs like the Weed Weasel and others with plastic deflectors in front of the hook point are classic heavy cover options. Roswick who fishes the trees of North Dakota's Devil's Lake says, “They're a mainstay for me anywhere near weeds or timber, and they have a heavy hook if you need to horse them out of nasty cover.” Tip them with your live bait of choice, and consider them anytime you are afraid to throw other jig styles into the thick stuff.

# SLIP BOBBER NUANCES FOR WALLEYE FISHING

By Jason Mitchell

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

As a guide, I believed that the most effective game plans just kept walleye fishing straightforward and simple. There are plenty of folks in this business who try to make fishing really complicated and you can make fishing akin to rocket science if you wish... I however made a living as a guide by dumbing the process down. I found that by keeping the process simple, I could accommodate people with a wider range of experience and skill levels without making fishing intimidating. I didn't want to set out and prove my angling abilities or show off some superior intellect... that is not what I wanted to be. My goal was to take people out and put them in a situation where they could catch fish, not watch me catch fish or feel intimidated.

Using slip bobbers to catch walleyes is incredibly effective if done right. I relied on slip bobbers an awful lot through my years as a guide. The reasons being that I could anchor on a good spot and not worry about boat control... a good anchor is the best boat control there is. My hands were free; I could deal with tangles, interact with the folks in my boat, not burn up a lot of gas and catch a lot of fish. Slip bobbers were also hands-on enough where the people get to enjoy the hook set and everybody loves watching a bobber disappear.

Now if the bobbers are not disappearing, using slip bobbers are akin to watching the paint dry on a barn but in the right location... this simple system is deadly. The biggest myth there is regarding catching walleyes with slip bobbers however in my opinion, is just the light line, small jig mentality. There were a group of people who thought you had to add milligrams of shot to the line until the bobber just barely poked out of the water. Now I am not saying that you have to fish like a caveman but there are so many scenarios where anglers shoot themselves in the foot by trying to finesse fish to the point where they are just not efficient. For a while, there was a mentality that slip bobbers had to be delicate and the presentation had to be natural, which meant; light line, small hooks, and tiny amounts of weight.

Here is my take on this mentality of slip bobber fishing. When you combine a tiny little slip bobber and have no weight in regards to split shot or jig, it takes longer for the bait to reach the fish. If you can count to ten and your slip bobber is still lying on its side because the bobber stop hasn't pulled to the bobber, you are wasting time. Here is the other factor, small bobbers that have just a little bit of the tip poking out of the water can't be seen once they drift from the boat. I can understand trying to subdue the motion of waves on the presentation but there are better ways to do this without sinking the bobber to the point where you cannot see it. In all honesty, there are so many situations where some resistance is good for walleyes.

The reality is that every fishery is a little different and there are many ways to skin a cat. What we have found however is that we are often much more effective with slip bobbers by being somewhat unorthodox to conventional slip bobber wisdom. The basis of the system is this; put and keep good bait in front of fish. Some of the nuances however surprise some anglers.

I like to use the largest slip bobbers I can get away with. I am not talking jugs but if I were to pick one size, it would be the Northland Tackle Lite-Bite Classic 1 inch oval slip bobber. Why the larger float? Because it will hold up more weight which gets down to the bottom faster as soon as the bobber and bait hit the water. When running several rods, it is easier to manage the course or drift of each bobber. The other advantage is that I can fish further away from the boat and see the bobber in heavy waves. Walleyes don't have any issue pulling them under, they just disappear. Because I often had to deal with pike and flooded timber, I liked to use braided line for my main line from a durability standpoint but the bad part about braid is that bobber stops slide. Bionic is one of the better-braided lines for bobber stops sticking. Use a heavier braid like 14-pound test so that the bobber stop can stick well.

Below the bobber, I rig a small egg sinker instead of using a split shot and I tie on a snap swivel. Now, why the egg sinker? Egg sinkers don't get tangled in the net so much or wrap up in themselves as bad as removable split shot. Pull-on the line and the tangle pops and untangles out of the net after getting a fish, just a little tip to speed up your get back in the water time. Below the sinker and snap swivel, we attach a short snell that either has a plain hook or a small jig. In timber, I would often rig up a snell that would break off versus the main braided line so I didn't have to chase bobbers around the lake. Another option if you are targeting big fish in really snaggy timber is to forgo the swivel and leader and just tie the hook or jig directly to the braid and use a bobber stop above the jig and below the bobber to keep from losing bobbers.

When the fish are biting well, you can use either plain hooks or small jigs and catch fish. Obviously, the number one focus is sitting in a good spot. Both plain hooks and jigs however have a place. There are times for example in strong winds where the swells were big when plain hooks and longer leaders were the ticket. I believe what was happening was that the waves were pushing the presentation up and down too dramatically and by using a longer snell and plain hook; the whole presentation was subdued with less up and down movement. Small jigs on the other hand can add a small flash of color which seems to help at times. A great wide gap hooked jig for slip bobbers is the 1/16 ounce Fire-Ball® Jig. Most 1/16 ounce jigs have tiny panfish hooks so a small jig with a walleye size hook is really beneficial. Bait selection can really vary from lake to lake but across the board, leeches are tough to beat below a slip bobber. Especially when using a plain hook, hooking the leech through the middle will increase the swimming motion of the leech and is too much for most walleyes to ignore.

(continued on page 36)

# Early Season Bassin'!

By Mike Frisch

Northland Fishing Tackle

<https://www.northlandtackle.com>



Shallow water cover areas are prime spots for finding early season bass. Photo credit Mike Frisch courtesy Northland Fishing Tackle <https://www.northlandtackle.com>

**E**arly season bassin' means spring largemouth bass are usually a shallow water affair as these fish are often in, and around, shallow water cover at this time. Pencil reed patches, boat docks, fallen trees, and any other shallow cover will often harbor largemouth bass as they go through their spawning ritual, and also roam the shallows looking for food. When chasing "largies" at this time, I often rely on two bait presentations.

When shallow water largemouth bass are the target, I like to start my day using a presentation that fishes fast allowing me to cover water searching shallow cover.

Obviously, I am hoping to catch some fish, but am also trying to read what the fish are doing as far as how they are relating to the shallows.

When starting the day, my bait is a swim jig tipped with some sort of soft plastic trailer. A swim jig is simply a skirted bass jig, though often in a somewhat smaller size than we often use for the classic bass flipping and pitching techniques.

For example, when flipping and pitching, many bass anglers prefer jigs from 3/8- to 5/8-ounce in size. When swimming the jig, however, I often like a 1/4-ounce sized jig.

**My jig of choice is, in fact, a 1/4-ounce white shad Jungle Jig.**

I tip the jig with various trailers but recently have had good success tipping with a white or fathead-colored Impulse Paddle Minnow. This bait has a wobbling, injured-minnow appearance as it moves through the water that the bass seem to like. I prefer the white jig and light-colored trailer combination because I think it does a good job of "matching the hatch" in mimicking the baitfish that largemouth feed on.

When fishing swim jigs, I simply make long casts to the shallows and reel the bait back using a steady retrieve.

Some days, the fish will be roaming the shallows and I encounter fish scattered here and there using this presentation. When that is the case, the swim jig is the bait I often use all day.

Other days, however, the fish will be holding closer to the actual docks, reeds, and timber and are less willing to chase. When that happens, slowing up, and using another bait often yields better results.

My bait in this situation is the "do nothing" stick bait. This bait, in shape, resembles a pen we would use for writing.

When fishing shallow, I hook the bait wacky-style, which means hooked in the middle, and use a weed-less hook. Without the addition of any weight (other than the weight of the hook), this presentation has a slow, "do nothing" fall that shallow largemouth often can't resist! Simply casting it to cover and slowly letting it fall is usually best.

I prefer a soft plastic stickbait when "wacky rigging" the shallows for largemouth as this bait has a tantalizing fall and features the Impulse scent and flavor formula that the fish bite and hold onto, giving me ample opportunity to set the hook.

A white bait works well in the shallows because I can often see the bait and watch fish bite it!

On other days, the fish prefer darker colors like black and blue and June bug. As always, the only sure way to determine the color the fish prefer is to experiment.

Regardless of what colored baits largemouth bass prefer on a given day, one of the two presentations just detailed will probably fool some into biting this spring.

As always, good luck on the water, and remember to include a youngster in your next outdoor adventure!

Mike Frisch is a western Minnesota fishing guide and co-host of the Fishing the Midwest TV series.

Follow Fishing the Midwest on Facebook for more "fishy" information!

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

## Hunter Recipes: Grandma's Wild Turkey And Rice Casserole

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

Who doesn't love a good ol' casserole with canned soup? Like many of you, I'm guessing that we all have a go-to casserole recipe that can be easily adapted to wild game. This is one of my in-law's favorites, and we substituted chicken for the sous vide wild turkey in a previous Idaho Fish and Game recipe.



### Ingredients:

- 1 onion
- 1 bell pepper
- 1 box wild rice, cook according to directions
- 1 can cream of celery
- 1 can diced water chestnuts
- 2 cups diced wild turkey (cooked)
- 1 can French-cut green beans
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- Juice from 1 lemon
- Salt & pepper
- Shredded cheddar cheese

### Directions:

- Dice and sauté onion and green pepper in a splash of olive oil, salt, and pepper
- Mix all of the ingredients (except the cheese) together in a cast iron pan or casserole dish
- Add additional salt and pepper to your liking
- Cover with shredded cheese
- Cook at 350 degrees for 35 minutes, or until casserole bubbles

## U.S. Fish And Wildlife Service Provides Over \$1.2 Billion To Support Fish And Wildlife Conservation And Outdoor Access

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
<https://www.fws.gov>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced over \$1.2 billion in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration apportionments to support states, commonwealths and territories in their efforts to fund conservation and outdoor opportunities. This program aligns with President Donald J. Trump's strong support for state-led conservation and access to public lands.

This critical funding is generated by manufacturers who paid federal excise taxes last year on ammunition, firearms, archery and angling equipment, and a fuel and small engine tax. The funds are disbursed to partner fish and wildlife agencies through grants by the Service's Office of Conservation Investment.

This state-industry-federal partnership, commonly known as the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson/Wallop-Breaux Acts, was established almost a century ago with the support of concerned conservation organizations, firearms manufacturers and conservation professionals who recognized the need to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitat.

Since 1937, more than \$31 billion has been distributed through annual apportionments to monitor and manage our nation's fish and wildlife resources, support hunter, trapper and aquatic education, and improve access for outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing and boating.

"State wildlife agencies are critical partners who are on the front lines of wildlife management and conservation. They provide expertise and leadership in our shared conservation efforts," said Service Director Brian Nesvik. "Through this partnership, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration funding helps states to improve access to wildlife and wild places through one of the most effective conservation tools in the world."

Along with the more than \$31 billion distributed through annual apportionments, partner fish and wildlife agencies have contributed over \$10 billion in investments throughout the program's history. Through these combined funds, agencies have supported monitoring and management of over 800 species of wild mammals and birds, annual stocking of over 1 billion fish, operations of fish and wildlife disease laboratories around the country, and provided hunter, trapper and aquatic education to millions of students. These funds have also supported operations and maintenance of over 800 target ranges, over 9,000 fishing access areas and the opening of over 36 million acres of state land to hunting and angling.

# How To Properly Train For Backcountry Hunting In The Rocky Mountains

By Ted Ramirez Jr  
Caribou Outdoor Equipment Co.  
<https://www.caribougear.com>

Backcountry hunting in the Rocky Mountains requires a high level of physical fitness and preparation. Proper training is essential to ensure a successful and safe hunting experience. Here are some key tips on how to properly train for backcountry hunting in the Rocky Mountains.

## 1. Cardiovascular Endurance

Cardiovascular endurance is crucial for backcountry hunting, as it involves long hours of hiking over rugged terrain. Aim to incorporate activities such as running, cycling, or hiking with a weighted pack to improve your endurance levels. Start with shorter distances and gradually increase the intensity and duration of your workouts.

## 2. Strength Training

Building strength in your legs, core, and upper body is essential for navigating the challenging terrain of the Rocky Mountains. Focus on exercises such as squats, lunges, deadlifts, and pull-ups to improve your overall strength. Incorporating resistance training will help you tackle steep inclines and carry heavy loads more efficiently.

## 3. Balance and Stability

Improving your balance and stability is key to navigating uneven terrain and avoiding injuries. Incorporate exercises such as single-leg squats, balance boards, and stability ball exercises into your training routine. Enhancing your proprioception will help you move confidently and safely in the backcountry.

## 4. Flexibility and Mobility

Flexibility and mobility are essential for preventing muscle strains and maintaining optimal performance during long hunts. Incorporate stretching exercises, yoga, or mobility drills into your routine to improve your range of motion and reduce the risk of injury. Focus on areas such as the hips, hamstrings, and shoulders to enhance your overall flexibility.

## 5. Altitude Training

Training at high altitudes can help you acclimate to the thin air of the Rocky Mountains and improve your endurance. If possible, incorporate altitude training into your regimen by hiking or running at higher elevations. This will help you adapt to the reduced oxygen levels and perform better during your backcountry hunt.

By following these training tips and incorporating them into your fitness routine, you can prepare yourself physically and mentally for backcountry hunting in the Rocky Mountains. Remember to listen to your body, stay hydrated, and gradually increase the intensity of your workouts to avoid injuries. With proper training, you can enhance your hunting experience and make the most of your time in the wilderness.

Learn more and shop at <https://www.caribougear.com>.



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## Land Board Approves FWP Habitat Conservation Leases In Eastern Montana

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

The Montana Land Board approved four Habitat Conservation Leases (HCL) proposed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks protecting more than 27,000 acres of rangeland habitats and providing public access for both recreation and hunting.

The four HCLs were approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission at their regular meetings in August and December. The Montana Land Board approval was the final step before finalizing the agreements.

“These leases are proactive tools to help landowners, maintain or improve wildlife habitat and provide public access,” said FWP Director Christy Clark. “We’re grateful for the support of the Land Board and are working hard on more projects like these.”

All four HCLs are located in eastern Montana.

The Dunbar HCL is in Philips County and is 4,049 acres.

The IOU Ranch HCL is 9,444 acres and located in Garfield County.

The Lone Tree Land & Livestock Ranch HCL is 8,557 acres and located in Garfield County.

The Rock Barn Ranch HCL is 5,091 acres and located in McCone County.

**The four easements together will provide a minimum of 312 hunter days and 936 recreation days. The cost of the four easements was about \$3.1 million. All four are 40 year leases.**

HCLs are voluntary, incentive-based agreement with private landowners conserving high-priority prairie habitats while providing for traditional agriculture operations. They are typically 30- or 40-year leases. They also include an agreement for public access.



Photos credit Tom Cooper

# First Buck

By Tom Cooper

We followed my standard routine: wake up (not easy for a young teenager), breakfast of scrambled eggs with a little burger or sausage mixed in, toast, and fruit. Then, almost always, I want to arrive at our hunting destination by legal shooting light (which means, in the dark). My goal this day was to continue to teach my son, Gary, more about hunting than just the shooting and hiking all-day parts; we had done plenty of that already. So we started with my standard morning routine. Then, I began to talk about how hunting is impacted by many things besides shooting: keep your gear in working order, practice with your weapon, always plan your hunts, keep yourself in shape for the planned hunts, etc. Hold on! Overload! He had heard it all before; and I knew it.

## His First Hunting Year

During Gary's first licensed year, we hunted three times. Football had priority on Saturday mornings. Our first outing was up the mountain road south of Rimini. We spent our time hiking quietly through three large meadows, but did not see any game. On our second hunt, we were in the Elkhorn Mountains southeast of Helena. We saw several elk 300-400 yards away, including a spike which was legal for us in the Elkhorn's. It was too far for a shot, so we attempted a stalk, but could not intercept the elk. On the positive side, we had a nice walk, it was close to home, and we saw elk.

For our final hunt, we traveled south to Doherty Mountain to hunt mule deer bucks. After about an hour of hiking we finally saw several does in the tall sagebrush. Since the wind was blowing hard and it was an extra crisp morning, we found a little shelter from the wind and watched the deer.

In a few minutes we spotted a small buck moving through the sage where it joined the does. Gary was eager to take a shot, but he was cold and shivering. After warming his hands a bit, he tried using a small, dead Juniper tree to rest against but the wind gusts kept pushing him and his gun around.

We discussed not shooting unless comfortable about taking a shot, and to make sure your gun is safe and secure before, during, and after shooting. He decided not to shoot.

## Processing and Packing

I wanted him to experience processing a deer and packing it back to our vehicle. So I decided filling my deer tag with him now would provide that experience. I found a friendly boulder somewhat larger than a 36 inch television set from the 1970's. I knew the boulder would not move in our 25 mile-an-hour wind. A few deep breaths while hugging the rock with my knees and elbows and I shot the 2-point while he was standing still and broadside.

We used the no-gut process; Gary mostly held legs for me while I skinned the deer.

We decided to bone out the shoulders to lighten our load, and Gary watched and listened as I sliced on the first shoulder, then he used his knife on the second while I repeated everything I had said the first time (I received minor criticism, apparently for talking too much while he was working); we packed out equal shares.

Several times we stopped to rest and really enjoyed the warming sunshine. The truth is, because he would quickly leave me in his dust, I had to holler at him to get him to stop for rests that I needed.

Fortunately we brought (in my pack) several snacks which were pretty much gone when we arrived at the truck. On the way home we talked about his next hunt, before he started his hard-earned nap.

## His Second Season

Gary didn't fill a tag during that first hunting season, and of course, football was just as important during his second season. We would try harder for a mix of hunting and family events.

Turns out, the second weekend was open. We planned a mule deer hunt close to Helena in 10-mile Creek Canyon. We expected to climb through steep sliding rocks for 100 yards (turned out it was 200 yards).

Near the top of the ridge, was a decent size, relatively level, grassy clearing where I expected we would sit, watch, and wait. Then we would stalk-hunt along the ridge for about half a mile.

There wasn't another open park, but the ridgetop was covered with mature pines so the visibility was good for slow stalk hunting.

### **There Was a Buck**

We followed my morning routine and arrived at legal shooting light.

The hillside proved difficult to climb, because the sliding rocks just kept sliding.

It was almost sunrise when we carefully approached the clearing.

We looked first, and started to discuss where to sit. Then, oh my goodness, there was a deer. It was a small buck (just right for Gary), maybe 60 yards away.

I asked, can you shoot it off-hand, or should we find a close tree for a rest?

Gary's quick response was "I can shoot off-hand".

Ok, let's give it a try.

By now the buck was very slowly moving away through the timber.

Gary couldn't shoot because the deer was walking straight away from us. But, suddenly he stopped and turned broadside.

I said "now, before he starts to move again".

Unfortunately, he just couldn't keep the crosshairs steady enough for a good shot.

Okay, now the buck has turned around and is walking back toward us.

"Lean on a tree, it will help" came out of my mouth.

Gary frowned at receiving my repeated advice; he was already trying to do what I said earlier.

Now the deer was moving closer, but straight on; Gary could not shoot.

After a few steps, the buck stopped and turned broadside once again. "

"Boom", and I watched his first deer hit the ground.

We waited for a few minutes, but the young buck did not move.



As we walked toward his deer, I asked about his gun. Did he eject the empty?

Sometimes, I explained, wounded animals lie really still, though vitally wounded, yet jump up and run as you approach, and you probably wouldn't have time to eject an empty and shove in a live round.

He responded by stopping, ejecting and loading, and clicked the safety on. All I said was "there you go."

His first deer was dead, shot behind the shoulder, both lungs.

We processed his buck for carry-out and found a game trail.

We didn't have to slide on rocks all the way down.

### **But What's His Name?**

Traditions are an important part of hunting and one of mine is naming animals you kill.

I try to tie names to surrounding geography, a mountain, a creek, or even a town.

So, let's return to the buck I shot at Doherty Mountain.

When we were ready to start the pack to our vehicle, I asked about a name for our deer.

Without hesitation Gary said "Jose". Well, Jose is fine.

After we processed Gary's first deer above 10-mile Creek, I asked the same question. This time, again without hesitation, he responded with "George the First". Ok, George the First it was and will always be.

I'm told Jose and George became fast friends.

# Narrowing Down Spots For Spring Bear Hunting

By Josh Kirchner

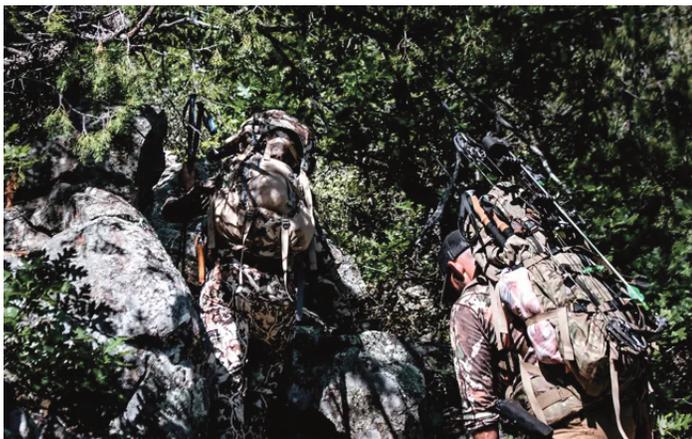
Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com



Photos courtesy Josh Kirchner and GOHUNT.com

Our hunting gear is laying dormant and fall has long passed. Spring is upon us. It's always sad seeing hunting seasons end, but when one ends, another begins. Spring is high in my thoughts right about now. The thought of fresh green grass, flowers and most exciting of all: bear hunting. Spring bear is a season that can't come soon enough each year. The weather is still nice before summer comes and the bears are out walking around in some of the most lush and beautiful landscapes Mother Nature has to offer. Not to mention that getting out and stretching the legs after a long winter is always nice. It lets you shake off the dust and make sure those knees still work. Narrowing down where to hunt spring bears, though, can be a challenge. Folks go out every year and never even see a bear. So, in light of the upcoming spring bear seasons, I'm going to lay out some things that have helped me narrow down spots for spring bears.

## They Like It Rough



The places where I've found myself getting mixed up in when it comes to bear hunting are nothing short of gnarly. These animals truly like the steep and deep in terms of terrain. I've seen bears in places multiple times where an approach wasn't even possible due to the sheer ruggedness. So, when it comes to where to start your search: look towards the nasty.

Deep canyon systems are a great place to start and particularly east/west running canyons. The reason why that's important is it means that one side of the canyon is a north face and the other is a south face. That setup offers the best of both worlds for a bear to live. The south slope will be where most of the food is, especially early in the spring. While the north slope will offer bedding with the bottom of the canyon usually having a source of water for them. These kinds of spots can be easily found just by way of a map and are fantastic starting points. Steep country like this will also give a hunter the ability to glass as you should easily be able to see across these drainages, depending on whether they are heavily timbered or not. Glassing is one of the most effective ways to locate bears in nasty country like this. I truly believe that bears like these steep and deep areas because they feel the most secure there. They are an animal of the shadows and rugged country and live in solitude.



One of the best ways to figure out potential bear hunting locations is by using 3D satellite imagery. This can easily be accomplished by using GOHUNT's 3D maps. Being able to view the terrain in 3D allows you to quickly see terrain that might hold bears. Plus, on top of that, you have layers that can be very beneficial for honing in on a bear area. Layers I like to look at are fires, elevation, timber cuts, roads and trails, etc. You can then find places to glass, camp, and locate those hidden spots where bears hide out.

## Food Is Everything and Then Some

Outside of the breeding season, bears live to fill their stomachs. This is the number one way to narrow down spots to look for bears. It's one thing to just tell you what food to look for, but it's equally important to know where to look for what food during what part of the year. In the early parts of the spring, bears will be somewhat still close to their dens at what is likely mid to lower elevations. This usually means very rocky areas that offer habitat for them to crawl into a den and come out to look for the first emerging green up. Green grass is the most common of the spring foods. Bases of rock bluffs, rock slides and south slopes are all great places to look for the first green up. Bears will also be flipping rocks to find grubs, termites, etc. Flipped rocks are bear sign that most folks just walk right past and never even see. As the weeks roll on, they'll venture farther and farther from their dens in search of food through the unforgiving country they call home. Throughout that time, they'll be traveling up in elevation with the snow line as it melts.

(continued on page 38)

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# Understanding Waterfowl: What's Your Limit?

By Mark P. Vrtiska, PhD  
Ducks Unlimited  
<https://www.ducks.org>

Photo credit Ed Wall Media  
Courtesy Ducks Unlimited  
<https://www.ducks.org>

**W**hat makes the perfect bag limit depends on who you ask. Hunters have widely varying opinions based on age, experience, and where they hunt.

One of the only blemishes on an otherwise perfect hunt was that I totally whiffed on a drake gadwall that had come in with a couple of mallards, which I identified as they decoyed, and still promptly missed two easy shots. The gadwall flew off, along with my opportunity to obtain a full daily limit of six ducks (five of which can be mallards in the Central Flyway) and the ever-important edge in bragging rights over my buddy, who drove the point home as we were picking up decoys. “You know, I can’t say that I was heartbroken that you missed that gadwall,” he quipped.

We had just experienced a duck hunt that many waterfowlers would have been delighted with, but the fact that I didn’t get my full limit gnawed at me on the drive home and left me with just a hint of disappointment. This feeling aligned with what many waterfowl managers have discovered, which is that for a certain percentage of waterfowlers, hunting satisfaction is strongly related to achieving a daily bag limit. Two different studies of duck hunters in the United States confirmed this connection. More recently, a similar study from New Zealand indicated the same correlation, even with that country’s incredibly generous bag limits of up to 50 ducks per day in some areas. Thus, it appears that when managers set a daily bag limit, it’s considered to be a benchmark for success that certain hunters strive to attain. This might also inadvertently create an expectation for a level of success that many hunters cannot realistically achieve, at least on a regular basis.

What about the impact of bag limits on waterfowl populations? Implemented in 1995, Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) prescribes annual season lengths and daily bag limits for ducks in each flyway based on annual breeding population estimates and spring wetland conditions in the Prairie Pothole Region and other key breeding areas.

Waterfowl hunters have enjoyed liberal hunting regulations (with some added restrictions for certain species) every year since AHM was implemented—a remarkable 30-year run. Because there have been few changes in bag limits during this time, it is difficult to estimate how different regulation packages may or may not impact waterfowl populations.

Another poorly understood impact of daily bag limits is how they influence bird behavior. It stands to reason that species with higher bag limits will receive more hunting pressure than species with lower limits. **Recent studies of mallards marked with GPS tracking devices indicate that the birds spend more time in sanctuaries in response to intense hunting pressure in surrounding areas.** Thus, by increasing hunting pressure on certain species, liberal bag limits could make these birds more elusive and therefore more challenging to harvest.

All this begs the question, what is the perfect bag limit? Opinions certainly vary among waterfowlers according to their hunting experience, age, and where they hunt. In a national survey of US waterfowl hunters, approximately half (48 percent) indicated that they did not need to shoot a limit of ducks or geese to have a satisfying hunting experience. Additionally, 42 percent indicated that they had not shot a full limit on any hunt during the previous season (less than 1 percent reported taking a limit of ducks on all their hunts).



Photo credit GaryKramer.net.  
Courtesy Ducks Unlimited <https://www.ducks.org>

In a study of Central Flyway duck hunters and their daily harvest activity, only 13 percent of successful hunters reported that they had obtained a full six-duck limit during the previous season (compared to 28 percent during the three-bird-limit days of the late 1980s and early 1990s). Data from Missouri indicate that hunter satisfaction was only slightly higher among hunters who harvested five or six ducks than it was for those harvesting four ducks. Researchers found similar results for New Zealand duck hunters, even with the larger bag limits. Finally, larger bag limits appear to only preferentially benefit more avid duck hunters. Again, from a study of Central Flyway waterfowlers during liberal harvest regulations, the top 10 percent of duck hunters in terms of harvest (those harvesting more than 35 ducks per season) accounted for 38 percent of the total harvest. Hunters with the lowest harvest level (only one or two ducks a season) accounted for less than 1 percent of the total.

If you're after a good discussion in the blind this fall, throw out the question or statement of what the daily bag limit should be for ducks. You will get a wide variety of answers depending on who you are sharing a blind with. This variation would likely be repeated up and down the flyways. Studies have clearly shown that different groups of waterfowl hunters want different waterfowl hunting experiences. While harvesting some ducks or geese is important in all these groups, the level of harvest varies in relation to an individual's overall hunting experience.

Personally, I believe that I could live with a daily limit of four ducks. When I say that in front of other hunters, some nod in agreement while others look at me like I have two heads. (As mentioned at the beginning of this article, I gladly shoot a full limit of six ducks when the opportunity presents itself). I also wonder how the bag limit discussion would go in duck blinds versus goose pits. In some preliminary work we've done at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we found that satisfaction among goose hunters is not as directly tied to bag limits and harvest as it is among duck hunters.

You may have noticed that at the beginning of the article I said "blemishes" and not "blemish" about our late-season hunt. When we got back to my truck and put our birds on the tailgate for pictures, one of my buddy's "hen mallards" turned out to be a drake gadwall!

He'd deftly shot a double on the first two ducks that pitched into our decoys right after shooting time. In the dim light and chaos of retrieving and having more ducks decoy, he had assumed that he'd shot two hen mallards—one was, but the other was a drake gadwall. As it turns out, he missed out on his full mallard limit, but more importantly, his bragging rights!

Dr. Mark Vrtiska is a professor of practice at the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

### About Ducks Unlimited

DU got its start in 1937 during the Dust Bowl when North America's drought-plagued waterfowl populations had plunged to unprecedented lows. Determined not to sit idly by as the continent's waterfowl dwindled beyond recovery, a small group of sportsmen joined together to form an organization that became known as Ducks Unlimited. Its mission: habitat conservation

Thanks to decades of abiding by that single mission, Ducks Unlimited is now the world's largest and most effective private waterfowl and wetlands conservation organization. DU is able to multilaterally deliver its work through a series of partnerships with private individuals, landowners, agencies, scientific communities and other entities.

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**HONDA**

# Catch More Trout (Or Your First) With These 10 Time-Tested Tips

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

Idaho Fish and Game stocks millions of trout annually for anglers

Trout are the most popular game fish species in Idaho and plentiful in the entire state and all types of waters from small streams and ponds to Idaho's largest lakes and reservoirs. One of the best things about spring trout fishing is that anglers of all ages and experience levels can enjoy it, and Idaho Fish and Game will stock about 450,000 catchable trout throughout the state during May alone, and hundreds of thousands more throughout summer and fall.

Whether you want to catch freshly stocked rainbows out of a Boise pond or catch a native trout out of a remote mountain stream, there are great opportunities...



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

Here are 10 tips for trout anglers new and experienced

## 1. CHOOSE THE RIGHT FISHING SPOT

If you want to find the best places to trout fish, it often boils down to what kind of fishing experience you want, whether a popular local fishing hole or a backcountry getaway. Check Fish and Game's Fishing Planner at [https://idfg.idaho.gov/ifwis/fishingPlanner/?\\_ga=2.82695382.1738717131.1653333419-651477113.1653333419](https://idfg.idaho.gov/ifwis/fishingPlanner/?_ga=2.82695382.1738717131.1653333419-651477113.1653333419), which is a database of all the state's fishing spots and gives you information on where they're located, what fish you might find there and a history of fish stocking.

## 2. IDENTIFY GOOD TROUT WATER

Good trout fishing spots are generally characterized by rocks, gravel bars, holes and a change in bottom contour. You should also be looking for eddies and current seams or shadow lines created by a bank when river fishing for trout. Trout can often be seen feeding on insects on the surface, so keep an eye for those tell-tale rings.

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Trout inhabit a lot of different kinds of habitat, but where you find them once, you will likely find them again unless water temps get too warm.

## 3. KNOW THE FISHING RULES

Most of Idaho offers year-round fishing, but there are exceptions. It's fairly easy to know if there are special rules at a certain fishing spot.

Look in the 2025-2027 Idaho Fishing Seasons and Rules at: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/rules/fish>.

Don't be intimidated by the booklet — it's pretty easy to figure out. It's divided into the state's seven regions, and at the beginning of each section is a list of waters that have special regulations. If the body of water you're fishing, or plan to fish, is not on the list, all you have to know are the general rules for that region.

## 4. KNOW THE BEST TIME OF DAY TO FISH FOR TROUT

The best time of day to fish for trout is during the early morning hours. To be more specific, fish from dawn until about two hours after sunrise. The next best time is late afternoon, from about three hours prior to sunset until dusk. When determining the best times to fish for trout, realize that water temperature and cloud cover will also play a role.

## 5. GET THE RIGHT FISHING EQUIPMENT AND TACKLE FOR TROUT

When buying trout fishing equipment or tackle, for family fishing trips you'll want to look for ultralight spinning tackle. The best rod and reel for trout in small streams and rivers is a 5 to 6-foot ultralight rod and reel combo. If you're fishing for trout that are bigger than 20 inches, or plan to do any trolling, go with a medium power rod.

## 6. CHOOSE THE BEST LINE FOR TROUT

The best fishing line for trout is generally 4 to 8-pound test monofilament for still fishing or spinner fishing. The weight of the line depends on the species and size of the trout you are targeting (go on the heavier side for larger trout). It's typically easier to cast small lures with lighter line. When trolling with a medium power rod, use 10 to 20-pound braid main line with a 6 to 10-pound monofilament or fluorocarbon leader.

## 7. PICK THE RIGHT BAIT FOR TROUT

If you're fishing with kids, use live or natural baits for more bites. The best bait for trout during the spring is garden worms or nightcrawlers. Garden worms are smaller worms that are generally around two to five inches in length. They are the best and most often used trout bait, particularly in spring when they are found in rivers, creeks, lakes and ponds after a period of rainfall. Nightcrawlers are available nearly any place that sells fish bait.

## 8. KNOW THE BEST FISHING RIGS FOR TROUT

The best trout fishing rigs to use with bait would be either the fixed bobber rig (best for shallow ponds and small streams) or the slip bobber rig (when trout

are feeding in the middle of the water column in deeper water), or weighted to the bottom. Anyone can learn the basic set up for trout fishing in a few minutes. See Fish and Game's Learn to Fish webpage at: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/fish/learn-to> for instructions.

### 9. CHOOSE THE RIGHT LURE FOR TROUT

Small inline spinners are among the best trout fishing lures, particularly those that come in gold or colors that match the local baitfish in your area. Inline spinners in sizes #00, #0 & #1 are good trout fishing lures when used on an ultralight spinning combo for brook trout, rainbow trout or brown trout in rivers or streams.

### 10. DON'T FEAR FLY FISHING FOR TROUT

It's a really fun way to fish for trout and very effective. When fly fishing for trout, a 9-foot flyrod rated for 5-weight line is the most versatile when fishing for trout in lakes, creeks and rivers. Fly patterns like the elkhair caddis, Adams, Griffith's Gnat or Woolly Bugger are good patterns to start with for spring trout.

Spring trout fishing can be a whole lot of fun for everyone in the family once you have the right gear and knowledge to get started.

Portions of this article are courtesy of <https://www.takemefishing.org>.

## Central Montana Game Wardens Report An Increase In Illegally Taken Mountain Lions

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

During 2025, Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks game wardens reported an increase in the number of mountain lions illegally harvested in central Montana by hunters who had not already purchased a license.

Five lions were taken by hunters in Region 4 during the 2025 general big game season, and wardens report that three of the five hunters later admitted to buying their license after they had already shot the lion. All three of those hunters were issued citations for either hunting without a valid license, or unlawful possession of wildlife. Fines and restitution for the three hunters totaled \$3,605 and all of the lions were confiscated.

"These are really just crimes of opportunity," said Game Warden Sergeant Trent Farmer, who assisted with the investigations. "Hunters are encountering and harvesting lions as they hunt for deer and elk and then attempting to circumvent the law by buying a license after the fact. Hunters interested in harvesting a lion need to plan ahead and buy their license before the season begins."...



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

# Should You Install An Optic On A Shotgun?

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



Shotguns are excellent tools for hunting, sport shooting, and self-defense. They're versatile tools and are easy to pick up once you get the knack of pointing the firearm.

Shooters transitioning to shotguns from rifle shooting often bring some of their training. Especially prevalent is the desire to assist their aim with a scope or red dot, the same as they have on their rifle.

## This leads to the common question:

Should you install an optic on your shotgun?

Naturally, the answer depends on how you're using your shotgun.

But you don't have to look at a complicated table to figure out if you should use an optic with your shotgun.

## The trick is to answer this question:

Are you shooting a stationary target or a swiftly moving target?

Optics on shotguns help improve your precision when shooting targets either moving slowly or not moving at all.

However, they can slow you down when taking quick shots at flying birds or clays by distracting your eyes.

The reason this is the case may not be obvious, so we'll cover the hows and whys optics are sometimes helpful and sometimes harmful.

Then we can answer what type of optic is best for your shotgun!

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## THE BASICS OF SHOTGUN SIGHTS

You may have noticed that I used the word "point" to describe the process of bringing a shotgun on target instead of the word "aim."

That's because shotgun shooting is more instinctual than rifle shooting. It's kind of like traditional archery that way.

When shooting a rifle, or a handgun, you ensure a good hit by lining up the front and rear sights and superimposing them over the target. If the gun has been sighted in properly, the point of aim and point of impact will be the same.

Those guns function this way because they fire a single projectile that travels in a (hopefully!) consistent arc.

An optic lets you see that point of aim without having to align the iron sights, thereby improving speed and accuracy.

Shotguns, on the other hand, fire a cloud of projectiles, called the shot, in a semi-random pattern. A precise point of aim only tells you where the center of this cloud is likely to impact. Heck, no pellets may hit at the exact center!

This is why shotguns are a great choice against birds, from doves to quail.

The shot is also slower than the typical bullet. This introduces a noticeable travel delay, which becomes essential when shooting at a moving target such as a clay pigeon or the duck you just called in.

(I'm ignoring slugs for now but don't worry, I'll get to them in a little bit!)

For these reasons, shotgunners don't bother aligning sights the same way a rifle shooter would. You need to be fast, but you don't need to be nearly so precise.

Leading the target and following through after pulling the trigger are more important. And this means keeping both of your eyes on the prize.

Instead of iron sights, most shotguns have a bead atop the barrel, near the tip. It's a quick point of reference that doesn't distract your view of the target. This process is handled subconsciously once you've gotten used to a shotgun.

Some shotguns have a rib, a second bead halfway down the barrel, or both. These are tools to help ensure you're consistent in mounting the shotgun. Your view of the bead(s) must be the same every time.

Because you're focused on the target instead of the gun, you can direct your attention toward getting a quick hit.

Some shotgunners are so consistent they can remove their front bead and still hit 25 out of 25 clays!

## IS IT WORTH PUTTING A RED DOT ON A SHOTGUN?

### So, what does an optic add to this equation?

Precision.

Now, reflex sights are assuredly faster than a rifle's iron sights, but that glowing reticle draws the eye's attention. This can confuse your sight picture and slow down your shooting compared with bead sights, which blend into your subconscious.

Scopes, magnified or unmagnified, are guilty of slowing you down even further. But they still have their uses.

This means that shotgun shooting that relies on snapshots is hampered by adding a red dot sight.

I've seen people use red dots at the trap line, but it's rare for them to outshoot someone with a bead.

On the other hand, if you need extra precision in your shooting—say, because you're hunting deer with slugs—then an optic is worth adding to your shotgun.

An optic is a worthwhile addition to your shotgun against anything that moves at about human speed or slower. It'll likely slow you down when shooting at anything running on the ground or flying through the air, though.

I'm not being definitive here because there are exceptions to both of my statements above. I know people who shoot pheasants better with a red dot than without. And I know people who can put a slug in a bullseye at 100 yards with a front bead but can't seem to do that consistently with a scope.

You may have to experiment to see whether or not adding an optic is worth it to you.

Hey, that's more range time, right?

### TYPES OF SHOTGUN OPTICAL SIGHTS

Red dot sights are the most commonly used shotgun optics but aren't the only available options.

Let's look at the three main types of shotgun optics to see which will work best for you.

#### Red Dot Sights

Red dots, also called reflex sights, impose a floating reticle in front of your eyes.

These sights are available as an enclosed tube or with an open emitter, shining their light upon the window to reflect the dot back at your eyes.

These optics work well with many shotguns because they let you focus on the target with both eyes.

Tube-style red dot sights are bulkier and heavier than ones with open emitters but are immune to a bit of snow or muck getting inside to block said emitter. The open-style reflex sight is lighter and smaller, especially the ones designed for use on a pistol.

You'll often see these sights on the shotguns used by 3-gun competitors and for tactical shotgunning.

**I'm a fan of the circle and dot style because the circle gives you a rough estimate of where the pellet cloud will impact, so you can still use your shotgun for snapshots.**

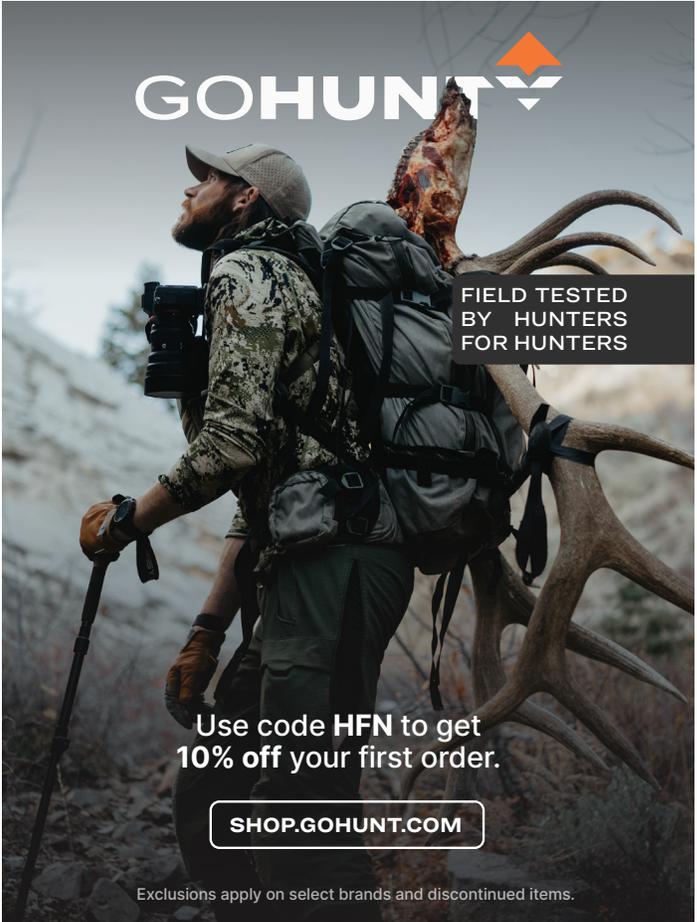
I currently have a Holosun HS515CM on my self-defense shotgun, though I am planning to replace it with an HS507C soon to lighten it up.

#### Holographic Sights

Holographic sights are similar to red dot sights, except they use a laser to form a hologram as the reticle.

This hologram is unlike the reflected light of a reflex sight because it doesn't need the view window to stay intact. Holo sights are an excellent choice for environments where you need extra durability.

(continued on page 30)



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# Should You Install An Optic On A Shotgun?

(continued from page 29)

Holographic optics also compensate for parallax better than red dot sights. In practical terms, this means you'll be more accurate even if your shooting stance is slightly off.

However, holo sights are larger and heavier than any red dot sight.

I had my EOTech 512 on my self-defense shotgun for a time, but it was just too much weight, so I took it off.

Some people like them for self-defense or 3-gun shooting, though.

The EOTech XPS2 would be the better choice in this case because its smaller weight affects the shotgun's balance less.

## Shotgun Scopes



Vortex Diamondback 2-7x35

A scope may seem like a silly addition to a shotgun, but there are two use cases where you may want to use a magnified optic.

The first use is obvious: Slugs.

Shotgun slugs are like large, slow rifle bullets, so a more rifle-like setup is common with dedicated slug guns.

4x is the most common shotgun scope magnification, though I've seen some shotguns sports glasses that go up to 7x!

Turkey hunters may appreciate some magnification as well.

Unlike other birds, turkeys are often taken with as tight a choke as possible at a comparatively long range. And those darn birds seem to wear Kevlar jackets, so you need to put as much shot into the head and neck as possible.

This means precision wins out over speed.

The Vortex Diamondback 2-7x35 is my favorite shotgun scope. It's inexpensive and has enough magnification to put that slug precisely where you want it to go.

## WHO SHOULD INSTALL AN OPTIC ON THEIR SHOTGUN?

You probably have a good idea of whether or not installing a red dot or other types of optics can help your shotgunning by now.

For ground-based shooting, optics are a good choice. For wing shooting, however, optics tend to lose out to the good ol' bead sight.

That's not always the case, though.

For example, if you're hunting rabbits, you need to swing on target rapidly and have great follow-through, much like partridge hunting. So, any optic may slow you down.

Upland bird hunting especially depends on well-placed rapid shots against panicking birds. My upland hunting shotgun will stay optic-free.

Conversely, if you're cross-eyed dominant, a red dot sight can improve your ability to break clays by making your brain focus on the eye's input in line with the shotgun.

And red dot sights are becoming more common for hunting slower birds such as ducks and doves. In that case, it's a personal preference. I've tried red dots against even slow-flying targets, and my ability to track the target was impaired enough to not guarantee a killing blow against a live animal.

We don't want to harm any animal and let it suffer, so all my wing shooting is done without an optic.

With these facts in mind, here's a chart of various shotgunning disciplines and whether or not a certain type of optic can be helpful:

Use	Red Dot Sight	Holographic Sight	Scope
Upland Hunting	No	No	No
Rabbit Hunting	No	No	No
Waterfowl Hunting	Maybe	Maybe	No
Deer Hunting	Maybe	Maybe	Yes
Turkey Hunting	Maybe	Maybe	Yes
Clay Shooting	No	No	No
3-Gun Competition	Yes	Yes	No
Self Defense	Yes	Yes	No
Survival	Yes	No	No
Recreational Blasting	Why not?	Sure	Nah

## PROS AND CONS OF MOUNTING A RED DOT ON A SHOTGUN

Still unsure if a red dot sight is right for you?

Here's a list of arguments in favor of and against adding a reflex sight to your gun.

### Pros

- Can make your shotgun more precise (especially slugs)
- Added visibility in low-light situations
- Can help with issues such as cross-eye dominance by drawing the eye's attention
- Doesn't require a strict form for accuracy, so those awkward shots are less awkward
- May allow for a more natural and comfortable head position

## Cons

- The reticle can distract the eye, slowing your shot or affecting your ability to lead the target properly
- Can run out of batteries or break, leaving you to rely on pointing anyway, just with a useless hunk of metal in front of your eye
- Glare can reflect off the glass
- Susceptible to snow and mud on the emitter or lens
- Increases the upfront cost of using your shotgun

## CONCLUSION

Unlike rifles, shotguns are not always upgraded when you install an optic.

Shotgunning involving instinctive shooting keeps your shotgun barrel and bead out of focus. Adding a bright dot to the picture may be distracting and interfere with your ability to lead a swift-moving target properly.

However, a red dot sight can be an excellent choice when you want to use your shotgun as a precise weapon.

And for slugs or turkey loads, a scope can improve your ability to put down that animal with one shot. That's something we should always strive for. Ultimately, though, the edge you get from an optic on a shotgun isn't quite as strong as when you put the same optic on a rifle.

Try it out, though. You may be surprised at how much you like having a circle to show your shotgun's pattern!

## FAQS

### Can You Mount a Sight on A Shotgun without a Picatinny Rail?

Many shotguns that don't have Picatinny rails are compatible with saddle mounts. You can also buy barrel clamps with a short section of rail for an optic.

### Why Would You Have a Scope on a Shotgun?

Scopes can be used on shotguns to increase your effective range. This is primarily useful when hunting deer and turkey.

### Do You Need an Optic on a Shotgun?

No shotgun needs an optic to be useful. If you have a consistent mount with a shotgun that fits you properly, you don't need the front bead. A shotgun sight can improve your speed and precision in some cases, though.

Andrew Jackson learned to walk in the mountains and has spent much of his life exploring the outdoors. He is equally at home in the woods, at the range, or on the gunsmithing bench, and loves to build guns almost as much as he enjoys shooting them. His travels have taken him to the four corners of the United States. Though his favorite hunting spot is in Alaska, Kansas deer taste better.

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# 5 Tips To Increase Your Shooting Accuracy Before Your Rifle Hunt

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

Let's be honest, we've all been there a time or two with a shot at a shooter buck or bull. You have the wind perfect, the animal is broadside, but just out of range. One of the key instincts of mature western big game animals is their keen ability to evade hunters and that's a common occurrence in the hills. But what if I said you had the ability to change some of these occurrences for the better? Would you give them a try?

Most people that I have helped get dialed in for rifle season do the same thing when they park at the range. They take a seat at the bench with sandbags/bipod, sight in at 100 or 200 yards and then shoot a couple of rounds at acceptable hunting shot distances. Then, they proceed to put the rifle back in its case and call it "good to go" until they go hunting, but are you really?

Follow along with these five pre-season tips and, hopefully, they will help you increase the odds in your favor next time you're in the field.

## 1. Ditch the Bipod

You don't always need a bipod when going for a hunt although they make prone shooting more comfortable. Plus, you can save some weight on your overall rifle setup. Give shooting off your backpack a try. Most of the time it's always on your back and can easily be deployed when prone. Heck, when shooting from a knee or your hindquarter, it's pretty close to the same as a bipod.

When shooting prone you can lay the rifle across the pack either on its back for a little increase in height or, if you need more height, roll it on its side and shoot off the side giving you an incredibly stable platform if your bag has a frame.

When seated, you can sit with your legs crossed and place the bag inside your legs. Using slight leaning, forward and back, you can quickly find the sweet spot to make the shot.

I practice these techniques when in the offseason so, that way, when a shot presents itself, I'm not fumbling around trying to figure out what will work. This is honestly my go-to setup for shooting either during hunting season or at steel targets at distances over 1,000 yards.



All photos credit Anthony Wright courtesy GOHUNT.com

## 2. Practice Longer Shots in the Offseason

We all have our own comfort level when it comes to taking an animal with the caliber we chose to hunt with. For some, it's 200 yards; for others, it's 500. To each their own. I respect all hunters who have a cutoff distance for their opinion of an ethical shot. What if you could increase your effective range by 50 to upwards of 200 yards? **There's no secret that practice makes perfect; however, focused repetition is the main key to this tip.**

Here in the West, we have an infestation of rocks that need to be shot to keep the population down; to our benefit, these make great targets when they have a proper backstop. When out shooting on public land or at the range, take a couple shots that exceed your comfort range when hunting. Don't just take a shot and call it good, pay close attention to detail. Take note of your sequence, weather conditions and distances you shot. Continue to practice these shots to build confidence in yourself so when you have that shot, which may have been out of range last season, you are prepared to make it count. The only negative to this tip is that ammunition can be expensive, but it can pay for itself in the future with the chance of a lifetime animal!

## 3. Make a Drop Chart

The old adage, "I'm zeroed in at 100 so I'll just aim high at 200," is old news and leads to poor shots. With current technology, making a bullet drop chart is fairly simple. The easiest way to do it without getting too scientific would be to:

- Zero your rifle at your preferred distance, then take a vertical target (I prefer freezer paper) and place it at your zero distance with a 2" to 3" black dot towards the top and the rest of the paper blank.
- Then, without adjusting your zeroed rifle, put the target 50 or 100 yards past your zero distance. Aim at the black dot and fire three good shots. Then, walk up to the target with a measuring tape and measure the drop. Continue to back up to whatever distance you want your chart to represent. (Be sure to annotate the distances shot with the applicable drop. Also, mark off the previous shots with a marker to not confuse them with the shots you're about to fire.) Once finished with that, simply type up a chart in a Word document and make it small enough to either carry in your bino harness or do what most do and tape it to the rifle. I highly recommend either taping it or laminating it to protect it from the weather.

That's the simplest version that you can make with what most people have in their garages. Other than that, you can download apps with calculators that require a decent amount of data for specific variables, which, in turn, gives you a much more accurate table. Just make sure to validate the data the app gives you at the range—don't always rely on technology. If you have a long-range rifle scope, such as the Vortex Viper PST Gen ii 5-25 FFP, that has exposed turrets, I would highly recommend taking the time to do the app or computer calculators to take advantage of the turrets. They can be very fast and accurate to adjust with practice.

**(Bonus tip:** Make sure you are using your hunting ammunition with the same lot number if using box ammo while performing this. This will assure that your data is as accurate as possible with minimal error.)

#### 4. Practice Shooting from Uncomfortable Positions

A very good practice that I've done, which greatly increased my confidence at distance, was to simulate positions that I may have to shoot from to see what gear I have that can give me an advantage, such as my pack, trekking pole, bipod, extra clothing layers or maybe a combination of each. This gives you that real-world simulation that makes you more efficient when trying to get on target while approaching a shot opportunity. Try to mix in some angled shots both up, down, off a tree, resting on a rock, etc., as well as the really enjoyable sidehill shot. You'll thank me later.

#### 5. Saving The Best For Last...Shoot With An Elevated Heart Rate

We may all be able to shoot sub 1" groups at 100 yards when we are calm and not under pressure, but how good are you when you've just hiked a steep climb or had to run to your shooting position and had to stop yourself from shooting because you couldn't settle the crosshairs?

This is a good opportunity to not only get a quick workout in, but you can somewhat replicate the respiratory movements you'll have when huffing and puffing behind the scope.

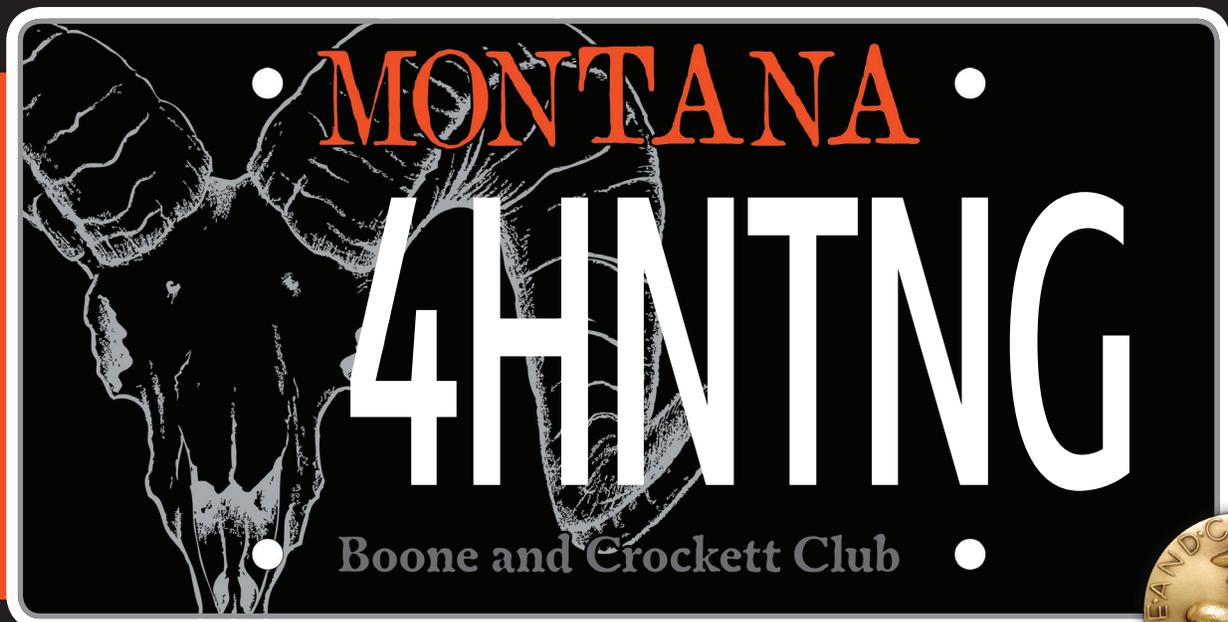
Don't be fooled when you do 100 jumping jacks, sprint, pushups or do burpees that you see that your group sizes increase substantially.

In this tip, be sure to focus on your buttstock in your shooting pocket as well as trigger control. Although some may look at you funny at the range, just keep the main goal in mind: to give the animal the most ethical shot that you can provide.

All in all, I hope you give some of these techniques a try...

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# Strategies For Tough Spring Toms

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

If you have been out turkey hunting in the western United States, there is no doubt that you have encountered some downright stubborn or wise tom turkeys. A western turkey has to deal with some of the most potent natural elements like deep snow, strong winds and numerous predators that turkeys in other states do not have to contend with. This is why some birds that survive a few seasons out West seem impossible to get within range.

Here are a few strategies that might tip the scales back in your direction and help you harvest that wise bird that keeps making fools of your morning hunts.

## Your Calling Matters



Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

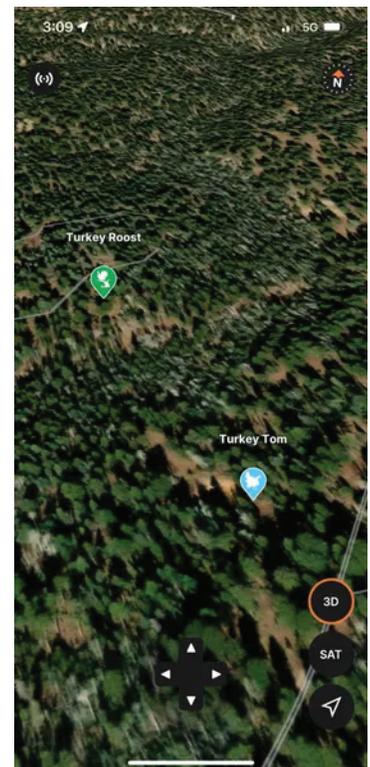
Turkeys are one of the most vocal animals you can hunt and they can be a blast to communicate with during your hunt. However, there are often times when you call in an area with known bird activity and they simply do not respond or respond, but go in the opposite direction. When this happens, you can change the game up and help you take home a bird. The first option to change the game is simply to change the call you are using. For whatever reason, some calls just get a turkey fired up; others, the bird simply ignores. The ones that are liked or ignored are always different from day to day. I often try calling a bird with my mouth call to have him hammer back, but when I use my slate call, I get silence. The next time I am in the woods, I use the mouth call and get no response, but the slate call gets the bird going. The reason behind this is unclear to me; however, one thing is certain: if a bird is not responding or not doing what you would like, feel free to reach into your pack and try a different call. After all, sounding like multiple birds might just be enough to get that tom to turn your way. Along this same notion, I always make sure to vary my cadence, volume and speed of calls until I find something that works. If you can get a bird fired up, keep using that call and try to work him into your position.

## Do Not Be Afraid to Move

Though turkeys have excellent eyesight — and most turkey hunters will tell you not to move — there are times when it is crucial, especially when dealing with a tough bird that doesn't want to come in. You can move in three ways when dealing with a bird hanging up out of sight or not wanting to play the game. The first way is to move in closer to the bird. When the terrain allows it — and I hear a gobble from a bird interested in my calling — I often quickly cover as much ground as possible to get closer to the bird before letting out another call. This shows the bird that I have covered ground to get to him, reduces the chance of another hen coming in and stealing the gobbler's attention on the way to you and reduces the possibility that there is some terrain or barrier in between you and the tom. The second way that I move when turkey hunting is parallel to the tom turkey's direction of travel. This will show the tom that you are moving, making your calling setup seem more realistic and providing enough realism to draw the bird into your setup.

Using GOHUNT Maps in 3D for turkey hunting is another great way to see the terrain you're about to hunt.

The final way I move is to back out of an unresponsive tom to circle and get ahead of him. This works when a tom doesn't want to come into your current position due to a barrier or when he has a spot that he goes to daily to strut and attract hens. This also puts you in a good position if a tom were to breed a hen and lose the rest of the flock. This is a time during the late morning when they are more susceptible to calling as they are alone and trying to reconnect with their flock. Of course, if you see the bird, it is not a good time to move; however, if you cannot see the bird and he is not cooperative, do not be afraid to change it up on a stubborn bird. Don't forget to mark all the information you encounter in the turkey woods on your maps to develop a solid plan on your hunt and remember, GOHUNT even has turkey waypoints!



Learn more about GOHUNT maps here:  
<https://gohunt.com/user/login?destination=/maps>.

(continued on page 38)



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# - Time To Spool Up - High-Percentage Spring Baits

(continued from page 14)

In the spring, Fisher throws a grub in the same shoreline spots that he'll throw a shallow-running Rapala crankbait in the summer, when fish are more aggressive.

For smallies, pair a Trigger X 4-inch Swimming Grub with a 1/8 oz. VMC Half Moon Jig. For walleyes, rig your grub on a 1/8 oz. VMC Moon Eye Jig. Green pumpkin is usually the best grub color to start with, Fisher says, "but you should experiment."

## Make Return Trips

No matter which of these four baits work best for you this spring, be sure to return a few times to productive spots. "If fish are moving through that area and using it in the spring, they'll often replenish," Fisher says.

## Fishing openers

While fishing seasons for the various species are open year-round in some regions, some states forbid fishing for several months in order to protect the resource. In those states, the "opener" – the date on which one can again legally fish for a given species – is a red-letter day anticipated feverishly by anglers. Walleye and pike openers generally precede bass openers by a couple weeks, because bass generally spawn later in the spring.

**Rapala How2TV** Watch Fisher demonstrate his

Top 4 multi-species spring baits in this video:

<https://youtu.be/wJQqc-z-TGQ?si=1awTHmD8Nvp7-zD>

# Dust Off The Fishing Rod And Plan Your Next Family Fishing Outing This Spring

(continued from page 2)

## Dworshak Reservoir

Looking for a big body of water in the heart of Clearwater country? Dworshak Reservoir in central Idaho along the North Fork of the Clearwater River offers anglers both picturesque mountain views and chances at hooking several species of fish, most notably smallmouth bass and kokanee...

## Mann Lake

Mann Lake – well, technically a reservoir – is 137-acres holding a number of game fish, including catfish, perch, bass, bluegill and you guessed it, rainbow trout. Fishing at Mann Lake is usually a good option early because it is a lower-elevation lake that hits prime temperatures quickly when things warm up.

Mann Lake is easily accessible and close to the city of Lewiston, making for the perfect getaway.

## Middle Fork Clearwater and Lochsa Rivers

The Middle Fork of the Clearwater River is a great spot for springtime fishing. Whether you're fly fishing, spinning, or baitcasting, your chances of getting a bite here are good. There's a large variety of fish species including the chance to catch a bass, whitefish or trout. So grab your favorite fly fishing rod and reel and head out to the Middle Fork Clearwater River this season.

# SLIP BOBBER NUANCES FOR WALLEYE FISHING

(continued from page 16)

Half crawlers can be deadly behind the 1/16 ounce Fireballs, just thread the crawler so it can hang straight off the back of the jig. Minnows are another staple. Shiners are often lip hooked. Chubs and rainbows can be tail hooked.

Long rods with some backbone allow anglers to fish slip bobbers further away from the boat allowing you to make longer drifts and cover more water. We designed an eight-foot telescoping slip bobber rod that was designed specifically for corking walleyes. One feature we added to the rod which can be used as a tip for any rods that you already own... every foot of the rod blank we marked with a white dot. This allows you to use the rod blank as a ruler for making quick adjustments to your depth setting. When running several rods, you will speed up your adjustment time dramatically as you hop from spot to spot. Our rods already have the markings but an angler can mark any rod with either tape or some other marking to create the same concept.

Slip bobbers are effective and efficient because you can sit on a good spot with a good-looking presentation, i.e. Jumbo leech squirming and swimming frantically about a foot off the bottom, what is there not to love? By making a few adjustments, however, you can fine-tune this presentation to become more efficient when focusing on walleyes.

In addition, the Lochsa River is known for excellent trout fishing on an easily accessible river as it follows portions of Highway 12 through this scenic river corridor. It draws avid anglers and novices alike and is home to native trout species as well as mountain whitefish. Springtime conditions can produce high flows, yet when the water level drops, this can be an excellent place to find good spring fishing access.

## C.J. Strike Reservoir

This huge impoundment of the Snake and Bruneau rivers is no stranger to early season anglers, and for good reason. C.J. Strike Reservoir provides a variety of fishing and boating access sites and a grab bag of species to choose from. Crappie, perch, bass and trout are commonly caught in the spring. Fishing can be good year round, and unlike other southern Idaho reservoirs, this one isn't drained each summer for irrigation water, so it's fairly consistently full.

Strike is well suited for both boaters and shore anglers. There are numerous launch spots for boats, and most of the southern shoreline is vehicle accessible...

## Trail Creek Pond

Nestled at the base of the Teton mountain range, this often overlooked pond is the perfect stop for families headed on vacation to Jackson Hole or nearby Grand Teton Park. Restroom facilities, picnic tables, and beautiful mountain scenery make Trail Creek an opportune place to stretch your legs and catch a few rainbow trout before continuing on your journey or when camping nearby.

# Broadhead Options For Elk That You Can Trust On Your Hunt

(continued from page 12)

They are available at your local pro shops or in gear stores like ours across the country in both 100- and 125-grain versions. They are very well priced for what you get. I've witnessed bulls being shot with a Montec and the results have been good; good flight and good penetration. While I can't suggest how the Montec ranked because I don't think it was tested, I have played with Montec heads and found them to be quite accurate with some tuning. Since the blades are vented, they aren't the quietest fixed blade on the market, but I didn't find them to be especially loud either. Overall, I still think the Montec is a great broadhead for elk, offered at a great price point.

## Conclusion

Picking a broadhead is a personal decision based on what you value: accuracy, penetration, and durability. Your personal setup will also dictate what might be the best option for you. Additionally, price and how readily available the broadheads are a part of that equation.

## Here are some generalities that I've observed over the years that may help:

1) Fixed blade broadheads generally have better penetration potential. 2) Mechanical broadheads are more accurate and shoot smaller groups.

3) While I've had some good blood trails with fixed blade broadheads, I've had more poor blood trails with fixed blade broadheads than I have with mechanicals. I've had some poor blood trails with mechanicals, but I've had more that were great. Blood trails are finicky. It depends on so many different factors, but in my personal experience, the blood trails made by a mechanical broadhead have been better. 4) Fixed blade broadheads are more durable. 5) No matter what broadhead you shoot, I suggest that you practice with them regularly. Because I encourage practice with the broadheads you will hunt with, I think that it makes good sense to be able to replace the blades of those broadheads so that you enter the field with the sharpest blades possible. In saying that, there are quality broadheads like the Iron Will that will hold an edge better than pretty much everything else on the market and they can be resharpened. 6) Low poundage, low FPS, lower total arrow weight bowhunters should strongly consider a fixed blade broadhead to increase the potential for better penetration.

Lastly, the broadheads noted above are my recommendations. There are literally hundreds of more options on the market — some of which are also good broadheads. Whatever the broadhead you choose, do due diligence by practicing with them prior to your hunt.

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# Narrowing Down Spots For Spring Bear Hunting

(continued from page 22)

The snow line is a fantastic place to start because you know the bears won't be above you, they'll just be below as that is where the newest grass will be. As the spring warms up and grass burns off of the south slopes, bears will transition over to north slopes for grass as those will sprout later than south slopes. These north slopes hold moisture longer, so they take longer to warm up. They'll also begin to focus on berries. Bears love berries. Their name is in the food. The bottom line is that a bear thinks with their stomach and their movements are a reflection of that.

## Climate

Lucky for us, spring bear seasons can be found in a wide variety of climates. It gives more opportunity to get out in the field, but also the ability to hunt bears in a variety of climates. Searching for bears in these areas may be different, but the overall thinking is the same. Food, cover, water. Let me elaborate a little.

In drier climates, water is a massive factor. For instance, down in the desert, creeks are not flowing like they do in wetter climates and green is a color not seen like in other parts of the country. You'll see much more brown and yellow instead. So, when scouting for bears in drier climates, if there isn't water around, I won't even bother looking at the area. Doing so is a flat-out waste of time. This may sound a bit frustrating, trying to hop around and look for water, but there is some gold to this. Once you do find water, you will likely find bears. Placing trail cameras on secluded pools of water that build up in the bottom of drainages is a great way to get photos of bears. Bears need water and this is a fantastic way to narrow down where to look.

Now, in more mountainous terrain in other parts of the country, water isn't so much of a thought. It's still a necessity, but it won't concentrate bears as it will in arid environments. In places like these, I'm looking more for a main drainage to work that has a creek/river flowing through the bottom, but more importantly paying attention to the feeder canyons that come off of that main drainage. The bears don't need to stay as close to main water sources like they do in the desert. Water is everywhere in a lot of these areas. So, it really comes down to covering country and focusing your efforts on glassing food sources. Bears might be a little more spread out in places that have ample food and water. Country like this offers a great place for a bear to live and a great place for you to start your bear search.

## Closing Thoughts

Spring bear hunting is something that has continually grown in popularity each year. However, it's still nothing compared to something like elk hunting in terms of hunting pressure. So, along with getting to head out and dust off the hunting gear, you'll likely be doing so in solitude. This is especially true if you're willing to hike or backpack into spots. Most folks aren't willing to work that hard for a bear, which opens up a great opportunity for those who are — and it's not many.

# Strategies For Tough Spring Toms

(continued from page 34)

## Pattern Your Bird



Photo credit Chris Neville courtesy GOHUNT.com

Though it is not a regular topic of conversation, patterning a tom can be done with some time in the woods, watching and listening to your bird. Unless predators, hunters or other hens disrupt his behavior, a tom and its flock will follow the same pattern daily. This means that even if a turkey is not willing to be called in, you may find a pinch point, a small field or a logging road that the turkey frequents at a particular time of day. If you are there before him, you may be able to harvest that stubborn bird. Often, if I use this technique to harvest a bird, I will only call if I have to. I want to keep the situation as realistic as yesterday and not give the bird any reason not to continue along its same pattern.

## Decoy Usage

Last, but not least is the thought between using a decoy or not. While everyone is different, here is my rule for using decoys when turkey hunting: if I am hunting in thick cover where a bird might not be able to see me until it's in shotgun range, I do not use a decoy; however, if I am hunting an open side hill, field or pasture where a bird may emerge more than shotgun range and look in my direction, I always use a decoy. The decoys do not have to be the expensive, 100-dollar version of a turkey, but they do have to look like a turkey. It is important to note that decoy motion never hurts, so I like to use a foam decoy that twists in the breeze. Note: you 100% do not need to use a decoy to kill a bird and most of the time, not using a decoy can make for a more enjoyable hunt as you work in a bird with just calls.

## In Conclusion

Hunting turkeys in the spring is a great experience and a great time of year to be in the mountains. If you are local, it is often a hunt that you can do before work and be back in time for breakfast. If you are from out-of-state and wish to chase turkeys in the West, endless opportunities and affordable tags are available in most states. Some states even have multiple bird limits that will allow you to maximize your hunt time and harvest numerous birds. If you are chasing stubborn, wise toms that are making it difficult for you, consider using the tips mentioned above to seal the deal and harvest a mature bird this fall.



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