

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING NEWS

AUGUST 2026



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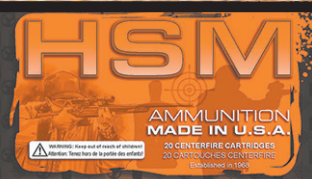




Photo courtesy Idaho Department Of Fish & Game <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Idaho Falls Angler Lands 43.25-Inch Lake Trout...And Returns To The Idaho Record Books

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

An Idaho Falls angler miraculously reeled in a new state catch-and-release record lake trout and, even more unbelievably, was able to hoist it up into the boat. Dylan Smith — the lucky angler in question — was fishing on Payette Lake in McCall on May 2 when a 43.25-inch lake trout took the line for a sprint.

Smith was able to land the laker (well, boat it), get it stretched out on the tape measure, and was shocked when the tailfin crossed the 43rd inch line. The previous state catch-and-release record for lake trout just barely hit 42 inches.

But that's not the end of the story.

Dylan Smith ain't a stranger when it comes to the Idaho record fish books, and believe it or not, this was not his first rodeo with a 40-inch lake trout. During a separate outing in 2018, Dylan landed and recorded another impressive lake trout that eventually earned him a spot atop the record books.

Shortly after, angler Aaron Goettsche beat out Dylan's record with a 42-inch lunker laker himself. Both fish were caught and released back into Payette Lake.

Sensing a pattern?

Payette Lake is arguably one of the premier lake trout fisheries in the state of Idaho. Catches like these have made big splashes in the record books over the past decade or so, largely due to active lake trout management by the Southwest Region's McCall fisheries staff.

Years of netting to remove large numbers of smaller, young lake trout has reduced the population and lowered predation on kokanee. As a result, the lake is producing healthy trophy lake trout again, and kokanee numbers have started to improve.

To read more about how Payette Lake's triumphant comeback as a lake trout destination fishery, check out this article by Sportfish Coordinator, Martin Koenig <https://idfg.idaho.gov/article/payette-lake-produces-new-state-record-lake-trout>.

Want to Catch One? Here's How

If you're dreaming of record-breaking lake trout, it's time to get serious about your gear and tactics.

Here's some tips for targeting these deep water predators:

Technique: Trolling or jigging near the bottom are the go-to methods.

Depth: Focus on 35–80 feet, where lake trout tend to hold tight to structure.

Locations: Target underwater ridges, drop-offs, and boulder piles.

Bait: Mimic kokanee. Use realistic lures, tipped jigs, and scent — lake trout can be selective, especially when food is abundant.

Be prepared for a potential record fish.

Catch-and-release records will need a photo of the fish on a tape measure, or measuring board. You can find all the info and how to apply on the State Record Fish Page.

And lastly, congratulations to Dylan Smith on his spot atop Idaho's catch-and-release leader board.

More About Idaho's State Record Fish

Thinking about chasing a state record fish? Check out the state record fish page <https://idfg.idaho.gov/fish/record> for more information.

How to Apply for a Catch-and-Release Record

All applicants must submit a complete Record Fish Application Form, with accompanying photographs. This form can be completed online or downloaded from our website here <https://idfg.idaho.gov/sites/default/files/state-record-fish-app.pdf>.

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2026 Fall Mack Days on Flathead Lake

Sponsored by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes

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

More Entries per angler=Higher Payout for that angler

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



Thursday-September 10th to Sunday-November 8th

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

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

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

Friday- Sunday-competitive Mack Days-lottery prizes, tagged fish, and bonuses-ends Sat 11/7

Top twenty angler prizes: Pick your best 18 days/26 possible-Friday-Sunday. Check out pick up sites on the website or turn in at Blue Bay from 12:00 till ½ hr. before sunset

Monday-Thursday- 12:00 to ½ hr before dark to turn in fish only at Blue Bay – 3-\$100, 3-\$200 4-\$250 lottery drawings plus bonus dollars -33 days-entries totaled with Fri-Sun totals at the end of the event for bonus amounts

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8th –SEPARATE DAY ALL ENTRIES IN BY 3:00-only AT BLUE BAY

All prizes & lottery drawings will be done on Sunday morning 11/7 and posted for awards ceremony at 3:00. Cash Drawings for Sunday will be-\$400, \$350, \$300. Largest lake trout under 30" \$100-1st \$75-2nd Smallest \$200 Top Angler by 11/8 total \$300 Totals count for bonus awards

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

Friday-Sunday Prizes excluding the last day

Lottery drawings **\$2,000- \$600** all lottery drawings & prizes end Saturday 11/1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Applications are free and available at:

Zimmers Tackle-Pablo

Walmart-Polson

Sportsman's Warehouse-Missoula

FWP-Missoula and Kalispell

Westland Seed-Ronan

Sportsman & Ski Haus-Kalispell

Bob Ward & Sons-Missoula

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5 Shooting Tips For Deer Hunters

By Mike Hanback
Big Deer Blog
<https://bigdeerblog.com>

If you're lucky you'll fire one bullet at a mature buck this fall.

Sight-in and fine-tune your rifle/scope/load this summer, and practice until you are efficient and confident out to 250 yards.

Then remember these tips that will help you make that one shot count in the woods.

• Think out a shot before it happens.

Say you're climbing a hillside or stalking on a ridge. What if a buck jumps out of that draw? Which way will he run? Is it 100 or 200 yards across that canyon?

Anticipate and be ready for a quick shot as best you can.

One November day I crawled up on a buck browsing in the shade, zapped him at 173 yards with my Leica Geovid binos, flipped down the legs of my Harris bipod, breathed and aimed for 10 seconds and pressed the 6.5 PRC's trigger.

Boom, the buck buckled and dropped on the spot; I might as well have shot him off a bench rest.

• Use a short bipod in big country where you can go prone and set up a shot through the low grass.

There is no better rest.

But remember, untold numbers of big bucks get away every fall because hunters spend too much time fooling around with a %@%#* & rest.

Practice flipping and extending the legs of a bipod until you can set up the shot quickly and smoothly.

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• In the mental chaos of trying to shoot an old, thick 8-pointer who can remember a fancy wind-doping equation?

Lex Webernick, who builds custom rifles and kills deer with them at long ranges in Texas, puts it in terms we can understand: "If the wind's blowing lightly at 5 or 10 mph hold dead-on a buck. But if you're having trouble keeping on your cap, use your gut instinct and hold into the wind on shots past 150 yards."



Photo courtesy Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog <https://bigdeerblog.com>

Example:

A buck is broadside, looking west into a stout west wind. Aim slightly forward point of his shoulder, still on hair, and let the wind push that bullet back into his boiler room.

•When's the last time you shot underneath a buck?

"By far most misses are high," says Wyoming outfitter Brian Beisher. He notes that on the Western plains, most hunters instinctively aim too high, even when a buck is only 100 to 200 yards away.

Beisher coaches his clients to calm down and "aim for the heart, aim for the heart." It helps them pull their shots low into a deer's chest.

• When a buck is walking toward you, quartering slightly on, aim the crosshair onto the point of the shoulder you can see.

Hit a deer squarely on the mid-point of the shoulder with a stout bullet that drives back through the vitals, and the animal always thumps straight down. It's one of my favorite shots.

How To Build A Cooler Plan Before An Elk Hunt

Ted Ramirez Jr
Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Company
<https://www.caribougear.com>

A cooler plan should be built before the elk is down. Once meat reaches the truck, the work is not over.

Warm coolers, poor drainage, not enough ice, overloaded truck space, and loose bags piled together can undo good field care fast.

Most cooler problems are not caused by one big mistake.

They happen because hunters assume they will figure it out later.

Later usually means tired, hot, short on daylight, and standing at the truck with more meat than expected.

Know How Much Cooler Space You Actually Need

An elk takes up more cooler space than many hunters plan for.

Boned-out meat, quarters, loose cuts, trim, cape, ice, and drainage room all compete for space.

A cooler that looks large in the garage can feel small once heavy meat bags start coming off the mountain.

Before season, think through:

- whether the elk will be packed out bone-in or boned-out
- how many coolers fit in the truck
- where ice will go
- whether coolers can drain safely
- how meat bags will stay separated
- how long the drive home or to the processor will be

Cooler space is part of the hunt plan, not an afterthought.

Do Not Count on Buying Ice After the Packout

Ice is easy to take for granted until every gas station near the unit is out.

Busy weekends, warm weather, remote towns, and long drives can make ice harder to find when hunters need it most.

Build the ice plan before the hunt starts.

(continued on page 34)



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Boone And Crockett Club Launches AI-Powered Big Game Records Live 2.0

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

The Boone and Crockett Club recently launched Big Game Records Live 2.0, a major evolution of its digital platform that transforms the world's oldest big game records database into an interactive analytics tool for hunters.

While the original platform allowed users to search the Club's archives, Big Game Records Live 2.0 integrates 140 years of harvest records with 12 proprietary, data-driven analysis tools designed to identify trends, isolate geographic biological hotspots, and evaluate environmental variables.



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

The centerpiece of the new subscription-based platform is the built-in “Research Assistant,” an AI-powered research agent trained on the Club’s data and equipped to use advanced search tools to explore the archives. Users can type direct questions—such as identifying specific counties where public-land whitetails are historically taken, or evaluating how temperature and barometric pressure fluctuations impact elk harvest dates. The platform instantly cross-references more than 50,000 official trophy entries, historical weather info, and other variables to deliver data-backed answers to hunters’ queries.

“For nearly a century, the data collected through our records program has served as a vital indicator of wildlife health and habitat quality,” said Kyle Lehr, Director of Big Game Records for the Boone and Crockett Club. “With version 2.0, we are putting the full weight of that data directly into the hands of the public. This platform allows hunters to research our records anytime, anywhere.”

In addition to the AI Research Assistant, the updated interface features enriched data profiles for individual entries, including digital copies of official score charts, shot distances, and specific calibers or weapons used. Thousands of vintage and modern field photographs have also been integrated into the database.

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The platform’s 12 core sub-tools allow users to cross-reference data across 39 big game categories spanning every U.S. state and Canadian province.

Key features include:

Enhanced Trophy Search: An overhaul of the core search engine allows users to easily scroll through the latest entries as well as vintage field photos and digital score charts with ease. Individual entry files are now enriched with granular details from the hunt, including weather conditions, barometric pressure, time of day, and the specific weapon or caliber used.

State & County Heat Maps: Visual tools highlight regional trophy production to map biological hotspots.

Method Visualizer and Shot Distance Analysis: Real-world metrics detail the specific weapons, actions, calibers, and actual yardages recorded during successful fair-chase harvests.

Environmental Trackers: Tools including Hunter’s Moon, Date of Kill, and Weather Analysis correlate historic harvest success with specific lunar phases, calendar windows, time of day, and barometric trends.

Trophy Analytica: Deep-dive charts map decades of regional antler, horn, and skull measurements used by wildlife managers to monitor herd dynamics.

Personal Scoring Database: A secure digital ledger for users to document and track their own personal entry measurements.

Big Game Records Live 2.0 is mobile-optimized for field use and is available now. The platform is accessible via monthly or annual digital subscriptions through the Boone and Crockett Club web store, and a full annual subscription is included as a benefit for all Club members at the \$100 level and above.

To learn more about the platform or to access the database, visit Big Game Records Live 2.0: <https://www.boone-crockett.org/bcs-big-game-records-live-20>.

More about the Boone And Crockett Club

Founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1887, the Boone and Crockett Club promotes guardianship and visionary management of big game and associated wildlife in North America. The Club maintains the highest standards of fair chase sportsmanship and habitat stewardship.

Member accomplishments include enlarging and protecting Yellowstone and establishing Glacier and Denali national parks, founding the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and National Wildlife Refuge System, fostering the Pittman-Robertson and Lacey Acts, creating the Federal Duck Stamp program, and developing the cornerstones of modern game laws.

The Boone and Crockett Club is headquartered in Missoula, Montana. Click here <https://www.boone-crockett.org/about-boone-and-crockett-club-1887> to learn more about the Boone and Crockett Club.

Where Big Bucks Live: 2 Core Areas

Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog <https://bigdeerblog.com>

Scientists tracked adult bucks fitted with GPS collars on a hunted property on the Maryland coast. Data collected from the GPS collars allowed the researchers to home in on the home ranges of mature bucks, and the “core areas” within those home ranges. The property was a mix of agricultural fields and woods, typical of whitetail habitat across the United States.

“We saw core areas show up in places that (people) basically don’t hunt,” said Dr. Mark Conner, who headed up the study.

Mark described 2 sites in particular that served as the core areas for multiple bucks.

“One is a sanctuary because it is impenetrable to humans,” he said. “Very dense greenbrier and other thorny vegetation. The only way you can get into it is to find a deer trail and get on your hands and knees and go in there.”

The other core area is a designated waterfowl sanctuary that surrounds a pond. Human activity is restricted to avoid disturbing the geese and ducks that use the pond.



Photo credit Mike Hanback Big Deer Blog <https://bigdeerblog.com>

The restricted area is about 25 acres and includes woodlands, fields and pockets of native grasses.

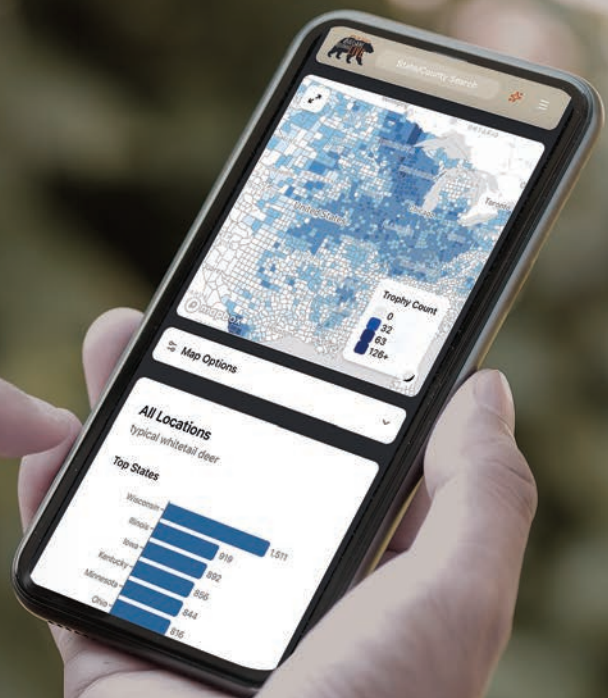
“It’s almost the opposite of the (first) sanctuary. It’s very open,” Mark said. “But like the other sanctuary, there is no human disturbance. These 2 areas were core areas for multiple bucks, and by our definition of core area, the bucks spent 50 percent of their time in those areas.”

Lesson is simple: Anywhere in America, mature, big-racked deer spend most of their time where humans, including us hunters, can’t or won’t go.

YOUR TROPHY SEARCH JUST GOT *EASIER.*

For years, **Big Game Records Live** gave hunters access to the official B&C trophy database. You could search records, filter by species, study measurements. It was useful.

Version 2.0 is something else entirely.



WWW.BOONE-CROCKETT.ORG

September Elk: To Call Or Not To Call?

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com



Photo courtesy GOHUNT.com

It's archery season and you are 150 yards from a large herd bull with multiple cows and they have no clue you are downwind. There is adequate cover between you and the 6 and the wind is just perfect. Do you cow call, bugle or don't make a peep as you try your luck at the stalk? To call or not to call? That is the question that almost every DIY public land hunter struggles with on a daily basis in the elk woods. After all, our elk heroes from YouTube and The Outdoor Channel are out there calling in bull after bull and motivating us to call in an elk. You've tried to call in a bull before, but when you bugle, the bull turns and pulls his cows away from you. What is the difference between you and what you see on TV and the internet? Every situation is different, but here are some clues and cues that have helped to know whether I will call or not. Below are five differences that you should think about when deciding whether calling is the best strategy or not for your hunt.

What Week of Hunting Season Is It?

September can be a magical time if you are in the elk woods chasing bulls. This is what draws a lot of hunters to the mountains from all over the continent and the world on a yearly basis. When hunting during archery season in a public land setting, I am usually only confident with calling in bulls during the first week or two of the season. The reason I stop trying to coax a bull my way after that is due to hunting pressure and call shy bulls. In my experience, by week two, a lot of hunters have broken out a cow call or bugle tube, not paying attention to the wind, where they are calling from, how close an elk is and other situational differences. By week two, most bulls within a few miles of a trail or road have heard "John" or "Karen" blowing a cow call or squeezing a Hoochie Momma walking the same trail day after day. Elk are smart animals and, after hearing and encountering hunters, will not only be unresponsive but often turn and pull their cows the opposite direction upon hearing calls. This is why I put my calls away after week two and try other strategies to fill my tag. Exception: When you are four to five miles deep or in a ridiculously hard to access basin where pressure is going to be less, hunting in a restricted hunting zone or on private land, calling any time of the season could work great.

Cover Type

If I am hunting in an area that has openings to spot and glass from I usually choose to try and find elk that way first, then close the distance and decide what to do once I am closer. Often, each bull I see requires a different stalk, calling plan and strategy so I will need to make decisions on the fly. When you are hunting in thick and nasty cover where spot and stalk or bugle and sneak is not an option then calling may be your only option. One thing that will help is to pay attention to where you are calling from. Call from areas where the wind is in your favor, you are off the main trail, you have shooting lanes and you are close to where you think the elk are. Trust me, your success will increase. If you are hunting in thick timber, elk will be less reliant on their eyesight and more receptive to calling and using their nose upon their approach, so a correctly positioned hunting partner — if you have one — will be crucial.

Partner

Understand that if you have a calling partner, then the chance of calling an elk in and making a shot is so much better than trying to call solo. When you call an elk, they will have you pinpointed and, if they come in, they will know exactly where you called from. Upon their approach, they will expect to see another elk and elk movement. If they do not see this, they will become wary and turn and get out of there before you can get a shot off. A correctly positioned hunting partner can mask your location by calling. This will help present you with a better shot if the bull comes in and, if he does not come in, you have the stalk option. If the bull hangs up or doesn't want to come, you can still continue your stalk and your partner can stay still and maintain the elk's attention for a short while. If you have a partner, consider calling more frequently while still paying attention to wind, cover, elk location and other details.

Can You Get Closer?



Photo credit Brady Miller courtesy GOHUNT.com

If you are trying to close the distance on a bull, I would always suggest that you get as close as you can without calling. Plenty of time, a successful stalk within bow range will allow the elk to keep its normal routine. If the bull doesn't know you are there, then he would have no reason to pull his cows from their normal pattern, which can sometimes happen if you bugle towards them. Always pay attention to the wind and thermal direction, the cover and terrain between you and the elk, the direction they are heading and how many

animals are present in the area. The more elk equals more eyes, which equates to a higher chance you might get busted on your stalk. However, a well planned silent stalk is a very successful way to take a mature bull.

Elk Behavior

During the rut, elk can get really fired up bugling, showing signs of aggressiveness, jealousy and dominance. If the bull you are chasing is all sorts of fired up and bugling its head off then calling is definitely something that you can do more of in that situation. A bull that is trying to keep his cows together or fend off other bulls will be more vocal and give you the indication to be more vocal. Start with some cow calls and see how he reacts. If he bugles to your cow calls and looks or sounds mature, hit him back with an angry bugle and see what happens. Worse case scenario: He doesn't behave the way you hope and you can plan an attack that evening or the next day. When elk are fired up, you really have to get busted good for them to get out of the area.

In Closing

Ultimately, to call or not to call is the question and every situation is different. Thinking about what you are doing and strategizing every situation is important in order to capitalize on every hunt. I want to be clear: calling bulls can work on public land and many people are successful this way. My thought is that, often, it is hard enough to find bulls on public land so just analyzing the situation before deciding what to do is very important. After you come up with a plan



Chris Neville's 2019 Wyoming bull elk. Photo courtesy GOHUNT.com
You can watch the GOHUNT Original film, OUT WEST here: <https://youtu.be/TI0gLLEPLAo?si=xaKT5tHdLb21Slz8> to see how this hunt went down.

for the situation, execute the plan and either harvest the bull or not. The more important thing to do is to look back on what you did correct or wrong and learn from it. Every time we can be in the mountains is a learning opportunity that will make you a better elk hunter, able to strategize quickly with each subsequent elk encounter.

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

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Expert Insights On Tactics For How To Bowhunt Elk Throughout All Stages Of September

By Trail Kreitzer

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

September is a sacred month, and beyond that, the 15th through the 25th are the most anticipated ten days of my calendar each year. It's a culmination of sights, sounds, smells, and the dynamic nature of archery elk hunting that sucks me in so heavily that it's almost completely consuming. In preparation, I am always analyzing the factors that can make or break my hunt. My goal, which I think most of us share, is to harvest a bull with my bow. With that in mind, I want to share what I would consider the critical puzzle pieces to finding success in the elk woods each fall.

How to find elk to hunt



<https://youtu.be/KWLM9r24F2s?si=XFJKpQYIUWIKDjCD>

The most common question we get is, “How do I find elk?” Assuming you have selected a unit to hunt or have drawn a permit, the next step is to think about what elk need — and even more so — when they need it.

Step 1 - locate water to find elk

Water plays a critical role for elk — much more so than mule deer. Elk need water every day. In many areas of the West, water is plentiful in the high country, but in the arid states like Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico, water sources are great places to start your search for elk, especially early in the season.



A wallow setup for early-season elk. Photo credit Trail Kreitzer



Photo credit Chris Neville

In addition to water for drinking, in early September, bulls will establish “wallows” that they will utilize to coat themselves in mud and their own urine. Essentially, they are trying to make themselves into a walking advertisement to attract cows that will be coming into estrus in the coming weeks. A wallow can be made in a wet meadow, a seep, a spring, a pond or, even, a stock tank. Experience suggests that bulls begin wallowing a couple of weeks prior to most cows coming into estrus, and they will continue to wallow throughout the rut.

Wallows are phenomenal ambush points — most notably in the early weeks of September. If you are struggling to call in elk, ambush hunting on a wallow is highly effective. Bulls are most likely to visit a wallow just after first light or just prior to dark. Using aerial imagery, I'd encourage you to focus on finding water holes, wet meadows, seeps, springs and any small open green benches with water. If you can find a spring seeping out of the side of a shady north-facing timbered slope, elk are typically not far off. For more information on how to hunt wallows for elk, check out an article I wrote [here](https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/early-season-elk-tactics-how-to-effectively-hunt-elk-wallows) <https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/early-season-elk-tactics-how-to-effectively-hunt-elk-wallows>.

Step 2 - locate elk feed, and elk will surely be nearby



https://youtu.be/SvTdRxjl_k0?si=p3CtpVwqtsKMHw6

Food is the second feature I look for when evaluating a landscape to find elk. Elk are more of a generalist when compared to mule deer or antelope, but during August and September they are going to be grazing green grasses and forbs primarily. In the last weeks of August and early days of September, bulls will be heavily focused on consuming calories in preparation for the rut.

To understand what you are looking for, evaluate the type, quality, and amount of vegetation covering the ground. For example, in conifer forests, elk flock to recently-burned areas due to the flush of grasses and forbs that follow. Small clear cuts, logging areas or habitat restoration areas provide greater amounts of quality forage. Beetle kill is rough on old growth trees, but it opens the forest floor to more light, water and nutrients and produces phenomenal feed. Aspen forests have particularly healthy understories of grasses, forbs and new shoots. Alpine meadows and avalanche chutes are highly productive feeding areas. Elk love mosaic high edge habitat types. By that, I mean patchy mixes of open feeding areas intermixed with heavy timbered bedding areas. If I can find a mosaic of feeding areas and heavy north-facing coniferous bedding areas sprinkled with some wet meadow benches and seeps, then I know I will find elk. One more side note: elk are famous for feeding up slope toward bedding areas in the morning with the thermals coming down to their keen noses and down slope in the evening once again with the warmer afternoon thermals carrying up slope.

I touched on the last habitat requirement above, but to quickly revisit it: elk need cover. The type and location of the cover they choose changes somewhat later in the year, but in August and September throughout most of the West, elk are searching out cool shady north or west-facing slopes in the morning and may transition toward east-facing slopes in the afternoon. Essentially, they are chasing shade and cover mid-morning during the warm early-season months.

The last piece I will touch on is security. Elk are susceptible to hunting pressure and will gladly move into new drainages to avoid it. The more recent trend of going farther into the backcountry has interestingly created somewhat of a pinch point in a lot of areas where the elk are not as steep and deep as they once were, but are also not hanging out by the road. More frequently, I am focusing on the areas in the three to five-mile range away from roads and trailheads.

In conclusion, evaluate the landscape in terms of what elk need, and you'll find elk. And with GOHUNT Maps, that research is now easier than ever! Learn more about GOHUNT Maps at GOHUNT.com.

Getting within range of elk — surefire elk hunting methods

The goal is to get within range of a bull, and more specifically, a herd bull. Within that, it's worth noting that there are several methods, and the more of those tools you have in your toolbox, the more successful you will be. The versatile archery elk hunter is the one who fills tags.

Pre-rut elk bowhunting tactics

In August and perhaps even into the first week of September, it's not uncommon for bulls to occupy the same areas where they have spent the later parts of June and July.

(continued on page 33)



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Photos credit Ryan McSparran

Tips To Prepare And Cook Mouthwatering Antelope Meals

By Zach Lazzari

Table Mountain Outfitters

<https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com>

Antelope meat gets mixed reviews from hunters. It's a difficult thing for me to understand personally, because I can't get enough of antelope. When properly cared for, pronghorn is easily among my favorite big game meats. Improper care can leave any wild animal with a gamey taste. But with a little attention, antelope is right up there with the best wild meats.

As we approach antelope hunting season in Wyoming, here are a few processing and cooking tips to make the most out of your pronghorn meat:

Field Dressing and Preparing Antelope

Field care is extremely important and will determine the quality of the meat. Quickly cooling and processing the antelope is imperative in the field. Gut your animal and allow for heat escape soon as possible.

Hang the quarters in a cool, dry space until it can be processed or taken to a local processor.

Lastly, process and freeze the cuts for consumption.

If you process yourself be sure to take out as much of the connective tissue and fat. While fat is a flavor additive in beef and other consumer meats it will only detract from the great flavor of your antelope. If you want a fat additive to help with a grind I would suggest adding a pork or beef suet.

Working with Prime Cuts

The prime cuts are perfect for steaks and roasts. I like my antelope steaks rare to medium rare, seared and cooked quickly.

Cooking individual steaks is an option but doing the entire backstrap in one piece on the grill is also fun for a group dinner.

The unique savory taste of perfect antelope steaks will please the pickiest pallets.

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Pan-frying steaks in a cast iron skillet is simple and easy. No marinades are necessary either. Cut your steaks and add sea salt and pepper. Occasionally, I will add a pinch of cayenne pepper as well. Heat the pan on high, add butter or oil and sear for 3-4 minutes on each side. The thickness of the steaks will determine the duration. I use a fork to poke the meat and pull it off to rest for 8 minutes when the fork easily penetrates about a quarter of the exterior.



On the barbecue, cut the steaks or take an entire backstrap and splay it in half or thirds. Mix olive oil, Worcestershire sauce and minced garlic and rub liberally on the meat. Rub down with sea salt and pepper and heat the grill to a high heat setting. Set the meat on the grill and allow the oils and seasoning to sear on each side for 4-5 minutes. Pull the meat and rest for 10 minutes before serving. An internal temperature of 130-degrees is good for medium-rare roasts and big cuts. Do not over cook your antelope it will only become tough and dry.

Cooking the Tough Cuts

The tougher cuts like the shanks, neck and front quarters are perfect for slow-cooked recipes that tenderize the meat and break down connective tissue. Stews and chili are two easy favorites. Cooking on low heat for 8-10 hours will bring out more flavor in stew and chili recipes.

You can take any standard stew or chili recipe and substitute the antelope for other meat options. I like it spicy and add a jalapeno pepper to chili recipes, removing the pepper just before serving. The slow cooker is a game changer for tenderizing the tougher cuts on any game animal.

To learn more about guided antelope hunts with Table Mountain Outfitters, please visit their antelope hunting page <https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/hunts/antelope/>. For booking, availability and other details, please don't hesitate to contact them at <https://www.tablemountainoutfitters.com/contact-us/> or call 307-632-6352.

Zach Lazzari is an OUTDOOR WRITER, fly fishing guide and hunting enthusiast. Follow Zach at [BUSTEDOARLOCK.COM](https://www.bustedoarlock.com).

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Alpine Lakes in Montana's Yellowstone Country

<https://visityellowstonecountry.com>

There are hundreds of alpine lakes dotting Yellowstone Country, each one tucked up into a little slice of heaven. If you have the time and inclination, many of these lakes make great backpacking destinations. However, backpacking isn't necessary; some lakes you can drive right to, or take a day trip. Peaceful, magical, and generally full of fish, visiting these lakes is nothing short of rejuvenating. **Here are a few of our favorites, but do some exploring; there are hidden gems everywhere!**



Photo by, @expedition_summit Courtesy Montana's Yellowstone Country
<https://visityellowstonecountry.com>

Pine Creek Lake

This local favorite is a short, but steep hike to reach the lake. Camping is allowed around the lake, but the area is very pristine. If you're backpacking, make time to climb Black Mountain, the second-highest peak in the Absaroka-Beartooth Mountain Range at 10,941 feet. If you're not up for that much adventure, you can hike to the waterfalls, a nice mellow trail, and a short walk. Camping is also available at Pine Creek Campground.



Photo by @tigers.eye.photo Courtesy Montana's Yellowstone Country
<https://visityellowstonecountry.com>

East Rosebud Lake, Red Lodge, Montana

Located in the Custer-Gallatin mountain range, East Rosebud Lake has breathtaking scenery. You can drive right to the lake, with camping, hiking, and fishing nearby. The lake sits at one of the trailheads to The Beaten Path, a 26-mile trail that takes you to Cooke City. In between, you'll find lakes all along the way, including Elk Lake, the Snow Lakes, Arch Lake, and Sylvan Lake. Some require a bit more bushwhacking than others, depending on the level of adventure you are seeking. You can also base out of East Rosebud Lake Campground and adventure along the trail as far as you like.



Photo by, @thestevefowler Courtesy Montana's Yellowstone Country
<https://visityellowstonecountry.com>

Mystic Lake, Bozeman, Montana

There are two Mystic Lakes in Yellowstone Country. The trail taking you to this one outside Bozeman is ten miles, making it a popular mountain biking destination. The alternate single track, "The Wall of Death," traverses a steep sidehill, not for the faint of heart. During the winter months, the trail is groomed for Nordic skiing. Mystic Lake Cabin, a Forest Service cabin, is available to rent year-round.



Dailey Lake, Emigrant, Montana. Courtesy Montana's Yellowstone Country
<https://visityellowstonecountry.com>

Located in Paradise Valley, just outside of Gardiner, Montana, Daily Lake is an easy drive. This little lake is loved by windsurfers, kite surfers, and sailors. There are 35 tent and trailer campsites on the shores, along with restrooms and drinking water. Anglers love the variety of fish, including; rainbow trout, yellow perch, Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and walleye. Fish range in size between 9-16.9", so they are good-sized!

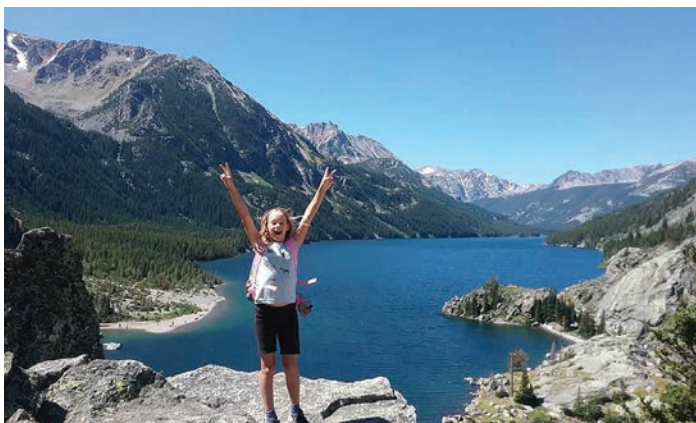


Photo by, @beingbreanne Courtesy Montana's Yellowstone Country
<https://visityellowstonecountry.com>

Mystic Lake, Fishtail, Montana

The deepest and longest lake in the Beartooth Mountains, this Mystic Lake, is also more developed, with a hydro-electric dam.

Don't let this fool you; the hike is fantastic and feels incredibly remote.

You'll pass Emerald Lake on the way, and just beyond Mystic Lake is Island Lake, and beyond that Silver Lake. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks keep the lake stocked with Rainbow Trout, and while they aren't huge, they are entertaining to catch!

Beartooth Lake

If you take a drive over the iconic Beartooth Highway, a stop at Beartooth Lake is a must. You'll be close to the Top of the World store, aptly named because, at the top of the pass, that's literally how you feel. The views are breathtaking. While Beartooth Lake makes an excellent picnic spot on a day trip, there are campsites available. Keep in mind; there is no cell service.



Courtesy Montana's Yellowstone Country
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Learn more about visiting Montana's Yellowstone Country here:

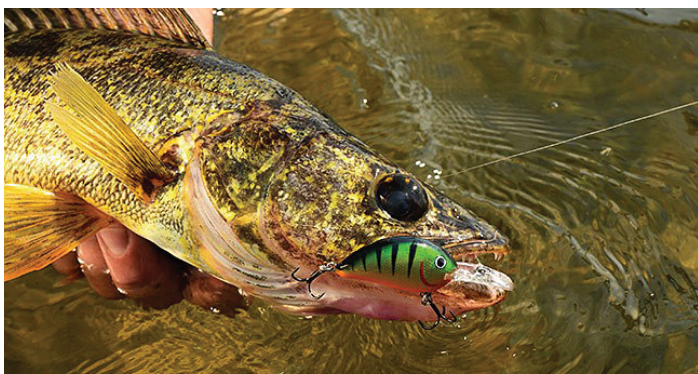
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Beat The Heat On The Troll

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

When it comes to catching walleyes, late summer can be tough, especially during the heat of August. Just a little bit early for the fall feedbag bite, walleyes can prove tough to boat. Sure, you can catch a few 'eyes live bait rigging, slip bobbering, and using other finesse approaches, but to consistently put numbers of delicious marble eyes in the livewell, you've got to cover water. Lots of it.

The best way to do that? Trolling crankbaits, which means anything from exploring weededges to flats to open basin areas where 'eyes are grouped, suspended, and feeding on clouds of baitfish. But no matter where you find them, the new Northland Rumble Series offers a solution.

We talked with Northland pros and masters-of-the-troll Brian "Bro" Brosdahl and Jason Mitchell for tips on catching dog days walleyes. The beans they spilled should prove invaluable to your late-summer walleye program...



Mitchell Talks Trolling Cranks

Former longtime guide and host of JMO Outdoors, Jason Mitchell has been pulling cranks extensively over the past couple of weeks and doesn't see an end in sight. The Dakotas have experienced high waters this year, which has pushed the fish shallow, perfect for trolling shorelines, a technique typically reserved for earlier in the summer walleye season.

In particular, North Dakota's Lake Sakakawea is up some ten feet which has pushed walleyes into bays and cuts in the lake.

"What's been dynamite is trolling Northland Rumble Bugs with minimal line out behind the boat in waters as skinny as four to seven feet. You get back up in the bays and find walleyes relating to flooded vegetation, wood, and old shorelines. There's a lot of young-of-year white bass, drum, and even carp. The minnows and bait are in the bays, so my program is pulling the Rumble Bug shallow," notes Mitchell.

Trolling in such shallow water, Mitchell doesn't have to long-line very far. Sometimes, he has the bait out a mere 15 feet behind the prop wash. "You have such little line out that a seven- or eight-pound walleye will shake on the surface of the water right behind the boat."



Rumble Bug - Sneeze



Rumble Bug - Lemon Tiger

Conversely, on Devils Lake the walleyes have moved deep—and there's been an algae bloom, so the fish have moved out to the deeper-than-average weeds.

"Again, I've been pulling the Rumble Bug a lot—and I don't want to sound like a broken record—but the bait just flat-out catches fish. For the depths on Devils, I've been using leadcore, typically running anything from 90 to 130 feet of line out, depending on the depth of the fish. I've been running that 18- to 30-foot contour.

Some days the walleyes are deeper, some days they're shallower.

I'm usually looking for rocks and clouds of baitfish to pull over and through. But rock and gravel transition areas are really what's been holding fish lately," remarks Mitchell.

Mitchell professes he's not much of a "color guy," and insists that the Rumble Bug profile and wobble is more the deal. However, he has done especially well on a few specific Rumble Bug colors, including Wonderbread and Lemon Tiger. "The Rumble Bug's profile matches the size of young-of-the-year white bass, so I gravitate toward the colors with some white in them. The Rumble Bug has a tight wobble, sends off vibrations to the lateral lines of fish, and tracks perfectly on-the-troll," notes Mitchell.



Bro Knows Trolling Cranks

While better known for his jig designs and proficiency with live bait tactics, veteran guide and Northland pro, Brian “Bro” Brosdahl, does know a thing or two about trolling crankbaits for walleyes.

“Trolling cranks allows you to cover a lot of water fast. It’s as simple as that,” says Bro. “No matter the season, they just produce—and late summer is no exception. The thing is, crankbaits draw reaction strikes, something you don’t get rigging or slip-bobbering. That’s finesse. Trolling cranks—either on a flat-line or lead core—is a power game that often produces more and bigger fish.”

In terms of location, Bro says that sometimes in the late-summer ‘eyes will congregate on the tops of flats from morning through the day, but especially at night.

“There’s a special place in my heart for night trolling crankbaits. I’ve had a lot of success over the past couple decades pulling balsa over flats on long-lines. But make sure the lights on your boat work and you’ve got a headlamp. Other than that, it can be as simple as locating those expansive flats in six to 15 feet of water and throwing a Rumble Bug or Rumble Shiner behind the boat. Then it’s hang on for hard for reaction bites, which are made even more intense under the shroud of darkness,” notes Bro.



Rumble Shiner - Wonderbread



Rumble Shiner - Sneeze

Bro says not to ignore basins, either. “It’s a good idea to own at least one rod with a line-counter reel and leadcore for this kind of fishing. I’ll target basins in the 20s and even 30-feet-plus areas on the main lake with leadcore and a Rumble Shiner. The action of the Rumble Shiner is straight, tight, and makes a lot of sound in the water drawing fish in from afar,” says Bro.

Bro insists that anglers should spend more time experimenting with crankbait colors when the action slows. “Walleyes key in on color a lot more than you’d think,” notes Bro.

(continued on page 38)



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Photo courtesy Ted Ramirez Jr. <https://www.caribougear.com>

How to Pressure-Test Your Elk Plan Before Opening Morning

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

A hunt plan can look solid at home and still fall apart before daylight.

The road is rougher than expected.

The wind is wrong.

The trailhead is already full.

The water source is dry.

The packout route looks worse under real terrain than it did on the map.

That is why an elk plan needs to be pressure-tested before opening morning.

The goal is not to create a perfect plan.

The goal is to find the weak points before the season starts.

Start With the Access Plan

Access is usually where a hunt plan breaks first.

A drainage may look good on a map, but the real question is whether you can get there, park cleanly, move quietly, and leave safely.

Before opening morning, review every access assumption.

Check:

- road condition
- parking options
- gate status
- turnaround space
- trailhead pressure
- alternate access
- how long it takes to reach the first glassing point
- how long it takes to get back out

If the first access point is crowded or blocked, the backup should already be clear.

Opening morning is not the time to start figuring that out.

Test the Plan Against Wind

A good elk plan that only works with one wind direction is fragile.

Wind can change the approach, the glassing point, the setup, and the exit.

Before season, look at each plan and ask what wind makes it work.

Then ask what wind makes it fall apart.

For each area, note:

- which wind direction helps the approach
- which wind exposes you
- where thermals may shift
- where the wind may swirl
- which glassing point works with the likely wind
- which backup route keeps you from blowing out the drainage

If the wind is wrong, the answer should not be guessing.

The answer should be moving to a different setup that was already planned.

Look for the Pressure Problem

Public-land elk plans often fail because hunters underestimate pressure.

Not just hunting pressure.

Road pressure. Camping pressure. Hiking pressure. Side-by-side traffic. Livestock movement. Other hunters using the same obvious glassing point.

Before opening week, ask where people are most likely to show up.

Pressure-test the plan by checking:

- obvious parking areas
- easy glassing points
- main trail routes
- water sources close to roads
- popular camp locations
- places where several access routes meet
- terrain that naturally funnels hunters

Pressure does not automatically ruin an area.

But a good plan should account for how pressure may move animals and people.

Do Not Trust One Water Pin

A single water source should not hold the entire plan together.

Water can change before season.

Livestock can move in.

Other hunters may focus on the same source.

A spring that looked good in summer may not matter the same way once pressure, weather, and elk movement change.

Before opening morning, review:

- which water sources were confirmed
- when they were checked
- whether they looked reliable
- what sign was nearby
- whether livestock were using them
- whether the approach is exposed
- what backup water exists nearby

For more on reading water as part of the larger hunt plan, read "Why Water Conditions Matter Before Elk Season" <https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/water-conditions-before-elk-season>.

Check the Weather Failure Point

Weather does not need to be extreme to change a plan.

A hot afternoon, muddy road, lightning risk, early storm, or cold front can change where you can go and how long you should stay.

Before opening week, identify what weather would break each plan.

Ask:

- Does rain make the road difficult?
- Does heat make the climb unrealistic?
- Does lightning make the glassing point unsafe?
- Does mud affect the exit route?
- Does wind make the approach unusable?
- Is there a lower, safer option if weather builds?

The best plan still leaves room to adjust when conditions change.

For more on this topic, read "Afternoon Storms, Heat, and Access: What Western Hunters Should Plan Around" <https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/afternoon-storms-access-summer-scouting>.

Pressure-Test the Packout

A hunt plan is incomplete if it ignores the retrieval.

Finding elk is only part of the problem.

Getting meat back to the truck safely and efficiently is part of the same plan.

Before opening morning, look at each area and ask what happens if an elk goes down there.

Review:

- distance to the truck
- elevation gain on the return
- deadfall sections
- creek crossings
- sidehill exposure
- where meat could be staged
- where darkness would make the route harder
- whether a longer route may be safer

If the packout looks unrealistic, that does not mean the area is impossible. (continued on next page)

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How to Pressure-Test Your Elk Plan Before Opening Morning

(continued from page 19)

It means the decision needs to be made before the shot, not after it.

Check Communication and Emergency Assumptions

Many hunters assume communication will work until it does not.

Service fades. Radios lose range. Batteries die. Plans change. Partners split up.

Before opening week, make sure the communication plan is clear.

Confirm:

- who knows the hunt plan
- where the truck will be parked
- when check-ins should happen
- what device is being used
- who has backup power
- what happens if the group separates
- where the fallback meeting point is

A simple communication plan removes confusion when the day changes.

Build the First Pivot Before You Need It

A strong elk plan should include the first pivot.

That means knowing what you will do when the original plan no longer makes sense.

Examples:

- If the trailhead is full, move to backup access.
- If the wind is wrong, glass from the opposite side.
- If the road is muddy, stay on the lower route.
- If pressure moves into the basin, shift to the secondary drainage.
- If water is dry, hunt the next confirmed source.
- If storms build early, avoid exposed ridges.

A pivot is not quitting.

It is using the plan instead of forcing a bad setup.

Clean Up the Plan Into One Page

Too much information can become its own problem.

Before opening week, reduce the plan into one simple page or note.

Include:

- primary access
- backup access

- first glassing point
- backup glassing point
- wind notes
- water notes
- pressure concerns
- packout route
- weather pivot
- communication plan

For more on organizing scouting information into a usable hunt plan, read *How to Turn Summer Scouting Notes Into an Opening Week Elk Plan*:

https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/turn-summer-scouting-notes-into-elk-plan?srlti-d=AfmBOorOpniM0XD4PhJFhL85mkTwxqA-gK9Jx-P4O_UdG_9UhZZW2pO1f.

A Plan Should Survive Contact With Reality

The best elk plan is not the one that looks perfect at home.

It is the one that still works when something changes.

Pressure-test the access.

Check the wind.

Question the water.

Review the packout.

Build the first pivot.

That is how a plan becomes useful before opening morning instead of falling apart when the first problem shows up.

Elk Hunt Plan FAQ

What does it mean to pressure-test an elk hunt plan?

It means checking the plan against real problems such as access, wind, pressure, weather, water, packout difficulty, and backup options before season starts.

Why should elk hunters build backup plans before opening morning?

Backup plans help hunters adjust when roads are crowded, wind is wrong, water changes, weather builds, or pressure moves into the area.

Should packout planning be part of the hunt plan?

Yes. Hunters should know how meat could be retrieved from each area before deciding whether a location is realistic to hunt.

How simple should an opening week elk plan be?

The final plan should be simple enough to use quickly. Include primary access, backup access, wind notes, water notes, pressure concerns, packout route, and the first pivot.

Learn more and shop online at Caribou Outdoor Equipment Company: <https://www.caribougear.com>. Questions? Call 303-798-5824 or email: hunt@caribougear.com

Keep On Crushin' With The New Size 3-1/2 And New Colors For "The Mayor"

Rapala <https://www.rapala.com>



Photo courtesy Rapala <https://www.rapala.com>

Having produced huge results on the tourney trail for Rapala's bass pros over the last couple of seasons, CrushCity's® flagship swimbait, The Mayor®, is one of the hottest swimbaits on the market. With a new size (3-½ inches) and six bright new walleye colors, The Mayor's hot streak seems destined to continue.

It's no secret that minnow profiles are dominating soft baits at the moment. The new 3-½ inch size of The Mayor is truly the "goldilocks" of swimbaits – not too big and not too small. Bright new Walleye colors include: Black Gold, Fire Flame, Green Perch, Hot Firecracker, Hot Flash, and Purpledесent.

With its tight action, subtle body rock, and lively tail kick, The Mayor is a wildly versatile swimbait that, bottom line, just catches 'em. Since day one, The Mayor has been exceptional at crushing big bass. The new 3-½ inch size and hot new colors will enable walleye and even inshore anglers to get in on the action.

Designed in collaboration with Jacob Wheeler, and launched in 2023, Rapala's® CrushCity™ Softbaits have more than lived up to their name. They've helped Rapala pros rack up huge tourney wins worth over \$3M in earnings and recreational anglers worldwide hook up with more and bigger fish. And The Mayor has been right there in the thick of the fish-crushing action from the very beginning.

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Summer Whitetail Scouting Questions Answered By The Hunting Public

Vortex Optics <https://vortexoptics.com>

Deer season is inching closer and if you're like us, scouting is a top priority in the summer. It's hot. It's humid. Woods are thick and ticks are relentless. However, this can be a great time to get a leg up on the deer you plan to hunt this fall.

What should I pack for a summer scout?

1. Permethrin

The number one question we get during the summer is how to keep ticks off. Make no bones about it: Ticks are nasty little creatures born from the fires of hell and they carry all sorts of disease-causing bacteria. Infectious tick related diseases are on the rise and if you're not taking the necessary precautions, you could be their next victim.

We spray down with permethrin often in the summer months. A product called Sawyers works extremely well. It's best to hang your clothes up and liberally spray it on anything you plan to wear in the field. Let it dry on the fabric for several hours before use. One application should last several weeks. It works so well we rarely find ticks on us during summer.

2. Binos

Good optics almost always come with us to the field. We're often looking at bucks from a distance in summer, so a pair of binos are a must. For more open terrain, a good spotting scope and tripod can also help. The Vortex Diamondback 10x42's are a great choice.



Make sure to bring the right optic for the job, especially if you plan on some long-range glassing. Photo credit the Hunting Public courtesy <https://vortexoptics.com>

3. Water

Seems obvious, but you'd be surprised how often folks don't take water on scouting missions. We like Nalgene bottles for this. Just fill them up before you leave and throw some water in the pack. It'll keep you in the woods longer and you won't die of thirst, which is nice.

4. Maps

Never forget your maps or mapping system while scouting. We use the OnX Hunt app downloaded to our phones and save the areas we're scouting to the off-grid feature. This will allow you to continue using the map when you don't have cell service.

5. Boots

Unless you enjoy sticking your foot in a microwave, this might not be the best time for the rubber hunting boots. We prefer super light hiking shoes or boots that are waterproof or dry out easily. Merrell and Keen are brands we've worn in the past and had good luck with. It might also be a good idea to invest in a boot dryer. Sometimes it takes wet feet to get where you need to go, and you can't let your boots stop you.

How does summer scouting differ from scouting at other times of the year?

It's thick, hot, and miserable out. Plus, the ticks and mosquitoes are out in full force. The cover is denser in summer vs. winter and spring, so it makes old sign more difficult to see. However, the old sign is still present, and much can be learned during summer.

Bucks become more visible in open areas toward the end of July. Long-range glassing and observation can be useful during this time. For example: If we're able to spot a group of bucks in late July on public land we're unfamiliar with, we'll map scout the potential bedding areas near those bucks and immediately go in and scout them.

You're probably thinking, "Won't you spook all the bucks then?" and you'd be correct. The point is, we just aren't worried about it. Season is still several months away and if we don't know the area, we're going in to scout it. The bucks return to the same area often once they're bumped out of bedding, especially in summer. In our experience, it's the constant pressure on a spot that tips them off.

What are some of the key things to look for?

The first thing is identifying bedding areas in locations where we feel few people will go. Once found, we're scouting trails around the bedding looking for scrapes, rubs, or funnels close by. The trick is finding a setup just out of sight from the bedded deer. We try to dissect all this information on one scouting trip.

What are some typical mistakes you see people making when getting out to scout later in the season?

They don't gather enough information on their first trip in. Most folks scout an area once, then return to hang a stand, hang cameras, or finish scouting it. We believe this educates the deer when you return to the area. We've seen our best results by scouting the spot in one day, then backing out completely until it's time to go in and hunt. This puts the least amount of pressure on the spot, while giving you one chance to figure it all out. We call it the "get out of jail free card."

(continued on page 38)



Turns Mountains of Solitude

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Photo credit Trey Douglas

Chasing The Speed Goat

TUO digital marketing specialist
Trey Douglas breaks down
regional tactics and gear
requirements for hunting the American pronghorn.



By Jay Anglin Traditions Media <https://traditionsmedia.com>

The American pronghorn is native to North America's western and central grasslands. Ranging from southern Canada to northern Mexico, and while they are often erroneously called an antelope, the pronghorn is unique and closely related to Africa's giraffes and okapis.

Considered the fastest land mammal in the Western Hemisphere, the pronghorn can reach astonishing speeds with the capability to sprint at 60 mph. This remarkable characteristic is shared with other specialized adaptations including a massive heart and enlarged lungs, all of which evolved millions of years ago so pronghorn could outrun the now-extinct American cheetah. While these Ice Age predators may be gone, the pronghorn remains where it always has been and no modern North American predator can keep up with a healthy adult pronghorn in a straight footrace.

Sometimes referred to as "speed goat" by hunters, the pronghorn's distinctive pronged, black horn made naming this prairie dweller a no-brainer. Besides the uncanny ability to outrun everything, pronghorn also possesses remarkable vision with a 360-degree field of view that can spot movement up to four miles away. When it's time to flee their distinctive white rump patch flares to visually alert herd members to danger. This makes the pronghorn one of the more difficult game animals to get the jump on, so to speak. TUO Digital Marketing Specialist, Trey Douglas, lives in Western Nebraska where the pronghorns roam, and recently discussed hunting the American pronghorn and offered some advice for hunters who are ready take a crack at this native game animal.

QUESTION: How long have you been hunting pronghorn and what is the attraction?

DOUGLAS: I've been hunting pronghorn for about 7 years. The attraction is the challenge. They have incredibly good eyesight, and most of the terrain they live in is relatively flat, making it even tougher. You must use all the variation in the terrain to have a chance in most cases.

QUESTION: Many people don't realize how early pronghorn seasons open. What is your favorite time to hunt?

DOUGLAS: My favorite time to hunt is late September - mid-October when the rut is in full force. Bucks are chasing does around and chasing other bucks away from the does in their midst, so I like to use a decoy because the dominant bucks may present a shot when they see the decoy and approach within range as they attempt to run the intruder off.

QUESTION: Do you apply for tags or go with OTC (over the counter) tags?

DOUGLAS: I do OTC archery tags, but I have also applied for muzzleloader tags as well. I prefer archery, and while it is significantly more difficult, I enjoy the challenge. Knowing the terrain, wind, where the pronghorn are and how they are acting is critical. Archery hunting pronghorn probably isn't for everyone - it is more challenging than muzzleloader or rifle hunting.



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

QUESTION: What are perfect conditions for hunting pronghorn?

DOUGLAS: A light breeze is good to cover the sound of your footsteps, but wind direction doesn't matter very much unless there is a very apparent odor that catches their attention. They rely very heavily on their vision, so if you can beat their eyes the chances of getting a shot go way up. Usually, sunny with some clouds is good because if there are any terrain variations, you can use the shadows to your advantage. If it is too hot, say 85 plus, they won't move as much. The upper 70s to low 80s is about the right temperature for them to be on their feet throughout the day.

QUESTION: How wary are pronghorn compared to whitetail deer?

DOUGLAS: Pronghorns are VERY wary. Most of the time when I stop to glass, they are already looking at me from 400 plus yards away. One important thing to know about pronghorns is that if they sense something is off, they'll simply leave. Whitetails will hesitate and run a little, then stop, while pronghorns will run and not stop for hundreds of yards. So, when getting into position for a stalk, it is important to stay unseen and unheard.

(continued on page 26)

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Chasing The Speed Goat

(continued from page 24)

QUESTION: Spot and stalk hunting can be tough, especially with archery gear. Have you ever hunted from a blind or fixed position over food or water?

DOUGLAS: I have only hunted pronghorn spot and stalk style, but if you can find where they are watering and set up a blind, it is a very smart strategy.

In Western Nebraska where I hunt, it is very difficult to get permission on private land, and it's also difficult to find where they are watering.

QUESTION: Assuming it's warm, what steps do you take to preserve your pronghorn?

DOUGLAS: When it's hot out you need to have the animal dressed and packed with ice in the chest cavity for the ride home or quartered and in a cooler with ice within an hour of the kill ideally.

I also bring a smaller cooler for the cape and head in case it's a buck worth mounting. This keeps everything cool and allows you to finish the process at home as necessary or get to the taxidermist without getting too warm on the drive.

QUESTION: Hunting freelance style in a new region can be potentially intimidating for hunters, and in this instance hunters who live back east in whitetail country will note the setting is in stark contrast to the woods and fields at home.

Is freelancing for pronghorn something easy to adapt to for experienced hunters who have never done it?

DOUGLAS: Freelancing for pronghorn hunting is relatively easy to adapt to for experienced hunters who have never done it, but the main thing is to be in good enough physical condition to hike the distances needed to close the gap.

On the upside, pronghorn hunting has the advantage of not being as gear intensive and the weight reduction makes it easier to move around.

QUESTION: As far as gear goes, what are your preferences?

DOUGLAS: For my bow I use a Mathews Lift with a forward and rear stabilizer to help steady on the longer shots if needed.

For scouting, I use a 27-60 x 85 spotting scope and carry 10x42 Vortex binoculars.

It's important to see at a great distance with the spotting scope so you can determine if it's worth taking a closer look at a buck and potentially make a move on him.



Photo credit Trey Douglas

Clothing-wise, I love TUO's Verse camo for this application and my standard kit includes the Clime Pant, Kinetic Merino 150 Hoodie, Aptitude Softshell Vest (more for gear storage than warmth), Kinetic Merino Fingerless Gloves, and Kinetic Merino 150 Balaclava.

During pronghorn season it is important to dress for warm temperatures, but also protect yourself from the rugged environment. Besides ideal temperature regulation, I have found Clime pants and softshell vest do a great job keeping me concealed while also offering good protection from the rugged environment in the event I have to belly crawl.

QUESTION: How does pronghorn rate as far as table fare goes?

DOUGLAS: They taste better than many would expect. They are a definite change from whitetail venison since they are much leaner, but they are very good. We typically make summer sausage out of them, which is always a great option.

Mapping Public Hunting Access Across Pronghorn Range

The real challenge for modern freelancers lies in mapping out where to legally put boots on the ground. Because these wide-ranging icons thrive across a diverse landscape of federal acreage, state trust land, and sprawling private ranches, public hunting accessibility shifts dramatically depending on geography. Understanding the regional breakdown of public land availability is the definitive factor between a wide-open western adventure and a logistical dead end.

The Intermountain West

For hunters prioritizing expansive acreage and true self-guided freedom, the western portion of the pronghorn range stands as the premier destination. Vast expanses of federally managed land offer unchecked access across prime sagebrush flats.

Wyoming: The absolute epicenter of pronghorn hunting. The western half of the state features massive, contiguous blocks of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, giving hunters miles of room to roam without hitting private boundaries.

Montana: Public access remains highly available, particularly across the eastern prairies where pronghorn concentrations peak. Montana's robust hunter-access programs on private acreage further supplement the extensive federal holdings.

Idaho and Nevada: Both states boast immense percentages of public BLM and U.S. Forest Service lands within core pronghorn habitat, though drawing the required tag remains highly competitive.

The Central Plains and Southwest

In the mid-tier regions, public land exists but demands meticulous planning, digital mapping tools, and a sharp eye for checkerboard ownership patterns.

Colorado: The northwestern quadrant provides excellent pronghorn numbers on solid blocks of public ground. Conversely, the eastern plains are heavily privatized, leaving limited, high-pressure public parcels.

New Mexico: Massive tracts of BLM land hold exceptional trophy potential, but the eastern side of the state transitions quickly into private holdings. Navigating the restrictive non-resident draw system adds an extra layer of difficulty.

The Southern Plains

On the southern and southeastern fringes of the pronghorn range, public hunting land becomes virtually nonexistent, requiring a complete pivot in strategy.

Texas: While the Panhandle and Trans-Pecos regions host healthy herds, nearly 97 percent of the state is privately owned. Public options are exceptionally scarce, meaning hunting is dictated by private landowner permits, established leases, or contracted outfitters.

Oklahoma: Confined primarily to the far western reaches of the Panhandle, pronghorn habitat here is overwhelmingly dominated by private ranches, with opportunities restricted to tightly regulated, limited controlled draw hunts.



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

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 - 4-way stretch throughout for mobility, fit, and function
 - 4 zippered pockets (2 waist, 2 chest) for secure storage
- MSRP \$169.99



TUO Kinetic Merino 150 Hoodie

FEATURES:

- 150g 86% 18.5 micron merino wool, 12% core-spun nylon, 2% spandex
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 - Naturally moisture wicking & antimicrobial
 - Flatlock seams for next-to-skin comfort
 - 3-piece hood protects against the sun and adds warmth when layering
- MSRP \$109.99



TUO Clime Pant

FEATURES:

- 93% polyester, 7% spandex material
 - 278 gram fabric weight
 - 4-way stretch fabric for increased mobility and comfort in any terrain
 - Polygiene StayFresh™ helps reduce odor from bacteria and OdorCrunch™ captures and inhibits odors
 - Super DWR treatment for water and stain resistance
 - Articulated knees and inner thigh gusset for improved fit and mobility
 - Side seam vent zips with mesh lining for temperature regulation
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Saint Maries Trio Sentenced In North Idaho Deer Poaching Case

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

Final sentencing concludes Panhandle Region case involving multiple felony wildlife violations

On May 11, the final sentencing was issued for one of three individuals involved in the unlawful killing of seven mature white-tailed deer bucks in North Idaho during November 2024.

The individuals involved in the case were Will Clark, Lucas Mitchell and Laura Willis.

Sentencing for Mitchell (Feb. 2026) included:

- \$17,200 in restitution (jointly shared among three individuals)
- \$525 in processing fees (shared with Clark)
- All associated court costs
- Seven months in county jail
- Five years of supervised probation
- Ten-year hunting license revocation

Sentencing for Clark (April 2026) included:

- \$17,200 in restitution (jointly shared among three individuals)
- \$525 in processing fees (shared with Mitchell)
- All associated court costs
- Zero to four years in prison—currently incarcerated
- Ten-year hunting license revocation

Sentencing for Willis (May 2026) included:

- \$6,000 in restitution (jointly shared among three individuals)
- \$150 in processing fees
- All associated court costs
- \$200 fine
- One year of unsupervised probation
- One-year hunting license revocation



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

Details of the case

Clark and Mitchell were originally charged on June 27 with eight felony counts related to the unlawful killing of the deer. The investigation, conducted by Idaho Fish and Game conservation officers in the Panhandle Region, documented 56 wildlife violations.

All seven deer were illegally killed in November 2024. Five of the deer were taken within a single 24-hour period, and three of the bucks met Idaho's legal definition of a "trophy" white-tailed deer, which carries enhanced civil penalties under state law.

All seven deer were taken outside of legal shooting hours, and meat from three of the animals was left to waste.

Willis later pleaded guilty to charges related to tag transfer and unlawful possession of big game.

Fish and Game thanks the public for remaining vigilant in reporting potential wildlife crimes through the Citizens Against Poaching hotline.

Public involvement plays a critical role in ensuring Idaho's fish and wildlife exists for future generations.

Fish and Game also thanks the Kootenai County Prosecutor's Office for reviewing the case and pursuing charges consistent with the violations.

Anyone who observes or has information about a wildlife crime is encouraged to call the Citizens Against Poaching hotline at 1-800-632-5999 or submit a report online here: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/enforcement/tipline>.

Please provide as many details as possible to help with the investigation.

If it's an emergency, please call 9-1-1. If this crime is underway call 9-1-1 or your local sheriff's office or police.

Monetary rewards may be available for individuals who provide credible, detailed information that significantly aids in identifying suspects and leads to charges being filed.

Mule Deer Breakdown: A Month By Month Look At Where To Find Bucks

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

A look at each month of the year for where to find mule deer

Mule deer are a native species to North America that are thriving all over the West. They can live at elevations above tree level to sea level. Mule deer can survive in lush, forested environments as well as open desert sage. They, indeed, are the monarchs of the West, with some bucks grossing over 200" in measured points. Some mule deer migrate to wintering and summering grounds, and some keep a tighter home range. Hunters from all over the United States and the world head to the western states to chase bucks throughout the fall and winter; however, each month, mule deer bucks do something different.

Here is a month-by-month breakdown of expected mule deer behavior from August through December. This breakdown can give you a good idea of what to expect and where you might find bucks hanging out during any given month for hunting season.

Mapping out mule deer is going to be the key to success. So use these tips, jump into GOHUNT Maps, and start your e-scouting for your hunt.



Photo credit Luke Dusenbury

August

During the month of August, bucks are typically in bachelor groups that range in size from two bucks all the way up to a dozen though many mature bucks will only hang out with a few other mature deer. Since March, they have been growing their antlers and, now, the velvet has pulled tight into their antlers. Bucks at higher elevations will hold onto this velvet into September, but some smaller bucks and other bucks that live at lower elevations will begin to rub off the velvet towards the end of the month. The days are hot, so bucks will typically seek the shade of trees and are often seen bedding out in the open under a solitary tree, scanning the area for danger. During this time of year, bucks mainly concentrate on feeding, staying cool and being near a water source. Mature bucks tend to prefer higher elevations since higher elevations are cooler and the prevailing winds keep the bugs to a minimum.

(continued next page)

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Mule Deer Breakdown: A Month By Month Look At Where To Find Bucks

(continued from page 29)

If you are hunting during August, do a lot of scouting and watch open meadows an hour or two after first light and an hour or two before dark. Besides the rut, you will see the most daylight activity during this time of year.

September

During the beginning of September, bucks will still be in their summer routines, heading from feed to bed along a similar, patternable path.

Once they start to feel the pressure of some hunters, they may be more reluctant to travel during the daylight hours and will most likely reduce their daylight activity level.

Typically, towards the middle of the month, most will start to rub off their velvet — even at higher elevations. Hunting along these rub lines may be a good idea, especially if you see some fresh rubs and good deer sign.

Early cold nights will freeze some of the deer's higher elevation forage and bucks may adjust their patterns to find better food.

By the end of September, hunting pressure, weather and food changes will typically put mature bucks in some thicker timber and on a primarily nocturnal timeline. Many hunters choose to glass at first and last light and then still hunt through some thicker timbered areas mid-day, especially if they are carrying a muzzleloader.

October

By October, bucks have left their bachelor groups and are mostly traveling solo. They have also left the lush open, high elevation meadows and are finding protection and better food by utilizing the cover of thick middle elevation timber. Their antlers are hard, their daylight activity is at a minimum and they can be challenging to find during this time of year.

Towards the end of the month, they may start transitioning to a pre-rut area — near zones that hold more does. Smaller bucks tend to do this first with bigger bucks following when they are ready. Snow can be a common occurrence during October; however, mature bucks can hang back in a foot of snow if it means they have better access to cover and protection from hunters.

Try glassing at first and last light, still hunting through thicker timber mid-day, putting on deer drives, and following fresh tracks in the snow to find success during this time of year. Glass the thick timber and have multiple glassing points picked out.

November

November can be a magical time for mule deer hunters hoping to harvest a mature buck because anything is possible. Bucks will begin to rut as does begin to show signs of estrus. The smaller, younger bucks will start to harass does first, but the big bucks will swoop in to establish dominance and breed with the does when the timing is right.

It is common to see bucks on their feet any time of day during this season, pinning does down in less than ideal areas. Ultimately, your job is to find does and, eventually, the mature bucks will find them too.

Elevation will be less and less during this month and bucks can be seen along highways, in agriculture, on the foothills and at higher elevations during mild winters.

Hunting along ridges, saddles and funnel points near areas of high doe activity can prove very effective during this time of year.

December

The beginning of December can still produce bucks in rut behavior as some of the younger does continue to come into estrus and some does that were not bred come back into estrus.

Some deer will be migrating while the rut continues since snow and lack of food will keep them moving towards wintering grounds if they are not already there.

Bucks have been worn out throughout the last month because their number one concentration was on breeding and not feeding.

During the middle to end of December, expect to find mature bucks in recovery mode. This often means they will seek out some of the best food in the area — usually a farmer's agriculture field.

Hunting private land can be very effective during the later seasons of December when it is common to see multiple mature bucks out feeding through the day, especially when temperatures are extremely low.

Mule deer bucks follow similar patterns and behaviors year after year. Yet, it is important to note that the bucks in eastern Wyoming may act differently from the bucks in Arizona if the weather is drastically different. However, you can bet that bucks will go from bachelor groups to being solo, to chasing does and then into recovery and survival mode no matter where they are. Learning how deer behave and how to hunt them month to month can help you be successful this year and for years to come.

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Deer Hunting Q&A

By Mike Hanback

Big Deer Blog <https://bigdeerblog.com>

Here are some questions I got from BIG DEER TV viewers, with hopes that the answers will help you shoot a buck this fall.

Mike: It was warm where I hunt all last fall, with temperatures in the 60s and 70s some days. We saw fewer deer than normal each day and hardly any of them came to our corn fields, even though there were few acorns in the woods. Weird, tough season! What can we do if it's warm again this fall? Paul

Paul: Hunting in heat is the new norm in many places, and I get a ton of questions about it...

As to why you had fewer deer coming to your corn fields, get this. Missouri biologist Grant Woods points out that during an extended stretch of unusually warm fall or winter weather, deer prefer to feed on green forage (weeds, browse, etc.) and forgo corn or even soybeans, since the grains are rich in carbohydrates and digesting them generates more body heat that the animals don't want or need when it's hot.

Strategy-wise, move your stands off grain fields, and set up back in the woods near green thickets and other browse areas where does and bucks will forage both morning and afternoon. Set some stands in creek bottoms and other cool, shady funnels leading to or from the browse.

Mike: I've heard that a buck can learn you are hunting him, and move around to avoid your stands. Do you think that's true? Joe

Joe: I don't believe a mature buck can reason that you are in the woods, hunting him and trying to kill him. But he most certainly feels your presence and disturbance, perceives you as a threat and tries to avoid you at all costs.

New science backs that up. Tracking and charting 37 GPS-collared adult bucks over three years in South Carolina, researchers found that late in hunting season, the bucks moved an average of 55 yards farther away from tree stands than they did earlier in the fall. The big deer had seen, smelled and sensed humans in and around those stands over the weeks, and had skirted them right out of bow range.

When you're hunting a big buck in his small core range, don't over-hunt your best stands, but rest them for days. Once in a while, move a stand 50 to 100 yards where the wind is right (a climber works great) or set up for a quick ground ambush. Try to surprise a buck from a new spot where he doesn't expect you to be, as I have said many times on TV.

How high do you hang a tree stand? Pat

Over the years, I've experimented with stands from 15 to 30 feet (I don't like any stand that is too high

and don't recommend it) and have now settled on 17 or 18 as just right for me. This is high enough where the wind is good, and if you move skillfully, deer won't look up and see you. At this height, you have a good sight plane down and out to a buck's vitals for a shot.

Mike: Most every time I sneak into my tree stand I jump a couple of deer. What am I doing wrong? Travis

Travis: You are accessing your stand from a wrong direction, most likely walking too close to a bedding or staging area. Check your maps and chart a different route in. Put the wind in your face or move in a cross wind as you sneak in a new way, and use foliage and terrain (deep creek, hogback ridge, etc) to cover your moves. Get to your stand without bumping deer and your odds of seeing a shooter buck later in the day or next week go way up.

I was surprised to read in Outdoor Life one time that you pee off your tree stand. Is that right? Rob

Rob: Years ago, I used to carry and use a pee bottle, but now I look around to make sure no deer are coming (I don't want them to see or hear me) and let fly right off my stand. Urine is 95% water. Many deer scientists that I read and respect, including James Kroll and Grant Woods, have deduced from their studies that human urine does not spook deer, and in fact may attract a curious animal on occasion. So I say go ahead and pee when you have to. I should note that many great hunters and scent freaks that I know totally disagree and would never do it.

Mike: Is it true that once a buck sheds his velvet, he's ready to breed does? Jacob

Bucks typically peel the velvet from their antlers the last week of August or the first week of September. Older bucks often shed the velvet a few days earlier than younger bucks. The day a mature buck becomes "hard horn" his demeanor begins to change, he gets more aggressive by the day and yes, he is ready, willing and able to breed a doe. But in reality he won't get that opportunity until mid-October, when a few odd does come into an early estrus cycle, and most likely he'll get his first shot sometime in November.

I've noticed some large trees in my area that have obviously been rubbed by generations of bucks over the years. What's up with those rubs? Dave

Trees with old scars that have healed and thickened, and upon which more bucks rub their antlers each fall, are "sign-posts." Biologists point out that these trees are rubbed mostly by older bucks (3½ years and up). One theory is that the older bucks deposit pheromones on the rubs, and this plays an important role in the dominance and subordination process in a herd. Does and all size of bucks have been observed interacting with sign-posts—they often nuzzle and smell them—but only older bucks rub them hard. Sign-posts are blazed in areas with high deer traffic, and should be markers for your strategy. While you won't hunt over a sign-post per se, it makes sense to scout out from the big rubs, look for nearby cover edges, funnels and trails where bucks travel, and hang tree stands there.

Expert Insights On Tactics For How To Bowhunt Elk Throughout All Stages Of September

(continued from page 11)



Photo credit Mather McKallor

One of the best ways to kill a true giant bull with your bow is to catch him early via spot and stalk techniques prior to him moving toward the cow/calf herds. In these instances, scouting is critical. After that, standard spot and stalk methods apply: keep the wind in your favor, stay quiet, concealed, and patient.

As previously stated, wallowing begins about two weeks prior to the cows coming into estrus, which would be approximately the first week of September. Early in the month, ambush hunting over an active wallow from a quickly constructed ground blind is very effective.

Rut bowhunting tactics for elk



Photo credit Mather McKallor

As the bulls move into the rut, they often become more aggressive and vocal. Calling increasingly becomes more effective at this stage. There seem to be two major schools of thought in terms of calling elk. One, there are individuals who lean very heavily into bugling and working bulls into an excited and aggressive state and pulling them in to fight. Two, others may utilize a cow call or a bugle to locate a bull and then sneak in or shadow the herd quietly without calling until they can either get close enough for a shot or possibly lure the bull out with some soft cow calls.

Both methods work, but I have a few thoughts on each.

If you plan on using the more aggressive approach, you often need to encounter more bulls to find the right bull on the right day that is ready to commit. You are also more likely to encounter and call in younger more inquisitive satellite bulls. The more proficient and versatile you are with a bugle often yields better results with this style of calling. The payoff to this type of calling is that it's highly interactive and rewarding. The satisfaction of trading guttural bugles with a herd bull is unmatched. It's a really fun way to hunt, but pulling a herd bull away from cows can be challenging.

The alternative is a more stealthy approach and not nearly as interactive. Often, it involves minimal cow calling or a locator bugle and a lot of leg work to shadow a herd as they make their way towards a bedding area. The payoff on this style of calling is that you may be able to slip into the herd bull's bedroom and get close enough when he checks each cow mid-day or possibly softly cow call him away. The downside is that it's often not as interactive and can require a lot of patience.

Both are great methods. I have my opinion on what works best for me. What works best for you will depend on your objectives. Having both in your arsenal is an even better option.

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How To Build A Cooler Plan Before An Elk Hunt

(continued from page 5)

That may include:

- freezing blocks ahead of time
- using frozen water jugs
- knowing where ice is available near the unit
- bringing more ice than seems necessary
- keeping a backup ice stop marked on the route home

Frozen jugs and block ice often last longer than loose cubes and help reduce the amount of water directly contacting meat bags.

Pre-Cool the Cooler Before Meat Goes In

A hot cooler does not protect meat well at first.

If a cooler has been sitting in the sun, garage, truck bed, or trailer, it can hold more heat than hunters realize.

Putting warm meat into a warm cooler makes the cooling job harder.

Pre-cool coolers before the hunt when possible.

Simple options include:

- keeping coolers in the shade
- adding sacrificial ice before the hunt
- using frozen jugs before meat goes in
- keeping lids closed until needed
- avoiding direct sun in the truck bed

The cooler should be ready before the first load reaches the truck.

Keep Drainage in the Plan

Meltwater is one of the biggest cooler problems during meat transport.

Cold water may seem harmless, but meat bags sitting in water can create avoidable problems, especially during long drives or overnight storage.

The goal is to keep meat cold without letting bags soak in dirty water.

Plan for:

- cooler drain access
- elevating meat when possible
- frozen jugs instead of only loose ice
- checking water buildup during transport
- keeping bloody water away from clean bags

Drainage is easier to manage when the cooler is not packed blindly.

Do Not Pile Hot Meat Tight Together

Coolers are not magic boxes.

If warm meat goes in tight and stacked, heat can stay trapped between bags longer than expected.

This is especially true when several loads reach the truck close together after a long packout.

Before sealing everything up, give the meat a chance to finish shedding heat when conditions allow.

At the truck, avoid:

- stacking warm bags tightly without checking them
- burying large pieces under other loads
- closing hot meat inside a warm cooler too quickly
- letting bags sit in direct sun while rearranging gear mixing clean and dirty gear around open coolers

Field care does not stop when meat reaches the tailgate.

Use Game Bags That Make Cooling Easier

The right cooler plan starts in the field.

Meat that has been protected, separated, and allowed to breathe is easier to manage once it reaches the truck.

Game bags should protect meat from dirt, insects, and debris while still allowing heat and moisture to escape during the packout and staging process.

Hunters preparing for elk season can review Elk Game Bag Systems here: <https://www.caribougear.com/collections/game-bags-for-elk> before building their packout and cooler plan.

Match the Cooler Plan to the Drive Home

A short drive to camp is different from a six-hour drive home.

A quick stop at the processor is different from an overnight hold before butchering.

The longer the meat stays in coolers, the more important the cooler setup becomes.

Before the hunt, decide:

- whether meat is going straight home
- whether it is going to a processor
- how long the drive will take
- where additional ice can be purchased
- whether coolers can be drained during the trip
- where meat will go once it arrives

The cooler plan should cover the whole trip, not just the moment meat reaches the truck.

Leave Room for Dirty Gear

Cooler planning is not only about meat.

After a packout, the truck also has to handle packs, boots, game bags, knives, gloves, tarps, loose gear, and dirty clothing.

If everything is thrown into the same space, the truck gets disorganized fast.

Before season, plan where dirty gear will go so clean meat stays separated from contaminated equipment.

Useful truck organization items include:

- contractor bags
- plastic totes
- extra gloves
- cleanup wipes
- paper towels
- a separate area for dirty packs and boots

A clean truck setup makes the final part of the packout easier to manage.

Build the Cooler Plan Before the Hunt

A good cooler plan does not need to be complicated.

It needs to be ready.

Know how much space you have.

Pre-cool what you can.

Bring more ice than you think you need.

Keep drainage in mind.

Leave room for dirty gear.

Then make sure the system still works when the packout takes longer than expected.

For more on managing meat before it reaches the truck, read "How to Stage Elk Meat Between Packout Trips" here: <https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/how-to-stage-elk-meat-between-packout-trips>.

Elk Cooler Plan FAQ

How much cooler space do elk hunters need?

The amount depends on whether the elk is packed out bone-in or boned-out, how much ice is used, and how long the meat must stay cold during transport.

Should hunters pre-cool coolers before adding elk meat?

Yes. A cooler that has been sitting in the sun or a hot garage can hold heat. Pre-cooling helps the cooler work better when meat reaches the truck.

Is loose ice enough for elk meat?

Loose ice can help, but hunters should also think about drainage and meltwater. Frozen jugs or block ice can reduce direct water contact and last longer.

Should elk meat sit in cooler water?

Meat bags should not sit in dirty meltwater for long periods. Plan drainage and cooler organization so meat stays cold without soaking.

Shop online at <https://www.caribougear.com>.

The graphic features two hunters in a mountainous landscape, each carrying a large bag of meat. The hunter on the left is using the Wapiti System, and the hunter on the right is using the Carnivore System. The central text asks "WHICH SYSTEM ACTUALLY FITS YOUR PACKOUT".

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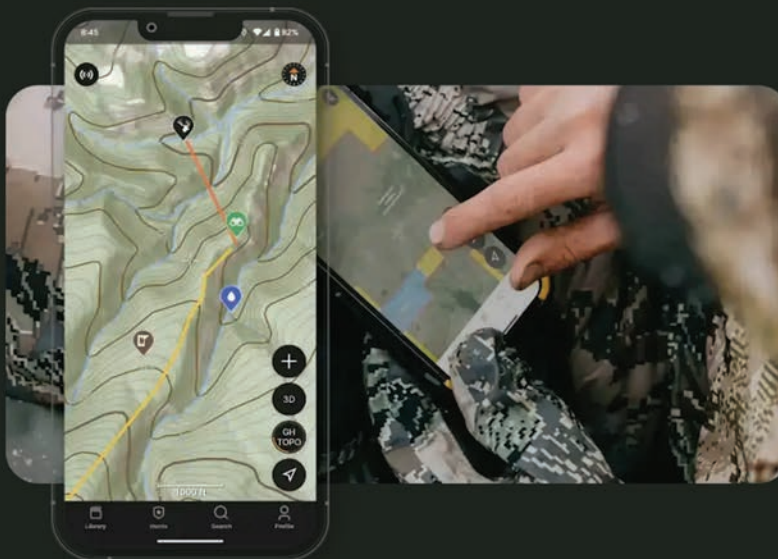
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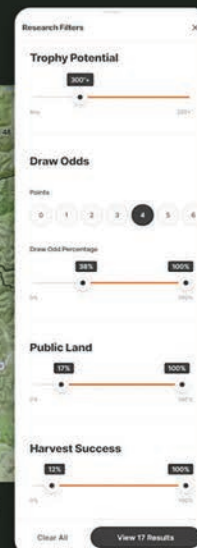
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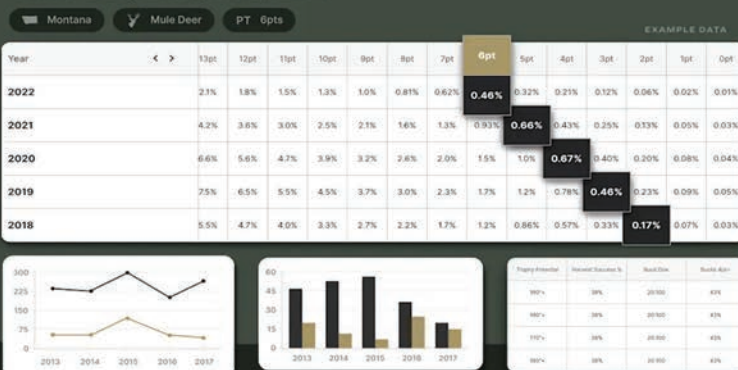
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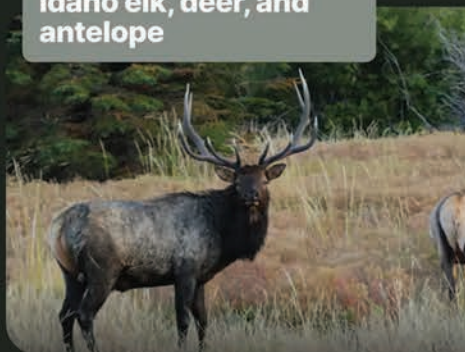
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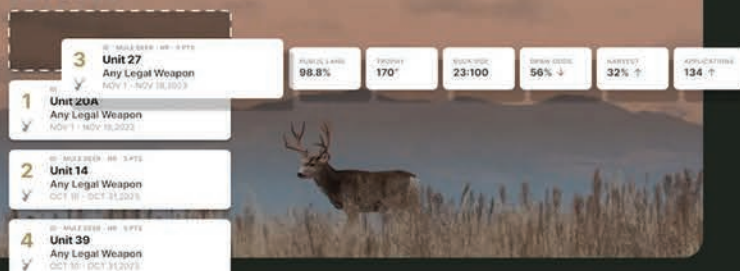
ELK

- Removed antlerless only harvest in Units 22 and 32A from the Weiser River Zone B Tag.
- Boise River Zone B tag season opens Oct. 27 — five days earlier.

Idaho elk harvest trends

General tag elk killed	Controlled tag elk killed
10241	5784
9853	8373
12886	7190
15048	8799
13172	7493

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Summer Whitetail Scouting Questions Answered By The Hunting Public

(continued from page 22)



Wherever you're scouting from, try and accomplish as much as you can in one scouting trip to limit pressure on the deer.

Photo credit the Hunting Public courtesy <https://vortexoptics.com>

Yes, you often spook deer out of the bedding when you scout it.

Once is usually okay because they're caught off guard.

Think about it: Those deer have been using that bedding area over and over again for most of their life because NOBODY goes in there.

They aren't used to people in their safe zone during the day, otherwise they wouldn't be bedded there.

Spook them out, get your info, and get out.

Let those deer move back in, get comfortable for a few months and go in for the kill come hunting season.

BIO

The Hunting Public's core mission is to create a community of hunters that can interact and learn together as a group. Their video journals and podcasts create a platform that allows them to teach, learn, and interact with other hunters. They cover everything from advanced whitetail tactics to unique hunting situations. Through hunts on public land and small, privately-owned properties, they create relatable content that appeals to all hunters.

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Beat The Heat On The Troll

(continued from page 17)

"There have been times in the boat with guide clients where we have four lines out and only one gets bit consistently, even though the profile and action, depth curve, etc. is the same. That's when we all switch out to that color. While I like to start with perch and other match-the-hatch colors, seems like we're catching more fish on the Great Lakes custom patterns like Wonderbread and Sneeze. They just get noticed.

Bro's also a big fan of trolling the Northland Rumble Bug. "The smaller profile has an aggressive wobble that calls in big fish to destroy it. You wouldn't think that looking at how small the bait is, but it's a big fish magnet."

Confused as to how much flat-line or leadcore to let out? Bro suggests anglers download the Troller's Bible app on their phone, which contains dive curves for various line lengths and depths, including data for the Northland Rumble Shiner and Rumble Bug.

Or you can simply cast the Rumble Shiner or Rumble Shad out, let out a bunch of line, wait for it to hit bottom, and then reel in a little bit of line. It's that simple. "Until you internalize the line lengths for letting out cranks on the troll—after a while it becomes very intuitive and almost second nature—using a line counter reel is a good idea.



Parting Words

Trolling cranks simply catches fish. You can cover a lot of water, locate walleyes, and put more fish in the livewell, including some big fish for photos and release. Even when the bite gets tough during the dog days, Northland comes to the rescue with Rumble series crankbaits in a variety of dive curves and sizes to match every conceivable depth and forage type. They also offer loads of colors, from match-the-hatch patterns to Great Lakes-inspired custom paint hues like Wonderbread and Sneeze. Do yourself a favor and get on the troll!

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