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# HUNTING GUIDE

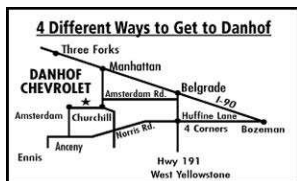
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# Hunter ethics and long seasons

As we approach the 2018 hunting season, it is worth taking a moment to address our ethical relationship with the animals we pursue. To begin with, it must



**JIM  
POSEWITZ**

be acknowledged that Montana does an excellent job of hunter education; addressing both firearm safety and ethical hunter decision making.

In the process, hunters are taught there are two parts to the definition of an ethical hunter, in addition to *respecting the animals hunted*. One is: *a person who knows and respects the law*, and the other is; *a person who behaves in a way that will satisfy what society expects of him or her as a hunter*.

When hunters take to the field in 2018, they will be presented with a growing complexity of extended seasons. In some, and perhaps many circumstances, these season options may preclude a person's ability to satisfy all the requirements of being an ethical hunter.

Montana's general big game hunting season traditionally sent hunters afield when animals were in their peak condition and sport hunters were offered a generous five week

season to pursue them in the context of fair chase.

In times past, when land and wildlife managers concluded they needed special seasons to reduce the public's wildlife, options put hunters and hunting in unsustainable positions. Past examples of that were: killing elk on the "firing-line" north of Yellowstone Park in the 1950s and 60s; and, more recently, the buffalo liquidation north of the Yellowstone Park boundary in the late 1980s.

The hunters followed the law while the managers of our public trust in wildlife, put them, and hunting, in a socially unacceptable position. In both cases, the public's tolerance was exceeded and changes were made.

In the more recent buffalo killing episode, game wardens and park rangers led shooters to every buffalo that set hoof in Montana and killed it. Public outcry was intense, and the anti-hunting movement filled their coffers. Sport hunting was vilified along with the mandated buffalo killing. As far as the general public was concerned, we were back in the 1880s, and hunter ethics was nowhere to be found.

A quick scan of the 2018 hunting regulations verifies that in many hunting districts there are now "shoulder seasons" added to the old list that includes 'regular

seasons,' 'extended seasons' and 'management seasons'.

For the most part, this variety of options for killing big game is usually done to accommodate private landowners. In the case of the new shoulder seasons, there seem to be few concessions the landowners are required to make, for example finding a way to allow public access to hunters during the regular season.

The 2018 result of this growing complexity is that cow elk can be legally chased for up to six months. The time window stretches from the dry heat of mid August to the period of late winter stress in mid February. That does present ethical hunters with a dilemma. This seems to meet the first standard of ethical hunting, which is to hunt within state regulation. However, from the elk's point of view, can six months of 'chase' really be fair?

When these shoulder seasons were initially proposed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks a few years ago, Montana sportsmen objected to a number of features of the program that would have facilitated the commercialization and privatization of our fish and wildlife. To its credit, the state responded to those concerns and bull elk, and their ability to attract a private revenue stream, were

removed from the formula.

Perhaps it is time for the land and wildlife management agencies responsible for the public trust management of this precious resource to address the ethics of micro managing to facilitate killing wildlife and focus on issues at the core of the problem. Issues including: improving habitat quality and security on public lands, accessing private lands during the general hunting seasons, and educating all parties on the beauty of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

When this is done, it might put us all on the same ethical page. That could produce a relationship between us and those wonderful wild animals that belong at the center of every discussion of hunter ethics.

*Jim Posewitz of Helena spent 32 years with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, leading the agency's ecological program for 15 years. He then founded Orion the Hunter's Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of ethical hunting and wild resources essential to that purpose. Posewitz has published five books on those subjects and also served as executive director of the Cinnabar Foundation from its inception in 1983 to 2010.*

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# 'Challenge and adventure'

## Western Hunter Magazine editor Ryan Hatfield talks hunting industry, outdoor writing and high country mule deer

TOM KUGLIN

[tom.kuglin@helenair.com](mailto:tom.kuglin@helenair.com)

Ryan Hatfield never intended to become an outdoor writer.

The editor of Western Hunter Magazine earned a degree in forestry, and after college, the life-long hunter decided he'd like to compile stories of legendary mule deer from his home state of Idaho. After publishing "Idaho's Greatest Mule Deer," the industry took notice and he went on to work for Boone and Crocket Club and Eastman's Hunting Journal before taking the helm at Western Hunter.

"I've always felt like I have a fairly unique perspective on it compared to a lot of people that are in the industry because I didn't seek it out," Hatfield said. "There are a lot of people in the industry that are in it for selfish reasons. They want to promote themselves, they want to be the star, be the face of something, and I didn't get into it for that and really I never intended to get into it at all."

Hatfield holds some stringent standards when it comes to what goes in the magazine – for example he does not print the yardage of long-distance shots – instead using his platform to promote hunting to non-hunters as well as encourage hunters to appreciate what they have and the responsibility they carry.

"My litmus test for my readers has always been a 12-year-old boy," he said. "If he picks up my magazine and reads it, what's he going to take away?"

For non-hunters, he believes emotion often overshadows the discussion and urbanization has disconnected many from



Hatfield

eons of hunting ancestry.

"There's no satisfaction in a kill, but it's the challenge and adventure and the instinct of the hunt that drives us to be out there," he said. "So it's making people understand that hunters are the biggest conservationists, they

have the most at stake, they always produce the most funds for the effort. To say we're not part of the life cycle, not part of the food chain is a mistake."

On the subject of hunting and social media, Hatfield doesn't mince words.

"I do believe that social media is the absolute worst thing that has ever happened to hunting," he said. "Before social media, the only people seeing dead shots and grip and grins were showing it to their hunting buddies, showing it to a receptive audience. Now on social media you never know what the hell is going to show up on your timeline."

To those who don't care about the opinions of the non-hunting public as they post graphic hunting photos, Hatfield hopes they'll take a step back and think about how it comes across to the non-hunting public.

"Social media is turning people against us faster than anything I can do from a professional perspective in trying to educate and trying to embrace hunting," he said. "Hell, that's like trying to throw buckets uphill against a river."

Hatfield has an old photo from 1922 of his great grandfather and a big buck on the ground. Last year, 95 years later, his

10-year-old son killed his first buck. It's a long lineage of family hunting tradition that requires a balancing act with his career.

"There's an old saying that if you do what you love for a living you'll never work a day in your life. I don't agree," Hatfield quipped. "It is actually very difficult to not let it ruin the true passion and genuineness of the hunt. I love hunting, but it's hard to find that balance sometimes between that promotion needed to keep yourself in existence and to hold onto a platform so you can try to impress good things upon others, without going into that other zone where people are very much self-promotional and sell out."

Hatfield doesn't read his competition, saying he knows what he wants and doesn't want it influenced by anyone else. He recommends prospective outdoor writers find a way to connect with their readers.

"If you simply say that I went out, I got in truck, I hiked up hill, I killed animal, I packed animal out, congratulations, I've heard that story a million times," he said. "But if it's a story that you're sharing with someone, why is it different, why does it matter, why is somebody going to take 10 minutes of their time to read this and come away thinking that was pretty cool?"

While Hatfield has taken two big bull elk in his life, a mountain mule deer remains his favorite species.

"That high country is only accessible so many months of the year, and it's the most beautiful area on Earth," he said. "Those big mule deer are so solitary that finding them and beating them in their own element is not an easy chore. I just like the whole romanticism of being in a spike tent up in high country and getting away from the people, enjoying the challenge."

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Southwest Montana's Region 3 holds by far the most elk of any region in the state. With an estimated population of more than 70,000, most districts remain at or above objective.

Larry Lamsa Photo



# Elk and deer hold their own through long Montana winter

**TOM KUGLIN**

[tom.kuglin@helenair.com](mailto:tom.kuglin@helenair.com)

Elk and deer fared well through a tough Montana winter and hunters should see plenty of opportunities to bag a buck or bull this fall.

Whether it's high country elk or mule deer or lowland whitetail, Montana offers some of the most liberal seasons in the West. Archery hunters have six weeks to chase rutting bulls followed by another five weeks of general season. If that isn't quite enough time, extended shoulder seasons open up opportunities for antlerless elk harvest in many areas into February.

The 2017/2018 hunting season was a good one for harvesting big game in Montana, with records showing hunters taking home more than 30,000 elk and nearly 106,000 deer. Last year's solid season came off a lower harvest in 2016/2017, marked by mild temperatures followed by heavy snow.

"The winter was toughest up in northwest Montana and we did reduce some antlerless opportunities up there," said John Vore, game management

bureau chief for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. "For the rest of the state, deer and antelope are just doing great out there and we didn't have a hard enough winter to affect elk populations."

Biologists were already seeing good fawn production for deer and antelope, particularly in eastern Montana, he added.

Southwest Montana's Region 3 holds by far the most elk of any region in the state. With an estimated population of more than 70,000, most districts remain at or above objective.

Central and eastern Montana holds burgeoning elk populations as well, with nearly every district in Regions 4, 5, 6 and 7 over objective.

Western Montana's Region 2 is a bit of a mixed bag of districts over, at and below objective.

And northwest Montana's Region 1 holds both the lowest elk numbers in the state as well as the most district below population objectives.

When it comes to mule deer numbers, populations had a decent bump from last year. The current population

estimate of about 386,000 is up about 20,000 from the previous year, and well above the long-term average of 285,000.

Central and eastern Montana are still the places to look if mule deer numbers are what hunters are after, with Regions 4, 6 and 7 holding nearly 250,000 of the statewide deer total.

There may not be as many whitetail as mule deer in the state, but the estimated total of about 235,000 is still above the long-term average of about 200,000. And also, unlike mule deer, whitetail are thickest in western Montana where Regions 1 and 2 hold more than half of the state's total population.

Chad Klinkenborg is the regional director for the Mule Deer Foundation in Montana. Working across a landscape as diverse as the western and eastern halves of the state is something he relishes.

"I think there are challenges to it but for me, personally it keeps it exciting working in different habitat types," he said.

In the eastern part of the state, plentiful habitat has allowed the species to

continue to flourish. There, the organization typically focuses on range improvements and, specifically, fence removal, which pose a hazard to fawns. They also work on hunter access and anti-poaching projects to keep game herds safe.

The organization specializes in habitat improvement projects in western Montana where intermountain sage brush has seen depletions. Their work includes conifer removal, prescribed burns and weed control with the goal of providing productive grassland habitat for deer and other wildlife.

For Klinkenborg, mule deer may have once been a species overshadowed by elk, but no longer.

"I consider them kind of an icon of the West," he said. "It's a species you can only hunt in one part of the world and that's the western U.S. Finding a big mule deer and harvesting a big mule deer in the Rockies is a challenge and I think it adds to the allure."

Reporter Tom Kuglin can be reached at 447-4076 @IR\_TomKuglin



# Keep up on license changes for elk hunting this season

**TOM KUGLIN**

[tom.kuglin@helenair.com](mailto:tom.kuglin@helenair.com)

Every hunting season comes with a few changes in regulations and southwest Montana is no exception.

Hunters in the Helena area should be aware of some new licenses and new opportunities for antlerless elk hunting in the districts northwest of Helena, in the Elkhorns and in the Big Belts east of Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

One of the biggest changes for 2018/2019 is the combining of antlerless elk licenses in districts 339 and 343. Hunters 16 and older holding the permit are prohibited from hunting antlered elk in the districts, but can hunt cow elk in both.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks area biologist Jenny Sika said the new license allows her to manage elk at a population level rather than district by district.

"Along with district 293 that makes up the elk management unit for 339 and 343, we've been within objective for 20 years," she said. "But in my areas, all the elk have to do is move across the highway and we're over objective in one unit."

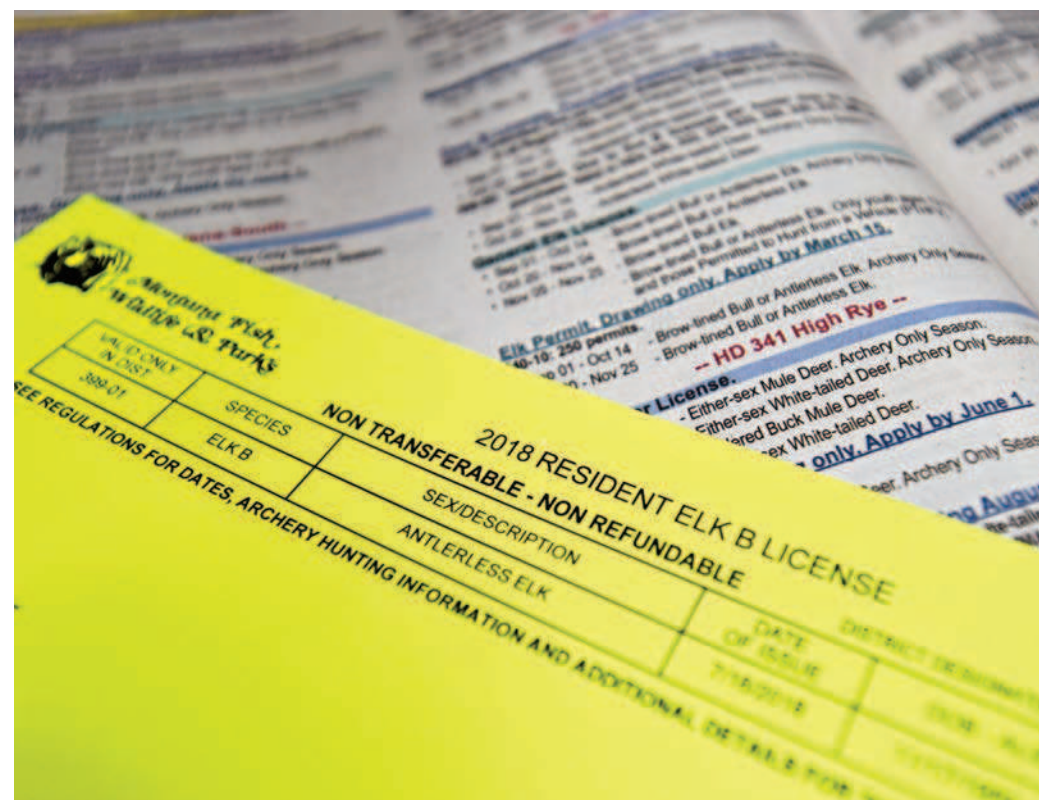
The highway Sika referenced is Highway 279, also known as Lincoln Road, which makes up the boundary between 339 and 343.

District 293 lying to the west across the Continental Divide would see some changes as well. Area biologist Scott Eggeman said FWP dropped antlerless permits from 150 to 100, but made the licenses valid district-wide.

The goal of the 293 changes also are to oversee at the elk management unit level, rather than the smaller district level, he said. There are still some antlerless licenses for private land in the south, Egge-

man added.

For hunting district 380 in the Elkhorns, FWP reduced



Thom Bridge, [thom.bridge@helenair.com](mailto:thom.bridge@helenair.com)

Hunters in the Helena area should be aware of some new licenses and new opportunities for antlerless elk hunting in the districts northwest of Helena, in the Elkhorns and in the Big Belts east of Canyon Ferry Reservoir.

antlerless elk licenses overall, but is allowing targeted private land hunting in some areas with a general license.

From Oct. 20 to Nov. 1, general license holders may harvest an antlerless elk on private land in the defined north and south portions of 380. Area biologist Adam Grove explained that while the overall district is within population objectives, the area from Boulder wrapping around the Elkhorns to East Helena is made up of a lot of small tracts of private land.

"The proposal would focus more harvest pressure on those elk associated with private land, and having it the first part of the season only reduces the potential of a big storm pushing elk that are more traditionally migratory onto private land," he said.

The land ownership makes harvest challenging, with some areas, including

subdivisions, acting as a refugee for elk during hunting season, Grove said.

With the new general season opportunity in the Elkhorns, antlerless licenses valid on public and private land but specific to the northern and southern portion of the district were reduced from 350 to 150 and 325 to 175 respectively. The district-wide antlerless license was bumped up from 125 to 150.

In hunting district 391, which includes lands west of Canyon Ferry into the Big Belts, FWP raised antlerless licenses from 350 to 400 and instituted a shoulder season from Nov. 26 to Feb. 15. The shoulder season is restricted to private land south of Duck Creek, and hunters must possess one of the antlerless licenses.

For the existing shoulder season in districts 393 and 391 south of Townsend, FWP

opened BLM and state trust land to the hunt.

For hunters venturing out near Butte, area biologist Vanna Boccadori reports no major changes in licenses or opportunities as elk populations have remained stable in the region.

Reporter Tom Kuglin can be reached at 447-4076  
@IR\_TomKuglin

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# Confessions of an aspiring hunter

In Montana Wild off Highway 12, a sturgeon bellies up to the glass and slides against it, the bony whip of a tail slashing through the water. I've been watching it



**THOMAS  
PLANK**

for the past 15 minutes waiting for the rest of the class to finish their tests and practical exam.

I never took a hunter's education course in Colorado,

where I grew up. My dad wasn't a hunter; he enjoyed fishing and the outdoors, but one incident involving chest waders, the Niobrara River and a deer that wasn't quite dead seemed to have blown out the hunting candle for him. I decided that I wanted to learn how to hunt; in all honesty I'm not sure I'll ever succeed in downing an elk or deer, or even a bird.

So learning with the youngest groups of new hunters seemed to be the best way to handle my ignorance.

In January I took a three-day class with a score of 10-15 year-old new hunters and realized that "ignorance" might be the understatement of the century when it comes to what I don't know about hunting.

First, the difference between a mule and a white-tail deer can be told by a number of things, but foremost is that mule deer ears are huge. Though I could tell you that a whitetail deer has a big white tail.

Oh well, at least I knew deer have antlers and not horns.

Wayde Cooperider, the outdoor skills and safety supervisor for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, is a big man with an old-school mustache. He booms as he explains what, exactly, the right way to go about preparing a firearm for the hunt, how to decide



Barbara Wheeler photo

A mule deer buck with its prominent ears alert.

what to pack, and, to me, that the most important part of this is impressing safety onto the students.

The students were sleepy for most of the Saturday class, which ran nine hours, non-stop, with hands-on and in-class demonstrations of loading weapons, trigger control, field-dressing technique and all the major points of safety that are drilled into new hunters. (Wear orange! Never shoot at a skylined animal! Call Tip-Mont if you see poaching! Don't wear bloodstained clothing into stores! Always be wary of bears! Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot! Never point a firearm at something you don't intend to shoot!)

I spoke with parents who were going through the process and sitting in on classes. The parents were so passionate that it seems to radiate off of them. The kids are bouncing around, answering questions and looking at me like I'm a teacher who decided to sit down with them

during lunch.

Marci Gohn and Fred Fessenden were gracious enough to answer the litany of questions I had about hunting. Gohn never took hunter's safety as a youngster but said, "I've been hunting my whole life."

Gohn said that it was a "big deal" when her older son took hunter's ed, and that she was using this class as a way to get a credit for a concealed weapon license. "We want to know how to help and instruct and help out where we can," Gohn said of why she and her husband were spending their weekend at Montana Wild.

Fessenden said that he remembered taking hunter's ed when it "was more hands on," with live fire and more tramping around in the snow.

"I missed out on live fire as it was too cold that January to shiver at the range," he said.

Gohn agreed that a more hands-on experience would be more helpful.

"Kids have different

learning styles," Gohn said. "A lot of them are more hands-on."

Both Gohn and Fessenden see hunting as "family time," when they can go and teach their kids important lessons in the wilderness.

"It's learning survival for the future," Fessenden said.

Harvesting meat for eating is something that Gohn remembers as being deeply important to what her family would survive on for the year.

I just hope that I'll have something to put in my freezer by the end of this year that isn't beef.

For me, I exited hunter's education with three things: new hunter's orange, a card saying I was able to purchase a hunting license in the state of Montana and a sense that I didn't even know what I didn't know.

But I can say I have a renewed sense of excitement about starting to learn it.

*Thomas Plank is a reporter for the Independent Record.*



# How to stay safe in the back country

## LEO DUTTON

The 2018 big-game season is upon us and every year the Lewis & Clark County Sheriff's Office has several interactions with hunters and landowners. When hunters begin the process of hunting big game, it is no small feat. Finding and harvesting an animal is a major enterprise. Here are a few rules and tips to help you. Some you will hopefully find as reminders from your hunter safety class.

**1)** Do not hunt from the road or at night.

**2)** Obtain permission to hunt on private land. Please know your hunting boundaries, and during the fair chase process know what happens if you wound an animal and it crosses to where you do not have permission to hunt.

**3)** Hopefully you started earlier in the year with your personal preparation. Walk with a backpack to start getting in shape.

**4)** Be fit for the hunt, meaning enough rest and hydration and being physically capable. If you were consuming alcoholic beverages the night before, are you clear of that influence?

**5)** A large portion of our response is for lost hunters. Even if you are going on a short day hike, consider the following in a small backpack for survival:

- Water
- Food
- Small first aid kit
- Rope
- Matches
- Signaling device (mirror, flashlight, smoke)

## ■ Communications device.

In the back country, cell-phones are often unable to connect. Please consider a personal locator beacon that uses satellite technology to alert someone for help.

■ Bright-colored marker tape to mark your trail if you harvest an animal and need to return.

**6)** You may know your hunting area better than anyone else, but if we don't know you need help, or where to find you, our subject-matter expertise is gone. Tell someone else your plan. If you deviate from it, as can easily happen, explain to someone some of the contingencies you have.

**7)** The last thing a person wants to admit is that he or she is lost. Usually we get the call from a citizen (if they happen to have coverage) that they have been walking for some time and are not sure where they are. It is difficult to triangulate if you are only in reach of one tower. This is where the PLB is exceptional. There are several commercial companies offering quality products. These devices can send messages to whomever you choose and give your Global Positioning System coordinates to your monitoring service.

**8)** If you are not sure where you are, stop, sit down, and think for 5 minutes. Orientate yourself to what you have around you for shelter, water, or possible signaling devices. Start a small campfire. Prepare to spend the night, or a day. This is the scenario in which



Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Office

Lewis and Clark County Sheriff Leo Dutton

having someone know the approximate time of your return is helpful.

**9)** If you are injured, hopefully the items you have in your backpack are still accessible. Believe that someone (namely our office) is coming to look for you.

We hope you are successful and have a safe hunt.

*Leo Dutton is the sheriff of Lewis and Clark County.*



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# YOUR SHOTS

Montana hunters share their photos



**Randy Mazurek**

Randy Mazurek of Helena shot this whitetail deer last fall in Hunting District 411.



**Jeff Brewer**

Helena hunter Justin Brewer, 12, shot a bull moose in the Boulder Valley on Sept. 17. It was his first year to put in for tags. His father, Jeff Brewer, has put in for the tag for 21 years and never drawn.



**Matt Schuyler**

Eleven-year-old twins Mason and Smith Schuyler, of Bozeman, used 20 gauge shotguns to bag two toms near Three Forks after their father, Matt Schuyler, called them in close on May 12. Their grandfather, Dave Schuyler, lives in Billings.





Helena hunter Kylee Gardipee, 11, shot her second deer on Oct. 28. Last year she shot a three-point muley and her goal was to top that this year. This 4x4 was taken near Augusta while she was hunting with her father, Bob Gardipee.

**Bob Gardipee**



**Travis Casebolt**

Kendra Casebolt shot this buck while hunting near Three Forks with her husband, Travis, and daughter, Hailey in November.



**Travis Casebolt**

Twelve-year-old Hailey Casebolt shot this buck while hunting with her family near Three Forks.



Jean Brown, a 75-year-old grandmother, shot this buck the second weekend in November while hunting in the Bull Mountains north of Billings.

**Jim Brown**

**Russ Wildin**  
Nicole Wildin, 23, of Billings, shot her second deer and first whitetail while hunting in mid-November in the Little Snowy Mountains with her father, Russ Wildin.





# Waterfowl hunting outlook promising

**TED McDERMOTT**  
ted.mcdermott@  
mtstandard.com

Adam Grove, a Townsend-based wildlife biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and parks, spends much of his time working at the Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area, a key site for migrating waterfowl.

From his vantage, Grove said “things are looking good” for ducks and other aquatic game birds in the area. In part, he said, that’s due to recent draw downs on dust abatement ponds in the Canyon Ferry WMA, which helps kill off out-of-control carp populations, improves vegetative growth and gives migrating fowl a healthier food source.

As a result, Grove said,

“Habitat-wise, things are looking good” for waterfowl.

While improvements to habitats have resulted in a “fair number of local broods,” Grove said Montana’s waterfowl numbers are highly dependent on what happens north of the border. Canada is home to the breeding grounds of various North American species of waterfowl, including many of those that migrate through the Treasure State. As a result, what happens in the western Canadian provinces greatly affects what Montana hunters can expect.

“It’s just how many birds are potentially coming through,” Grove said. “What we typically get through here is migrants, so it all depends on what was going on Canada, northeast Montana — areas



Rebecca Matsubara photo

With a positive outlook for the coming seasons, FWP is returning the daily pintail bag to two from one, which it was reduced to last year.

where they’re (waterfowl are) nesting.”

According to recent reporting from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which works with state agencies and the Canadian Wildlife Service to survey waterfowl populations and habitat, conditions indicate this year will be another good one for waterfowl, despite a relatively dry year in some Canadian breeding grounds.

In a report from southern and central Alberta, FWS’s Jim Bredy noted “excellent condition between the Montana border and Edmonton, Alberta,” and expressed optimism “for good waterfowl production” in the area. In another report, FWS’s Walt Rhodes wrote, “It should be a good waterfowl production year across northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba.”

Jim Hansen, central flyaway migratory bird coordinator for FWP, said he’s seen the same “good water conditions” in western Canada, with southern Alberta looking “really great.” As a result, he said, “I think we’ll still have good production coming out of Canada.”

And Hansen said breeding grounds in Montana have also been “really wet,” due to record snowfall in places and a rainy spring.

“That was a good start for some areas of Montana,” Hansen said. “So I think for the most part, we’ll be in pretty good shape.”

If these predictions hold true, they will continue a

strong trend in Montana and the western Dakotas. According to FWS’s Waterfowl Population Status, 2017 report, waterfowl populations in Montana and the western Dakotas have been booming, of late. The agency reports that duck populations in the area were up 28 percent over the long-term average last year.

With a positive outlook for the coming seasons, FWP is returning the daily pintail bag to two from one, which it was reduced to last year. That should make things easier on hunters, Hansen said, as now there are “no ducks with a one-bird bag.”

Duck, coot and geese season opens Sept. 29 and runs through Jan. 6 in Montana’s Pacific Flyway, which covers Western Montana. An additional weekend will also be tacked onto the season Jan. 12-16. Swan season will span from Oct. 6 to Dec. 1 in those areas of the Pacific Flyway (in Cascade, Chouteau, Liberty, Toole, Teton and Pondera counties) open to swan hunting with a special permit. And thanks to a special statewide program, young hunters 10-17 years old will have a chance to get a jump on waterfowl season Sept. 22-23.

While water levels are dropping as the summer heats up, Hansen believes there will be some areas available for hunting that are not available every year.

“It’ll be a good year to get some new hunters out or some kids out,” Hansen said.

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# Manufacturers offer more women's hunting gear

**SKYLAR RISPENS**  
skylar.rispens@  
mtstandard.com

She remembers slipping into the first women's-specific hunting gear her father bought her nearly seven years ago.

It was different, but a good different.

"It made me feel more comfortable," said Taylor Reisbeck Allen, a lifelong hunter from East Helena, praising the form-fitting gear from Under Armour, arguably one of the first large companies to release women's specific hunting gear.

Growing up, her parents would buy gear with her two younger brothers in mind as well. At the time, there were limited options for her.

"Starting out, I just wore the gear I could find," said Reisbeck Allen.

Now, other brands are developing women-specific lines with technological innovations around warmth, preferred fit and even pony tail inserts.

"It's easier to walk in and it's not so bulky," said Savannah Pamach, an avid hunter and employee at Bob Ward's in Butte. "It's nice not to wear men's clothing, I used to hunt in jeans."

Bob Ward's in Butte carries brands such as Under Armour, Sitka Gear and Girls with Guns that are commonly cited as the most popular women's hunting lines. Sitka Gear has been developing its women's specific line for more than two years. According to its website, only

women help in designing the line.

Expansions in clothing haven't been the only innovations for female hunters. Bows and guns also have been developed specifically for women. Changes include a wider variety of draw weights for bows, as well as shorter stocks on guns. Bob Ward's, along with many Montana retailers, have made an effort to offer a more inclusive sales floor.

"They've definitely expanded what they carry. It definitely brings better business for us," said Corbyne Pamach, Savannah's sister, who has worked for six years at Bob Ward's.

The total number of hunters in Montana has been steadily increasing since 2011. According to Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the total number of hunters rose 13 percent from 2011 to 2015, at least partly because of an increase in women hunters.

"The information that we have does seem to show that around the year 2012 there was a spike in young female archery hunters," said FWP spokesman Greg Lemon, who described the trend as an "unpredicted but pleasant surprise."

Reisbeck Allen said she believes more women now feel included.

"I think people feel more comfortable going out and hunting, I think they feel like they are included," she said. "I think it's just going to keep coming and keep getting better for women."




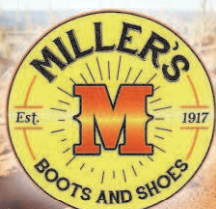
**Thom Bridge**, [thom.bridge@helenair.com](mailto:thom.bridge@helenair.com)  
Women's-specific Sitka Gear clothing is on the racks at Bob Ward's in Helena. Sitka Gear has been developing its women's specific line for more than two years. According to its website, only women help in designing the line.

"It made me feel more comfortable," said Taylor Reisbeck Allen, a lifelong hunter from East Helena, praising the form-fitting gear from Under Armour, arguably one of the first large companies to release women's specific hunting gear.

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# 15 things you need for a safe hunt

**TOM KUGLIN**

[tom.kuglin@helenair.com](mailto:tom.kuglin@helenair.com)

As Montana's big game season arrives, thousands of hunters will set out across the state in pursuit of elk and deer.

Preparedness means having the gear necessary to safely and efficiently navigate the terrain as well as respond in an emergency. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks education Bureau Chief Thomas Baumeister and outdoor skills and safety supervisor Wayne Cooperider have decades of combined hunting experience, and shared what they include in their packs for a day or days in the field.

Hunters must wear 400 square inches of orange in order to comply with Montana law. When wearing a pack, a vest may be easily covered up from the back and leave a hunter out of compliance. Baumeister and Cooperider both add orange to the outside of their packs to meet the safety requirement.

While they both use Badlands packs, several manufacturers make good packs that can stand up to the rigors of many Montana hunts. Having a good pack is nearly as important as having good boots, Baumeister says, and is one piece of gear worth spending a little extra money on.

1. Seeing elk or deer before they see you first typically means a pair of binoculars, and Baumeister recommends a quality harness system to keep binoculars secure, and at the ready.

2. A first aid kit should be in every hunter's pack, Baumeister said.

3. Tape is the preferred method for attaching a tag to a successfully taken animal. Baumeister uses electrical tape or orange flagging tape. A length of rope is also a staple of every hunter's gear.

4. Cooperider carries a water filter when he ventures to the backcountry to eliminate illness-causing microbes. Purification tablets can take up to 30 minutes to work and filters keep bits of debris out of drinking water as well, he said.

5. "Spend the money on a good headlamp," Baumeister said. Bring two headlamps in case one burns out, plus extra batteries.

6. Baumeister carries the old and the new, bringing his compass and paper map as well as a GPS. Both Baumeister and Cooperider carry a Spot device, which allows prewritten messages to be sent to loved ones along with an alert button in case of emergency.

7. Hunters should carry extra layers, a pair of gloves and a hat for any unexpected change in the weather.

8. Fire starter is probably the most critical piece of equipment in an emergency. There are many products on the market, but a good chemical fire starter may be the only thing that will start a fire in damp, cold conditions, Cooperider said.

9. Knives and saws have countless uses in the field when an animal is down, in an emergency or simply to cut off a piece of salami for lunch.

10. A couple of classic emergency items should not be overlooked, Cooperider said, when talking

about packing a small mirror and whistle.

11. Keeping hands clean during field dressing is important for staving off infection and keeping blood and scent down. Both Baumeister and Cooperider carry rubber gloves for field dressing.

12. Toilet paper, because who wants to use leaves or a sock?

13. Cooperider carries a stove with him even on his day hunts. His Jetboil lets him quickly heat up a cup of coffee on a cold day, plus the added insurance of a torch for starting a fire.

14. Bear spray has proven to be an effective predator deterrent and easier to use in a stressful situation than a gun.

15. Cooperider admits that he is a caffeine addict, and his body would react poorly if he got stuck in the woods without a jolt of coffee. He carries some instant coffee packs for just such a situation, plus a Vitamin C supplement which can help with cramps.



# Cool spring may lower chick count

**TED McDERMOTT**  
ted.mcdermott@  
mtstandard.com

A wet, cool June was good for lots of things in western Montana: boosting the hay crop, staving off the start of fire season, growing wildflowers. But the weather's effect on sage grouse was mixed, according to Kirk Miller, president of Helena's Headwaters Chapter of the conservation group Pheasants Forever.

"The June weather definitely may have had a toll on chick survival because it was so cool and wet," Miller said. "But the upside of that for those that did survive is there's plenty of grass out there for them to eat."

And with grass, he said, come insects — another important food source for grouse.

At this point, though, Miller said the mixed spring conditions mean predicting grouse and other upland bird populations is a guessing game.

"There's no real data out there yet," Miller said. "But some anecdotal reports look good."

One of those anecdotal reports, he said, came from someone living near Conrad who has been seeing lots of birds. Another came from northeast Montana, where

a longstanding drought persists but some decent spring moisture has locals anticipating good conditions for brooding.

Vanna Boccadori, Butte-based Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks wildlife biologist, said she agrees that sage grouse conditions are hard to predict, due to the good and bad effects of recent weather.

As for mountain grouse, including blue grouse, spruce grouse and ruffed grouse, she said things should be "status quo."

"I've been running into a few broods here and there, but it's not stellar numbers and it's not impoverished (populations)," Boccadori said.

As for turkeys, she said, populations "look to be pretty healthy as always," adding that "as far as the huntable populations, I don't see any red flags there."

While turkey numbers don't look to have fluctuated much, Boccadori said there was an important recent regulatory change for hunters, with FWP switching over to a region-wide turkey tag during the spring hunt and continuing to offer it this fall.

"It's nice that a person can hunt the whole region if they have that tag," Boccadori said.

While partridge and



Tom Koerner/USFWS

The effect of this year's weather on sage grouse was mixed, according to Kirk Miller, president of Helena's Headwaters Chapter of the conservation group Pheasants Forever.

pheasant populations are never very big in southwest Montana, Boccadori said the cool, wet June "certainly didn't lend itself to population explosions" among these ground-nesting birds.

"So expect the same or a little bit less than usual," Boccadori said.

Despite this year's uncertain outlook, FWP population predictions are not low enough to warrant a change in upland-bird

bag limits or the length of hunting seasons, Boccadori said. Mountain grouse, sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, partridge and turkey seasons open Sept. 1 and end Jan. 1, with one exception: sage grouse season ends early, on Sept. 30. Pheasant season opens Oct. 6, though youth ages 12 to 17 will have an early opportunity to take pheasant the weekend of Sept. 22-23. Pheasant season also ends on New Year's Day.



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# The gutless field dressing method

**TOM KUGLIN**

[tom.kuglin@helenair.com](mailto:tom.kuglin@helenair.com)

Along with the reward of a successful hunt comes the responsibility to properly care for the meat it provides.

Most hunters learn the tried-and-true field dressing technique of opening the body cavity to remove entrails. Separating meat from organs, intestines and the windpipe are critical to preventing spoilage before the animal can be transported from the field for processing.

Increasingly, hunters are turning to a new method of preparing an animal for the trip back to the truck. Called the “gutless-method,” the technique allows hunters to remove all the meat that the law requires without much of the mess and weight.

“You’ve got to cool this animal down if it’s a warm day, and that means you want to get the animal’s heat out of that meat as fast as you can,” said Thomas Baumeister, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks education bureau chief. “In some ways the classic field dressing method is not the best way to accomplish this.”

Baumeister demonstrated the gutless method at a Helena Hunters and Anglers meeting a few years ago. The seminar included a live demonstration with a road-killed mule deer destined to feed bears and raptors at Montana WILD’s animal rehab center.

For most public land hunters, getting a vehicle to a downed elk is seldom an option and using horses to pack out an animal is both expensive and requires horsemanship skills.

The gutless method reduces animals down to manageable loads for backpacking. It also has the advantage of reducing blood and smell, which can attract predators, Baumeister said.

Going gutless also eliminates the need for a saw by using the knife to remove animal quarters at joints, and has become his preferred method when hunting the backcountry, he added.

“This is a great way to reduce the weight and to be able to bring your game out on your back,” he said.



**Thom Bridge photos, Independent Record**

After validating a tag and attaching it to the animal, any field dressing technique starts with skinning. Baumeister skins from the legs up to provide a clean surface for placing meat, however, doing so is not the proper method for “caping” for taxidermy purposes. No matter the skinning method, Baumeister recommends using a knife with a short blade, carrying a sharpener plus a pair of headlamps in case one fails.



Once the skinning is completed, Baumeister removes the front quarter. While lifting the leg away from the body he cuts underneath between the shoulder and rib cage. No bones attach the front shoulder to the body, so cutting all the way through to the top of the shoulder blade frees the front quarter. Once the shoulder is loose, cutting around the knee joint will allow the bottom leg bone to break off. To save the most amount of weight, Baumeister “bones out” the shoulder by cutting the meat away from the shoulder blade and bone, and placing it in a clean game bag. Boning out meat saves a little bit of weight but is typically not necessary, he said.





One of the more difficult steps in the gutless method separates the hind quarter. Baumeister ran his knife along the inside of the leg, separating meat while using the weight of the leg against itself. At this point, hunters should hear a pop as the leg begins to free, he said. After working the leg away, hunters will encounter the ball joint, and with some knife work, can separate the ball from the socket and eliminate the need for a saw. Baumeister continued past the joint, cutting to the top of the quarter and working the knife along the pelvis until the quarter came free.



The back strap can easily be identified as the muscle running along the top of the back. At the base of the neck, Baumeister made a perpendicular cut from the spine to the top of the ribcage. He then ran his knife the length of the spine cutting to where the rear quarter was removed. He then made the same cut at the bottom of the back strap, running his knife the length of the top of the ribs. By pulling the back strap away from the original cut while working the knife to assist as needed, the meat easily separates and is ready for the game bag.



Hunters are not legally required to take meat from the neck, but Baumeister praised it as great for crockpots or burger. He removed the neck meat by working the knife along the spine to the back of the skull, and then cutting down with one hand while pulling the meat away with the other. Other meat that is not required to be taken but available is the meat between the ribs and brisket along the breastbone. All of that can be easily cut away and added to a game bag.



The majority of the gutless method involves intuitively cutting away quarters and meat from the outside of the body cavity, but that leaves perhaps the tastiest portion that needs to be collected. Underneath the rib cage sits the tenderloin, a smaller strip of muscle that hunters must legally take. Getting to the tenderloin is the most technical part of the technique requiring a bit of careful knife work and feeling inside the animal with fingers. Directly up from where the pelvis meets the spine, a small cut is necessary to open a cavity up to the back rib. The risky part of this cut is puncturing the stomach, so particular care is necessary to only open the cavity.

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# Ex-warden relishes the outdoors

DAVID MCCUMBER

David.McCumber@  
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Bob Hammer didn't set out to be a game warden.

He wasn't really sure what he wanted to do. He was in college "on the seven-year plan," working the summers to get money for tuition, and enjoying himself quite a bit. But something had to change: He was actually in danger of graduating.

He saw a friend all dressed up and asked him where he was going. "I'm going to take the test for game warden," his friend said.

Hmm, Hammer thought. He loved to hunt and fish and coming from the tiny town of Stanford in Judith Basin County, he'd grown up in the outdoors.

"Truthfully, I'd never thought about being a warden," he said. "But it sounded like a pretty good idea." So he took the test too.

"I got the job, he didn't," Hammer said with a grin. "The bad part is that it was his lifelong dream, all he ever wanted to do. He never did get in."

As a warden, Hammer spent a few years in Missoula, then in White Sulphur Springs, and then more than 25 years in his hometown of Stanford.

Now, Hammer is helping with his son Nick's outfitting business. He loves being a guide, doing the grunt work, whatever it takes — and working with his son.

When he started as a warden, he quickly discovered that he'd fallen into an occupation that was pretty much to his liking.

"The cool part of it was how varied the job was, day to day, depending on the season," he said.

"In the summer, you might get a call in the morning about some bears getting into somebody's beehives, or livestock,



Bob Hammer, a retired game warden, now works with his son Nick at his son's outfitting business.

or their barn. So you'd go trap them. Then you'd take a horse, or hike in to mountain lakes or backcountry creeks and check fishermen. You might even start getting some game damage — deer and elk coming down into the alfalfa fields.

"Then in August you'd get ready for what was coming, archery season, jumping into bird hunting, rifle season, you'd be on the go all fall. Then in the winter, you'd be back monitoring game damage, checking snowmobiles, ice fishermen."

He said, "Some districts aren't that way but for me March and April was always a little bit of a lull, before the bears got going again."

He said there's just no substitute for experience.

"You might be real smart coming out of college, have the computer stuff down, but you don't know anything until you get out into the field," he said.

"The way the FWP sets the pay scale you're the best warden you can be after 10 years

on the job. Well, I wasn't. I was the best warden I could be after 30 years.

"You take lion hunters. Those are about the most intense hunters you'll ever deal with, maybe camping out all night in the winter with their dogs. If you don't know what you're doing, you'll never be able to deal with them. You can't even talk to them.

"I saw stuff after I'd been doing this for 25 years — I thought to myself, man, I've been missing this s—t for years."

A big part of being a good warden, he said, is people skills. "You have to be able to build relationships," he said. "You need friends. You have to have those critical acquaintances who can help you out when you need it."

He said wardens learned to be self-sufficient, to handle all aspects of an investigation themselves.

"Your city cop, he has to put up the crime scene tape and wait for the homicide detective to show up,"

Hammer said. "Wardens, we handled every aspect of the investigation, talking to people, gathering evidence, the whole package."

He also relished the opportunities to flat-out enjoy the outdoors. "We had all the stuff — snowmobiles, jet-skis, horses, boats, you name it."

But Hammer said the job has changed a lot.

"I wouldn't necessarily want it today," he said. "It used to be you were totally your own boss. You're the one setting your schedule, deciding what you're going to do each day.

"Now they have all this technology — phones, computers. Trucks tracked, phones tracked, and yet they don't even really use that for warden safety. They use it for management."

Still, he admits, "You couldn't ask for a better office."

"One old warden told me, 'If you're not enjoying yourself at this job, it's your own fault.'"





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