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"I GUESS WHAT I'M HEARING IS ... WE DON'T HAVE ANY PLACE IN MONTANA TO PLACE SHEEP," SAID DAN VERMILLION, FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION CHAIRMAN, AT THE GROUP'S LAST MEETING.



Montana's Bighorn Dilemma

By Brady Miller - goHUNT.com



Montana's bighorn sheep management program continues to hit roadblocks caused by disease, domestic sheep and a disappointed wildlife commission.

Generally speaking, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has been successful in helping bighorn sheep populations expand and increase across the state. The overall bighorn population has grown from an estimated 1,200 animals in 1950 to a current population of about 5,700.

This increase is largely attributed to the state's aggressive trap-and-transplant program. According to John Vore, FWP's game management bureau chief, between 1922 and 2012, the agency has trapped 2,717 sheep for transplants, herd augmentations or out-of-state relocation.

Over the last several years, however, the agency has encountered a number of challenges in finding suitable new habitat for the bighorns within Montana. The goal FWP set forth in 2010 — to establish five new huntable populations of bighorn sheep in the state by 2022 — now seems improbable.

In 2013, plans to transplant sheep to public land near Lewis and Clark Caverns was canceled after a Cardwell legislator and landowner said he was unaware of the proposal and introduced a bill to restrict future transplants. The bill died in committee and the transplant proposal was nixed.

Later that same year, a proposal to place bighorns in the Bridger Mountains was put on hold because of the proximity of domestic sheep, which have been known to transmit lethal bacteria to bighorn sheep.

Then, this year, a transplant in the Madison Mountains was pushed back to 2014 after officials detected an outbreak of pneumonia in the parent herd.

Just last week, the commission rejected a proposal to relocate some bighorn sheep out of state, saying they would prefer the agency either find new locations in Montana or transfer animals between existing herds.

Yet moving sheep from one herd to another is also dangerous as it increases the risk of spreading infection.

More than 460 bighorns have been sent out of state to establish new populations or augment existing populations in Oregon, Idaho, Washington, Nebraska, Utah, Wyoming and North Dakota. The last out-of-state transplant was to Utah in 2009, before Montana instituted a ban on relocating sheep out of state.

Wildlife managers have recommended ending the state's policy barring out-of-state relocation, saying that overpopulated herds are making the animals prone to disease outbreak and they are having difficulty finding suitable relocation sites within the state.

This has prompted the state's wildlife commission to conclude that it may be time to rethink the state's conservation strategy for the popular big game species.

"I guess what I'm hearing is ... we don't have any place in Montana to place sheep," said Dan Vermillion, Fish and Wildlife Commission chairman, at the group's last meeting.

"Not with the criteria we've established," answered John Vore, FWP's game management bureau chief. "Much of our historic sheep habitat didn't have domestic sheep."

Vore stated that he is preparing a presentation for the commission that outlines the criteria for where sheep can be established and the places the department has already considered that do not meet those standards. "We keep looking at areas and we've looked at many, many," Vore relayed.

Yet some officials, such as now-retired FWP biologist Tom Carlsen, who sits on the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation board, and is also one of the authors of the state's bighorn sheep plan, beg to differ.

"Quite frankly, I don't think they've exhausted all of the (habitat) possibilities," Carlsen contends, pointing to the Tobacco Root and Snowy mountains as viable options.

Carlsen maintains that FWP is too focused on managing higher profile wildlife — such as wolves, bison and elk — that demand too much of the department's resources. This leaves less time, energy and resources available to manage the bighorn sheep, which doesn't sit well with Carlsen given the fact that an annual auction of a Montana bighorn sheep tag brings in hundreds of thousands for sheep management.

This year, the tag sold for \$320,000. Last year, it set a record at \$480,000.

One thing that Carlsen does believe the FWP has right, though, is that transplanting sheep to other states is the best way to reduce sheep herds to ideal management levels. He even goes as far as to say that the commission's decision not to move sheep out of state was "bad biology."

"You're putting those populations that are over objective at risk," Carlsen contested. "They are more susceptible to disease when they are at a high density."

In the winter of 2009-10, more than 500 bighorns died from disease in the greater Missoula area, with two of the four herds impacted experiencing die-offs of 60% or more.

"What I'd like to see them do, and they are doing it in other states, is go in and remove all of the animals and start over," Carlsen said. "You can't augment a herd that's carrying disease."

Carlsen explains that following a major outbreak of disease, bighorn lambs born to the surviving ewes will often perish as bacteria is passed on. He used the example of the Elkhorn Mountain herd, where he worked to establish a bighorn population. In that herd alone, 80% of the animals have died from disease, devastating the once-thriving herd to the point where only 20 to 30 bighorns still survive.

"Why fiddle around and wait for a potential recovery that never happens," he said. "And that's another way to use in-state sheep." ○



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Jason Leishman of Huson with his 2012 Montana wolf.

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The Next Big Game Season STARTS NOW!

By Hunting & Fishing News Pro Staff



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Is big game season really ever over? For most serious hunters, the answer is "no". We are always thinking about the next opportunity to go out and enjoy some quality time in the field. So, it's January and now is the prime time to get things in order. It all starts with the gear that we have been using and what we will need for the next outing. Remember, the spring turkey and black bear hunting season is only around 90 days away - so let's start with your gear.

• Organization

During the winter months, I like to take the time to organize and clean my outdoor gear and document any future needs. Document any items that you needed, ran out of, or did not have with you on your last hunt. An example would be gloves. I personally have gloves for warm weather, cold weather, and snow in various styles. Gloves get holes in them or lost throughout the season. List the specific core items you need to replace. Then, throughout your down time, you can purchase what you need. This will hold true for all of your clothing and equipment.

• Cleaning/Maintenance

Most, if not all things we use in the outdoors needs to be cleaned or maintained throughout their lifetime. Dust, dirt, moisture, sunlight and general wear and tear take their toll on our things. Optics for example are very expensive and any prolonged exposure to moisture or cold can be damaging. Dry, clean and/or oil any piece of gear that needs it prior to storage.

Riflescopes, binoculars, rangefinders and your camera lenses need to be cleaned regularly with optical cleaning solution. Rifles need to be cleaned and checked for any worn out pieces. Replace or upgrade with a new scope, sling, bi-pod or recoil pad if needed.

Knives need to be sharpened and cleaned prior to putting them back into their sheath. Backpacks or day packs should be emptied and inventoried. Replace anything that you used. Afterwards, repack and store. Boots and shoes also need cleaning and leather products should be treated with the appropriate conditioners and water repellants. If your boots have finally given out or you need a new back up, now is the time to buy and break 'em in.

• Storage

Be diligent about storing your gear in appropriate locations that pertain to each item. Gun safes with dehumidifiers are excellent for not only your firearms, but also optics, ammunition, knives or small keepsakes that need to be locked up. Plastic storage bins work for your hunting clothes. The main thing is to keep all items clean and dry when not in use.

With the recent hunting season fresh in your mind, this is the best time to replace anything you need, and by using a few simple organizational

skills along with preventative maintenance on your equipment, you will not only increase the life of your gear, you'll also have peace of mind knowing that you are ready to go on your next hunt. This will also save you money, future frustrations and disappointment.

Here is a list of the items most likely needing upgrade, cleaning or replacement.

- Rifle, shotgun or bow
- Optics - Binoculars, scope, rangefinder, or spotting scope
- Camera - Never miss that once in a lifetime shot. Don't rely on your cell phone
- Knives, rope, tape, firestarter
- Outerwear - cold weather gear
- Boots and socks
- Gloves and hats
- Backpack, packboard or game cart
- Ammunition - stock up!
- Cow calls, deer grunt tubes, rattling bag
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Calling Coyotes— Sealing the Deal

By Tim Titus
www.no-off-season.com



Many things play into the ability to seal the deal. The coyote's mindset, the gun, load and equipment, the shooter's skill and experience as well as the ability to read the coyote body language all play into the moment of truth.

As the screams drifted across the sage, my eyes scanned continually and my head was on a swivel knowing a coyote could appear at any moment. The earlier I detected him the more time I'd have to plan my final play. Would he end in the truck or wiser and warier than when he arrived? In short could I seal the deal or not? There. Was that light gray spot there when we sat down? I watch without raising my binoculars. There's a movement. Now he's working his way through the sage again. My partner this day is a longtime friend but a brand new predator hunter and we're set up together on opposite sides of the sage. My quiet attempts at getting him on the coyote were falling on partially deaf ears from too many years running a Skil saw. Before long, "One o'clock" gets through and he's on the coyote also.

My friend is shooting one of my rifles and I'm confident the rifle and load are up to the task. The coyote clears the sage onto an open flat at less than 200 yards. He's responding carefully with stop and go progress. I tell my partner to take him when he stops the next time. A moment later the coyote stops and he sends it knocking the coyote down but a second later he's up circling then he's moving off at a slow, struggling run. Coyotes are tough and I hate to lose any to a bad shot. When my friend can't get back on him, I took one shot and a moment later the AR barks again and the coyote is on the ground for good.

When The Approach is right, the Set-Up is effective and the calling works, it's all for naught if you can't seal the deal. The set-up is the key to allowing you opportunity to see responding coyotes. What happens after you see the coyote will determine whether the coyote ends up in the fur shed or at the graduation ceremony receiving its diploma which it will proudly display at the next encounter with a predator caller. We are fortunate this day that the coyote is down. Should I have let it play out longer? Probably. But, a shot at a standing coyote at 170 yards is a much better bet than a running coyote at half that distance. Taking an approaching coyote allows for a more relaxed shot than hurrying or feeling the pressure that comes when a coyote is leaving the stand.

Many things play into the ability to seal the deal. The coyote's mindset, the gun, load and equipment, the shooter's skill and experience as well as the ability to read the coyote body language all play into the moment of truth. In an earlier article I related a sad statistic from one of our first calling seasons. We called nineteen coyotes that year and killed only three of them. The school of hard knocks is pretty brutal sometimes—primarily on your ego. The learning curve is steep but there are things a hunter can do to shorten the curve. I hope the information here will help whether you've been at the game for a while or are new to predator hunting. (continued page 24)

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PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD



Ethan (15) of Missoula with his first elk taken on a hunting trip with 75 year old grandfather.

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2014 Montana Hunter Numbers By Region

MFWP

MFWP Region 1 Deer Harvest Slightly Higher than Last Year in Northwest Montana as Season Ends

At the six northwest Montana check stations, whitetail deer harvest finished slightly 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, November 30, a total of 16,708 hunters checked 1,138 white-tailed deer (988 of these were bucks), 139 mule deer, and 50 elk for a 7.9 percent rate of hunters with game. This is slightly higher than the 7.1 percent of hunters with game last year. The number of hunters in northwest Montana was down nine percent as compared to last year's total.

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 winter.

The Olney check station reported the highest percentage of hunters with game at 10.8 percent. Wildlife Biologist Tim Thier reports that this year was one of the best seasons for buck harvest since 1994. He added that biologists and check station attendants throughout Region One checked more mature whitetail bucks the last weekend of the season. Some real nice bucks came through on Saturday and Sunday.

Region One Supervisor Jim Williams notes that FWP has been tracking 3 years of good fawn survival in northwest Montana and the check station sample this year confirms that hunters were able to see and take good numbers of deer. Elk harvest is always dependent upon snow in northwest Montana and ended up being similar to last year. He also said that, new this year, FWP will have the general land ownership (Plum Creek, Stoltze, DNRC, USFS, Private) location of the check station deer and elk kill sample. That analysis should be completed in a few weeks, and the information will be released to the public. Stay tuned.

Wolf harvest: Through the end of the general deer and elk season, hunters in northwest Montana have taken 23 wolves. Statewide, 81 wolves have been taken. This is down from 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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MFWP Region 2 Whitetail Harvest Up, Mule Deer and Elk on Par at Season End in West-Central Montana

The big game hunting season closed on Sunday with elk and mule deer harvest on par with last season, and white-tailed deer harvest solidly higher at all three hunter check stations in west-central Montana.

The Bonner Check Station is Montana Fish, Wildlife & Park's bellwether for whitetail harvest in Region 2, where the season total of 382 was the highest since the 2010 season, and 7 percent above the four year average, despite only tallying 6,108 hunter-trips, down 10 percent from the four year average. **When elk, mule deer and other harvests are included, the Bonner check station logged 8.1 percent of hunters with game, the highest harvest rate since 2010.**

White-tailed deer harvest also increased at the Darby and Anaconda Check Stations this season. At Darby, the harvest of 110 whitetails was up 8 percent from the harvest checked on weekends last season, and this year's harvest of 22 whitetails at the Anaconda station was up 47 percent from last season.

Elk harvest began slowly in Region 2, but by season's end approached last year's totals. The tally of 51 elk at Bonner was 47 percent below the 4-year average, but came within five elk of last season's harvest. At Darby, hunters checked 161 elk on the weekends this season, only four animals off last season's pace, and Anaconda's tally of 41 elk differed by five from last year.

As with elk, the mule deer harvest sampled in Region 2 was predictably low, but close to last year's totals. The harvest of 56 mule deer at Bonner was 16 percent below the four year average, but slightly above last year's total of 51. This year's harvest of 35 mule deer through Darby was off by two deer from last year's tally on the weekends, and the mule deer harvest of 15 in Anaconda equaled last year's total...

MFWP Region 3 Hunting Season Closes Quietly Amidst Major Cold Snap

Hunters venturing out on the final weekend of the general deer and elk season were met with plummeting temperatures and moderate success. In at least one case, a near 60-degree temperature drop was noted on Saturday alone. Another station closed early on Saturday when only 32 hunters came by the typically busy check station by mid-afternoon. Here's a look at the weekend's data:

The Cameron check station checked the most animals, while Alder also saw a good hunter harvest checking 44 animals. Success was down at the Divide check station despite good elk movement onto winter ranges, and fewer than average hunters came through both the Mill Creek and Silver City check stations.

Total for the 2014 Season:

White-tailed Deer	113
Mule Deer	179
Elk	527
Hunters	9205

(continued on page 12)



Morgan Cooney
of Missoula

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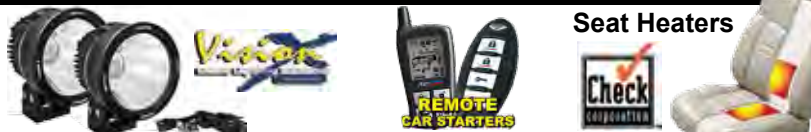
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Owner, Todd Sullivan has been customizing vehicles for over 20 years and has received national awards for his graphics.

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2014 Montana Hunter Numbers (continued from page 11)

MFWP Region 4 Rocky Mountain Front Elk Harvest Up, Deer Harvest Down

Hunters on the Rocky Mountain Front took home more elk but fewer mule deer and white-tailed deer than average during the 2014 general big game season, which ended Nov. 30.

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

"Total elk harvest was about 12 percent above the 10-year average," Lonner says. "Mule deer harvest was approximately 42 percent below the 10-year average, and white-tailed deer taken was 7 percent below the 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 349 animals (135 bulls, 179 cows and 35 calves) compared to the 10-year average of 308 elk.

Mule deer numbered 209 bucks at the check station. The 10-year average is 360 animals.

With whitetails, the count in Augusta was 265 (188 bucks, 62 does and 15 fawns), while the 10-year average is 286.



Tom Wandrych of Helena

MFWP Region 5 2014 Hunter Numbers, Deer Harvest Down From Average

The number of hunters who stopped at Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 5 check stations during the 2014 general season was down about 11 percent from the long-term average. The number of deer checked also was lower than average, but the elk harvest remained strong – up 30 percent from average.

The five-week general season closed Sunday, Nov. 30. In Region 5, which encompasses south-central Montana, FWP operated check stations at Big Timber, Columbus, Laurel and Lavina on weekends through the season.

FWP wildlife officials checked 4,418 hunters during the season. That was 89.2 percent of the long-term average of 4,955 hunters checked. Those who stopped checked 327 white-tailed deer, 51.9 percent of the average of 630. A total of 554 mule deer were checked, just 60.3 percent of the usual 919. Hunters checked 247 elk, which is 130.2 percent of the long-term average of 190 animals.

Of those who stopped at check stations in 2014, 25.5 percent had harvested game – down from an average of 34.9 percent over the past decade. (continued on page 31)



Jackie Sichveland



BIG LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

MFWP

Located near Molt, Montana the Big Lake Wildlife Management Area was established to provide suitable habitat for nesting and migrating waterfowl and suitable habitat for other wildlife species as long as their management does not negatively impact waterfowl production. Duck, geese and swan hunting is allowed. Check your Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks regulations before heading out. There is walk-in access from designated roads or parking areas. According to Jim Hanson at MFWP, water levels can vary from year to year, but hunters are taking duck, geese and swan.

MFWP Region 5

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MONTANA NEWS BRIEFS

FWP Warden Seeking Information on Seven Whitetail Bucks Shot and Wasted West of Trout Creek

MFWP 12/11/14

Thompson Falls area Game Warden Troy Hinck responded to a report of seven wasted whitetail bucks west of Trout Creek. The people involved cut off the antlers and wasted the majority of the animals. Anyone with information about this incident can call Warden Hinck at 240-2271. Callers can also anonymously report information to 1-800-TIP-MONT. Callers who provide information leading to a conviction may be eligible for a reward.

Information Sought in Larb Hills Elk Poaching

MFWP 12/11/14

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is seeking information on the poaching of two elk shot and left in the Larb Hills area south of Malta in hunting district 622.

FWP Warden Ben Morin said the two elk, one cow and one spike, were shot on Nov. 25 and left to waste. The cow elk was found on the Virginia Koss Block Management area, while the spike was located on adjacent BLM land.

Anyone with information about the crimes is encouraged to call Warden Morin directly at 406-654-7630 or FWP's 24-hour wildlife tip line at 1-800-TIP-MONT (800-847-6668)...

Bighorn Sheep Captured, Moved to Sheep Creek Drainage South of Great Falls

MFWP 12/11/14

State wildlife biologists have trapped and transplanted 21 bighorn sheep to the Sheep Creek drainage that flows into the Missouri River south of Great Falls.

The animals were captured over several days from the Missouri River Breaks north of Lewistown.

Sixty sheep were trapped, of which 30 were collared and re-released in the Breaks as part of a statewide research project. Another 30 were trapped, with nine going to Fish, Wildlife and Parks Region 3 and 21 to Sheep Creek drainage, which is the north end of sheep hunting district 455.

"We decided not to release them on the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area," says Cory Loecker, FWP wildlife biologist. "That population has been doing very well the last two years, producing and recruiting lambs."

Proposed Repeal of McLean Game Preserve Near Conrad

MFWP

Montana's Fish and Wildlife Commission is seeking public comment on a proposal to repeal the McLean Game Preserve about five miles west of Conrad...

Comments can be sent to Ryan Rauscher, FWP, 514 S. Front St., Suite C, Conrad, MT 59425; fax: (406) 761-8477; or email: rrauscher.fwp@gmail.com. Comments must be received no later than Jan. 9, 2015.

Ice Fishing Over the Edge

Surface irregularities serve as a template for pinpoint hole drilling during early-ice.

By Mitch Eeagan



Photo by Bill Lindner

Landing a limit of fish through a hole is a lot like running a flourishing retail business – no matter what you're offering, success ultimately boils down to location, location... location.

"Close enough" won't cut it with fish or commerce. In hardwater angling, the exact position of your hole must often be reduced to mere inches rather than "somewhere within sight."

With that in mind, enter the guru of ice angling, Brian "Bro" Brosdahl...

On the whole, Bro uses two types of electronics to determine exact places to drop a line – a sonar/GPS combo and an underwater camera...

Look before you leap Overall, Bro Country, as his turf is termed, is snow country, and later in the season a lake's entire topside will be covered with a thick blanket of snow. This is when modern-day electronics and mapping programs play the roles of their lifetimes.

But before the flakes start to accumulate in feet versus inches, Bro aims for areas where the ice has formed differently than its surrounding facade, as well as where small patches of snow have amassed, especially when the ice is clear as a bell. "There's a reason the ice has an unusual look to it in different places," says Bro. "Springs bubbling up from the bottom, a patch of still-green weeds radiating heat from the sun's rays and even a slight difference in depth are all possibilities. And all will attract fish throughout the season."

Right off the bat, Bro bores holes along the paths where clear ice butts up to white... And when he checks each hole with his Humminbird ICE 688ci HD, sure enough, there's structure, or better yet, fish below. And in holes not created directly over cover, he confirms the presence of favorable structure and cover with his Aqua-Vu AV Micro 5 underwater viewing system.

"Anywhere light penetration is reduced overhead, even if there is none of the "classic" cover [weeds, wood and rock] nearby, fish will gather," adds Bro...The darkness overhead can be considered "structure", and it's where fish congregate, summer and winter."

The answer is clear On lakes and reservoirs where little snow has fallen and clear ice covers the majority of the surface, Bro's initial holes will have a different look and feel about them.

It's in these holes Bro keeps his power auger running well after its point has protruded from the ice's underbelly, or when using a hand auger, will lower and lift it quickly several times so that water is brought up out of the hole and onto the ice. Immediately following, he'll set up his Frabill flip-over and/or Hub-style shelter over what seems like a sloppy, slippery mess – but there's a method to Bro's madness.

"First, the slightly warmer, freshwater from the lake will quickly etch into the slick surface of the clear ice, causing it to cloud and reduce light penetration," Bro claims. "And the shanty, too, will create a shadow, and the most active fish around will eventually swim over and take shelter under my shelter." Clever...

Setting up these holes first lets the immediate surroundings calm down while the dedicated guide's out drilling another swath of holes, setting tip-ups and the like... "Just keep as quiet as you can," warns Bro, "and keep your movement to a minimum or you will spook fish."



Stop. Look. Drill. If you're looking to land a limit of fish early in the ice-fishing season, just remember to stop and take a look around before drilling that first hole. Features seen on the surface of the icescape will often tell you where to start.

Bore your holes where clear ice butts to white, where heaves or cracks have formed, or over snowdrifts that create overhead cover; you'll stand a better chance of pegging fish than your buddy who doesn't pay attention.

Photo by Bill Lindner

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When Panfish Behave Badly

By Jason Mitchell www.jasonmitchelloutdoors.com

Confidence however must be seasoned or you are going to get into trouble as an angler. You have to believe and have confidence in order to mentally succeed on the ice. You have to believe that you are going to find fish and then figure out how to catch them. The trouble is when we have an over confidence in a spot or presentation because of one great moment and make the mistake that when we go back to "Lake X" everything will be the exact same as when we left. I am willing to bet that if you fish a lot, you have made that mistake as I know I have. The reality is that conditions are changing from day to day and especially from year to year.

The biggest mistake I have ever made as an angler is getting so confident in a particular presentation, mentality or location that I quit learning. Don't get locked into something so bad that you beat a dead horse. When people make comments with fishing like "always" or "never," I know they are confident but not as seasoned. If you fish enough, you will come to the conclusion that fish don't "always" bite on Lake X or a particular lure "always" works. Perhaps a particular location "never" holds fish. When you start believing yourself and get rigid, you are heading towards humility.

With panfish, the biggest trend over the past few years might be how anglers have embraced soft plastics. There is much to like about soft plastics. You can change colors and descent rate easily. The plastics move water and vibrate in a fashion where they can pull aggressive fish from great distances. You can catch several fish on one tail eliminating time spent out of the water reloading bait. Often, it seems like a quivering or gliding soft plastic will trigger more aggressive strikes from crappie, bluegill and perch. On many bodies of water, I start out with plastics and don't take them off all day. We have filmed countless shows using soft plastics and have written several articles explaining the merits of soft plastic. Once you arrive to the conclusion however that you "never" have to rely on live bait you are heading towards trouble sooner or later. The reality is that the tougher bites still force my hand and require tipping with traditional live bait options like minnow heads, Euro Larvae, wax worms or wigglers. The best anglers are flexible and have a fluid mindset that allows them to adapt.

One of the most common situations where I see traditional live bait often trumping soft plastics are on fisheries with out of balance forage. Fisheries with high amounts of forage and lower densities of fish. Some perch fisheries for example have huge numbers of freshwater shrimp for example. The fish grow big and are in great body condition. Because of the endless forage that is present, getting these fish to bite can seem like brain surgery. On the prairie lakes of the Dakotas, we often see this cycle. Typically when the water rises, the fish get less concentrated and the decomposing flooded terrestrial vegetation spikes invertebrates through the roof. Lots of stuff to eat for the fish but not necessarily the best situation for finding fish that make you look good. What is interesting is how some of these lakes can cycle. A particular lake might get a reputation for a winter or two as a tough lake for fishing. You work hard to catch a few fish and you mark many fish that won't eat. (continued page 18)



A common mistake some anglers make is thinking the world below the ice is static. The mistaken belief that nothing changes. We have all probably been lulled into a great bite where we set up on a location and the fish basically make us look good. The fish accelerate towards your presentation, rise up and than greet you. The reality is that you can use several different presentations and fish those presentations several different ways and get bit. We go home with a bounce in our step and a grin. We also go home with confidence.

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TIP-UP TRENDS ON ICE

Progressive 'Trap' Tactics Set to Fuel Your Best Season Ever
By Ted Pilgrim



Advanced trap-line tactics put plenty of big fish on the ice.
(Photo by Bill Lindner)

There's something satisfying about a well-planned network of tip-ups set across the white expanse of a frozen lake. Strategically placed fish "trap-lines," each rigged with a big frisky baitfish, attract and literally snare freshwater predators like nothing else under ice. Get a bunch of dudes together, stack some 'traps' into 5-gallon pails, and saturate the ice with baited flags.

When that first signal rises high above the icy horizon, heart rates soar as the rugged race ensues. The winner earns the right to set the hook and proudly hoist a hefty pike, walleye or any other freshwater prize that bites.

The smartest tip-up parties bait the big 'uns on spacious open flats or along lengthy sections of a drop-off—places where fish consistently search for food. With six or more buds along, each empowered to run 2 or more lines apiece, you can put live bait in front of a lot of toothy grins. That's trap-line fishing on ice in a nutshell, and it's devastatingly effective.

The sport's the ultimate testing grounds for gear. It's why I've relied on the same classic tip-ups for years. The contraptions perform a simple task—presenting bait and indicating strikes—and they do it reliably, day after day, winter after winter.

On a long point or drop-off, a wise strategy places one group of anglers at each end of the trap-line, with additional fishermen spaced evenly between. If you're going in cold turkey, searching a big area for the first time, perhaps you set one tip-up every 50 to 100 paces. Park a pickup truck or snowmobile every so often along your routes to serve as mobile basecamps. Better yet, set out a large pop-up style portable shelter, such as Frabill's cavernous, aptly named Headquarters.

Setting out on foot, groups of trap-line anglers work best in pairs. First run through, one dude drills, while the other follows with a sonar, dipping the transducer in each new hole. Sonar guy keeps driller guy on target with depth, as he also checks for fish with a portable unit, such as a Humminbird 597ci HD Combo. When he sees something that looks like a good fish, sonar guy might also trace an "F" or "BF" (big fish) in the snow, which assures they'll X-mark-the-spot with a tip-up next run through. In addition to sonar, the 597 'Bird also has a built-in GPS chartplotter with LakeMaster cartography, keeping you right on target with tip-up sets.



Humminbird 597ci HD

At the end of a bait set run, each fisherman grabs a bucket. If one of your buddies happens to be a tip-up pro the likes of Captain Pat Kalmerton, you're in for a good day. "When we're tip-up fishing for pike or walleyes," says the ace ice guide, "we use a systematic approach. First, you've absolutely got to have good gear, and you've got to have a solid plan. For my guides and I, nothing works better than the 'bucket system.'

"We can take a single Frabill bucket and fill it with at least six round Pro-Thermal tip-ups. The other bucket, a 1409 Aqua-Life Bait Station, gets used to house our tip-up 'soldiers'—wild live suckers, big shiners or chubs. We want bait that really kicks; the critters that swim in huge arcs below the ice, pulling in predators like a lab working a field for pheasants.



Frabill Min-O-Dipper Bait Bucket



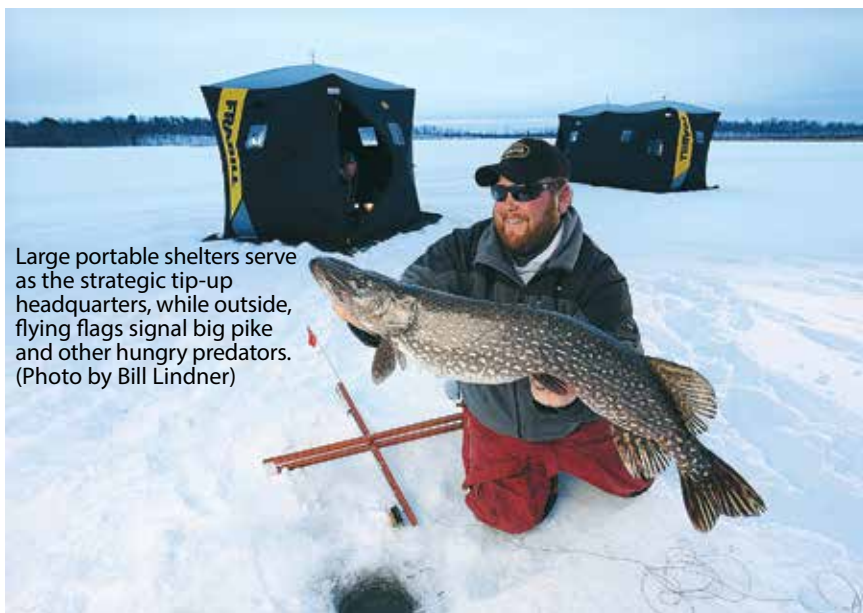
Frabill Aqualife™ Bait Station

The Bait Station keeps minnows happy. It's insulated and aerated. Water won't freeze, and the micro-bubbler infuses the tank with energizing oxygen—like steroids for baitfish."

Beyond robust bait, which drives his tip-up system, Kalmerton has recently taken his tip-up system to new heights. "If it ain't broke, don't monkey with it," quips the Great Lakes captain. "Whoever penned this credo must have been referring to ice fishing.

The sport's the ultimate testing grounds for gear. It's why I've relied on the same classic tip-ups for years. The contraptions perform a simple task—presenting bait and indicating strikes—and they do it reliably, day after day, winter after winter.

"Truthfully, never thought I'd have a need to alter my traps, but I was wrong. When I tested Frabill's Calibrator Tip-Up a few winters back, my fishing rose to a whole other level of precision and effectiveness.



Large portable shelters serve as the strategic tip-up headquarters, while outside, flying flags signal big pike and other hungry predators. (Photo by Bill Lindner)

I can take any existing tip-up and instantly convert it into a digital line-counter system, which also provides additional fish-catching intel.” Kalmerton says his Calibrator Line Counter kits and complete Calibrator tip-up systems allow him to drop baits to effective depths instantly, thanks to a digital LCD display. “Every good troller uses a line-counter reel, and I’ve now come to feel the same way about my tip-up fishing. Not only can I instantly measure how much line I have out, the Calibrator also tells me the precise amount of time that’s elapsed since a strike occurred, and how much line the fish has stripped from the spool—all displayed in pinpoint accuracy.”

Frabill’s Calibrator system takes tip-up fishing to the next level of efficiency and high-level intel. (Photo courtesy of Frabill)



Adding another layer of fun and efficiency, Kalmerton occasionally mounts a miniature underwater camera, such as an Aqua-Vu Micro 5, to his tip-up, providing a real-life view of what’s happening with his bait and any fish in the neighborhood.

“Cameras add a dimension of interactivity to tip-up fishing that anglers are just starting to appreciate. Think of it as a real-time trail cam for fishing. And with new wireless technology, camera fishing is more convenient than ever.”

Aqua-Vu’s Micro Series re-imagines underwater cameras, offering amazing color and clarity in a hand-held package. The Micro 5 with DVR features a high-resolution 5-inch color LCS with an IP67-rated waterproof case and sunshield / screen protector.



Whether your team’s tip-up program matches Kalmerton’s techno heights or remains a simpler affair, it’s always a race on ice to reach the flag first. Most of the time, especially with larger pike and walleyes, it isn’t necessary to let fish run for long. Rigged right, quick hooksets tag more fish, and certainly harm far fewer of them. In the meantime, it’s a game of waiting. Lean on a tailgate. Pour a cup of coffee. Talk a little smack. The winner’s always the first dude to the flag.

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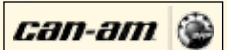


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When Panfish Behave Badly

(continued from page 15)

Then a few years go by and the lake level either stabilizes or drops. Once the fish crop down the edibles to a certain point, the fish miraculously begin biting good. Many lakes go through these highs and lows where fish bite really well one winter and require pulling teeth the next.

When you encounter lakes that are in this forage slump, live bait often reigns as king and the reasons become more obvious when you watch these fish with an underwater camera like the Vexilar Scout. What you see when using a camera while fishing for fish that have too much to eat around them is that these fish are not as motivated. Typically when you watch a panfish hit a lure or jig, they peddle up to the offering and suck the jig in. Usually, the fish only suck enough to get the jig about half way in. The second effort is when the entire jig disappears. Sight fishermen can relate to this. When fish are more motivated, these suck ins are more powerful and happen closer together. That is why on a better bite, soft plastics work so well. On tough bites, you sometimes don't get the second effort and the first effort is often lacking effort.

Imagine a ten inch bluegill or twelve inch perch in an environment where there is little competition amongst other fish for the available forage and there is a never ending opportunity to eat something that can't really get away. The result is a fish that is comparatively lazy, unmotivated and methodical. There might be windows where these fish will become more aggressive for short periods of time. Much of the time however, these fish can be very temperamental. They often have an extremely short ceiling where they will rise up through the water column to chase. These fish also often back down from any aggressive movements. These bites often call for a more stationary presentation where the rod is gently quivered or bounced subtly before hanging still.

The reality is that live bait still taste better than any soft plastic. I have an aquarium in my office that has perch, bluegill and crappie. I can drop a minnow or wax worm in the aquarium and the fish eat it. If I drop a soft plastic tail into the aquarium, the fish will still hit it and suck it in but they always spit it out. No fish in my aquarium has ever swallowed or digested a piece of soft plastic. On the toughest bites where fish appear extremely unmotivated, live bait gives you an edge because the scent will still pull fish over when you have to hold the presentation still and the fish will hold on to the presentation just enough longer to both distinguish the bite and set the hook.

A deadly tip for really tough fish that just come up to the bait unmotivated and only give the bait one light suck in and don't want to hold onto the bait is to use a dangler. A dangler is a tiny treble hook that gets slid onto the hook of the jig so that it dangles behind the bait. I really like to use danglers with wax worms. Wax worms ooze out a lot of scent and taste. Thread on a wax worm on to the jig hook. Slide the small treble hook on to the jig hook so that it dangles behind the wax worm and then thread on another wax worm over the top. When fish grab at the back of the jig and mouth the wax worms with little effort, the treble hook gets caught on the mouth of the fish. This little trick will help your batting average and allow you to detect really tough fish and has saved my tail many days when I have had to pull my hair out trying to catch tough fish.

These Tips Could Save Your Life...

By Joe Balog, Pro Staff Plano Synergy

Duck hunting can be a thrilling pursuit. Most waterfowlers attribute their passion to camaraderie in the blind, coupled with up-close-and-personal interaction with game. Lots of shooting helps the cause.

It's easy to get distracted, even overtaken by the moment. But such excuses weren't going through my head as my ears rang so loudly I couldn't distinguish what my hunting partner was saying. His words didn't really concern me anyway, as he had almost killed me a second prior.

A normal day of duck hunting had nearly turned deadly, giving me one hunting memory I'd rather forget. But I never will.

My partner for the day (who has never joined me since) was always the type of hunter to 'push the envelope,' often taking long shots, or greedily emptying his gun at each volley. I probably should have recognized that in the beginning. But I never thought he would shoot directly over my head as I squatted in front of him, attempting to stay concealed and call the ducks closer. He had no regard for distance, and fired away **just as I began to stand up.** Had I rose a millisecond sooner, he would have put a twelve gauge round into the back of my head.

I've thought about the incident many times since, and have come up with a few tips which I now incorporate in the duck blind. These include:

- It's vital the hunting party have a "leader." That individual calls the shot. If anyone fires at ducks prior, his name comes off the roster for future outings.
- Regardless of how often I hunt with the same guys, whenever a new hunter is introduced, a few key points are discussed prior to first light. Only shoot when we say, and don't shoot crippled birds unless I instruct. Never have your gun loaded when individuals are coming in and out of the blind, or loading the boat. And never, ever point a gun-loaded or empty-at another hunter or dog.
- I always say something along the lines of "Remember, they're only ducks. This isn't a last-second drive to win the Super Bowl, and we don't need to kill them to eat. If we don't get some of them, we'll make up for it next time. It's not that important." That often brings everyone back to reality.

Waterfowl hunting offers some of the most exciting interaction in the outdoors. The close range gunning, the calling, the dogs-there's nothing like it. But it leads to a tendency to forget the most important factor in hunting; we are using dangerous weapons, capable of swiftly killing a human being. We need to always have that in mind first, and everything else second.

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Ideal conditions should be in order on most high elevation lakes and reservoirs now, and with the low fishing pressure of recent months, these fish are willing to bite.

Winter weather doesn't mean that the good fishing is over until spring, and many lakes and reservoirs have great year-round action. These are some of the shortest days of the year now, so you'll want to take advantage of any calm, quiet days, and head out for a little winter fishing. Here are a few good bets for early winter action.

HEBGEN LAKE

Anglers looking for ice fishing action can head to the frozen areas of Hebgen now. The West Yellowstone area is cold and hardened up now, and the big brown trout and rainbows are ready for a fight. Hebgen Lake

is quite large at more than 16 miles long and 4 miles wide, making it ideal for winter fishing. The trout in Hebgen Lake are large as well, averaging around 16 inches.

The Madison Arm of the lake in particular is a good place to start. An abundance of feisty deep-running rainbows can be encountered on this lake with the big browns hanging near the bottom. To get the attention of fish now you can try dropping a nightcrawler to the bottom. Using some kind of scent to attract and induce aggressive feeding is highly recommended during the winter. Powerful scents are often the difference between getting a bite and going home skunked. Hebgen's quality fishing combined with its scenic beauty make for an awesome day of fishing.

GALLATIN RIVER

Open water fishing still exists now as well, and if you are in the area fishing Hebgen Lake, you can drop over to the mighty Gallatin River for some exceptional fly fishing now.

You don't have to be a great fly fisherman to take advantage of this bite. If you can manage a 15' cast, you are good to go. Nymphing with tiny midges couldn't be a simpler presentation. Make a short roll cast upstream and drift the offering to the target area. Super easy, super effective. Start with a small strike indicator, add a tiny weight, tie on an attractor fly (an egg or micro worm) 6 inches below, then add two midge droppers separated by a foot or so, (midges in size 18 to 22). These trout will be hugging the bottom, so you'll want each fly to drift by at eye level. You'll have good luck with red midges, but you can also throw black, olive and brown patterns now. Most fly fishermen don't even consider hitting the water once it gets cold, and the fishing can be slow now, but you can also stumble on an epic bite if you know what you're looking for.

LAKE MARY RONAN

This northwest Montana lake will have plenty of yellow perch action now as these fish will be rising off the bottom to catch jigs on the drop. Location is key here. Target the weed beds that are around the boat launch area or the north end of the lake for good ice fishing. Move and drill until you find the biters. Kokanee style hooks and Glo-Hooks with scented baits like Powerbait, garlic corn or perch eyes will put more fish in your bucket. Kokanee salmon can also be caught now using maggots, usually in the 30 foot water mark. The Logan State Park boat ramp is a good place to start. Further up the road west of Kalispell, Smith Lake offers up some fine perch and northern pike fishing now. Use a bright colored jig tipped with a maggot or if you are after the pike I'd advise using smelt on these hard-hitting fish.

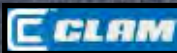
HOLLAND LAKE

If you drop down along Highway 83 near Seeley Lake, you'll find Holland Lake tucked away between the mountains. Holland Lake has excellent fishing for kokanee, rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and whitefish. During the off-season the lake is not overly used and can be perfect for a weekend get-away. Best fishing can be had near the shoreline using a Glo-Hook tipped with maggots or perch eyes. You'll have to search a bit deeper for any kokanee that are in the lake, typically around the 30 foot mark to start. You can also drop a Swedish Pimple with a Glo-Hook rig down for suspended kokes. Covering lots of ice should improve your odds. Once you find kokanee, you'll be a happy angler as these fish are worth the trip. They are fine to eat!

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Lying out in the middle of nowhere in the vast prairie lands of eastern Montana near the small town of Ryegate lies this 2,000 acre lake, loaded with plenty of rainbow trout that exceed 2 pounds, pesky brown trout, yellow perch, and even the rare tiger muskie inhabit the lake. Kokanee salmon can even be pulled up through the ice now. If you get out on a rare day without wind, the fishing can be fantastic here. Your standard ice fishing techniques apply here. Small spinners, dropped jigs and live baits work best here. Giant muskie can be caught through the ice here, but you'll have to have the right gear to pull up a beast here. It's a long ride for most, but the fishing and diversity of the lake's species make it a true winter fishing destination.

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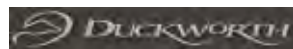
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Calling Coyotes—Sealing the Deal (continued from page 8)

The majority of hunters reading this are either into long range hunting or are considering it. Those with some experience already have an appreciation for the need for an accurate rifle and load as well as the need for a steady rest. Both of these will increase the odds of collecting the fur from the next coyote that appears at your stand. The major difference is that our objective in calling is to get the coyote as close as necessary to ensure a good, lethal shot. The circumstances are different than with pure long range hunting however. We've intentionally stirred the coyote up. He's more than likely either in the process of coming or

going. We have a finite amount of time to take the shot or miss the opportunity. That's not to say that ambushing a coyote or setting up for a long shot on a coyote that's working a meadow will necessarily allow us all the time in the world but in general, calling will limit the time frame for the shot.

The coyote's mindset determines how much that timeframe is shortened. A coyote coming in hot will usually leave just as hot. A coyote picking its way to the stand will be more likely to stop on its exit if it hasn't been shot at yet. During the last coyote calling competition we hunted, my son and I had more hot coyotes than usual responding to the call. Normally we'll bark the coyotes to a stop for a decent rifle shot but that weekend they were coming hard and then leaving just as hard. By the end of the hunt we determined to get proficient with a shotgun to avoid watching coyotes running over the hill. A double carry of both a rifle and a shotgun can give more flexibility in how you handle hard charges. I recommend an article Dustin Butler wrote for the December 2011 Predator Extreme magazine on shotgunning coyotes if you are interested in putting your shotgun to work on predators. For those who are primarily rifle hunters, we need to adapt to make the most of the opportunities.

The two things the rifle hunter needs from his firearm is accuracy and flat trajectory. If you are trying to save fur, you'll also need a bullet with the best terminal performance to minimize fur damage. (See the article entitled Fur Loads from the February 2011 edition of LRH magazine.) Although benchrest accuracy isn't necessary for coyotes, it's hard to have too much. A coyote isn't very big once the hair comes off. For hunting in the West, I strive for loads that will group one and a half inches at 200 yards for a three shot string. Ideally, the cartridge's trajectory will allow for a 200 yard zero with a maximum midrange trajectory of around one inch. Using the Maximum Point Blank Range (MPBR) theory of sighting in (usually around a 250 yard zero for most of the hotter varmint cartridges on a five inch vital size) resulted in too many misses at 150 to 175 yards. The slightest bobble results in shooting over coyotes. A 200 yard zero will still allow centermass holds out to 250 yards with most cartridges and covers 95% of our called coyotes.

The optics for a calling rifle need to be durable, transmit a reasonable amount of light and have enough field of view (FOV) to allow the hunter to pick up the animal easily through the scope. Many coyote hunters put high magnification scopes on their calling rifles. I've missed far more opportunities from too small a FOV than from not having enough magnification. I like a minimum FOV of around 35 feet at 100 yards. This usually means a variable scope with a lower ends of 2.5 to 3X. It's rare to need more than eight or nine power for a shot at a coyote but if you need more upper-end magnification, look at the four to six factor scopes. Shotgun carry allows one to get away with less FOV since the scattergun will be deployed on the close shots anyway. Many long range hunters feel handicapped hunting without a turret. Some of the Tactical scopes combine high FOV scopes with tactical or target turrets and companies such as Leupold will retro fit a number of turrets to their lower magnification range variables for a reasonable fee. A Leupold VX3 2.5-8X with a CDS turret installed by their Custom Shop would be hard to beat for the vast majority of coyote calling. The rangefinder you use for your LR shooting will also come in handy for a coyote that hangs up and determining the maximum distance for your shotgun or rifle before beginning calling. Choose some landmarks outlining your kill zone then start calling. (continued on page 30)

NEW GEAR REVIEW BOB WARD'S SPORTS & OUTDOORS

Smokehouse Smoke Chief - Turn Any Grill Into A Smoker

This unit produces "cold smoke" and can be easily connected to any grill or outdoor cooking device to quickly produce delicious smoked foods. This new product is unique in that it will turn a barbecue grill that most families already have into a smoker in a matter of seconds, and it produces a 'cold smoke' that allows for consistency in making your favorite recipe. Simply fill up the tube with BBQ pellets then plug it in and you're ready to go. On most grills it sits next to the grill and pipes the smoke in through the rotisserie hole that is already available. Smoke Chief smokes for up to 3 hours on just one cup of BBQ pellets and operates on 12VDC or 110AC power.



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At Discovery Ski Area January 22nd & 23rd

Hosted By: Lisa Densmore Ballard – Pro Skier

Sponsored By Bob Ward's, Elan Skis, & Discovery Ski Area

This January 22nd and 23rd, pro skier Lisa Densmore Ballard returns to Discovery ski area to host "Your Turn," a women's only ski clinic, for the second year in a row. Participants can expect a full day of instruction and analysis by Lisa and her instructors. This includes individual on snow clinics and video review for each skier.

It's not all work though! The day starts with continental breakfast, a ski demo paired with instruction, lunch falls in the middle, and finally the après-ski party! Expect food, fun, and prizes to go along with a full day of learning.

The clinic is limited to the first 64 women to sign up (32 per day) at bobwards.com. The cost is just \$30 for the clinic. The lift ticket to Discovery Ski Area is extra. Season pass holders need only pay for the clinic. Due to the popularity of this event participants may sign up for either the 22nd or 23rd, but not both. The 2014 clinic sold out immediately so it is recommended that interested parties visit bobwards.com as soon as possible.

Lisa Densmore Ballard has been involved in many aspects of the ski world. A member of the U.S. Ski Team in the late 1970's and a six-year veteran of the Women's Pro Ski Tour in the 1980's, Lisa has competed in ski racing for most of her life. Today, she is a standout on the master's circuit, with 4 world titles and 80 national titles across all alpine disciplines. She has been the number one ranked skier in her age group and a member of the U.S. Alpine Masters Ski Team since she joined the master's circuit 1991. In addition to competition, Lisa has been a highly regarded ski instructor and coach for over 20 years.

For more information, contact Ryan Corwin, Bob Ward's Advertising Manager at rcorwin@bobwards.com or via phone at 406.728.3220.

Hunting & Conservation News Proudly Sponsored By Republic Services of Montana



Bighorn Sheep Translocations Increase Genetic Diversity in Oregon Herds

ammoland.com Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 12/9/14

ODFW captured and relocated California bighorn sheep at several locations this week to improve genetic diversity among herds and continue efforts to restore this native species in Oregon.

Bighorns were captured in the Deschutes and John Day River canyons and in the Branson Creek area of Grant County. Fifteen sheep captured in the Deschutes River Canyon were released at Alvord Peaks (Harney County) and 20 sheep captured in the John Day River Canyon went to McClellan (Grant County).



Photo: ammoland.com

The sheep relocated this week will supplement existing herds at Alvord Peaks and McClellan, increasing genetic diversity within the herds.

"Research conducted in Oregon shows we need to mix up the genetics of the herds," said Don Whittaker, ODFW ungulate coordinator. "Higher genetic diversity leads to better population performance and we hope to see population increases, too."...

Each bighorn sheep was disease-tested and many were fitted with a transmitter so their movements can be tracked.

Twenty bighorn sheep were also released on Bureau of Land Management land in the Klamath River Canyon (below JC Boyle Dam) today, where bighorn sheep have not been seen since they were extirpated from Oregon in the 1940s....

Historically, California bighorns were the most abundant native wild sheep in Oregon and were found throughout the mountainous terrain of southeast Oregon....

"These magnificent animals are an iconic species in southeast Oregon's mountain country," said Tom Collom, district wildlife biologist in Klamath Falls. "This week's operation will help maintain healthy herds of bighorn sheep and continue the state's restoration efforts, which have been in the works since the 1950s."...

Bighorn sheep died off in Oregon in the 1940s due to unregulated hunting and their susceptibility to domestic livestock diseases. The first successful bighorn sheep relocation in Oregon occurred in 1954, when 20 California bighorns were relocated from British Columbia to the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in Lake County. Since then, the population of bighorn sheep has grown to an estimated 3,500-3,700 as a result of ODFW's aggressive restoration efforts.

Bighorn sheep are one of the rarest game mammals in Oregon today. Less than 100 bighorn sheep tags were offered to hunters last year on a "once-in-a-lifetime" hunt basis. ODFW also auctions and raffles off a bighorn sheep tag each year at events sponsored by sportsmen conservation groups; proceeds from the sales benefit the management of bighorn sheep.

HUNTING & CONSERVATION NEWS

Garrity Mountain WMA Adds Winter Range For Elk And Enhanced Recreational Access For Public

The Conservation Fund 11/24/14

The Conservation Fund and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) announced today the protection and addition of 640 acres to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) west of Anaconda. This project was made possible with funding from the Natural Resource Damage Protection Program, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), FWP and the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust.



Garrity Mountain WMA
Photo by Mark Sommer

The land, which features windswept grassy hillsides, natural ponds and a portion of one of the largest aspen stands in the Upper Clark Fork River basin, provides critical wintering and calving grounds for elk and will provide new public access to the northeastern section of the WMA.

"We can't thank the funding partners enough for making this project happen," said Ray Vinkey, FWP Wildlife Biologist. "And most of all we want to acknowledge the leadership and support of the Anaconda Sportsmen's Club and residents in the local area who brought this property to our attention and encouraged our efforts from start to finish. This is truly a community achievement."

The Conservation Fund, a national organization dedicated to creating land and water protection strategies that balance environmental stewardship with economic vitality, purchased the property in March 2014. FWP used funding from the Natural Resource Damage Protection Program, its Habitat Montana Program and the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust to acquire the acreage from the Fund on November 17. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation also provided strategic funding to help preserve this priority landscape from future development.

"Wild and beautiful places like this define our state's natural character," said Gates Watson, Montana state director of The Conservation Fund. "We are pleased to assist the state in the protection of this vital habitat for the benefit of both wildlife and people, and we thank the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust for their support."

"We are pleased to join with our partners in protecting and conserving this vital habitat for elk and other wildlife," said Blake Henning, RMEF vice president of lands and conservation. "It's part of RMEF's continuing commitment that included a \$100,000 pledge in the past toward much needed noxious weed treatments, fence removal and other habitat work on the WMA."

The public will be able to access the property from a county road just west of Anaconda. Public use regulations will be consistent with existing rules on the Garrity Mountain WMA, which provide for recreational use including hunting, while simultaneously conserving the natural resources for which the property was purchased.

"The purchase is a valuable addition to the existing Garrity Mountain WMA due to its exceptional winter range and aspen stands," said Gregory Mullen, environmental specialist with the Montana Department of Justice, Natural Resource Damage Program....

"This is a great addition to the Garrity Mountain WMA because it provides critical habitat required by our local populations of elk, deer, and moose during the late winter and early spring months," said Chris Marchion of the Anaconda Sportsmen Club. "This property complements our existing public lands and provides valuable access for outdoor recreation in the summer and fall months. The Club is thankful for the support of Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Skyline Sportsmen, Montana Wildlife Federation, and our local county government, as well as the many citizens that spoke in favor of this project."...

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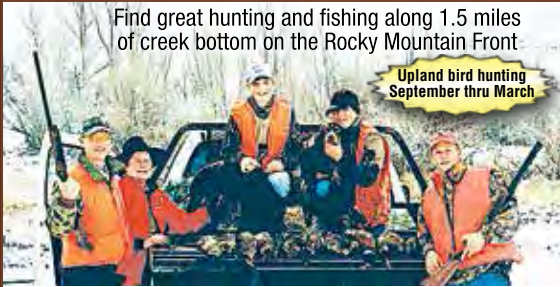
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HUNTING & CONSERVATION NEWS



Elk Camp Closes, Record Expo Attendance

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Fresh off closing out a highly successful national convention, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is setting a course toward 2015 with a goal of better carrying out its mission.

"We felt a rush of adrenaline and increased enthusiasm from our dedicated volunteers, members and conservation partners who attended Elk Camp from across the nation," said David Allen, RMEF president and CEO. "We will harness that energy and surge forward as we expand our conservation efforts in doing even more to improve the future of elk and elk country."

Elk Camp's evening events were at capacity Dec. 4-7 at The Mirage in Las Vegas. Among the highlights was Saturday's Volunteer Fun Night which included special RMEF recognition of top individuals, chapters and states for their passionate efforts to raise funds to ensure the future of elk, other wildlife, their habitat and our hunting heritage.

Performances by country music artists Daryle Singletary, Easton Corbin, and a memorable guitar pull featuring Tracy Lawrence, Chuck Wicks and Mark Wills provided quality entertainment. RMEF also hosted live feeds of the National Finals Rodeo. Legendary cowboys including Ty Murray and Dan Mortensen, and current cowboys like Chris Shivers took part in RMEF events and autograph sessions as did hunting personalities Lee and Tiffany Lakosky, Pat and Nicole Reeve, Randy Newberg, and Brandon Bates and Kristy Titus from RMEF Team Elk.

Attendance for the inaugural Hunter Christmas Exposition, presented by Cabela's, was approximately 28,000 at the Las Vegas Convention Center. That figure broke the previous all-time high of 23,000 for an Elk Camp-related expo set in Albuquerque in 2001. The 2013 expo, also held in Las Vegas, drew approximately 12,000 attendees.

"We are grateful for such a strong show of support of our sponsor partners and the exhibitors who believe in us and our mission," said Steve Decker, RMEF vice president of marketing...



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Bighorn Sheep Released In Pioneers



12/8/14

On Saturday, crews from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks released nine bighorn ewes into the eastern Pioneer Mountains as part of a herd augmentation effort approved by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission in November.

The sheep were captured in the Missouri Breaks north of Winifred and released at the BLM Maiden Rock Fishing Access Site. All of the sheep were fitted with radio collars so that biologists may monitor their movement in the area.

FWP contacted all area landowners to alert them to the augmentation effort.

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REGIONAL NEWS



A Relative 'Newcomer' Inhabits Northern Idaho Waters

A newcomer is establishing itself in northern Idaho. Walleye, a staple of the Midwestern United States, have not historically been a part of the northern Idaho landscape. They have found their way into area waters fairly recently.

Lake Pend Oreille, well known for its kokanee, Kamloops rainbow trout, bull trout and cutthroat is now also home to a growing walleye population.

Walleye were illegally introduced into the Clark Fork River, upstream in Montana. They gradually worked their way downstream into Idaho and were detected in Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend Oreille River around 2004-2006. Although occasionally caught by anglers, substantive catches of walleye weren't really evident until 2010.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) completed walleye surveys in 2011 and 2014 that showed walleye are expanding. Using gill nets, IDFG biologists sampled waters from the Clark Fork delta, across Lake Pend Oreille, and down the Pend Oreille River. Catches show walleye abundance has nearly doubled in the three years between surveys.

Walleye in the Pend Oreille system are growing fast. Five and six pound fish are relatively common. Although walleye are increasing, they are still relatively low in abundance compared to well-established populations in the northwest such as Washington's Lake Roosevelt, with over twice as many walleye per acre.

Walleye present a unique challenge for fishery managers. They are often revered by anglers for the quality of their meat and the challenging angling experience they provide. A walleye fishery has not been available in northern Idaho, and biologists recognize it is something a number of anglers desire.

Biologists recognize that new fisheries come with risks. Walleye are predators that live almost entirely on a diet of other fish. In Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend Oreille River, that means walleye may reduce the number of other species that anglers like to catch. They may also pose problems for some of the native fish in the system, such as cutthroat and bull trout.

Like them or not, walleye are now a permanent part of the northern Idaho waterscape. Eliminating the population would not be possible. However, because walleye were illegally introduced and may have detrimental impacts on some of the lake's existing fisheries, IDFG will not encourage walleye population growth.

IDFG has an official policy that states the Department will not promote or enhance fisheries for illegally introduced species. Rob Ryan, Regional Fisheries biologist for IDFG says the policy is intended to discourage anglers from establishing new fisheries through illegal introductions.

"Although illegal introductions may provide a new fishing opportunity for some anglers, it always comes at the expense of someone else," said Ryan.

Ryan acknowledges that many of Idaho's most popular fisheries are based largely on non-native fish, but notes not all introductions were well thought out.

"Over the past 100 years, there have been hundreds of introductions by government agencies, sportsmen's groups, and private individuals. Many of them provided benefits, but others have caused irreparable damage."

Taking into account the lessons learned, IDFG is now very cautious about stocking non-native fish into new waters, and fishery managers now implement a rigorous process to evaluate the potential impacts and benefits of new species introductions.

REGIONAL NEWS



Nevada Game Wardens Break Up Poaching Ring Responsible For Numerous Wildlife Crimes



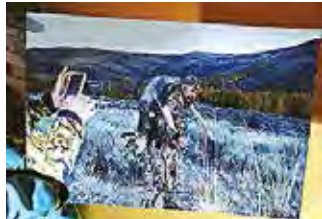
A game warden catalogs illegally taken game meat during the investigation.

Years-long investigation closes with felony wildlife and weapons charges for multiple offenders poaching-ring.

Nevada game wardens have concluded an investigation of a poaching ring involving three suspects in several counties, spanning almost two years in a case that has netted a dozen felony charges and uncovered the illegal killing of dozens of animals.

The suspects in the poaching ring are Adrian Acevedo-Hernandez, aka "El Pantera," 36, Jose Luis Montufar-Canales, 31, and J. Nemias Reyes Marin, 31. An initial arrest of a fourth, separate suspect, Jose Manuel Ortega-Torres, 30, led to the three men who were determined to be actively engaging in several different wildlife crimes, prompting an in-depth investigation of the three men by game wardens. Ortega-Torres is from Lincoln County and the men involved in the poaching ring were all living in Las Vegas.

"This case involved a lot of time, effort and commitment by game wardens," said Chief Game Warden Tyler Turnipseed. "We followed one lead into another in what seemed to be a bottomless supply of wildlife crime. Hopefully the resulting fines, forfeitures and jail time will discourage this kind of systemic criminal activity in the future."



A game warden holds a photo discovered while executing a search warrant that shows Adrian Acevedo-Hernandez, 36, with an illegally killed deer.

In June of 2013, Nevada game wardens received information that two deer had been unlawfully killed on a farm near Hiko, Nev. Game wardens viewed an image publicly available through social media and confirmed that two female deer were unlawfully killed out of season in late May.

Game wardens identified one of the suspects in the photograph as Ortega-Torres. This led to a search warrant in Hiko at his residence, seizing illegal deer meat, trace evidence, unlawfully killed migratory birds, butchering tools, weapons and ammunition. Ortega-Torres

was arrested at the same residence and later convicted in Lincoln County of a gross misdemeanor for unlawful possession of a mule deer.

Game wardens were able to identify a second suspect from the photograph, Acevedo-Hernandez. Game wardens served a search warrant at the suspect's residence in Las Vegas, seizing more deer meat, deer parts, butchering tools, weapons and ammunition. Felony and gross misdemeanor charges were filed on Acevedo-Hernandez in Lincoln County for the unlawfully killing of two female mule deer out of season, he was taken into custody in July 2013.

Two more suspects, Montufar-Canales and Marin were also identified through public view social media as potential wildlife criminals associated with Acevedo-Hernandez.

The investigation showed Acevedo-Hernandez, Montufar-Canales and Marin had all used false information to unlawfully apply for resident hunting licenses and tags. DNA results from seizures in Hiko and Las Vegas showed three female deer out of closed season in Hiko in addition to three other female deer for a total of at least six deer illegally killed. Other wildlife including game fish, migratory game birds and protected migratory birds were also suspected of being unlawfully killed by the poaching ring...

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Elk Hunter, Companion Cited Over Illegal Killing of Bull Elk Inside Fossil Butte National Monument

Two Wyoming men have been cited in connection with the poaching of a bull elk inside Fossil Butte National Monument in southwestern Wyoming. The elk was shot and killed inside the monument, which under federal law is off-limits to all hunting. In addition, the Wyoming state hunting season for bull elk had closed more than two weeks before the incident.

The poaching incident occurred in the Middle Canyon area on the east side of the monument, hundreds of yards inside the park periphery. Owing to its close proximity to legal hunting zones outside the monument, its entire 22-mile boundary is fenced, with "No Hunting" signs posted clearly at frequent intervals along the wire perimeter. Signs also identify it as national park land. Yellow "No Hunting" signs and prominent National Park Service markers are posted at the park's only entry points, where the north-south road enters and exits the park. Hunters can and do use the road to travel to legal hunting grounds outside Fossil Butte.

Cited for investigation of illegal use of a firearm in a national park and taking of wildlife in a national park was William Cruise, 51, of Kemmerer. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department also issued citations for hunting bull elk out of season and for not properly tagging the kill. Cited for investigation of disturbing and harassing wildlife was Jason Moss, 36, of Opal...

A National Park Service law enforcement ranger on patrol had encountered Cruise along the main road inside the monument the afternoon of Nov. 6, about two hours before the elk was shot. Park Ranger Kayla Powell provided him with a hunting brochure and park map, on which she noted for him his location inside Fossil Butte. She also advised him verbally that hunting is banned in the monument. Later on patrol, Powell responded to the sound of the gunshot and summoned a ... (BLM) ranger for a joint response.

The citations were issued the next day after the men returned to the monument to help NPS and state game authorities locate and remove the dead elk...

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Calling Coyotes—Sealing the Deal

(continued from page 24)

The accuracy potential of your rifle won't be realized without some form of rest. Portable shooting aids will greatly increase your ability to hit the grapefruit-size vitals of a coyote. I virtually always sit in front of vegetation or rocks to break up my outline while still allowing an unrestricted field of fire. Relying on field rests restricts the options in stand location. Options in bipods and sticks are almost endless these days. Just ensure that whatever you choose allows you to shoot over vegetation and is tall enough to work when setting up on a slope. A bipod that worked well on the rifle range may not be tall enough when set up on a slope.

While generally not as stable as a bipod, shooting sticks have the advantage of being able to make quick height adjustments by simply kicking the legs apart or together. My son leaves his Harris prone bipod attached to his rifle then uses sticks when in the sitting position. I like the Stoney Point Rapid Pivot Bipod. It has a rubber attachment point for the legs so the legs can be opened or closed for height adjustment like sticks but still attaches to the rifle via a push on/pull off attachment point so your rifle and bipod can be moved as one unit when repositioning for incoming coyotes. As the name implies, the bipod pivots in a panning motion. I use the sitting/kneeling height for most of my calling and carry the prone height bipod in my cargo pocket for use when the opportunity for a prone set up arises or

I need to get more stable for a longer shot. With practice groups of less than two inches at 200 yards can be accomplished off the sitting height bipod.

Experience on stand is invaluable to the coyote hunter. The more animals the hunter can observe, the more able he is to anticipate a coyote's actions. Coyote fever can grip a hunter especially when he isn't sure what the coyote is going to do. If you anticipate the coyote busting you at any second, the nerves can run wild. I hope I never get over the excitement of an approaching coyote but experience can calm the nerves and allow good decisions to be made and more coyotes to hit the ground. Watching coyote hunting DVD's or television shows also helps the hunter learn coyote body language. When carrying only a rifle, stop the coyote whenever it gets into your comfortable rifle range and take the shot. I use a quick bark with my voice to stop the coyote as it tries to determine who else is in the area. A whistle can also cause the coyote to check up but after one particular stand, I quit relying on the whistle as my primary mode of stopping coyotes.

My son called one morning on his way to school to tell me he'd seen three coyotes crossing onto our property. I put on my camo, grabbed my calling gear and headed out to see if they'd respond to my call. After a few howls and more distress cries, I thought they'd given me the slip. Then after a full 20 minutes into the stand they appeared at a full run coming down the fenceline towards me. When they were less than 100 yards away, I tried to whistle them to a stop and found that the cold, dry desert air had dried my lips and nothing would come out! The coyotes overran my position and scattered in several directions. I got only one offhand shot but I was too rattled to connect. Whistling might work for Randy Anderson but I have barked my coyotes to a stop since that day!

Moving coyotes aren't impossible to hit but they are challenging. Try to stop them if possible, carry a shotgun for the hard chargers and use some form of shooting aid to steady your rifle. Putting fur on the ground is what it's all about. When everything comes together, make sure you're ready to seal the deal! Good luck and good hunting. God Bless, Tim Titus www.no-off-season.com



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11th Hour Elk Hunter Uncovers RMEF Logo, Bags First Elk

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

“No matter how cold it is outside, some things should never be covered up!” That’s the moral of the elk hunting story for a long-time member of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

Sixty-two year old Paul Boutiette always hoped for an elk. He wanted the meat for his freezer. He wanted the mount for his wall. He ended up getting both! How he got there included planning, traveling, hard work, some one-man-band ingenuity and a little superstition.

Boutiette traveled approximately 3,000 miles from his home in Massachusetts to hunt elk in Montana. He spent the greater part of a month in Big Sky Country trying to fulfill his quest by filling his elk tag. His timing wasn’t perfect, at least not according to what Old Man Winter delivered. A mid-November Arctic blast sent temperatures plummeting well below zero.

“The 20 degrees below ice fog put a frost on the rear window of my Trailblazer. I knew no one would believe me as to how cold it was when I went in so I took a cell phone picture of the temperature shown in the truck dashboard,” said Boutiette. “I noticed my weather-worn RMEF logo decal was covered in frost and thought that I should wipe it off for good luck.”



With the necessities out of the way, Boutiette headed out to hunt. As mid-morning to early-afternoon temperatures soared to a balmy 3 degrees, his success soared as well. Thanks to a 275-yard shot from his .300 Winchester Magnum, Paul had his first elk on the ground.

“Got him out in one piece from 1/2-mile in, alone, with block and tackle, iron pin and 3 lbs. sledge hammer for uphill. And strap-on poly slide for downhill the next day. But surprisingly I had him out to the truck by 12:45 p.m. and on the game carrier and headed out by 1:30 p.m.,” he added.

Mission accomplished! And just in time too.

“This was the last day of my hunt then I was to pack up and head home,” said Boutiette. “What a way to slide in to home plate!”

Who can argue with that? Then again, maybe the Elk Foundation can take a tiny bit of the credit thanks to Paul’s insight to scrape the ice off his RMEF logo.

“I guess it paid off. I got my first ivories!”

Again, what’s the moral of the story?

“No matter how cold it is outside, some things should never be covered up!”

We couldn’t agree any more Paul. Congratulations!



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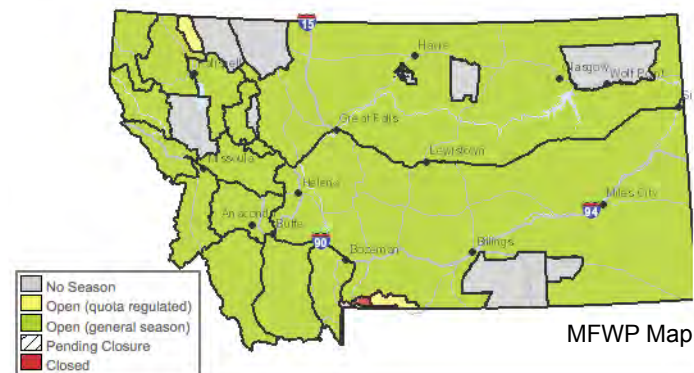
2014 Montana Hunter Numbers (continued from page 12)

MFWP Region 6 Havre Check Station Deer and Elk Numbers Down

	Total	2013 Season	Long-term Average
Antelope	67	32	378
Mule Deer	210	326	524
White-tailed Deer	42	48	196
Elk	30	41	42
Pheasant	781	593	909
Sharp-tailed Grouse	176	67	137
Hungarian Partridge	70	33	58
Ducks	69	56	46
Hunters	1378	1441	

MFWP Region 7 - Not Available

Wolf Hunting in Montana MFWP



MFWP Map

You don’t have to put your rifle away yet. The Montana 2014 - 2015 wolf hunting season (general) goes through March 15, 2015. Trapping goes through February 28, 2015. Check all MFWP regulations before heading out to hunt.

A wolf hunting license purchased after August 31, 2014 may not be used until 24 hours after the license is issued.

Use of bait is prohibited to hunt wolves in Montana.

Avoid harvesting wolves with radio collars.

The bag limit is 5 wolves per hunter/trapper in any combination of hunting or trapping.

To report the harvest of a wolf, please call the Harvest Reporting line at 1-877-FWP-WILD (1-877-397-9453). Obtain current harvest info by calling 1-800-385-7826.



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Are You an Average Hunter? By Kip Adams

For you older hunters, Webster's defines average as, "A typical or usual level, degree or kind." For you younger hunters, Wikipedia defines average as, "A measure of the middle or typical value of a data set." So, as you read this, would you consider yourself an average hunter? Many would be offended if considered average, especially with respect to our prowess at chasing and tagging whitetails. Myself included as I dedicate a tremendous amount of time during the year to learning more about this amazing creature in order to put myself in better viewing and shooting positions.

My use of "average" in this case though pertains more to hunting expenditures than success in the field. Every five years the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducts a national survey of fishing, hunting and wildlife-associated recreation. The most current survey was in 2011, and the results are just now available. The following information is from that survey.

In 2011, the average hunter spent \$2,484 on all things hunting related. Nearly \$2,500 is a substantial sum, and one that may make even the most understanding significant other roll their eyes. Let's break that down into the top 10 items we spent money on and you can determine for yourself how "average" you are.

10) Private Land Use Fees: The average hunter spent \$55 on this item in 2011 for a total of \$755 million. However, only 9 percent of hunters actually spent money on this category, and those few spent an average of \$633 each. These were not lease fees as that is a separate category.

9) Bows, Arrows and Archery Equipment: The average hunter spent \$68 on this item for a total of nearly \$935 million. Twenty-five percent of hunters spent in this category and I was way "above average" here. Expanded archery seasons and crossbow use both contributed to this category's seat in the top 10. In fact, over 50 percent of the total deer harvest in New Jersey in 2011 was by archers.

8) Hunting Dogs and Associated Costs: The average hunter spent \$70 for a total of over \$951 million. Only 7 percent of hunters spent here, and the average per spender was \$945. Hunting dogs aren't cheap, but good ones are certainly worth the expense.

7) Licenses, Stamps, Tags and Permits: The average hunter spent \$72 for a total of over \$986 million. How much does the average anti-hunter spend for wildlife conservation? Far less than the average hunter, and be sure to remind them of that at every opportunity. Seventy-five percent of all hunters contributed to this category. The remaining hunters are exempt due to age, landowner status, etc. In Pennsylvania I purchase a hunting license, archery stamp, muzzleloader stamp, bear license, furtaker license, bobcat permit, migratory bird stamp, duck stamp, antlerless deer license, and two to four DMAP permits for a total of \$140 to \$160. It looks a little pricey on paper, but the opportunities it provides are worth at least 10 times the cost. Also, I process my own deer and get approximately 25 meals (for my family of four) from each animal. The same amount of meat for 25 meals from the grocery store costs more than my total Pennsylvania license purchase. So, the venison from one deer covers my licenses and I still have two to four deer tags, a bear tag, etc. left. I'm not suggesting venison is inexpensive when you combine all hunting-related purchases, I'm simply showing the value I get from my hunting license.

6) Ammunition: The average hunter spent \$95 for a total of nearly \$1.3 billion. Amazingly, only 65 percent of hunters spent money on ammunition in 2011. I guess the rest were stocked up from 2010 or they have some really giving friends.

5) Firearms: The average hunter spent \$223 for a total of over \$3 billion. Twenty-two percent of hunters spent in this category for an average of \$1,015 each. This category included rifles, shotguns, muzzleloaders and handguns. Note: you can win a firearm at a QDMA Branch event for far less than \$1,015 – support your local Branch!

4) Food (for hunting trips): The average hunter spent \$235 for a total of over \$3.2 billion. Equal to the license category, 75 percent of hunters spent in this category. Interestingly, food and lodging are often discussed together as hunting expenditures, but lodging expenses were only a fraction of food's. The average hunter only spent \$49 on lodging in 2011.

3) Special Equipment: This is a big category as it included boats, campers, cabins, ATVs, pickups, and more. The average hunter spent \$321 in this category for a total of nearly \$4.4 billion. However, only 4 percent of hunters spent here for a spender average of \$7,159!

2) Transportation: The average hunter spent \$349 on transportation for a total of over \$4.7 billion. Eighty percent of hunters spent in this category making it the most popularly purchased item. This total included both public and private transportation...Drum roll please.

1) Land Leasing and Ownership: The average hunter spent \$540 for a total of nearly \$7.4 billion. This was by far the top category as it was 57 percent higher than the second item. The survey did not separate leasing and land purchasing, but another U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service survey showed just under 7 percent of hunters leased land in the U.S. in 2006. That same survey showed 1.3 million hunters owned over 134 million acres, and over a decade ago (2001) the number of hunters owning land exceeded the number leasing land. How do QDMA members fit in this? Many feel all QDMA members are large landowners. In reality, a full third of our members (33 percent) do not own any land, and over half of our members hunt (not own) on less than 500 acres.

Two other items of particular interest that just missed the top 10 are Plantings (**No. 11**) and Taxidermy/Processing Costs (**tied Lodging at No. 12**). I certainly contribute more than my share to these categories (and my taxidermy bills are at cost). Notably, the Plantings category was not even listed in the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. It is amazing that in the past five years the average hunter went from spending less than \$2 (the smallest category in the 2006 survey) to \$51 on plantings for a total of over \$702 million. No wonder there are so many food plot blends and products available today. This is an increase of over 2,400 percent!

Back to the original question, "Are you an average hunter?" I spent more than the average hunter on 6 categories (numbers 1,2,4,7,8 and 9) and less on 4 categories (numbers 3,5,6 and 10). However, simply by being a QDMA member and reading Quality Whitetails you're clearly above average with regard to your knowledge about deer, their habitat, and the importance of ensuring our hunting heritage. That's where it really counts, so here's to above average.

This article is reprinted with permission from the website of Quality Deer Management Association (QDMA), a non-profit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to ensuring the future of white-tailed deer, wildlife habitat, and our hunting heritage. To learn more about deer hunting and managing deer habitat, visit www.QDMA.com.

Plan Your Spring Turkey Hunt Now

By Steve Hickoff
Yamaha Outdoors Tips

What should you look for as you plot your gobbler-chasing plans? Here's what:

Is there room to hunt? Huge tracts of public land still exist in many parts of turkey country, especially out west, and even in the crowded northeastern states. Study up on these places. Call state wildlife agencies to get tips on newer public land purchases.

Also be sure to read up on land access for non-residents and how you might gain landowner permission before or when visiting to hunt.

When combined with a cheap motel (or camping) and cooking your own food, public land hunts might be the most affordable of all as a planned package deal goes. Want to hunt a spring turkey state without much public land access? Didn't think so...

TIP: Sometimes you can work out abbreviated pay-as-you-go stays with outfitters on a day basis. It doesn't hurt to ask.

Okay there's public land, but... Does the state have good turkey populations? Think of this first before planning your trip. A state with high bird numbers might mean greater hunter competition, of course, especially on public land. Then again wouldn't you rather hunt a place with high gobbler numbers than not? Kill data of a consistent trend can help you determine what location to hunt in such states as well. If you're lucky, the state has town and county information (this is often true for northeastern states).

TIP: Other locations, where registration isn't required, might just estimate both turkey kill and flock populations. This is where asking a buddy who has turkey hunted the state can help.

Let's face facts: Some states encourage non-resident turkey hunters with reasonable license and permit pricing. Others seem to discourage it with lofty fees per license and individual turkey permits...Still, we turkey hunters are not only chasing the great American game bird, but also the place, the experience, and so forth. You know what I'm talking about.

TIP: Study the total cost of what it'll take you to hunt that state, including the air fare or gasoline to get there. Hit your budget point? Then book it, plan it and look forward to it all winter.

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Predator Trapping: The Lost Component of Conservation

By David Graves, AGFC Private Lands Biologist, East Region
Arkansas Game & Fish Commission

Trapping is a valuable conservation tool used to manage wildlife, but



its use has declined greatly over the past 20 years. The recent increase in predator populations such as coyote, bobcat, raccoon, skunk and fox can be attributed to several factors; notably an increase in prey populations, but also the lack of control activities, primarily trapping.

Generally, biologists consider the first factor, increasing prey species populations. It's a very good result from wildlife management activities, especially when these prey species are wildlife such as quail, turkey and deer.

Ultimately, the increase of these species populations is the overall goal in our mission to help landowners provide high quality wildlife habitat. However, as has occurred in the past, when prey species increases in population size, the predator numbers are always soon to follow. With that in mind, the most effective and efficient predator management activity that wildlife managers can implement is trapping to assist in wildlife conservation. Predator management is an important tool in the management tool box. As mentioned earlier, predator trapping activities have decreased in recent times mainly due to the overall decrease of fur prices in the fur market. Fur prices have increased over the past year when compared to previous years, so hopefully we will begin to see more trappers dust off their old traps and put them to good use.

Regular trapping is known to reduce the occurrence of diseases such as rabies, mange, tularemia and others which can be responsible for large scale die-offs of wildlife and can be passed along to humans. (next page)

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Trapping works to alleviate the peaks and valleys in populations, Predator trapping can be accomplished by using one of three methods: live traps, snares or foothold traps. Each of these methods requires some understanding of how, where and why an animal will react in different situations.

Live traps are also known as cage traps. This style of trap is designed to entrap the targeted animal alive in a cage by the use of a trigger that when thrown allows a door to shut and a locking mechanism to fall in place which prevents the animal from opening the door. These traps are generally baited and set along well-traveled game trails. The use of live traps requires the least amount of knowledge and skill for predator trapping. However, the success of using live traps will vary depending on the predator species you are targeting.

Snares are another common trap used during predator trapping. These traps consist of an anchored cable snare designed to catch an animal around the neck or body. The successful use of snares requires the trapper to have some knowledge of the location and how and where predators may travel through the trapping location. Snares are generally non-baited traps that are set along well-traveled trails. With the proper knowledge and understanding, a trapper setting snares can be very effective at trapping just about any predator species...

Foothold traps are probably the most commonly used traps for predator trapping. These traps consist of a set of jaws, spring and a trigger mechanism which are designed to catch and hold a live animal by its foot until the trapper arrives at that location to dispatch or release the trapped animal. Foothold traps come in a variety of sizes that are used to catch different sized predators. Once set, foothold traps can be placed at a variety of locations, including well-traveled trails, field crossings, water crossings or known feeding locations. These traps are almost always baited with some type of hidden lure which is used to attract the targeted animal into the trap site. This method of trapping requires a good amount of knowledge and understanding in order for the trapper to be successful. The utilization of footholds also requires a lot of skill in setting and camouflaging the traps with the surrounding area so that the predator does not know a trap is there...

Trapping can be an exciting and rewarding activity for people who are conservationists at heart, especially those who enjoy having more game animals on their property. Now, I will not tell you that predator trapping is easy; matter of fact, it's not. Trapping takes a lot of practice, skill, and understanding to successfully "out-fox" some of nature's most clever wildlife.

However, there is an abundant amount of knowledge floating around that will give any landowner the opportunity to get on the fast track to becoming a successful trapper...From my personal experience, one of the best ways for a beginning trapper to learn the tricks of the trade is to tag along with a seasoned trapper for a couple of days. Most seasoned trappers have a wealth of knowledge that they are more than eager to share with a newcomer.

To have any significant impact on the predator or prey populations on your property, a long-term and intensive trapping operation may be required...

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RECIPE CORNER



Venison Pizza

Kris Winkelman
www.winkelman.com

Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 20 to 30 minutes

Main Ingredients:

venison (ground), mushrooms, onion, pizza sauce, cheese
8 oz elbow macaroni (cooked)

- 1 pound venison (ground)
- 8 oz elbow macaroni (cooked)
- 1 can mushrooms (sliced)
- 1 small onion (chopped)
- 15 oz pizza sauce
- Salt and pepper
- Shredded Mozzarella cheese

In skillet brown venison with onions. In 2 quart baking dish add ½ of meat mixture then add pizza sauce, mushrooms, cheese and repeat layers. Top with cheese.
Bake at 350 until heated and cheese is bubbly and brown.

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YAMAHA

Late Season Ways to Fool Waterfowl

By Steve Hickoff Yamaha Outdoors Tips

They've seen it all, especially the stale decoy spreads; heard every feeding and comeback call in the book. They can't be fooled – or can they?

SCOUT THE AFTERNOON BEFORE

Drive roads and glass feeding zones. Sometimes ducks and geese in big afternoon numbers gather briefly to recharge and move off to roosting areas nearby. Study these locations. Talk to farmers. Get permission where maybe you haven't hunted before – especially if you see fresh birds. Set up there the next morning: calls optional.

TALK TO DEER HUNTERS

Spread the word. Late-season opportunities for muzzle-loading deer often coincide with duck and goose hunts. If you've venison in the freezer – or don't even deer hunt, but have seen some – swap information with guys hunting whitetails (or other big-game). You might be able to help each other out. Would you do this early in the season? Likely not, but now is different.

FLUSH 'EM

Sleep in and jump shoot loafing birds. River and pond ducks, weather providing, especially like resting between the hard feeding they do at daybreak and in the afternoon. With luck, you'll find groups of birds settled in along the slow-moving edges of creeks, meandering waterways, unfrozen farm ponds and the like. Walk in with care, using terrain to hide, and flush them.

HUNT LOUSY WEATHER

Got hardcore apparel in your camo closet? Wear it on days others stay in. Ducks and geese are out in it, and you should be too. It's one way to ensure you'll likely see lower hunting pressure.

DON'T BURN OUT YOUR SPOT

Kill just a few? Leave. That's right. You don't have to shoot a day's limit. Stop short of it. Save the spot for the next day by not adding too much pressure. Load the decoys back on your Yamaha ATV or SxS. Get yourself home to that duck or goose dinner you'll make. And then return there tomorrow. Make it last...



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(Yamaha Outdoors photo)

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