WESTERN HUNTING & FISHING NEWS

DECEMBER 2026





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Winter Fishing Doesn't Have To Be Through The Ice In The Upper Snake

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

Open water fishing opportunities abound in the Upper Snake Region, even in the winter months.



Local rivers like the Henrys Fork, South Fork, and even the main-stem of the Snake River offer year-round fishing opportunities for those willing to brave the elements.

As the temperatures get into the 30s and even up into the 40s the fishing can be really good along the river without having to fight the crowds often seen during the summer.

Many open water fishing opportunities can be found only a short distance from town, making them a quick cure for anglers suffering from cabin fever and itching to wet a line.

"I've been getting out to do some winter fishing on open water instead of hard water over the past couple of months and have been doing well," says Fisheries Biologist John Heckel.

"Flies, spinners and jigs have all proven effective and produced fish for me."



Give the Idaho Fishing Planner (https://idfg.idaho.gov/ifwis/fishingPlanner/?_ga=2.52708904.1886785053.1612285991-1170167654.1611267347) a try to explore fishing opportunities close to home and across the state. And remember to check the Fishing Regulations (https://idfg.idaho.gov/rules/fish) as some sections of river are closed to harvest for portions of the year.



For more on open water fishing in your area visit:

Montana - MFWP:
https://fwp.mt.gov/fish/regulations

Idaho - IDFG:
https://idfg.idaho.gov/ifwis/fishing-planner/

Washington - WDFW:
https://wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/locations

Oregon - ODFW:
https://myodfw.com/fishing

WYOMING - WDGF:
https://wgfd.wyo.gov/fishing-boating

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Photo credit Ryan McSparran courtesy https://www.caribougear.com

The Most Underrated Component To Hunting Success

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

When hunters talk about being successful on a big game hunt, we like to talk about things like scouting and finding great new spots, dialing in our weapons with the latest shooting accessories, how to manage our license applications to get the best tags, or the importance of helpful gear like optics, boots and layering systems.

All of those things are important, no doubt. They could all make a difference in the outcome of a hunt. But we'd argue that there's one overlooked factor that's every bit as important, perhaps even more important. And that's a hunter's attitude. You could have a great tag in your pocket. You may be prepared with solid equipment and a detailed game plan. But without the right attitude, even what should be a great hunt can become a disappointment.

Is it an overstatement to say that your mental game is the most important thing you'll bring on a big game hunt? We don't think so.

Anyone Can Do It
The best thing about carrying a tough mental attitude on your hunts is that anyone can do it.

You don't need the ability to carry a 100lb. pack.

You don't need to be an ultra marathoner.

You don't need to be able to shoot 700 yards.

One of the most important weapons in your arsenal is your mind.

Having the right mental attitude isn't so much a skill as it is a choice. Stay focused, stay focused on the right things, and you can make a serious impact on the outcome of any adventure.

Here are a few ideas to take with you…

Always Be Ready
It doesn't take very much hunting experience to learn that a single moment can change everything. An entire hunt can turn around in just a second. Even when we know this is true, it's amazing how quickly we forget it, and how difficult it is to stay in the game mentally on a tough hunt. But one of the best things you can do to be successful is to stay ready. When an opportunity suddenly presents itself, be ready for it.

Just this past fall I was on a muzzleloader mule deer hunt with several friends in mid-September. We were hunting an area that we've hunted many times before with good success. It's open, brushy country and we typically see lots of deer. This year however, the weather was very hot. It could have been the weather or a number of other factors – but for whatever reason, the hunting was very tough.

On the first day of the hunt, I glassed over a ton of country and I didn't see a single deer. I couldn't believe it. The second day was almost the same story. Other than a couple of does, we saw hardly any deer and no bucks at all.

The hunt was nothing like my expectations. Because of that, I let myself begin to check out mentally. Because I hadn't seen anything for two straight days, I let my guard down. And on the third morning, I walked right up on a buck. Neither of us expected to see the other. If I had been hunting with confidence and paying attention, I probably could have had a shot opportunity. But instead, I was caught un-alert and unready.

After glassing for days without much success, it becomes easy to just glaze over the landscape without really looking. Or hiking with your rifle slung over your shoulder instead of in your hand. Pay attention to the little things. Even when things are tough, stay alert and stay ready. If you can focus on the fifth day like you focused on the first, you will undoubtedly improve your chances at success.

Stay Patient
One of the first things we can lose on very difficult hunts is our patience. That might be patience behind the glass. Or it might be patience in waiting for the right shot opportunity. No matter what the situation is, stay mentally strong in avoiding shortcuts or making poor snap decisions.

A number of years ago I was guiding an archery elk hunter from the Midwest. We hunted hard for several days. Each day we were out well before daylight and we didn't get back to camp until well after dark – which during September means very long daylight hours. We covered a ton of miles and we'd come close a couple of times. But as so often happens in archery hunting, we couldn't quite get a shot opportunity. By the end of the fourth day, we were tired. I could tell the hunter was beginning to question the possibility of getting within bow range of a bull elk.

On the fifth day we got out there again in the dark. That morning, we had a bull respond. Quickly moving into position, we got as close as we could. But the bull was 200 yards above us on a wide-open slope. We were out of cover. So the hunter set up behind a lone pine tree near the edge of the clearing. I dropped back into the timber to call. Soon, the bull responded and began making his way down toward us. Then suddenly he went silent. It seemed like ages. Had the bull changed his mind?

After many miles and so much effort, it would have been easy for the hunter to lose patience and sneak a look around that pine tree. But he showed incredible patience and even during that long silence, he didn't move a muscle. It's a good thing. If the hunter had moved, the bull, who was still approaching silently, would have seen him and busted while still out of range. Instead, patience paid off. Several minutes later, the bull rounded the corner presenting a perfect, 20-yard broadside shot. The hunter was ready. And we spent the rest of the day celebrating and packing meat.

When you notice your patience running low, take the time to slow down. Glass that hillside the way you know you should. If you do, you just might turn up that buck you've been searching for. Don't take a marginal shot at an animal, even if you feel like you're not getting any opportunities. A large part of what will make us strong and ethical hunters is staying cool and staying patient in those difficult situations.

Focus on the Right Things

One thing that can help us maintain patience is to focus on the right things. Why do you enjoy hunting in the first place? If you can't be happy going home with an unfilled tag, free-range hunting isn't for you. Hopefully, we're out there for much more than that.

It's easy to see how the pressure for "success" can take over. You may have spent a lot of time or money on a hunt. The pressures of social media certainly don't help. And it's just natural that after a lot of effort and planning, we'd love to punch that tag! But if you feel that pressure mounting, it's worth taking a step back and remembering why you're there.

One year I was guiding someone on his very first elk hunt...

On the very first day of the hunt, we were into elk. We set up at the edge of a narrow clearing and began calling. In no time, a bull emerged from the edge of the timber and let out a bugle. He was at 40 yards and the hunter was already at full draw. He let the arrow fly, but we were stunned when the arrow sailed clean over the bull's back. The bull spun around and disappeared.

The hunter was obviously shaken. His first day of hunting he'd just had a close encounter with a bull.

(continued on the next page)



The Most Underrated Component To Hunting Success

(continued from page 5)

But he'd missed on the opportunity he had waited so long for. In the excitement, he'd simply used the wrong pin on his sight. I told him to shake it off. It was only the first day. And as it turned out we had several more exciting encounters that week. It was a fun hunt by any measure – except he never got another shot opportunity.

On the last afternoon, we were sitting together on a hillside watching a beautiful sunset over the wilderness. To my surprise, he suddenly said that he was glad he missed that bull on the first day. "If I had killed that bull and gone home, I wouldn't have seen everything else that we've experienced this week." He said he wouldn't go back and make that trade. I was impressed at his attitude.

When you're out there, don't forget to stop and look up at what's around you. Watch a fox bouncing around a ground squirrel burrow. Listen to a canyon wren singing. Enjoy the time away with family or friends. Sometimes just shifting your focus can do wonders for your attitude.

Stay Positive

When you quit believing, you'll quit trying. On a long, hard hunt it can be a challenge to remain positive. But one of the most important things you can do is to hunt like you really believe it's going to happen. This helps you stay focused and ready – when that opportunity happens, you won't have your head down moping. You'll be ready to capitalize on it!

It's easy to be positive on the first day of a hunt. What about the third day or the fourth day? Especially if you're not seeing game or if conditions seem to be against you, it can be difficult to stay positive. If you quit on yourself or begin telling yourself that it probably won't happen, it will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. You'll stop paying attention, and you'll miss out on opportunities.

...One of my friends had a good archery elk tag. We hunted our tails off for six straight days. We'd come very close but hadn't quite connected.

On the final day of our hunt, we heard a half-hearted bugle right at daylight. We guessed that it came from a stand of timber about a mile below us. But we couldn't get the bull to respond again to pinpoint his location. There was nothing left to do but proceed with total confidence.

We made a wide semi-circle to get on the downwind side of the timber where we guessed he had been. Even if he was still there, the bull didn't seem interested in responding to calls. Still, we took the time to get the wind and the situation just right. As soon as we were in position, we started calling.

At first, there was no response to a few soft cow calls. So I let out a lazy bugle. Immediately the bull bugled back – and he was close! One more bugle was enough to make him mad.

Before we knew it, there were ivory-tipped tines coming through the undergrowth and he came screaming all the way in. The bull passed by my friend at 20 yards, who was at full draw and waiting. The last day, final effort paid off!

It's sometimes helpful to remind ourselves that a hunting trip almost never goes as planned. Conditions change. Animals don't read the script. Whatever the case is, be prepared for the unexpected. Be ready to roll with each unexpected challenge. If you can stay positive and hunt every single day with confidence, you'll greatly increase your chances at success.

Don't Let Letdowns Let You Down

One of the most difficult things in hunting is coming back from a letdown like a missed shot or a botched opportunity. Or maybe another hunter just killed an animal in your favorite spot on public land. When you've worked your tail off for a single opportunity and then you miss it, it can feel like that was your only shot.

When that happens, negativity can easily take over. You lose confidence, you quit trying and you won't be paying attention. Again, this quickly becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

On the other hand, if you can come back from that letdown and begin hunting with confidence again, things could easily turn around. No matter how much you might feel like, "That was my opportunity," don't let it be true. Continue to hunt with focus and with confidence and you could make something happen.

...I was mule deer hunting and missed what should have been a golden opportunity. I had just missed a shot at a good buck and was feeling stupid. It was mid-morning and already getting hot. Plus, I'd fired a shot, so I may have spooked anything else in the area. It felt like I wouldn't get another opportunity that morning.

Feeling dejected, I climbed up to a high point where I could spend the afternoon glassing. No sooner had I sat down, I spotted a different buck just a few hundred yards away. I quickly and easily closed a bit of the distance and made the shot count. Less than an hour after my miss, I had a buck on the ground. Even better, one of my friends killed a buck the next day in the very same canyon.

So the next time you blow a stalk or miss an opportunity don't assume that was your only shot. Even if another hunter kills an animal in your honey hole, don't assume the game has been blown out of the area. Rarely is that true. Big game animals will return to the areas where they feel safe – probably sooner than you think.

Don't think, "It will never happen now." If that's your attitude, it probably won't happen. The best way to find success is to come back from the letdown and continue hunting with positivity and confidence.

Be Comfortable in Uncomfortable Situations
Finally, mental toughness also comes in the form of being content in uncomfortable situations. Sometimes, the most successful hunters are the ones who simply show up. Again, the great thing about mental toughness is that anyone can have it. You don't have to be the most skilled hunter, the biggest or strongest. You just need a bit of grit and the willingness to stick it out. That will go a long way toward success.

When it comes to adverse weather conditions, quality gear does of course help. In tough conditions, having the right layering system, good boots, good rain gear and a good tent and sleep system makes a big difference. But assuming you have adequate gear to keep you safe and functioning in the elements, it's still a mental game. When you're in your sleeping bag in sub-freezing temps, it's really tempting not to get up and make an hour-long hike in the dark to get to that primo glassing spot. Will you do what it takes to put yourself in the best position for success?

...My friends and I had planned a November mule deer hunt. It was a backcountry hunt, requiring us to backpack in about four miles. As the hunt drew near, the weather forecast looked worse and worse. The high on opening day was projected to be ten degrees. The low that night would be below zero with wind chills as cold as -30.

We may have been crazy. But prepared with adequate gear, we packed in as planned. It wasn't easy, but it was a memorable adventure! We boiled water and slept with hot water bottles in our sleeping bags – both to keep us warm and to keep our water from freezing. In the evenings we actually had a great time around the campfire. And we all filled our deer tags! Not because we're very great hunters, but simply because we were the ones who showed up.

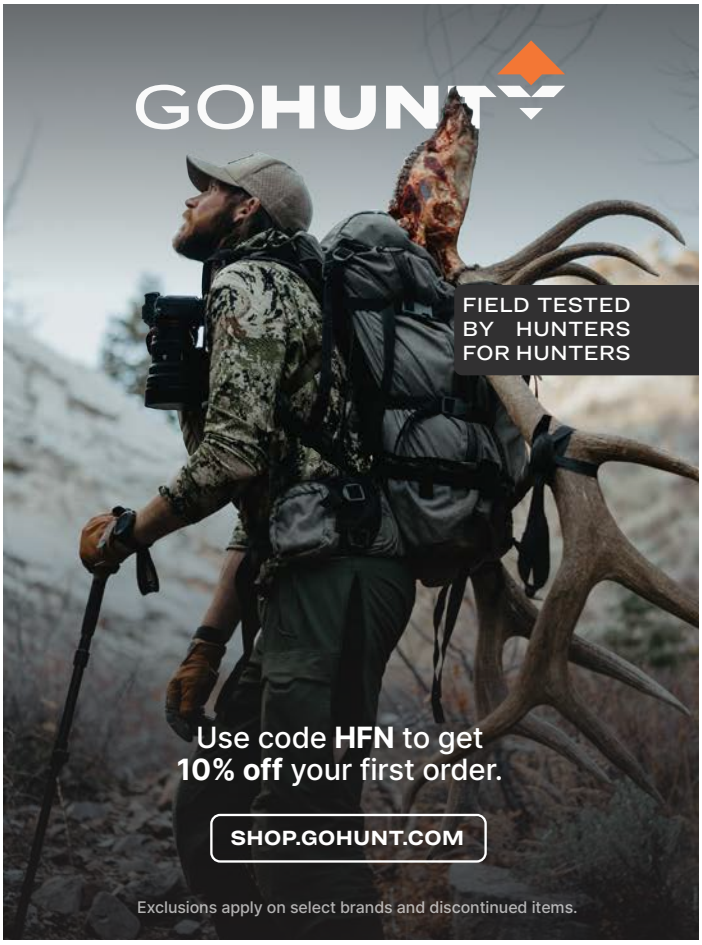
When it's cold and when it's dark, it can be difficult to pry yourself out of your sleeping bag in the morning. But the more you can get comfortable in those uncomfortable situations, the greater your chances at success. Get out there before daylight. Stay out until dark. Just have the mental toughness to show up, and you'll be putting yourself ahead of the curve.

Hunting Gear for the Adventure
If you have questions about getting ready for your next hunt, please let us know. The gear we carry here in our store are items that we personally use and trust in the field. We'd be happy to answer your questions and help you find the right items for your next adventure.

Remember that one of your best weapons is your mind! Stay positive, have fun and we hope you have a great hunting season ahead!

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





Tips to Stay in Shape During the Off Season

By Zach Lazzari & Ryan McSparran
Caribou Gear Outdoor Equipment Company
https://www.caribougear.com

It doesn't take long to start losing ground on fitness during the off-season. Busy work schedules, holiday binge eating and general life events can cause months of hard earned conditioning to slip away.

You don't need a crazy training schedule to stay in shape through the off-season however. A simple routine and some cross training will keep your activity level high and help maintain conditioning. This makes it much easier to ramp up training for those hard mountain hunts later in the summer.

Don't put it off. Here are a few ideas to stay in shape and keep the momentum on your side:

Cross Training Exercises

Cross training is one of the best ways to maintain conditioning throughout the off-season. Find activities you enjoy that are physically demanding and stay engaged in those to keep yourself active.

Hit the mountain with skis or snowshoes, hike around or join an intramural sports league. You can engage with the outdoors through a variety of sports like rock climbing and mountain biking or you can stay indoors and play in a competitive basketball league.

Cross training is ideal because it breaks up the monotony of daily gym workouts. Find something you are passionate about and stay engaged and active throughout the off-season.



Photo credit C. Hamilton | depositphotos.com

Plan a Spring Hunt

Why stop hunting at all? January and February are pretty much dead months everywhere. But you can plan a spring hunt that will keep you on the mountain.

Spring bear is the perfect opportunity to stay active while walking closed logging roads and scrambling through snow and mud in the high country.

Bear hunts are physical and planning one will help keep you motivated to exercise throughout the winter months leading into the hunt.

Most folks might not think of spring Turkey hunting as very physical. But here in the western states, there are some awesome opportunities for backcountry turkey hunts. Merriam's turkeys thrive in roadless and wilderness areas throughout the Rocky Mountain region. Consider shouldering a backpack and going after some mountain birds!

Soon after the spring bear and turkey hunts wrap up, summer will arrive and you can go backpacking and easily stay active outdoors while prepping for fall hunts. Take advantage of every low season hunting opportunity to stay active and in the game.

Consistency in the Diet

The off-season is a dangerous time for your diet. Holidays, super bowl parties and gatherings make it easy to fall off the wagon. Enjoy the events but work to maintain a consistent diet throughout the off-season.

Pack your body with healthy vegetables and take advantage of that excellent wild game in your freezer. The harvest from previous seasons offers major health benefits as organic, clean protein. Keeping your body fueled with vital nutrients will make it easier to ramp up to a more intensive training program as the fall hunting season approaches.

Bonus: Test Your Gear

In addition to keeping your body in shape, staying active through the off-season serves another great purpose. This is an ideal time to work on your hunting gear systems.

Need to purchase and break in new boots? Now is the time to do it. This is also a great time to test out your cold weather clothing systems. If any items are not performing as you hoped or if something needs to be replaced, winter or early spring hiking can highlight those needs.

While you're out there, take time to test out your cook system. Plus, bring along your optics and spend time glassing. If there are any issues or holes in your hunting gear setup, it's better to discover them now than later in the summer when hunting season is just around the corner.

If you have questions about gear or need recommendations for your next hunt, please don't hesitate to contact us! We're passionate about hunting gear and we'd love to help you get ready for that next big adventure.

Visit https://www.caribougear.com or call us at (303) 798-5824 or email hunt@caribougear.com.



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Garlic And Herb Buttered Elk Roast Recipe

By Dave Barnett
Originally published at GOHUNT.com



Photo credit Dave Barnett courtesy GOHUNT.com

Growing up, the entire process of harvesting and, eventually, butchering a game animal was a very real experience around our household. From the point when I could be trusted with a knife—something my wife still questions today—my main job was cleaning all of the scrap meat pieces of sinew, silverskin, twigs, etc. to be ground later for burger. We never looked at game meat any different than anything else in the world because, to us, it was just food.

I carried this mentality with me for a long time until sometime in my mid-20s when I really started thinking about the various flavors found in game meat. After some research and clumsily tossed together recipes, it soon became apparent that playing into the strengths and weaknesses of each cut and each species could really yield some incredible dishes that were unique in their own right.

Before getting to the meat and potatoes of this awesome dish—pun intended, I wanted to first address my complicated method of cooking. I can't follow recipes so much so that if I measure out the required water for my kid's macaroni and cheese it will end up as one of two things: a solid and mostly inedible brick of noodles or a form of mac n' cheese soup. On a molecular level, no two things I've ever cooked have been the same. While preparing for this article I really tried to be as descriptive as possible, but it really just took the fun out of it! Trust your gut when cooking wild game; everybody's taste preferences are different and experimentation has led me to some of my best dishes, including the following one.

Grocery List

This recipe is actually quite easy and allows for plenty of adaptation based on you and your family's preferences. The ingredients are simple and the flavors are huge:

3 to 4 lb elk roast	Salt
Garlic powder	Pepper
Olive, avocado, or vegetable oil	Bacon grease (optional)
1 large onion, diced	8oz sliced mushrooms
1 stick softened butter	3 to 4 garlic cloves
2 to 3 sprigs fresh rosemary	Beef broth
Cornstarch or flour	Roasting dish

Preparing the Roast and Vegetables

Before beginning this dish I like to let the roast rest at room temperature for a few hours. Before preparing, pat the roast dry to help the rub better adhere to the meat. For my rub, I chose to go very simple since our garlic and herb butter was going to be handling the flavor department. In a small bowl, combine salt, pepper, garlic, and any other additional spices you may typically use. Once combined, liberally spread the rub onto all surfaces of the roast. Once covered set the roast aside and prepare your pan for searing.

In a large skillet, add a small amount of olive, avocado, or vegetable oil and heat over medium heat until the oil begins to lightly bubble. I may hide this from the doctor, but a spoonful of bacon grease added to this can really boost the flavor, too! Once the oil is heated, add the roast to the pan and sear on all sides for four to five minutes or until browned and slightly crispy.

While the roast is searing it's time to get your onion and sliced mushrooms ready for a quick saute. Once the roast is seared completely remove it and add to your roasting dish. While the remaining oil is still hot, add diced onions and cook over medium heat. Once the onions are well browned and turning somewhat translucent it's time to add the sliced mushrooms. Continue to cook until the mushrooms become tender—about five minutes. Add just enough beef broth to the skillet to deglaze all of the stuck-on bits. Finally, add the cooked onions and mushrooms to the roasting dish and arrange around the roast.

Garlic and Herb Butter

This small add-on is really the MVP when it comes to this dish. To make this, you simply combine a stick of butter, three to four minced garlic cloves, two to three minced sprigs of rosemary, and salt and pepper.

Using a fork, mash all of the ingredients together in a bowl. Once the garlic and herb butter is well mixed apply it heavily to the elk roast. I don't worry about the bottom side of the roast, but will ensure I get the top and all of the remaining sides. At this time, start preheating the oven to 325°.

Almost Ready

Lastly, it's time to add just enough beef broth to the dish to cover the bottom. Once the oven is preheated, it's time to toss the roast in, uncovered. Set the timer for 2.5 hours and check the roast every 45 minutes or so, adding broth as necessary.

The Finishing Touches

After the roast has completed cooking, remove it from the oven and transfer to a cutting board. Once on the cutting board, cover the roast in tinfoil and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes.

In the meantime, it's time to strain out the cooking vegetables from the cooking liquid. Reserve the vegetables in a small bowl and add the cooking stock to a small saucepan. Add broth (the stock if needed) and slowly bring the liquid to a low simmer. Once simmering, stir in a small amount of cornstarch or flour and cook until the stock begins to thicken and form a gravy. Remove the gravy from the heat and add in the cooking vegetables. After the roast has rested, remove the foil and slice across the grain in a quarter or half-inch thick portions. And prepare for plating.

For sides...I decided on rosemary mashed potatoes, hard dinner rolls, and a Mediterranean salad. Top the roast and potatoes with gravy as desired and prepare for a feast!



From left to right: FWP Criminal Investigator Justin Singleterry, Ravalli County Prosecutor David Lakin, and Warden Sergeant Lou Royce, pictured with some of the evidence from the Davis case. Photo MFWP

Corvallis Man Sentenced For Five Felony And Thirteen Misdemeanor Poaching Crimes

MFWP https://fwp.mt.gov

Jason Rulon Davis of Corvallis was recently sentenced for 18 wildlife poaching crimes committed in Ravalli County.

In May, Davis was convicted of a mix of felony and misdemeanor crimes that resulted in a prison sentence, a requirement to pay restitution and court fees, and a lifetime loss of hunting and fishing privileges.

Davis, who had a history of previous hunting violations and loss of privileges, continued to pursue illegal activities. Tips from the public prompted Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to open the most recent investigation.

The case is a result of a four-year long investigation led by FWP and prosecuted by the Ravalli County Attorney's Office.

"We would like to thank the Ravalli County attorney's office for all of their work on this case," said FWP Region 2 Warden Captain, Kyle Miller. "These crimes were extensive and spanned many years, and we appreciate the time and effort that the Ravalli County attorney's office invested to prosecute this case and hold Jason Davis accountable for his actions."

Davis aided others with unlawful hunting-related activities and was found guilty of five felonies for unlawfully possessing, shipping, and transporting poached deer, along with misdemeanor accountability charges of hunting without licenses, and over-limit of deer in a hunting season.

In total, Davis was found guilty of unlawful possession and related charges for six game animals, including three trophy mule deer bucks, two trophy white-tailed bucks, and a mountain lion.

FWP Criminal Investigator, Justin Singleterry, said that in connection to this case, Davis was found guilty on charges related to an illegal mule deer buck killed in trophy Hunting District 270.

The investigation showed that Davis helped his son shoot a mule deer buck, which had a Boone & Crockett gross score of over 197 inches, without a permit, from the roadway, and after dark by the aid of artificial light. Davis and his son then removed the head and antlers of the deer, leaving the carcass to waste.

At his August sentencing, Davis received a 31- and one-half year sentence that included a 15-year prison sentence with a parole restriction of five years. He also lost his hunting, fishing, and trapping privileges for life and must pay restitution and court fees totaling over $50,000. Once Davis is released from prison, he will be prohibited from accompanying anyone hunting, fishing, or trapping and barred from entering public or private lands where hunting is permitted, to include FWP Block Management Areas for the duration of his sentence.

FWP game wardens say that wildlife crime investigations like this one are often initiated or solved because of leads from the public.

Visit tipmont.mt.gov for more information on reporting natural resource crimes and who to contact in your local area.





Photo credit jaCrispy | depositphotos.com

Where To Go Ice Fishing In Montana

MFWP https://fwp.mt.gov

Here is a guide to get you started. For more options, check with your regional FWP office here: https://fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/contact-us or explore the FishMT map here: https://myfwp.mt.gov/fishMT/explore.

Region 1 — Northwest Montana

Lake Mary Ronan is about 1,500 acres and located seven miles northwest of Dayton. Ice anglers can target kokanee and yellow perch.

Little Bitterroot Lake is located near Kalispell. This 2,970 acre lake offers a variety of species including rainbow trout, yellow perch, and kokanee.

Echo Lake is located five miles from Bigfork and 25 miles from Kalispell. The lake is filled by warm springs and a small amount of mountain runoff from Echo Creek. It is popular among anglers due to its large numbers of perch.

Thompson Chain of Lakes is comprised of 18 lakes of various sizes stretching along Highway 2 west of Kalispell. Depending on the lake, ice anglers can target kokanee, rainbow trout, brook trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and yellow perch. Be aware that access to some of the lakes may be restricted in the winter due to snow.

Learn more about Ice Fishing in northwest Montana here: https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/fish/ice-fishing/popular-ice-fishing-lakes-r1.pdf

Region 2

Browns Lake is located 15 miles from Lincoln. This 550-acre reservoir hosts a very popular rainbow trout fishery that usually provides some the earliest fishable ice in Region 2 (end of November). Standard jigging tackle including Swedish pimples and small tungsten jigs tipped with maggots or wax worms are productive set ups. Fishing quality and catch rates are typically better in the first half of the ice fishing season.

Georgetown Lake has good fishing all season (ice on until March 31) for kokanee and rainbow trout, also, opportunities for trophy brook trout. Fish with rocker jigs or Swedish pimples tipped with a maggots, corn, or pieces of earthworm.

Nevada Reservoir is located about 12.1 miles from Lincoln, anglers can catch rainbow trout, westslope cutthroat trout, yellow perch at this 337-acre lake. A lot of the annual fishing pressure occurs at this waterbody during ice fishing season.

However, you will not have trouble finding plenty of elbow room, as this reservoir is not as popular as many of the other nearby waterbodies. Rainbow trout achieve maximum lengths of 18–20 inches and some anglers have reported catching 10-inch perch.

Racetrack Pond is a small (50-acre) pond near Deer Lodge, MT. Racetrack pond is an ideal spot for anglers of all skill levels, including children and people new to ice fishing. Anglers can expect to catch primarily rainbow and westslope cutthroat trout.

Racetrack Pond is catch and release only for people over the age of 14.

Upsata Lake is located northeast of Missoula, this 119-acre lake provides angling opportunities for yellow perch, northern pike, and largemouth bass.

High densities of yellow perch make this a great spot to take the family, kids, or new ice anglers to for fun-filled days with lots of action.

Region 3

Harrison Reservoir is a 40-acre lake located about 23 miles south from Three Forks. A variety of trout species can be caught, with the majority being brown and rainbow trout. In the future, kokanee may become a part of the fishery through the ice.

Hebgen Reservoir is a large reservoir (6,500 acres) near the Idaho border about 20 minutes west of West Yellowstone. Anglers will mostly catch wild brown and rainbow trout as well as the occasional brook and westslope cutthroat trout. Maggots, worms, and horizontal sharp jigs are often used to catch trout, especially rainbows.

Be wary of uneven ice conditions across the lake as its a large reservoir that is influenced by frequent winds.

Hyalite Reservoir is a 206-acre reservoir located 12 miles south of Bozeman. Hyalite is a popular winter recreation destination that provides opportunities to fish for Yellowstone cutthroat trout, brook trout and arctic grayling. Use almost any jig or hook tipped with red maggots or worms to catch fish through the ice.

Region 4

East Fork Reservoir is a 380-acre reservoir that supports a popular yellow perch and northern pike fishery near Lewistown. This reservoir is a great place to take kids as perch are plentiful and relatively easy to catch using standard jigging tackle baited with maggots. Pike are typically caught using tip-ups baited with smelt or dead minnows. Rainbow trout are also occasionally caught. Typically has fishable ice by mid-December.

Holter Reservoir is a 3,667-acre waterbody located between Great Falls and Helena and is a very popular yellow perch, rainbow trout and ling (burbot) fishery. Fishable ice is typically not present until late January and lasts only 4–-6 weeks. Eater sized perch are common and usually caught on standard jigging tackle (Swedish Pimples, Hali Jigs, etc.) in 10–40 feet of water. Large rainbow trout are common and are usually caught on standard jigging tackle (lead, buckshot, tungsten and rocker jigs) in less than 10 feet of water. Worms or maggots work well for perch and rainbow trout. Ling are usually caught while targeting perch or fishing cut-bait (e.g., sucker meat) near the bottom.

Lake Frances is a large lake (5,251 acres) that is a popular northern pike, walleye, and yellow perch fishery and usually has fishable ice by early January. Setting tip ups with smelt or jigging in 6-20 feet of water is typically productive for northern pike. Yellow perch are generally caught in deeper water with standard jigging tackle and maggots or wax worms.

Newlan Creek Reservoir is a 265-acre reservoir located 12 miles north of White Sulfur Springs that provides opportunity for rainbow trout, westslope cutthroat trout, kokanee, and burbot. Burbot are often targeted at night using cut-bait or dead minnows.

Region 5

Cooney Reservoir is a 1,078 acre reservoir about an hour's drive from Billings. The reservoir has rainbow trout, burbot, yellow perch, and walleye that can be caught year-round.

Lake Elmo is a 64-acre reservoir in the Billings Heights and has a variety of fish. Yellow perch and crappie are the most likely species to be caught while ice-fishing using maggots and worms on small jigs just off the bottom...

Lake Josephine is a little pond on the south side of Billings at Riverfront Park that holds bluegill, channel catfish, and the occasional tiger muskie.

Wild Bill Lake is a small reservoir (3-acre) located seven miles south of Red Lodge that is especially great for kids and beginners. Rainbow and brook trout can be caught here. The Wild Bill parking lot is accessible in the winter and the road is plowed.

Region 6

Fort Peck Trout Pond is a 53-acre dredge cut pond three miles north of the town of Fort Peck. A variety of fish species are present including rainbow trout, Yellow perch, bluegill, northern pike, largemouth bass, and the occasional walleye. Access to the reservoir is available using a fishing access site on the west side of Highway 117.

Glasgow Base Pond is an eight-acre reservoir located 22 miles north of Glasgow on Highway 24. A fishing access site provides an access point to this reservoir. Anglers can target yellow perch, Rainbow trout, and northern pike at Glasgow Base Pond.

Whitetail Reservoir is a 25-acre reservoir located just southeast of the town of Whitetail. Ice anglers have the opportunity to catch yellow perch, Northern pike, and rainbow trout here. Access is available at the north and west ends of the reservoir.



Photo credit songbird839 | depositphotos.com

Region 7

Gartside Reservoir is a 40-acre reservoir located at Crane MT. Yellow perch, bluegill and northern pike are the most common fish species caught through the ice. Channel catfish and largemouth bass are occasional surprises through the ice.

South Sandstone Reservoir located south of Plevna or East of Baker MT is a 90-acre reservoir that is a popular ice fishing destination. Ice fisherman can expect to catch yellow perch and northern pike and occasionally walleye and crappie.

Spotted Eagle Lake is a 25-acre reservoir located in Miles City that produces sunfish, crappie and walleye.

Tongue River Reservoir is a large waterbody (3,600 acres) located just north of the Wyoming border near Decker, MT and is a prime ice fishing destination. Walleye, yellow perch, northern pike, crappie, and even smallmouth bass and channel catfish can be caught through the ice.

View MFWP 2026 Fishing Regulations here: https://fwp.mt.gov/fish/regulations.

Ice Fishing Safety

MFWP https://fwp.mt.gov

Is ice ever totally safe? Short answer is no.

Ice fishing is fun, but safety always comes first.

Ice conditions can change quickly over time and vary dramatically across short distances.

What about river ice? Safer or more dangerous than lake ice? Never walk out on river ice!

Here are some tips:

Check the weather.

Tell someone where you're going.

Bring a friend - for company and safety.

Look for signs that others have been out on the ice first. Never be first on the ice!

Check ice thickness and clarity.

There should be at least 4-6 inches of clear ice.

If there's snow on the ice, use caution. It can hide the ice condition.

Don't approach open water.

Stay clear of pressure ridges and/or large cracks.

Be extra cautious around areas that can make ice weaker such as docks and other structures, inlets and outlets, and springs.

Spread out if you have a big group.

Ice Thickness

You can't determine how thick the ice is by looking.

Drill a test hole and measure it to make sure it's safe.

Recommended minimum ice thickness guidelines for good, clear ice:

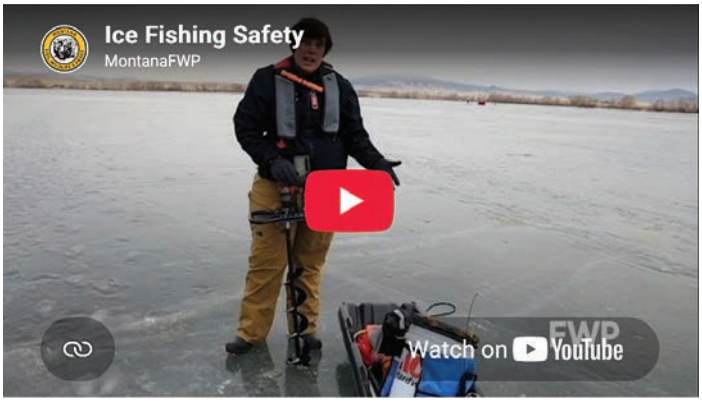
Under 4 inches: STAY OFF.

4 inches: Ice fishing or other activities on foot.

7 inches: Snowmobile or ATV.

10 inches: Small car (not recommended, but if you must, proceed at your own risk.)

12 inches: Larger vehicle (not recommended, but if you must, proceed at your own risk.)

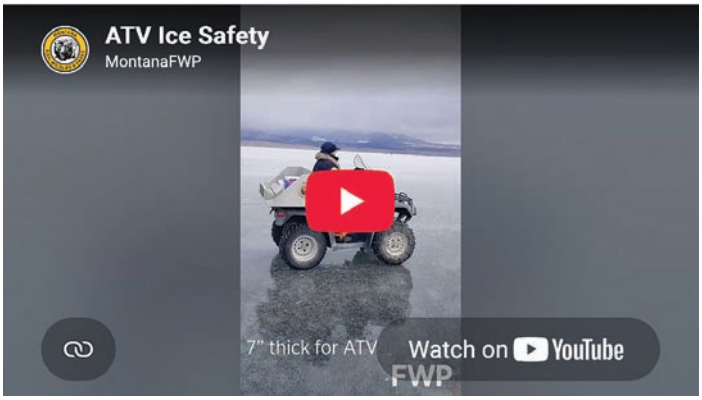


Ice Fishing Safety - Never assume ice is safe

A Montana winter doesn't always mean the ice is safe. Sara Smith, our Becoming an Outdoors-woman coordinator, gives some tips to help you make sure you're safe on the ice. Watch the above video here: https://youtu.be/8wes9_b_2xU?si=_8uggfkOHJsSTb8R.



What to do if you fall through the ice
After a day of ice skating on the water, Montana Outdoor Editor Tom Dickson never thought he'd be in the water, but in a split second, he found himself in a dangerous situation. Tom outlines what he did once he was in the water, which saved his life and what he looks for when he is on a frozen body of water, and the tools he brings with him. Watch the above video here: https://youtu.be/NWvlwDreySY?si=MzVFGf30_97DyI3z.



ATV Ice Safety
7 inches minimum

How do you ice fish safely using an ATV? Ashton Clinger, FWP Creel Tech, shares a few things to remember before you head out. Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/91yGaldD70Q?si=hjLniZSRHDHsls4-.

Ice Fishing: Defeat The Cold With Fish Monkey

Fish Monkey https://fishmonkeygloves.com
Traditions Media https://traditionsmedia.com

Ice fishing is one of the world's truly extreme sports. It's great fun and there is plenty of action, not to mention the good times and camaraderie shared by those who participate in this winter activity. In order to be safe and successful you need the right gear, and it starts with a good pair of gloves.

Most anglers just grab a pair of heavy insulated work gloves, but fishing requires more. You need a glove that's not only waterproof but also one that has the dexterity to allow you to manipulate small rods and reels easily. One that can go from driving a snow machine or side by side to drilling an auger to baiting tiny hooks. Meet the cold-weather glove lineup from Fish Monkey.

First up is the Stealth Sherpa Dry-Tec Heavyweight Gloves and Mittens. These are 100 percent wind and waterproof, but even more important, they are constructed with a durable water repellent finish.



This means they won't absorb water on the outside, which keeps them light and functional all day long.

The breathable membrane also helps prevent moisture buildup, keeping your hands warm without feeling clammy. There's 200 grams of Thinsulate on the back of the hand and another 100 grams on the palm, which ensures optimal warmth without sacrificing that critical dexterity. The mitten has magnetic stays for the slit fingers in the index and thumb to stay out of the way when not needed. The index fingers on both styles are touchscreen friendly, and the palms have non-slip grip.



Photos courtesy Fish Monkey https://fishmonkeygloves.com

Another option for extreme cold is the Yeti Premium Ice-Fishing Gloves and Mittens. These are the most technologically advanced cold-weather fishing gloves available today, with state-of-the-art materials and construction. It starts with a 100 percent wind and waterproof fabric which is lined with a thermo conductive fleece material which absorbs, retains and transfers body heat throughout the glove. The warmth level is incredible. It has 350 grams of Thinsulate in the back of the hand and another 150 grams in the palm, plus a pre-curved finger design and advanced cotton insulation throughout. There's a premium goat-leather palm for comfort and durability plus touchscreen fingertips and an index goggle squeegee built in. The fully adjustable wrist and cuffs give you a customized fit, too. The mitten style amps up the warmth level, allowing your fingers to share the body heat.

Don't forget about your feet, either. Standing on ice for hours in heavy boots requires more than just a good pair of socks—you need professional protection. Fish Monkey's Heavyweight line of socks are designed for extreme conditions, with 75 percent merino wool and two styles: a boot-cut and an over-the-calf length. Both styles feature superior arch and ankle compression for reduced foot and leg fatigue as well as a cushioned footbed for maximum warmth and moisture management. There's nylon reinforcement in the high-abrasion areas and a Y-gore heel that prevents slipping and chafing.



Don't be afraid of the conditions—embrace the cold with the right gear from Fish Monkey!

Shop online at https://fishmonkeygloves.com.

Pressure Cookers Tips & Tricks For Catching Fish On Tortured Waters

By Dan Johnson
Fish Monkey https://fishmonkeygloves.com

ICE ANGLERS DREAM OF TARGETING unpressured fish in secluded hotspots, for obvious reasons. Fishing pressure reduces fish numbers and frequently alters the survivors' location and behavior. This is especially true of the murderous, mass hysteria kind of pressure so common when word of a hot bite hits social media. Even so, you can still enjoy fine fishing and banner catches on beleaguered fisheries besieged by the bucket brigade.

Let's start with walleyes. Winter walleye location in many lakes begins with the fish in relatively—if not surprisingly—shallow water. As winter marches on, many fish move progressively deeper, before returning to shallower water just before ice-out. These spots are often adjacent to spawning areas. However, a variety of factors including fishing pressure can throw these guidelines out the window. First-ice walleyes are quick to abandon shallow feeding areas when the hubbub of cleats, spuds, scoops, tracks, shacks, and augers echoes through the underwater world.

The mob's typical response is to pack up and move deeper. Once they leave, few anglers look back toward shore. That's a mistake, because abundant forage can lure hungry 'eyes back to the shallows once the ruckus subsides. "It's common for pressured fish to come back to shallow areas on gradually tapering basin lakes," says veteran guide Jon Thelen. "Minnesota's Upper Red Lake is a prime example, but it happens across the Ice Belt. Searching the shallows with lures that appeal to all the walleyes' senses, which are easy for the fish to detect and tempting once they move closer, is a great way to track down fish that have returned to the shallows."

Walleyes also move shallow in lakes with ample structure. One of my favorite mesotrophic bass-panfish lakes...is a great case in point. It's hit hard by fishing pressure, most of which is directed at deep structure and flats. Throughout the winter, walleyes from 16 to 25 inches and up routinely move onto weedy flats in 4 to 6 feet to feed on yellow perch. Apparently, the 4- to 6-inch perch roaming the weeds are preferable to the hordes of tiny perchlings infesting the 15- to 35-foot depths nearby. Conversely, foot-long walleyes are common catches in those deeper areas, but not in the shallows with the bigger fish.

Water clarity is excellent in the area of the lake where this shallow pattern occurs. Peak fishing action coincides with low-light walleye feeding periods, but patient ice-men pick up weed fish here and there all day long. A large, shallow basin of the same lake—stained with sediments and algae—also hosts a stellar walleye bite most of the winter. This, too, is off the radar of anglers congregated over deep water on the main lake.

Perch aren't the only prey that draws walleyes shallow. Longtime Minnesota Department of Natural Resources fishery biologist Roger Hugill (also a diehard angler and veteran SCUBA diver) explained the bluegill connection to me years ago, and it still holds true today. "Bluegills may not be the best food source for walleyes, yet we know adult walleyes, being opportunistic feeders, frequently take advantage of the bluegill's poor visual acuity during low-light situations," he said. "Most of the bluegills eaten by walleyes are 1 to 2 years old (following their second or third summer of growth). "I have also seen dead walleyes with bluegills too large to swallow lodged in their gullets."

Brian Broshahl leans on leeches when pressured walleyes play hard to catch.

Hugill said shallow, weedy flats in the 6- to 12-foot range are key areas to target bluegill-pattern walleyes under the ice. "Shallow water is less of a deterrent than most people think," he noted. Not just on small waters, either. Minnesota's legendary Mille Lacs Lake is just one classic big-water walleye fishery where legions of anglers bypass prime salad bars that are flush with fish. You can catch walleyes in the weeds all winter in Isle Bay and other similar areas, but few people fish there.

In such scenarios, presentation isn't as key as getting away from the crowd. A 4-inch sucker minnow works wonders in clear shallows, while aggressive jigging attracts and triggers 'eyes in stained or other lowvis situations. When dealing with pressured walleyes in the midst of the mob, however, presentational tweaks can be critical. On deep offshore structure such as hard-hit breaks, bars, and flats, shell-shocked walleyes often idle in to check out jigs and lightly tethered minnows, only to turn up their noses or worse, dart away in a panic.

Iconic iceman Brian "Bro" Brosdahl sweetens the pot with a super-subtle livebait rig consisting of a small leech impaled on a fine-wire hook and light, lowvis line. "Even heavily pressured walleyes in clear water have a hard time turning down this deal," he says. "Saving leeches from late summer or fall is key, since they can be extremely hard to come by in winter."

Another presentational trick that works for pressured walleyes and other predators on ice and in open water is hooking the minnow so it rides on its side. It works with a variety of jigs, though I've had best results on banana-style heads. Gently fluttering and occasionally twitching the bait has produced strikes from tough-bite walleyes and saugers for me from the Canadian Shield to the Mississippi River and a variety of shallow, fertile fisheries—even the shell-shocked south shore of Lake of the Woods. Speaking of the latter fishery, where ice fishing pressure can be excruciating in tightly packed wheelhouse colonies, Zippel Bay Resort has long advocated a lightly fished near-shore option for giant walleyes. It's often a low-light pattern, largely missed by the masses, that yields super-size walleyes for adventurous anglers who break from the crowd.

THE PANFISH FRONT
When faced with pressure-cooker panfish, you can either search for overlooked fish, skirt the lunatic fringe, or roll up your sleeves and wade into the crowd. According to Dave Genz, godfather of the Ice Fishing Revolution, all three approaches hold water.

"Assess the situation when you get to the lake," he offers. "If everyone is gathered over a deep hole, check for other similar holes that nobody is fishing. If that's the only hole, consider flats, weedbeds, and other cover or structure that could attract fish. If these are a bust, work the edges of the pressured area first, as well as nearby cover and structure that could attract panfish spooked by all the activity. And if all that fails, don't be shy about working the crowd."

Gregarious Genz certainly isn't. I'll never forget the day a decade ago when I met him amidst a mob of panfish fans on a 260-acre...lake. The little lake maxed out at around 6 feet deep and had all the structure of a bathroom sink. But it held behemoth crappies. About 40 permanent and portable fish houses were clustered tightly toward the north end of the lake, with anglers spilling out onto the ice around them—almost shoulder to shoulder. Genz and a small entourage had spent several hours drilling here, there, and everywhere in an effort to avoid the congregation. Failing to find unpressured fish, they joined the meet and greet, which is where I found them.

"The fish are right under the ice," Genz grinned, setting the hook into a slab that quickly came topside. "Horizontal jigs and plastic tails are the ticket." Having just put the hurt on deep-water crappies with jigging spoons and minnow heads in a lake not 10 miles away, I was anxious to put spoons to the test. After 15 minutes with nothing to show for it, I took Genz's advice and began catching fish immediately.

"When you're in the thick of it, pay attention to what's going on, what's working, and what's not," he offered at press time as we recalled that trip. "Get a look at other people's lures. Trade information. Work together. Also note the best areas within the crowd—such as the top of a hump— as well as fish location within the water column: are they on the bottom or right under the ice? Often, a combination of lot of little things add up to make a big difference."

Getting picky about presentation is a must. "The fish have seen everything all winter long, so they're jaded," Genz says. "Pay attention to the details. Basic tenets like making sure your lure isn't spinning, and if you're using livebait, make sure it's fresh and the juices are flowing into the water. But try new twists, too. One of the most exciting tweaks I've tried lately is adding a subtle trailer like Clam's...Silkie."

When faced with pressured fish, Dave Genz has several strategies in his playbook for icing big panfish.

As for lure size, he says to experiment across the spectrum. "Once I have red lines on my Vexilar, I keep making changes until I figure it out," he says. "Generally speaking, we downsize. If the fish aren't biting, we keep going smaller. A drop-shot rig with heavy weight 'poofing' the bottom and a light jig above it is one way to accomplish this and attract fish to the area. But I've had just as much success up sizing to a larger, more active presentation. This is also a great way to target the biggest panfish on the block. Your catch rate will be lower than with small, slow-moving baits, but average fish size makes up for it."

In-Fisherman friend Scott Glorvigen combines finesse and aggression to deal with pressured crappies, as well as extreme weather changes. "I'm a finesse guy, so my main weapon is a small jig like a Northland Mooska or Hexi Fly in the 1/32-to 1/16-ounce range," he offers. "But sometimes a small spoon or swimming jig works when finesse fizzles. I keep a second rod rigged with a small chain-dropper spoon, Puppet Minnow, or Rapala Jigging Rap."

As chain-droppers go, Glorvigen favors Northland's Buck Shot or Forage Minnow spoons tricked out with a single Bait Chain dropper hook, though options abound, including Clam's Speed Spoon and plenty of others. "Chain spoons bring in curious crappies and allow them to inhale the bait by lightly flaring their gills," he notes, adding that eurolarvae and waxworms are top tippings. Swimming jigs are sweetened with a single spike or maggot on the nose or tail hook, not the belly treble. "Meat on the tip adds scent and is easy for the fish to suck in," he says.

Glorvigen fishes dropper spoons with shakes, not sweeping lifts. "Pick the spoon up, shake it, dead-stick, then shake it again," he says. Swimming jigs are more animated, though the cadence is still not over the top. "Raise it 4 to 5 inches, let the jig swing down on a slack line, then hold it still once the bait settles. If a fish comes in but doesn't strike, raise the jig to trigger a commitment."

Longtime Northwoods guide Jeff Sundin says overlooked, off-the-wall areas often hold slabs and jumbos on pressured waters. "The multispecies panfish smorgasbord served up where gentle, slow-flowing, incoming current brushes a shallow feeding flat is a prime example," he says. "Such areas attract perch, sunfish, and crappies. Perch are typically most common at first and last ice, crappies in early to midseason, and sunfish from mid- to late winter."

Hot depths vary by lake, but the 6- to 7-foot range is a perennial producer. "One of the most productive bottom types is clambeds on a semi-hard, sandy substrate. Sticks or other debris sweeten the pot," he adds, noting that panfish may roam an entire flat, but subtle depressions can be hotbeds of activity.

Fellow panfish fanatic Paul Fournier, pursuer of pressure-cooker crappies...compulsively adds serious pre-trip recon to his to-do list. Such homework, he says, is key to finding pockets of unpressured panfish. Toward that end, Fournier scours contour maps for trends in depths and structure.

(continued on page 38)



Photos courtesy https://christensenarms.com

Build A More Stable Rifle: Bipods, Rails & Adapters

Build a steadier, faster-deploying rifle setup without carrying unnecessary weight

Christensen Arms
https://christensenarms.com

Rifle accessories such as a rifle bipod, Picatinny rail, and correctly matched bipod adapter can make it easier to build a stable shooting position in uneven terrain. The best setup is not the one carrying the most hardware. It is the one that deploys quickly, supports the shot, and stays practical on the carry in.

Start with the positions and terrain you expect to use. Then choose the support and attachment interface that fit the rifle, rather than adding rifle rail accessories first and trying to make the system work afterward.

How Rifle Accessories Create a More Stable Setup

Stability begins with the shooter's position. A bipod, rail, or adapter cannot correct a rushed setup, poor natural point of aim, or inconsistent shoulder pressure. What the right accessories can do is create a repeatable interface between the rifle and the ground, pack, tripod, or other support.

Position
Build the Foundation
Set bone support, body alignment, and natural point of aim before relying on equipment.

Front Support
Control Elevation
A bipod or pack supports the forend and helps the rifle settle at the correct height.

Rear Support
Refine the Hold
A rear bag, pack, or controlled support hand helps make smaller elevation corrections.

Interface
Remove Movement
The rail and adapter should lock securely without shifting, rattling, or changing rifle balance.

Choose each accessory for a specific shooting position. If it does not improve stability, deployment, or carry, it probably does not belong on the rifle.

Choosing a Rifle Bipod for the Field

A rifle bipod is most useful when prone, seated, or low-angle shots are realistic. Leg height should match the vegetation and slope, while cant allows the rifle to level on uneven ground. Pan can help track a moving animal without lifting and rebuilding the entire position.

Consider how the bipod rides during the hunt. A permanently mounted model is always ready, while a quick-detach design keeps the rifle cleaner during long carries and can move between rifles fitted with compatible adapters.

Bipod Style -
Quick Detach
Best Fit -
Backcountry hunts and rifles shared with one support system
Tradeoff -
Requires a compatible adapter and practiced deployment

Bipod Style -
Rail Mounted
Best Fit -
Rifles with Picatinny or M-Lok attachment points
Tradeoff -
Adds hardware and may remain on the rifle during carry

Bipod Style -
Tripod Support
Best Fit -
Seated, kneeling, tall vegetation, and steep terrain
Tradeoff -
More equipment to carry and slower to position than a low bipod



7.6 OZ Standard Weight Javelin Pro Hunt Tac Bipod
Built from multilayer carbon fiber and 7075 aluminum, the quick-detach Javelin Pro Hunt Tac provides 15 degrees of cant and 30 degrees of pan to each side. Standard and long configurations let hunters match support height to terrain and shooting position. Shop Javelin Pro Hunt Tac Bipod® here: https://christensenarms.com/product/carbon-fiber-javelin-bipod

(continued on page 20)

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Build A More Stable Rifle: Bipods, Rails & Adapters

(continued from page 18)

Picatinny Rails and Rifle Rail Accessories

A Picatinny rail gives compatible rifle accessories a standardized mounting surface. For a field rifle, the useful question is not how much rail space is available, but where the bipod or adapter needs to sit for a natural support-hand position and clean deployment.

Keep unused rail space clear. Extra clamps and adapters add weight, create snag points, and can shift balance forward. Confirm the rail specification, mounting hardware, and clearance before ordering, then use the manufacturer's installation and torque guidance.

Matching a Bipod Adapter to the Rifle

The correct bipod adapter depends on the rifle's existing interface. A Picatinny-equipped rifle can use a compact rail adapter. A traditional stock with two sling studs may be better served by an adapter that preserves a sling attachment point and adds a short rail. A flush gunsmith adapter is another option when a clean installation is the priority.

M1913 Picatinny
Javelin Picatinny Rail Adapter
A 1.1-ounce 7075 aluminum adapter that uses 20mm of rail space and connects compatible Javelin support systems.

Shop Rail Adapter here:

https://christensenarms.com/product/javelin-bipod-picatinny-rail-adapter

Dual Sling Stud
Classic Rifle Adapter & Pic Rail
A 0.8-ounce adapter for compatible dual-stud rifles, with a QD sling point and short Picatinny rail.

Shop Rifle Adapter here:

https://christensenarms.com/product/spartan-classic-rifle-adapter-pic-rail

Flush Installation
Universal Gunsmith Adapter
A low-profile 0.3-ounce option designed to be bonded into a compatible wood or synthetic stock by a qualified installer.

Shop Gunsmith Adapter here:
https://christensenarms.com/product/javelin-bipod-universal-gunsmith-adapter

Spartan's official **adapter guide and product lineup** also shows how Picatinny, M-Lok, sling-stud, and other interfaces connect to its support systems. Confirm compatibility with the exact rifle and accessory before installation.

Building Rifle Stability for Real Terrain

Open ground: A low rifle bipod works well when vegetation permits a prone position and the legs can find solid contact.

Uneven slopes: Cant helps level the rifle without forcing the shooter's shoulders out of position.

Tall grass or brush: Longer bipod legs, a seated position, shooting sticks, or tripod support may provide the needed clearance.

Rock and hard ground: Confirm the feet grip securely and load the support without allowing it to skate.

Confined blinds: Check that legs, rail accessories, and sling hardware do not collide with the window or shooting rest.

Practice deployment from the same carry position you will use during the hunt. A fast attachment system only saves time when the movements are familiar and quiet.

Rifle Accessories Setup Checklist
Verify the rifle rail and bipod adapter match the exact mounting interface.

Install hardware to the product manufacturer's instructions and torque values.

Check that the bipod locks securely, deploys quietly, and clears the sling and support hand.

Test leg height, cant, and pan on flat ground, side slopes, and realistic field positions.

Inspect the complete rifle for added weight, forward balance, noise, and snag points.

Confirm zero after installation and before the hunt.

Rifle Bipod, Rail, and Adapter FAQ
Does every hunting rifle need a bipod?

No. A bipod is valuable when prone or seated shots are likely, but a pack, tripod, shooting sticks, or natural rest may be more useful in other terrain.

What height rifle bipod should I choose?
Choose enough height to clear expected vegetation and terrain while keeping the position as low and stable as practical. Test the setup before the hunt.

Can a Picatinny adapter fit any rifle rail?
No. Confirm the rifle uses the specified Picatinny interface and that the adapter has enough rail space and clearance for proper installation.

Can one bipod be used on multiple rifles?
A compatible quick-detach system can move between rifles when each rifle has the correct adapter installed. Verify every connection before use.

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Photos credit Mike Gnatkowski
courtesy https://www.hardcorewaterfowl.com

Giddy About Gadwall

By Mike Gnatkowski
Hardcore Waterfowl https://www.hardcorewaterfowl.com
Traditions Media https://traditionsmedia.com

I'll never forget the first gadwall I shot, even though it was 50 years ago, for a couple of reasons. Number one, it was the first gadwall I'd ever seen or shot, and it was part of the first double I'd ever shot.

My high school friend, Doug Haenlien, had some connections with the caretaker at the Stork Marsh, a private hunt club near Saginaw, Michigan. The marsh is now part of the Crow Island State Game area. Doug got us permission to hunt the marsh on a weekday when other members weren't hunting. We were in high school.

We slipped a small boat in off the side of the road and rowed out into the marsh. We didn't have to go far. Ducks were swarming as we threw out a few decoys. We weren't hidden very long when a pair of ducks hovered above the decoys. I killed them both, and they turned out to be gadwall...

Gadwall are becoming an increasingly common component of the bag for waterfowlers and a welcome addition. A medium-sized puddle duck, the gadwall breeds across the Great Lakes and the Northern Great Plains, the infamous Prairie Pothole Region, into Alberta and British Columbia, and the Intermountain West, including California. Gadwall can be found wintering across the United States and Mexico.

A key to identifying gadwalls on the wing is the lack of colors you see on other waterfowl. **A medium to large duck, the gadwall is the only duck with a white speculum in North America and is a dead giveaway in flight.** Otherwise, a lack of color and the nickname gray duck are helpful ID cues. Hen gadwalls make a higher-pitched and more raspy quack than a hen mallard. Drake gadwalls make a distinctive dink… dink… dink … call similar to the kreek… kreek … kreek…of a drake mallard.



Gadwall prefer grasslands and upland coverts in close proximity to water for nesting and show an affinity for nesting on islands. Gadwall numbers exploded during the height of CRP sign-up and a series of wet years, along with every other waterfowl species. But as CRP enrollment and a succession of dry years have seriously impacted mallard populations, gadwall have more than held their own. "It could have something to do with their feeding ecology (forage on submerged aquatic plants, etc.) and wetland selection," said Director of Conservation Science & Planning, Dr. John Coluccy. "Gadwalls tend to nest near and favor more permanent wetlands, which typically have lots of submerged aquatics and are less susceptible to drainage and drought. Thus, perhaps they are more "drought resistant" than mallards. The reason is likely much more complex than that, though."



Gadwalls are strikingly handsome.

Gadwall experienced a population decline from 2.561 million in 2023 to 2.284 million in 2024, but the number is still 11 percent above their long-term average. Researchers estimate gadwall harvest is highest in the Mississippi Flyway, accounting for 40 to 50 percent of the total US harvest annually...

The long-term average for gadwall harvest across the four flyways is as follows:
Atlantic Flyway- 51,507, Mississippi Flyway- 798,268, Central Flyway- 425,572, and Pacific Flyway- 161,466 (US total- 1,436,939). Percentage-wise, the Atlantic Flyway harvests 3% of the gadwall in any given year, the Mississippi Flyway accounts for 56% of the harvest, the Central Flyway 30% and the Pacific Flyway 11%.

"Gadwall make up a pretty good portion of the waterfowl harvest in North Dakota," said North Dakota Migratory Gamebird Biologist John Palarski.

(continued on the next page)

Giddy About Gadwall

(continued from page 21)

"Gadwall made up 18.3% of the harvest in North Dakota in 2024, and they are the third most common duck harvested. They typically make up somewhere between 15 and 20% of the annual harvest any given year," said Palarski.

Palarski said you can up your odds of seeing and shooting gadwall by targeting water. "A lot of waterfowlers come to North Dakota looking for the big tornado of mallards in the fields, but if you're interested in shooting a variety of ducks, like gadwall, you're better off targeting water."...

Friend Tod Connor is lucky. He married into great duck hunting. His wife, Tulip, is an Arkansas girl whose family lives for duck hunting. Tod was welcomed into the family and the duck hunting tradition with open arms. He makes an annual pilgrimage to "The Natural State" that typically takes in the last four days of the duck season. His relatives have the option of hunting flooded timber or rice fields. Tod says he prefers the rice fields. "You tend to get more variety in the rice fields than in the timber," he said. His in-laws have five fields leased between the Black and Cashe rivers in prime duck country.

Connor said one thing he's noticed is more gadwalls in the bag. No one is complaining. "I think last year, of the 60 birds we harvested during the four days, 12 or 15 of them were gadwalls. We love gadwalls. They're good-sized birds, work the decoys well, and are just as good as any other puddle duck on the table," he said.

Because of the changes in the types of ducks they're seeing, Connor said they've made some modifications in their decoy spread. "We've added more pintails and gadwall to the spread and fewer mallards," he said. "Last year, we saw a ton of pintails, but you could only shoot one, so we added more gadwall to the spread. A little group of gadwall decoys off to the side really seemed to do the trick."



Gadwall will work to a mallard spread, but it helps to add gadwall decoys when there are gray ducks around.

Adding gadwalls to the spread can make the difference between an average day and a good shoot. Lifelike, species-specific decoys, like Hardcore's Rugged Series Gadwall Decoys, can help lure shy gray ducks into range.



The true-to-life paint schemes and superior feather detail on these decoys are the epitome of realism. Rugged Series Gadwall Decoys are created with cutting-edge FowlFlex™ Technology, ensuring durability to withstand years of tough hunting conditions. The paint schemes match the subtle nuances of gadwalls right down to the drake's gray speckled head and stripped wing scapulas. Even the hen gadwall's muted tones are spot on. The innovative WhaleTail Keel adds subtle movements to your spread, even in minimal winds, and provides a life-like dimension to your setup. With four drakes and two hens per half dozen, the mix mimics the sex ratio you see in the wild.



Another option for customizing your decoy spread is Hardcore's Rugged Series Whistler Pack, Gadwall, widgeon, and pintails have a habitat of hanging out together, so decoys imitating those species appeal to all three birds.

(continued on page 38)



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All Warmth, No Bulk

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Base layers get judged on warmth, and that's fair, though the better question is how much fabric it takes to get there. ScentLok's Climafleece answers it with an optimized warmth-to-weight ratio, so you get real warmth out of a garment that stays light, trim and easy to move in.

The smooth polyester outer fabric lets mid and outer layers slide right over it without grabbing, and stretch panels keep the fit secure whether you're reaching, climbing or pedaling. The flat-lock seams sit smooth against the skin, which matters more than people think after a few hours on the move.

"Warmth is only half the job for a base layer. It also has to be comfortable to wear all day and easy to move in, and that's where Climafleece shines. It's light, it stretches, it doesn't have a bunch of seams to bother you, and it's got all three of our odor-control technologies built right in, for men and women both," said Steve Allie, Marketing Director, ScentLok.

Where The Warmth Comes From
A microfleece lining, flat-lock seams and a wicking treatment work together to deliver just-right warmth and moisture management right where it counts, next to the skin.

The lining traps heat when activity slows down, and the wicking treatment pulls sweat away when the pace picks up, so Climafleece stays warm at rest and dry on the move, instead of excelling at one and failing at the other.

A redesign trims down the seam count, too, and the flat-lock seams that remain stay comfortable all day.

A smooth polyester outer fabric makes for easy layering, letting mid and outer layers slide on without snagging, while stretch panels lock in a secure fit with maximum mobility when reaching, climbing or pedaling.

Less bulk means more freedom to move and less to carry, whether that's a pack on the trail or a duffel on a long trip. It also means Climafleece plays well with whatever goes over it, from a light shell in early fall to a parka in the dead of winter.

Odor Control At The Source
The layer worn closest to the skin is where human odor starts, so it's where odor control matters most. Every Climafleece garment, men's and women's, carries all three of ScentLok's odor-control technologies. Each one handles a different stage of the problem: catching the odor a body produces, destroying the bacteria that cause it, and keeping new bacteria from growing.

Carbon Alloy®: Capture
Carbon Alloy is ScentLok's own blend of treated carbon, activated carbon and zeolite. These natural particles have an enormous surface area, and they adsorb the odors your body produces, holding the odor molecules on their surface and not letting go. When the day is done, a run through a household dryer releases the trapped odors and reactivates the garment, ready for the next outing.

Fusix™ Technology: Destroy
Fusix goes after odor at its source by destroying the bacteria that create it. Fusix does that without stiffening the fabric. Climafleece keeps the stretch a close-fitting base layer needs to move through a steep climb, a long day in the saddle or hours on the trail, with no trade-off between odor control and active comfort.

Silver Alloy™: Prevent
Silver Alloy keeps the problem from coming back. A silver salt solution applied to the fabric controls the growth of bacteria, even in the hot, damp conditions inside a stack of layers. The fiber can be dyed and won't wear out, so Silver Alloy keeps working for the life of the garment, wash after wash and season after season.

Built For Women, Not Just Sized Down
Women in the outdoors have spent years making do with men's base layers in smaller sizes, and a base layer depends on fit more than any other garment. Gaps let warm air escape, bunching rubs over a long day, and a loose fit lets sweat collect instead of wicking away.

Climafleece comes in dedicated women's models with a women's-specific cut, so the warmth, moisture control and odor control work as designed for every woman who wears it.

"Anybody can make something warm if they don't care how heavy or bulky it gets. With the redesigned Climafleece, we focused on getting the most warmth out of the least amount of fabric, then added more stretch and cut down the seams so it moves with you. It's a base layer that stays comfortable all season long, in fits made for both men and women, with all three of our odor-control technologies built in," added Allie.

Women's Climafleece Top
The Women's Climafleece Top features a women's specific cut that sits close to the body, so warmth and wicking work as designed. It carries the same microfleece lining, smooth polyester outer, flat-lock seams and Carbon Alloy, Fusix and Silver Alloy odor control as the men's version. Women get the full Climafleece performance with no compromise on fit. MSRP $99.99



Women's Climafleece Bottom
The Women's Climafleece Bottom pairs with the top to make a complete women's set. Its women's cut fits close through the hips and legs without bunching under bibs or pants, which keeps warmth in and lets the wicking lining do its job. The stretchy fabric moves freely when climbing, kneeling or settling in at camp, and all three of ScentLok's odor-control technologies work right where scent starts. MSRP $99.99



Climafleece Hoodie
The Climafleece Hoodie is the most versatile piece in the collection. It works on its own on a crisp early season morning and under an insulated jacket in December. A 3-piece hood fits close and adds warmth and coverage under a cap or outer hood. Like every Climafleece piece, it pairs a wicking microfleece lining with a smooth polyester face and all three of ScentLok's odor-control technologies. MSRP $109.99



Climafleece Base Layer Top
The Climafleece Top puts the full Climafleece build into a clean crew-neck design that disappears under other layers. Its smooth polyester outer lets mid and outer layers slide on without snagging or bunching, and stretch panels keep the fit secure through a full range of motion. Flat-lock seams and a wicking microfleece lining keep it comfortable all day. MSRP $109.99

Climafleece Base Layer Bottom
The Climafleece Bottom completes the set. The micro fleece lining wraps warmth around the lower body. A wicking treatment handles sweat on the hike, flat-lock seams prevent chafing, and stretch panels move freely when climbing, kneeling or scrambling over rocks. An elastic waistband keeps it secure and comfortable, and a horizontal fly makes for easy access. Carbon Alloy, Fusix and Silver Alloy control odor right against the skin. MSRP $109.99

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How To Clean And Winterize Your Hunting Gear After The Season

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

As big game hunting seasons come to a close, hopefully you've got a pile of dirty, muddy and well-used gear. That's the sign of a fun season, right? But before you forget about it for the winter, give your hunting gear some attention.

You've probably invested a great deal on your clothing, sleep system, footwear, weapons, field dressing equipment, and a myriad of other accessories. Take the time to clean, dry and winterize your hunting gear. All that grime can be corrosive and a little bit of care now will help your gear perform better and last longer.

Get the Blood Out
If you harvested an animal this season, start with any items that need a good washing. As soon as you can after you get home from a hunt, wash and dry your game bags. If you need a refresher, check out this video and easy instructions on how to wash Caribou Gear game bags here: https://youtu.be/LL_RFobC5mE?si=coDSMbOXTt5KmDoz.

Next, get out your hunting knives, kill kit, Hunter's Tarp and anything else that might have dried blood on it. Wash them carefully and then make sure they're totally dry before you put them away for the winter.

Washing blood from your backpack can be a little more cumbersome, but it's usually not difficult. Unless the manufacturer offers other instructions, an hour-long soak in a bathtub full of cold water and dish soap, followed by a cold-water rinse is a safe way to clean most packs. Hang it to dry and you'll be good to go.

Clean and Wax Your Hunting Boots
Next, take good care of your hunting footwear. Quality boots are the foundation for being able to hunt hard and stay comfortable in the field. Take care of them and they'll take care of you.



Photos credit Ryan McSparran
Courtesy https://www.caribougear.com

Quality footwear like Kenetrek Boots should last for years, keeping your feet dry and comfortable through all conditions. But in order for them to last, you must keep them clean and waxed. Start by removing the laces and thoroughly cleaning your hunting boots. I like to use lukewarm tap water and Nikwax Footwear Cleaning Gel to rinse off the dirt and mud.

Once the boots are totally clean, leave them to dry overnight. When they're completely dry, I apply Kenetrek Boot Wax, as much as the leather will absorb. After letting it soak in for a couple of hours, use a clean rag to wipe off any excess wax. Replace the laces (or pick up some new laces) and store them in a cool, dry place where they won't be in direct sunlight.

If you use a synthetic boot rather than a leather boot, use a waterproofing agent that's designed for synthetic footwear and follow the instructions.

Revive Your Hunting Apparel
After a long hunting season, your hunting clothes could probably use some attention. If you've invested in high quality technical clothing, make sure you get the most longevity out of each piece. That starts with proper washing, treatment and storage.

Only use detergents that are designed for technical outdoor apparel. I wash all my outerwear in Nikwax Tech Wash. It's safe to use on items with Gore-Tex or a similar waterproof-breathable membrane. Then, I re-waterproof any items that have a DWR (durable water repellent) finish – that includes rain gear, gaiters, softshell jackets, hunting pants, gloves etc. The re-waterproofing step is something I do every year at the end of the season. Renewing the DWR finish allows water to bead and roll off the face fabric, just like when the garment was new.

Next, I wash my base layers and socks using a mild detergent that's recommended for outdoor gear.

Once again, I usually turn to Nikwax. Their Wool Wash for example, is great for all those merino wool socks and base layers.

After washing and re-waterproofing, hang everything to dry. Then, store your gear in a closed container or hang in a plastic wardrobe for the off-season.

Like your boots, keep the clothing in a cool, dry place that's out of direct sunlight and those items will last a great deal longer.

Inspect Your Rifle or Bow
After any trip, make it a habit to carefully clean and inspect your rifle or your bow. Wax the string or run a few patches down the barrel. Generally, make sure it's dry, clean and ready for storage.

Before you put it away, check that all mounts and screws are tight. If there are any issues, it's best to discover them now so that you can get it fixed before your next day at the range. Speaking of which - don't forget to keep up your range practice during the off-season!...

Clean and Carefully Store Your Sleep System
Your sleeping bag, sleeping pad and tent are critical parts of your hunting gear setup. And they are probably some of the most expensive! So it's worth making sure these items are ready for storage before putting them away.

After each trip, I like to set up the tent in my yard and hose it down (weather dependent of course). If it's snowy or wet outside, you'll have to do what you can indoors. In either case, do your best to get the tent clean and then totally dry.



Never leave your sleeping bag in a stuff-sack longer than is necessary. After the hunt, lay it out flat for a few days to air out and recover. For storage, hang it up in a closet or keep it in a roomy storage bag where the down feathers won't be compressed. In fact, our Medium Quarter Game Bag is the perfect size for storing a sleeping bag.

Does your sleeping bag need a wash? While it is possible to wash high quality down sleeping bags at home, a professional gear repair/cleaning service is recommended to help get the longest life and best performance out of your bag. You can expect about $30-$40 for a professional sleeping bag cleaning - and you might be surprised how much loft is restored!

Miscellaneous Items

As you put away gear for the winter, check for anything else that might have dirt, mud or blood that needs to be taken care of. Dirty gear will corrode if left unattended. Wipe down your optics. Take the batteries out of your headlamps, rangefinder and other electronics to avoid corrosion. As you put each item away, give it a quick inspection and make note of anything that needs to be replaced.

The off-season is a great time to make sure everything is in good shape and working order before the next adventure. If you've invested in great hunting gear, you want to get the most out of it! High quality gear isn't cheap. But when treated right, it can perform at a high level and last for many years.

If you have specific questions about our Caribou Gear products or how to take care of them, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Visit https://www.caribougear.com or call us at (303) 798-5824 or email hunt@caribougear.com.



The Importance Of Good Waders

By Erik Jutila
Outdoor Empire
https://outdoorempire.com

In A Coast to Coast Walk, author Alfred Wainwright famously said, “There is no such thing as bad weather, just unsuitable clothing.” This saying is often applied to outdoor gear, and it is never more accurate than when discussing waterfowl waders.

Hardcore waterfowl hunters know that some of the very best hunting occurs at the same time as the very worst weather. Because of this, choice of gear is crucial.

Many hunting days have been abbreviated because the conditions got the best of the hunter. Lots of waterfowl hunting scenarios call for the hunter to spend part or all of their day standing in cold water which makes wearing quality waders crucial.

A variety of factors will contribute to which waders are the right choice for you:

- weather
- how far you walk
- type of territory you hunt in
- budget
- how many times a year you hunt

If you make the wrong wader selection for hunting in muddy conditions, you can pretty quickly pull your stockingfoot waders right out of your boots when they stick in the mud. Breathable waders exposed to thorny brush can tear or develop pinholes and leak.

Selecting waders that are not well-enough insulated from the conditions is another commonly made mistake.

While there are a lot of ways that wader selection can go awry and be the cause of an uncomfortable day in the woods, the right choice can be warm, dry, durable and unrestricted.

Picking the Right Waders
When it comes time to make your wader selection, consider the following questions and answers guidelines:

How often do you plan on hunting?

Several wader options on the market are affordable because the manufacturer sacrificed product durability and longevity in favor of lower price.

In many cases, these waders are suitable for a handful of trips a year over a few years but not the abuse of multiple trips on a weekly basis. A couple of the very best waders from this affordable category are reviewed at https://outdoorempire.com.

Some products are designed for more avid hunters and many of those come with some warranty protection.

The peace of mind that your waders are designed for heavy use and come with manufacturer product support is a distinct value to the right buyer. Waders that fit into this category are discussed as “The Best of the Best.”


Photo courtesy https://outdoorempire.com

Do you plan on hunting warm or cold weather/water?

For this question, make sure you consider not just the air temperature, but if you will be required to stand in cold water. Apparently, some hunters spend their time in flooded fields where waders are helpful but the hunter is not spending their day in thigh-deep water.

If you will be hunting in cold weather and water, a thicker neoprene wader is preferable. Also, attached boots may be a good choice because they are offered with thick insulation.

As a rule, rubber boots with thick padding and space for both warm socks and air will be warmest.

Wearing super warm waders on hunts in warmer weather or where lots of moving is required can be as bad as being too cold. Profuse sweating can lead to being very uncomfortable.

If you plan to be in warm weather, consider a breathable wader or a wader with at least breathable uppers. With lighter waders, layering underneath for warmth is possible. You are more stuck in the situation if your waders are too warm for the conditions.

How much will you be moving around?

Some hunting requires driving an ATV or boat right to your blind, and some require wading, hiking or paddling to a spot. Many hunters have dogs to retrieve their down birds but some must wade or use a boat to recover them.

You might be a hunter that avoids the blind altogether and simply hikes to ponds and jump-shoots waterfowl.

The answer to this question will turn up similar results as the weather conditions question. If you are going to be doing a lot of sitting with minimal movement, a very warm wader will probably be needed to keep you comfortable.

On the other hand, if you will be moving around a lot, a cooler, breathable wader will be necessary to help you ventilate and regulate your body temperature.

If covering ground or lots of wading is required, a stocking-foot wader with a good pair of lace-up wading boots is a smart choice for comfort and traction. When much sitting is required, the warmer attached boots are likely better.

What environments do you hunt in?

A few environmental factors that come into play when considering which waders to choose are thorny bushes, ice on the water and thick mud.

Both thorns and jagged ice edges while wading are hard on waders, particularly those made of breathable materials. If you plan to spend much time encountering either, you need waders that are reinforced to deal with the abuse or neoprene waders that are at least more durable.

The type of surfaces you are required to walk on will be a significant factor in whether you go with bootfoot or stockingfoot waders.

If the conditions are muddy, you need a stockingfoot wader that can be tightly laced to stay on your feet instead of staying in the mud.

Many have made the mistake of wearing loose-fitting bootfoot waders in thick mud and have continually struggled to pull their boot from the mud instead of removing their foot from their boot.

Crawling through the mud to keep from walking out of your waders is an unpleasant scenario you should try to avoid.

How much money are you willing to spend?

Because wader price varies so significantly, the price is likely to play into your selection. There are some great values on the market...However, for the most part, the very best waders are going to cost you some coin.

If you are not willing to shell out for the best available, determine your priorities for what you need in a wader, and that will show you where you can compromise to find something in your budget.

These questions represent some of the basic parameters for making your wader selection. As you answer them, you may find that your answers do not point you to one particular wader.

Like many kinds of gear, if you often hunt and in a variety of situations, more than one pair of waders may be required to do the job right. In your own experiences, you might find other contributing factors to future wader purchases.

(continued on the next page)



The Importance Of Good Waders

(continued from page 29)

Leading Brands
...In many cases, the products heralded as the best are made by a brand that has made industry-leading products for a long time.

Whether you are looking for an alternative to a product that is no longer being produced, or you are looking for other options that may be suitable for your needs, consider the following brands.

USIA
USIA has not been historically known for making hunting waders. However, they are very well known for making dry suits, dive suits and survival suits for a variety of military and government applications.

If a brand is trusted to create products that keep professionals alive, they can be trusted to make a product that keeps recreational waterfowl hunters dry.

In almost any product category, “custom” manufacturers typically sell less volume than a brand selling stock waders off shelves all over the country. However, USIA has plenty of customers that are beyond satisfied with their products.

It is a sure sign that a product is superior when the price is on the high end of the spectrum, but the product is still viewed as a good value by its consumers. Such is the case with USIA products.

They stand behind their products and offer excellent customer service should you run into a problem. Their waders are made custom in the USA.

USIA products, background, and business model are all unique to the market, but certainly worth consideration if you are searching for top of the line hunting waders...

LaCrosse
Whenever you come across a company that has been in business for over a century, you know they are doing something right.

In 2017, LaCrosse celebrated its 120th year in business, a clear cornerstone of the boot and wader industry. Adding to that is their merger with Danner Boots which has been in the hunting boot business since 1932.

With over 200 years of combined history in the market, it is not hard to see why they are renowned for quality products.

You can reasonably expect LaCrosse to have a product on the market that is at the leading edge of advancement. They continually strive to be market leaders, and they stand behind their product as the best available to consumers.

Learn more at https://outdoorempire.com.



Photos courtesy https://www.budgeslodge.com

Plan Your 2027 Fishing Adventure Wilderness Camp Fly Fishing : Three Camps. Three Unique Experiences

By Ryan McSparran
Budge’s Wilderness Lodge https://www.budgeslodge.com

Make no mistake - our lodge and cabins are remote. From there, lodge-based anglers can explore wild and unpressured waters. But for anglers looking to go beyond the lodge-based trip, our wilderness camps offer a fully guided pack-in experience, where your group enjoys a private camp, great meals, and the ultimate in silence and solitude.

One of the things that makes these trips unique is that we offer three distinct wilderness camps, each with its own character, landscape, and fishing style. Whether you prefer canyon water, meadow streams, or alpine lakes, there’s a camp that fits the experience you’re looking for.

The Downriver Camp
Big Water and Rugged Canyon Scenery

For anglers who picture dramatic canyon walls, deep runs, and the opportunity to land a big fish, our Downriver Camp delivers exactly that.



Located along a remote stretch of river carved deep into the backcountry, this camp sits in a little meadow, surrounded by rocky cliffs, aspens, and pines.

From here, anglers have access to miles of water where trout lurk behind boulders, in deep pools, and in long runs and riffles. Cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, and cutbow hybrids are the dominant species in this part of the river.

Dry flies can be excellent, but the diversity of water also allows for a wide range of techniques, including nymphs and streamers, depending on the season.

The fishing here can be more technical at times, making this a great camp for anglers with some fly fishing experience.

The Upriver Camp
Meadows and Classic Dry Fly Water



If your ideal day of fly fishing includes aggressively rising fish and watching trout break the surface, the Upriver Camp is hard to beat.

Set along meandering meadow water, this camp offers a completely different feel from the canyon environment. The landscape opens up and the water slows down.

Riffles, undercut banks, and grassy edges create ideal habitat for wild trout that feed confidently. A few braided sections and beaver ponds can be found along this part of the river. Cutthroat trout and brook trout are the species that inhabit these waters.

Excellent dry fly fishing and big numbers of fish make this a great location for anglers of any skill level. It's also one of the most remote locations we offer, where you're more likely to see a moose than another person.

The Alpine Lake Camp
Something Big Lurks Beneath the Glassy Surface

For anglers who want to experience high alpine lake fishing, our Lake Camp provides access to two remote lakes – one of them holds something unique.

Reaching this camp is an adventure in itself, as the trail climbs nearly 2,000 vertical feet above the valley floor. Up here, our camp sits between two lakes. One of them holds cutthroat trout. But the other lake is the main attraction up here, as it's home to big lake trout.



Learn more and contact Budge's Lodge here: https://www.budgeslodge.com/contact-budges.



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Montana Top Pheasant Hunts

By H&F News Staff

There are plenty of bird hunting options for area sportsmen and women in Montana. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Projects offer a wide range of hunting opportunities. Private lands enrolled in the UGBEP require landowner permission prior to hunting game birds. Some projects are walk-in with no further permission from the landowner or may be administered through Block Management. To read and/or download the UGBEP Access Guide visit: https://fwp.mt.gov/binaries/content/assets/fwp/conservation/upland-game-bird-enhancement/2026/2026-uplandbird-pag-final-for-web.pdf.

With pheasant populations ranging from stable to thriving in parts of central and eastern Montana, here are some of the state's best-kept pheasant hunting areas.

Fergus County - Lewistown
Look for any land that contains water, whether a pond or slough with cattails and heavy cover, and is adjacent to grain fields. It's bound to hold plenty of pheasants. Around the Lewistown area, McDonald Creek, Big Spring Creek or any other dozens of smaller streams that run through the area should produce. You can hunt northwest of Lewistown and find some good hunting around Denton and Coffee Creek with Block Management areas as well as any number of parcels of State and Federal lands.

Chouteau County - Fort Benton and Loma
You can make the drive up Highway 87 and find plenty of Block Management areas that will allow a pheasant hunter willing to do some walking all the acreage it takes to fill a game bag. BLM lands near Loma along the Teton River should offer up some exceptional bird hunting.

Hill County - Havre, Blaine County - Chinook Phillips County - Malta
You'll find strong populations of ringnecks throughout these areas. In the Western portion of Region 6, ample cover helps to protect pheasant that hang out around waterways and ag fields. The central portion of this area above Highway 2 between Chinook and Saco typically offers very good upland bird hunting, with scattered BLM, State and Block Management hunting available. Walk brushy draws adjacent to wheat fields and you will find plenty of action, with or without a dog.

Northeast Montana - Sheridan County - Plentywood and Medicine Lake, Daniels County - Scobey
This bird rich corner of Montana features outstanding upland habitat. Unlike many other areas of Montana, where pheasant populations are limited to the riparian habitat of larger rivers and creeks, the Northeastern corner is part of the Prairie Pothole terrain. For the best success in this area, hunt places that have the most water including Big Muddy Creek and Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge sloughs. You can also

find Block Management areas east of Medicine Lake to hunt.

If you are looking for more land and better opportunities to hunt, we would encourage you to invest in the onX Hunt app if you don't already use it.
Visit: https://www.onxmaps.com/hunt/app.

It's a total game changer, especially if you are hunting in central and eastern Montana. It will open up lands you never knew were open to hunt. It will also ensure that you are not trespassing on private property.



Photo credit Anton Master | depositphotos.com

5 TIPS FOR MORE PHEASANT

Missing sucks. There is no way to sugar coat it. But we all miss occasionally. Here are a few shooting tips to help you put more birds in your cooler.

1. Use Heavy Loads
Shots tend to be higher and longer as the hunting season rolls along. Use a No. 4 shot and go with 1-1/2 or 1-3/8 ounce loads. The added knock-down power is key for longer shots.

2. Tighten Up
A tight pattern can mean the difference between birds on the ground and roosters sailing into the next county.

3. Be a leader
Too many hunters focus on the pheasants tail, they pull the trigger then they swing past it, which puts the shot either behind the bird or in the tail feathers. Focus on the ring around the bird's neck. Find it and fire as you pull past it, always keeping the gun moving.

4. Aim high
Pheasants often fly straight over offering a high overhead shot many hunters don't like. However, you can learn to love it by blocking the head of the bird with the barrel, and fire as you swing past him. He will fly right into your pellets.

5. Be ready
Sauntering through cover with your gun over your shoulder is a sure way to blow shot opportunities. It's better to be ready at all times while walking with your shotgun at port arms position to take advantage of every shot opportunity. In isolated patches of thick cover, a lone gunner can also inch forward in a contact ready stance.

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Essential Pre-Application Season Planning Strategies For The Upcoming Hunting Season

By Trail Kreitzer
Originally published at GOHUNT.com

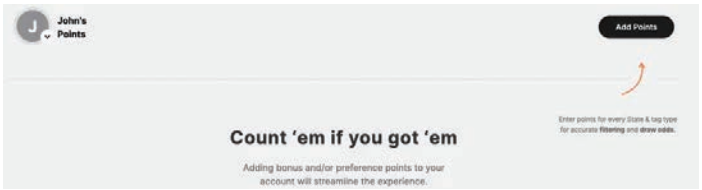
Our recent hunting season is behind us, and we are looking ahead to next year's application season and planning our schedules for next fall. One aspect of planning my upcoming year is considering my objectives for next fall. In this article, I plan to explore some of my goals and give you some ideas as well. I also want to dive into some of the steps along the way that will help me achieve my goals. Diving into all the tools available on GOHUNT is my first step.

Review preference and bonus points across every state

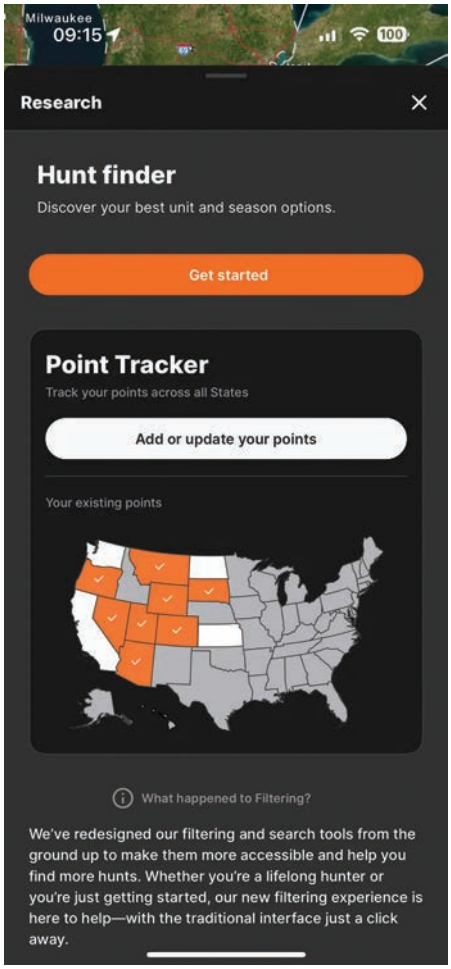
The first step in my process every year is to review the number of points I have, the states I applied in, and the species I applied for. I will go through, state by state, and update my points as well as review the individual hunts I applied for.

If you need some help looking up your bonus and preference points in each state, check out the article below:
https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/insider/how-to-look-up-your-bonus-preference-points-in-each-western-state.

Update your point totals in Point Tracker
As part of your Insider subscription, we have a tool called Point Tracker, which allows you to input your preference and bonus points into your user profile, and as you review draw odds and research within Filtering, or our standalone Draw Odds tool, the odds will populate at your point level. You can access Point Tracker on the web version of Insider or our mobile app.



A view of GOHUNT's Point Tracker when you haven't entered any points.



Accessing Point Tracker on the mobile app is super easy. Just open the GOHUNT mobile app, tap on "Research" at the bottom, and then you'll see a screen that shows you Point Tracker and if you click on "Add or update your points," you can make changes to all your points across every state we cover on Insider.

One thing to be aware of is that you must go into your account and update your point levels. I make a point of updating every state and species well before the first draws open up so that I am prepared to research and make the best decisions throughout the spring application series. One additional note worth mentioning is that you can build out a Point Tracker profile for every applicant you manage. For example, I apply for and build points in several states for both of my boys, who are of hunting age, and it makes it much easier to research and track hunts for them with their own Point Tracker within my Insider account.

There are also many people who are brand new to hunting and may have no points at all. Don't get discouraged, there are still plenty of opportunities to hunt this fall. Utilize Filtering and Draw Odds within your Insider account and search for hunts that can be drawn without points or use the Select Season drop-down filter to find states/species where OTC tags are available. Likey, the best opportunity OTC is still Colorado elk. They offer OTC tags for, 2nd and 3rd rifle seasons in many units in the state. Some states, like New Mexico and Idaho, allocate tags in random draws without a point system. (continued on page 36)



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Essential Pre-Application Season Planning Strategies For The Upcoming Hunting Season

(continued from page 34)

Odds can be long for the best hunts, but you always have a chance. Research, research, research, and you will find a hunt for this upcoming season.

After I have updated my point totals, I begin to ask myself the following questions:

What hunts do I have a good chance to draw, and what ones are just pipe dreams?

I've been applying in several western states for a variety of species for many years, and even still, in most cases, I do not have enough points to draw permits for species like moose, bighorn sheep, bison, mountain goat, and quality hunts for elk, mule deer, and antelope. Most of you reading this are in the same boat, so it's essential to be realistic in our expectations.

For bison, moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goats, my reality is that I don't have the points to feasibly draw a tag, so I already know that. I am really only concerned with draw odds and my application budget (more on that later). My applications for those species are actually relatively easy. I apply for areas with better odds and in states that offer a random chance. If you have the opportunity to draw a tag for one of those species based on the points you have, I would encourage you to find a hunt that fits your objectives and draw it sooner rather than later. I would make that hunt a priority over others.

The bulk of all of our hunting each fall is going to be for deer, elk, and antelope. Within that, there are both opportunity-type hunts and quality elk hunts Quality-style hunts are going to be Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona—although if you are creative, there are some easier-to-draw hunts in Arizona and even New Mexico. My opportunity-type states are Colorado, Montana, and perhaps Wyoming or Oregon. Idaho has been a good opportunity state in the past, but their OTC tag sale...sold out within the day. I can still apply for controlled hunts in Idaho, but it may or may not be worth the cost of the hunting license to apply, depending on how the rest of the year's applications have developed.

My typical priority is to utilize my points in the smartest way possible. I love to hunt elk with my bow during the heart of the rut, but in some cases, I've built up enough points to draw a mule deer tag where it makes more sense to utilize those points and potentially put elk on the back burner and build a few more points for a better hunt in the future. This could be vice verses as well, but I try to use my points as efficiently as I can regardless of the species. Everyone is different in what they value and what they are looking for in a hunt. For me, I tend to let the number of points I have for each species and the potential quality of the hunt guide my applications. Here is a real world example for me going into an upcoming season.

I have enough points to draw a quality deer tag in both Arizona and Wyoming.

I recently burned my Utah elk points, and although I have points in states like Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, they are not sufficient to draw the quality of tag that I can for deer.

Hence, for me, it may make more sense to utilize my deer points to draw good permits and build points for elk by either taking a swing-for-the-fences approach on my application or simply buying points for the states that allow that. I still want to hunt elk, but I try to pick one hunt to go all in on regarding scouting and time off to hunt, and for me, some years, it might be going on a deer hunt.

The long and short of my application plan is that I most often let my points guide my application strategy to find the highest quality hunt I can. Our GOHUNT Insider Draw Odds and Point Tracker are, therefore, two of the best tools I have for finding those hunts.

What is your application budget?

Applying in the West is expensive, and it seems to be getting more expensive every year. Most of us do not have an unlimited amount of money to apply. If you do, I would encourage you to apply for any species. If you don't, there are some general strategies I use...

• In states where you have to buy a hunting license to apply, apply for every species that you are interested in...

• Weigh your odds of drawing against the cost of applying to see if it's worth it. For example, if you have never applied for Colorado moose, sheep, and mountain goat, you must apply for a preference point and build three points for each species before you even are considered in the draw. That's three years... per species before you even have a chance in the draw. If you review the odds beyond that 3-point level, they are extremely low for me as a nonresident that I would ever draw in my lifetime...It may or may not be worth applying. That decision is one that each of us will have to make.

• Do I need more credit on the card? Several states require you to cover the costs of the licenses you apply for. For example, New Mexico requires you to buy a...hunting license to apply, but after that, you can apply for all species as long as you front the cost of the permits. If you are unsuccessful, you get a refund. If you applied for elk, deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, ibex, oryx, and barbary sheep, you could be floating... in permit fees. Your refund would include that entire amount minus...application/license fees. Many states also charge the card you used if you are successful. If your card is declined, they move on to the next application. Make sure you have the plan to have the credit you need to apply and that your cards are valid. Other states are similar, including Wyoming and Montana.

• Where is your biggest bang for your buck? Generally, Nevada permits are tough to draw if you only apply for the best hunts. Consider if it's worth the...annual license to apply. The same goes for Idaho, which has no point system; is it worth the cost of the...hunting license to apply? Do some research and apply where it makes sense for your budget. For me, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Arizona always make the list. They may not be yours, but you should consider the pros and cons of each system to see if it makes sense for you.

• Lastly, set a budget to apply and a permit budget. Find the opportunities that make sense and stick to them.

Within your Insider account, the state rules and regulations section and each application strategy article will outline the cost of applying. Before you apply throughout the West each year, you should set a budget and make a plan to apply and/or buy points where you get the most value for your money.

Pre-application planning tools for the upcoming hunting season:

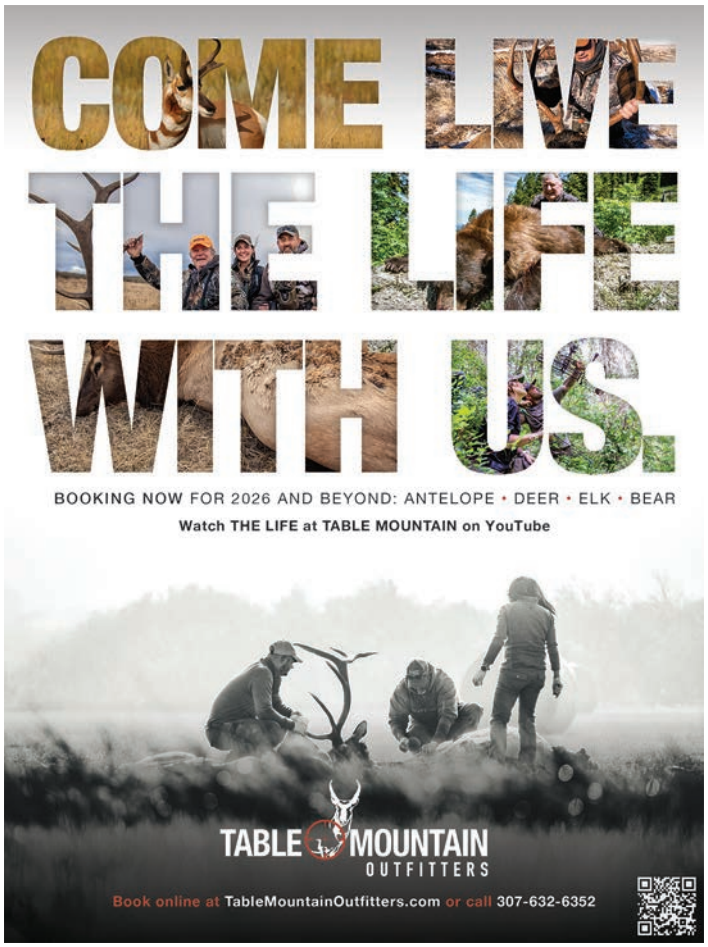
- State Profiles and Rules and Regulations section
- Application Strategy Articles
- Draw Odds
- Filtering
- Point Tracker
- Hunt Planner
- Dates and Deadlines
- Download the GOHUNT mobile app

How much time do you have to hunt?

Before I plan my application strategy, the amount of time I can take off from work needs to be a major consideration. How many days do you have off to hunt? What hunts are most important to you? Do you have co-workers that you need to work with to make sure you are covered before you apply? All of these are worth considering before you plan to apply. I often apply for and try to hunt areas close to my house, which also give me the chance to get a mule deer or an over-the-counter (OTC) elk hunt on the weekends.

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that I am more effective and more satisfied with my experience if I can string several days together to hunt one tag versus trying to piecemeal days off to hunt several tags. For example, since I prefer to bowhunt, I would rather have one good tag and two weeks off to hunt it continuously than two tags where I had two separate weeks off to hunt. Again, everyone is different, but I've been more successful and typically kill a quality animal when I invest all my time into one tag. At my stage in hunting, I would rather kill an older-class buck or bull and hunt fewer tags..

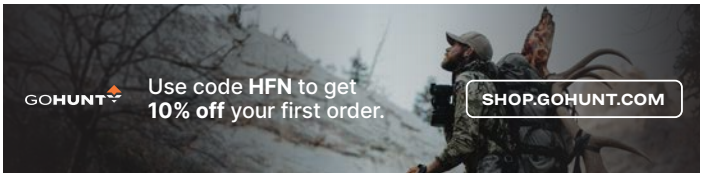
(continued on page 39)



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Pressure Cookers
Tips & Tricks For Catching Fish On Tortured Waters (continued from page 17)

"In shallow, basin-type lakes, finding fish is often a matter of ferreting out the deepest water available," he says. "Depth is relative. But, for example, a 20-foot hole in a lake with lots of 12- to 16-foot water can be a hot zone." Oxygenated inflows, bottom content changes, and subtle changes in weed density or height can concentrate panfish.

To fish a flow-graced flat, Sundin starts with an active presentation. "A glow-red, 3/16-ounce Lindy Frostee Jigging Spoon tipped with 3 or 4 waxworms is a great first strike," he says. "It typically triggers a few active fish, so you can see what's in the area and then tone it down as needed. Where bluegills reign, Sundin tips a Lindy Toad or other small jig with a solo waxie or soft plastic tail. Crappies and perch prefer 1/16- to 1/8-ounce offerings such as Lindy Jigs, Foo Flyers, and Slick Jigs, adorned with natural or artificial tippings.

In deeper systems, crappies may roam the same locations in early winter as they did in late fall—such as the outside edge of a deep weedline or main lake points adjacent to deep water. The fish often slide deeper as winter progresses, but the presence of food and cover can cause them to move shallower. For this reason, Fournier also brushes up on the fishery's forage base. Determining what's on the crappie's menu can steer him toward potential strike zones. An abundance of food in shallow, green vegetation, for example, can cause slab crappies to cruise surprisingly shallow water, offering opportunities for unpressured fish while offshore schools a long cast away are pounded by the masses.

After settling on a spot to fish, Fournier focuses on the best cover or structure available. "Like the tip of a point, or an inside turn on a break or weedline," he says. He drills a grid pattern of holes to allow total coverage of whatever the spot has to offer—such as varying depths, bottom transitions, and other potential hot zones, then checks each hole with sonar, looking for fish. Fournier's first strike is typically a small horizontal hanging jig like the Lindy Toad. "It fishes heavy for its size, so it works equally well in deep water or when punching through shallow weeds," he says. Common tippings include waxies and eurolarvae—typically skinhooked wacky style, though skittish slabs may prefer lengthwise threading. Fournier's second option is a small jigging spoon such as a Lindy Rattln' Flyer or Frostee Spoon, with waxies impaled between the treble tines. With either presentation, Fournier fishes above the crappies, subtly coaxing the fish higher until they take the bait. If a rising crappie falters, he drops the jig to trigger a take.

Dan Johnson is a long time In-Fisherman contributor and marketing manager of LVC Companies.
Guide contacts: Brian "Bro" Brosdahl, 218-340-6051; Jeff Sundin, 218-245-9858.

Giddy About Gadwall
(continued from page 22)

It's not uncommon to see all three species in the same flock, especially in the Central Flyway...

Last year produced the typical waterfowl smorgasbord during our North Dakota hunt. Prospects were not good when we arrived. Mild weather had not pushed any new birds south, and the ones that remained were stale and wise. Cold weather coincided with our arrival, though, and a pulse of new birds elevated our expectations.

The first morning's hunt produced the typical North Dakota smorgasbord that we love. Flocks of green-wing teal buzzed the decoys, and we all got our trigger fingers some exercise. A couple of stud drake widgeon made a fatal mistake. A constant stream of divers staffed the outside edge of the set, and some bluebills ventured too close. We added a couple of greenheads and a boss drake shoveler whose plumage was as nice as they get in North Dakota. The smorgasbord continued until the very last day.

Weary after a week of hard hunting, we weren't too enthusiastic about setting a huge spread the last morning. We'd found a concentration of a couple of hundred birds in a shallow finger off the main lake. There wasn't much for cover, but we found plenty of tumbleweed to hide our pop-up blinds. We tossed out a couple of dozen Hardcore Rugged Series mallards in one bunch and another two dozen widgeon, pintails, and gadwalls in another with a sizeable gap in between. Good-sized ducks wheeled over us nonstop in the faint light, and we could hear hoarse quacks and feeding chuckles from where the birds were pitching in 150 yards from us.

At shooting time, the ducks continued to pour into the shallows not far from us but refused to commit to our decoys. They would show interest, make a wide pass, and then pitch into the live birds. I was sure from their outline and their raspy quacks that the majority of them were gadwall. We reasoned they'd been hunted, we weren't hidden well enough, or they were just being wily ducks. The ducks weren't flaring but just being frustratingly shy. Finally, a couple of singles ventured too close and confirmed our suspicion. My Lab, Samson, retrieved the birds that turned out to be gadwalls, including a handsome drake.

We resolved ourselves to continue playing the game... and were rewarded with more gadwall singles. Eventually, a knot of gray ducks read the script, and three plunged into the pond, and the grass beyond. Samson brought one of the ducks back to the blind before we could even stand up, and my son, Matt, ordered Sam to heal up so he could handle him and retrieve the other birds... He gave the "Fetch it up!" command, and Sam took off on a beeline for the far side of the pond. Halfway across, Matt yelled, "Sam!" He stopped and looked back. "Back!" he ordered him, and he went straight to the far side of the pond. It was only a minute or two rooting in the grass before he was splashing his way back with a fat gadwall in his mouth and delivered it to hand. The third retrieve was a repeat performance, only in an opposite direction down the pond. I didn't realize that it would be Sam's last waterfowl retrieve.

Essential Pre-Application Season Planning Strategies For The Upcoming Hunting Season

(continued from page 37)

Here's how I am going to do that:

A buck or bull needs a few things to grow a large set of antlers: quality feed, genetics, and, most importantly, age. Feed and genetics are out of my control, so hunting areas with bucks or bulls that can reach an older age class is where I put my focus. For a buck or bull to get that old in an OTC or easy-to-draw area, it needs refuge. Refuge in these areas is obtainable in a few ways: remote and rough roadless terrain, private property, or a limiting factor like grizzly bears or wolves that might limit hunting pressure. Using my Insider account and Filtering, I have been using the "odds filter," then the "select season" filter, and, finally, the "trophy potential" filter. Then, I review the individual unit profiles, looking for things like terrain, land ownership, and access descriptions. Within those, I'm finding possible areas to focus my time and attention. Learn more about how to utilize our Unit Profiles for your hunting research here: https://www.gohunt.com/browse/tips-and-tricks/insider/unit-profiles-why-they-are-an-important-tool-to-find-tags-to-put-in-your-pocket.

If trophy hunting is your thing, my advice would be to limit your hunts to just one or two a year and focus on getting permits in areas that can produce a trophy animal. Then, use all of your time to scout and hunt that area.

If your strategy is to fill the freezer, use the draw odds, select season, harvest success, and perhaps, the public land filters to find hunts that meet that objective. An antlerless hunt is a great way to fill the freezer and we provide draw odds for all antlerless and female species hunts.

There are several other types of objectives — all of which you can use your Insider research platform to help you achieve. If you want to get your kids out, we have application strategy articles specific to youth. We also cover the draw odds for states that offer youth- only permits. Antlerless elk, antelope, and deer are great hunts to get kids started in hunting. If you want an adventure hunt, don't forget that we have Alaska as part of our platform. There are many opportunities to get permits over the counter for species like black bears, blacktail deer, caribou and moose in Alaska. For roughly $5,000-$8,000 for a hunt in Alaska, you can use the platform to find, plan, and go on an adventure hunt of a lifetime...

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Wildlife Trafficking Case Results In $20,000 Fine For Montana Man

MFWP https://fwp.mt.gov

John Lewton, a Montana resident, was sentenced Oct. 20 in federal court in Billings after pleading guilty to violating the federal Lacey Act involving the trafficking of wildlife.

Lewton was fined $20,000 and sentenced to one year of probation. As part of his probation, the court prohibited him from engaging in commercial hunting, fishing, trapping or outfitting activities for one year. He is also prohibited from accompanying others in the field who are engaged in commercial hunting, fishing, trapping or outfitting.

In October 2019 Lewton guided a client on a bighorn sheep hunt on public land in Montana. During the hunt, the client harvested a trophy-sized wild bighorn sheep. Lewton subsequently collected the sheep's testicles and sold them to an alternative livestock ranch in Vaughn.

The collection and sale of reproductive material from the wild bighorn sheep violated Montana law, which addresses unlawful wildlife activities and offenses involving alternative livestock ranches.

The case highlights concerns about the unlawful movement and sale of wildlife and wildlife genetic material, particularly when those activities threaten native wildlife populations and undermine conservation efforts. "Montanans have worked hard to protect the wildlife that we all cherish. The individuals in this case, driven by ego and greed, utilized every advantage and technology available to target our biggest and best wildlife," said MFWP's warden investigator Dirk Paulsen.

Montana restricts the import and export of prohibited species, as well as the unlawful sale of wildlife and wildlife parts. These regulations help prevent the introduction and spread of disease and protect the state's native wildlife populations...

FWP warden investigator Bryan Golie has worked on the case since 2020. "It's a sad thing to see how these wild sheep genetics were stolen from our citizens, to ultimately end up being sold to out-of-state high-fenced shooter farms for nothing more than a profit and a trophy on the wall," Golie said.



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