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January 2014

News

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NUMBERS**

2013 Regional Review

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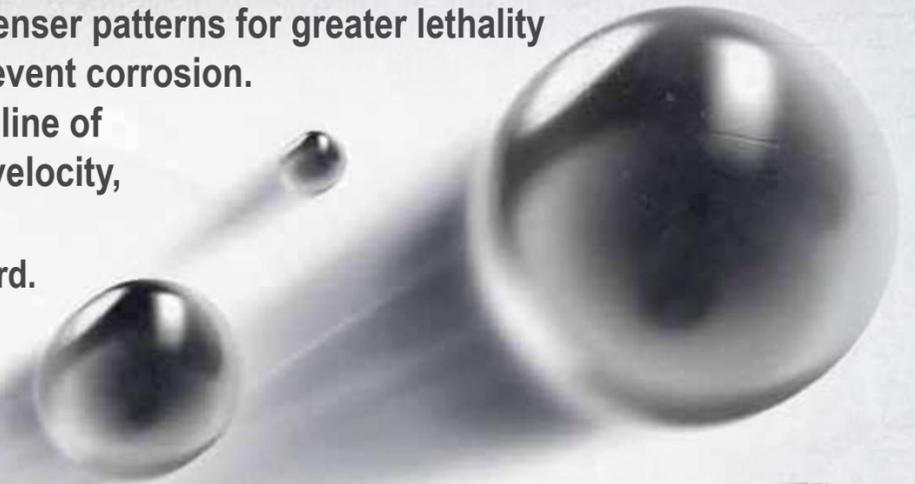
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2013 Montana Big Game Numbers

**Deer Harvest Slightly Higher Than Last
Year In Northwest Montana As Season
Comes To An End** MFWP Hunting Region 1 12/3/13

At the six northwest Montana check stations, whitetail deer harvest finished ahead of last year's totals as the season wrapped up on Sunday.

At the six northwest Montana check stations through the end of the season on Sunday, December 1, a total of 18,262 hunters checked 1,112 white-tailed deer (985 of these were bucks), 134 mule deer, and 56 elk for a 7.1 percent rate of hunters with game. This is slightly higher than the 6.5 percent of hunters with game last year.

Hunters checked about the same number of mule deer, but fewer elk as compared to last year. The number of hunters in northwest Montana was very similar to last year's total.

According to FWP Wildlife Biologist John Vore, whitetail bucks, a reliable indicator of the population, are up significantly from the last three years. "The increase in bucks harvested is a good indication that the whitetail population continues to recover from a recent low in 2009," Vore said. "As expected, based on our spring surveys, many of the bucks harvested were yearlings and 2-year olds." Vore added that there was also a good representation of 5-year old and older trophy bucks in the harvest.

The counts at the six northwest Montana check stations represent a sampling of the harvest and do not represent the complete number of animals taken. Details of total harvest for each hunting district will be known after telephone hunter surveys are completed this spring.

Wolf harvest: Through the end of the general deer and elk season, hunters in northwest Montana have taken 32 wolves. Statewide, 93 wolves have been taken. This is slightly ahead of last year at the end of the general deer and elk season. The wolf hunting season continues until March 15. **Hunters can still purchase a wolf hunting license, but there is a 24-hour waiting period before it is valid.** Wolf trapping begins on December 15. Wolf trappers must purchase a furbearer trapping license, and have completed the wolf trapping certification course to trap wolves. The bag limit is 5 wolves per hunter/trapper in any combination of hunting or trapping.

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TURKEY CALL TUNE-UP

By Bob Humphrey Yamaha Outdoors Tip

Every craftsman has his tools; and the tools of the turkey hunting trade are calls. If you're like me, you probably haven't touched yours since you hung up your turkey vest after the last day of last turkey season... In any case, there's no time like the present to start getting your gear in order once more. It's tune-up time.

Mouth Calls Go through your old diaphragms and give them a good inspection. Toss out and replace any that are moldy, have torn reeds, frayed skirts or are otherwise in disrepair. Incidentally, this is why it's a good idea to do this well before the season.

If your favorite call is hard to get, you'll have time to track down a replacement. And don't be cheap. A diaphragm costs about as much as a 3-1/2-inch magnum shell. When in doubt, throw it out and get a new one. Next it's time to "re-condition" those you intend to keep and re-use. I start by soaking mine in a diluted solution of mouthwash, to kill any lingering bacteria. After they've soaked for a while, I'll take a toothpick and gently separate the reeds. Then lay the calls on a paper towel to dry, leaving the picks in place so the reeds don't "re-stick."

Friction Calls Moving on to friction calls, we'll start with slates, or pot calls. First, wipe the surface with a clean, dry towel. Using the appropriate material, sand the face in one linear direction, i.e. back and forth or up and down - perpendicular to the direction you'll be "drawing" the striker. Which abrasive material you should use will depend on the surface material (use whatever came with the call when you bought it). A fine to medium grit sandpaper works well on a natural slate or soft metal surfaces. For harder materials like glass, plexi-glass and some metals, you may need a coarser or more abrasive scouring pad. Blow off any excess dust, being careful not to touch the surface with your bare (oily) fingers. Now, treat your striker tips similarly, roughening up their surface with the appropriate material.

(continued on page 37)

Hunting Season Ends With Deer, Elk Totals On Par With Last Year In Western Montana

The 2013 general hunting season for big game closed quietly in west-central Montana on Sunday evening, with deer harvests through the Anaconda, Bonner and Darby Check Stations nearly equaling those checked in 2011 and 2012, and elk harvests up slightly from last year.

Numbers of elk and deer checked through the three check stations totaled 1,116 this season, 19 more than the total of 1,097 recorded in 2012.

The white-tailed deer harvest was almost identical to last year's, with 534 whitetails checked this year compared with 536 checked last year. Mule deer harvest was down slightly from 164 in 2012 to 151 this year. The elk harvest of 431 through the three check stations was up from the total of 397 last year, due to a bump in harvest checked at the hunter check station near Darby.

"Elk were more available to hunters in the East Fork (Hunting District 270) this season, and we saw more hunter-trips as well as harvest through Darby as a result," said Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 2 wildlife manager, Mike Thompson.

The elk harvest through Darby of 329 was up 25% from last year, but was 6.5% lower than the five year average. The mule deer harvest of 85 was up 12% from last year, but 27% below the five year average. The white-tailed deer harvest of 192 was 19% higher than last year, and on par with the five year average of 193.

The Bonner Check Station is the region's bellwether for white-tailed deer, according to Thompson, and hunting success for whitetails in the Blackfoot was fairly good, despite the weather. The white-tailed deer harvest at Bonner of 327 was down 9% from last year. While harvest totals are important, FWP biologist Jay Kolbe is also keeping a close eye on the age structure of the animals he checks at the station as a tool for predicting future populations.

"We continued to check a relatively high proportion of younger age-class bucks at Bonner, which suggests that Blackfoot deer hunters can look forward to some good hunting over the next few years," Kolbe said.

The elk harvest through Bonner of 56 was 39% lower than last year and 54% down from the five year average. Weather conditions in the Blackfoot were very difficult for elk hunting all season long, capped by a freezing rain event on Sunday morning, Kolbe observed. The mule deer harvest of 51 was 14% below last year and 43% lower than the five year average.

Hunter-trips and harvests through the Anaconda Check Station this season were as low as or lower than any year in the previous five. Elk harvest at Anaconda totaled 46, while white-tailed and mule deer harvests were each 15.

"In the Upper Clark Fork, hunters never got the weather needed to achieve significant harvest, or even average harvest," reported FWP biologist, Ray Vinkey. "Deer and elk remained widely scattered up to the very end of hunting season, and deer harvest did not even pick up significantly with the rut."

For the second season, FWP biologist Vickie Edwards operated a check station on weekends at the mouth of Fish Creek, in Mineral County. Edwards checked 1,626 hunter-trips in 2013, along with a harvest of 68 white-tailed deer, 20 mule deer and 4 elk—numbers almost identical to those that she tallied last year.

The data and conversations with hunters at check stations will inform hunting season proposals for 2014, Thompson said.

"The check station information could not come at a better time," said Thompson. "FWP will present its recommendations for next hunting season to the Fish and Wildlife Commission on December 12, where the Commission will adopt tentative proposals for public comment. Look for a public meeting near you in January."

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Harvest Success Slows in Final Weekend SW Montana

Region 3 operated six check stations (Alder, Cameron, Divide, Gallatin, Mill Creek and Silver City) on the final weekend of the big game hunting season with most seeing a dip in the hunter success rate at respective stations from the previous week. Weather conditions were considerably mild with some areas in the northern parts of the region dealing with rain.

1,597 hunters passed through check stations with an overall success rate of 7.3%. Silver City again saw the most hunters with 514. Alder had the highest success rate at 11.3%.

2013 R3 Check Station Season Summary

| Check Station | Hunters | White-tailed Deer | Mule Deer | Elk | Hunters w/Game |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------------|------------|------------|----------------|
| Alder* | 928 | 39 | 21 | 62 | 12.7% |
| Cameron | 2,212 | 23 | 33 | 181 | 10.7% |
| Clyde Park** | 762 | 23 | 36 | 21 | 10.5% |
| Divide | 1484 | 11 | 63 | 68 | 9.6% |
| Gallatin*** | 447 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 3.1% |
| Livingston**** | 97 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 15.5% |
| Mill Creek***** | 852 | 1 | 3 | 26 | 3.5% |
| Silver City | 3029 | 54 | 62 | 68 | 6.1% |
| Totals | 9811 | 156 | 222 | 446 | 8.4% |

*Alder was open only 3 weekends/several hunters harvested more than one animal

** Clyde Park was open only 2 weekends

***Gallatin was open only 2 weekends

****Livingston was open the first weekend only

*****Mill Creek was closed during the fourth weekend

(continued on page 12)

Jason Dinius with his mule deer buck taken in Region 3 182", 26-1/2 wide, 5-1/2 eye guards. Biologist said 8+ years old



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OF MOOSE AND MEN

By Mark Reller

Hopefully John Steinbeck will forgive me for ripping off the title of his 1937 novel about incredibly strong friendships and the common dreams that hold odd groups of men together. But it just seemed to be the perfect title for a story about my 44th hunting season here in Montana.

I have some buddies that are the kind of friends that share their favorite hunting spots. Not with the traditional blindfold-on during the drive into camp sort of sharing, but real sharing. While filling out a party elk hunt application for an archery hunt in the Missouri breaks, they actually asked if I wanted to apply in the same Montana moose hunting district that they like. This generous offer came after my boat and I backed out on that same Missouri breaks elk hunt last year, because I foolishly bagged an elk just a few days before our planned hunt and left them scrambling to find another boat. These are good friends.

These friends are among the same guys that showed up in West Yellowstone a couple of years back and spent several January weekends following me around on snow-shoes and x-country skis trying to find what turned out to be non-existent bison.

Such friends share common dreams of hunting some of Montana's more exotic big game animals. I have held the dream of bagging a trophy bull moose since I was in third-grade when my father allowed me to tag along on a Canadian moose hunt, complete with bush-plane ride back into some near-wilderness lake in northern Alberta. I still carry the memories of the boat rides, and his shot on a velvet bull. I was the smallest and was poked in the very back of the bush-plane for the ride out, where I sat on moose quarters for the entire flight.

When I drew one of two bull moose tags for "their" district, it was an odd sort of phone call to make. I knew they would be happy for me, but it also meant I was going to back out, again, on the Missouri breaks elk archery hunt, which we also drew this year. Good friends as they are, all was forgiven, and they wanted to join in on the hunt, and join they did.

Brian shared a tent with me the first of three long weekends that we hunted moose. We both packed bows. That way we could hunt elk as well. He was recovering from a sail boat accident that had broken bones in his face and damaged some teeth. He could hardly operate a bugle diaphragm, yet still managed to locate us an elk to torment. We managed some fish and grouse for dinners. We even found a moose scrape, thanks to the help of some neighboring campers who were also archery elk hunters and stumbled into our campfire at beer-thirty one evening. They told us of a chain of small ponds that were at the end of a three mile long closed road, and shared a secret access point, over a killer ridge, that shaved off nearly two miles of hiking. It was there we found a fresh moose scrape along the shore. That told us there was a bull moose entering the rut. We assembled a ground blind and made plans to return the next weekend.

I made it a long weekend by tacking on a Friday and a Monday. Brian and I were joined by F. Scott and Ron as the elk bugling was heating up. Under difficult conditions the character of men is sometimes revealed and such was the case that weekend when it rained one to two inches every day. Now we are all old enough to come in out of the rain, with our average age at the time at 55 years old, but still young enough to milk every day for as much hunting as we could. Lesser men, when saturated to the bone, day after day, might tend to get a bit cranky. But this elite group of stout-hearted men still found humor and joy at being out in the weather and around the campfire. That first night around the fire, Brian advanced the ball for the cause and shared with me a coordinate where he had spotted what he described as "a moose that was chasing mule deer". I spent two and a half days and nearly 20 miles of hiking coming at that coordinate from all different directions. I found the does and the odd little buck Brian had described, but nary a moose track. Granted I got distracted by elk a couple of times but no moose.

At the end of the weekend, we all coordinated, checked the domestic tranquility indexes or the DTI as Brian calls it, and got the wifely permission slips for the next weekend's hunt. As we gathered for what would be the 8th and 9th days of the hunt there was some troubling news to be shared. Mid-week, some other friends of the group had been using our camp site. From atop the ridge a scant two miles yonder, they had spotted a sow grizzly with two cubs feeding on an elk carcass. They observed with binoculars from a safe distance, said "cool", then backed-off a half mile and started elk bugling again. Wrong choice, before it was over they had used up their pepper spray only to have the grizzlies run off down the very trail they needed for the exit back to camp. As it was 0-dark thirty, they built a large fire and prepared to spend a long cold night on a ridge at nearly 7,000 feet. How long a night was it? The length was not measured in hours, but in the three times over the course of the night that the sow returned and they had to fire pistols to drive her off. (continued)

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Such news was confirmed when F. Scott returned to camp on Friday night to report fresh grizzly tracks in the snow just a mile from our camp. Such news lead me to switch from my strategy of jointly bow hunting elk and moose to picking up the rifle and focusing solely on moose.

Something Ron had been lobbying for since the first weekend. "Sure as can be you will see the moose of a life time at 200 yards and have no way of getting at him with a bow, you will kick yourself forever for that choice," he had wisely counseled.

Saturday morning F. Scott and Ron headed off to where F. Scott had left elk the night before. Since I had found some fresh moose tracks less than a mile from the ground blind the night before, Brian and I headed that way. At sunrise we learned the wind was all wrong to just jump on those moose tracks and follow, so we decided to use the secrete passage route and head directly into the ground blind and try to call for a few hours.

That route allows for some great glassing, so we were slowing creeping in, stopping periodically to study all we could see with the binoculars. We decided that when we hit the closed road to stop at what we had named "the knapweed spot" for a break. It was so named, because in week one, we had found a single large knapweed plant and had spent considerable time debating once we had pulled on it, what to do with it. Should we bury it deep, burn it, or pack it out? It ended up in the Lewis and Clark County landfill.

As we sat in the closed road, now just a modest trail because of the encroaching willows and brush, we took off our packs and started to dig for a treat. We both heard the rumble in the brush off the trail and made eye contact, both silently asking the other if they had heard the same thing. Heads nodded and later we both confirmed we were both thinking, grizzly bear. I grabbed for my rifle just as Brian whispered in a calm and steady tone, "moose", and pointed with minimal motion down the trail.

By the time I rolled my pack around, steadied my rifle and had cross hairs on it, Brian too had laid down in the trail. My disappointment was immense when I saw it was a cow moose not a bull. "Cow" I sighed. In the same calm and steady tone Brian kept me on task, "there is another moose in the brush behind it".

In the heat of that moment I somehow had the safety clutch in the brain engage. I noticed that Brain was in the zone of what was soon to be my muzzle blast. "Move back" I whispered and Brian did, somehow knowing exactly why I was instructing him to do so.

Both moose were now above us, at 150 to 175 yards and walking dead away up the hill, just as Ron had predicted it could happen. I made the classic bull moose call "ooh-ahh" and the bull stopped. The cow walked on and disappeared into the timber. The bull turned his head, but not his body, he was perhaps ten steps from disappearing. "Ooh-ahh, ooh-ahh" I again repeated. He looked in the direction where the cow had disappeared and back at us. "Ooh-ahh" I grunted hoping for a shoulder to appear in the cross-hairs.

F. Scott and Ron were a mile and half away and down the canyon when they heard the first shot. They said they figured it was likely us. At the second shot Ron later explained he turned to F. Scott and said, "finishing shot". On the third shot, F. Scott's confidence in me faltered, "He's missed it and now he is just flinging lead". Actually I was just following Brian's instructions. With his binoculars on the bull, after each shot he would report, "You hit him, now hit him again", to which I dutifully obliged.

Good friends may go hunting with you when you draw a special tag. Really good friends, walk away from their elk hunt, bring you the game carts, help you field dress it, pack it out, butcher it, grind it and wrap it. Recall I mentioned Brian's sailing accident and his limited bugling ability? That same event tore a tendon in his shoulder which would eventually require surgery. Yet there he was, delaying surgery, spotting my moose for me, then helping to pack and cart out moose meat and antlers, bad shoulder, broken face and all. Good friends not only share in your dreams, they became part of making them a reality.

Rattling in a Big One

By: Mark Rohlfing

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For more please go to: www.bowhunting.net



I was perched 20 feet up a big hackberry tree overlooking a creek crossing in northeast KS. I just completed a rattling sequence and was patiently waiting as the sun dropped below the horizon. My eyes caught a faint movement through the trees.

I picked up my binoculars and glassed the buck. He looked heavy with some tall tines, although I could tell he had a weak side, with some injury or broken points. His actions and appearance indicated he was a barrel-chested mature buck and would be a worthy prize.

I was pretty sure he had heard the rattling but gave a couple grunts and doe bleats to try and coax him my way. I believe he already knew exactly where the "fake fight" was but he made a nonchalant circle around the sound in an attempt to get down wind. Stopping to rub and scrape along the way, he crossed the creek and was heading out of sight. I thought it was over so I gave a couple more grunts trying to peak his interest. He turned my way.

He slowed his pace and straightened up. You could see it in his eyes; he was thinking those deer I heard should be right here... He closed the gap to under 25 yards and was in a shooting lane walking slowly in my direction. The dying evening winds brought just enough breezes to him. He was about to realize the whole thing was a fake.

Too late, he'd been fooled. The arrow was good. I watched him tip over after trotting 50 yards. He does not have the highest scoring rack, but appears to be mature and is one of the bigger bodied deer I've ever shot. It's always fun when you fool one of those old bucks!



Author used proven techniques to bring this nice buck in.

Winter Four-Wheeler Fishing

By Steve Hickoff Yamaha Outdoors Tip

Winter fishing involves both frozen and open water. Let's look at what you should and should not do as your four-wheeler access to cold-weather angling goes.

OPEN WATER Many states have generous fishing seasons through the winter months. Angling never stops. While some think of Snow Belt options only in terms of ice, the truth is plenty of open water fishing is available right now in some streams and rivers too.

If you live in a southern state, easy access to fishing spots by four-wheeler is a given. Chances are snow or ice won't inhibit your backcountry trip. Up north however you've got to plot your way through all that nature dishes out.

First check regulations regarding ATV or Side-by-Side access. Next, investigate special angling seasons — and winter stocking schedules — to find action now you might typically wait for later.

If both four-wheeler access and fishing is now legal, hatch a plan to target open water you might only fish in spring and summer. Winter trout need to eat too.

FROZEN WATER Mild weather winter trends insist on safety as ice fishing goes. Ride your four-wheeler to the frozen lake or pond you want to fish. Park your rig on the shoreline where designated spots are often available. It'll be waiting there for you when you're done fishing.

Ice sleds afford the opportunity to transport gear across the frozen water easily on foot. The exercise will do you good as well during this couch-sitting indoor season. Why join a gym when you can get your workout while ice angling?

When done, gather your gear — plus the fish you've caught if you've kept some — and cart it all back to your waiting rig. Load up and make the ride home safely.

WINTER TACTICS Fly fish with a slower presentation now, using nymph patterns and even streamers for winter trout — especially in snow-covered states. Work your presentation just off the bottom. Cast near structure where fish hold. Live bait will work now, as always and small baitfish-imitating spinners are a good move for spin-casting outfits. Keep it simple.

Heavy-duty chest waders (and even a wading staff) are musts right now when fishing open winter water. Take a buddy or two along for safety's sake. Tell friends and family where you're going.

On the ice, keep it simple too. Jig live baits or set tip-ups for a less active approach. Ice thickness will vary on a body of water. Check with other anglers to get a good sense of the conditions. Check yourself as well before you walk out on the ice.

Be safe, have fun and enjoy the times outdoors fishing and riding now with far less pressure than in spring.



Photo: Steve Hickoff

Off-Season Stuff to Keep You Busy

By Steve Hickoff
Yamaha Outdoors Tip

I know, you're bored, waiting on spring turkey season. There's plenty to do now though to keep you busy.

Clean Your Freezer: Eating wild game extends the hunt. Sure, it was plenty fun hunting deer, ducks, geese and turkey last fall, along with everything else. It's now time to enjoy this bounty on the supper table. A quick online search can reveal many recipes that would allow you to swap out venison for beef or burger. A hot chili on a cold winter day is a great thing.



Attend Consumer Shows:

Maybe you're on the bubble. You've enjoyed riding Yamaha ATVs and Side-by-Sides in the past, but those four wheels belong to friends and family members. Maybe you want to know more about owning and enjoying one. Consumer shows are often set up for this reason — to share product and answer questions in a comfortable setting. Unlike trade shows, they cater to you and not buyers. So find one in your local area and check out Yamaha products.

Work-Out Plan: Sure, we all love to ride our four wheels. Truth is, it doesn't help you get into hunting shape. To do that, set up a walking routine, ideally over terrain you'll hunt this spring. Run road races. Join a recreational hoops league. Lift weights. Get ready for the action to come.

Hunt Spring Snows: The conservation order for so-called "light geese" (snows and blues) is likely underway soon in your state or one within driving distance. Check out the regulations.

If you haven't done it, hire an outfitter for a hunt. You'll not only pass the time until spring turkey starts, but also play your conservation part in helping manage these abundant populations.

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Rocky Mountain Front Elk Harvest Up, Deer Harvest Down MFWP Hunting Region 4 12/10/13



Steve Hyde with his Region 4 Buck

Hunters on the Rocky Mountain Front took home elk but fewer mule deer and white-tailed deer than average during the 2013 general big game season, which ended Dec. 1

The numbers were collected at Fish, Wildlife and Parks' check station in Augusta, says Brent Lonner, FWP wildlife biologist.

"The elk harvest was about 25 percent above the long-term average," Lonner says. "Mule deer harvest was approximately 19 percent below the 10-year average, and white-tailed deer was about 20 percent below the 10-year average."

The numbers at the Augusta check station – FWP Region 4's sole biological check station – apply only to a handful of hunting districts on the Rocky Mountain Front.

Elk hunters this year brought in 408 animals (112 bulls, 259 cows and 37 calves) compared to the 10-year average of 308 elk.

Mule deer numbered 303 at the check station (275 bucks, 27 does and one fawn). The 10-year average is 375 animals.

With whitetails, the count in Augusta was 235 (163 bucks, 52 does and 20 fawns), while the 10-year average is 295.

Hunter Numbers Up, Deer Harvest Lower In South Central Montana

MFWP Hunting Region 5 12/2/13

More hunters stopped at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks check stations in south central Montana this year than in 2012, but the deer harvest was down from last year and the long-term average. The number of checked elk was up from last year and well above the long-term average.

At the Columbus check station, FWP wildlife biologist Shawn Stewart reported the lowest number of hunters for any weekend this season—12 percent fewer than the same weekend in 2012 – and fewer deer and elk than last year.

For the entire five-week general season, Stewart checked 1,320 hunters – the most since 2004 and eight percent more than the long-term average. Of those hunters, just 30 percent took home an animal – the lowest percentage since before 1999 and well below the long-term average of 44 percent.

The 182 white-tailed deer checked at Columbus during the season were 22 percent fewer than last year, but near the long-term average of 186. The mule deer harvest was slightly better than in 2012, but 47 percent below the long-term average. For the year, 36 elk were checked at Columbus, well ahead of the long-term average of 19.

At FWP's Big Timber check station, wildlife biologist Justin Paugh reported fewer hunters over the final weekend than the same weekend last year. The deer harvest also was well below last year and the long term average. The percentage of hunters who took home game was the lowest on record for the closing weekend of the year – just 39 percent. The elk harvest remained strong, however, with 14 animals checked compared to 10 during the same weekend in 2012 and 16 over the long-term.

For the entire season, 982 hunters stopped at Big Timber compared to 976 in 2012 and a long-term average of 1,001. The percentage of hunters who took home an animal was the lowest on record, however – just 34 percent compared to a long-term average of 55 percent.

The white-tailed deer harvest was off by 44 percent this year with only 106 animals checked. Paugh checked 144 mule deer, down 40 percent from the long-term average. The elk harvest remained strong all season with 57 elk checked – 10 more than the average season total.

At the Lavina check station, FWP wildlife biologist Ashley Beyer checked 508 hunters with a total of 102 animals over the weekend for a success rate of 20 percent. In 2012, 447 hunters checked 143 animals for a 32-percent harvest rate during the final weekend of the general season. Over the weekend, hunters checked 22 white-tailed deer – half as many as the closing weekend in 2012. Fifty mule deer were checked compared to 65 the previous year. Thirty elk were checked Saturday and Sunday compared to 33 a year earlier.

For the year, 1,922 hunters stopped at Lavina, compared to 1,681 in 2012 and a long-term average of 2,318. This year, 19 percent of the hunters who stopped at Lavina had game compared to 24 percent last year and a long-term average of 33 percent.

At the Laurel check station, FWP wildlife research specialist Jay Watson checked just 174 hunters over the weekend, well below the 232 who stopped during the same weekend in 2012. Hunter success was limited, too, with 27 percent of hunters taking home an animal, compared to 36 percent last year.

For the season, 706 hunters stopped at Laurel. That is 43 fewer than 2012 and 143 fewer than the long-term average. Hunter success was even with last year – with 29 percent of hunters bringing home game – but well behind the long-term average of 37 percent.

This year's white-tailed deer harvest was the lowest since 1999 at the Laurel check station. The mule deer harvest was similar to the past two years, but still below the long-term average.

The five-week general deer and elk season ended Sunday evening. (continued on page 28)

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afternoon. But here's the interesting thing...none of them came on a rail-style tip-up. All the bites came on Frabill Pro-Thermal round tip-ups.

Why? We ran equal numbers of rail and round tip-ups and they were rigged identically. So I concluded that since the round tip-up blocked sunlight, the pike preferred the more natural setting.

That's only one benefit of thermal round tip-ups. I've been in situations with temps in the double digits below zero with blowing snow and round thermals have been the only tip-ups that didn't freeze up. Add that you can stack a half dozen in a five gallon bucket with no tangles or snagged kids, and I'm a big fan.

SCOUTING PANFISH At the beginning of last season I was introduced to a new, inexpensive tip-up design that got me rethinking tip-ups as a tool for panfish.

Aptly named "The Ice Spider," it features legs that deploy in seconds and fold up neatly for easy storage. What lead to a whole new way of fishing panfish for me, though, are The Spider's dual trip settings, one with more resistance for walleyes or the use of larger baits, and a lighter setting for panfish. The latter, combined with Frabill's Ultra Glide spool shaft, means crappies and bluegills can suck in a panfish jig on light line and never be the wiser.

At first, the idea of using a tip-up for panfish was a bit weird. Yet, the longer I thought about it, the more it made sense. We started using Frabill Spiders to scout for active main basin crappies and discovered it was possible to stay on roaming biters by using a wide spread of tip-ups.

The system is pretty simple. We'd cut jig holes over main basin crappie spots, and then on the outskirts of the area we'd cut a series of three holes for every location we planned to set a Spider tip-up. Then we'd hole hop to find fish, and as soon as a Spider would go off, we'd run to it...one guy pulling up the biting fish while the other two dropped jigs on the active feeders in the two adjacent holes.

We've found the system also works well for scouting panfish over massive weed beds, especially funnel areas that fish use like highways.

DEEP SNOW HACK Tip-ups and deep snow don't typically play nice, especially when you're already working with a foot to three feet of ice in February. Of course, one approach is to shovel out the snow around the hole, but

then the flag is hard to see. That also leaves the hole exposed to freeze quickly.

With input from anglers in snow-heavy regions like Michigan's Upper Peninsula and northern Canada, Frabill developed a tip-up that performs like no other in deep snow. Aptly named the Snow Shoe, it features a nearly-indestructible composite base in the shape of a snow shoe to ride high in the snow. It has a long Ultra Glide spool shaft to reach down into the water for near frictionless free spooling off an extra large spool with 200 feet of line capacity. It also comes with a 17.5-inch flag stem to remain visible from afar. I know that when winter dumps on us, I'll be ready.



GOING DIGITAL No other tip-up demonstrates better how far we've come from the first handmade stick-styles. Called the Calibrator, it's basically a Snow Shoe with a tiny digital LCD mini computer that records the depth of your bait, time of bite, time since the bite and the amount of line taken by the fish. (continued on page 42)



Progressive Tip-Ups And Tactics

By Steve Pennaz

The simple design of the rail style tip-up – like the Frabill Arctic Fire – is classic and functional, and my choice in most ice fishing situations. There are, however, situations where different styles perform better.

There are ongoing bait shop debates about the impact of sunlight coming through an open ice hole, particularly when snow cover cuts light penetration significantly. Some anglers refill a hole with ice shavings or snow to reduce light, particularly when fishing shallow and/or clear water. Others see no reason to take this step.

I am a fan of sight-fishing, and in the days before Aqua-Vu underwater cameras, I spent years in a blacked out fishhouse to maximize visibility. Besides learning how easily walleyes spook in shallow water, I found that nearby holes would allow a beam of light to penetrate when the sun was high. The fish didn't seem to care about the light, but then most of the time I was targeting bottom-huggers like perch.

Then a few pieces started falling into place. Why did suspended 'gills seem to shy away from larger ice holes? Why did shallow-running pike seem to drop more baits than deep pike, particularly when fishing tip-ups? Did light have a bigger impact on fish than I realized? Or was movement the problem...the jiggle of a rod-tip or tip-up going off?

Then last winter, while taping an episode of "Stone Cold Fishing" on Lake of the Woods, something happened that really opened my eyes.

We were targeting giant pike with both live and dead baits on a shallow flat. We kept the baits high, just 2-3 feet below the ice in 8 feet of water. The first fish, a thick 14-pounder, hit a live sucker. The second, a bruiser pushing 20, took a dead cisco. In total we had eight flags that

Spoony Tunes

By Mitch Eeagan



Jigging spoons are Joe Balog's go-to all winter long. And this jumbo perch came utilizing Humminbird sonar coupled with an Aqua-Vu underwater camera to get his lure in the fish's face. Photo by Bill Lindner Photography

Flip, flash, flutter and fall; jigging spoons have it all. Whether tipped with livebait, fake or sporting nothing but a plain Jane hook, jigging with spoons is one of the deadliest tactics for taking fish through the ice.

But not any old spoon is going to work wonders every time out. The lure's shape, metal-makeup and the thickness of the stamp not only dictates the action, but determines what performs best at different depths and on various species.

UPS AND DOWNS Enter ice-fishing expert Mark Brumbaugh; the... touring walleye pro that's no stranger to the ups and downs of using jigging spoons year round. And he has his favorites, especially during days when fish are in a funk.

"First of all, thin [in thickness] spoons are going to have the most 'natural' action," says Brumbaugh. "They are usually wider in shape and lighter in weight, too, which causes the bait to waft with the water currents; just like the very forage fish are feeding on."

Brumbaugh then revealed his go-to spoon – Custom Jigs and Spins' Slender Spoon. This lure is both slight in thickness and tapers ideally from head to foot. Unlike many other ice-fishing experts, Brumbaugh uses the Slender Spoon just the way it is right out of the package—putting no "secret" torque to it with needle-nose pliers in an attempt to alter the action. Slender Spoons require no such tweaking.

Through trial and error, Brumbaugh will determine what 'swirl' induces strikes; be it quick-and-aggressive foot-long lifts and drops of the rod tip, to nothing more than a vibration of the wrist. Oftentimes, you'll find him deadsticking with spoons; the only action coming from lake currents or the liveliest minnow in the bucket.

"A lot of anglers don't realize that a lightweight spoon never stops stirring," Brumbaugh asserts. "When you hold a rod at rest, the tip's still shaking a little – even when the rod is camped on a bucket, the lure delicately whirls with any current. It's that continuous movement, ever so slight, which gently reflects light, mimicking the scaly sheen of baitfish."

However, it's not just the spoon that makes a fish hit. To that, Brumbaugh is very specific about choosing his entire ensemble of gear.

First of all, there's the largest accessory: the fish house. Brumbaugh's is a Frabill Thermal Predator Flip-Over Shelter. He asserts that fishing from a shanty improves the catch times two. "It's all due to cutting winter's winds, which can blow so hard they grab and pull on what little line is out in the open between rod tip and hole." Huddled in a shelter, he's able to concentrate on every flicker of the spoon, as well as detect the slightest nip.

Brumbaugh's rod and terminal tackle are lighter than one might expect, too, even when he's after fish that register as trophies.

He prefers a medium-light action rod for engaging multiple species. This rod action bodes well with 6-pound-test, 2-pound-diameter superline spooled as the main line; the fine diameter line maximizing the Slender Spoon's native action. (continued on page 42)

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Say Hello To Success: Where to chase the Fish this Month

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Travis Mastrude with steelhead

Winter has come to Montana in a rush. December's prolonged sub-zero temperatures have frozen up all area lakes and reservoirs now, making for ideal conditions for area hard-water fishermen, and you won't have to travel far to find hungry fish now. Only the heartiest of fishermen and women fish over ice here in Montana. The benefits of ice fishing in January are that things are quite different than the summer months, as a lot less folks will be willing to brave the cold elements, and the low numbers of anglers on these lakes will keep fishing good for those that venture out. On a typical winter weekend, you can expect a handful of people fishing, and on a weekday, you may have it all to yourself. If you are not into ice fishing, a few open water fishing opportunities still exist as well, but mainly it's going to be over ice. Let's take a look at a few options to consider.

HEBGEN LAKE

Anglers looking for ice fishing action can head out now to Hebgen Lake, around the West Yellowstone area for some good winter fishing for rainbows and big brown trout. Jiggling near the bottom of the lake

for big trout using Rat Finkies, Swedish Pimples or a simple colored jig combined with a trout's favorite, a nightcrawler or maggot will entice these fish to bite. Hebgen Lake is quite large at more than 16 miles long and 4 miles wide, making it quite the attraction for winter fishing. The trout in Hebgen are large as well, averaging near the 16 inch mark. Fish the various bays near shore for excellent trout fishing. The Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake in particular is a popular place to start. Highway 287 parallels the lake on the north side, allowing for easy road access. Several roads on the south side provide good fishing access and numerous campgrounds as well. Hebgen's quality fishing combined with its scenic beauty make for an awesome day of fishing.

THOMPSON LAKE CHAINS

These lakes located between Libby and Kalispell along Hwy. 2 will be iced up and in prime shape to fish. You can fish for northern pike that average 5 to 10 pounds, yellow perch that are plenty, schools of kokanee salmon and big rainbow trout that will fight you till the end. This is a magnificent chain of lakes with

endless fishing opportunities for the avid iceman. Lakes to fish include the Upper, Middle, and Lower Thompson, Loon Lake and Crystal Lake. Average ice thickness will vary from 10 inches to 3 feet. Good ice fishing tactics to cover a lot of ground would be to load up a sled and pull around your gear with an ATV. Set-up, fish for awhile, then move on. Access is excellent on all three lakes with several nice fishing sites that provide easy to access camping areas.

HOLLAND LAKE

Holland Lake has excellent fishing for rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and whitefish. Kokanee salmon and some bull trout are also found in Holland Lake, located a short drive up a gravel road from Hwy. 83 north of the town of Seeley Lake. During the off-season the lake is not overly used and can be great for a weekend get-away. Best fishing will be near the shorelines. Try using a Glo-Hook tipped with maggots or perch eyes for good winter action on trout. You'll have to search a bit deeper for any kokanee in the lake, typically around the 30 foot mark to start. Drop a Swedish Pimple with a Glo-Hook rig down for suspended kokes. They'll be hard to find, but once you find 'em, it's like finding a gold mine as these fish are delicious. Covering lots of ice should improve your chances of finding some nice kokanee, normally in the 12 inch range.

DEADMAN'S BASIN RESERVOIR

Lying out in the middle of nowhere in the vast prairie lands of eastern Montana near the small town of Ryegate is where you'll find this 2,000 acre reservoir. Plenty of rainbow trout that often exceed

2 pounds and 14 inches are common. Pesky brown trout, perch and tiger musky also inhabit the lake. It's one of the few places in Montana where you can pull out a giant musky. The biggest, a 38.75 pound giant was caught by Leo Cantin in September of 2012. Kokanee salmon can also be snagged through the ice now. The wind will normally come into play here in this open range country, so be prepared. Your nearest town will be Harlowtown, about 20 miles away. The low fishing pressure, coupled with the lake's isolation give these fish an opportunity to grow to a descent size in this reservoir. Your standard ice fishing techniques apply here. Small spinners or live baits on jigs work best. Expect perch to be biting here as well, and lots of them.

LAKE MARY RONAN

If you are after yellow perch, you'll want to make the trip up to Lake Mary Ronan as these fish should be very aggressive by mid-January. They will be rising off the bottom to catch jigs on the drop. Gold and perch colored lures will also attract the perch. Location is the key here. Target weed beds that are around the boat launch area or the north end of the lake. Move and drill holes until you find biters. Kokanee style hooks and Glo-Hooks with scent baits like Garlic Corn, Powerbait and perch eyes will put more fish in the bucket. Start out at the 60 foot mark and move up to find the perch. The Logan State Park boat ramp area is a good area to start. Kokanee salmon can also be caught now with a Glo-Hook tipped with maggots. Kokanee love this combo. You can find schools of salmon in the 30 foot mark to start.

HOLTER DAM

The best walleye fishing of the winter won't be under the ice of frozen reservoirs, it's the open waters below large dams that will provide some good fishing for those who are looking for open water opportunities. Holter Dam, Houser Lake, Canyon Ferry Dam, and the Fort Peck Dam area will all be fishing well in January. Walleye and rainbow trout on the Missouri River below Holter Dam is well known for its fine fishing, and just because it's the dead of winter, doesn't mean the fish stop biting. These river fish are hungry, many of them are large, and all of them can be caught right now with a minnow, (real or artificial), impaled on a heavy jig. Best tactics are to drift a rubber-tailed jig baited with a minnow in the rubble to get into the walleye strike zone. Remember, if you are not hanging up, you're not in the zone.

Email us your fishing photos:
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CANYON FERRY RESERVOIR

Ice fishing Canyon Ferry will be awesome this winter. While the walleye fishing over ice may not provide the action you are used to here, the perch and rainbow trout will give you plenty to cheer about, and you won't have to go deep to find the trout. Fishing from 6 to 9 feet below the ice should produce trout now. Try Kit's Tackle's Marabou jig or Glass Minnow Yellow Perch. These home-town products will catch the fish on Canyon Ferry. You can also tip a jig with a nightcrawler along the bottom to pick up yellow perch. Maggots also work on perch. Your best bet on perch is to find a submerged fallen tree or structure and fish down around it, as these perch will naturally be looking for shelter and hiding spots. Early morning and last light are the best times to fish, especially during and on both sides of a full moon. Night fishing works too. The walleye seem to go dormant under the ice in winter, but you may encounter a hungry one that isn't following the normal fishing calendar.

Trout numbers remain high in Missouri River

MFWP

Fish surveys this year indicate rainbow and brown trout numbers remain above the long-term average in the Missouri River between Holter Dam and the town of Cascade, says a state fisheries biologist. State fisheries crews this fall estimated 5,194 rainbow trout greater than 10 inches long per mile near the town of Craig on the Missouri. Not only is that above the long-term average of 3,174 rainbows per mile, but continues a trend of above average numbers over the past three years: 6,034 per mile in 2011 and 7,312 in 2012.

This year's population was bigger in size and slightly lower in abundance than the past two years, says Fish, Wildlife and Parks fisheries biologist Grant Grisak, which is typical as the current population reaches its maximum size.

"This year," Grisak says, "87 percent of the rainbow trout in the Craig section were 15 inches long or greater, and 35 percent of the population was 18 inches long or longer."

Next year, the population should return to normal levels, unless an unusually high water event occurs in the spawning tributaries, Grisak says. High water in the Missouri River tributaries typically results in high rainbow trout production.

Brown trout in the Craig section at 10 inches long and greater were estimated at 745 per mile. The long-term average is 578.

In the Cascade section, near the town of Cascade, the estimate for rainbow trout 10 inches long and greater was 2,260. The long term average is 1,551 per mile.

Brown trout in the Cascade section 10 inches long and greater were estimated at 447 per mile. The long term average is 387.

Brown trout populations are sampled in the spring and rainbow populations are sampled in the fall.

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Forecast Pegs 2014 Spring Chinook Return Double Over This Year; Snake River Wild Above Average

Columbia Basin Bulletin <http://www.cbulletin.com/429223.aspx>

Columbia River upriver spring and summer chinook salmon returns are expected to rebound a bit in 2014, coming in above the 10-year averages, according to preseason projections produced this week by the U.S. v Oregon Technical Advisory Team.

The forecast released...by TAC's state, tribal and federal officials predicts that the "upriver" spring chinook return next year will total 227,000 adult fish to the mouth of the Columbia River.

Such a return would almost double the 2013 return of 123,100 adult upriver spring chinook and better the recent 10-year average of 175,000.

The spring chinook return includes wild fish from both the upper Columbia River (endangered) and Snake River (threatened) stocks that receive special protections under the ESA.

The new forecast says that about 42,200 "wild" Snake River spring/summer chinook should return to the mouth of the Columbia.

"The Snake River wild return is going to be above average," said Stuart Ellis fishery biologist for the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. The 2014 preseason forecast for wild Snake River wild spring/summer chinook returns would be nearly double last year's total of 21,900 and the recent 10-year average of 24,000.

"That would be the fourth highest run on a data set going back to 1979," Ellis said. The only better Snake River wild spring chinook returns were 63,000 in 2001, 52,000 in 2002 and 51,000 in 2003.

The optimistic forecasts for spring chinook returns in general are because 2013 witnessed the third highest "jack" chinook counts on record "and we had pretty good returns of 4-year-old fish."

Jacks are fish entering their third year of life who return to spawn after spending one year in the Pacific Ocean. And a certain portion of each year's run returns to the Columbia-Snake system as 5-year-olds after growing for two years in saltwater.

Returning spring chinook salmon adults are comprised of lower river (originating from tributaries downstream from Bonneville Dam) and upriver (upstream from Bonneville Dam) components. Adult returns are comprised of Age-4, Age-5, and Age-6 fish. Age-3 fish are referred to as "jacks", and are typically male.

Spring chinook entering the lower Columbia River during mid-February to mid-March are predominantly larger, Age-5 fish destined for lower river tributaries.

Age-5 chinook are dominant throughout March and reach peak abundance in the lower Columbia River by late March, according to a joint state staff report prepared by the Oregon and Washington departments of fish and wildlife.

Smaller Age-4 fish enter in increasing numbers after mid-March, reaching peak abundance during April.

Upriver spring chinook returning to areas upstream of Bonneville Dam, including the Snake River basin, begin to enter the Columbia River in substantial numbers after mid-March and generally reach peak abundance at Bonneville Dam in late April to early May. Most wild spring chinook entering the Columbia River are listed under the federal ESA.

The new TAC forecasts predicts that the upper Columbia return will total 24,100 adult upriver spring chinook to the mouth of the Columbia, up from 2013's total of 18,000.

The predicted upper Columbia wild return is 3,700 fish, which would match the 2013 return of 3,600.

The upper Columbia summer chinook return to the mouth of the Columbia in 2014 is predicted to be 67,500 adult fish, as compared to 2013 run of 67,600. The predicted 2014 run would be 500 fish better than the recent 10-year average. The 2013 return totaled 67,700...



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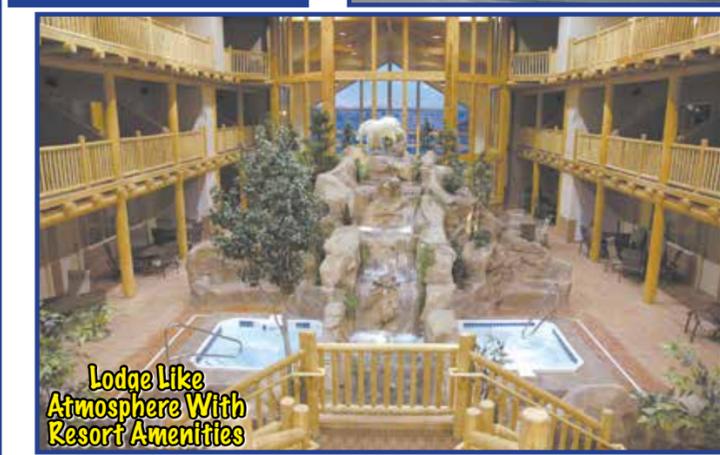
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It's All In The Details

By: Jason Herbert
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"My brain's just like a big computer... OK. I'm kidding. I'm really not that bright. In fact, I even struggle with my smartphone." I couldn't help but laugh. Good natured host of ScentBlocker's Most Wanted Larry Woodward was having some fun during a recent interview. His brain may not operate exactly like a computer, but in reality, he's probably the most detail oriented whitetail hunter I've ever spoken to.

While most hunters appreciate the meat on the table, they hunt as sport. For Larry Woodward though, hunting is his livelihood. Larry has to consistently kill big bucks on camera for his career. Larry's been guiding hunters, fishermen and working in outdoor video for nearly his whole adult life. In order to be as successful as he has in this cutthroat industry, he's got to be doing something right. So, he and I spoke recently about exactly why and how he does what he does to consistently get on mature whitetail bucks.

Scent Control: "Scent control is an absolute must." Larry explained what many of us have come to believe to be true- that bucks cannot know that we are hunting him. "I keep a case of ScentBlocker Trinity Ti4 in my truck at all times and use that stuff on everything. I spray all of my gear until it shines." Woodward even explained to me that he and his cameramen scrub their boots in scent free wash, let them air dry and then spray down with the potent scent eliminating spray. "The soles of those boots never touch anything other than the ground. They've never even seen a truck floorboard". Even with his most detailed scent control regimen of showering, garment care and liberal spraying, Larry always still plays the wind.

Scent control is especially important for people with limited hunting access. "Scent control is huge for the guys hunting small properties. There's no way to guarantee that big old buck will stick around, and if a hunter is consistently stinking up the only patch of woods he has access to hunt, he'll guarantee the buck WON'T be there."
Entrance/Exits: "So many hunts are over before they even get started." Simple, but true. The deer do not realize (or care) whether a hunter is coming, going or hunting. They just perceive human presence as danger. Larry will not hunt a stand if he thinks at any point his wind will blow toward the deer or where he anticipates them to be. He will wait until everything is just perfect before hunting a stand.



Larry Woodward and co-host Bob Richardson with two beautiful mature bucks

Larry has stands that often go un hunted because the conditions never were perfect.
Stand Placement: Speaking of stands, I asked Larry about stand placement. "We usually like to get about 30 feet high, to make sure my cameraman and I do not get busted."
 (continued)

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We've got a lot of gear and need to get away with movement that will not be tolerated much lower." I asked about the hunters who are not using a cameraman or who simply are not comfortable that high. "What matters most is that you are well hidden and that your wind will be right. A lot of times we're in areas that do not have thick trees but will make for great TV, so we just hunt higher." Larry prefers to hang several stands leaving him many options when it comes time to hunt. He'll have some close to the bedding area, near a small Whitetail Institute food plot and everywhere in between.

Data: "I depend on my Cuddeback cameras to tell me everything I need to know." I have a few farms I hunt near home and simply cannot be at them all at once." What a problem to have! But in reality, Larry makes a great point. We hunters, whether we are hunting a small farm or several large ones, cannot be in the woods all the time. Larry depends on his trail cameras to tell him what the deer are doing, when they are doing it and how he should best set up on one. Trail cameras have become an indispensable tool for many hunters. As always, hang them a bit high, aim them down at the target area and be sure to lock each camera to the tree to help keep people honest.

Other Hunters: "Come the first week of November, every hunter south of the Mason/Dixon line is hunting in Pike County, Illinois. I'm serious... I see more out of state license plates there than local ones." Even the fabled Pike County has to deal with hunting pressure... "Some of the properties I'm on are lined with a fresh batch of outfitted hunters, who paid good money to shoot a buck, week in and week out throughout the season.

Adapt: "Right now... acorns trump everything". Larry was explaining that in the area he hunts right now, many cornfields have not been picked and the acorn crop is abundant. Instead of waiting for deer to come to him, Larry continues to hunt stands that he knows will have deer nearby. There's no sense wasting time in an unproductive location, find the preferred food and the deer will be close. He looks for large concentrations of droppings to help pinpoint where the deer are feeding heavily.

As far as sign goes, Larry pays attention to scrapes, rubs, and tracks. He also factors in what phase of the rut the deer are in to help devise his plan. In the early rut stages, Woodward enjoys using a doe decoy to help lure in that wise old buck who may not just bite on rattling and grunts alone.

Be Realistic: "Hunting is supposed to be fun. So many people watch too much TV and read all the magazines and think they shouldn't shoot anything less than 4 1/2 years old. In reality, on most properties hunters across the country have access to will not hold a mature buck." Larry raised a very good point. In my home state of Michigan, there are certain areas where a 2 1/2 year old buck is considered mature. Larry described his stomping grounds of Missouri as very similar. Believe it or not, even TV show host Larry Woodward has to work for hunting permission, and has to share access with others.

Some Things Never Change: I really enjoyed talking with Larry. I learned a lot and he inspired me to get out and find a new buck or two to hunt. He reminded me that with the help of his ScentBlocker gear, he's been able to get away with so much over the years. Still, when Larry does make a mistake somehow, he analyzes every aspect of it and tries to make it a positive learning experience. He may not be a supercomputer but the lessons learned from his old school logic and woodsmanship skills are timeless.

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HUNTING & CONSERVATION NEWS

FWP Agreement Covers Selected BOR Lands in Phillips County MFWP

A memorandum of understanding between Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation allows about 3,700 acres of federal land near Wagner in Phillips County to be specifically designated as being open to the public.

According to Acting FWP Region 6 Hunting Access Coordinator Tim Potter Jr., the new 20-year agreement covers federal lands associated with Reclamation's Milk River Project. The Milk River Project was authorized by Congress for the primary purpose of irrigation, but the Project also provides incidental benefits for public recreation, fish and wildlife and flood control along the Hi-Line. Provisions are included in the agreement to allow it be renewed for an additional 20 years later if both parties concur.

"The South Phillips BOR signing project will be the first of many projects FWP and Reclamation would like to pursue," Potter explained.

The agreement allows FWP employees to install, monitor, and maintain signs along these Reclamation lands to facilitate public access for hunting and other recreational use. FWP will be responsible for all related planning, development, purchasing, and operation and maintenance activities associated with the new public signing project.

"This agreement will allow multiple signs to be placed on the Reclamation lands that will help hunters and other recreationists know for sure when they are on public property in the area," Potter said. "Maps of the lands will be available through FWP's Region 6 offices."

RMEF Conserves 3,329 acres of 'Best of the Best' Wyoming Elk Country RMEF

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation worked with conservation-minded landowners, who are also long-time RMEF members, to permanently protect 3,329 acres of critical elk habitat along the eastern front of Wyoming's Laramie Range.

"This transaction not only protects high wildlife habitat values and thwarts the potential threat of increasing development, but it's also the first conservation easement in Platte County," said Blake Henning, RMEF vice president of Lands and Conservation. "The location is significant since subdivisions are in the works less than five miles away. This action may encourage nearby landowners to consider conservation over development as they go forward."

"Conservation easements can play a key role with willing landowners in conserving the 'best of the best,'" said Ryan Amundson, habitat extension biologist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. "This property is one of those key properties."

Located adjacent to the Medicine Bow National Forest, Bureau of Land Management land and State land, the acreage also provides vital year-round forage, water and shelter for mule and white-tailed deer, pronghorn and other wildlife. The easement also provides connectivity of the public lands and contiguous habitat between summer and winter ranges.

Cottonwood Creek and its tributaries meander through the property creating riparian corridors with cottonwood galleries transitioning to mixed grass prairie and shrub-steppe habitat.

"The open ridges, in combination with the Wheatland area's famous winds, provide open foraging areas in winter months for all these mentioned species," added Amundson. "Thank you to RMEF for your efforts in keeping agricultural lands and important wildlife habitats intact in southeastern Wyoming."

HUNTING & CONSERVATION NEWS



Researchers Study Southwest Pronghorn Antelope Herds WG&F

Wildlife researchers with the University of Wyoming, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Bureau of Land Management are cooperating on a project to study pronghorn antelope in the Bitter Creek, Baggs, and Red Desert pronghorn antelope herds.

According to biologists, both herds are under growing pressure from increasing human presence and have seen declines in numbers and the ability to recover from hard winters over the past 20 years, primarily because fawn production is very low. The intent of the study – Factors Influencing Pronghorn Survival and Reproduction in South-Central, Wyoming – is to provide credible information to industry, the Game and Fish, and land management agencies such as the BLM, that are involved in permitting energy development in south-central Wyoming. In this study, the Bitter Creek and Baggs pronghorn antelope herds are the study herds, or impact herds, and the Red Desert herd is the control herd because there is little to no impact from roads and industry.

This past November, 130 adult doe pronghorn antelope were captured from a helicopter where biologists with the Native Range Capture Services used net guns to capture the pronghorn and transport them though the air to a mobile work station for examination and testing.

"Each pronghorn was aged, weighed, their blood tested for pregnancy and disease, and their body fat measured," said Baggs wildlife biologist Tony Mong.

Fecal samples were collected to determine pronghorn stress levels and each animal was fitted with a collar. The proposal for this three-year study specifies that thirty-five animals in each study area will be fitted with GPS collars, which will record locations for three years. Twenty-five additional animals in each study area will be fitted with VHF collars to bolster the sample for survival estimation. The pronghorn will be monitored from the air on a bimonthly basis. The collars will be retrieved once an animal dies or after the collars are automatically released.

Mong said the research project has four objectives:

- Evaluate and compare pronghorn survival and reproductive output in two areas that contain oil and gas fields and one reference study site in south-central Wyoming
- Identify areas of crucial pronghorn winter range in south-central Wyoming
- Evaluate and compare pronghorn behavioral and physiological responses to infrastructure associated with well pads and a site that has received very little gas/oil pressure in south-central Wyoming
- Determine if there are fences that may be impeding habitat selection or migration movements within each of three study areas in south-central Wyoming

"This study will provide an opportunity to better understand the influence of oil and gas fields on the survival and reproduction of pronghorn in south-central Wyoming," Mong said. "The study will provide direct measures of survival, population productivity and resource selection, delineate crucial winter ranges and critical migration corridors, and provide information on fences that may be limiting habitat selection, migration, and winter range..."

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REGIONAL NEWS



Springs Man Sentenced In Poaching Incident

A fifty-year-old Colorado Springs man was sentenced in Prowers County on Oct. 23 for numerous wildlife violations. The conviction of Jay Beaman was the result of an investigation by Colorado Parks and Wildlife that took place in Prowers, Cheyenne, Kiowa and El Paso counties.

The District Attorney's office initially charged Beaman with eight counts, including two felonies. The charges were reduced with a plea deal.

"This whole case began with a call from a person in the field who noticed a man hunting deer while not wearing the required blaze orange garments," said Kevin Mahan, a district wildlife manager in Lamar for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. "This shows the importance of people calling in even small wildlife violations. In this case, what started out as a small violation, turned into numerous wildlife violations."

Beaman pled guilty to felony willful destruction of wildlife, illegal possession of a trophy class whitetail deer, and hunting without a proper and valid license. These illegal activities occurred near Holly, Colo., on Dec. 5, 2012. Beaman was ordered by the Court to pay fines in the amount of \$10,637.50 and will serve two years on probation. During the probation period, the Court ruled that Beaman will not be allowed to hunt or be around hunting in any way.

"While penalties could have been more severe, the most important aspect of this conviction is that this individual will no longer be participating in hunting related activities while on probation or possibly for life if suspended by the Parks and Wildlife Commission," Mahan said. "The Prowers District Attorney's Office did a great job on this case and worked with us to achieve this plea."

Beaman still faces a suspension hearing process through the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission. He faces a possible lifetime suspension of his hunting and fishing privileges in Colorado as well as 38 other states that are part of the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.

If you suspect that a wildlife crime is being committed, note the location and, if possible, get a description of people and vehicles. Call local law enforcement or Colorado Parks and Wildlife as soon as possible. You can also call Operation Game Thief at 1-877-265-6648. Callers contacting the OGT line can remain anonymous and may be eligible for a reward if the information leads to a citation or arrest...

Firing Up Aerators At Henrys Lake In Preparation For A Difficult Winter

Ice is a fact of life for nearly half the year at Henrys Lake.

During a typical winter the fish in the lake are able to handle the difficult conditions fairly well, but a number of potentially negative factors have prompted fish managers at Idaho Fish and Game to do all they can to mitigate for potential damages.

Fortunately Henrys Lake happens to have one of the largest man-made aeration systems in the country already in place to help keep a small portion of the lake ice-free, allowing for much needed oxygen to enter the lake water trapped under the ice. Rather than wait for conditions to turn bad, the aerators are now being turned on.

Some of the same factors that make Henrys Lake a world-class fishery able to produce trophy trout can also lead to major problems when a variety of negative factors coincide. Henrys Lake is shallow, normally only averaging about 16 feet, but this year the water level is lower, and higher than normal fish numbers because of natural reproduction mean more fish packed into a smaller space.

The lower water also allowed for sunlight to penetrate deeper, resulting in greater than normal growth of fish and decomposing aquatic vegetation. But when the lake freezes over and sunlight cannot penetrate, the vegetation can use up much of the dissolved oxygen in the water. Typically during the winter the ice is about 20 inches thick at Henrys Lake.

"This year we are especially concerned due to the lower lake level combined with the high biomass of fish and aquatic weeds, both of which consume oxygen during the winter once the ice and snow cover the lake," said Dan Garren, the Upper Snake regional fisheries manager.

While the aerators are an attempt to make a difference, they can only keep about 20 acres of the 6,200 acre lake free of ice. Fortunately nature also provides a little assistance by keeping areas near creek mouths, springs and upwelling areas oxygenated.

The cost of the electricity to operate the aerators can run into the tens of thousands of dollars, so the decision to flip the switch is not made lightly.

"We decided to be as proactive as we could, we won't be able to save all the fish if things get really tough, but we will be able to provide an additional area of refuge," Garren said. "Fish and Game will be monitoring oxygen levels in the lake throughout the winter, and will evaluate any winterkill in May, once the ice leaves and we can implement our annual population monitoring efforts."

To learn more about conditions at Henrys Lake, contact the Upper Snake Region office at 208-525-7290 or the Henrys Lake Hatchery at 208-558-7202.



Hunters Shoot-Up ASA

Idaho Fish and Game conservation officers gave out 10 citations and four warnings over a three-hour enforcement operation using an Artificially Simulated Animal (ASA).

On October 19, in Unit 56 south of Sublett, officer's set-up a doe mule deer ASA near a major road. The goal of the project was to address concerns from the public regarding adults harvesting antlerless deer in the area, an opportunity afforded only to youth hunters.

The first day, the ASA was shot at a total of 19 times by four adults, and two youth hunters. This included an adult shooting from an ATV loaded in the back of a truck. "He was using it like some sort of mobile tree-stand," said Ryan Hilton, district conservation officer.

The following day, officers set the doe up again in the same area. One adult and two youth hunters shot at the deer an additional 12 times. All shots were fired from the road, a violation of Idaho law.

A total of 10 citations were given to five adult hunters, which included shooting from a road and hunting without proper tag. Four youth were also given warning for shooting from the road.

"Shooting from a public roadway is an incredibly dangerous thing," said Doug Meyer, senior conservation officer. "People drive on the roadways, and when someone is honed in on a deer in their scope, they may not see the people in front or beyond their target." "It is also not a very good example of fair chase, and demonstrates poor ethics on the part of these hunters," said Meyer.

"The use of an ASA is a valuable tool for Idaho Fish and Game because they allow us to address management issues that we otherwise could not get at," Hilton said. "Our ability to maintain a general season, with over-the-counter tags in Unit 56 is dependent on compliance with regulations."

Five adults were sentenced in Cassia County court on November 4. A plea agreement was reached with all five adult hunters that were issued citations. Each violator agreed to plead guilty to shooting from a public roadway and pay \$160 in court costs and fines for that charge. As part of the same agreement, each violator agreed to pay \$480 in ASA restitution to Idaho Fish and Game. If all fees are paid to the court within the agreed upon time, the second charge of hunting without the proper tag, will be dismissed.



REGIONAL NEWS



Bighorn Sheep Captured In Nevada Wait To Be Transported To Their New Home In Utah

Using a helicopter, capture specialists captured the sheep near Lake Mead in Nevada. The sheep were then driven to Bullfrog, Utah in trailers. As soon as the sheep were certified "disease free," they were again flown by helicopter to an area east of Bullfrog.



Bighorn sheep captured in Nevada wait to be transported to their new home in Utah. Photo by Mike Christensen

Dustin Schaible, bighorn sheep biologist for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, says the area where the sheep were released is very remote. "Normally," he says, "we keep the sheep in horse trailers, drive them to the release site and open the door."

The area where the 49 sheep were released doesn't have any roads, but it's perfect sheep habitat. "With the assistance of the Utah Highway Patrol and its helicopter," he says, "we were able to fly the sheep into the remote area."

Before the sheep were lifted into the air, they were placed in specially designed metal boxes that were attached to a cable hanging from the helicopter. A pilot with the Utah Department of Public Safety then flew the sheep about 15 miles into the red-rock canyons that surround Lake Powell.

"The boxes are designed to hold about three sheep each," Schaible says. "As soon as we opened the door, the sheep took off and ran into the canyons to find a new home."

Biologists released the sheep on an area known as the Kaiparowits bighorn sheep management unit. The 49 additional sheep will add to the herd's genetic mix.

The transplant project was funded by hunters through dollars generated from the sale of bighorn sheep hunting permits...



Board Approves Hunting Changes

Those 17 years of age or younger, who don't have their own big game hunting permit, can use an adult mentor's permit to take a big game animal in Utah in 2014.

Starting in 2014, young people can hunt with an adult mentor and use the mentor's permit to take a big game animal in Utah. Once an animal is taken, the hunt is over for both the youth hunter and the mentor.

As soon as an animal is taken, the hunting season will be over for both the mentor and the young hunter.

Archery deer and pronghorn hunters will also be allowed to hunt on six Utah waterfowl management areas in 2014. And, if the need arises, eight different areas in Utah are on a list of areas to receive transplanted mule deer.

The changes are among several big game changes the Utah Wildlife Board approved on Dec. 5

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Man Sentenced For Shooting Moose For Elk

Thanks to a tip from a concerned hunter, a Rawlins man is facing fines and penalties for killing a moose he thought was an elk and leaving it to waste.

Albert Wayne Vanderford Jr., 49, of Rawlins, was sentenced by Judge Jane Eakin in the Carbon County Circuit Court on Nov. 6 for taking a moose without a license. Judge Eakin sentenced Vanderford to a one year probation, hunting and trapping privileges suspended for three years, and \$8,520 in court fines and restitution for the moose.

Baggs Game Warden Kim Olson said had it not been for a tip from another hunter who suspected something was illegal this case might not have been solved.

"On Oct. 25, Vanderford asked another hunter not associated with him if he would help load his "elk", Olson said. "This legal hunter immediately knew that was no elk and told Vanderford that it was a moose and not an elk."

Vanderford proceeded to tell the other hunter that he moved to Rawlins from Florida and it was his first time hunting elk. The other hunter was able to provide a physical description of Vanderford, including that he had a southern accent, a vehicle description, and a partial license plate number.

"Had this man not taken the time to record this information we might not have been able to solve this case," Olsen said.

Olson said everyone makes mistakes at some time in their life and hunters are no exception.

"We understand that accidents happen, but honesty is the best policy in every case," Olson said. "Mr. Vanderford had two opportunities to turn himself in and admit he made a mistake. Instead, he chose to flee the scene, lie about the moose poaching, and leave a moose to waste instead of field dressing it. He could have made the best of a bad situation, but he chose poorly. If there is a bright side, it's the fact that another hunter cared enough to notice there was a problem and take action."

Olsen said the moose did not go to waste. "The Snake River Taxidermy and Processing Plant in Baggs donated the time and cost to process the moose and the meat was given to those in need."

Anyone with information on a wildlife violation may call the Stop Poaching Hotline at 877-WGFD-TIP. Tips may be reported online at wgfd.wyo.gov and to local Game and Fish offices and game wardens. Callers can remain anonymous and may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$5,000 if the information leads to a conviction.

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Final Havre-Area Check Station Results Released

MFHP Hunting Region 6 12/5/13
Overall hunter numbers and big-game harvests were down at the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Region 6 game check station outside Havre during the eight weekends it was open this fall.

"Hunter numbers were down 9 percent below those seen in 2012, and 35 percent below numbers seen in 2010," said Havre-area Wildlife Biologist Scott Hemmer. "There were a total of 671 parties and 1,443 hunters checked this year."

Hemmer noted that the severe winter weather in 2010-11 resulted in decreased deer and antelope populations throughout most of the Region, and that was reflected at the check station. In addition, there was high white-tailed deer mortality from epizootic hemorrhagic disease (EHD) outbreaks in the eastern part of Region 6 in 2011, and in the western part of the Region earlier this year.

"Due to these weather and disease events, antelope, mule deer, and white-tailed deer doe licenses have all been significantly reduced below historic levels," Hemmer said. "The combination of decreased game populations and fewer available doe licenses are primary factors in the decreased number of hunters and harvest seen at the station this year."

The largest percentage decline in this year's harvest was with pronghorn antelope. The number of harvested antelope checked was down 67 percent from last year and 93 percent below the long-term average.

"There were only 27 antelope checked this year, and in the past we would historically check 400-plus antelope in a year," Hemmer said. "The drop in harvest concurred with hunter reports of fewer antelope observed."

White-tailed deer harvest was also down significantly, and the number of white-tailed deer checked was down 57 percent from last year and 76 percent from the long-term average. Mule deer harvest was down 15 percent from last year and 38 percent below the long-term average.

"The reports from mule deer hunters at the check station indicated lower deer numbers observed overall, but reports were variable," Hemmer explained. "Hunters in some hunting districts reported seeing substantially fewer deer than in past years, but in other areas hunters reported average to above average deer numbers." Both mule deer and white-tailed deer were also more widely dispersed this year due to mild fall weather and excellent forage conditions, which resulted in fewer deer observed by hunters.

Elk harvest this year was up 46 percent from last year, but was 2 percent below the long-term average. The number of elk checked was up substantially at the beginning of the big game season, but harvest appeared to slow toward the end of the season.

"Most elk hunters reported seeing good numbers of animals, although some cow elk hunters reported encountering mostly bull elk," he said. "Overall, weather conditions this hunting season were warmer with less snow, which may have reduced big game activity and reduced harvest. The weather did result in improved road conditions and hunter access in most areas."

The reported upland bird harvest was down this year in FWP Region 6. Above-average precipitation this spring and summer resulted in increased vegetation heights and wider distribution of birds, which may have limited hunter harvest.

Hunters reported patchy upland bird distribution, with increased bird densities in better habitat. Overall, bird hunter reports for pheasants and Hungarian partridge indicated bird numbers comparable to last year, while hunters reported seeing fewer sharp-tailed grouse.

Along those lines, the reported pheasant harvest was down 22 percent from last year and 35 percent from the long-term average, and the Hungarian partridge harvest was down 14 percent from last year and 45 percent from the long-term average. Sharp-tailed grouse harvest was down 52 percent from the previous year and 59 percent from the long-term average...

Increased precipitation this spring and summer resulted in good wetland conditions for waterfowl. Duck harvest was up 22 percent from the long-term, but was down 32 percent from last year. Most waterfowl hunter reports were positive, but Hemmer said fewer waterfowl hunters were seen at the check station later in the season. (continued next page)

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Big Game Season Ends Quietly In Southeast Montana

MFHP Hunting Region 7 12/5/13
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks biological check stations that were held across southeast Montana in Glendive, Hysham and Ashland saw an increase in the number of hunters than in 2013, however success in deer harvest was down from last year and 27% below the long-term average. Elk harvest in 2013 was 50% higher than the long term average.

The number of mule deer checked across the region in 2013 was 25% lower than what was observed in 2012 and 25% below the long term average. White tailed deer were roughly 50% of what was checked in 2012 and 66% of the long term average. Reduced deer numbers checked in 2013 are a reflection of lower overall deer populations across the region and a reduction in the number of antlerless mule deer licenses available and sold.

Deer numbers in southeast Montana are still below long-term averages. Mule deer are 32% lower and white tailed deer are 7% lower according to 2013 spring surveys, however, the prognosis for the next couple of years remains very positive. A good portion of the population is compromised of young, fit individuals with incredible reproductive ability.

In response to declining populations due to unprecedented severe weather and disease outbreaks since 2009, antlerless mule deer (doe) licenses have been reduced 90%. In 2008, when overall deer numbers were at all time highs roughly 66% of the harvest checked consisted of antlered (buck) mule deer and 33% of antlerless (doe) mule deer. Reduction in antlerless license numbers is reflected in the harvest with 88% of the mule deer harvest in 2013 consisting of buck deer and just 12% of the harvest represented by doe mule deer.

At the Glendive check station, FWP wildlife biologist Melissa Foster reported a hunter success rate lower than in recent years among deer hunters. "This year there is a tremendous amount of cover on the landscape. It was the end of November and there was still green grass and abundant water sources, which has kept deer well-dispersed on the landscape. Combine that with warm weather and there has been nothing significant to concentrate deer into areas with thermal cover and browse."

Despite reduced harvest, hunters and biologists alike report the presence of good numbers of fawns and young bucks in observed herds, which bodes well for future production of deer herds across the region.



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COYOTE CAPERS FOR MORE SUCCESS

By Mark Kayser

I assumed the small parcel of public land had been hit earlier in the winter by an avid Montana coyote hunter, but it was worth a try. The parcel butted up against a ranch managed for wildlife so I knew coyotes would cruise the borders looking for a meal. Instead of using the traditional dying rabbit call I decided to ramp it up a bit. My setup started with a coyote howl and after a few minutes I added in the bawl of a distressed fawn. That followed with the yips of several coyotes fighting.

It didn't take long for a curious coyote to show and his aggressive nature was enough to bring my heart to a rapid heartbeat. As the coyote dropped out of sight in a creek I readjusted my Thompson Center rifle and when he appeared again I barked to stop him before he disappeared into a cedar thicket below my vantage point. The Hornady V-Max bullet put an end to one more coyote's marauding days.

Why did I do a switcheroo from tradition? Today's coyotes receive more attention than ever with the explosion in popularity from predator hunters. To get the ingredients for a fur coat you need to be as savvy as your quarry.

Author Mark Kayser with a winter coyote called in using coyote vocalizations combined with prey in distress.

NEW MENU ITEM Many coyotes hear dying rabbit calls and it just makes sense if they have a bad experience they may shy from the squall. Try something new. As opportunists most predators view any living thing that looks weaker as a potential dining opportunity. That's why in recent years overlooked prey in distress sounds such as whitetail fawns, squawking woodpeckers and squeaking rodents have made an appearance on electronic caller switchboards and even to hand calls. But even those calls are being bypassed for the huge libraries of animal sounds on digital callers.

Electronic libraries include scores of new sounds you would never have considered a decade ago. The sounds may represent an occasional visitor to your calling area or be totally exotic. Don't be fooled into believing that the sounds you send out as an invitation has to come from your area. The fundamental role of the call is to pique interest either via a hungry stomach or from curiosity. In either case new can be different and different can be inviting to a coyote.

For instance, feral hogs are several states away from my Western address, yet I've called on them from time to time to dupe crafty coyotes. My friends along the East Coast have used prairie dog sounds as well so it works across the country. As I noted in the opening the whitetail fawn in distress has become a staple in many calling circles, but using the higher pitched pronghorn fawn call works anywhere across the country, especially in the West. Varying your bird calls can also be a way to spark predators into loping into shooting range. Sandhill cranes may not winter nearby, but it could be the new call to get a coyote, or even a bobcat, to poke its head out of cover from curiosity. The lesson here is to just try something new if old isn't working.

MATCH.COM By mid- to late winter coyotes can be testing for even the best hunters. By this time period most coyotes have heard it all including the foot-stomping vroom of a V-8 in hot pursuit. Although any call may work at any time, especially if you can hunt limited-access properties, it takes a special message to bring a coyote into rifle range. You do have one cause for rejoice. It's coyote breeding time. **The months of January and February mark the time period when coyotes court, fall in love and settle into a quaint den. They begin the dating process later in January.**

It's a fact that love can cloud your judgment. Coyotes wear the same rose-colored glasses this time of year as adolescent human males do year-round. As the race ramps up to find a mate coyotes wear the pads off their feet to meet the right partner. They also use auditory clues to push them closer to the finish line.

I'll be honest. Simple howls work to lure coyotes into range during breeding season. That isn't to say the coyotes haven't been duped by hunter howls and are keeping a safe distance from the perceived threat. If you're looking for a new sound practice up on the love language of coyotes. In short, be flirty.

Like the dog in your backyard, coyotes have a range of vocalizations and although the various howls are the most familiar, in breeding season females incorporate high-pitched yips, and whines into their vocabulary to advertise their breeding willingness to males. I'm sure several coyote experts take claim for bringing this sound into the limelight. I first heard about it from my coyote hunting friend Dave Tatum, a past animal damage control officer who now hunts coyotes with a passion wherever they roam. He witnessed a pair of coyotes bantering back and forth one winter day using the high pitched whines. It's been a staple for me since from mid-January through mid-March.

If you want to send a love letter vocally you need to capitalize on the coyote estrus yip, the estrus whine and the basic howl. Estrus yips are short, simple and high pitched. Three or four advertise a female is in the area and are unmistakable to male coyotes. Follow this with what's referred to as the estrus whine. Forget the fancy definition and imitate the whining your pooch makes when you pluck a steaming, hot bratwurst from the grill. Give it intensity and sound sultry. Wait for up to 15 minutes and if that doesn't do the trick you can always end your setup with a howl for a long-range invite.

DECOY DECEIT. Nothing diverts attention more than something visually new in the immediate area. Consider your drive to work. You rarely miss a new billboard along the route. That's why camouflage is imperative to hide yourself while predator hunting, but you can use a coyote's quickness to pick up on the obvious and distract it by using decoys. Coyote decoys break down into two groups: predator and prey. Most early coyote decoys were designed to imitate prey either in a still-life pose or animated with wind, or battery operation. Today you can test a coyote's patience with prey, but companies have also developed coyote lookalikes that can fool coyote and hunter alike. (continued on page 40)

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WANTED: COYOTE HUNTERS!

By H&F News Pro Staff



At a time when predators are at an all time high and area deer and elk herds are well below long term goals for our State's game management objectives, area big game hunters are encouraged to take up predator hunting.

Disease, predation, and winter kill have put whitetail deer numbers in parts of Montana at seriously low numbers. Areas where EHD have stricken the last two summers, mainly near creeks and river bottom areas where these deer inhabit need relief from predators now more than ever.

You can help and here's how.

- **Choosing an area to hunt** You won't have to travel far to find coyotes anywhere in the state, however, your chances increase if you focus on the right areas. Coyotes are present in good numbers along most creek drainages, river bottom areas, and cattle pasture fields. Access will be the key in some of these spots, so you may have to set up arrangements to hunt prime areas, and in some private lands trap lines are already set up. Still, there are plenty of prime hunting areas on Federal and BLM lands, State lands and Block Management areas that allow coyote hunting now.

Coyote hunting will be decent anywhere there are sheep or cattle on winter range, but you will have to be careful hunting these areas. Deer or elk wintering ranges also attract coyotes.

- **Focus and set up on these areas** Any creek or canyon bottom with plenty of willows or thick brush, which hold rabbits, pheasants, grouse and mice that attract varmints.
- **Increase your odds** Try setting up on a small bluff that overlooks open range with good visibility.
- **Hunt with a partner** Remember four eyes are better than two. One person can be the caller, and the other the shooter, then reverse roles.
- **Hunt the areas you would during the big game season, or areas adjacent to these** You may find a new hot spot for the upcoming season or learn more about the area you plan to hunt in the future.
- **Hunt early** Try setting up by first light. Predators hunt at night, and will be on their feet at first light looking for an easy meal. You can intercept them coming off or going onto fields or pasture land.
- **Cover some ground** Start early by calling and glassing the area. If nothing pops out, pick up and move to another location. Pre-plan your day with the spots that you plan to hunt. This way, you're not wasting a lot of time in one area.
- **Blend in with the terrain** Use proper camouflage that will blend you into the area. If there is snow on the ground, use white camo. If not, use brown or green.
- **Repeat the process** Go out as much as you can. One day may be dead, the next may have varmints out in every spot.
- **Have fun** Make it a fun experience, just as you would with a deer or elk hunt. Plan ahead, be prepared, and hunt hard. This will only make you a more seasoned and better all around hunter.

Oh, and by the way, make sure you have a wolf tag in your pocket too, and take a kid hunting if you can.

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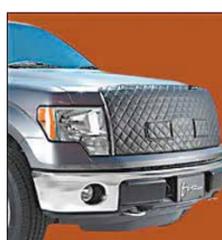
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Whether or not you are planning on preserving the coyote's hide will help determine what caliber and bullet will be right for the job. If you plan to keep the hide, going with a lighter caliber and a harder bullet will help keep the hide intact. If you are shooting for population control the caliber and bullet does not tend to matter as much. A larger cartridge shooting a heavier bullet will be less affected by the wind.

Some of the more common calibers for coyote hunting are: .223, .22-250, and .243. There are also some great "wildcat" cartridges such as the 22-243M, 6mm-250, and the 6mmx47 Lapua.

Using a crisp, light trigger will help you stay on target while touching off your shot. This is especially important when shooting small targets at a distance. Jewel and Timney triggers are excellent options.

Barrel selection is another important factor when shooting long distances. A good match grade barrel carrying a heavy contour is important in maintaining rigidity and repeatability.

One of the most important factors in long distance shooting is optics. A quality optic that is crystal clear and reliable is best. After all you can't shoot what you can't see. Scopes in the 4-16x magnification range (or greater) with adjustable turrets are ideal. Vortex's Viper PST in 6-24x50 is an outstanding option for varmint hunting.

Snowy Mountain Rifles can help you determine which caliber and components will be right for your perfect coyote rifle. Contact them at 406-546-8732.



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'Becoming an Outdoors Woman' Workshop Set for Red Lodge

MFWP

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has scheduled a winter-skills workshop in its popular Becoming an Outdoors Woman (BOW) program for Jan. 31 through Feb. 2 in Red Lodge.

Participants will choose three classes from a list of winter activities that includes cross country skiing, ice fishing, snowshoeing, wildlife in winter and winter survival. Women 18 years old or older may participate. The fee ranges between \$170-240 and includes class instruction and meals.

Registration forms and information are available online by logging in to fwp.mt.gov and following the link to 'Education.' Women are encouraged to sign up with a friend and learn a new activity or improve existing skills...

For more information on the BOW Winter Workshop, call Liz Lodman at 406-444-9940, or by email: lodman@mt.gov.

Turkey Call Tune-Up

(continued from page 6)

Now on to box calls. Start by "cleaning" off the bottom of the paddle and the side rails, lightly sanding away any old chalk, dirt or oils. Next, simply apply chalk and give it a test. If it sounds good, you're done. If not, you may need to do a little tweaking, something you may want to do anyway.

In most box calls, the paddle is attached to the box with a screw. Loosening or tightening this screw can change the tone of the call considerably. Adjust the screw in half or quarter turn increments, trying a few yelps between each turn. Once you find a tone that pleases you, draw across the paddle and screw with a permanent marker as a reference mark. That's about all there is to it.

Of course, practice makes perfect, so you should spend plenty of time re-acquainting yourself with your calls. And if you practice enough, you may want to do one more quick tune-up before heading out for the real thing. »

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Bob Ward & Sons New Gear Review

Polar Loop Activity Tracker With Smart Guidance

The Polar Loop is for anyone that wants to track their activity 24/7 and get guidance to reach their activity goals. Key features include heart rate monitor compatibility, a program that gives a clear path to fitness, and it's waterproof. The Activity Guide helps you stay active all day long. While the Loop's Activity Benefit gives feedback about your daily, weekly, and monthly activity. The Loop displays calories burned, steps taken and time of day, and provides free guidance with the Polar Flow app and Polar Flow web service. Compatible with Polar H6 and H7 Bluetooth Smart heart rate sensors, and memory capacity that includes 12 days of activity data. Better understand your performance with the Polar Loop Activity Tracker.



Pack Light, Fish Big With A Clam Vista Shelter

If you are looking for that "beginner" hub shack you will find this one to be extremely appealing. The Vista Shelter is lightweight, easy to assemble and take down, and transports in any size vehicle.

Features:

- Tough 420 Denier fabric
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- Oversized carry bag for easy re-packing
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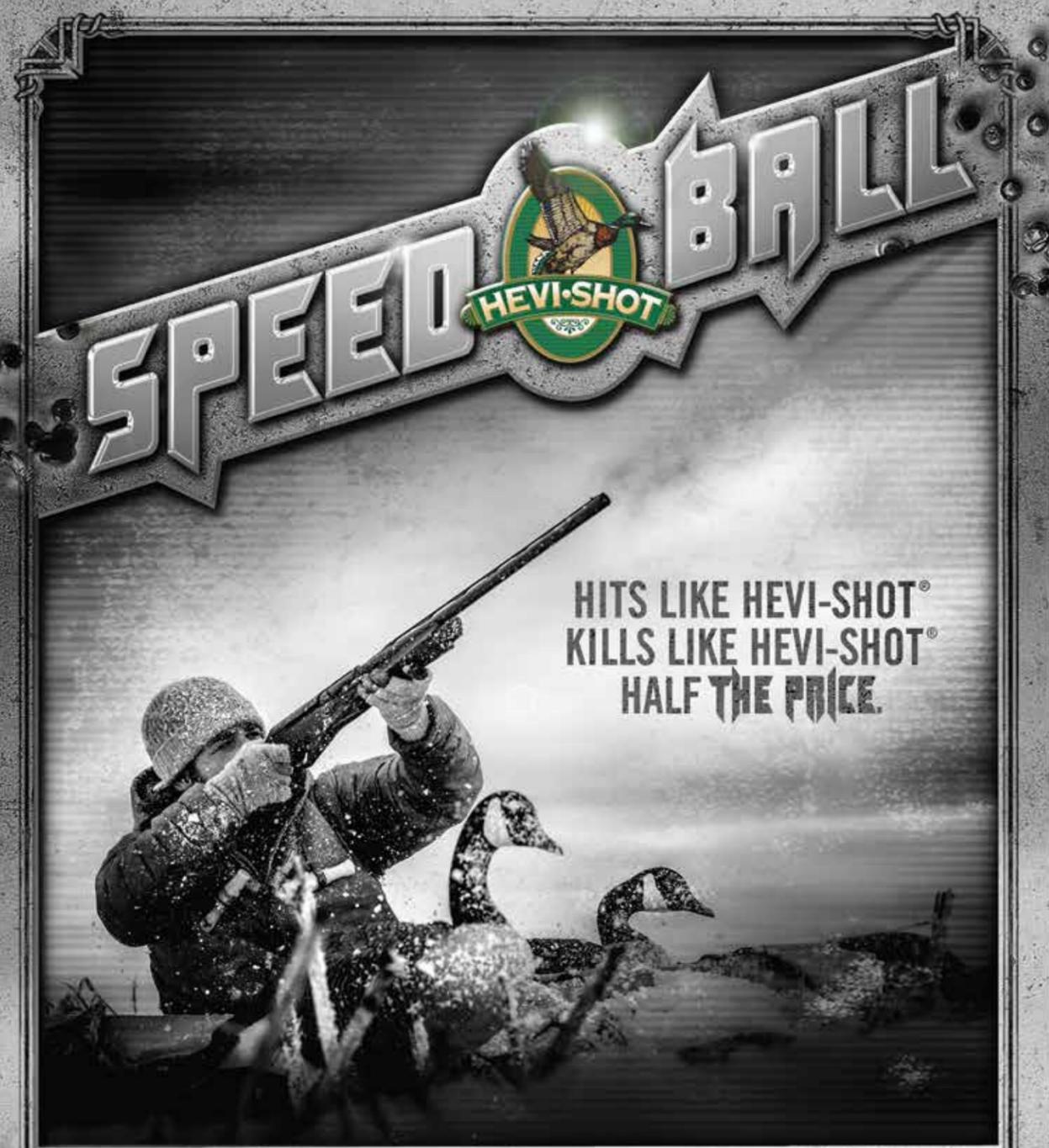
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Goose Hunting - Marias River WMA

MFWP Open through January 15th.

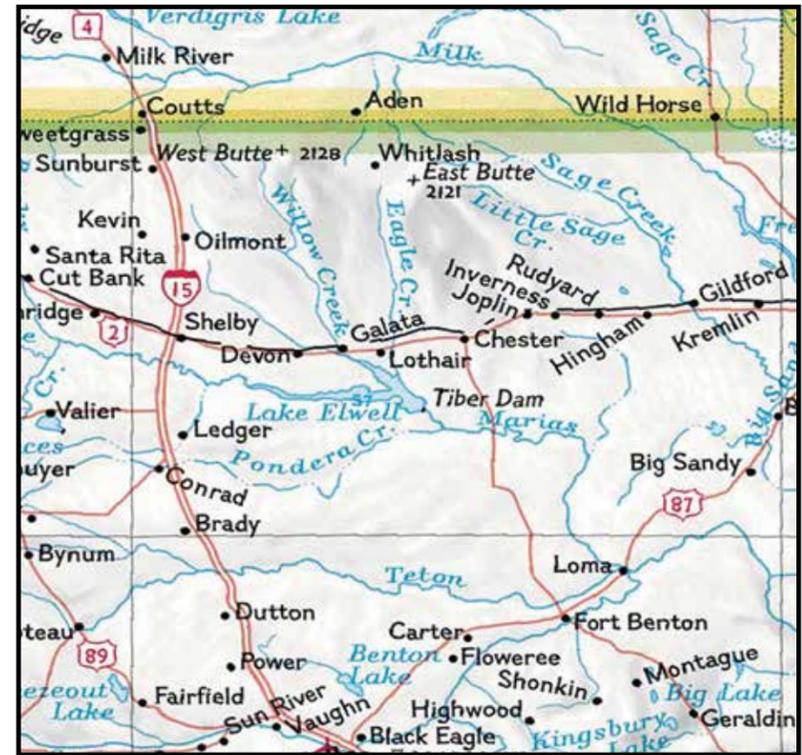
If you are looking for a place to hunt some end-of-season geese, consider the Marias WMA. The Marias River WMA provides habitat for mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, waterfowl, upland birds and other non-game wildlife.



Open: Apr 1 - Jan 15
Size: 5845 acres
Elevation: 3290 ft
Nearest Town: Shelby

Directions:
From I-15, Exit 358 east to Marias Valley Road, North 3.5 miles, turn west on Hjartarson Road, for 10.2 miles, then south 2.5 miles.

Contact Information:
Ryan Rauscher
Conrad FWP Office
4600 Giant Springs Rd
Conrad, MT 59425
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FWP to Move Forward with Madison Bighorn Sheep Reintroduction MFWP



With Thursday's approval from the Fish & Wildlife Commission, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will move forward with the reintroduction of bighorn sheep to either the Indian Creek or Wolf Creek area of the Madison Range this winter.

FWP will trap up to 50 bighorn sheep from the southern Madison range herd in the Quake Lake area then reintroduce them to the Indian Creek drainage (unless the Wolf Creek drainage proves more appropriate given timing and logistics) in the winter of 2013-2014 with the understanding that future transplants may be necessary to augment the population.

The goal of this reintroduction is to increase the overall herd size in the Madison, establish a new wintering area in the Madison for bighorn sheep, and restore a native species to the area.

A copy of the Department's decision notice including a summary of the comments and details about the reintroduction plan can be found at the following link: http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/decisionNotices/prn_0674.html

In the last year, area Biologist Julie Cunningham worked closely with area landowners throughout this process. A 52-day public comment period which closed Nov. 8, 2013 generated 35 comments almost entirely in favor of the reintroduction.



COYOTE CAPERS FOR MORE SUCCESS

(continued from page 30)

Decoys can divert a coyote's attention giving you more opportunity to swing and make a good shot.

Montana Decoy's Kojo coyote, Flambeau's Lone Howler or the Edge Expedite Yote coyote all provide realistic options to con coyotes into believing the howls they heard were real. You can use these coyote likenesses with confidence howling or even aggressive coyote vocalizations to entice a fight. Montana Decoy and Flambeau also offer fawn decoys to match the distress bleats of a fawn having a horrible day. Not to be forgotten, Flambeau's Rigor Rabbit and the Mojo Critter add in the element of action to entice predators.

If you want to complement prey sounds with prey visualizations and have it all in one package look to companies like Cass Creek with their Wagglar that includes a caller, decoy and scent dispenser. The Edge Expedite Hare Bawl Screamer quivers, but also bawls at intervals. The Foxpro Black-Jack and Jack-Attack decoys connect directly to the caller and can be turned on and off with the auxiliary button on the remote. Lastly, the Mojo Double Trouble remote unit includes 50 sounds with storage for 1,000, plus a tantalizing prey decoy that stores right in the caller.

Coyote hunting is one of the best ways to spend a weekend afternoon, but to be successful you have to add in a few capers of your own. Try something new for a new experience in coyote hunting.

To keep up with Mark Kayser and new hunting tips:
www.markkayser.com
www.facebook.com/pages/Mark-Kayser

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Photo courtesy The Boone and Crockett Club

MEAT HUNTER SCORES WORLD'S RECORD

The Boone and Crockett Club

Armed with an old 303 British, the 6'5" subsistence hunter, Heinz Naef got more than he bargained for. He shot the beast at 35 yards with open sights, and then later hacked off the antlers with a chain saw, nicking them in the process. After all, antlers don't offer much nutrition.

The scoring of the trophy drew much attention in the community. They probably should have sold tickets!

Official measurer Clint Walker tells the story.

"Immediately following this last measurement, I had my helpers go back to the shop, where the rest of the measurements had been made, while I tallied up the score.

There were apx 40 local residents in attendance to watch the measuring take place, which in Dawson City, Yukon, translates to over 3% of the population of the town and surrounding area!!! Even the two local Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers who were on duty that evening attended to watch!

After determining the official measurement to be 263 1/8 net (267 1/8 gross score), I returned to the shop where everyone was waiting in silence. I approached the hunter, Heinz Naef, and in a quiet tone that could still be heard by everyone in the nearly silent room I said, "Well Heinz, no matter what the measurements are, you have yourself a really great trophy right there" as I pointed to the rack on the table. He humbly hung his head a little, clasped his giant hands together and replied, "Thank you, I know, I know..."

I looked at him for a couple seconds and followed with, "Unfortunately.....(- insert long pause here- and at which point the room let out a collective groan), you are going to have to get it measured by the panel because I have it officially measured at an inch and a half..... (- insert another pause here-) larger than the current world record!" The room then erupted deafeningly with cheers of congratulations for the hunter while pictures and backslaps were certainly aplenty following that moment.

It is such a great story. Taken at 35 yards after a "cat and mouse" stalk by a local hunter whose hunting party was just looking for winter meat, with an old .303 British rifle and open sights, is something that we rarely hear of in today's times. There is nobody more deserving of such honor as being a world record holder, than Heinz!"

There was no skull retained, and no cape! His comments in his swiss accent were; "I should haf, eh?". Haha.... Yes Heinz, you should haf!

*The trophy will be panel scored for verification in Reno, Nevada in January 2014.

What's the Right Hunting Dog?

By Bob Humphrey
Yamaha Outdoors Tip

If you're thinking about getting a hunting dog but unsure of the breed there are several things to consider, not the least of which is your intended quarry.

Specialists When targeting only one type or group of game, you should lean toward a breed bred specifically for that type. Beagles, for example, are the classic rabbit hunting dog, just as certain types of hounds are bred for bear, hog or lion hunting. But if you hunt a variety of game you may be better off choosing a more versatile breed.

Generalists Versatility is certainly a factor and a recent upland bird hunt I participated in provides a prime example. Our hunting party divided into three groups with three different guides running three different types of dogs.

The first group hunted over English setters. The classic upland bird dog, setters and pointers cast about until they catch a hot scent, then move in and lock on point, "holding" the birds until hunters move in to flush them. Setters will also retrieve fallen birds.

If upland birds are your primary game, they make a great choice. They will make water retrievers if you also hunt ducks, but aren't as hardy in cold weather, or as strong swimmers as other breeds.

The second guide ran Labs. Labrador retrievers are known and used primarily for retrieving waterfowl, and can withstand cold temperatures, icy waters and strong currents better than upland dogs. They're equally adept at dry-land retrievers and when properly trained cast well and make good flushing dogs. There's even a strain specifically bred for pointing.

The third group ran spaniels, representing something of a compromise. They too are flushing dogs and retrievers, and are a bit more eager to make water retrievers, though like setters they may not hold up as well in cold, late-season duck hunts.

Keep in mind that within these categories - setters, retrievers and spaniels - there are multiple different breeds (Gordon setters, Chesapeake Bay retrievers, water spaniels) each designed for slightly more specific applications...



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Tom Wandrych
Black Bear

Winner Gear Give-away



Progressive Tip-Ups And Tactics

(continued from page 14)

The genius of this tip-up design is that you can consistently set your bait at the same depth – no need for arm stretches or sinking a transducer. Last year I found this made bait-checking a lot quicker—and invariably led to more fish on the ice. Likewise, for those situations when you miss a tripped flag, it's handy to know how long the fish has had the bait.

For example, there was a situation last winter when I didn't realize a flag had tripped. The Calibrator display told me that the fish bit 5 minutes ago, yet hadn't taken out much line. Unlike pike or bass, whose tendency is to run with the bait, walleyes will often stay close to the hole.

Lastly, I found it versatile for not only walleyes but pike and lake trout in the heavier trip setting, which allowed me to size up and fish big bait on big rigs. I don't know how much time I've wasted over the years chasing flags only to discover a big sucker minnow has tripped the flag.

Don't be fooled into thinking tip-ups are old school, or that one size fits all. Rather, tip-ups have become as sophisticated as ice fishing rods and there's a well-suited style for every fishing situation.

Spoony Tunes



A perfect match: Humminbird sonar allowed Brian "Bro" Brosdahl to get his jigging spoon into the strike zone of this suspended crappie, while the Aqua-Vu underwater viewing system was just the ticket to seeing them strike in real time.
Photo by Bill Lindner Photography

(continued from page 15)

Contrary to popular light-line beliefs, however, he adds a 12-inch piece of 8-pound-test fluorocarbon leader. Yes, that's two pounds worth of test heavier and a whole lot thicker.

"It's the stiffness of the wider-diameter fluorocarbon that keeps my lightweight spoon from tumbling and getting tangled up in the mainline," Brumbaugh says.

Brumbaugh connects the mainline and fluorocarbon via a tiny ball-bearing swivel, and then joins the Slender Spoon to the leader with a small snap (not 'snap-swivel' as the extra hardware will impede the action of the lure).

Si... I see
Now introducing Michigan's Joe Balog – Ice-fishing extraordinaire when it comes to cranking hardwater panfish and perch on spoons.

And I have experienced this love affair with spoons firsthand.

...I watched Balog work his magic with a thinly-stamped spoon on perch and panfish. And to boot, no bait was skewered on; the only dressing, a plastic bead threaded on the hook shank.

But Balog's true prowess is seeded in his confident use of electronics.

"With the aid of both my Humminbird sonar and Aqua-Vu, I can set the hook the millisecond a fish hits. The two really go hand in hand."

Balog deploys the transducer of his Humminbird ICE 597ci HD Combo the moment a hole is bored, testing depth hoping to spy active fish. Once depth is determined, he lowers the lens of his AV Micro II—a palm-size underwater camera that's attached to his Humminbird via the Pro-Snake AV-Micro Camera Mount.

"The sonar allows me to get the lure where it needs to be – right in front of the fish's nose or just above; the camera lets me see strikes before I could ever feel them. I can also see the size of the fish on the camera, and lift my spoon out of bite's way of smaller ones."

SPOONY TUNES Overall, spoons rock (wobble and waggle, too) when it comes to catching fish through the ice. But not any old spoon is going to work wonders every time out.

Thinly-stamped spoons have the most flutter on the fall and an enticing waggle at rest. Just make sure to use your sonar wisely, and utilize the real-time images underwater cameras can provide, and you'll be catching more fish than ever on jigging spoons.

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