

WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING NEWS

OCTOBER 2026



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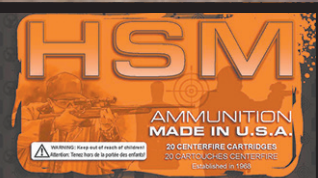




Photo courtesy IDFG <https://idfg.idaho.gov>

Payette Lake Produces New State Catch-And-Release Lake Trout — Yes, Again

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

By now, if you follow Idaho Fish and Game's stringer of record fish stories, you're well aware that there's one lake that comes to mind when you mention the words lake trout: Payette Lake. But if not, allow me to bring you up to speed.

Bringing back Payette's lake trout

Lake trout (also known as Mackinaw) were introduced into Payette Lake in 1955. These long-lived predators can survive for more than 40 years, grow beyond 40 inches in length, and exceed 50 pounds. As the stocked fish matured, the trophy fishery gained popularity. During the 1990s, it wasn't uncommon for anglers to catch multiple lake trout over 15 pounds and occasionally fish exceeding 30 pounds in a single day.

By the early 2000s, lake trout abundance had increased dramatically, but there was a tradeoff. Overabundance of lake trout meant fewer food resources, leading to thin and undernourished lake trout that still reached decent lengths but more closely resembled eels than trophy freshwater fish. This also meant big declines in the kokanee population, the lake trout's main diet.

By 2014, fisheries managers recognized that action was needed. They began reducing the number of smaller lake trout to lessen predation on kokanee, but released trophy-sized fish. This increased kokanee survival and made more food available for the remaining trophy lake trout.

And the results paid off.

Since 2018, staff have removed approximately 3,100 lake trout from Payette Lake, averaging roughly 445 fish per year. The condition of lake trout has also recovered, with Payette Lake producing five catch-and-release state records since 2016.

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Read Regional Fisheries Manager Jordan Messner's "What's going on with the Payette Lake fishery?" article here: <https://idfg.idaho.gov/article/whats-going-payette-lake-fishery>.

Actually, make that six

Normally, we're lucky to highlight one record fish per fishery per year, but again, if you've been following the Fish and Game newswire this summer, you might recall seeing Payette Lake in the headlines already this summer.

Dylan Smith, the lucky Idaho Falls angler who caught a 43.25-inch laker back on May 2, barely had time to show off his crown to his friends. Pencils have erasers, thank goodness, because on July 8 of this year, Kim Anderson pulled out a 44-inch lake trout from none other than Payette Lake, earning himself the new state catch and release record.

Anderson's fish is now the third record in the last two years.

Congratulations on your new state record, Kim!

More About Idaho's State Record Fish

Thinking about chasing a state record fish? Check out the state record fish page 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>.

- Fish must be released alive. (See tips on safely releasing fish in the Fishing Rules booklet.)
- Steelhead, ocean-run salmon, bull trout, and white sturgeon submitted for records must be measured and photographed in the water.
- Catch-and-release records are based only on the total length (snout to tip of tail) for fish released alive. Fish must be photographed directly next to a ruler/tape or an object of known verifiable length.
- New catch-and-release white sturgeon records must be broken by a minimum of 2 inches.
- Catch-and-release records for all other species must be broken by a minimum of ½ inch.
- All applications must be submitted within 30 days of the catch date.

How to Apply for Certified Weight Records

Records will be awarded for either fish caught by angling (rod/reel) or by archery/spearfish for legal unprotected nongame species. Archery/spear fishing records will be listed separately and identified by the angler on the application form. No records will be awarded for fish caught during salvage seasons or at private pay-to-fish facilities.

NOTE: Idaho Fish and Game now provides certified scales for weighing potential records at the Panhandle, Clearwater, Nampa, Headquarters (Boise), Jerome, and Pocatello regional offices.

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 11 till ½ hr. before sunset

Monday-Thursday- 11:00 am to ½ hr before Sunsturn 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

Snappys Sports Senter-Kalispell

CSKT NRD Offices-Polson

Telephone 406-675-2700 Ex. 7290 or 406-274-0613

Sanctioned by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks



Photo credit twildlife | depositphotos.com

Six Tips For Harvesting Big Mule Deer Bucks

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Mule deer hunting is challenging, especially if you are trying to find and harvest a mature buck consistently. After all, they live in some of the highest and steepest terrains, they blend into the surroundings perfectly and they can become nocturnal and be virtually impossible to find in the open. Yet, some hunters consistently harvest good bucks every year. What are they doing differently than the average hunter that allows them to get good bucks nearly every season? Now, I cannot speak for every successful mule deer hunter, but there are some tips that I have learned over time that increase my success at harvesting big bucks year after year.

Glass, glass, glass

The first tip to mule deer hunting successfully year after year has to do with optics, patience and patience. Yes, I said patience twice. Mule deer blend in nearly perfectly and, under typical situations, they can be quite challenging to find, especially once they are bedded for the day. This is why a successful mule deer hunter knows that you need to get to a good vantage point and systematically pick apart the terrain with good optics. This takes a lot of patience and determination, but all it takes is one mature buck to make it all worth it.

Find optimal habitat

Mule deer tend to find a place with food, water and cover far from the hustle and bustle of human activity and stay there. So, to find a place that mature bucks might live, you need to think about areas within your hunting unit that are hard to get to and have good food, water and cover. In the West, food and cover are pretty standard, but water is often the limiting factor.

To find basins with water without being there, pick apart aerial imagery for ponds, creeks and areas with different colored grasses. A light green grass in a satellite photo usually will indicate some sort of water source in the near vicinity. I have also seen many good bucks use stock tanks in areas with limited water sources, so do not be afraid to mark them during your e-scouting.

Concentrate on shade and broken terrain

Once you are glassing optimal mule deer territory after sunrise, concentrate your glassing on shaded areas and broken terrain. Mule deer love to live in areas that have rock outcroppings, cliffs, steep sidehills and high vegetation. They find security in these areas since they can quickly escape downhill or into the next divot and out of sight. Mule deer will often bed in the open, especially during the early seasons. Though they might bed in the open, they do not like that hot early fall sun hitting them. During these seasons, concentrate on anywhere a tree casts a shadow.

Arrive early and stay late

It might go without saying, but mule deer are nocturnal animals. Even though many of them are out and about during the early morning and late afternoon, mature bucks are typically not. The best time to find a mature buck on his feet is at the crack of dawn or during the last light of the day—the rest of the day, they might be bedded or in thicker timber. If you want to have a chance at a mature buck, increase your chances by arriving early and staying until it's dark. You never know what might pop out just in time.

Mark the buck's location

Since mule deer live in such undulating terrain, it is imperative that you mark a buck's location on the GPS prior to leaving your glassing point. In prior years, before the aerial maps on today's GPS units and before you could use GOHUNT maps on your phone, I didn't have a good way to mark a buck's location before a stalk. I could see the topo lines and make a good guess, but it was a shot in the dark. Nowadays, you can zoom in on your phone or aerial map and find the tree the buck is bedded against prior to your stalk. Taking a few extra minutes to pinpoint precisely where that deer is could make the difference of harvesting it or not.

Play the wind correctly

If you are stalking a mule deer and the wind shifts and blows towards the buck, it is game over. This is why the wind is the most critical factor in a stalk. Always err on the side of caution and move around until both the thermals and the prevailing wind are in your favor. If you feel the wind starting to shift, make an adjustment or back out until it stabilizes. If your wind is good, but a buck hears or sees you, stop in your tracks, remain as still as possible and wait for him to calm down. I have seen good bucks look right at me for 20 or 30 minutes, then bed back down. If they didn't smell you, then you still have a chance.

Hunting mature mule deer in the West can be tough; however, it can be done if you put in the time to pick a good unit, scout, glass and make intelligent decisions on your hunt...Learn more at GOHUNT.com.



Matt "Flatlander" Cheever.
Photo courtesy Mike Hanback
Big Deer Blog <https://bigdeerblog.com>

Recipe: Grilled Venison Surf & Turf

By Matt "Flatlander" Cheever
Mike Hanback's
Big Deer Blog
<https://bigdeerblog.com>

Many of us have a freezer full of deer and fish that to be need thinned out before we start replenishing this fall.

Here's a great way with what I call "Outdoorsman's Surf and Turf." There is no finer dining than the loin of a nice whitetail deer and fillets from ice-fished bluegills.

(You can vacuum seal packets of these to take to turkey camp or on a fishing trip; they save well in an iced cooler for several days.)

Stuffed Venison Filet Mignon:

From a back-strap/loin, cut 1½-inch-thick fillets or cutlets; make a small incision in each cutlet that opens up the center like a pocket.

Next, run roasted garlic, fresh mozzarella, sweet Italian peppers and artichoke hearts through a food processor until the mixture looks like a relish; stuff about a teaspoon inside each filet.

Next wrap each filet in bacon and marinate for 2-3 nights in a mixture of Coca Cola, olive oil, dried parsley, onion salt (or season salt) and black pepper.

When ready to grill, remove meat and discard marinade. Grill until medium rare.

Accompany the venison chops with your favorite pan-fish fillets rubbed down with olive oil, season salt, lemon pepper (or sweet ginger seasoning).

Cover fillets with small slices of lemon and grill on foil tray.

Portobello mushrooms brushed with olive oil and seasoned with salt and black pepper go nicely with these. Morel mushrooms sautéed in butter would be even better.



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Photo credit Cam Henderson courtesy GOHUNT.com

Effective Multi-Person Calling Strategies When Bowhunting For Elk

By Dave Barnett

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

The bull had been playing us for hours. He would answer our challenge bugles with his own and was clearly getting worked up about it, but, try as we might, he wouldn't break into bow range for me to get a shot. Most likely, a side effect of pressure from other hunters over the previous days. In a last-ditch effort, we decided to make a play based upon one constant: He was answering every bugle we threw at him as long as we kept a 100-yard or greater distance from him and his cows. My partner hung back and kept the bull talking while I crept in silently, using the bull's constant vocalizations as directing beacons. The result? A well-placed arrow on an unsuspecting bull at 25 yards and many high fives and sore backs to follow.

Hunting with a partner can be rewarding on many levels and, in most cases, can greatly increase your odds of successfully selling a calling sequence to a bull and punching a tag. Understanding some calling tactics and how to play a bull's demeanor to your advantage can quickly turn stories of missed encounters into stories of success and accomplishment. You can check out an article on how to choose the best hunting partner here: <https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/other/how-to-choose-the-best-hunting-partner>.

Establishing roles when bowhunting elk with a friend

As simple as it may be, the biggest downfall of our early elk endeavors was rooted deeply in our established roles as the shooter and the caller. Sure, we knew who was shooting and who was calling, but when it came to each encounter, one guy would simply call as we both moved in together. At this point, we weren't any more effective than a solo hunter calling his way into a herd bull, and we accounted for twice the noise. We've since established a system that works great for us where we switch the shooter and caller roles every time an elk is called in or at the start of each day—whichever comes first. Be sure to talk with your partner and devise a plan that works best for you.

The most important part of this puzzle is for the caller to remain the caller and consider their only objective in life at this point to be delivering the bull into the shooter's lap. All the while, the caller must also be prepared in case a bull attempts to backdoor the operation and ends up in range for them.

Same page thinking when working in a bull elk

Along with a clear-cut role on who is what for each encounter, it is also important for hunting partners to think and act alike when calling to elk. The best hunting partnership is generally shared between two hunters who always know what the other is thinking. Of course, a lot of this will come with time spent in the woods, but it is also important to talk regularly during the offseason to discuss scenarios and game plans. Think back on past experiences that blew up in your faces. What could've been done differently? Once eye contact is lost between the shooter and the caller, it will be extremely important to understand what each partner is working towards in their respective role and act on this accordingly.

Elk calling scenario 1: Play the silent killer

Like I mentioned in the opening of the article, sending in the shooter silently can be deadly effective and is one of my favorite plays on a bugling bull. Like most of you, I spend nearly all of my season hunting public land elk—most of which have likely been called at heavily. Because of this, not all of our encounters end up like those on your favorite hunting video or program. When elk are rutting, they have an inherent drive to respond to calls; it's written into their DNA. While this is generally an absolute fact, most situations get messed up by hunters either conveying the wrong message or acting unnaturally. Unless a pressured bull is in the right mood, it can be tough to go in swinging and expect a favorable outcome.

When a bull is located, I like to first listen to his demeanor and try to get an accurate judgment on how worked up he really is. Generally, if a bull is responsive but stays in one spot or is slowly moving away, he likely has cows and is telling you to "Stay away!" These bulls can be difficult to call in unless you're right on top of them, and past elk and hunter interactions can even make that difficult. If I have any doubt whatsoever that this bull may be difficult to call in we will go at it with the silent approach.

Caller's job

Your job is to sell yourself to this bull and create just enough of a distraction to anchor him in a position and put him on edge. You want to push him enough so that he goes into a rage. We don't want this bull losing interest and taking his cows with him and heading for the next basin before the shooter can get into position.

Remember, this bull could be a few hundred yards away at this point and can't see you. Make some noise by kicking rocks, breaking sticks, and otherwise causing a bunch of commotion; this will only add to your realism. If all else fails, simply mimicking every sound the bull makes can be a surefire way to get on his nerves.

Shooter's job

Move quickly and silently! While the caller is keeping the bull occupied, you need to move in on the bull as quickly and silently as possible. Remember to keep a close eye on your wind; one small whiff of smell in the bull's direction can send him packing. Once you close the distance to under 75 yards, begin slowing down and keeping a sharp eye out for the bull, satellites, and cows. Sometimes the bull may be raking a tree, which can provide a great distraction for closing the distance quickly.

Generally, the shooter is not making a peep on this approach; however, in some situations, you may need to. Mistakes happen constantly while elk hunting. What happens if you bump into his cows first and spook them? React quickly, throw out a lip bawl bugle and charge the bull! This mimics a new bull that snuck in on the herd and is attempting to steal a cow. Be prepared, as the bull is either leaving with his cows or coming absolutely unglued and charging you!

Elk calling scenario 2: The sneak attack

Going toe to toe with a bull in close proximity is unlike anything else in this world and something all elk hunters dream of. Again, I like to approach every bull as if they've been called to a thousand times over, and I need to really sell my approach to them to prove that I am indeed a genuine elk and someone who wants their cows. Each morning, I'll start off by cruising ridgetops, either waiting for a bull to locate or by soliciting a response with a location bugle of my own. Once I get a response,

I'm going to try to pinpoint the bull to within a small area. Next, I want to sneak in on the bull as close as possible, keep the wind in mind, and get ready for some fast action! With this tactic, I am attempting to draw the bull past the shooter.

Caller's job

As the caller, your job is to try to get within 100 yards of the bull's last known location and set up while the shooter moves ahead another 25 to 30 yards. Think about your setup here. We want to act like an elk and create a realistic scene. Set up where you have plenty of cover and will have the ability to move around if needed. Once the shooter is ready, I like to first let out a few soft cow calls in case the bull is very close. At this point, one of two things is likely going to happen: If the bulls respond with a bugle, I want to bugle right over the top of him with a challenge bugle. Basically, I am saying, "That is my cow, and you need to stay away!" If the bull does not answer, I'll wait a few more minutes and then let out a non-threatening, social-type bugle like the locator. If the bull responds to this, I will now bugle over the top of him again, issuing a challenge. At this point, you want to start making some noise and creating a commotion. Respond to any of the bull's bugles with more of your own; raking a nearby tree with a large branch will display your dominance and further enrage the bull. If the bull abruptly shuts up, do not panic; this could mean he is sneaking in to check out his would-be challenger. Continue with your raking and issue more threats.

(continued next page)



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Effective Multi-Person Calling Strategies When Bowhunting For Elk

(continued from page 7)

Shooter's job

Your role in this situation is fairly straightforward. Move ahead of the caller 25 to 30 yards as quietly as possible and set up in an area where you have good visibility and plenty of shooting lanes. Range some landmarks and prepare for some action. Do not set up behind cover. Instead, rely on your camo and set up in an area that will provide the best opportunity for drawing and shooting. Once you've picked your spot, you need to commit to it and stay patient. Unless a situation arises where the bull is obviously moving away, you do not want to move and risk being spotted.

Depending on the terrain and vegetation, the caller and shooter may not be able to maintain eye contact. Before splitting up, it is important to establish a time frame for when the caller will begin his sequence. The above calling situation is solely based on what happens when things go right. Many things can happen in this situation, and it will be important for the caller to react accordingly. Try not to overthink your actions here; imagine you're actually an elk in this situation and think about the message you are conveying.

Elk calling scenario 3: Tug of war

Like most things in the elk woods, plans can fall apart in an instant, and it will be important for hunters to adapt accordingly if they wish to consistently fill their elk tag. The above situation can be a deadly combo when it comes to herd bulls, but what happens when the bull responds but refuses to move and advance towards the shooter? These are times when thinking outside of the box can quickly turn an encounter into a successfully punched tag. To begin, let's break down this situation to the basics: We have a herd bull that is likely guarding a hot cow due to the fact that he is issuing challenging bugles to us (the intruding bull). At this point, the bull may or may not believe we have cows, but why would he leave the sure thing to find out when he may lose everything if this new bull is bigger and badder? What if a cow just happened to wander between these two bulls? Would he break then?

For the next scenario, we are going to consider that you and your partner have closed the distance and made vocal contact with a hot herd bull. He has answered your challenge bugle, but won't budge, and now the ball is in your court to force a play. With this scenario, the shooter is going to aid the caller with their own calls.

Shooter's job

Employing this tactic will largely rest on the shoulders of the shooter. Conditions must be right for this to work, and the curiosity of the bull and available cover must be strictly considered. If the bull your caller is working is fired up but not advancing, it may be time

to force an action. Let out a few loud, drawn-out, and demanding cow calls. If the herd bull responds with a lip bawl or welcoming bugle (normal bugle followed by several chuckles), you can instantly respond to him with several calls in recession and start walking directly at him, though watch your wind! Crash through the brush and keep your head on a swivel. The herd bull thinks he has won you over and may start raking to show dominance for his new cow. Be ready to draw on an instant if necessary. A second and less risky option is to play into your caller with the exact same steps. Move back toward your caller, and issue rapid cow mews as you go for 20 or so yards. The bull won't instantly follow, but now he knows he can sneak to your last known location to scent-check and see if this new cow is in heat. Quickly turn and sneak back to your last spot—or further if possible—and set up again. Wait patiently, as the bull will likely sneak in silently now.

Caller's job

Listen to what's going on in front of you. If you hear your shooter make cow calls, it's time to spring into action. Let out a huge lip bawl to demand that this new "cow" join your herd. If the shooter begins heading toward the herd bull, you need to react quickly and try everything in your power to call "her" back. This will add a bit of realism to the whole scenario and could provide some distraction for the bull and allow the shooter to get a shot. If the shooter heads in your direction, throw out a welcome bugle and begin raking to show dominance. This may bring the bull running, but nonetheless, it will add realism and increase the chance of him coming to scent-check the new cow.

As with all of the other scenarios, staying mobile and fluid with your calling will be key here. From the first moment you make contact with a bull, you are running on a time clock to make something happen before he gets suspicious or bored and moves off. Try your best to read the mood the bull is in and react in a manner that will swing the odds in your favor.

The nose knows

While all three of these scenarios presented different challenges and actions, one thing is always a constant: the wind. It doesn't matter how careful you are with your scent and what clothing or products you use. If a bull gets downwind of your location, your goose is cooked. Even in scenarios where you think the wind might hold, it likely won't. In elk country, the wind is constantly swirling, and you should never fully trust it. Keep a wind checker handy and use it often—that's just cheap insurance!

Closing Thoughts

These scenarios are just three of the hundreds you'll encounter over a lifetime of chasing bugling bulls. They won't always work; however, I'm sure that anyone reading this article can think of a few encounters in their hunting career where they may have. The biggest thing to remember here is that calling elk isn't rocket science. If something you are saying to the elk isn't working, then take a moment to regather your thoughts and try a new tactic.

Learn more or join GOHUNT at GOHUNT.com.



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Photo courtesy Ted Ramirez Jr www.caribougear.com

Best Game Bags For Mule Deer Hunting: What Size And System Do You Need?

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

The best game bags for mule deer should be sized for the animal hunters are actually carrying.

Oversized bags add bulk and allow smaller loads to shift.

Undersized bags force quarters and loose meat into tight shapes that are harder to manage.

A well-built mule deer system should provide enough room for the four quarters, loose cuts, trim, and other meat without turning the packout into a collection of mismatched bags.

Proper sizing makes meat easier to protect, stage, carry, and organize.

Mule Deer Need Deer-Sized Game Bags

An elk quarter and a mule deer quarter are different loads.

Using the same oversized bag for every species may seem convenient, but it does not always create the cleanest pack shape or the best load control.

A mule deer quarter bag should provide:

- enough room for a bone-in deer quarter
- a secure closure without overfilling
- a manageable shape inside the backpack
- breathable protection
- durability for brush, rock, and repeated handling

Species-specific sizing helps the bag fit the meat instead of forcing the meat to fit the bag.

A Complete Deer System Needs More Than Four Quarter Bags

Four quarters do not represent the entire animal.

Hunters also need a plan for:

- backstraps
- tenderloins
- neck meat
- rib and brisket meat where required
- trim
- other loose cuts

A dedicated meat-parts bag keeps those smaller cuts from getting buried inside a quarter bag or placed loosely into the backpack.

It also makes the truck and cooler handoff easier to organize.

Bone-In Mule Deer Packouts

Many mule deer hunters carry the quarters with the bone left in.

That creates four clearly defined loads, but the bags still need enough room and strength for awkward bone-in shapes.

For a bone-in deer system, look for:

- four properly sized quarter bags
- one separate meat-parts bag
- secure closure points
- strong seams
- compact storage inside the hunting pack

The Caribou Gear Muley Game Bag System (<https://www.caribougear.com/products/muley>) includes four deer-sized quarter bags, one meat-parts bag, and a storage bag.

It is built specifically around mule deer, deer-sized animals, and organized meat-on-bone field handling.

Boned-Out Mule Deer Still Need Load Separation

Boning out a mule deer creates smaller, more flexible loads.

It does not eliminate the need for organization.

Loose meat can settle into the bottom of an oversized bag, creating a dense shape that shifts inside the pack.

Several appropriately sized bags can help hunters:

- divide the animal into balanced loads
- separate premium cuts
- avoid overstuffing
- stage meat with space between bags
- organize meat at the cooler

The correct number of bags depends on the size of the deer, packout distance, and how much meat each hunter plans to carry.

Backcountry Mule Deer Hunts Reward Lower Bulk

Mule deer hunters often cover open, steep country before an animal is down.

Every item in the pack needs to justify its weight and bulk.

Game bags should pack down small enough to remain in the kill kit without taking space from water, layers, optics, and emergency equipment.

Low bulk should not come at the expense of:

- seam strength
- protection from insects
- proper sizing
- breathability
- reusability

The goal is a compact system that still performs when it is carrying real weight.

Breathable Protection Still Matters for Deer

A smaller animal does not remove the need for good meat care.

Mule deer hunts can involve warm afternoons, exposed slopes, long descents, and several hours between the kill site and the truck.

Game bags should help protect meat from:

- dirt
- hair
- flies
- brush
- pine needles
- dirty backpacks
- unnecessary handling

At the same time, the material should allow heat and moisture to escape while the meat cools.

Do Elk Game Bags Work for Mule Deer?

Large elk game bags can physically hold mule deer meat.

That does not automatically make them the best fit.

Oversized bags may allow quarters or boned-out meat to settle into wide, loose shapes that are harder to position in a backpack.

(continued on page 36)





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

Fall Bass Fishing Tips

By Glenn Walker

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

Fall time has a lot of fun things going on, football, hunting, pumpkin spice latte's...wait, heck no...fall time bass fishing! Our Northland Tackle pros excel at bass fishing all year, but some of these anglers eye up the fall time bite and absolutely put the hammer down on the bass this time of year!

The host of Teal's Bass Galaxy and Northland Tackle Pro, Aaron Teal likes to fish the same lures he does during the summer months but will slow things down to keep the bass biting during the fall months.

"The bass are putting the feedbag on, and moving baits can be effective," said Aaron. "Most people aren't optimizing the possible success of these baits, as they are fishing the same way they would be fishing for them in July and August."

As Aaron explained, bass are going to eat bigger lures, but they don't want to work as hard for that food, so slowing down your retrieve, or going to a lower gear ratio reel will aid in the slower retrieval of the bait.



During this time of the year, when the water temps are in the 46 to 52 degree range, he'll fish the Minnesota Mullet, as it has the amount of hair and buoyancy to present the bait effectively, a big Magdraft swimbait with a belly weighted swimbait hook, and ChatterBait (3/8 oz), retrieving it so the blade is barely moving, with an Eye-Candy Paddle Shad as the trailer as it keeps the presentation compact.

"I like to use the 3/8-ounce Mullet and just crawl it along and allow it to hover over the grass and the bass, this is putting a BIG MEAL right in front of them," said Aaron.

He likes to target areas that hold heat, such as grass, rock or wood, and any time you have a combination of those elements in less than ten feet of water, that is the key. You also want cover that does have access to deeper water nearby.



Now when the water temperatures get lower than 46 degrees, Teal will turn to the Nedster or Finesse Football Jig with a very buoyant plastic like a Z-Man TRD. "I will just deadstick the bait or crawl it along the bottom. The bass are not going to move very far, so find them, stay put and milk that area!"

It is important to use the lightest size jig possible, as you don't want to have your jig bogged down in the grass. It also seems like heavier jigs are more likely to be picked up and dropped by the bass in the fall, so Teal will use the 1/8 oz jig in six feet of water or less, and then the 3/16 oz size when he is fishing in six to ten feet of water.

Northland Tackle Pro and Champions Tour ace, Noah Schultz likes to fish a crankbait in the fall, as he can cover water quickly, and when the bass are chewing, in turn load the boat.

"During the fall, the Sunny B really shines in my opinion," said Noah. "The bass have been pressured all summer long and seen every type of lure in the tackle box."

With the water temps dropping, and the nice, tight subtle action of the Sunny B, it will get a ton of bites when other baits tend to quit working."

Noah likes to look for any type of hard cover whether that be boat docks, rocks, wood or even sparse vegetation. "The colder the water gets the more I lean towards just cranking rock," commented Schultz.

The depth of water he fishes doesn't really seem to matter as much as just being able to find rock even if it's just two feet deep.





Schultz likes to fish his Sunny B on fluorocarbon, and will use 10 lb test when fishing the Shallow Sunny B, or Sunny B. But if he is using the new Elite Series Pro Sunny B Deep, he'll up the lb test to 12 or 14.

When targeting cold water smallmouth, diehard, bronzeback guru, Damien Luchterland will break the fall into two water temperature ranges. "I consider midfall to be when the water temps are in that 48-to-58-degree range," said Damien. "That's when the smallmouth are really feeding and getting ready for the winter ahead."

The smallmouth will use the entire water column and are really focused on minnows or perch as their forage base. "This is when the Smeltinator is king! You can select whatever weight jig, hook size, or color, that works best for the body of water you are fishing."

Damien will fish the Smeltinator in several different ways, with the first pairing it with a soft plastic paddletail, like the Eye-Candy Paddle Shad. "I like to stay in the 3.3" to 3.8" range, but don't be afraid to go bigger in this time frame either."

The second way he'll rig up the Smeltinator is with a jerk shad type minnow, which he'll also rig up on the Smeltinator Underspin, which is a very effective technique when the water temp starts dropping.



A way that many people haven't thought about using the Smeltinator jig is on an Alabama rig, which is just another way that Damien puts the jig to work.

"Now when the water temperature gets to below 48 degrees, and all the way until ice up, this is what I consider late fall, and this is my favorite time of year to target some of the biggest smallmouths of the year!"

During the late fall Damien will still use some of the midfall tactics mentioned above but will also add in some bottom oriented techniques. This is because the smallmouth are switching up their forage focus slightly as they are getting more lethargic with the colder water.

(continued on next page)



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2026 Lund 185 Heavy Gauge (New Model For 2026)

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Fall Bass Fishing Tips

(continued from page 13)



"I'll be targeting the bottom six feet of the water column and using three main techniques. First, a tube, specifically a baby tube, as it can mimic baitfish or crawfish, and I'll rig this on an Elite Series Finesse Football head jig. It's got a small, but strong Gamakatsu hook to match the small plastic."

Next Damien will crawl a soft plastic swimbait on bottom, rigged either on a Finesse Football Jig, or the Smeltinator. Lastly, is the standby Nedster jig, as it just catches bass year long, and has quickly become Damien's jigsaw choice in the boat this season.



Damien's tournament partner, Hayden Anderson is likewise a big Smeltinator fan, and during those late fall days on the water, will use the 3/8 oz Smeltinator Jig with a 3 to 4" swimbait.

"This is the first thing I'll cast into areas holding deep pre-wintering smallmouth, so I can catch the active fish first," explained Hayden. "I will fish it within a foot or two of bottom, and sometimes I'll just drag the jig as well."

After Hayden has exploited these fish with the Smeltinator, he'll switch over to the Finesse Football Jig with a Ned style plastic. He'll either rig something up resembling a craw or the baitfish forage that the smallmouth are feeding on, he'll drag it slowly on the bottom with lots of pauses mixed in.

"I look for deep rock or hard bottom areas on humps and points next to main lake basins. On smaller lakes there's usually only one or two areas that they'll all congregate, but lakes that are a couple thousand acres or more there could be five or more areas that they'll use."

Michigan Northland Tackle Pro Staff, Chase Serafin, loves fall fishing on the Great Lakes as it can be some of the best days of the year to catch trophy smallmouth once you land on them, "but landing on them can be the tricky part," said Chase.

"Our smallmouth here in the north know that once those cool fall nights hit, winter and a lid over their heads isn't far behind."



This groups the smallmouth up in specific areas of the lake where the baitfish conjugate into giant schools

and one of the main things that Chase looks for is current, which will help move the bait around. "This is the perfect time of year to pair the Smeltinator Underspin with your favorite small subtle swim bait and have a chance at a giant every time your bait hits the water."

Chase will look for rocks that set up perfect for giant schools of hungry smallmouth to have a great ambush point on the schools of baitfish. He likes to throw the Underspin on a 7' to 7'3 medium spinning rod, with 10 lb braid line to an 8 to 10 lb Fluorocarbon leader.

As those air and water temperatures start to drop, don't fret, bundle up and get out on the water, for as you have just read, there are a lot of big bass to be caught this time of year!

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TIE ONE ON: SKINNY BUGGER

By Greg Lemon,
communication and
education division
administrator

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

Photo courtesy <https://fwp.mt.gov>

Hook: Streamer hook 6-12 (shown size 8)

Thread: Black, 6/0.

Body: Lead wire, UV brown Semperfli straggle string, and copper wire

Tail: Brown maribou with rootbeer Krystal Flash.

Hackle: Brown grizzly saddle hackle

Start by putting 12 to 14 wraps of lead wire sized to your preference. Ideally the lead wire would provide enough weight to give this fly some undulation as you retrieve it. Put down a thread base and then tie in the following in order:

- Wispy maribou tail about a hook shank long
- Two strands of Krystal Flash on either side of the tail
- Small copper wire to wrap over the hackle
- Straggle string for the body

Once all this is tied in, move your thread to the head. Leave a gap at the head to avoid crowding the eye of the hook.

Wrap the straggle string in touching wraps forward. Try to keep the flash in the string teased out as you wrap. Tie it over behind the eye.

Tie in the hackle at the eye. Strip off a few hackle fibers near the tail of the hackle to get a good tie in point. Take one full wrap at the eye and then wide wraps toward the tail. When you reach the tail, take your copper wire and catch in your hackle and then reverse wrap the wire forward (opposite direction that you wrapped the hackle). This locks in your hackle and protects it from fish teeth.

Tie the wire off at the eye and remove excess. Build a small thread head and whip finish. Coat the head with head cement or superglue.

How to fish it: We're getting into the time of year when trout are bulking up for the winter...They start to be aggressive with a variety of patterns and the "match the hatch" time of year is about done. Stillwater guru Phil Rowley says they start looking for the bread and butter food items. Leeches, like this pattern imitates, are big protein rewards all year long, but trout can really key in on them in the fall. This pattern is great in lakes and rivers both and the wispy tail gives it incredible action. The UV in the straggle string is a big attractor for hungry trout. Don't forget to tie a few in smaller sizes. Fish this with slow strips on a floating line, or with faster strips on a sink tip or full sink line. It can also be fished under an indicator.

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Photo courtesy GOHUNT.com

Tips For Glassing Mule Deer

By Jake Horton

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

Mule deer inhabit various terrain across the West and can be a blast to hunt. They have large bodies, large racks and tasty meat. Often, the most challenging part of mule deer hunting involves actually finding them. Or, at least, finding good bucks. I seem to easily locate does and young fork-antlered bucks galore, but have to truly put in the time to find and harvest a quality mule deer buck. The biggest thing that goes into locating mature bucks is finding a good area and spending a lot of time behind glass. Mule deer are famously hard to find; however, some glassing tips and techniques can help.

Find a Vantage Point

Glassing for mule deer starts with your glassing location. Ideally, you have found a good unit, drawn a tag and have used GOHUNT Maps to scout out spots that look like they could hold bucks. Areas that hold mature bucks will primarily have food, cover and water and be far from a road or trailhead. The trick is to be at a good glassing point for dusk and dawn — if not all day. What makes a good glassing point, though? A good glassing point is one that allows you to see a lot of huntable country with the wind and sun in your favor. Try to find a glassing point that has wind hitting you in the face or, at least, not going in the direction of mule deer habitat. Though you may be hundreds of yards from your intended quarry, a lousy wind can ruin your hunt before it even begins. The sun can also help or hurt your success. I always like to try to set up in a way that has the sun at my back for two reasons. First, nothing can give you a headache quicker than squinting and staring into the sunrise or sunset for hours on end as you try to find a buck's antler, tail flick or ear twitch. The second reason I like the sun at my back is that it really allows me to see the hillsides I am glassing well as I scan the basin. Mule deer are hard enough to spot in low-light situations, so I love to take advantage of the early light or last light shining on a hillside that I am looking at. A good vantage point is crucial to success when glassing for mule deer or any animal.

Use good glass and a tripod

Mule deer are difficult animals to spot because they are designed not to stand out and to blend in with most western vegetation. This is why a good pair of

optics is crucial if you want to give yourself an advantage when glassing. I always like to use binoculars with high quality glass — 10x or more — and a good size objective lens. The glass is important because the glass quality combined with the objective lens size determines how much light is absorbed and transferred to our eyes. Essentially, quality glass and a large objective lens size means that we can see more at lower light, which means we can find more deer earlier. The zoom is crucial if we want to take a closer look. A lot of mule deer hunters use spotting scopes to look for bucks. These often have adjustable zooms that allow hunters to really get a good look at a buck and decide if he is mature enough to go after. No matter if you are using binoculars or a spotting scope, a successful mule deer glasser almost always uses tripods. The movement you are looking for is often a tiny flick or twitch, which means the steadier you are, the better chance you have to see this happen.

Be methodical

When it comes to glassing for mule deer, a couple of things can help you find bucks, especially if you are paying attention to your surroundings. First, I always concentrate on where you might think to see mule deer. This means looking at shady spots, areas with some cover and areas that are hard to access. On sunny days, bucks will almost always prefer shade over the sun; on rainy days, they will almost always choose to bed under cover and mature bucks almost always love being in a hard-to-access portion of a basin. Once I find these areas of concentration, I am methodical in my glassing technique. To do this, I develop glassing boundaries or search areas. Once I know my search area, I start working my way across it from left to right, then right to the left, moving up or down once I have confirmed there were no deer in my sweep. Once my search area has been proven void of animal life, I set up a new search grid bounded by different landmarks and follow the same process. This is the best way to find deer that you might otherwise assume are not there. Searching like this also gives you the confidence that there are no deer there and that it's okay to move on to a new spot.

Patience and perseverance

If you have a good spot, some good optics, a steady setup and are searching methodically, there is only one more thing that can increase your success. This is patience and perseverance! Mature bucks turn nocturnal very quickly once they feel some pressure. This means that they are in their beds or almost in their beds by the time the sun comes up and stay bedded down until the sun is down. For this reason, if you want to have the best chance at finding a mature buck, it is essential that you stay at your vantage point until you can't see through your glass. If you do this, then you might just find a good buck standing up or moving through that you would have missed while you were at the truck. It only takes one second to change a hunt, so spend as much time behind the glass as you can to try to find that buck making a mistake for one second.

Glassing for mule deer is the best way to find and harvest mature bucks. They often spend their time in hard-to-reach areas at high elevations or far from roads.

If you are going to spend the time hiking back in there, consider doing your glassing right. To do this, find a good vantage point where you can see a lot of habitats, keeping in mind the wind direction and the sunrise or sunset directions. Then, use good glass with a good steady base to methodically scan sections of the habitat until you would bet money there is nothing there or find a buck. Be patient and push through the mundanity of glassing because it just takes one flick, twitch or antler glare and you are in the game. Once you find a good buck, your next job is to plan a successful stalk to get you within bow or rifle range and make the opportunity count.

Learn more or join GOHUNT today at GOHUNT.com.

Data Released On Montana Hunters First Act, Survey Open

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

Hunters who are interested in sharing their experiences and opinions on the impacts of nonresident hunting on how licenses are allocated can provide feedback via a new survey from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

The survey is part of research released today as required by House Bill 568, The Montana Hunters First Act, which was passed during the 2025 session.

The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Courtenay Sprunger, required FWP to do a nonresident hunting impact study. The data collected in the study and the survey can be found on the FWP Website here: <https://fwp.mt.gov/legislature/montana-hunters-first-act-hb-568>.

Overall, Montana is seeing growth in nonresident license sales across the board, though some of that has tapered a bit in recent years.

In general, license sales are sold according to state law, which can change with every legislative session. The Fish and Wildlife Commission can also dictate how licenses are distributed and has cut back on some licenses for nonresidents in recent years.

HB 568 required FWP to assess nonresident hunting impacts on deer and elk hunting in the state in each of the seven FWP regions. The legislation also required FWP to identify specific issues for consideration by the legislature, the department and the Fish and Wildlife Commission "concerning nonresident impacts on deer and elk hunting."

On the website (<https://fwp.mt.gov/legislature/montana-hunters-first-act-hb-568>), people can see a license trends report, the language of HB 568, and study of license trends, along with the survey which will be open through Dec. 1. This is a preview (<https://fwp.mt.gov/legislature/montana-hunters-first-act-hb-568>) of the data being compiled by FWP for a final report that will be published by Dec. 1.



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Accountability For Access: New Network Will Enforce Rules On Block Management Areas

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

Hunters on some block management areas will see changes this year as some landowners have enrolled in a new program to reinforce the importance of landowner rules.

As a result of Senate Bill 441, introduced by Senator Denley Loge, landowners now have the option to opt-in to the block management enforcement network. The network is intended to assist with hunter compliance of rules on block management areas (BMAs).

"The hope is that this reminds hunters that using BMAs is a privilege and will keep a hunter who's convicted from breaking rules on one property of going to a neighboring property and breaking rules there, too," said Peter Glowacki, chief of FWP enforcement.

When a hunter commits a violation on a BMA in the enforcement network that results in a conviction, that offender is subsequently restricted from accessing all BMAs in the network for a period of time...

In addition to following rules on all public and private lands, hunters accessing lands enrolled in the enforcement network must follow all rules governing access to block management property. Any conviction based on a violation of those rules will result in the following:

For a first conviction, the individual must be prohibited from accessing all lands participating in the Montana block management enforcement network for the remainder of the current license year;

For a second conviction, the individual must be prohibited from accessing all lands participating in the Montana block management enforcement network for up to three consecutive license years; and

For a third conviction, the individual must be prohibited from accessing all lands participating in the Montana block management enforcement network for life...



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

Leaving In Seven Days? The Final Gear And Meat-Care Check Before A Western Hunt

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

Quick answer: Seven days before a Western hunt, stop adding random gear and verify the system you already plan to carry. Confirm the current rules, access and forecast; test the equipment in its packed configuration; match your Caribou Gear game bags to the species and breakdown method; and make sure the packout, coolers, transportation and partner responsibilities work together.

A week is enough time to correct a real gap. It is not enough time to rebuild the entire hunt around untested equipment.

The final seven-day check should reduce uncertainty. Every decision needs an answer, every critical item needs a location, and every person needs to know what happens after an animal is down.

Seven-day rule: If an item protects the hunt, the rifle, the hunter or the meat, put hands on it before departure. Do not accept “it should be in there” as verification.

A Week Out, Change From Shopping to Verification
Late preparation often creates more gear and less certainty.

Hunters see one more forecast change, one more social post or one more empty space in a tote and start adding equipment without deciding where it belongs or what problem it solves. That is how a clean system turns into a crowded truck, an overweight pack and a kill kit nobody can find.

At seven days, freeze the broad gear list. Only add or replace something when the check exposes a specific failure:

- a missing legal requirement or required document
- a damaged, wet or incomplete piece of equipment
- a dead battery, failed light or broken closure

- a Caribou Gear game bag system that does not match the animal or breakdown plan
- insufficient cooler, vehicle or packout capacity
- a forecast or access change that alters the operating plan

The goal is not to take more. The goal is to know that what you take will do its job.

Seven Days Out: Reconfirm the Hunt, Rules and Access

Start with the parts of the hunt that can change without touching your gear room.

Open the current regulation source from the issuing wildlife agency. Recheck the unit, species, season dates, license or permit, legal methods, evidence-of-sex requirements, carcass-transport rules, chronic wasting disease requirements where applicable, and any fire or emergency orders that affect the country you plan to hunt.

Then confirm the route. A pin on a map does not prove a gate is open, a road is passable or a trailhead is accessible. Check the land-management agency responsible for the ground and contact the local office when the published information is not clear.

Use the National Weather Service forecast for the hunt area, not only the town where the truck will be parked. Look at daytime heat, overnight lows, precipitation, wind and the timing of the next front. Those details affect clothing, shelter, fire conditions, packout pace and the meat-care plan.

Save the information where it remains available without service. Make sure every hunter knows which facts were verified and which conditions still need another check before departure.

Five Days Out: Test the Gear as It Will Be Carried

A gear list confirms ownership. A hands-on check confirms readiness.

Load the pack in the arrangement you expect to use. Turn on the headlamp. Confirm the navigation unit has the correct maps and offline data. Check communication devices, charging cables and backup power. Deploy the shelter, inspect the sleep system and run the water-treatment equipment. Protect the rifle for the weather and transportation the hunt actually requires.

Do not bury the equipment needed first. Rain protection, navigation, the kill kit, Caribou Gear game bags and the primary light need to be reachable without unloading the entire pack.

Run one short driveway drill:

1. Put on the packed pack.
2. Remove the rain layer without scattering equipment.
3. Find the headlamp and backup power in low light.
4. Hand the complete kill kit to a partner.
5. Return every item to the same location.

If that sequence feels confused at home, it will not improve after dark on a steep slope.

(continued on page 20)



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Leaving In Seven Days? The Final Gear And Meat-Care Check Before A Western Hunt

(continued from page 18)

Four Days Out: Lock the Meat-Care System

Do not leave the most important post-shot equipment in a garage tote because the hunt has not started yet.

Open the Caribou Gear storage package and inspect every game bag. Confirm the count, size, closure, seams and intended job. The bags should be clean, completely dry and grouped with the cordage, gloves, knives, light and clean work surface needed to use them.

Match the system to the breakdown decision:

- Meat-on-bone elk plan: Carry the Caribou Gear Wapiti system so the four quarters and meat-parts load have assigned bags.
- Boned-out elk plan: Carry the Caribou Gear Carnivore system so boned-out meat can be divided among five matching loads.
- Another species: Use the Caribou Gear game bag collection to choose a species- and use-specific system instead of forcing an elk setup onto a different job.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game summarizes the core meat-care job as keeping meat cool, clean and dry. Its current field-to-freezer meat-care guidance also emphasizes getting heat away from the meat, protecting it from contamination and maintaining air circulation.

A Caribou Gear game bag supports that work. It does not replace shade, airflow, a clean breakdown, an efficient packout or prepared cold storage.

Pass test: One hunter can pull the complete meat-care system from the pack, name the job of every bag and begin work without returning to the truck.

Three Days Out: Prove the Packout and Cooler Plan

The packout cannot end with “get the meat back to the truck.”

Estimate the route, elevation change, likely travel time, available carriers and the number of trips the animal may require. Identify where bagged meat can be placed in lasting shade with space around each load. Decide how the party will communicate when hunters are separated between the kill site, trailhead and vehicle.

At the truck, confirm:

- the coolers are clean and large enough for the intended animal
- the vehicle has a clean lane for meat and a separate lane for dirty packs, boots and field gear

- ice or another dependable cooling option is identified
- meltwater and drainage can be managed without leaving meat submerged
- the processor, home freezer or next cold-storage location is ready
- the truck keys and backup key have assigned owners

The first load should be chosen by cooling risk and conditions, not habit. Review which elk meat load should come out first before the crew needs to make that decision under fatigue.

Forty-Eight Hours Out: Pack in Order of Use

Now build the final load and stop moving equipment between containers.

Keep the daily essentials where they can be reached quickly. The exact order will change by hunt, but a practical system separates equipment by when it becomes necessary:

- Immediate access: navigation, light, rain layer, gloves, water, emergency communication and basic medical equipment.
- After the shot: complete kill kit, Caribou Gear game bags, cordage, tarp, spare blades and required tagging materials.
- At camp: shelter, sleep system, cooking equipment, food and camp clothing.
- At the truck: coolers, recovery equipment, clean clothes, processor information and the equipment needed for the drive home.

For the detailed kill-kit layout, use The Kill Kit Standard <https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/hunting-kill-kit-checklist>. This seven-day guide has a different job: confirming that the kill kit, pack, vehicle and meat plan operate as one system before departure.

Choose the Caribou Gear Elk System That Matches the Plan

For an elk hunt, the final week is the wrong time to remain undecided about bone-in versus boned-out recovery. That choice controls the bag layout expected.

The Night Before: Verify People, Not Just Gear

The final check is a conversation.

Each hunter should know the route, meeting point, communication plan, emergency contact, expected return window and the location of shared equipment. Assign the first-aid kit, emergency communicator, kill kit, Caribou Gear game bags, vehicle keys and meat-care tools to named people.

Confirm licenses, permits and required identification one final time. Charge electronics, update the forecast and verify the access route. Then stop reorganizing.

A late-night reshuffle creates two problems: the written plan becomes wrong, and the person who needs an item no longer knows where it is.

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This means you can dial precisely and more quickly, ensuring dead-on accuracy.

With custom turrets, precision shooting becomes accessible to all hunters, equipping you to manage almost any shooting scenario with ease.

Currently, these turrets are specifically designed for the Razor® HD LHT™ and the Viper® HD riflescopes, with additional compatible models coming in the future.

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Custom turrets are advanced solutions for hunters looking for quick, precise adjustments that get them on target fast.

Vortex® Custom Turrets are specifically calibrated to your firearm's specifications and the environmental conditions of your typical hunting grounds.

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HOW TO CREATE A CUSTOM TURRET

Creating a Vortex® Custom Turret requires detailed information about your firearm and ammunition.

You'll need to specify your preferred ammunition, the exact muzzle velocity of your rifle, and environmental factors such as temperature and altitude.

After submitting this data through the Vortex® Custom Turret Data Form, your new turret is laser-etched and delivered directly to you.



Watch this video "How to create a custom turret," which provides a clear walkthrough of the necessary rifle and ballistic information to get started. <https://youtu.be/-4IEm0yCjvw?si=1K22gZaLmp2JuNII>

HOW TO INSTALL A CUSTOM TURRET

Installing your custom turret is simple and can be completed at home with minimal equipment. All you need is a screwdriver or included turret tool to remove the factory turret and securely attach the new custom turret.

Start by ensuring your riflescope is accurately zeroed. Replace the stock turret by unscrewing it, then align and secure your new custom turret so your zero distance matches the designated hashmark (typically 50, 100, or 200 yards depending on your setup). Once installed, confirm your holdovers to make sure the data matches and your riflescope is accurate at all corresponding distances.

Want to equip your Razor® HD LHT™ or Viper® HD with a custom turret? Click here to get started: <https://vortexoptics.com/vortex-custom-turret.html>.

Custom turrets can deliver an advantage for accuracy and ease of use in diverse hunting environments. Consider replacing the factory MOA or MRAD turret for your Razor® HD LHT™ or Viper® HD with one that complements your unique hunting style and location, and experience the difference in your shooting accuracy and consistency.

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Try the free Vortex Optics Finder tool online at <https://opticsfinder.vortexoptics.com/preprod/categories> to find the right optic for you.



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

Historic Whitetail Verified As Largest U.S. Typical In Boone And Crockett Records

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

The Boone and Crockett Club announced that the Sam Aiuppa/James Martin typical whitetail deer has officially been verified at a score of 207 7/8 inches, making it the largest typical whitetail ever taken in the United States.

The score surpasses the famous Jordan buck by 1 6/8 inches and ranks second worldwide behind Milo Hanson's 213 5/8-inch world record.

Sam Aiuppa killed the buck in late November 1991 during a pheasant hunting trip to LaSalle County, Illinois. He mounted the antlers on a plaque and stored them in his basement, where they remained for 32 years until an electrician noticed their extraordinary dimensions, most notably eye-guards more than a foot long.

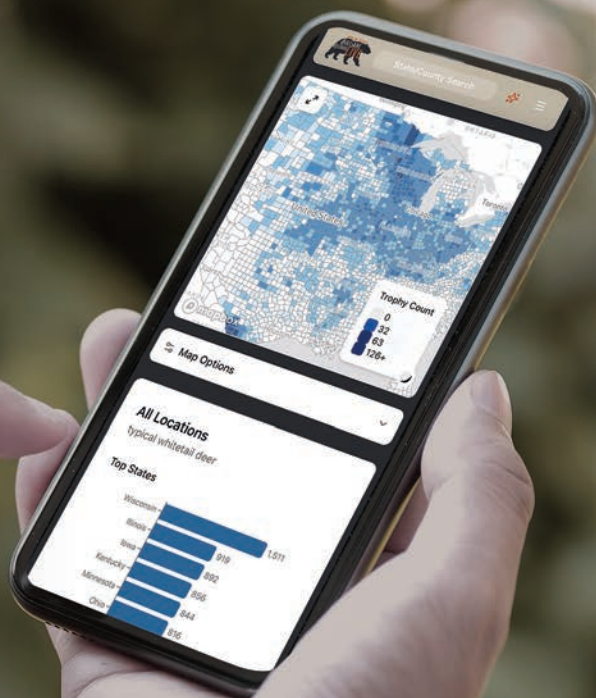
Antler collector James Martin later acquired the antlers and had them measured by a Boone and Crockett Club Official Measurer. After the initial score was submitted, the antlers were independently re-measured by two additional Official Measurers to verify the score. The completed score charts were reviewed by Dr. Jon McRoberts, chairman of the Club's Records of North American Big Game Committee, who confirmed the official score of 207 7/8 inches.

"This is a monumental addition to North American big game records," said Kyle Lehr, Boone and Crockett Club director of Big Game Records. "We are thrilled to officially welcome the Aiuppa buck into the Boone and Crockett records. It took more than three decades for this remarkable deer to be recognized, but its place in the record books is well deserved."

Thanks to a generous donation from a long-time Boone and Crockett Club Lifetime Associate and conservation benefactor, the Club waived its \$40 entry fee starting January 1, 2026. This gift removes a key financial barrier to submission, encouraging broader participation and expanding records data to support the science-based management of North American wildlife.

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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



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

10 Tips For Firearm Handling Safety While Out Hunting This Fall

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

While firearm accidents are rare, human error or inattention is the leading cause.

Statistics from the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) show that hunting with firearms is actually one of the safest recreational activities in the country. That's not to say that accidents can't happen, and practicing safe firearm handling can greatly reduce the risk.

In recent years, about 280,000 people annually hunted in Idaho. Even with that many people in the field, there are typically very few, if any, hunting accidents involving firearms in Idaho.

"Although there are very few firearms-related hunting accidents, we'd prefer to have none," said Brenda Beckley, Fish and Game's Hunter Education Administrator.

"Among the most common causes of the accidents we have is when firearms are loaded when they shouldn't be — such as putting it into or removing it from a vehicle — or while navigating through rough terrain. Those accidents are easily avoided if you adhere to the basics of firearm safety."

In the hopes of avoiding firearm accidents whether hunting (or target shooting), Fish and Game offers these guidelines:

Treat every firearm as if it is loaded. When another person hands you a firearm, assume it is loaded even if you are told it is not. Ask anyone handing you a firearm to open the action before they hand it to you.

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Always control the muzzle of your firearm.

As long as the muzzle is pointed in a safe direction, it is unlikely someone will get hurt, even if the firearm discharges unexpectedly. A safety is a mechanical device which can fail, so there is no instance where you can disregard the muzzle's direction simply because the safety is on.

Never touch the trigger until you are ready to shoot.

Keep your fingers away from the trigger while loading or unloading. Never pull the trigger on any firearm with the safety on or anywhere in between "safe" and "fire." Again, the gun's safety serves as a supplement to proper gun handling but does not serve as a substitute for common sense.

Never point a firearm at anything you do not intend to shoot.

Carry and use binoculars to check out the hillside. Never look through your scope at something you can't identify.

Be certain of your target (and what is beyond it).

A safe hunter makes certain that movement or sound is a game animal that is in season before pointing a muzzle. Prior to taking a shot, a hunter must check the background for other people, livestock, buildings, equipment or roads to make sure there is a safe backstop.

Mistaking a person for game is one of the most common causes of hunting accidents, which can be serious or fatal. One way to make sure every other person in the field can clearly identify you is by wearing hunter orange. While a safety measure recommended for those on both sides of the gun, Idaho is one of few states where hunter orange is not required, except for hunters on wildlife management areas where pheasants are stocked during the pheasant season. A hunter orange hat meets this requirement.



Be sure the barrel is clear of obstructions before shooting.

Make a habit to check your barrel often. Even a small obstruction in the bore can cause the barrel to bulge or worse...explode.

The same can happen by placing a smaller gauge or caliber cartridge into a gun, such as a 20-gauge shell in a 12-gauge shotgun. This can result in the smaller cartridge acting as an obstruction when a cartridge of proper size is fired. Always pay close attention to each cartridge you insert into your firearm and only carry the correct ammunition for the gun you're carrying.

Never cross a fence, climb a tree or do anything potentially hazardous with a loaded gun.



There will be times when common sense and the basic rules of firearms safety will require you to unload your gun for maximum safety. Never pull or push a loaded firearm toward yourself or another person.

Store firearms and ammunition separately.

While most gun owners consider this most of the year, many leave guns and ammunition in their vehicles during the hunting season. Firearms should be unloaded for safety when in the vehicle. Ammunition should always remain inaccessible to children.

Alcohol and guns don't mix.

If there is alcohol in your hunting camp, make certain all firearms are put away before the alcohol comes out. Taking out ol' Grandad's 70-year-old wood stock rifle to show your buddies after you've had a few beers can lead to a tragic mistake.



Don't be timid when it comes to gun safety.

Don't hesitate to let your hunting partners know when you think they are putting themselves or others at risk. Gun safety starts with you.



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Upland Game Bird Forecasts

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

New this year, Montana upland game bird hunters have a 10-day head start on nonresident hunters. As a result of Senate Bill 514, passed during the 2025 legislative session, nonresident upland game bird hunters using private lands enrolled in FWP hunting access programs -- including block management -- or hunting on public lands may not begin hunting until 10 days later than resident upland bird hunters for all upland species except mountain grouse (blue, spruce [Franklin] and ruffed grouse).

Northwest Montana (Region 1)

Rains and the wet spring did not favor good brood production for upland game birds in northwest Montana this year. Mountain grouse numbers are expected to be below normal due to a lack of chick production. Pheasant and partridge habitat is limited in Region 1 to the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area on the Flathead Reservation and the Flathead Valley. Pheasant and partridge brood production was likely negatively impacted by the cool, wet spring and periods of heavy rain as well. Overall, it looks like a down year for upland game numbers in R1. Hunters looking to pursue upland game birds within the Flathead Reservation are reminded that a reservation upland game hunting license is needed for nontribal members.

Western Montana (Region 2)

Forest grouse and wild turkey populations in the region continue to look good and should offer quality opportunity during the hunting season. Consecutive mild winters have allowed for consistently high winter survival of adults and previous seasons broods. Despite a dry winter, the spring conditions turned out well with good and timely precipitation to create quality habitat for broods throughout the summer. Through several observations, wild turkeys and forest grouse had large broods slightly earlier in the spring, which should bode well for numbers this fall.

Spring surveys were conducted in Region 2 in May to gather information on spring mountain grouse numbers and allow FWP to obtain a reliable estimate to detect trends over time. The surveys focused primarily on dusky (blue) grouse but recorded ruffed and spruce grouse incidentally. Spring surveys showed abundant adult grouse numbers spread widely across the region. Hunters focusing on dusky grouse should move up in elevation as the season progresses.

To obtain a better estimate of summer brood production and juvenile recruitment, FWP is asking hunters in Region 2 to voluntarily submit one wing of each harvested mountain grouse. There will be a "wing barrel" set up at the Region 2 office in Missoula starting in September and at hunter check stations later in the fall. The wing will be used to age the harvested bird as a metric for estimating productivity.

Bird hunters are reminded that due to recent efforts to restore native sharp-tailed grouse to several areas in western Montana, it is possible you could encounter

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a sharptail while hunting. Be careful to identify birds, as hunting is closed for sharptails west of the Continental Divide in Montana.

Southwest Montana (Region 3)

Wildlife biologists in Region 3 will be collecting wings from hunter-harvested grouse during the fall season to assess young-of-the year composition.

Sage-grouse lek counts in the 18 monitored leks in southwestern Montana showed improved numbers for the second spring in a row. Though this did not apply to all leks and the documented growth follows approximately 10 years of overall declines. The proportion of juveniles to adults documented from hunter donated wings have indicated poor juvenile recruitment in recent years. However, in 2024 and 2025 this improved somewhat, particularly east of I-15. This recruitment and a mild winter may have improved population performance. Thus far, conditions appear to have been favorable for recruitment. Though little snowpack was available, Region 3 has experienced regular precipitation, which may improve forage.

Information on mountain grouse is more limited. However, Region 3 has seen a similar pattern in juvenile-to-adult ratios as sage-grouse. Only a handful of mountain grouse surveys are conducted in spring, but results from this past spring were encouraging. In recent years recruitment appeared poor in mountain grouse but improved in the past two seasons. The poor snow year may have reduced moisture with consequences for forage and cover this summer. However, this may be counteracted by timely summer rainfall.

North-central Montana (Region 4)

Weather conditions during the winter of 2025-2026 in north-central Montana were quite mild. Much of the region had above-average temperatures, strong winds and very little snow accumulation, and the birds on the landscape carried over well due to this mild winter weather.

The above-average temperatures and low precipitation continued into the spring, but in June much of the region experienced multiple large weather events with large amounts of precipitation and cooler temps. The moisture from these storms has kept much of the region looking green well into July, and habitat conditions are looking good for the first time in several years. Wet conditions have pushed haying into mid-July and... other crops into August. Large hail producing summer storms have been minimal except in a few isolated parts of the region which is good for brood survival. There is some concern that the cooler wet conditions in June may have affected brood survival, but it is still too early for biologists to determine the overall impacts at this time. Brood sightings around the region have been minimal but there is evidence suggesting a later hatch.

This has been a difficult year to put together an outlook for upland bird hunting, but habitat conditions have biologists optimistic that bird numbers will be up from 2025. Spring surveys showed pheasant crow counts above last year's counts especially in places with good habitat.

(continued on page 38)

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How To Field Dress A Deer

Vortex Optics
<https://vortexoptics.com>

Congratulations on your harvest. Whether you're a new hunter or a seasoned veteran, sportsmanship includes the responsible care and use of meat obtained while hunting. An important step to placing quality venison on your dinner table is proper care of the animal immediately following harvest. To help with that endeavor, here's a step-by-step guide to field dressing a whitetail deer.

Some hunters have a meat pole or skinning shed where they hang their deer to remove the entrails. That's great, but most hunters field dress their deer on the ground prior to bringing them home or taking them to the meat processor.

If you field dress your deer while it's hanging, you can still follow these directions – gravity simply helps the process. If you field dress your deer on the ground follow these 10 steps to make this important task quick and easy.

1. Start by tagging your deer, if required, and then put on a pair of rubber, plastic, or latex gloves.
2. Place the deer on its back with its hind legs spread open.
3. If it's a buck, remove the testicles and use the hole left behind as your starting point. If it's a doe, start at the bottom of the udder.
4. Poke your knife into the skin and begin cutting up toward the chest. Take care to keep the cut shallow and only cut through the skin.

A deep cut will puncture the stomach and make your job messy and smelly.

Cut from your starting point up to the sternum (bottom of rib cage). If your knife has a gut hook, pull from your starting point up to the sternum.

A gut hook can help guard against cutting into the stomach.

5. The lower half of the body cavity is now open, and you can remove the entrails (stomach, intestines, liver, etc.). Pull everything out and cut them away from the body. The large intestine runs to the anus and you will not be able to remove it in its entirety at this point.

You can cut through the large intestine or move it aside until Step 9. If you choose to cut through it, be careful not to get any feces on the carcass. You will remove the lower portion of this and the bladder in Step 9.

6. You now have an empty lower cavity and you will be able to see the diaphragm. The diaphragm is simply the thin wall of muscle that separates the chest cavity (heart and lungs) from the lower cavity (stomach and intestines).

7. Remove the diaphragm by cutting along the inside of the ribs. You will now be able to see the heart and lungs.

Note: You may also cut through the sternum (brisket) using a saw or heavy knife to reach the heart and lungs.

Cutting through the sternum is not necessary to field-dress a deer, but it's an option as long as you will NOT be mounting the deer. If you will be making a trip to the taxidermist's, never cut through the sternum or anywhere in front of the front legs.

8. Reach into the chest cavity and remove the heart and lungs by cutting them away from the body. You will need to reach in and cut the esophagus to detach the lungs.

9. Return to your starting point between the back legs and cut from there down through the meat to the anus. This will allow the back legs to lay open and will expose the pelvis. Cut through the pelvis with a small saw or a pair of lopping/pruning shears. This will expose the bladder and lower portion of the large intestine. Pull and cut these away from the carcass with care to not spill urine or feces on the animal.

The deer's tenderloins are among the highest quality cuts of meat and they lie on the inside of the body cavity, close to the stomach and intestines. Spilling urine or feces on them can affect their quality.

10. Roll your deer over or pick its front end up to dump any blood out and you're done.

Take care to keep the carcass clean of dirt, leaves and other debris. At this point you can take your deer home or to the meat processor. As long as you've kept the carcass clean, there's no need to wash the meat.

Congratulations and enjoy your venison!

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Photo credit Mike Hanback courtesy <https://bigdeerblog.com>

.35 Remington: Thick-Woods Buck-Thumping Cartridge

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

I bet most of you hunters under the age of 40 have never heard of the .35 Remington, much less ever owned a rifle chambered for it. The cartridge gained popularity in the 1950s and '60s, when Marlin and Winchester chambered lever-actions for the .35 Rem. People who hunted thick woods, from northern Michigan to Maine to anywhere in the country where most shots are 100 yards and in, loved the hard-hitting cartridge that dropped deer on the spot. The niche round continued to be popular into the 1980s and '90s.

I began hunting with the .35 Rem. in 2018, when Marlin, owned by the now-defunct Remington Arms Company at the time, chambered a new Model 336 lever for the round.

The first time I shot my new rifle, topped with a Trijicon Accupoint 3-9X scope, some things stood out. The huge 200-grain bullet (MV about 2,225 fps) was amazingly accurate at 100 yards, and acceptable out to 150 yards. Past that, the huge chunk of lead drops precipitously, about 13-16 inches at 250-300 yards.

This is a short-range deer cartridge for sure.

The recoil of the .35 Rem. is manageable, due to the compact design and fit of a lever gun.

The first buck I shot with a .35 Rem. lever, a Tennessee 6-pointer, dropped like he had been hit over the head with a bag of bricks.

All the deer I've killed with the .35 Rem. since have been 120 yards or closer, and all have thumped down, or shuddered and ran less than 60 yards. When you hit a deer right, the 200-grain bullet makes a big wound channel and exit hole for short, easy blood trails.

While several ammunition companies still offer 200-grain .35 Rem. loads, no major firearms companies build new guns for the cartridge. I fear the days of the .35 Rem. are numbered. If you see a rifle chambered for it on a used gun rack, especially one of the 2018 model Marlin levers, buy it.

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Photo credit Ted Ramirez Jr. www.caribougear.com

How To Mark A Kill Site And Packout Route Without Creating Confusion

By Ted Ramirez Jr

Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Co. www.caribougear.com

Most hunters remember exactly where an elk went down.

That does not mean the location will be easy to find again after dark, under fatigue, or during the third trip back into the same piece of country.

A kill site, a meat staging location, and the safest packout route are not always the same place.

If those locations are not marked clearly while the details are still fresh, confusion starts building fast.

A simple marking system helps hunters keep the retrieval organized before darkness, distance, and heavy loads start changing the situation.

Mark More Than the Kill Site

Dropping one pin where the elk went down is a start.

It is not a complete packout plan.

Once the animal is broken down, meat may move to a shaded staging location. Gear may be left in a separate spot. The return route may need to avoid steep terrain, deadfall, or a difficult creek crossing.

At a minimum, mark:

- the original kill site
- the meat staging location
- the safest route back to the truck
- major terrain hazards
- reliable creek crossings
- backup access points

Separate pins make it easier to understand what each location means when the packout stretches into multiple trips.

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Use Clear Names for Every Pin

Generic GPS pins create problems later.

A map full of unnamed waypoints does not help much when you are tired, moving in the dark, or trying to explain the route to another hunter.

Keep waypoint names short and specific.

Useful examples:

- ELK KILL SITE
- MEAT STAGE 1
- SAFE CREEK CROSSING
- STEEP DEADFALL — AVOID
- TRUCK ROUTE
- BACKUP EXIT

The goal is not building a complicated map.

The goal is making the route understandable when your attention starts slipping late in the packout.

Record the Route While It Is Fresh

The safest route is usually easier to identify before the first heavy load leaves the kill site.

Once you start moving under weight, it becomes harder to remember every obstacle, crossing, and decision point along the way.

Record the route during the first trip out.

Pay attention to:

- sidehill sections that become unstable under weight
- deadfall that slows movement
- loose rock on descents
- water crossings that become difficult after dark
- terrain where the route becomes easy to lose
- places where a longer route may be safer

For more on planning retrieval routes before the shot, read [How to Plan an Elk Packout Route Before You Ever Kill an Elk](https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/plan-elk-packout-route-before-shot) <https://www.caribougear.com/blogs/hunting-tips/plan-elk-packout-route-before-shot>.

Use Photo Notes When the Terrain Gets Complicated

GPS pins are useful, but they do not always explain what the route actually looks like.

A quick photo can capture the information a waypoint misses.

Take pictures of:

- the safest creek crossing
- the entrance to a hidden trail
- a difficult deadfall section
- the meat staging setup
- a junction that may be confusing after dark

Photo notes are especially useful when another hunter may need to follow the route later.

Do Not Rely on One Marker

One landmark is not enough in thick timber.

Low light, weather, fatigue, and changing approach angles can make familiar terrain look different on the return trip.

Use a simple combination:

- GPS waypoints
- offline maps
- photo notes
- clear route names
- temporary flagging only where lawful and necessary

If you use temporary flagging, verify local rules and remove it when the retrieval is complete.

Build a Return Plan for Darkness

Many elk packouts finish after dark whether hunters planned for it or not.

Terrain that feels obvious in daylight can become slow and confusing once visibility drops.

Before leaving staged meat behind, confirm:

- the next approach route
- the safest crossing points
- the location of spare batteries
- the staging waypoint
- the truck waypoint
- which route still makes sense under a heavy load

Do not wait until the return trip to figure those details out.

Keep Loads Easy to Identify

Navigation is only part of the organization problem.

Multi-trip packouts can also create confusion around quarters, loose meat, capes, trim, and the order loads should move.

That becomes more noticeable when several hunters are helping, loads are staged in different locations, or the retrieval continues into the night.

Game Bag ID Tags help keep meat bags identified so the next load is easier to understand when you return.

A Simple Marking System Prevents Expensive Mistakes

Most packout confusion does not happen because hunters lack technology.

It happens because the route, staging location, and load order were never clearly recorded while the details were still fresh.

- Mark the kill site.
- Mark the staged meat.
- Record the safest route out.

Then make sure the system still makes sense when you are tired, carrying weight, and returning in the dark...

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The graphic features two hunters in a mountainous landscape, each carrying a large pack of meat. The hunter on the left is using the Wapiti system, with meat in multiple bags secured by straps. The hunter on the right is using the Carnivore system, with meat in a single large bag. The background shows a misty mountain valley.

CARIBOU GEAR

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WHICH SYSTEM ACTUALLY FITS YOUR PACKOUT

WAPITI SYSTEM

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

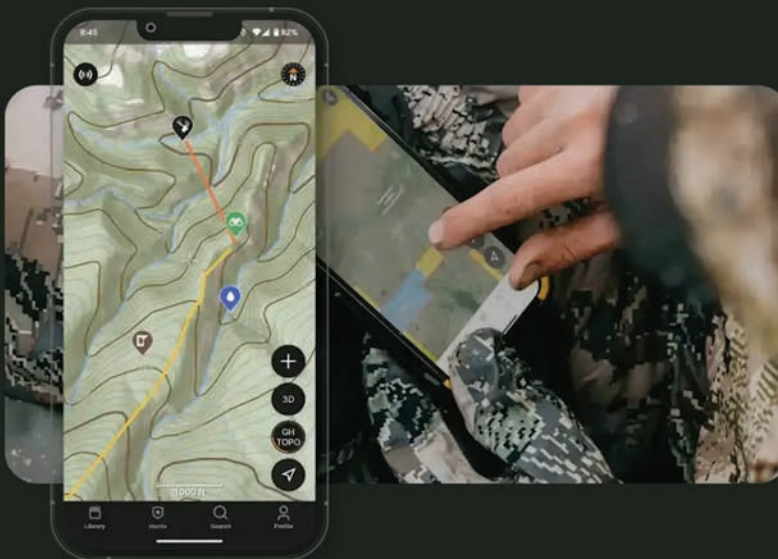
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BETTER PACKOUT.
BETTER MEAT.**

CARNIVORE SYSTEM

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

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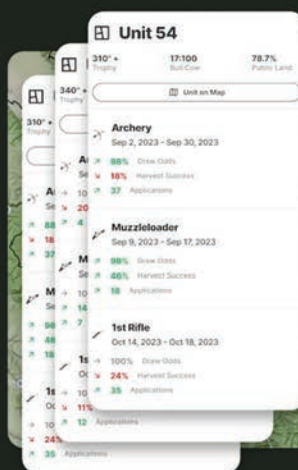
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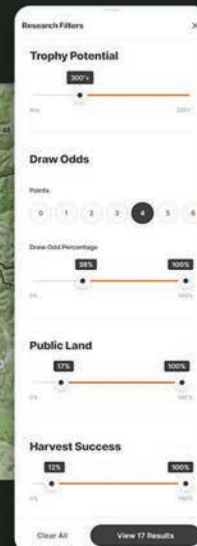
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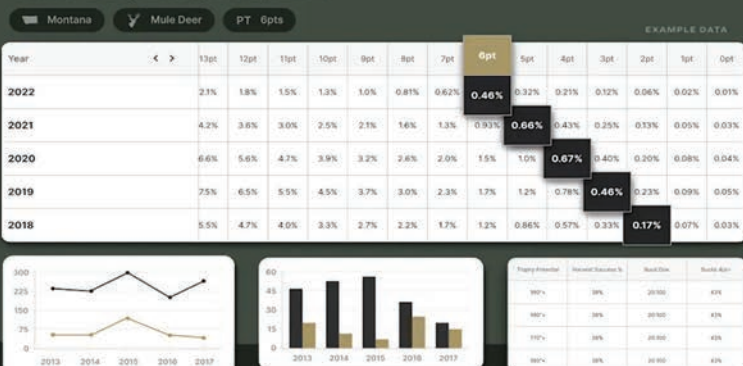
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EXAMPLE DATA



Units 251, 252, 253, 254



% Draw Odds

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GOHUNT Hunting more often just got easier

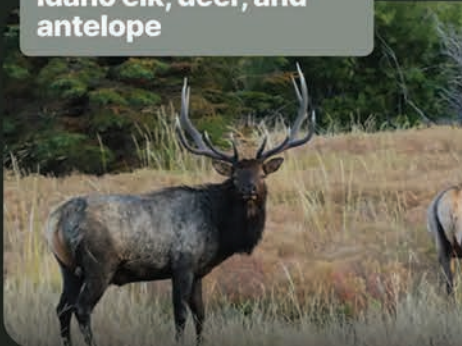
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Learn the key strategies, tips, and tactics of experienced hunters, find out new ways to maximize your days in the field, and discover new hunting opportunities you never knew existed.

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APPLICATION STRATEGY 2023 Idaho elk, deer, and antelope



What's new for 2023?

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

Idaho Mule Deer Hunt SEASONS

3

Unit 27

Any Legal Weapon

NOV 1 - NOV 18, 2023

98.8%

170"

23:100

56% ↓

32% ↑

134 ↑

1

Unit 20A

Any Legal Weapon

NOV 1 - NOV 18, 2023

2

Unit 14

Any Legal Weapon

OCT 18 - OCT 31, 2023

4

Unit 39

Any Legal Weapon

OCT 18 - OCT 31, 2023



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PT Point Tracker

Keep track of every state, species, and season you've built up points for in one place, then take that info into our advanced filtering tools and draw odds.

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ADDITIONAL PERKS

Dates & Deadlines

See at a glance when you need to apply for any hunt you can think of.

State Rules & Regs

Up-to-date information on state specific guidelines for hunting

Species Profiles

Concise insights into the behavioral patterns of any species you can hunt

Unit Profiles

Boots-on-the-ground information about every hunt unit in the west

Monthly Giveaways

Monthly giveaways from some of the top names in hunting

Michael's Points

Montana

Big Game Combination License

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Colorado

Deer

4 pts

Nevada

Mule Deer

12 pts

Wyoming

Antelope

2 pts

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Hunting & Fishing News | 33



Photos courtesy GOHUNT.com

Hearty Wild Game Stew Recipe

By Dave Barnett

Originally published at **GOHUNT**  GOHUNT.com

I think that all of us around the office — and those of you reading this — can firmly agree that fall is the best time of the year for obvious reasons. The world transforms into a beautiful display of colors, snow teases the high country and haunting bugles echo throughout the canyons. It's a perfect time of the year. Beyond enjoying all of the outdoor experiences brought on by the fall season, I also really enjoy spending more time in the kitchen. Fall foods are just where it's at; everything is hearty and warm and it's the perfect time of the year to do some experimenting with any game meat you may have freshly acquired.

Stews are probably one of the most requested dinners around our house. This is an easy meal that anyone can nail, the flavor is amazing and the ingredients are simple. This is also a great use of less desirable meats or tougher cuts as the long-simmering action of this dish will make every cut fork-tender. What's more, stews are an accepting dish and can easily be modified with a slew of other ingredients to truly make it your own...



Photos credit Dave Barnett courtesy GOHUNT.com

For this particular recipe, I chose to prepare this dish in a slow cooker, but stove top, oven or even a wood stove are all great options.

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Hearty Wild Game Stew Ingredients

- 1 to 2 pounds of stew meat (I generally cut mine in 1" cubes.)
- 2 to 3 celery stalks
- 1 medium onion (I prefer red onions, but any will work.)
- 3 to 4 garlic cloves
- Yukon gold potatoes
- 2 to 3 carrots
- 32 oz beef broth or preferred broth
- Red wine (optional)
- Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 cup flour
- Oil
- Salt and pepper
- 3 to 4 bay leaves
- 3 to 4 rosemary sprigs
- Water as needed

Preparation



To begin with, heat a splash of oil in a medium to large skillet over medium-high heat. While the oil is heating, pat dry all of the stew meat pieces and season with salt and pepper.

Once the oil is shimmering, add individual pieces of meat to the skillet. Heavily sear each piece of meat on all sides and then drop these into the slow cooker. Keep adequate space between the meat pieces while searing to allow a good crust to form. It may be necessary to do the meat in batches.

While the meat is searing, chop the celery stalks, onion and garlic cloves. Once you have finished searing all of the stew pieces, add another splash of oil to the pan if needed and combine the celery and onion. Saute these until the onion begins to turn translucent and the celery is slightly softened. Add the minced garlic cloves and saute for an additional one to two minutes.

Once the garlic is fragrant, add 1/2 cup of all-purpose flour to the vegetables and mix well. Once combined, add the beef broth or red wine to the skillet and bring to a soft simmer. While simmering, scrape the bottom of the pan to dislodge any baked on bits. A whisk may be necessary to knock out any remaining clumps of flour. This base may thicken as it cooks and it may be necessary to add additional liquid.

Once the stew base is well combined and everything is cozy, add the mixture to stew meat in the slow cooker and mix everything. At this point, I will also add more broth or water until my desired consistency is reached.



Keep in mind that the liquid consistency can be adjusted throughout the cooking process. At this point, I will also add in the rosemary and bay leaves. I love to tie these together so they can easily be retrieved in a few hours.

Cover and set to low for the next four to five hours.

About an hour and a half to two hours before you would like to eat, chop the carrots and potatoes into bite-sized pieces and add these to the stew. Additionally, you can pre-boil these items and add them in 20 to 30 minutes before serving. Remove the bundled herbs at this point.

Ladle the stew into a big bowl and serve with a large roll. Stews can also be topped with chives, scallions, cream cheese or sour cream.

This is an excellent way to use up some meat that would otherwise end up ground and it's also incredibly delicious to boot! Additionally, this is an excellent recipe to experiment with various ingredients.

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WDFW Announces 40 Tentative Days Of Coastal Razor Clam Digging Opportunities Beginning Oct. 9

Washington Dept. Of Fish & Wildlife <https://wdfw.wa.gov>

Shellfish managers with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) today announced 40 tentative days of razor clam digs at four coastal beaches from Oct. 9 through Dec. 27.

"The razor clam season is right around the corner, and we're excited to announce another fall schedule of harvest dates," said Bryce Blumenthal, a WDFW coastal shellfish biologist. "Summer population assessments showed significant decreases on Copalis and Mocrocks, which will result in considerably less digging opportunity this season. Thankfully, Long Beach and Twin Harbors populations remain strong and should allow for similar amounts of harvest to previous years."

All beach openings are dependent on final approval of marine toxin testing, which usually occurs about a week or less before the start of each digging series. Before a beach can open for digging, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) requires two test samples seven to 10 days apart and domoic acid levels under the guideline level.

On all open beaches – Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis, and Mocrocks – the daily limit is 15 clams per person. Each digger's clams must be kept in a

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separate container, and all diggers must keep the first 15 clams they dig, regardless of size or condition.

"It's important that diggers keep the clams they dig to prevent wastage (includes discarding small clams, clam with broken shells or reburied unwanted clams)," Blumenthal said. "It's not unusual to encounter some small clams, especially this early in the season."

Kalaloch beach off the northern Olympic Peninsula coast won't be open due to continuing issues with depressed populations of harvestable razor clams.

Most successful digging occurs between one and two hours before the listed time of low tide. Below are the tentative dates, along with low tides and beaches.

Tentative dates during late afternoon/evening (noon to midnight only) low tides:

Oct. 9, Friday; 6:23 p.m.; 0.1 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Oct. 10, Saturday; 7:02 p.m.; -0.3 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Oct. 11, Sunday, 7:39 p.m.; -0.6 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Oct. 12, Monday, 8:15 p.m.; -0.6 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Oct. 13, Tuesday, 8:52 p.m.; -0.4 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Oct. 14, Wednesday, 9:32 p.m.; -0.1 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors

(continued on page 37)

Best Game Bags For Mule Deer Hunting: What Size And System Do You Need?

(continued from page 11)

A deer-sized bag system can provide:

- better load shape
- less excess material
- lower packed bulk
- clearer organization
- a better fit for deer quarters

Hunters who regularly pursue both elk and mule deer may choose separate species-specific systems rather than forcing one set to handle every animal.

Plan for the Cape Separately

A mule deer cape should not be treated like another bag of meat.

Hunters planning to preserve the cape need a separate strategy based on temperature, taxidermist instructions, packout length, and the intended mount.

Before the hunt:

- speak with the taxidermist
- understand the required cuts
- carry the appropriate tools
- keep the cape separate from dirty gear
- plan enough pack and cooler space

Do not assume the normal meat bag system will solve every cape-handling requirement.

Reusable Bags Make Sense for Serious Deer Hunters

Game bags are exposed to blood, dirt, brush, heavy weight, and repeated handling.

A reusable system should be built to survive cleaning and return to the pack for future seasons.

Before choosing mule deer game bags, ask:

- Can they be washed thoroughly?
- Will the seams handle repeated use?
- Do they store compactly?
- Are replacement bags available?
- Does the system fit other deer-sized game?

The lowest purchase price is not always the lowest long-term cost.

How to Choose the Best Mule Deer Game Bags

Choose a system based on the way the deer will leave the mountain.

Consider:

- bone-in or boned-out meat
- quarter size
- loose-cut organization
- packout distance
- temperature
- expected deer size
- available help
- cape requirements

Hunters comparing systems for deer, antelope, elk, and other big game can review the full Caribou Gear Game Bags Collection here:
<https://www.caribougear.com/collections/game-bags>.

The Right Size Creates a Better Packout

Mule deer hunters do not need the biggest game bags available.

They need the right bags for deer-sized quarters, loose meat, long walks, and real field conditions.

Choose enough capacity for the entire animal.

Keep cuts separated.

Use breathable protection.

Then match the bags to the way the meat will actually be carried.

Mule Deer Game Bag FAQ

What are the best game bags for mule deer?

The best mule deer game bags are breathable, reusable, compact, and properly sized for deer quarters and loose meat.

How many game bags are needed for a mule deer?

A bone-in system generally needs four quarter bags plus separate capacity for backstraps, tenderloins, neck meat, trim, and other parts.

Can elk game bags be used for mule deer?

They can hold the meat, but deer-sized bags usually provide better load shape, lower bulk, and a cleaner fit for mule deer quarters.

Should mule deer meat be boned out?

That depends on terrain, distance, regulations, temperature, and hunter preference. Both bone-in and boned-out packouts require properly sized breathable bags.

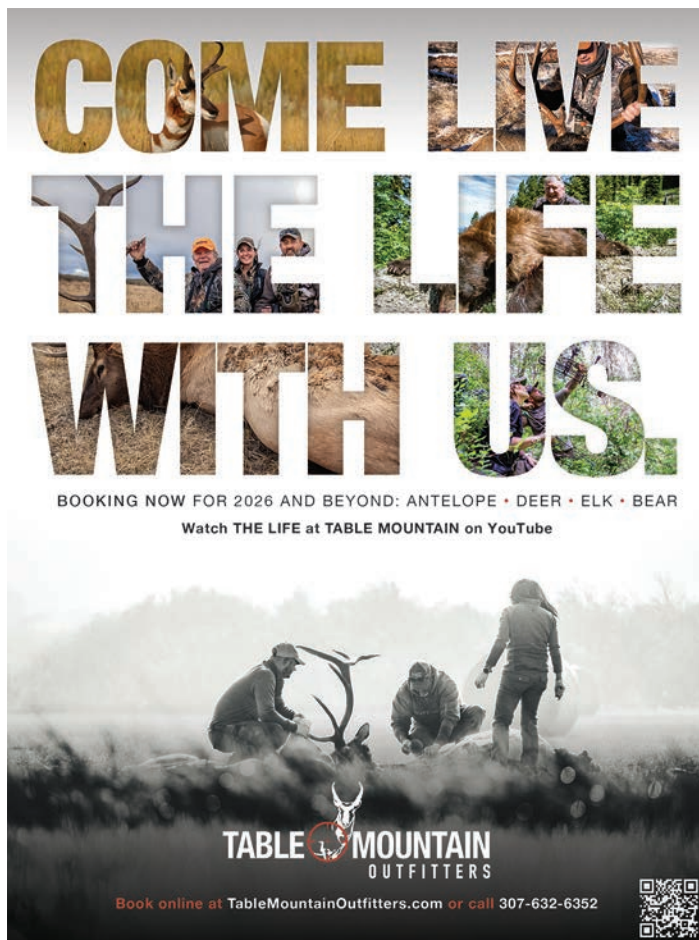
Are reusable mule deer game bags worth it?

Reusable bags can provide better long-term value when they are durable, washable, properly stored, and used across multiple seasons.

Shop Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Company at www.caribougear.com.

WDFW Announces 40 Tentative Days Of Coastal Razor Clam Digging Opportunities Beginning Oct. 9 (continued from page 35)

Oct. 24, Saturday, 5:58 p.m.; 0.1 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Oct. 25, Sunday, 6:37 p.m.; -0.7 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Oct. 26, Monday, 7:18 p.m.; -1.2 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Oct. 27, Tuesday, 8:01 p.m.; -1.5 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Oct. 28, Wednesday, 8:47 p.m.; -1.5 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Oct. 29, Thursday, 9:38 p.m.; -1.2 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Oct. 30, Friday, 10:34 p.m.; -0.7 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Nov. 7, Saturday, 5:06 p.m.; -0.2 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Nov. 8, Sunday, 5:44 p.m.; -0.6 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Nov. 9, Monday, 6:19 p.m.; -0.7 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Nov. 10, Tuesday, 6:54 p.m.; -0.7 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Nov. 11, Wednesday, 7:29 p.m.; -0.5 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks (Veterans Day)
 Nov. 12, Thursday, 8:07 p.m.; -0.1 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Nov. 22, Sunday, 4:33 p.m.; -0.4 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Nov. 23, Monday, 5:18 p.m.; -1.2 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Nov. 24, Tuesday, 6:02 p.m.; -1.7 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Nov. 25, Wednesday, 6:48 p.m.; -1.9 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Nov. 26, Thursday, 7:35 p.m.; -1.8 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis (Thanksgiving Day)
 Nov. 27, Friday, 8:25 p.m.; -1.4 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Nov. 28, Saturday, 9:18 p.m.; -0.8 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Dec. 5, Saturday, 4:07 p.m.; 0.3 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Dec. 6, Sunday, 4:49 p.m.; -0.2 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Dec. 7, Monday, 5:27 p.m.; -0.4 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Dec. 8, Tuesday, 6:03 p.m.; -0.5 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Dec. 9, Wednesday, 6:37 p.m.; -0.5 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Dec. 10, Thursday, 7:12 p.m.; -0.4 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Dec. 11, Friday, 7:48 p.m.; -0.2 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Dec. 21, Monday, 4:13 p.m.; -0.6 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Dec. 22, Tuesday, 5:02 p.m.; -1.3 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Dec. 23, Wednesday, 5:50 p.m.; -1.8 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis
 Dec. 24, Thursday, 6:36 p.m.; -1.9 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Dec. 25, Friday, 7:23 p.m.; -1.8 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors
 Dec. 26, Saturday, 8:09 p.m.; -1.4 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Mocrocks
 Dec. 27, Sunday, 8:55 p.m.; -0.7 feet; Long Beach, Twin Harbors, Copalis



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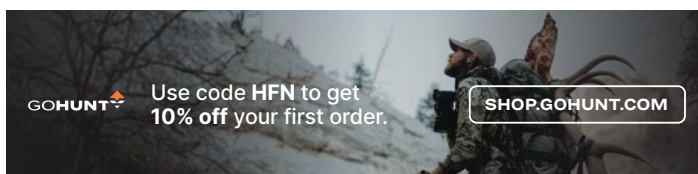
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Upland Game Bird Forecasts

(continued from page 27)

Grey partridge fared well in 2024 and 2025 in most of Region 4, and this year looks to be similar. Spring lek surveys showed sharp-tailed grouse numbers are similar to last year's count which is still below the historical average.

...Hunters are encouraged to read the regulations before hitting the field this fall, as there were some changes made for 2026 and it's important that hunters are aware of these changes.

South-central Montana (Region 5)

Following two very good years for upland birds in Region 5, staff expect hunters will have average opportunity to hunt and harvest birds this season.

Sharp-tailed grouse are expected to be closer to average following last year. Hunters should expect spotty encounters in favorable habitat and below average numbers in areas that have been impacted by drought. Spring sage-grouse surveys showed below average numbers across the region.

Brood counts indicate that gray partridge and chukar numbers will be good this fall.

Similarly, pheasant numbers are expected to be fair in favorable habitat though some areas were impacted by severe weather over the summer. Spring surveys showed pheasant crow counts below last year's numbers in areas of good habitat.

Turkey numbers seem to be good with many broods observed around the region. Some areas may have been impacted by localized hail events.

Intense summer hailstorms negatively impacted upland birds in portions of northern Region 5 this year. The majority of the region is experiencing varying levels of drought conditions, which limits habitat cover.

Northeast Montana (Region 6)

Northeast Montana had a mild winter across the region with good overwinter survival and an early spring. It was a dryer than normal spring with good residual cover, but by June it started to rain with good habitat response that should result in at least average nest success and brood-rearing conditions, and biologists believe it looks to be shaping up into a decent bird year. The northeast corner of Region 6 had unusually high bird production and harvest from 2021 to 2024. While those years were great for upland bird hunting, that was not normal or what the region traditionally experiences. Recently, the area is back down to what biologist consider "average," and the days of hunters experiencing daily bag limits by mid-morning should not be expected.

Pheasant numbers across the region should provide good opportunities for hunters, and likely similar to or better than the last couple of years. Surveys in the central and western portion of the region saw increases from the previous year's survey and numbers

are near or above average. The eastern end of the region has seen lower numbers in recent years and are currently near average. Habitat conditions remain good throughout the region and should benefit broods into the fall.

Sharp-tailed grouse surveys in the eastern half of the region are below average and down from the previous year due to difficult hatching conditions the prior two years. The western half of the region has seen some improvements in sharp-tailed grouse numbers the last three years and spring counts indicate numbers are slightly above the long-term average.

Sage-grouse lek surveys in the region are below average and down from the previous year due to difficult hatching and brood-rearing conditions the prior two years. Like sharp-tailed grouse, biologists expect the improved habitat conditions will favor nest success and early brood survival this year. However, hunting may require putting on miles in preferred habitats to find adequate numbers of birds...Although populations of gray partridge are often spotty, there should be ample opportunity across the region for hunters pursuing this tasty game bird. Observations of widespread distribution and above-average harvest the past couple of years indicates that populations seem to be doing well, and based on the aforementioned weather and habitat conditions, biologists expect gray partridge numbers to be above average again this fall.

If there are any questions regarding bird numbers and distribution in northeast Montana as the season progresses, please contact the Region 6 FWP headquarters in Glasgow at 406-228-3700...

Southeast Montana (Region 7)

Southeastern Montana spring conditions were characterized by warm temperatures and below-average precipitation. Limited grass and forb growth combined with frequent dust storms in late May, likely impacted early nesting attempts for upland game birds. By the end of May, most of southeastern Montana was in moderate to extreme drought conditions; however, frequent early summer precipitation dramatically improved habitat conditions. This timely moisture coincided with the nesting and brood-rearing season, likely boosting nesting and brood rearing success. However, this respite was short lived, as July saw hot, above-average temperatures and below-average precipitation.

Sharp-tailed grouse male lek attendance this spring was above average; however, numbers decreased by around 40 percent from last spring. Sage grouse male lek attendance this spring was below average and declined by around 50 percent from last spring. Ring-necked pheasant crow count surveys were more optimistic, with numbers well above average. Despite spring survey numbers, it is important to remember that for many upland game bird species, spring chick production is crucial to hunter success in the fall. Poor spring moisture and variable precipitation during late spring and early summer likely impacted upland game bird production. Upland game bird numbers will likely vary across the region depending on weather patterns and habitat conditions...

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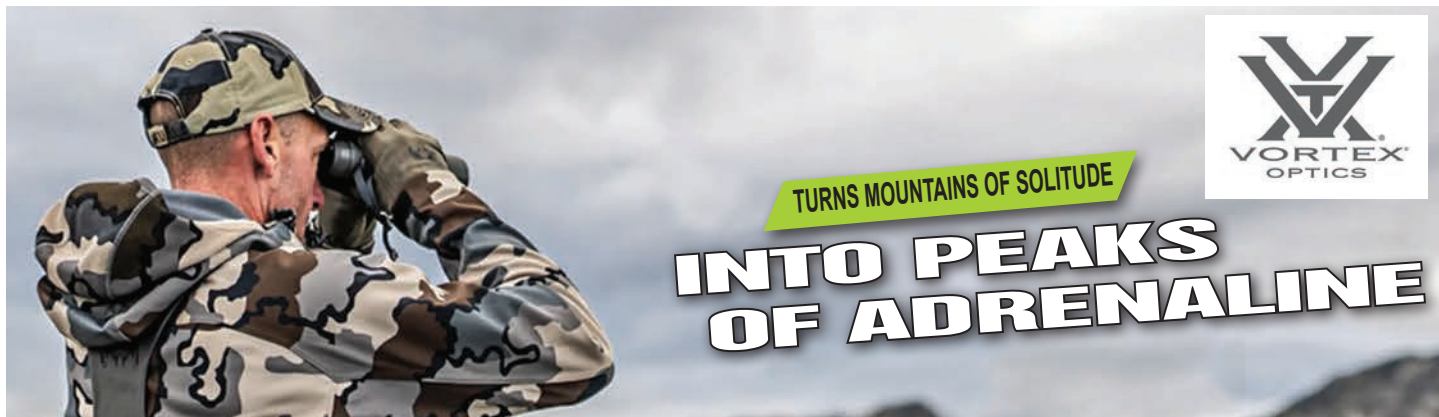
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