

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING NEWS

JUNE 2026



The Key To Successful Shooting...
HSM Ammunition

Made in Stevensville MT. Available at your local retailer.





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

How To Glass Like The Pros

Vortex Optics <https://vortexoptics.com>

From eastern timber to western mountain peaks, midwestern swamps to southern desert foothills, we're lucky to live in a country where big game roams wild. But no matter where you hunt, before you can fill your tags, you've got to find your quarry first.

While some tactics work no matter where you are, to give yourself the best chance at filling your freezer, you need to adapt your tactics to the region, and the animal you're hunting. Read on to join four of today's best hunters as they stalk some of their favorite game.

GLASSING ELK WITH BRAD BROOKS

Elk are easily one of the best tasting animals in my freezer, which makes the difficulty of hunting and packing them out well worth the effort. I've hunted elk in the intermountain west in a variety of terrain and vegetation from early August to late December in everything from sagebrush covered flats, to dense canopy forests, to high-mountain, moderately open country. And while the tactics for hunting elk in each season and terrain type is unique, I use similar methods for finding bulls and getting in close.

- Don't ignore wide-open country. Elk are a plains species. They can spend all day in wide-open sagebrush country if they have food and water, and open country can make them feel safe since they can see all around. I've seen bulls at 10,000 ft. in late December on wind swept mountain sides, and herds of elk in low elevation sagebrush in 100-degree weather.

- Use a tripod and glass slowly. Elk are easier to see than other big game animals due to their size and color, which causes some people to move too quickly with their binoculars, assuming if there was an elk, it would be obvious to see. But elk can blend in easily when they aren't in the wide open. Move slow, use a tripod, and look for antler tips, small patches of hide, or movement.

- Glass the edge habitat. Elk tend to come slowly out of bedding habitat and frequently stay close to the timber where they feel safe.

- Glass the shadows. In the heat of the day, even during archery season when it is hot out, I've found more elk than I can remember by continuing to glass when other people are napping or back at the truck.

Find a high spot and glass from above on a tripod in a grid pattern.

I've also found a lot of elk in the middle of the afternoon getting up for a quick bite, or to get water. If you're consistently out hunting and glassing during this time, you'll see elk.

Join Argali in the field for a hunt in one of America's last true wild places with this video:

<https://argalioutdoors.com/blogs/films/the-last-wild-places-the-frank>

GLASSING SHEEP WITH GREG MCHALE

Sheep hunting is a test of all aspects of a hunter's capabilities, including glassing and animal judging, physical fitness, mental toughness, patience, determination, and shooting abilities. These challenges are faced at high elevations and often in steep and rugged country. Why do it? Because the greatest challenges offer the greatest rewards.

Here are four glassing tips to help you fill your tag.

- Use your map to plan each day. Aim for locations offering expansive glassing opportunities (ridges and peaks) that allow you to cover an area with confidence and move on to new areas.

- Check the high-value areas first. Skylines, shoulders, and grass patches to start, but don't neglect rocky slopes, as rams can be found there also.

- Get the right glass. A 60x spotting scope with a smooth and steady tripod is going to be the key to selecting the right ram. Don't leave home without it!

- The ability to cover ground quickly will open up more opportunities. You can't find sheep if you're not moving when it's time. Use 10x binoculars to quickly glass close-up areas while standing and on the move.

When it's time to sit down and pick the mountains apart, the 10x binoculars and the 60x scope will work in tandem to spot animals and to identify whether something is worthy of closer inspection.

To get more tips from Greg McHale, including how to glass in the snow, checkout his blog series here:

<https://vortexoptics.com/blog/protip-glassing-in-snowy-conditions.html>, and learn to navigate with old school tools of the trade with this podcast featuring Greg here:

<https://soundcloud.com/vortexnationpodcast/ep-158-land-navigation-with-greg-mchale>.

(continued on page 38)



**BUILT TO CARRY
WHERE OTHERS FEAR TO TREAD.**



VIPER® HD 10X50 Shown

VIPER® HD BINOCULARS

Viper® HD delivers outstanding clarity, rugged durability, and the versatility to keep up with hunters who embrace the tough, unpredictable conditions lasting memories are made from. With sharp resolution that brings every detail into focus and a lightweight, ergonomic build that won't wear you down, Viper® HD gives you the upper hand—keeping you ready to glass longer and move farther without missing a thing.

Available in:

12x50
10x50
10x42
8x42

INCLUDED IN THE BOX

- Rainguard Eyepiece Cover
- Tethered Objective Lens Covers
- Comfort Neck Strap
- Glasspak™ Binocular Harness
- Lens Cloth



**UNLIMITED
UNCONDITIONAL
LIFETIME WARRANTY**

NEW! TRY OPTICS FINDER To Find The Right Optic For You
Go To: <https://opticsfinder.vortexoptics.com/preprod/categories>

- VISIT ONE OF THESE DEALERS FOR YOUR NEXT VORTEX PURCHASE -

FULL CURL MFG

www.fullcurlmanufacturing.com

MURDOCH'S

www.murdochs.com

NORTH 40 OUTFITTERS

www.north40.com

OWENHOUSE ACE

www.owenhouse.com

SHEDHORN SPORTS

www.shedhorn.com

SHIPTON'S BIG R

www.shiptonsbigr.com

SPORTSMAN & SKI HAUS

www.sportsmanskihaus.com

RIFLESCOPES • BINOCULARS • SPOTTING SCOPES • RANGEFINDERS • RED DOTS • MONOCULARS • TRIPODS • GEAR

JOIN THE VORTEX NATION



www.vortexoptics.com



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

From Dream To Reality

By Jay Anglin TUO Gear <https://www.tuogear.com>

Worldwide Trophy Adventures aids hunters in the intricacies of applications, points, etc. through their TAGS services.

American outdoorsmen have a wealth of options when it comes to which game species to pursue. This diversity of species can be a blessing, and curse, depending on how you view things, because there are only a few prime months each fall to target game – and in the case of elk, significant travel is often required.

The truth is that many hunters dream of elk hunting but are restricted by geographic distance and logistical challenges. In fact, even hunters who live in states where elk thrive may have to drive several hours to take advantage of prime time.

Traveling only scratches the surface when it comes to elk hunting. Suffice it to say the necessary gear and even physical ability can be an obstacle and require lots of planning as well as expenses and commitment to making time for preparation well in advance. Then there is this little matter of obtaining an elk tag, too, which in of itself can be the biggest challenge of all. As any veteran elk hunter will tell you, this is rarely a matter of stopping at a Ma and Pop gas station once you get “there” and grabbing a tag. Maybe it used to be that way in some states, but with few exceptions, those days are long gone.

In fact, elk licenses and tags are almost always shrouded in a morass of lotteries, points, and zones that for some hunters, is just too much to bear. This is especially the case for hunters who live in an elk-free region. While many hunters are well-versed in the unique aspects of the elk hunting world, the entire process borders on mysterious and even intimidating for those who are not.

It doesn't have to be that way, however. There are ways to expedite the process and quickly learn what it takes to end up on a mountain out West (or even east of the Mississippi) and set your sights on a trophy bull. While this service comes at a cost, it's well worth the investment and is most certainly one of those “you get what you pay for” deals.

Worldwide Trophy Adventures aids hunters in the intricacies of applications, points, etc. through their TAGS services. TAGS is a full-service licensing program to assist hunters in drawing the very best, limited-entry, big-game tags in the country – the WTA website TAGS page even has a ticker on the masthead that scrolls through the various application deadlines.



Nick Filler of WTA recently broke down some of the vital aspects of planning an elk hunt, including a basic orientation on the points system that confounds so many new elk hunters.

“Preference points are a way that many states manage demand for big game hunting tags when there are more hunters than available licenses,” explained Filler. “When you apply for a hunt and don't draw a tag, you often earn a preference point. The next year, your point total goes up, giving you better odds of drawing. The idea is to reward persistence—the more years you apply without drawing, the more preference points you get, and the closer you are to drawing that tag you are applying for.”

Filler continued, “Point creep is a slow, gradual increase in the number of preference points it takes to draw a limited hunting tag. So, let's say a certain hunt took 4 points to draw for a few years. As more hunters apply and build up points, that same hunt might start taking 5 points to draw. That small increase over time is what hunters call point creep.”

States with the Best Success Rate:

Wyoming: Consistently strong success rates – especially for non-residents in general areas. Well-managed herds, quality access, recently reduced the number of tags allocated to non-residents.

New Mexico: No points system so everyone has a chance, however, high number of hunters typically put in for the draw. High success rates with quality outfitters.

Utah (limited entry): Success rates are high for controlled hunts but point creep is a real issue.

Arizona: Excellent draw hunts with high success, but tags are hard to come by.

Colorado: Most over the counter (OTC) opportunities, however they are shifting away from them. Dropped archery OTC recently and may move to do the same with 2nd and 3rd rifle elk seasons. Success rates are lower (~15-20% on public land).

Expert Insight: Success rates vary heavily by unit and whether a hunter is guided. WTA clients hunting with vetted outfitters often see far better results than DIY hunters.

Easiest (OTC or low barrier):

Colorado – OTC units available annually for elk
Idaho – first-come, first-served, but tags go fast
Oregon and Washington – easier draws but lower quality units

Hardest:

Arizona – very high-quality bulls but 20+ points may be required
Utah – limited entry
Nevada – very limited tags and high competition

Expert Tip: Point creep is worsening in many states. Building a smart application strategy across several states is key and that's where WTA TAGS can help you to build a strategy that fits your budget.

Best to Least Chance for a Trophy Bull

Top Trophy States:

- Arizona
- Utah
- Nevada
- New Mexico
- Montana's Missouri River Breaks

Less Likely Trophy Opportunities:

- Oregon and Washington – spike or small bull seasons dominate
- Colorado OTC units – some good bulls but very pressured

Expert Insight: Use draw odds + trophy potential + success rate + access to determine best fit. WTA's role is to find that "sweet spot" for each hunter's goals...

...Don't just chase the cheapest tags—consider total ROI (draw odds + hunt quality + logistics). WTA TAGS helps hunters balance all of this...Hiring a professional consultant to handle the process of tailoring your dream hunt makes a lot of sense. Filler couldn't agree more, "Don't wait! This is a great time to start your plan and with WTA TAGS, one conversation with a consultant sets everything in motion. We'll build your strategy, apply on your behalf, and when you draw, we'll recommend a trusted outfitter to give you the best shot at a great hunt." Book Your Adventure at 1-800-346-8747.

FREE ENTRY FEE

Thanks to a generous donation, the Boone and Crockett Club announced that the \$40 entry fee will not be charged for entries received after January 1, 2026.

SCAN TO LEARN MORE:



WWW.BOONE-CROCKETT.ORG



What To Look For On Your Summer Scouting Trips

By Jake Horton

Originally published at  GOHUNT.com

Our goal as hunters is to be successful and nothing can help us be more successful than some good research and scouting. Hunters can do a lot of this research on GOHUNT's Filtering and e-scouting can be done using GOHUNT Maps, but nothing beats some boots on the ground in a unit you're interested in hunting this fall. Being out there to see the terrain, look for animals and get a grasp on the unit can help intensify your e-scouting and be exponentially more successful come hunting season.

This summer, scouting can help your early season hunts by locating game, which will help your later season hunts since you know where the animals started their seasons. If you know the animals live there, your scouting and hunting drive and morale to find them will definitely increase, especially if you have already seen some mature animals.

It doesn't matter what you are scouting to hunt; there are some basic things that you need to see and mark in your GPS to be able to find success.

Make a Plan

When it comes to summer scouting a new unit, you need to have a plan. Even though you are not hunting, you should definitely do some e-scouting before your scouting trip to make the most of your time in the mountains.

Pick out some of the planned areas that seem better to you, find camping spots that look good, glassing points to hike to and ridges to hike up and down. When you arrive to scout, you can walk these areas and see what you think. While you are there, you can look for different signs, animals and habitat quality.

A plan is crucial if you have limited days to scout.

Accessibility

The first thing you will be able to determine when heading to a spot is accessibility. Many maps tell you what roads are open at certain times of the year, but no map will tell you the condition of the road and whether your vehicle or ATV is fit to drive on it.

I have been to some roads here in Colorado labeled four-wheel-drive roads that I can barely get my four-wheeler up due to the grade and loose gravel.

Pay attention to gated signs as some gates are only open to forest service personnel or closed during hunting seasons. Any intel you gather on road and trail access will be able to give you good intel for e-scouting and also give you a good idea where other hunters might be going.

Food

After determining accessibility for different areas, you can look at food sources and determine if the area has some. During the summer, the grasses are lush and green at middle to higher elevations. This is an excellent time of year to determine if the area holds habitat for animals. If there is little greenery, the area is desert-like or the area is a recent burn that has not regrown yet, you may want to look elsewhere.

Water

Water is another essential survival need that animals require in both wet and dry environments. I always mark every hidden water source I find whether it's a stock tank that holds water or hidden ponds. I even mark ponds, waterholes and stock tanks that are dry during a given year. If they are dry mid-summer, there is a good chance they will be dry come fall. If a water source is torn up with fresh sign, you can also note the direction of the trails and where they are coming from. This can be crucial information to have during a hot day when you have no other plan, but to patiently sit on a water hole.

Trails

Looking for trails can be a great way to get an idea of animal travel routes. Most places that elk, deer, moose and other big game animals have lived will have some game trails crossing the steep sidehills. Though I do not mark every one of those, I do mark the game trails that look to have a pinch point or that appear to be heavily traveled. When I do not know where to hunt, getting on one of these trails to still-hunt or waiting at a pinch point may just be an option that helps me succeed.

Last Year's Sign

Though bucks and bulls might not have rubbed off their velvet yet during a summer scouting trip, you should be able to see where they have done this in prior years. Trees stripped of their bark can be a good indication that the area has good pre-rut activity and might be worth checking out during an early season hunt. Another thing I pay attention to is animal scat. Though scat dries very quickly in the West, it can tell you a great deal about the number of animals in an area or how often animals frequent that spot. It doesn't hurt to mark a meadow or bedding area loaded up with animal feces.

Animal Sightings

Though I do a lot of walking when I am preseason scouting during the summer, I also spend a fair amount of time glassing. Watching meadows, open slopes and lightly covered side hills at first and last light can allow me to get a good look at the caliber of animal that resides there. These sightings can help establish my expectations correctly in a unit with large or small bucks, bulls, moose or other animals. Anytime I see an animal, I always mark it on my GPS, so I don't get confused down the road.



Photo courtesy GOHUNT.com

Bedding Areas

The last thing I always seek out during pre-season and summer scouting is bedding areas. These are usually preselected during my e-scouting process though sometimes I do stumble upon a bedding area. Bedding areas are different sizes and locations for different species. For elk, you can concentrate on thick northern slopes; for mule deer, you can focus on areas with less cover and so on. Bedding areas get used repeatedly, so understanding where they are can help you hone in on the animal activity. Pay special attention to small benches on the upper half of a slope since a lot of animals like to bed high and watch for danger below.

If you are putting in the time to put some boots on the ground in a western state, be sure to get as much out of it as you can. Scouting, done right, is hard work and a very observant hunter can improve their success rate during the hunting season by putting this knowledge to work.



Remember that if you find a mature animal or multiple mature animals, they should be in the general area during the later seasons; you will just have to find them. If you are scouting for an early season hunt, then it would make sense to try to arrive as close to that timeframe as possible. Deer, elk and other animals change their patterns around the month of September due to breeding seasons, temperature changes, food changes and more. Boots on the ground scouting can increase your success rate this fall, so get out into the mountains and put on some miles.

Learn more or join at GOHUNT.com.

2026 POLARIS Ranger Crew XP 1000 NorthStar Ultimate POWER THROUGH TASKS AND TRAILS IN ANY WEATHER

CREW XP 1000 NORTHSTAR STANDARD FEATURES:

- Factory-installed heating & air conditioning system
- Enclosed cab with full glass tip-out windshield & powered front windows
- 29" 8-ply Pro Armor X Terrain tires with 14" ground clearance
- 4,500 LB winch with synthetic rope, Auto Stop & wireless remote
- 82-hp ProStar engine
- USB charge port & battery charge port
- 1,000-lb. box capacity & 2,500-lb. towing capacity

UPGRADE TO NORTHSTAR ULTIMATE

Upgrade to NorthStar Ultimate trim to experience more amenities, including an in-dash, glove-compatible infotainment system and premium JBL audio.



HUNT PACKAGE SHOWN

- Front Hood Storage Rack
- Rear Headache Rack
- Rear Cargo Rack
- Kolpin Stronghold Gun Boot XL

**SEE WHAT'S
IN STORE
FOR YOU AT**

LewistownPolaris.com
302 TRUCK BY-PASS, LEWISTOWN, MT 406-538-9435

Warning: Polaris off-road vehicles can be hazardous to operate and are not intended for on-road use. Driver must be at least 16 years old with a valid driver's license to operate. Passengers, if permitted, must be at least 12 years old. All riders should always wear helmets, eye protection, and protective clothing. Always use seat belts and cab nets or doors (as equipped). Never engage in stunt driving, and avoid excessive speeds and sharp turns. Riding and alcohol/drugs don't mix. All riders should take a safety training course. Call 800-342-3764 for additional information. Check local laws before riding on trails.
©2026 Polaris Industries Inc.

POLARIS

Portable Power Where You Want It, When You Want It

For Use At Home, Camping, On The Jobsite Or More.

HONDA



EU2200i

2200 watt 120V inverter generator with CO-MINDER™

- Ideal for TV, DVD, satellite, fridge, coffee pot & more
- Super quiet & lightweight
- Inverter - stable power
- Honda My Generator app + Bluetooth® capability
- CO-MINDER: advanced carbon monoxide detection system



We stock a wide variety of Honda generators to meet your needs.

SEE WHAT'S IN STORE FOR YOU AT

LewistownHonda.com

302 TRUCK BY-PASS, LEWISTOWN, MT

406-538-9435

Please read the owner's manual before operating your Honda Power Equipment and never use in a closed or partly enclosed area where you could be exposed to odorless, poisonous carbon monoxide. Connection of a generator to house power requires a transfer device to avoid possible injury to power company personnel. Consult a qualified electrician.

You Drew A Montana Elk Or Deer Tag, Now What? A Guide To Post Draw Insights For Your Upcoming Hunt

Drawing a tag is only step one. Now the real work begins to figure out where to hunt in Montana with a general season or permit tag, plus how to approach e-scouting and tools you can use now to increase success this fall.

By Brady Miller

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

If you drew a Montana elk or deer tag—Now What? A GOHUNT Insider's Guide to Post-Draw Success. Drawing a coveted elk or deer tag in Montana is a thrilling moment. Whether it's your first time or you're a seasoned hunter finally cashing in points, that successful draw is just the beginning. If you drew a tag this year, now the real work begins: research, planning, and preparation. And that's where GOHUNT Insider shines.

With your Montana general season tag in hand, you're now faced with big questions: Where exactly should I hunt? What does the terrain look like? How can I increase my odds of success this fall?

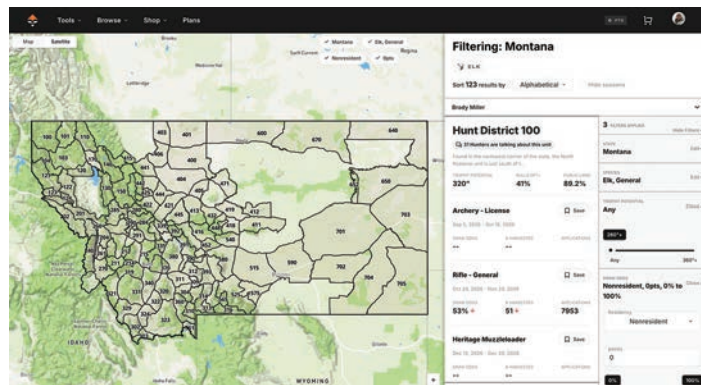
This guide breaks down everything you can do inside GOHUNT's Insider research platform to make the most of your tag, from narrowing down units to reading maps like a pro.

Step 1: Narrow Down Your Hunt Area With Filtering

Montana has massive general-season hunt districts scattered across the state, as well as more complex limited-entry districts. After you draw, it's time to get surgical with your location choices. This is especially important because with a Montana general tag (Big Game Combination, Elk Combination, or Deer Combination), you can hunt a plethora of areas. So you need to narrow down your selection to start developing a plan.

I say it a lot, but you really need to develop a plan and start this plan early!

For example, there are currently 123 general season elk hunt districts in Montana. And there's the same number (123) of general season mule deer hunt districts.



Muscle for every mission.

FourTrax Foreman 4x4

Through smart engineering, unmatched build quality and a rich list of proven features, the Foreman 4x4 doesn't just work hard, it works better. It's an ATV that not only you can count on, but the next generation can too.

SEE WHAT'S IN STORE FOR YOU AT

LewistownHonda.com

302 TRUCK BY-PASS, LEWISTOWN, MT | 406-538-9435

powersports.honda.com. UTILITY ATVS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR RIDERS 16 YEARS AND OLDER. ATVS CAN BE HAZARDOUS TO OPERATE. FOR YOUR SAFETY, BE RESPONSIBLE. READ THE OWNER'S MANUAL. ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET, EYE PROTECTION AND PROTECTIVE CLOTHING. BE CAREFUL ON DIFFICULT TERRAIN. NEVER RIDE AFTER CONSUMING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL, ON PAVED SURFACES, ON PUBLIC ROADS, WITH PASSENGERS, OR AT EXCESSIVE SPEEDS. NO STUNT RIDING. RESPECT THE ENVIRONMENT WHEN RIDING. FourTrax®, Foreman®, HondaCare® Protection Plan, TraxLok® are registered trademarks of Honda Motor Co., Ltd. ©2026 American Honda Motor Co., Inc.



GOHUNT Insider's Filtering tool lets you:

- Filter potential hunt districts by number of animals harvested, bull-to-cow ratios, public land percentage, and more: Target areas with solid animal numbers and good access. The data makes it easy to focus your efforts where they count.

- Dive into Unit Profiles of prospective hunt districts: Avoid broad generalizations by looking at the specific areas where hunters surveyed (pressure) is lighter, or where the terrain and vegetation suit your hunting style. This helps you find honey holes that many hunters overlook.

Bonus Tip: Use the “select seasons” and “weapon” filters to align with your exact tag type.

The beauty of this system is that you can research on the web side with a computer or use the GOHUNT mobile app.

Step 2: Get Visual With GOHUNT Maps

Once you've identified a few promising hunt districts on Filtering, it's time to hit the GOHUNT Maps platform. This tool is integrated directly into Insider on both the web and our mobile app and allows you to:

- View 3D terrain and satellite imagery: See ridges, valleys, and elevation changes to evaluate glassing spots, travel routes, potential bedding areas, and find areas elk and deer might live in.

- Start an initial marking of waypoints for camp, glassing knobs, and access points: Build your hunt plan visually. Save key locations so you know how to hunt the unit and locate backup spots if things change.

- Layer public/private boundaries, land ownership, trails, burns, and more: Ensuring you're hunting legally and efficiently is always essential. Understanding access points and wildfire history can be game-changing.

- Sync everything to your phone for offline use: The GOHUNT Maps app lets you take all of your e-scouting into the field, even without cell service, once you download layers for offline use.

- Stack layers to zero in on areas with high opportunity AND access: One of my favorites is stacking layers like elevation, species distribution, and terrain type, which allows you to pinpoint the best overlap of animal presence and huntability.

- View Montana Block Management maps: During the summer months (Typically around August 15), Montana FWP provides maps of all of the Block Management Areas in each region. You can also view these areas starting in the late summer on GOHUNT Maps.

Expert Strategy: Save 2-3 different “Plan A, B, and C” plans to account for access issues or hunting pressure.
(continued on page 34)



C'mon INN HOTEL & SUITES

Lodge Like Atmosphere With Resort Amenities

- Spacious & Comfortable Rooms • Free Hot Breakfast
 - Large Indoor Pools & Jacuzzis - All Hotels
 - Business Meeting Facilities
- High Speed Internet Access • Exercise & Game Rooms
- Refrigerators, Microwaves, Coffee Makers In Every Room
 - 50" or Larger Flat Screen TV In Every Room

BILLINGS - 800-655-1170
BOZEMAN - 866-782-2717
MISSOULA - 888-989-5569
www.cmoninn.com

Like us on

<https://www.facebook.com/HuntingFishingNews>

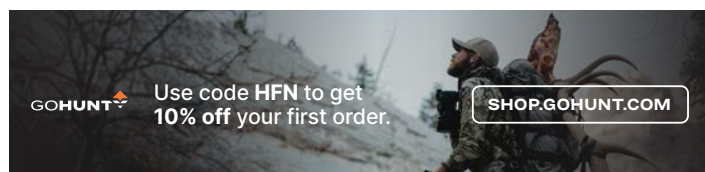
Contests, photos, hunting and fishing news, recipes & more



HUNTING & FISHING NEWS
Have it delivered FREE to your inbox.
Just go to www.huntingfishingnews.net

NEVER MISS AN ISSUE!
DOWNLOAD
READ
PRINT
SHARE

The entire contents is © 2026, all rights reserved. May not be reproduced without prior consent. The material and information printed is from various sources from which there can be no warranty or responsibility by Big Sky Outdoor News & Adventure, Inc. Nor does this material necessarily express the views of Big Sky Outdoor News & Adventure, Inc. All photo & editorial submissions become the property of Big Sky Outdoor News & Adventure, Inc. to use or not use at their discretion. Volume 23, Issue 4. Cover photo: twildlife | depositphotos.com



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



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

JIGGING SHALLOW INTO JUNE

Northland Fishing Tackle
www.northlandtackle.com

Perhaps the single quickest abandoned pattern in a walleye angler's arsenal is jigging shallow, and I plead "guilty" to the above charge. Anglers that have six boxes with nothing but jigs in them for the opener, forget what part of the garage they're now in collecting dust. Early in the season, shiners are purchased not by the dozen or the scoop, but by the gallon, as the simple act of just threading one on the correct-sized jig will instill confidence throughout the north country and beyond. One week later, anglers flee the shallow shorelines, developing weed lines, and near-shore rock piles in the hope of greener pasture out deep, and more familiar, longer-lasting summer patterns. Rigging, slip-bobber, pulling crankbaits, and anything but jigs seem to get the nod as temperatures rise and the fishing heats up. Yet, there's plenty of reason to keep those jigs around, and even tip them with minnows in the weeks after the opener. What's more, is that there are a number of developing shallow bites right now that keep jigs in play, just maybe with some different meat threaded onto the business end.

I asked the famed guide, Tony Roach, last week what was getting him bit, and his response was simple. "Everyone sees me up shallow in 4-8 feet of water. They think I'm bass fishing, but I'm whaling on walleyes right now." Truly, there are strong segments of the walleye population in most lakes that never leave the shallows for the entirety of the year. That's news for structure fishermen that use electronics to pick apart deep water structures and dissect off-shore features during this time of year. As the lake system ramps up biologically, fish need food, cover, and oxygen, with the greatest limiter being food. Developing weeds, especially cabbage, are magnets when interspersed with rock or other hard bottoms. These locations always hold some bait, and typically always hold some walleyes throughout the season.

My experience has seen some good shallow bites going right now too, with the best being a river run in 5-7 feet of water. Current is the great equalizer, as high skies, bright sun, and no wind still translate into a great day when fishing current seams, eddies, and riffles in rivers. The same conditions that absolutely kill other patterns, especially in clear water natural lakes, don't seem to hassle the river fish that are taking advantage of the current that sweeps unsuspecting invertebrates, bait, and terrestrials downstream and into their gullets. Long-lining and lead core staples that typically produce good numbers of fish during this time of year were poor in comparison.

The bite ebbs and flows, with low-light periods, still shining brightest, but moving water is a great savior to an otherwise weary day of walleye fishing.

In both jigging shallow scenarios, the classic pitch-and-run technique utilizing jigs and shiners was tweaked if only slightly. "As the water warms up, there's a transition to where plastics become just as, if not more effective than shiners or other minnows," mentions Tony. "It's something I see every year. As people move to the mud or mid-lake structure to rig, I simply switch to plastics and get these fish to chase a bit more," explains Roach about his shallow techniques, honed on the big waters of Mille Lacs, Leech, and Winnie. Roach continues, "Plastics allow me to fish more quickly, cast further without losing bait, and keep on a hot bite without pausing to re-bait." Those valuable bite windows can be small and precious, especially in unfavorable conditions, so staying with the heavy part of the bite and not missing out on fish becomes crucial to making a decent day into a great one. Visual cues put off by paddle tails, curly-tailed grubs, and even minnow-shaped flukes go well beyond your average minnow, especially in the colors and hues available. Nowadays, our choices for colors to pique a fish's curiosity are nearly limitless, and often we can mimic forage that doesn't even resemble our offering just by switching colors. For example, an orange jig and grub combination looks nothing like a rusty crayfish, but don't tell that to Lake of the Woods walleyes that were coughing up blaze-orange crustacean parts all over the livewell last summer. Those fish happily engaged that offering and crawled near the bottom on many of the rock reefs and points that we fished.

The plastic design has come a long way since basic Mister Twister varieties from days gone by. Color and flash give way to vibration, flicker, and quiver all throughout the very lifelike baits on the market today. The end result is an attraction based not just on visual cues, but key components in the way a bait pulsates that trigger fish's predatory instincts. As walleye's lateral lines pick up these distinct tremors in the water column, I'm convinced that the heavy "thumpers" truly call in fish from a distance to warrant a close investigation at the very least.

Let's say that for whatever reason, plastics just aren't your thing, or they haven't given you the confidence you need to reliably pitch them all day. As larvae rise from the lake bottom in clouds, and the resulting hatch of spinners covers everything near your favorite fishery, crawler bites become stronger no matter what part of the water column you fish. People pull them behind sinkers and on spinner rigs, but don't hesitate to thread one up a jig-head and pinch off the bottom half of the crawler. This is a go-to river technique that produces walleye, and often, the unintended non-target species. Few things that swim will offer a jig and nightcrawler safe passage back to the boat.

Stay shallow a bit longer and see if those same opener fish aren't near where you left them. Fishing a jig is a rewarding way to get bit, and offers a few more weeks of great near-shore fishing for walleyes.

Three Summertime Fishing Tips

Northland Fishing Tackle www.northlandtackle.com

Top guides reveal three tricks for tagging fish at the plate

Every guide worth his salt has one. You know, that sneaky trick up his sleeve that always keeps his clients' rods bent. Cold fronts, breathless firecracker days, July blizzards (it could happen)—the conditions are almost beside the point. These slick tricks simply catch fish, atmospheric conditions losing their bark and bite. Ask any guide: when times get tough...it's really nice to know you've got that ace bait awaiting deployment.

In my own guiding days, the golden ticket was a Gopher Bait Spin tipped with a minnow. Throw these simple contraptions behind the boat, start driving around the weed edge, and pretty soon, we'd have all kinds of fish hooked up—everything from bass and pike to walleyes and crappies. Another client's fish fry was delivered. The photos would tell the story—big grins on everyone's faces. Curiously, today lures like the Bait Spin remains overlooked and underutilized. So simple in design, but oh so appealing to fish, which pretty much describes the three patterns that follow: basic, fundamentally great baits that simply catch lots and lots of fish.

Sneakin' through the Weeds

Early in my guiding career, I still recall a particular blazing-hot August day. It had been a challenging one, to say the least. I was falling all over myself apologizing to my clients for the tough bite when who should roll into the dock but the legendary Marv Koep, possibly the most-recognized fishing guide in the North Country. Of course, Marv had fish (he always did)—a beautiful mixed bag of walleyes, pike, crappies, and even a deep-bodied smallmouth for someone's wall.

Days later, I caught up with Marv, who graciously shared his secret. "Weed Weasels tipped with minnows," he said simply, flashing his characteristic sunshine smile.

As I gradually discovered in the years that followed, Northland Weed Weasels were a secret of many top guides. Slick pointed nose, tapered head, light Y-weed-guard, bait-keeper, Mustad Ultra-Point hook—the combination proven deadly for everything with fins. Mostly, though, the boys kept the 'Sneak secret under their hat, so word never spread much beyond a handful of local sharpies. Still, I quickly learned to add these amazingly weedless jigs to my own bag of tricks. On any given summer day, I always had an array of rods rigged with Weed Weasels. Slowly we'd move along the edge of the spacious weed bar, peppering casts up into the vegetation, and swimming the combo back through the cover. Within a cast or two, rods would bend. The trick never failed to produce action. And I mean never.

(continued on the next page)

SAVE THE DATE

25TH ANNUAL
MONTANA PIKEMASTERS PUBLIC FISHING
TOURNAMENT

Limited to 75 Boats

\$1,000 Award for the Biggest Pike

MONTANA PIKE MASTERS BILLINGS CHAPTER INC.

\$200 per Team
Entry must be postmarked by June 12, 2026

\$250 per Team
Entry postmarked After June 12, 2026

JUNE 27TH AND 28TH 2026

Rock Creek Marina • Fort Peck, Montana

APPLICATION: www.montanapikemasters.com OR call Eugene at 406-690-4044

Three Summertime Fishing Tips

(continued from page 11)

Sometimes, we'd tip the jig with a three-inch grub for extra buoyancy, color, and action, but live bait was the thing. Wild redbait chubs, small suckers, and golden shiners—you absolutely knew something was going to take a bite. In the world of guiding, that level of confidence is a beautiful thing. The Weed Weasel fished through weeds so well, so clean, that anyone could catch fish with it.

Throw the bait out, count it down, and start slowly reeling it back. Then as now, it's just that simple. When summer's heat sends fish deep into vegetation, many of the best Northwoods guides still reach for their classic Weed Weasels. Ask their clients. These jigs just plain catch fish.

A Rockin' Bite

While everybody and their uncle's out backtrolling the rocks, sand, and mud, guide Tim Anderson likes to cast weeds. Nothing crazy about that. Nothing, that is, except the walleyes, muskies, pike, and bass he's extracting from these jungles. Anderson operates Central Minnesota's Big Fish Hunt Guide Service, chasing the hottest predator bites going. This year, he discovered a deadly new lure that's out-fished everything from crankbaits to spinnerbaits and jigs to jerkbaits.

For Anderson, that lure is the Northland Rock-R-Minnow—a super-realistic soft plastic paddletail swimbait. Among insiders, the Rock-R-Minnow is on the fast track to "classic" status, a lure that's always kept rigged and ready in the boat, even though said insiders aren't themselves spilling the beans (sound familiar?).

Anderson likes the bait for its lively, yet easygoing stature. "If you can cast and reel, you can catch fish with this bait," he says.

And he's right. Rigged with a simple 3/8- to 1/2-ounce jig-head or the weighted Lipstick Swimbait hook included in the package, the 5-inch Rock-R-Minnow casts like a bullet, sinks fast, and slithers through the grass like a snake. Reel, reel, then pause a second. Reel-reel-reel-pause again. Rip a weed or two. Whack! That's all there is to it.

On recent trips to a famous walleye lake, Anderson and I boated fifteen to twenty big walleyes each day, as well as several bonus pike and bass. We filled the Frabill net with a constant procession of heavyweights, all while dancing around bored jiggers and riggers.

Roach's World Spins

"If I simply want to catch fish in summer, I'm pulling my little spinner rigs," says veteran guide Tony Roach. Growing up with a family of mega-talented anglers, Roach learned early that if he wanted to catch more than sloppy seconds, he'd have to get sneaky with his own set of tricks. Chief among them was a small spinner rig tipped with live bait. More often than not, Roach's approach delivers the goods—a fact to which I can readily attest.


"In summer, I like to tie my own multi-species rigs," Roach states. "Start with a three to six-foot leader of 6-pound test mono. Snell on a single #6 Super-Glo Attractor Hook. Slide on three or four 4mm beads, a clevis, and a #2 Baitfish-Image Colorado blade.

In dirty water, I like Northland's Golden Shiner pattern. For clear lakes, the Yellow Perch pattern is a winner." In weeds, Roach runs a bullet sinker. Over clean bottom, he prefers a Northland Slip-Bouncer, which lets him troll faster without losing the ability to feed line to biting fish.

He tips the rig with a medium leech and simply starts cruising along the structure using his bow-mount electric motor. When the leech needs replacing, a Frabill Leech Tote is always at hand and quickly coughs up a volunteer.

Roach's multi-species spinners account for a dazzling array of catches. The #2 blade weeds out little panfish, and selects for the biggest bluegills in the lake. If the spot holds crappies, walleyes, perch, or bass, the rig takes them as well. "It's what I call my vacuum rig," Roach quips. "If you pull this thing through fish, it's going to get bit."

Indeed, in want of a summertime fish fry, or just plain action at the end of your line, it would be hard to imagine a more potent lineup than the triple threat of tricks above. Some baits overlooked, others destined for greatness—regardless, I won't be betting against those above.



SIBERIAN COOLERS
PROVEN BEYOND
SIBERIANCOOLERS.COM | 844.782.COLD (2653)
FREE SHIPPING WITHIN CONTINENTAL USA
CAM LATCH SITS FLUSH TO THE BODY FACE.
KEEPS FLY LINES FREE AND ENABLES YOU TO PACK
THE COOLER TIGHT WITH OTHER GEAR.
REVERSIBLE EZ SLIDE-NON-SLIP RUBBER FEET
IGBC CERTIFIED BEAR RESISTANT
WHITE | GRANITE | SAHARA TAN
FREE ACCESSORIES
LIFETIME WARRANTY
"BE THE ALPHA...
OWN THE ALPHA"
@ # f v



Photo courtesy IDF&G <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

New State Record Burbot Hoisted Out Of Kootenai River

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

Caleb Wilson, a local angler from Troy, hauled up the Kootenai River's most legendary fish. And not just any legendary fish, a new state catch-and-release record.

Burbot—also known as cusk, freshwater cod, ling, lingcod, and eelpout—are the only freshwater cod species found in North America, and they have a special place in Idaho's heart. These long-bodied, cold-water fish are not your run-of-the-mill sport fish. Burbot have flat heads and long bodies that sprout long pectoral fins just behind their gills. Their back-half is eel-like, with stumpy rounded fins. Burbot have brownish-yellow mottled skin, earning them the nickname "Kootenai leopards" among anglers.

The burbot on the end of Wilson's hook that day on March 19 fit the description perfectly, with one small caveat: It stretched 26.75 inches long!

Wilson knew he might have a state record contender on his hands, so he whipped out the tape measure under the light of his headlamp. As the name implies, these leopard-like fish are predatory and feed during the night. They also tend to hang out during the day in deep, slow-moving pools, then seek out food such as crayfish or small fish in shallow water.

Conservation partnerships between Idaho Fish and Game, British Columbia officials, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho and funding from Bonneville Power Administration have helped bring back the river's burbot numbers. Decades of aquaculture research from the University of Idaho, and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho's successful hatchery stocking program have been helping fuel the increasing burbot numbers.

Despite being often overlooked gamefish that make impeccable table fare, Wilson opted to release the fish back into the Kootenai, but not before earning himself a place in Idaho's record books...



2026 Lund 200 Heavy Gauge (New Model For 2026)

Mercury 225XL Pro XS

Mercury 15EXLPT EFI Pro Kicker

EZ Loader Galvanized Custom Trailer

Options: Stainless Prop, Smartcraft Gauge, Kicker Tie Bar, Port/Starb In-Floor Rod Storage, 1/2 Hardtop, Net Holder- Starb Side, 6" Stern Rails w/ Downrigger Mounting Pads, Stern Cover, Smooth Moves Seat Pedestals, Bed Rails, Dual Bilge Pumps, 5 Bank On Board Charger, Hardtop LED Flood Light, LED Docking Lights, Electric Trim Tabs, Black/Chrome Raised Lund, Load Guides, Spare Tire.



2026 Lund 2075 Tye

Mercury 250XL Pro XS DTS, Mercury 15ELPT Pro Kicker

Shoreland'r Custom Tandem Axle Trailer

Options: Power Steering Upgrade, Smartcraft Gauge, Drotto, Bow Step Ladder, Suspension Pilot Chairs, 6- Sporttraks Brackets w/ Rod Holders, Washdown System, Wireless Phone Charger, Lund Ruler, Rockford Stereo Upgrade, Aquatracton Weatherboard Protection, Port Rod Tubes, 4 Bank On Board Charger, Travel Cover, Sport Top w/ Walkway Curtain, Humminbird Xplore 10 MSI, Humminbird Xplore 10 MSI CHO, Minnkota Terrova 112/MDI/wr-72", Fully Networked, All Batteries, Transom Saver.



2026 Vexus DVX22s

Mercury 400L Verado V10, Mercury 15ELPT Pro Kicker

Vexus Tandem Axle Custom Trailer

Options: Two Tone Deck and Hull Stripe, Reflex Flooring Throughout, DVX Victor Package (Intensive Care Livewell System w/ Oxygenator, High Density Polyethylene Pad On Center Rod Box, CoastKey Digital Ignition, Airwave Pedestals), Raw Water Wash Down, Digital Ignition Key Fob, Minnkota On Board Charger 10x5, 3-100AH Amped Trolling Motor Batteries, 1-100AH Amped House Battery, AGM Crank Battery, Humminbird Xplore 12 MSI, Humminbird Xplore 12 MSI CHO, Minnkota Ulterra 115/MSI/72" 36v, TM Plug, Quick Release Bracket, Mercury System Monitor Gauge, Bobs Hydraulic Jackplate w/ Gauge, 54" Rear Handrails, Bow Handrails, Stereo System, Auto Glide Trim Tab Upgrade, Bike Seat, Deluxe Boat Cover.

**THE BEST PRICES ON THE BEST BOATS
BIGGEST LUND DEALER IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST**

Townsend Marine

7809 Hwy. 287 S., Townsend

406-266-5700

www.townsendmarine.com

See us for our large selection of Boats, ATVs & Accessories.

4 Tips For Fishing Streamers On Wilderness Creeks

By Zach Lazzari
Budge's Wilderness Lodge <https://www.budgeslodge.com>

When we trek into the wilderness for wild and unpressured trout, streamers are rarely on the mind. Thoughts of eager fish that will rise to attractor dry flies is usually the name of the game. After years of guiding and fishing in these environments, I've come to really enjoy fishing streamers in smaller waters.

Most streams are hiding a few fish that are outliers in terms of age class and size. These slightly larger specimens exist in small numbers and are difficult to locate as the small to mid-range class of fish are quicker to strike your dry fly. If a particular stretch of water feels like it has the depth and structure to hold a bigger fish, I often cover it with a dry fly first, let it rest, then I return with a streamer to probe for larger fish.

Here are several tips you can use to build a simple strategy for fishing streamers on wilderness creeks with big results...

1. Fishing Unweighted vs Weighted Flies

I carry a mix of weighted and unweighted flies. It doesn't take much weight to punch below the surface and you really only need a few feet of depth to cover a small stream thoroughly.



Photo credit Zach Lazzari courtesy Budge's Wilderness Lodge <https://www.budgeslodge.com>

When a deeper hole does appear, simply allow the fly to sink a bit longer. When fishing unweighted flies, adding split shot roughly 6-inches above the fly will help to reach depth while allowing the fly to swim and move with a ton of action.

Weighted flies save the hassle of adding split shot and a simple bead head, cone head or dumbbell eye pattern is a great option for any small stream. The only time this becomes an issue is when you want to fish through shallow sections of the stream. Move the fly quickly in these situations to avoid snagging bottom.

2. Choosing the Right Size

Fly size and profile is important because small fish will also chase down your streamer. You can increase hookup rates by fishing flies in the 8-14 size range.

TRAILHEAD
RIVER SPORTS
Missoula, Montana

Moving at the Speed of Life

2505 S. Garfield St., Missoula, MT | 406.543.6966 | TrailHeadRiverSports.com

They border on the micro-streamer category and do a great job of imitating small baitfish. There's no need for the big articulated streamers you might fish in larger rivers and lakes.

Many fish will charge the fly in a territorial response, nipping at the tail. For this reason, shorter hook shanks and flies with short tails or trailing hooks will increase hookup rates. The aggressive nature of fish in these situations makes for some serious fun.



3. Fishing Strategies

The best thing about streamer fishing a small stream is the ability to cover everything with ease. A dry fly tends to drift through a lane and while fish often move to eat the fly, it's not swiping across every inch of holding water. These two simple approaches will cover 90 percent of the habitat, giving you an opportunity at nearly every fish in the area:

Upstream Sink and Strip - Casting up and across while methodically working upstream means that you aren't kicking rocks, casting shadows and spooking fish. It's the best approach when fish are a little edgy and spooky. It's also ideal for deeper runs where you want to get deep while staying back and away from the run itself.

Cast directly up or up and across. Line control is critical as you strip to maintain tension while the fly sinks. When it feels like you are in the zone, use long strips followed by short pauses to regain depth. Work from the tailout to the head of the run and hold on tight as this technique can move the biggest trout in any stream or river.

Across or Down and Across - Controlling line and maintaining speed on the strip is difficult on the upstream presentation. Sometimes, fishing across or down and across is the absolute best approach. It's efficient and you can use the current to swing the fly. Ideally, stay near the bank or even on the bank to avoid spooking fish. Be mindful of your shadow and simply cast and retrieve, hitting every likely holding area while slowly moving downstream.

BOOK YOUR STAY TODAY FOR MOUNTAIN FUN IN LINCOLN MONTANA

Make us your basecamp for hunting, fishing, hiking, off-trail riding and more.

Nestled in the heart of some of Montana's most pristine wilderness. All rooms have cable TV, microwave, refrigerators, coffee pot.

- Kitchenettes • Laundry room
- Sauna • Free WiFi



Reasonable rates

**LEEPER'S
PONDEROSA
MOTEL**

110 1st Ave., Lincoln, MT
(406) 362-4333
Pets welcome

4. Favorite Patterns

Simple flies that move well without being too bulky are the best bet. You only need a few patterns in different color schemes. Olive, black and purple, brown and natural colors with a little flash will catch trout anywhere.

Slump Buster - The size, darting motion and color schemes in Olive/Red or Black/Purple make this an incredible option. I fished these in small creeks in Alaska and the trout went crazy for them, hooking far more fish than the typical mouse or flesh fly. For creeks, the Slump Buster is a must-carry fly pattern.

Rubber Leg Buggers - Buggers are my go-to streamer. The classic pattern is simple, easy to tie and it performs well in moving and stillwaters. You can dead drift, retrieve or swing with success. For small creeks, I tie short tails to avoid missing the tail strikes. Olive or brown/yellow with rubber legs are my personal favorites.

Muddler Minnow - The design and performance of this classic pattern is fantastic. It's also versatile with the option to fish as a dry or wet fly. Add some floatant and you have a hopper pattern. Swing just below the surface as a streamer or add a small split shot to really get deep.

Clouser Minnow - This pattern is a treasured saltwater and bass fly but it crosses over to trout really well. Tie them small with light dumbbell eyes for best results. The materials are sparse and they leave the hook exposed for better hook sets.

Sculpzilla - An all-time favorite for trout, the trailing hook design makes this a winner in the backcountry. Expect more hookups as fish nip at the tail of the fly. White with red is my favorite color, although any of the commercial color schemes are very natural and effective.

Contact Budge's Wilderness Lodge With Questions
Have questions about wilderness fishing expeditions with Budge's in Colorado? Please call or text them at 970-536-1341. You can find details and pricing on their fishing trips here:
<https://www.budgeslodge.com/fly-fishing>.

How To Locate Elk During A September Bowhunt

By Trail Kreitzer

Originally published at  GOHUNT.com

Elk are relatively simple in regards to their requirements to survive, and it's commonly stated that there are three pillars for good habitat: food, water, and cover. I might add a fourth, which would be hunting pressure and how elk react to it.

In order to find elk, the key is to know where they are most likely to live. Depending on the time of year that you're hunting, the locations you find elk will vary. For this article, I'm going to primarily approach it from a September archery perspective.

Once you move into the last couple weeks of October, it seems that there's a transitional period where mature bulls are moving into more secluded pockets of good feed and cover where they are less likely to be pressured. During the late hunts from November and even later, bulls may be occupying south facing slopes more readily and ridgelines where they can find feed and get some warmth from the sun to ward off the cold season temperatures. These statements are generalities and depend on the weather; however, throughout much of the central and more northern states, it's a great starting spot.

With that, let's dive into September archery elk.

Bedding areas for elk

Bedding areas are critical for elk and archery elk hunters. In many cases, bedding habitat may be the most important. If you think about a typical archery elk hunting scenario, bowhunters are trying to find elk in the morning hours when rutting bulls and cows are feeding and working their way toward a bedding area. In my experience, it's common that a herd bull with cows will not initially leave his harem and come back to challenge another bull or inspect to see if he's lost a cow. Over the years, I've had good success remaining within earshot of a moving herd during the morning hours until late in the morning when they're settling into a bedding area. As the herd slows or enters their bedding area and feels more secure, a herd bull is more likely to come back to check out another bull or search for a lost cow. In mid-afternoon, I regularly hear bulls get up from their bed and bugle a few times to test the pulse of other elk in the area, and even later in the day, the whole herd will get up to feed. They may also begin to move towards water, which they will hit either just before or after dark. The point being: bedding areas are important to helping you get close to bull elk. But what makes a good bedding habitat?

Elk need shade during the warmer months of August and September. A bull elk is a big animal with a thick hide, and in order to thrive, they need cooler

temperatures to regulate body temperature. Shady, cooler slopes are preferred for bedding during the archery season. North facing slopes are cooler, wetter, and typically composed of dense evergreen timber.

East facing slopes offer some sun early in the day, but shade out sooner in the afternoon. In most cases, during the archery season, elk are bedding on north, northeast or east facing slopes that have the vegetation to offer long-term shade. It's not to say that they'll never bed on a south or west facing slope, but it's far less likely. Elk seem to gravitate towards dense lodgepole, mixed spruce and fir forests. I've also seen them bed in thick stands of regenerating aspen several years after a wildfire. Old growth aspen stands produce good feed in the understory, but are less desirable for bedding. Elk will also regularly bed in blowdown and deadfall zones where there is good shade and security.

To drill down further, mid-elevation benches and flats on a slope make great elk bedding habitat. Herds of elk prefer milder slopes to bed, perhaps in the 10- to 20-degree range. They often bed on a bench just below the crest of a ridge or a peak, which offers them good wind detection and escape over the ridge. Escape routes are worth noting: elk like areas where they can easily dive off into a remote canyon, up and over a ridge, or into thick vegetation or blowdown to evade predators easily. The prevailing wind and thermals can further dictate where elk are most likely to bed. Two points to consider are early morning and late evening timeframes when the thermals move down slope. During late morning, noon, and afternoon hours while the sun is warming the slope, the thermals will move uphill. In addition, where you may have prevailing winds, elk often bed so they can monitor both for danger. The normal pattern for elk is that they will move up a slope in the morning with the thermals in their face. Early in the mid-afternoon/evening hours, they will regularly feed downhill, once again with the wind in their face. Elk utilize the wind to help them avoid predation, and their bedding areas are selected to give them a good advantage. Lastly, a good bedding area is close to good feed and water. However, elk will travel for miles for both feed and water if they are pressured, so this is less of a determining factor. Lastly, hunting pressure is a consideration. The best bedding area in the world won't hold elk if there is ample hunting pressure. If the area is easily reached, glassed from a road or just generally highly pressured, it's not going to hold elk.

Water and its importance for elk

Elk need water. During the summer months and through the September and early October rut, it becomes even more important. A mature bull can require two to five gallons of water per day, depending on temperature and forage moisture. During the rut, when temperatures are hot and dry, water will influence an elk's daily patterns. If the weather is dry and relatively warm, elk will have to go to water every single day. Water sources that are close to feeding and bedding areas are preferred, but, once again, elk will travel for water if they have to because of

hunting pressure. Elk will seek out creeks, streams, or rivers; however, in my experience, they seem to gravitate towards seeps, springs, or standing water in small catchments or ponds. I believe that it's in part the minerals and deposits associated with standing water, and that they can probably hear and see better while watering from a stationary source.



Photos credit Nate Nebel courtesy GOHUNT.com

In addition to drinking water, bulls will utilize seeps and springs to wallow in. A wallow is essentially a water/mud source that bulls will use during the rut to cool down and scent-mark. Wallows are mostly established during the first part of September as bulls are covering ground in search of cows, but I have observed and killed bulls while ambush hunting on wallows throughout the first three weeks of September. They are creating a walking scent trail to advertise themselves as a bull on the lookout for cows. To scout for water sources, I use our GOHUNT Maps in 3D mode.

I'm primarily looking for isolated water tanks in arid terrain, hidden springs, seeps, and wallows. The historical imagery tool in both mapping platforms can be very helpful to analyze each water source, and, in many cases, I can see if there's a wallow established.

If I can find water sources in close proximity to mid slope benches in a shady north or eastern facing slope, it's a good indication that elk will probably be using those.

I've observed elk watering from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. before feeding or just after feeding as they approach bedding areas. During the midday hours, a bull will often get up and sneak away from his bedded cows to wallow and water.

One of the best times to hunt a water/wallow is in the evening hours from about 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Herds will get up in the afternoon and feed towards water sources and regularly water just before or after dark.

Overall, elk need water every day during September. They prefer springs, seeps or water catchments like ponds. Wallows are a key component for bull elk during the pre-rut and rut. To find likely water sources, use aerial imagery on GOHUNT Maps in combination with the water layer. Finally, keep in mind that seeps and springs within or close to bedding areas are ideal.

(continued on next page)



"BE THE ALPHA...OWN THE ALPHA"

CAM LATCH SITS FLUSH TO THE BODY FACE ALLOWING THE COOLER TO BE TIGHTLY PACKED WITH OTHER GEAR & KEEPS FLY LINES FREE.

FREE ACCESSORIES | LIFETIME WARRANTY
 IGBC CERTIFIED BEAR RESISTANT
 REVERSIBLE EZ SLIDE - NON-SLIP RUBBER FEET
 WHITE | GRANITE | SAHARA TAN
 FREE SHIPPING WITHIN THE CONTINENTAL USA

SIBERIANCOOLERS.COM | 844.782.COLD (2653) |





How To Locate Elk During A September Bowhunt

(continued from page 17)

Locating elk feed

Elk are more opportunistic feeders with a wider range of food sources that they can consume to survive when compared to a mule deer. During the summer months — and even into September — they are primarily consuming grasses, forbs (broadleaf plants) and new growth. As grasses cure, they will gravitate more towards a mix of grasses and shrubs like serviceberry and snowberry. While we've all seen classic elk terrain in movies and magazines, it's rare to see elk out feeding freely in big open green meadows during the September hunting seasons. At that time of year, they feed more in isolated pockets or micro meadows located near bedding areas. When I'm evaluating maps or looking at a landscape, I'm looking for a "mosaic." What I mean by that is I'm looking for areas that are broken with a mix of small pockets of feed and cover. I often use the word "edge" when referring to feeding areas. Elk like the edges of cover to feed. They also like areas that offer both a good understory of feed and cover. That can be provided through disturbances like fire or beetle kill. In those cases, the disturbance will have opened up the canopy, allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor and will generate new growth while the standing dead trees provide cover. Some of the best elk habitat can be found in new burns (one to five) years old or in beetle-killed pine forests. In those areas, elk have cover, new green feed, and often, water sources will have emerged since the trees are no longer pulling water from the ground. However, jackstraw downed trees can be very hard to navigate and hunt, but it does provide great elk habitat. Elk feed heavily for one to two hours after sunrise before moving to bed and about one to two hours in the evenings before dark. Feeding areas are often adjacent or below bedding areas. Once again, an elk's primary means of defense is its nose, so they will bed and feed where they can use the thermals and prevailing winds to reach those feeding areas safely.

Pressure

When I think about a mule deer buck, I know it will avoid hunting pressure by becoming nocturnal or adjusting his bedding and feeding areas ever so slightly to avoid being detected. He may slip onto the backside of a ridge or move up or down the canyon slightly. Elk are not the same. Elk will move miles away from pressure, and they can do so because they can survive on a wider arrangement of feed. They are a bigger animal, they move more easily across the landscape, and seem to be content to avoid hunting pressure by just moving into entirely new drainage and terrain. So, is the most remote elk habitat the best? The answer to that is, to some extent, yes. More remote, quality habitat will be more productive, but that's not to suggest that more accessible terrain can not also hold elk.

It really boils down to where people are hunting, and most hunters are prone to using the same trailheads, trails, and roads. There's really no silver bullet to avoid other hunting pressure, but here are some commonalities to areas or factors that often yield less hunting pressure.

Hunting weekdays rather than weekends will often result in lower hunting pressure. Most bowhunters are willing to backpack hunt or day hunt anywhere from three to five miles from their jump off point, but there are fewer willing to hunt over six miles away from their rig. Before I leave, I'll glass and listen for pressure before committing. I might glass trailheads, roads, and visible main ridges for other hunters. In most cases, I can find aerial imagery during the month of September, so I can look to see where the vehicles are on the landscape and how many.

There are also often good hunt areas closer to access points, but those might be the steeper blowdown or thick portions of timber that are harder to get into and hunt.

Typically, when I hunt a new area and I'm covering ground, I'll take note of where I'm seeing other hunters and how far they are from the trailhead. In many cases, they are mostly hunting in that three to five mile range, leaving the closer quality areas and the areas even deeper into the backcountry more untouched.

Additionally, I might suggest thinking about barriers to accessing good areas. If there's a river crossing that limits most people or if there's public land on the backside of private land that's difficult to access, those areas are generally much less pressured. Don't overlook tiny basins or benches that most people glass past on their way to the more traditional looking basin and bowls.

One of my favorite ways to avoid hunting pressure and find elk is to stay mobile and hunt across the landscape, either by backpacking or in my vehicle.

Far too many hunters get married to their plan or their spot that has produced in the past.

If you aren't finding elk or if you aren't finding bulls that you have a high percentage of killing, move. In some instances, there will be elk in an area even though there's a good amount of hunting pressure. In those situations, the bulls may bugle less, only randomly calling very early in the morning or evening. They may only bugle after dark. You may see bulls moving to heavy cover earlier or onto private lands or inaccessible areas. All of these can be signs of high hunting pressure, and in those cases, we have to decide to go find less pressured, more killable elk or hunt them differently.

Elk hunting with a bow is a lot like a chess game; you have to be able to evaluate the elk behavior, the terrain, and the other hunting pressure to see where you can ultimately get within range of a bull and kill it.

(continued on page 20)



SHOT-CALLING PRECISION

IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

RAZOR® HD 4000 GB Ballistic Laser Rangefinder

One device. All the range and ballistic data you need to make the shot of a lifetime, every time. For precision shooters and long-range hunters, the fully loaded Razor® HD 4000 GB accelerates your speed to target, helping you range with first-shot confidence at pushbutton speed. Rugged. Reliable. Whether targeting a trophy above the treeline, across an open prairie, or ringing steel out to 4000 yards, the Razor® HD 4000 GB delivers all the range, ballistic, and environmental data you need for absolute accuracy when and wherever opportunity happens.



- Included in the Box**
- Premium Carry Case
 - Utility Clip
 - Bungee Cord Lanyard
 - 2mm Hex Wrench
 - Lens Cloth
 - CR2 Battery



UNLIMITED UNCONDITIONAL LIFETIME WARRANTY

**BINOCULARS - RANGEFINDERS - RIFLESCOPES - SPOTTING SCOPES
MONOCULARS - TRIPODS - APPAREL - GEAR**

BOB WARD'S
bobwards.com SPORTS & OUTDOORS
MISSOULA | BOZEMAN | HAMILTON

NEW! TRY OPTICS FINDER To Find The Right Optic For You
Go To: <https://opticsfinder.vortexoptics.com/preprod/categories>

JOIN THE VORTEX NATION



www.vortexoptics.com

How To Locate Elk During A September Bowhunt

(continued from page 18)



Finding areas to hunt elk

The information shared above will hopefully help you find good areas to hunt elk. Beyond knowing where elk are most likely going to be, there is the actual “finding” elk on the landscape. I have said it before, but I think glassing is underutilized by most archery elk hunters. I recall a hunt a few years ago when I hunted a new area that I’d never been to. The first morning, I climbed to a high point in the area that was approximately three miles in and spent that first half of the day glassing a giant swath of country. That glassing session told me the distance most other hunters were willing to backpack in, and I was able to see three large herds of elk. I made note of where each herd was and, more importantly, what type of terrain they were living in, including the elevation, the slope, and the vegetation. I learned most of what I would need to find success a few days later just by spending a half day glassing from a great vantage point.

Blind calling can be effective as well. I know several very successful archery elk hunters who cover great terrain day in and day out bugling and cow calling for elk and listening for a response. Night time bugling can be very effective in helping you locate herds. Night bugling from access roads and trails can be a great way to find elk that are holing up in pockets close to roads that other hunters are overlooking.

Overall, if you do your homework prior to leaving, make a plan, and then be adaptable and think like an elk when you get there, you’ll find elk and give yourself a great chance to kill one. Like I said, elk are a relatively simple animal...they need food, water, cover for bedding, and relief from pressure. As you evaluate the landscape, keep those in the forefront of your mind, and you’ll find elk.

Learn more or join GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com.

Pheasants Forever And Quail Forever Applaud NRCS Investment In Hunting Access On Private Lands

Pheasants Forever <https://www.pheasantsforever.org>

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today announced the availability of \$52 million to increase hunting and fishing access through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), the only federal program dedicated to enhancing recreational opportunities on private lands. This represents the largest single investment in VPA-HIP since its creation in 2008, and the first opportunity for new funding since 2019.

With funding secured through last year’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act, this announcement underscores the Trump Administration’s commitment to voluntary, incentive-based conservation and aligns with the goals of the Make America Beautiful Again Commission and the recently announced MABA250 initiative. “Expanding voluntary public access on private lands is one of the most effective ways to strengthen our nation’s upland hunting tradition while supporting private landowners,” said Andrew Schmidt, Director of Government Affairs for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever.

“Increasing access for hunting and incentivizing voluntary conservation on private lands are both key priorities for the MABA 250 initiative, and PF & QF thank NRCS and the Trump Administration for ensuring VPA-HIP will continue to deliver meaningful benefits to rural communities.”

With more than 70 percent of the lower 48 states in private ownership, sportsmen and women are reliant on private lands for hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities. VPA-HIP helps address this by opening a significant number of access opportunities on private farm, ranch, and forest land, while also contributing to habitat conservation efforts.

VPA-HIP provides competitive grants to state and tribal governments to incentivize landowners to voluntarily open private lands for public hunting, fishing, and other wildlife-dependent recreation, while upholding private property rights. **The application period will be open through June 8, with an estimated grant start date of September 30.**

About Pheasants Forever And Quail Forever

PF and QF make up the nation’s largest nonprofit organization dedicated to upland habitat conservation. This community of more than 500,000 members, supporters and partners is dedicated to the protection of our uplands through habitat improvement, public access, education and advocacy. A network of 754 local chapters spread across North America determine how 100 percent of their locally raised funds are spent — the only national conservation organization that operates through this grassroots structure. Since its creation in 1982, the organization has dedicated more than \$1 billion to 580,000 habitat projects benefiting 31 million acres.



Photo courtesy Zach Lazzari and Table Mountain Outfitters
<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>

5 Tips For Better Marksmanship

By Zach Lazzari
Table Mountain Outfitters
<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>

Too many hunters sight in their rifles just before the season and head straight into the field.

Shooting on a regular schedule and practicing in real hunting scenarios is essential for building a reliable skill set. Training at the range and in the field will make you a better marksman and a more successful hunter.

1. Get Your Setup Dialed

Shoot with the same rifle, optics and rests in practice as you will use during the hunt.

Shooting on a bench with a rest is great for sighting but it does not represent the shooting scenarios you will encounter in the field. Get your rifle outfitted with a bipod or use a tripod and rear sandbag for long distance shooting.

2. Shoot from Different Positions

Hunting rarely puts you in an easy shooting position. Get used to shooting from the ground, setup in prone positions, use shooting sticks and rest on tree limbs. The ability to set up efficiently and find a stable shooting position in any type of terrain will quickly give you an edge in the field. Simply working through the setups to find stable positions without firing is a useful practice. Focus on finding a stable rest and settling on your target downrange.

3. Shoot At Angles

In many hunting scenarios, you'll find yourself shooting at uphill or downhill angles. Practice shooting at different inclinations or declinations to prepare for hunts that take place in rugged terrain. It's not uncommon that you must take a shot down into a drainage or slightly uphill. Take the time to work through different scenarios and practice at a variety of angles until your shot placement has confidence on the mountain.

Skinner® Sights LLC
MACHINED FROM SOLID BARSTOCK
STURDY SIGHTS
Rifle cases & more
for your rifles



PLEASE SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION
WWW.SKINNERSIGHTS.COM
P.O. Box 1810, St. Ignatius, MT. 59865

P.O. Box 1810, St. Ignatius, MT. 59865

4. Range vs Field

Shooting at the range is great but it's difficult to get angled positions and mimic hunting scenarios. The range is a great asset and is convenient but head out into the field for practice whenever possible. You can combine shooting sessions with physical training by hiking to a remote area where shooting is safe and legal.

The range is ideal when you are short on time but hit the mountains for shooting practice whenever possible.

5. Practice Often

Frequency makes all the difference when developing marksmanship skills. Set a schedule and shoot as often as possible. Ideally, you will shoot once a week throughout the summer. Consider ramping up the month or two prior to a hunt and really find your groove while building confidence. It will make all the difference when you make a difficult shot in the field.

Learn About Hunts with Table Mountain Outfitters

If you'd like to learn more about guided hunts with Table Mountain Outfitters, please explore their website at:
<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>.

They offer hunts for antelope, deer, elk, mountain lion and spring black bear.

Send them a message at:
<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/contact-us/>
or give them a call at 307-632-6352.

They would love for you to come live THE LIFE with them in Wyoming!

Zach Lazzari is an OUTDOOR WRITER, fly fishing guide and hunting enthusiast. Follow Zach at BUSTEDOARLOCK.COM.

Wapiti vs Carnivore: Which System Actually Fits Your Packout

By Ted Ramirez Jr
Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Company
www.caribougear.com

Most hunters don't think about their game bag system until they're already using it.

That's usually when the problems show up.

Loads don't sit right. Meat isn't cooling the way it should. The system works—but not as well as it needs to once the packout starts.

Choosing between Wapiti and Carnivore isn't about preference.

It's about how you're actually hunting—and what your packout is going to demand.

Where Most Hunters Get This Wrong

They choose based on simplicity or assumption.

"I just need game bags."

That works—until conditions get harder.

Early season heat, longer packouts, or multiple trips will expose a system fast.

If the setup doesn't match the conditions, you'll feel it in time, weight, and meat care.

Wapiti System: Built for Full Protection and Longer Packouts

The Wapiti system is built for full containment and maximum protection.

Each quarter has its own structured space, which helps with:

- keeping meat clean
- protecting from debris and exposure
- managing multiple loads over longer distances

This matters more when:

- you're running multiple trips
- you're dealing with heat or variable weather
- you need to stage meat between loads

Where it works best:

Longer packouts, early season conditions, and hunts where meat care needs to stay controlled across time.

Carnivore System: Built for Speed and Boned-Out Efficiency

The Carnivore system is designed for a different approach.

It's built around boned-out meat and faster load movement.

That means:

- less bulk
- faster breakdown
- more flexibility when loading your pack

This matters when:

- you're prioritizing speed over structure
- terrain is steep and technical
- you're trying to reduce total trips

Where it works best:

Faster packouts, tighter terrain, and hunters who prefer to move meat quickly in fewer loads.

YOUR HOMETOWN MARKET & BUTCHERY
Meat that's raised better tastes better!
Market - Meat Subscription - Domestic Meat Processing
Wild Game Processing

Stop in at our Market and shop for fresh meats, groceries, seasonal and holiday specials.
Mon-Fri: 9am - 6pm Saturday: 10am-2pm Sunday: Closed

TIZER MEAT BUNDLE - IT'S SIMPLE.
1. CHOOSE YOUR BUNDLE: Pick from our curated butcher's choice boxes. Breakfast Meat, Meat Variety, Pork, or Beef Bundles Available.
2. CHOOSE YOUR DATE: Get your bundle every month.
3. PICK UP YOUR BUNDLE: Let us know when you're coming and we'll walk it right out to you, curbside!
Get FREE Sausage Links For Life

WILD GAME PROCESSING HOURS:
Check-in at the market for hours.

Shop online at tizermeats.com

MARKET: 2805 York Road Helena, MT 59602 (406) 422-4822	WILD GAME SHOP: 3558 Tizer Dr Helena, MT 59602 (406) 442-3096
------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

TIZER MEATS MARKET & BUTCHERY

The Decision Comes Down to This

If your packout is going to take time, involve multiple trips, or require staging meat—structure matters more.

If your goal is to move fast, reduce bulk, and stay mobile—efficiency matters more.

Both systems work.

The difference is when and how they work best.

Why the System Matters More Than the Material

Most gear decisions get framed around material or features.

In the field, it's about how the system performs under pressure.

Airflow. Containment. Load stability.

If those aren't working together, you'll feel it during the packout.

That's why choosing the right system ahead of time matters more than trying to adjust it mid-hunt.

What This Decision Actually Affects

This isn't just about gear preference.

It affects how efficiently you move, how well meat cools, and how much effort each trip takes.

And those differences don't show up at the truck.

They show up halfway through the second load, when the terrain is still steep and the margin starts getting smaller.

Shop for Caribou Gear Game Bags here:

<https://www.caribougear.com/collections/game-bags>

Visit Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Company online at www.caribougear.com for apparel and accessories, boots, camping, dry bags, food and cook systems, game bags, hunters tarp, hunting gear, Koyukon gear, meat care accessories, rifle covers, gift cards and more.

Questions, give them a call at 303-798-5824 or email hunt@caribougear.com.

CARIBOU GEAR

WAPITI VS CARNIVORE

WHICH SYSTEM ACTUALLY FITS YOUR PACKOUT

WAPITI SYSTEM

- FULL PROTECTION**
Each quarter in its own protected compartment.
- MAXIMUM AIRFLOW**
Promotes fast cooling and maintains meat quality.
- BUILT FOR LONGER PACKOUTS**
Ideal for multi-trip hunts and variable conditions.

THE RIGHT SYSTEM. BETTER PACKOUT. BETTER MEAT.

CARNIVORE SYSTEM

- SPEED & EFFICIENCY**
Designed for fast packouts and fewer trips.
- GREATER FLEXIBILITY**
Conforms to your pack for better balance on tough terrain.
- BUILT FOR BONED-OUT MEAT**
Streamlined for hunters who break down in the field.



Photo credit chrisfinch99 | depositphotos.com

Quick Tips For Field Judging Antelope

By Zach Lazzari

Table Mountain Outfitters

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>

Field judging antelope is a subjective art that requires a keen eye and great optics. Closer is always better but sometimes you are forced to make decisions from a long distance. Elk and deer are far easier to judge because they have distinct tines and features that are easy to spot. An antelope's horn features are subtle and can be difficult to discern.

Our guides are experts at judging antelope. Experience and repetition are the best teachers. But if you're new to pronghorn hunting, here are a few quick tips that can help you better judge a pronghorn buck in the field.

Record Book Requirements

The minimum score for Boone and Crockett entries is 70 but it takes 80 to make the four-year report. The all time records go 82 or greater.

The scoring formula is based on length of horn, length of prong and circumference. This means hunters should be looking for height, mass and long prongs in the field.

Pronghorn shed annually and their regrowth is not consistent year over year. They will produce greater or lesser horns based on health and range conditions.

24 | Hunting & Fishing News

Clues in the Field

Using the ears as a comparative measuring point is ideal in the field. Ears on pronghorn are 5-6 inches in height when you're looking straight on but closer to 7-inches from a side profile. You are looking for around three times the ears in horn length for a quality buck.

To make things more difficult, not all pronghorn bucks have horns that curve the same direction. If a buck's horns curve back, he won't look very big from the front. Only when he turns sideways will you see the entire length. Or, a buck whose horns curve inwards might look small from the side view. Then when he turns straight on, you can get a better view of his length.

All that to say, it's important to view an antelope buck from many different angles before you can decide if he's worth pursuing. Many antelope are smaller than perceived by new antelope hunters.

Watch as many antelope as possible to improve field judging accuracy. It really takes some time to get a feel for size and many antelope will look very close in size. You will know when a big one arrives after watching the bulk of small and average size bucks. Investing in high quality optics also delivers an advantage for field judging.

Scoring After the Shot

You have an antelope down and it's time to get busy working. Take care of the meat first and get everything field dressed, cooled and transported for processing.

After the meat is handled, you can turn the focus to actually scoring the buck.

Antelope with mass and strong prong measurements tend to score quite a bit higher.

There are plenty of nice, tall horns that score 70+ up to 80 but the difference maker over 80 comes from that mass and prong length.

To score your antelope buck, you can use the Boone and Crockett Online Scoring Calculator here: <https://www.boone-crockett.org/online-scoring-calculator>.

Learn More About Antelope Hunts with Table Mountain Outfitters

If you'd like to learn more about guided antelope hunts at Table Mountain Outfitters, please read the information on their Antelope Hunting Page:

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/hunts/antelope/>.

Visit <https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>, where you'll find details and pricing on all of their hunts. For availability and other details, please feel free to contact them. You can find all of their contact information here:

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/contact-us/>.

HSM AMMUNITION



SINCE 1968

Pick up a box or more at
your local sporting goods
store or one of our
online retailers.

FOR ALL OF YOUR SHOOTING NEEDS

RIFLE-BEAR LOAD-DANGEROUS GAME-HANDGUN-LEAD FREE-REDUCED RICOCHET-COWBOY ACTION
RELOADING COMPONENTS-CLEANING SUPPLIES-FIREARMS-LAW ENFORCEMENT AMMUNITIONS

A portion of
each sale of our
Bear Load ammunition
goes to support
events for our Veterans.



www.hsmammunition.com

Manufactured in Stevensville, MT.

Montana's 2026 Conditions Are A Reminder: Preparation Matters More Than Ever

By Ted Ramirez Jr
Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co.
www.caribougear.com

Montana doesn't usually give warnings.

It just changes the conditions and lets hunters figure it out the hard way.

This year, though, the signals are already there.

Low snowpack across much of the state. Early concerns about water levels. Talk of river closures coming sooner than expected. Access issues in certain areas from blowdown, slides, and damaged infrastructure. And a wildlife outlook that's anything but simple.

Some herds are doing well. Others are not. Mule deer concerns in multiple regions. Whitetails in parts of the state still feeling the effects of EHD. Elk numbers in the Missouri Breaks sitting well below objective.

None of that means the season is lost.

But it does mean one thing clearly:

You cannot hunt 2026 like it's 2024.

Conditions Change. Assumptions Get Hunters in Trouble.

Every Western hunter carries a mental map of how things "usually" go.

Where water tends to be. Where animals hold early. When access roads open up. What pressure looks like. What a normal September feels like.

The problem is that "normal" doesn't show up every year.

Low snowpack changes water. Water changes movement. Movement changes pressure. And pressure changes how animals use the country.

That ripple effect is where most hunters fall behind.

They don't miss because they're not capable. They miss because they're hunting memory instead of current conditions.

Low Water Changes More Than You Think

When moisture is down, everything tightens up.

Water sources matter more. Feed quality changes. Travel patterns shift. Animals concentrate differently, especially early in the season.

In some areas, you may see more predictable movement around limited water. In others, pressure builds fast because everyone finds the same places.

Either way, it forces hunters to adjust.

And that adjustment starts long before opening day.

It starts with scouting differently. Paying attention to current water. Not last year's water. It means glassing longer. Walking farther. Verifying what you think you know.

Because when conditions tighten, the margin for guessing gets smaller.

Access Isn't Guaranteed

One of the quieter parts of this year's outlook is access.

Blowdown. Rockslides. Bridge damage. Repairs.

Those don't show up on a map app the way people think they do.

And they don't just slow you down. They change where hunters go.

A blocked road pushes pressure somewhere else. A closed crossing turns a one-mile hike into four. A washed-out access point changes how animals experience pressure during the season.

Good hunters adjust quickly.

Great hunters plan for it ahead of time.

They build backup plans. Multiple access routes. Different elevations. Different units if needed. They don't rely on one entry point working the way it always has.

Wildlife Outlook Means You Need to Be Selective

Not every part of Montana is trending the same direction.

Some bighorn populations are doing well. Some mule deer regions are struggling. Whitetails in certain areas are still below average. Elk numbers in parts of the Breaks are down significantly, and that can affect tag availability and pressure.

This is where serious hunters separate themselves.

They don't just pick a hunt based on tradition or habit. They look at the current reality.

They ask harder questions:

- Is this unit still producing the way it used to?
- What's the pressure going to look like this year?
- How will conditions affect animal behavior here?
- Do I need to adjust expectations or strategy?

Because in a year like this, being stubborn costs more than being flexible.

Preparation Is the Only Thing You Control

You don't control snowpack.

You don't control water.

You don't control herd numbers or tag allocations.

You control how ready you are when things don't go as planned.

That means building a system that holds up when conditions get tougher.

It means thinking through your hunt before you're in it.

It means asking simple questions early:

- Can I adapt if access changes?
- Am I ready for longer hikes or different pack-out routes?
- Is my gear built for heat, distance, and variable conditions?
- Can I handle meat care correctly if the weather is warm?

This is where dependable gear stops being a convenience and starts being part of the plan.

When conditions are easy, almost anything works.

When conditions get harder, the system matters.

Why Meat Care Matters More in Tough Years

Warm early seasons and low moisture create one problem fast:

heat.

And heat is unforgiving when it comes to meat care.

If you're hunting in dry conditions with warmer afternoons, the margin for error gets smaller. Meat needs to cool quickly. It needs airflow. It needs protection from dirt, insects, and contamination.

This is where a real game bag system matters.

Not just any bag. A system built for Western hunting. Breathable. Durable. Sized for the animal you're hunting.

And it doesn't stop there.

A clean work surface. Reliable cordage for hanging meat. A setup that keeps your process organized instead of chaotic when you're tired and the work gets real.

That's the difference between hoping it goes right and knowing it will.

(continued on next page)



ROOTED IN HISTORY

DRIVING THE FUTURE



LEARN MORE AT BLACKBUTTECOPPER.COM



Photo credit gsagi | depositphotos.com

Montana's 2026 Conditions Are A Reminder: Preparation Matters More Than Ever

(continued from page 27)

Practical Takeaways for 2026

- Don't rely on last year's information. Verify everything.
- Expect water to matter more than usual.
- Build multiple access plans before the season.
- Be willing to adjust units, elevations, or strategies.
- Prepare for warmer conditions and faster meat-care timelines.
- Make sure your gear system works when things get difficult, not just when they're easy.

Final Thought

Montana isn't getting worse.

It's just not staying the same.

And hunters who expect it to stay the same are the ones who struggle when conditions shift.

The ones who stay consistent year after year are the ones who adapt early, prepare seriously, and rely on systems they trust when the work gets harder than expected.

If you're tightening up your system before the season, now is the time to do it.

Make sure your game bags, tarps, and field gear are ready before conditions force you to depend on them.

Shop Caribou Outdoor Equipment Company online at www.caribougear.com. Questions? Give them a call at 303-798-5824 or email hunt@caribougear.com.

Witness Report Leads To Successful Investigation In Multiple Hunting Violations

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

Quick thinking and quality documentation by a witness helped game wardens investigate an individual who was recently convicted of multiple hunting violations.

Juan Garcia-Gomez of Bozeman pleaded guilty last month in Madison County Justice Court to misdemeanor charges of unlawful possession of a game animal, unlawful hunting from a public highway, and failure to validate his general deer license. This was the result of a joint investigation by game wardens with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Madison County Sheriff's Office.

A video recorded by the witness showed Garcia-Gomez kneeling in a roadway, propped against his vehicle, and shooting a mule deer buck on a nearby hillside near Jeffers in November. Garcia-Gomez loaded the buck into his vehicle and left the scene.

The witness's actions were key to the successful investigation and prosecution of this case. Upon seeing the violations, the witness immediately began recording a video of the incident with their phone. Shortly after Garcia-Gomez left the scene, the witness located a spent shell casing in the road and photographed it. Then they reported the incident to FWP.

Game wardens coordinated with the Madison County Sheriff's Office to detain the suspect and assist in the investigation.

This case underscores the importance of being a good witness when violations are observed. This includes getting accurate, detailed descriptions of suspects, vehicles and license plates; collecting quality photos and video when it is safe to do so; and locating but not disturbing evidence. Reports from members of the public who care about the state's natural resources greatly help game wardens as they seek to hold violators accountable.

The witness in this case has been recommended to receive a monetary reward through FWP's TIPMONT program.

Garcia-Gomez paid \$1,100 in fines and was sentenced to a 24-month suspension of hunting and fishing privileges. Montana is part of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact where violators who lose privileges in one state lose them in all 50 states.

Anyone with possible information about crimes against fish, wildlife or state lands is encouraged to visit tipmont.mt.gov to provide details. You may be eligible for a reward of up to \$1,000.

How To Prepare For The Elements On A Wyoming Antelope Hunt

By Zach Lazzari

Table Mountain Outfitters

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>



Photo credit Ryan McSparran courtesy Table Mountain Outfitters
<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>

The weather in Wyoming changes by the minute. And chasing antelope in open country means you are often exposed to the worst. Heat, wind, cold, rain, snow and sleet are all in the cards. On many days, the weather is downright pleasant in Wyoming's antelope country. But planning for everything can save your hide when the conditions take a turn.

Here are a few tips on how to prepare for your next Wyoming hunt:

Bow Hunts

Archery season opens August 15th in some Wyoming units, and you can expect plenty of sun along with the occasional rain storm during the early part of the season. The sun exposure calls for plenty of water, covered skin and lightweight boots to move across the landscape without overheating. Although lightweight, breathable boots help, make sure they provide plenty of protection against thorns, cactus and rocks.

When September hits, you are still likely to encounter hot daytime temperatures, but the nights will begin to cool down. The daily weather forecast is liable to change at any minute with more wind and the potential for moisture. This is a good time to dress in layers and keep a spare set of warm clothes in your duffel. Plan for cool mornings, hot days and the potential for anything to blow through the region.

Archery hunters can expect to spend long hours in a ground blind, and should pack accordingly. It's not uncommon to spend part of the day in a t-shirt, and then layer up when the clouds roll in.

Rifle Hunts

The rifle season is a different ball game for Wyoming antelope. Rifle seasons begin in late September in some units, running through the month of October. October in Wyoming brings cold nights, some nice days and more variability in the weather. Rather than combating heat, on many days, you are working between bouts of beautiful fall weather with crisp air and sideways wind blowing snow and sleet. Hope for the nice days, but prepare for the cold ones.

Bring along waterproof gear and stash your warmest layers in the truck when you head out each morning with your guide. Many days will not require more than your mid-layers but the notorious Wyoming wind can throw a serious chill in the air.

On rifle hunts, especially in the late season, bring along a thermos for hot coffee or tea. Long days spent glassing, or out stalking bucks in cold weather calls for a few extra comforts. That thermos of hot coffee at the truck is the perfect way to celebrate after a memorable day in the field.

To learn more about Wyoming antelope hunts with Table Mountain Outfitters, please have a look at their Antelope Hunting Page:

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/hunts/antelope/>

For details and availability, don't hesitate to give them a call at 307-632-6352 or send a message to:

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/contact-us/>

COME LIVE THE LIFE WITH US.

BOOKING NOW FOR 2026 AND BEYOND: ANTELOPE • DEER • ELK • BEAR

Watch THE LIFE at TABLE MOUNTAIN on YouTube

TABLE MOUNTAIN OUTFITTERS

Book online at [TableMountainOutfitters.com](https://www.TableMountainOutfitters.com) or call 307-632-6352



Zortman Motel & Garage

- RV Park
- Laundromat
- Kitchenettes
- WiFi
- Conference Rooms
- Recreational Gold Panning Claims

Located in the heart of some of the best deer hunting in Montana.

Book your stay today.

Call 406.673.3160

Zortman76@itstriangle.com | zortmanmotelandgarage.com

8 Packing Tips For High Country Mule Deer & Early Archery Elk

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

There's something special about being at timberline at the end of August or early September. Here in Colorado, timberline is usually between 10,000 and 12,000 feet. Perched on a lofty ridge and surrounded by rocky peaks, there's nothing like spotting a big mule deer buck or hearing the bugle of an elk in one of these high alpine basins.

Hunting these high lonesome places is breathtaking (literally). The first challenge is often just getting there. There's a fine balance between being prepared and keeping your pack light. You need to be ready for what the mountain will throw at you, but every ounce is an ounce you'll curse before the hunt is over.

As you pack for your next high country mule deer hunt, or early season archery elk hunt, here are a few tips to consider:

1. Start With Good Boots

A mountain hunt should begin with good boots. If you're backpacking into the high country, a quality pair of boots is mandatory. Even if you're setting a base camp at your vehicle and doing day hunts, you should still plan to invest in a great pair of mountain boots.

We can't say enough about Kenetrek boots. I have a pair of Mountain Extremes (non-insulated) that are going on their fifth season... They are supportive and have protected my feet in rugged terrain from Alaska to Arizona. With proper conditioning and care, they are still in great shape. For a nominal fee, Kenetrek will even resole and refurbish them.

Additionally, be aware that the best boots in the world won't function properly if you're wearing cotton socks underneath. In fact, that goes for the rest of your base layer clothing too. Get a quality pair of synthetic or merino wool blend socks, like the ones from Kenetrek, that help move moisture away from your feet.

When it comes to your feet, don't make compromises. We've seen failed boots end hunts early. This is an all too common mistake. Don't let it be you.

2. Cut Weight With Dual-Purpose Items

Whenever possible, pack items that serve more than one purpose to cut down on weight. For example, a lightweight and packable down jacket provides warmth while you're glassing on a windy ridge. But it can also add warmth to your sleep system. With this in mind, you could carry a lighter sleeping bag with a higher temperature rating than you otherwise would.

Likewise, look for other ways to use items for multiple purposes. Make a few wraps of duct tape around your water bottle, and electrical tape around your lighter. Bring one tripod that you can use for a shooting rest, spotting scope, binoculars and camera.

If there's an item in your pack that only serves a marginal purpose – ask yourself how badly you really need it. Because when you're climbing for a steep ridge above timberline, you'll feel every single ounce.

3. Don't Forget Your Rain Gear

When you're hunting mule deer above timberline, or chasing elk in early September, this is monsoon season here in Colorado. Afternoon thunderstorms can be expected almost every day. In addition to being aware of lightning, you should certainly be prepared for rain.

Rainstorms here usually don't last long, but they can be intense. Your rain gear might spend more time in your pack than it does on your back, but it still needs to be solid. There's a fine line between ultralight and stormproof. And walking that line with quality rain gear usually isn't cheap.

For a typical high mountain hunt, look for a quality rain jacket that's breathable and weighs in somewhere in the 12 to 16-ounce range. Don't be surprised if a jacket of this quality ranges between \$250 and \$350. However, quality rain gear is worth the investment.

In addition to protecting you from rain, breathable rain gear also blocks wind. That means it's perfect for keeping you warm on a cool morning, or when glassing from a windy ridge. We already mentioned bringing dual-purpose items. Good rain gear meets that mark.

4. Use Compression Sacks

When packing for a mountain hunt, use compression sacks wherever possible. Any item that's compressible should probably go in a compression sack. Water resistant and even waterproof compression sacks are ideal.

Forget the cheap stuff sack that came with your sleeping bag. Instead, use a waterproof or at least water resistant compression sack. This will reduce your sleeping bag to a much more manageable size in your pack. Just know that you shouldn't store your sleeping bag in a compression sack (or any stuff sack) longer than necessary.

Additionally, pack your spare clothing, rain gear and anything else into a compression sack to reduce the size it takes up in your backpack.

5. Build Your Own Emergency Kit

When you purchase a first aid kit or an emergency kit off the shelf from a sporting goods store, you're inevitably adding items to your pack that are not customized to your specific adventure. For example, the kit we'd carry to Alaska is going to be much different than an emergency kit we'd pack for an alpine hunt here in Colorado. Customizing your kit will help you be more prepared, without taking unnecessary items.

We recommend building your own emergency kit. For starters, most first aid kits come in a handy nylon bag. While nice for keeping things organized, they are usually full of pockets, zippers, mesh dividers and other weight-adding features. So, ditch the pack that your first aid kit came in, and start with an ultralight pouch or even a plastic sandwich bag.

Next, add items that you need and nothing that you don't. You might add a basic selection of bandages, antibiotic gel, gauze, wire splint, and blister pads. It's also a good idea to carry blood clotting treatment or similar items in case you cut yourself on a broadhead or knife. You might also carry a whistle, a lighter, a backup compass, a spare headlamp like the Petzl E+Lite, and iodine pills in case your filtration system fails.



Photo courtesy Caribou Gear www.caribougear.com

6. Know How to Care for Meat in Warm Weather

When you're hunting mule deer or elk early in the season, the weather can be hot. Even at timberline, temperatures can get very warm in early September. Don't wait until you have an animal on the ground to begin making a plan. Your planning for early season meat care begins now.

Of course we'll be the first to tell you that quality game bags are essential. You need to keep your meat clean, protected, and get it cool as soon as possible. Our Caribou Gear High Country series is perfect for backpack mule deer hunts, and early season archery elk hunts.

Our High Country series comes in three sizes. This includes the Muley, designed for mule deer and similar sized game, and the Wapiti for elk. Each pack includes four long quarter bags and one meat parts bag for backstraps and other loose meat...

(continued on page 33)

Kenetrek
Boots
FOR THE TRAIL LESS TRAVELED®

BRIDGER HIKERS

You know that feeling... when your feet barely touch the ground as you glide over uneven terrain... and whether you're racing across trails or running errands, super-light and exceptionally tough gets you there without a care in the world. With bedrock support in a feather weight platform, the waterproof High or the easy breathing Low will be your best friend every day.

VISIT US ON SOCIAL

 WWW.KENETREK.COM
800-232-6064

©KENETREK, LLC 2016



Photos courtesy GOHUNT.com

The Perfect Beer Cheese Wild Game Burger Recipe

By Stefan Wilson

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

If you are like me, nothing beats a good burger. The variety of flavors and textures creates a classic eating experience perfect for warm evening cookouts. There are quite a few beer cheese recipes out there, but this is my version of this outstanding combo. If you have ever wanted to try something new with your elk or deer meat, give this recipe a try!

Ingredients



Here is the list of ingredients you will need for this recipe:

- 1 lb. ground elk/deer
- Kaiser rolls or sourdough pretzel buns (I highly recommend using pretzel buns)
- Kosher salt
- 1 sliced onion
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 bottle of beer (lagers and ambers work well, but feel free to experiment with your favorites)
- 12 oz. grated medium cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon Frank's Red Hot Sauce
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Worcestershire sauce

Directions

Step 1: Form Patties

Take ground elk/deer meat and separate into three to four equal size patties. Place in refrigerator until ready to grill.

Step 2: Make Beer Cheese

To make the beer cheese, begin with a medium saucepan and add two tablespoons of butter. Once butter is melted, whisk in two tablespoons of flour until fully mixed and light brown.

Slowly whisk in half of the bottle of beer until mixed well. Let the mixture slowly warm, stirring occasionally. Once the beer mixture is warm, begin adding grated cheddar, stirring to melt.

Continue adding cheese until thickened.

Remember: Once the cheese cools, it will thicken slightly so don't make it too thick too soon. Add one teaspoon of Frank's Red Hot Sauce and black pepper to taste (about a quarter to a half teaspoon). Leave simmering, stirring occasionally, to prevent scorching the cheese.

Step 3: Grill Onions

To prepare the onions, slice one medium onion into thin slices. Add one tablespoon butter to skillet on medium heat. Once butter is melted, add onions and a dash of Worcestershire sauce. Stir occasionally to ensure onions are browned all over and slightly crisp.

Step 4: Grill Patties

You can cook the patties over an open flame or in a skillet. I prefer a skillet because I find that hand-formed patties do not hold up as well on an open flame grill. Your experience may be different, though, so do whichever you prefer. Cook patties to desired level of doneness.

Step 5: Build the Burger

Now it is time to build the masterpiece. Begin with the bottom bun from your kaiser or pretzel roll (again, I highly recommend the pretzel roll as it complements the taste of the beer cheese well, but if you do not like sourdough or if the store is all out of pretzel rolls, go with the kaiser roll). Spread Dijon mustard on bottom bun to round out the flavors of the burger.

Next, place your grilled patty on the bottom bun and then pile the grilled onions on top.

Next, drizzle beer cheese on top of onions so that it runs all over the burger. It should be thick enough that it does not just run right off, but thin enough that it is easy to drizzle. If it comes out like honey, it is too thick and can be thinned out by adding beer; if it is thin like milk, thicken it with more cheese.

Step 6: Fries and Enjoy

Fry or bake some sweet potato fries to go with the burger and be sure to wash it down with another beer from the six-pack you bought.

8 Packing Tips For High Country Mule Deer & Early Archery Elk

(continued from page 31)

7. Consider A Satellite Communicator

When you're planning a hunt in remote and rugged country, you shouldn't rely on your cell phone. You might sometimes get a signal on random mountaintops here in Colorado, but don't count on it. It's a great idea to carry a Garmin InReach or other satellite communicator. In addition to saving your life in case of injury, it's nice being able to text and update your friends and family back home.

The Garmin InReach pairs with an app on your smartphone, allowing you to text from your phone, without using the clumsy interface on the device itself. When your InReach is activated, you'll pay a monthly fee. When you don't need it during the off-season, you can simply deactivate the device, and pause billing.

8. Gear Up For Early Season Hunts

As you prepare for an early season hunt in the alpine or open tundra, check out the rest of our gear in the Caribou Gear Store. The products we carry are the same items we personally choose to carry in the field throughout years of testing.

Shop online at www.caribougear.com.

Reminder: New Regulations In Place For Elk Harvest Opportunities In Region 1

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks reminds hunters that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approved the following changes to antlerless elk harvest in Region 1. These changes take effect this hunting season.

Changes include: All Elk B Licenses in Region 1 are now valid only on private land. They are no longer valid on public land. The Fish and Wildlife Commission made this change to shift hunting pressure away from public lands and focus antlerless harvest on private lands.

The Permission to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV) will no longer provide an antlerless elk hunting opportunity in Region 1 (HDs 100, 101, 103, 104, 121, 122, 123, 124). Because PTHFV licenses are valid for life, the number of hunters participating has steadily increased over time... This change only affects antlerless elk opportunities in Region 1...

Antlerless elk hunting opportunities during the archery season have been eliminated in Region 1. The Fish and Wildlife Commission made this change to reduce the total harvest of antlerless elk in northwest Montana...

To review the Deer|Elk|Antelope Hunting Regulations for 2026 visit: <https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/hunt/regulations/2026/2026-dea-regulations-final-with-low-resolution-maps-for-web.pdf>.



BRIDGER TENT

14' x 14' WITH 5' WALLS AND 10' PEAK
ALL IN ONE 83 LBS. DUFFLE BAG

**NEW FOR
2025**



\$1,499.99



WALL TENTS



**WE BUILD IT
HOW YOU WANT IT**

1-800-235-6518

DESIGNED, BUILT, ASSEMBLED, CUT,
SEWN, MANUFACTURED, **MADE**
IN MONTANA, USA SINCE 1982



You Drew A Montana Elk Or Deer Tag, Now What? A Guide To Post Draw Insights For Your Upcoming Hunt

(continued from page 9)

Step 3: Analyze The Terrain Like a Pro



Elk and deer aren't truly evenly spread across the landscape, meaning they spend different times of the year occupying certain habitats. Understanding topography is key to finding where they feed, bed, and move.

GOHUNT Maps includes our proprietary custom detailed topographical map, but it takes some know-how to interpret it. And understanding how to read a topographical map is key, and then combine that with our Terrain Analysis Tool... and you're setting yourself up for success.

With our topographical map and Terrain Analysis Tool, you can learn how to:

- Spot north-facing bedding slopes: These slopes stay cooler in the summer and are often used by elk and deer for mid-day bedding.
- Identify benches, saddles, and migration funnels: These features are natural travel corridors and staging areas. Recognizing them helps you set up smarter ambush locations.

Step 4: Dive Into the Unit Profiles Packed With Hunt Unit Research

For every hunt district in Montana, we have what we call a Unit Profile that includes:

- Full hunt unit breakdown: From terrain photos in the unit, vegetation breakdown, historical temperatures, and moon phases, all the way to weapon/season insights.
- Access notes and terrain overviews: Be informed about access, roadless areas, or extreme terrain. These sections can be helpful learning about the unit and how to approach your e-scouting.

- Tag quotas and draw odds: Know what the chances are that you'll draw for any of the species in this unit and how many tags are given out to residents and nonresidents.

- Historical harvest success rates: Gauge how past hunters have fared by viewing the Animals Harvested graph, and set realistic expectations for your hunt. Also, you can check out the Hunters Surveyed graph to see how popular some general season Hunt Districts are.

- Trophy potential and season trends: Understand the quality of animals available and how conditions have changed over the years.

Comments from other users:

Each Unit Profile includes a comment section at the bottom where GOHUNT members can interact with one another. Our comment section is on an individual unit basis and is much more valuable than a random internet search and misleading information that you typically find on hunting forums. We have all seen how those discussions go on an open forum... Plus, users can share photos from the unit.

Combine this with Filtering and GOHUNT Maps to get the full picture before committing boots to the ground on your hunt or scouting trip.

Step 5: Use Insider Gear Lists and Hunt Planning Tools

GOHUNT doesn't just help you choose a unit—it helps you prepare for it.

- Customize gear lists for different terrain or weather scenarios: Build your gear list for your specific hunt based on whether you'll be backpacking into alpine country or truck camping near lowland meadows.

Read gear reviews from serious western hunters:

Get real insights on boots, optics, shelters, and layering systems that work in Montana's rugged environments.

Check out those gear-based articles here:

<https://www.gohunt.com/browse/gear-lists-and-reviews>.

Watch videos on e-scouting, gear reviews, tag strategies, and much more:

Learn about everything from shooting your bow, tuning your bow, dialing in your rifle, optic choices, e-scouting, and navigating each state's draw system on our GOHUNT YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@GOHUNT>.

The GOHUNT Gear Shop is also fully integrated, with curated kits built for elk and deer hunters.

Shop here:

<https://shop.gohunt.com>.

Use code HFN to save 10% off your first order with some exclusions.

Why All This Matters

Drawing a general-season Montana deer or elk tag, or even a limited-entry permit tag, is often the culmination of years of waiting, building points, or beating the odds.

But simply having a tag in your pocket doesn't guarantee success.

Montana's vast landscapes, diverse terrain, and varying access issues make it one of the most rewarding yet challenging places to hunt. This is why being fully prepared is critical.

Everything outlined in this article—from our Filtering and Unit Profiles, to GOHUNT Maps and our Terrain Analysis Tool—translates directly into better decision-making in the field.

Here's why it matters:

- You'll waste less time: Instead of blindly exploring unfamiliar terrain, you'll know where to focus your efforts based on data-backed insights.
- You'll hunt smarter, not harder: Understanding where animals move, bed, and feed helps you intercept them more efficiently. You'll be in the right place at the right time.
- You'll increase your odds of success: The combination of scouting, knowledge of pressure zones, and tailored gear can be the difference between a filled tag and a story of what could've been.
- You'll have confidence in your plan: Having A/B/C hunt plans mapped and researched ahead of time gives you the flexibility to adapt on the fly if conditions change or pressure spikes.

Montana is big, wild, and full of opportunity.

GOHUNT Insider empowers you to make informed choices, maximize your time in the field, and ultimately walk away with meat in the freezer or antlers for the wall.

Final Thoughts

Drawing a tag in Montana is a huge win—don't leave your hunt to chance. GOHUNT Insider gives you the edge at every step:

Start preparing for your Montana Deer or Elk hunt today.

Start a free trial of GOHUNT Insider and leave the hunting pressure behind.

Sign up here:

<https://www.gohunt.com/learn/insider-trial>

Learn all about GOHUNT at [GOHUNT.com](https://www.gohunt.com).

Deadline Reminder For Hunting Applications

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

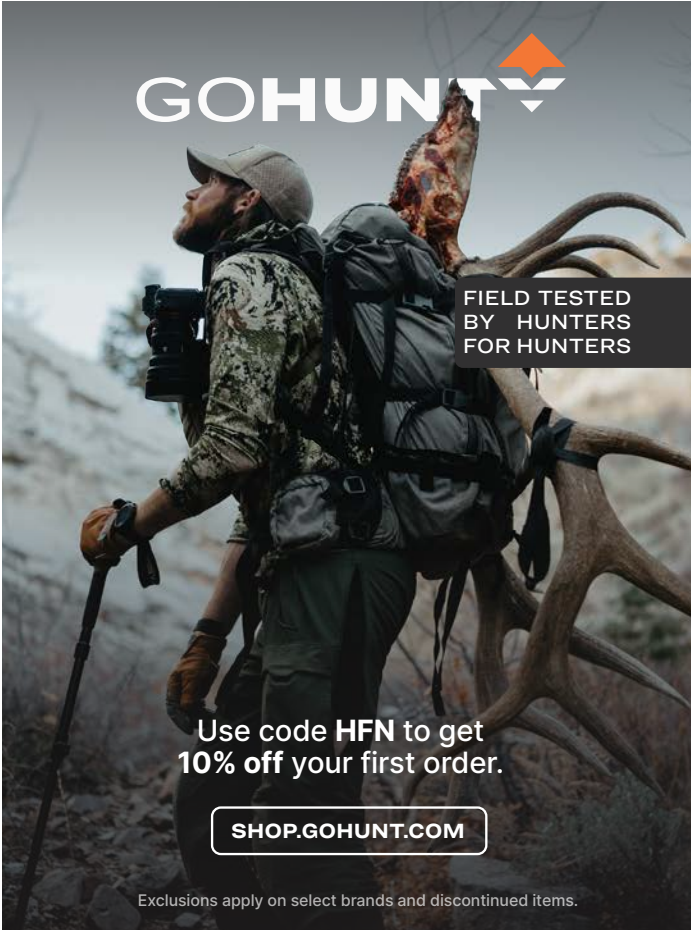
The deadline to apply for elk B, deer B and antelope is Monday, June 1. All applications must be completed online at: <https://fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply>, at a License Ambassador location or at an FWP office. Most FWP offices with license sales are open Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5p.m.

FWP offers several tools to help hunters navigate the application process. The application process is different for residents and nonresidents, but FWP has created instructional videos to help with both kinds of customers which can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0wIcm9ZecPLnB8MJisJnTOuRnUSj3Kgl>.

Hunters can also take advantage of the MyFWP mobile app. The app holds and displays licenses, permits and E-Tags, which can be downloaded and used in the field without cell service. To create a MyFWP account, visit the MyFWP login page: <https://myfwp.mt.gov/fwpExtPortal/login/login.jsp>.

Applicants have the option to reapply for the same offerings as last year with just a simple click, eliminating the need to search through previous applications.

For more information on Montana hunting licenses and permits, go to fwp.mt.gov/buyandapply/hunting-licenses.



GOHUNT

FIELD TESTED
BY HUNTERS
FOR HUNTERS

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

[SHOP.GOHUNT.COM](https://www.gohunt.com)

Exclusions apply on select brands and discontinued items.



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

The Best Early Season Antelope Hunting Gear

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

Aaron Ambur's Go-To System for Western Hunts

If you're planning an early-season western antelope hunt, dialing in your clothing system is just as critical as scouting or shooting prep. Long hikes, temperature swings, and relentless wind define pronghorn country—so your gear needs to work smarter, not harder.

TUO Gear President Aaron Ambur recently shared his field-tested layering system for early-season antelope hunting. It's a setup built for breathable performance, lightweight mobility, and protection from harsh western elements.

Here's a detailed breakdown of what he packs—and why each piece earns its place.

Kinetic Merino 150 Hoodie – The Ultimate Base Layer for Antelope Hunts

For warm weather and active movement, Aaron starts with the Kinetic Merino 150 Hoodie. This ultra-lightweight, long-sleeve layer is made from premium merino wool that naturally regulates temperature, controls odor, and breathes incredibly well.

Ideal for glassing at first light or stalking in the afternoon sun, the 150 Hoodie stays quiet and comfortable throughout the day—a must-have for any early-season pronghorn hunt.



Aptitude Vest – Windproof Core Insulation for Cool Mornings and Evenings

Next up is the Aptitude Vest, a compact thermal layer Aaron wears when early morning or evening temps dip. This vest provides lightweight insulation and is fully windproof, keeping your core protected when gusts pick up across open plains or high ridgelines.

Layered over the Kinetic Hoodie, the Aptitude Vest is a go-to for stationary glassing sessions and post-sunset pack-outs.

Velocity Merino Pant – Lightweight Outerwear for Hot, Dry Antelope Hunts

The Velocity Merino Pant is Aaron's choice for breathable lower-body protection during high-heat hunts. As a lightweight outerwear pant, it combines merino wool's natural odor resistance and softness with nylon stretch for long hikes and spot-and-stalk mobility.

For early-season hunts in dry, open country, the Velocity delivers airflow, stealth, and comfort—ideal when temperatures rise and movement is constant.

Clime Pant – Durable, Wind-Resistant Protection for Rough Terrain

When conditions call for more rugged protection, Aaron turns to the Clime Pant. This outerwear piece is slightly heavier than the Velocity but provides greater durability, wind-blocking capabilities, and better resistance to moisture from dew-covered grass or light weather.

Whether crawling through sagebrush or hiking through rocky draws, the Clime is purpose-built for western antelope hunting terrain.

Why This Layering System Works for Early Season Antelope Hunting

Aaron's system offers the flexibility needed to handle unpredictable conditions during the early antelope opener out West:

- Lightweight, breathable layers for high-output movement during hot hunts
- Windproof insulation from the Aptitude Vest to block morning and evening gusts
- Durability and mobility with two outerwear pant options tailored for heat or rugged terrain
- Natural stealth and odor resistance thanks to high-merino content fabrics

How to Layer for Early Season Pronghorn Success

Here's Aaron's strategy for building the perfect layering system for an early western antelope opener:

1. Start with the Kinetic Merino 150 Hoodie – Your breathable base for glassing and mid-day movement.
2. Add the Aptitude Vest – Windproof and insulated for chilly mornings or evening sits.
3. Choose your outerwear pants:
 - Velocity Merino Pant – Best for dry, high-heat hunts where breathability is key.
 - Clime Pant – Ideal for moisture-rich terrain or when more protection is needed.

Each piece compresses easily, layers efficiently, and adapts to changing weather—perfect for staying mobile and undetected across pronghorn country.



Final Take: Gear Up Smart for Your Early Season Antelope Hunt

Aaron Ambur's trusted system—featuring the Kinetic Merino 150 Hoodie, Aptitude Vest, Velocity Merino Pant, and Clime Pant—is built for hunters tackling the unique challenges of early-season western antelope hunting.

Lightweight, packable, and field-proven, this gear setup ensures you can focus on your hunt—not your discomfort.

Explore TUO Gear's full pronghorn-ready lineup and build your own early-season layering system today at <https://www.tuogear.com>.

Poacher Loses Hunting Privileges For Life

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

The defendant in a criminal poaching case has been sentenced to a lifetime ban of hunting and fishing privileges. Jerry "Trey" Truitt III, a resident of Tennessee, has a prior history of violations. The crimes in question occurred in western Montana.

Charges included two counts of unlawful possession of wildlife—a turkey and sandhill crane, and hunting without a license, criminal trespassing and hunting out of season. Sentencing on April 2, 2026, builds on the prior convictions related to separate poaching incidents.

The defendant was convicted in April 2025 in Ravalli County for killing an antlerless elk and an antlerless white-tailed deer without a license.

Additionally, he pleaded guilty in 2025 to obstructing justice, using another's license and violating commission regulations in Lake County, Mont.

This appears to be an individual who has repeatedly demonstrated a disrespect and disregard for the hunting laws that act as a valuable protection of our hunting heritage.

While Truitt's offenses occurred in Montana, his ban will also spread to Tennessee, as both states are members of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact. This compact states explicitly "any person whose license privileges are suspended in a member state would also be suspended in their home state."

"We would like to thank both county attorney's offices for all of their work through the years on these cases," said Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 2 Warden Captain Kyle Miller. "The Ravalli County Attorney's Office, and particularly Deputy County Attorney David Lakin, dedicated a lot of time and energy to these cases, and we appreciate his extra efforts."

Game wardens say tips from the public often play a key role in solving wildlife crimes.

Anyone with information about suspected violations can report them through the state's TipMont system here: <https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/enforcement/tip-mont>.

To learn more about the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, join, shop online or find a RMEF Banquet in your area visit: <https://www.rmef.org>.

Visit their headquarters and Visitor's Center in Missoula Montana at 5705 Grant Creek Road. Phone 406-523-4535. Free Admission Mon-Fri: 8 am – 5 pm, Sat: 9 am – 5 pm, Sun: Closed

How To Glass Like The Pros

(continued from page 2)

GLASSING WHITETAILS WITH MARK KENYON

Whitetail deer are the most pursued and beloved big game animal in North America, and for good reason. A mature whitetail buck is arguably the greatest survivor in the North American animal kingdom, navigating both wild and human predators, across terrain as diverse as the suburbs of New York City, the marshes of Michigan, and the mountains of Montana. They are the ultimate quarry for hunters looking for a true chess match.

Just as in chess, a good view of the playing field and an understanding of where your opponent might move next is of the utmost importance. In the deer hunting world this means glassing.

- A few well-informed hunts are better than dozens of uneducated sits.

The key is to gain use-able intel about local deer movement through long-distance observation. If you don't have a clear handle on what local deer are doing, set up away from high activity zones but with a clear view of them, and watch from a distance.

Don't move in for the strike until you've seen exactly how deer are moving through a given area and have developed a plan with that knowledge in mind.

- Mature bucks move the most at dawn and dusk. Lowlight visibility is of particular importance for whitetail optics. Make sure to choose binoculars or a spotting scope with the best low-light performance you can afford. First and last light movements are often the very most important to see. Don't miss them.

- Stabilize your glass. Binocular tripods are most popular in the western world, but whitetail hunters would be wise to learn from their big game hunting brethren. If setting up for a long-distance scouting session, there's no easier-on-the-eyes option than binoculars, and a tripod makes that kind of glassing session an entirely more stable and clear proposition.

- Add a phone adapter to your repertoire. By attaching a phone to your spotting scope, you can record videos of exactly what you're observing, allowing you to review the footage later and better analyze the movements and deer you identified. A phone-screen view can also be easier on the eyes during long glassing sessions.

Want to make hunting your career? Checkout this podcast with Mark Kenyon on how he started Wired to Hunt:
<https://soundcloud.com/vortexnationpodcast/ep-152-mark-kenyon#t=0:00>.

GLASSING MULE DEER WITH REMI WARREN

Mule Deer hunting is the ultimate spot and stalk game. They can be found scattered from down in the arid high desert foothills to up in the highest elevation rocky alpine basins. There are plenty of places for them to hide high and low.

I believe there is no greater challenge out west than hunting mature mule deer, but before you can even attempt to slip within range, you have to know how to find them.

- Vantage up. Finding a good spot means finding a good vantage. Being able to look over a lot of prime country from one spot makes you more effective. You can cover more country during the optimal hours this way. Big deer can be few and far between. The more ground you can glass, the more opportunity you have to turn up a buck.

- Lock down. Taking the shake out of your binoculars is a proven tactic to picking up more animals.

Using a tripod is a great addition to your glassing set up.

If you don't want to use a tripod, sit down with your back supported against your pack and get comfortable. Then, lock your elbows to your knees and hold the binoculars by pinching them between the bill of your hat and your hands.

- Cover up. Additional light hitting your eyes or optics can lead to a less clear picture through your binoculars or spotting scope.

It is best to glass from the shade, but that is not always possible.

Use your jacket to cover up and block the ambient light from hitting the back of your optics. You will be surprised how much better you can see. This trick allows for better concentration while glassing and cuts down on any eye fatigue.

- Break it down. Start early in the morning by focusing on feeding areas with good browse. As the day progresses focus on bedding areas. Mature deer like to bed with the wind at their back, and the shade on the downhill side of cover. Focus on areas that match that description. In the evenings, refocus on feeding areas. If you are hunting during the rut, find the does, and the bucks will be nearby.

To get an inside tip on calling in monster elk, checkout this blog from Remi Warren:

<https://vortexoptics.com/blog/pro-tip-with-remi-warren---the-splash-call-for-elk-hunting.html>, and to get more on hunting mule deer, checkout this podcast on early archery mule deer hunting featuring Remi:
<https://soundcloud.com/vortexnationpodcast/ep-133-remi-warren-and-ryan-lampers-early-archery-mule-deer#t=0:00>.



**DRIVES TACKS
SPLITS HAIRS**

RAZOR® HD LHT™ RIFLESCOPE

Western hunting demands an optic built for long range and the long haul, and the Razor® HD LHT™ 4.5-22x50 FFP delivers. You still get the core of the Razor® HD LHT™, including a stunning HD optical system and rugged build in a hunting scope that's among the lightest in its class. Where the Razor® HD LHT™ 4.5-22x50 FFP distances itself is in offering more magnification, and a first focal plane reticle featuring the XLR-2 reticle system, which is intuitive, easy to use, and illuminated. You also get our RevStop™ Zero System for a reliable return to zero after dialing in the field, and a locking elevation turret keeps your zero safe.

INCLUDED IN THE BOX

- Sunshade (All)
- Tethered Lens Covers (4.5-22x50 FFP)
- Lens Covers (3-15X50) and (3-15X42)
- Lens Cloth (All)
- CR2032 battery (All)
- Rev Stop Zero Ring (4.5-22x50 FFP) and (3-15X50)
- Free Custom Ballistic Strip Coupon (3-15X50) and (3-15X42)



Available in:
4.5-22X50 FFP (shown)
XLR-2 (MOA) Reticle

3-15X50
G4i BDC (MRAD) Reticle

3-15X42
HSR-5i (MOA) Reticle

Custom Turrets Available On All



**UNLIMITED
UNCONDITIONAL
LIFETIME WARRANTY**

- VISIT ONE OF THESE DEALERS FOR YOUR NEXT VORTEX PURCHASE -

FULL CURL MFG

www.fullcurlmanufacturing.com

MURDOCH'S

www.murdochs.com

NORTH 40 OUTFITTERS

www.north40.com

OWENHOUSE ACE

www.owenhouse.com

SHEDHORN SPORTS

www.shedhorn.com

SHIPTON'S BIG R

www.shiptonsbigr.com

SPORTSMAN & SKI HAUS

www.sportsmanskihaus.com

RIFLESCOPES • BINOCULARS • SPOTTING SCOPES • RANGEFINDERS • RED DOTS • MONOCULARS • TRIPODS • GEAR

JOIN THE VORTEX NATION



www.vortexoptics.com



SAVE ON TIRES BUILT FOR THE LONG DRIVE

GET

\$100

APR 20th - MAY 31st, 2026

Redeem via online rebate when you purchase ANY 4 DYNAPRO, ION, OR SELECT VENTUS TIRES

*See dealer for details.



www.tiresupplysc.com

VISIT ONE OF THESE DEALERS FOR TIRES, BATTERIES, CHAINS, WINDSHIELD WIPER BLADES & MORE!

Anaconda	Lisac's of Anaconda	406-563-6110	Kalispell	M&C Tire	406-752-9662
Billings	J&T Tire	406-969-2075	Missoula	Big Sky Tire	406-251-5988
Billings	Lisac's of Billings	406-656-7502	Plains	Gary's Glass & Auto Body	406-826-4279
Bozeman	Kolar Tire Bozeman	406-587-5415	Polson	Beacon Tire	406-883-6258
Butte	Lisac's Tire	406-782-4294	Ronan	Arnie's Gas & Tire Center	406-676-0400
Butte	American Car Care	406-494-4450	Shelby	Mark's Tire & Alignment	406-434-5118
Darby	Automotive Solutions, Inc.	406-821-3440	St. Ignatius	Stuart's Hometown Auto	406-745-2190
Ennis	D&D Tire Supply	406-682-4234	Thompson Falls	Easy Street Auto & Tire	406-827-3808
Eureka	Big Sky Tire	406-297-2623	Three Forks	Kolar Tire Three Forks	406-202-1113
Gardiner	Yellowstone Dino Lube	406-848-9401	Three Forks	Three Forks Motor Supply	406-285-3212
Glasgow	Arch's Tire	406-228-2258	Townsend	Kolar Tire Townsend	406-202-1113
Great Falls	Falls Tire Service	406-453-1418	Whitehall	Full Circle Tire	406-287-5682
Helena	Kolar Tire Commercial	406-438-4165	Williston, ND	OK Tire Store	701-774-0233
Helena	Kolar Tire 1380 Joslyn St.	406-459-3135	Rexburg, ID	Tri-State Tire	208-356-9069
Helena	Kolar Tire Hwy 12. E	406-465-2442	Victor, ID	All American Tire & Brake	208-787-8473

GO TO WWW.TIRESUPPLYSC.COM FOR SPECIAL OFFERS

*See your dealer for details or visit <https://myhankookrebates.com>