THE HUNT

FREE

Photo courtesy Wayne D. Lewis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

2024 PAGOSA SPRINGS HUNTING GUIDE

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Photo courtesy Wayne D. Lewis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Pagosa Country: a hunters' headquarters

Pagosa Country is headquarters for many hunters in southwest Colorado. It is ideally located in the midst of some of the best big game hunting in the United States.

Many of the people who live in the area are big game hunters and have, therefore, learned to cater to the needs of hunters. The town and surrounding area can supply all of the amenities needed. There are motels, hotels, lodges, campgrounds, medical facilities (including a hospital), supermarkets, convenience stores and many retail stores.

The inventory of hunting equipment in local stores is extensive. There are hunting and fishing supply stores, hardware stores, clothing stores and automotive service establishments.

Pagosa also has some of the finest restaurants to be found in the region. Hunters, after several days of camp food, will find that any of the area restaurants will provide a welcome diet change. These restaurants make a special effort during hunting season to provide hearty meals.

Stores are well-stocked with warm, comfortable outdoor clothing and shoes. They carry special boots and shoes for hunting and for stormy weather, plus fluorescent orange vests, jackets and hats (required by law).

Hunters often wish to take home a gift or souvenir of their visit to this part of the world. There are numerous stores and shops with every imaginable type of gift.

Along with the merchandise and items for sale, local merchants are a good source of information about the area and will assist hunters whenever possible.

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Photo courtesy Wayne D. Lewis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Why hunt Pagosa Country?

By Dick Ray

I was born and raised (reared) in New Mexico, a grandson of pioneers who came to the territory in a covered wagon.

I grew up hunting in the dry, rocky, cactus-covered mountains of southwest New Mexico where my grandparents had homesteaded.

Then one day more than 50 years ago, my wife and I discovered Pagosa Country.

Of course we noticed the scenic grandeur of the San Juan Range, but we also noted that we could ride our horses over most of the terrain and the vegetation that did not include cholla or prickly pear cactus. Every major drainage had a creek, stream or river, and most had trout in them. There was a variety of game animals, and plenty of them.

We decided this is better, and proceeded to move from New Mexico to Pagosa Country. But, we weren't truly satisfied with the game situation. The state allowed spike (yearling) bull elk to be harvested and, consequently, there were very few 5x5 bulls or larger taken each fall. All deer and elk licenses were unlimited and public land was crowded.

It seemed that Pagosa Country had been discovered. The standing joke around town was, "If the Mexicans knew when Colorado elk season began, they could retake the Alamo with no resistance," as every able-bodied man in Texas was in Colorado hunting.

All of this prompted some research on my part. This resulted in the purchase of a guide/outfitter territory in British Columbia, Canada, in 1977. We continued to remain Colorado residents, but quit guiding elk hunters in Colorado and focused on private land in New Mexico, and elk, moose, bear, mule deer and white tail deer in Canada. Traveling to Canada each fall took me through Wyoming, Utah, Idaho and Montana, always on the lookout for better hunting grounds. This went on until 1992, when we decided to sell the Canadian venture and refocus on Colorado and northern New Mexico. My son, Mike, and I had been licensed to guide in Utah, Arizona and Wyoming and had decided, "Pagosa is better."

Good judgment had prevailed in Colorado, for all through the 1980s, the state had made a bull elk less than four points illegal to take in most areas. It took a while, but finally, there were some older-age class bulls to be found to keep the spike from breeding, allowing the elk herds to begin to regain their sizes. (Without older-age bulls to drive the yearling away, he will mate with his mother, sisters and aunt, thus depriving the herd of the genetic diversity required.)

In 1999, encouraged by sportsmen, the Colorado Wildlife Commission totally limited the numbers of deer licenses in the state. Deer numbers have rebounded to some degree, bears are abundant, foxes are common, as are mountain lions and coyotes — all are the result of good habitat.

With the largest wilderness area in Colorado, the Weminuche, to the north, and the South San Juan Wilderness to the east, hunters and prey have the room to roam.

Pagosa Country is good country.

Hunter safety card required to purchase hunting license

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife and Donald D. Volger

Colorado law requires that anyone born on or after Jan. 1, 1949, complete an approved hunter education course before applying for or buying a Colorado hunting license.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) hunter education courses, led by certified volunteer hunter education instructors and/or CPW staff, are offered throughout the state year-round.

Courses are offered in several formats:

• Traditional classes: Students complete the course in a classroom setting that includes lectures, hands-on activities and videos.

• Internet course plus conclusion class: Students complete a portion of the course online at their convenience, then attend a shorter class than required by the traditional course.

• Bowhunter education class: Bowhunter education is not a required course in Colorado, but is offered as an opportunity to learn additional skills.

Students should register online prior to the class. To register, go to the CPW website, cpw.state.co.us, click on "Learn" then click on "Classes — Traditional" under the Hunter Education heading and follow the instructions. The direct link is https://register-ed.com/programs/colorado/98-colorado-hunter-education-course.

Local hunter safety courses are sponsored by CPW with support from the local chapter of the Friends of the National Rifle Association.

Accommodations for persons with disabilities

If you need special accommodations as a result of a disability, please contact the hunter education instructor or the hunter education office at (303) 291-7233 or (303) 291-7470.

If you are hearing impaired and need sign language interpretation, please download the accommodations form and send an e-mail to michael.gallegos@state.co.us to request the hunter education interpreter(s).

Note: The hunter education team requests that you contact us with at least 15 days notice prior to the event you wish to attend.

To learn more about how CPW provides opportunities to individuals with disabilities, please its accessibility page on its website.

DEER SEASON DATES

ARCHERY	SEPT. 2-30*
MUZZLELOADER	SEPT. 14-22*
SECOND RIFLE	OCT. 26-NOV. 3
THIRD RIFLE	NOV. 9-15
FOURTH RIFLE	NOV. 20-24
PLAINS RIFLE	OCT. 26-NOV. 5

ELK SEASON DATES...

ARCHERY	SEPT. 2-30
MUZZLELOADER	SEPT. 14-22
FIRST RIFLE	OCT. 12-16
SECOND RIFLE	OCT. 26-NOV. 3
THIRD RIFLE	NOV. 9-15
FOURTH RIFLE	NOV. 20-24

BEAR SEASON DATES

ARCHERY (over-the-counter and/or limited)	SEPT. 2-30
MUZZLELOADER (over-the-counter and/or limited)	SEPT. 14-22
SEPT. RIFLE (limited)	SEPT. 2-30*
SEPT. PLAINS RIFLE (over-the-counter)	SEPT. 2-NOV. 24
RIFLE (over-the-counter and/or limited)	
1st season:	OCT. 12-16
2nd season	OCT. 26-NOV. 3
3rd season	NOV. 9-15
4th season	NOV. 20-24
PRIVATE-LAND-ONLY RIFLE (over-the-counter)	SEPT.2-NOV. 24*

**unless otherwise noted in the brochure tables*

Satellite messengers save lives

By Archuleta County Sheriff's Office

Getting lost or hurt in the backcountry is a helpless feeling.

To increase survivability during a backcountry incident, experts recommend always carrying the "Ten Essentials." The first of the 10 essentials is navigation and the ability to determine your exact location.

One of the most critical things you can do during an incident is communicate an accurate location to emergency services. It can mean the difference between life and death. An accurate global positioning system (GPS) location allows first responders and search and rescue teams to create the best operational plan based on where you are at. Your location and description of the emergency circumstances will help responders determine what level of medical care is needed, and what the best extrication mechanism will be.

Many hunters and backcountry enthusiasts are turning to their smartphones for navigating in the woods. There are several good third-party apps (such as OnX Hunt) that provide accurate navigation even without cell service. Your phone is constantly receiving signals from GPS satellites that work independently from data connection, provided you have downloaded maps of the area ahead of time. These apps allow you to determine an exact latitude and longitude coordinate even without cell service.

Accurate navigation in the backcountry is important and can help you find your way back to camp, and back home, but in the event of an emergency, your ability to communicate your location is critical. Many backcountry emergencies happen outside of cell service.

Smartphones are a great tool for navigating off the beaten path, but they can fall short when it comes to getting help on the way. A critical piece of gear that should be in any outdoor enthusiast's pack is a satellite messenger. These devices have revolutionized search and rescue responses.

Satellite messengers started with the need for reliable emergency contact, but have expanded into two-way communication devices that can also be used to update friends and family when you find yourself outside of cell service.

In an emergency, these devices can alert national emergency dispatch centers with the touch of a button. An SOS activation will automatically send your exact coordinates to a national dispatch center, which will begin the rescue process with local response agencies. They also give you the ability to communicate the circumstances of the emergency, whether you are simply lost or need emergency medical services. For anyone venturing beyond the safety of cell coverage, a GPS satellite device is an investment in your safety. Satellite messengers give yourself, your friends and your family piece of mind, and they might just save your life.

Take your cellphone into the backcountry

By Mark Rackay

These days, most of us are dependent, to some extent, on our cellphones. While service can be nonexistent or, at best, sketchy in remote areas, emergency rescue experts suggest that hunters carry their phones with them in the field.

Cellphones have become the most important tool for finding people who are lost or injured. Here are some tips on the use of cellphones in the backcountry.

Start your trip with the phone fully charged. You can always top off the charge in your vehicle on the way to your starting point. Also, turn on the phone's automatic location setting. This allows emergency services to get a "ping" and calculate your position using GPS. Then, keep the phone turned off. When phones are on, they are constantly searching for a signal which drains the battery. Try to store the phone close to your body — keeping it warm also helps conserve battery power.

Turn your phone on at least once each day for about five minutes. When powered up, the phone will search for, and hopefully find, the nearest tower. Even though there might not be enough signal to make a call, it can be enough to leave an electronic trail that can be used later in an emergency.

Cellphones, like radios, work off of a line of sight. This means that land features such as mountains, heavy tree cover and rock formations can block signals. If you are going to make an emergency call, find the highest and most open location and search for a signal. Hold the phone in the air at arm's length and rotate around until you find reception.

I was on an elk hunting trip some years ago where the only service I would find was in a spot about 50 feet from camp, next to a fence line. I would power up the phone and check in twice daily from that location.

If you do not have enough reception to make a call, or if reception is spotty, it's possible you can send a text message. Send it to someone you know, give the location and the problem you're having. Your friend can then call 911 with the information to request help. If the text doesn't send, just keep moving. As soon as the phone locates a tower, the message will be sent.

Given that cellphone service is becoming available in more and more remote places, it's a good idea to carry your cellphone with you in the backcountry.

Hunters: Who are they?

By Dick Ray

Each fall, in the months of September, October and November, Colorado is invaded by a force clad in camo and/blaze orange. They come in numbers and are well-armed.

The question is often asked, "Who are these people and where do they come from?" The answers are different, from different people. Some say they are all from Texas and they just come to kill, either an animal or a bottle. Others may say that they are my friends from whatever state the respondent came from.

Anyway, they are hunters, and it is best to analyze just what a hunter is before passing judgement.

According to Webster, "hunt" is defined as the act of seeking, searching or finding something.

By that definition, we are all hunters, for the day we are born each of us begins life by seeking our mother's milk to beginning our life here on Earth. Our individual hunt never ends as we go through life searching for knowledge, a date, a mate, a better job, an affordable home, and bargains on anything and everything.

So, if we are all hunters, why do some dress in blaze orange or camo? These are the men, women and youth who are hunting animals and use blaze orange, as the law requires, for safety during hunting seasons where firearms are legal. Camouflage allows archery hunters to blend into the vegetation for concealment, allowing a very close shot opportunity with bow and arrow.

Elk and deer hunters are often criticized for simply just being cold-blooded killers. However, statistics show that only about 40 percent of deer hunters and 20 percent of elk hunters actually kill an animal. Yet each and every one must purchase a hunting license. The total of their license purchases generates almost all of the annual operating budget for Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Additionally, an 11 percent excise tax is collected on the sale of all sporting arms and ammunition. Authorized by the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act, funds in excess of $27 billion have been collected in the United States since 1937.

Although most of the money has come from sportsmen east of the Mississippi, Colorado has been able to purchase and create some 350 state wildlife areas using 90 percent federal aid funds. This is something that all Americans can take pride in — a win/win for wildlife and recreationists.

One asks, "Why doesn't the 60-70 percent of hunters kill an animal?"

The answer lies with each individual. The American elk and/or deer hunter has never been better equipped with clothing, optics, weapons and information. An individual may choose not to even shoot at an animal because it may be too difficult to bring out of a remote location, or it may not be definitely mature enough to harvest. The quarry may be on the move or in the trees and a good, clear shot opportunity just is not available. The hunter is governed by a multitude of laws and ethical considerations. The laws and penalties, both state and federal, can be life-changing for the hunter who makes a fatal mistake. In some cases, a convicted hunter can lose hunting privileges in their home state as well as almost every other state. The informed hunter is wisely cautious before squeezing the trigger.

Select a licensed outfitter

Legal, legitimate outfitters operate around the state and can provide invaluable resources for your hunting trip.

Guides and outfitters must be registered, bonded and insured in Colorado. They also need permits to operate on public land and must register with the Office of Outfitter Registration, 1560 Broadway, Suite 1340, Denver, CO 80202, (303) 894-7778; www.dora.state.co.us/outfitters.

Verify an outfitter's registration by contacting the above office or Colorado Outfitters Association, www.coloradooutfitters.org.

For more information regarding hunting and fishing, contact Colorado Parks and Wildlife at (303) 297-1192 or visit cpw.state.co.us.

Photo courtesy Buck Pierce

Know the rules and your own limits

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Hunting is challenging. Not only must you understand the habits of the animal you are hunting, you must also understand regulations, laws governing public and private lands and your own limitations.

Following are some reminders and things to consider before you start your hunt.

• To obtain a license, all hunters born after 1948 must present a hunter education card from Colorado or another state.

• You must know the specific rules that apply to the game management unit in which you are hunting. If you violate rules, you can be cited and fined.

• Be sure to know where you are hunting. You can only hunt in the game management unit that your license specifies.

• As you are hunting, be aware of buildings, homes, roads and your overall surroundings. Make sure you know what is behind an animal before you shoot. A bullet shot from a high-powered rifle can easily carry for more than 1,000 yards.

• Make sure that someone at home knows where you are hunting, your vehicle's license plate number and where you are staying.

• Weather in the fall can change rapidly in Colorado. A day that starts sunny and warm could end with a snowstorm. Be sure you are prepared for all weather conditions.

• Make sure you can recognize the symptoms of hypothermia in your hunting partners.

• Know how to get back to your camp.

• Cellphone service is not reliable in the mountains. Don't expect to contact someone by phone if you are lost or if your vehicle is stuck.

• Make sure to drink plenty of water. Colorado's dry air and high altitude can quickly dehydrate you and deplete your energy stores.

• Be sure to consult Colorado Parks and Wildlife regulations to understand antler requirements for taking bull elk.

• Do not attempt to shoot at animals that are in areas where you could not retrieve the meat. Know your physical limits.

• If you harvest an animal, make sure the carcass is properly tagged. Tags must remain with all processed meat.

• If you transfer an animal killed by another hunter, ensure that it is properly tagged. You could be cited for illegal transport of a game animal even if someone else made the error.

• Do not strap a harvested animal on the outside of your car.

• Operate ATVs and OHVs responsibly. The vehicles must be registered in Colorado — even if it is registered in another state. Off-road vehicles can cause resource damage. Be sure to know the local travel management rules for public lands. OHVs also disturb animals and other hunters.

• If you see hunters violating laws, please report the actions to a wildlife officer or other law enforcement agency. Actions by a few hunters can reflect badly on all hunters.

For more information, visit cpw.state.co.us.

How not to get lost in the woods

By Chris Parmeter, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

In the 1980 classic movie "The Mountain Men," the character Henry Frapp is questioned by a young greenhorn: "Haven't you ever been lost?"

Frapp scratches his whiskers and, after a recollecting pause, replies, "A fearsome confused for a month or two … but I ain't ever been lost!"

For the fur trappers, wandering through a vast and unexplored country, "lost" would have been something of an oxymoron. Not knowing where you were was a necessary part of the mountain man business. The blank space on the map was as much "home" as it was wilderness, and "lost" was more a state of mind than a physical dilemma.

When the mountain men plunged headlong into the unknown, they knew that, where they were going, there would be no restaurants or hotels. So, they planned accordingly. They learned quickly where to find food and how to get it; how to mend equipment, to make new or make do; they could sleep in a log, a cave, or just plain under the stars — and survive. How did they accomplish this incredible feat? Simply, they were prepared — mentally and physically.

Today, the same principles apply. When you head out into the woods, be prepared: for cold, rain or snow; to tend an injury; or to stay the night in the woods. It's not as difficult as it sounds. Here are a few nuggets of mountain man wisdom to help you survive.

Staying found

The old-timers relied on "dead reckoning" for navigation: utilizing a compass to guide them in the general direction they wished to go. Sometimes in the absence of a compass, they relied only on "reckoning:" As in "I reckon camp is back that way." The contemporary woodsman may have the handiness of a GPS, but owning one of these high-tech gizmos is not an adequate substitute for map and compass skills. Just as with other conveniences (cellphones, cameras, flashlights), the batteries will invariably go dead just when you need them the most.

Learning how to read a map is not that difficult; up is north, left is west and so on. The closer the lines are together, the steeper the country. Water is shown as blue, while man-made objects are black. It is simply a two-dimensional rendition of a three-dimensional world. Using a map and a compass to show you which way is north, you'd be hard pressed to get seriously lost. Sure, some practice is required, but that's all part of the preparedness thing.

Paying attention to where you're going can also be a big help to staying found. As you pursue your quarry, notice which way the shadows are falling. Have you been mostly climbing or descending? Look for landmarks as you go. Not stumps and rocks, but big landmarks that give your relative position to the valley below, or that craggy peak to the west. Turn around and look behind you; what would it look like if you were going that way — back to camp or the truck?

The essentials

Unless your trip is taking you across the Gobi or the Brooks Range, you probably don't need to carry 50 feet of copper wire or spare fishing line and hooks. The largest wilderness area in Colorado can be traversed in a day or two by a man in decent shape. So, what are the essentials you need when you're on your own hook?

Water. Without it, you're dead in three days. Without it for a few hours, at 9,000 feet above sea level, you're not dead, but you may wish you were. Dehydration can lead to altitude sickness and hypothermia. But, even worse, it can impair your judgment, induce panic and result in a fatal case of lost.

Fire good. Fire friend. Fire No. 2 in importance. Learn how to build one, without toilet paper and gasoline. It's as easy as one two three: One, you need dry tinder. Scratch around under grass tussocks for the driest stuff. Get lots of it, about a volleyball-sized bunch. Two, kindling. You want about twice as much as the tinder you gathered. Kindling is small stuff — the sized of a matchstick. Three is the fuel itself. Gather up plenty if it looks like you may have to spend the night. Pick dry branches 1 to 2 inches in diameter — these burn without difficulty and make it easy to control the heat. Of course, we can't overlook the match. You don't need to be proficient with a flint and steel, but you should have at least a couple of ways to start fire; it doesn't matter if it's a lighter or a fire plow, as long as you can get it lit.

Shelter. Now don't jump right into bivy sacks and backpacking tents. Let's take a step back and start at the beginning. Shelter starts with your clothing. Dress for the worst. And in a Colorado autumn, the worst can be pretty harsh. Pick synthetics — like fleece or polyester blends — but wool is best. Dress in layers: long handle union suit, light mid layer(s) and warmer outer layer. Dressing appropriately when you leave camp will find you well on your way to surviving a night in the outback even without a buffalo robe.

Make a plan and let someone know what it is. Leave a map open on the dashboard of the truck. You don't have to give up your secret spot with an "I am here" arrow, just circle a square mile or two. When you leave camp, a plain old "I'm gonna work this ridge out and come back down the crick" is enough to give your buddies a place to start looking for you if you should become "a fearsome confused." The important thing is to stick to your plan.

As you head into the high country this fall, see yourself as one of the Lewis and Clark Expedition: Be prepared, both mentally and physically, for the challenges of the unknown. Keep your powder dry and your eyes on the horizon, and you'll know that "lost" is, by and large, just a state of mind.

Hunter orange and pink requirements

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Hunters must wear fluorescent orange or pink during certain hunting seasons.

The law requires hunters to wear at least 500 square inches of solid daylight fluorescent orange or fluorescent pink material on an outer garment above the waist while hunting deer, elk, pronghorn, moose or bear with any firearm license. A fluorescent orange or pink hat or head covering, visible from all directions, is also required. Camouflage orange or pink does not qualify. Mesh garments are legal but not recommended. This includes all muzzleloader hunters. It also includes archery hunters who hunt during rifle seasons.

Archers hunting during the limited September rifle bear season; archers with an archery bear, deer, elk, pronghorn or moose license; and archers licensed for private land hunting through the Ranching for Wildlife program do not have to wear fluorescent orange or pink, but should consider wearing it to increase safety while in the field. Auction- and raffle-license holders do not have to wear orange or pink when hunting with archery equipment when no rifle seasons are open. If using a ground blind or pop-up blind, hunters should display orange or pink that is visible from all directions on the outside of the blind.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife recommends wearing fluorescent orange or pink clothes in the field, even if not hunting. Archery deer, elk, moose and bear hunters are encouraged to wear hunter orange or pink during the overlapping archery and muzzleloader seasons to help address safety concerns. Wearing orange or pink is for hunter safety, as big game animals don't see these colors like we do. Movement, sound and smell are what give hunters away.

Enjoy your hunt!

High-altitude survival tips

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Every year, more than a few hunters must be rescued from the wilds and high country of Colorado. Hunters get trapped by snowstorms, injured in various types of accidents or simply get lost in the woods.

Hunters must remember that altitude can affect their health and their ability to move easily. And in the Rockies, weather can change quickly, with fast-moving storms dumping a couple of feet of snow in just a few hours.

Be prepared for all types of weather — wet, cold, dry and hot. Take appropriate clothing and the right camping gear. If possible, especially for those coming from lower altitudes, spend a few days at higher elevation just before the hunting season to allow your body to acclimate.

Heavy snowfall can occur starting in September. High-country hunters, especially those who backpack into wilderness areas and have to get out on foot, need to watch the weather closely and pick their escape routes before they choose a campsite. Snow can obliterate trails or make them impassable.

Survival experts recommend that you never go into a wilderness area alone. Unavoidable accidents do happen that make self-rescue impossible. Learn how to use a compass, take a map of the area and orient yourself before leaving camp. Explain to your hunting partners where you'll be going and when you plan to return.

Always carry a survival kit and know how to use it. Such a kit should include a knife, waterproof matches, fire starter, compass, reflective survival blanket, high-energy food, water purification tablets, first aid kit, whistle and unbreakable signal mirror.

If you get lost, sit down, regain your composure and think for a few minutes. Many times people who are lost can figure out where they went wrong and make it back to camp. If you truly don't know where you are, stay put.

Survival experts explain that survival is 80 percent attitude, 10 percent equipment, and 10 percent skill and knowledge.

If you are caught in a storm or forced to spend the night out, there are three keys to survival: shelter, fire and signal.

If you can't find camp and have to overnight in the wild, your first priority is shelter. Even if you have nothing else going for you — no fire or food — an adequate shelter that is warm and dry will keep you alive until rescuers find you. That means anything from an overhanging rock shelf to a cave, a timber lean-to or snow cave. Always prepare for the worst and build a shelter that will last. Cut boughs from evergreen trees and use them as padding and for covering.

Dress in layers and take extras with you. Put on layers before you become chilled and take off a layer before you become damp with perspiration. Staying warm is a process of staying dry. Do not dress in cotton — it becomes wet easily and is difficult to dry. Use wool, wool blends or synthetic clothing that wicks moisture away from skin.

Be sure to carry a quality stocking cap that is made of wool or synthetic fleece. You lose up to 45 percent of your heat around your head, neck and shoulders.

Winter headgear should conserve heat, breathe and be water repellent. The old saying, "If your feet are cold put your hat on," is good advice.

Use waterproof footgear, wool or synthetic socks, and always remember to carry gloves.

Fire is the second priority if you are forced to stay out overnight. Know how to build a fire even in wet or snowy conditions. That means carrying a lighter, metal matches or wooden matches in waterproof containers and a fire-starter — such as steel wool, cotton or sawdust saturated with paint thinner or alcohol. Camping stores sell a variety of fire starters. Experiment with various materials before going into the field. A fire will warm your body, dry your clothes, cook your food and help you to signal for help.

The third priority is signaling. This can be done by fire — flames at night or smoke from green branches during the day; with a signal mirror in bright sunshine; and with sound — hence the whistle.

You can live up to three or four weeks without food. You will, however, be more efficient and alert, and have more confidence, if you are able to satisfy your hunger. So, carry some high-energy food in your survival kit.

Water is more important to survival than food. Your body needs about three quarts of water a day to metabolize its energy reserves and carry away waste. Carry iodine tablets to add to water taken from streams or snowbanks. Avoid drinking ice-cold water, which can cause your body temperature to drop.

Altitude sickness is another danger. Hunters who are fatigued, cold or exhausted are vulnerable. At the very least, altitude sickness can ruin a hunting trip; at the worst, it can be fatal. Hunters who are coming to Colorado from low altitude areas should be especially careful.

Take time to acclimate and do not move quickly above 8,000 feet. Symptoms of altitude sickness include shortness of breath, fatigue, nausea, headache and loss of appetite. To avoid altitude sickness, get in shape, limit alcohol consumption, acclimate for a few days before the start of the season and drink lots of water. Staying hydrated is a key factor in reducing your chances of getting altitude sickness.

Hunters with any heart problems should be extra careful in Colorado's high country. If you have a heart condition, you should keep any prescribed medication with you at all times. Inform your hunting partners of your condition.

Finally, be sure to leave accurate information at home about where you're hunting and when you'll return.

Photo courtesy Wayne D. Lewis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Use OHVs properly and know the rules

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

The number of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) used during hunting seasons has been increasing steadily during the last decade. While the vehicles can be useful tools to aid a hunt, some hunters are using them improperly and causing a variety of problems.

Hunters must be aware of Colorado OHV rules, local regulations and federal travel management regulations for national forests and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands.

All OHVs must be registered in Colorado. Your home-state registration is not valid. To register your vehicle, call the Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) office at (303) 791-1920 or go to cpw.state.co.us.

Hunters need to remember that rifles carried on OHVs must be completely unloaded and placed in a hard or soft case — no bullets in the chamber or magazine. Bows must also be carried in a case.

On national forest and BLM lands, OHV travel is allowed only on roads and trails designated for such use. Roads and trails open to motorized use will be signed as "open" or be shown as open on Forest Service and BLM travel maps. It is recommended that you consult with the local Forest Service or BLM office prior to your trip to make sure you understand travel regulations in your hunting area. Federal fines, up to $500 per incident, may be levied for violations of travel management regulations.

CPW officers are authorized to write tickets for illegal OHV use. Besides the federal fines, violators who are using OHVs while hunting, fishing or trapping will be assessed penalty points against their license privileges: 10 points for most violations, 15 points for riding into wilderness areas. Hunters who accumulate 20 penalty points lose their ability to buy hunting or fishing licenses for at least one year.

Matt Thorpe, area wildlife manager in Durango, explained that hunters must minimize their use of OHVs if they expect to see any big game animals.

"There are some hunters who drive around on OHVs all day and then they complain that they're not seeing any animals," Thorpe said.

The constant drone of OHVs also causes problems for other hunters. OHVs are noisy and cause animals to move deep into inaccessible territory. Just one vehicle can cause problems for numerous hunters.

"There is getting to be a real backlash against OHVs from people who actually get out there and hunt the way they're supposed to," Thorpe said.

Big-game hunters who wish to be successful must walk slowly and quietly well away from roads. It is unlikely during hunting season that a hunter will see a big game animal from the road. And if an animal is spotted, a hunter doesn't have time to get off the vehicle, take a rifle or bow out of its case, load the weapon and move off the road to take a shot.

Besides disturbing animals and other hunters, improper use of OHVs can cause resource damage when they are driven off of established roads and trails. That action can destroy vegetation, compact soil, and lead to stream and water-quality degradation.

Photo courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Please, remember these rules and guidelines:

- Rifles and bows carried on OHVs must be completely unloaded and secured in a case.
- Be sure to check with local Forest Service and BLM offices for the local travel management plans in areas where you will be hunting.
- In most areas an OHV cannot be used to retrieve harvested animals. Check with local BLM and Forest Service offices for specific game-retrieval policies.
- OHVs cannot be driven into designated wilderness areas.
- Be careful not to trespass onto private roads.
- Be considerate of other hunters. Drive slowly to reduce noise; minimize driving distances; don't hunt from the road.
- Explain these rules and guidelines to young hunters and those unfamiliar with proper OHV use.

For more information and to register OHVs, visit cpw.state.co.us.

Information resources available

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Hunters looking for information to help with their big game adventure will find plenty of helpful material online at the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website, cpw.state.co.us.

The information includes how to apply for a license, where to hunt, tips for hunting elk, detailed maps, how to field dress a big game animal and much more.

A popular feature is "Elk Hunting University."

Jim Bulger, hunter outreach coordinator, has worked with hunters, huntmasters, biologists and field officers to compile a series of articles that address details on how to hunt elk. Article topics include: scouting, using maps, ballistics, how to select a hunting area, archery hunting, etc. Search for "plan your hunt" on the website.

"We're providing hunters with helpful information that will make their hunts more enjoyable and productive," Bulger said. "These articles are not just aimed at novices; even veteran hunters will benefit from these."

Also available on the website are hunting guides for each of the agency's four regions: Northeast, Southeast, Northwest and Southwest. Available as PDFs on the website and in printed booklet form, the guides provide statistics, game management unit descriptions and hunting tips.

The website also offers statistical tables that provide complete harvest details for all big game species, including method of take and a season-by-season breakdown.

Hunters can also check if they've drawn a license and look at preference points tables for each game management unit and season.

Detailed maps are provided by the agency's geographic information system, known as the Natural Diversity Information Source. These maps show habitat areas and migration corridors in a detailed topographic format. Go to http://ndis.nrel.colostate.edu/.

Also on the website: hunting regulations, the Big Game Brochure, explanations of ranching for wildlife, leftover license information, information about all Colorado hunting opportunities, descriptions of various species and much more.

The following offices can assist hunters with animal checks and taking samples that are related to hunting activities. See Colorado Parks and Wildlife's website for a complete list of our park locations that can also sell licenses, issue duplicate licenses and accept some licenses for refunds.

DURANGO
151 E. 16th St.
Durango, 81301
(970) 247-0855

MONTE VISTA
0722 S. Rd. 1 E.
Monte Vista, 81144
(719) 587-6900

Hunting violations can be costly

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Every hunting season, officers for Colorado Parks and Wildlife hand out thousands of tickets for violations that cost hunters hundreds of thousands of dollars.

While some of those tickets are for flagrant violations of wildlife regulations and hunting laws, many more are for minor violations that could have been avoided.

Hunters are reminded that not only can they be fined for violations, they can also lose their hunting privileges in Colorado and the 45 other states that cooperatively participate in a wildlife compact agreement.

Rick Basagoitia, area wildlife manager for the San Luis Valley, explained that hunters need to set aside some time to review the Colorado Big Game Brochure. The brochure explains many of the common violations and how to avoid them.

"Hunters must know their responsibilities when they get into the field," Basagoitia said. "Wildlife laws are written to protect a valuable resource and for safety."

Following are some of the more common violations that occur every year:

• Not wearing fluorescent orange or pink: You must wear at least 500 inches of daylight fluorescent orange/pink, including a head covering of the same color that can be seen from all directions. Mesh garments are legal but not recommended. Camouflage orange/pink does not qualify.

• Carrying loaded firearms in or on vehicles: Rifles must not have ammunition in the chamber while in or on any motor vehicles. For those riding OHVs, weapons (rifles and bows) must also be in a closed case and fully unloaded (chamber and magazine). Most accidents involving firearms occur in or near vehicles.

• Shooting from a road: Before firing a shot, you must be at least 50 feet off of a designated state or county road, and just off Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management roads. You also cannot shoot across a road.

• License not voided: After you kill an animal, you must void the license immediately.

• Improperly attached carcass tag: The carcass tag must be attached to the animal. The best way is to cut a hole in the hide and attach with a tie. It is OK to wait until you get the animal back to camp or to your vehicle to attach the carcass tag.

• No evidence of sex: Be sure to leave evidence of sex naturally attached to the carcass. Evidence includes the head, the vulva or the scrotum.

• Waste of game meat: Big game meat can begin to spoil at 38 degrees. To keep the carcass cool, remove the hide as soon as possible after the kill to allow for air to circulate around the meat. Reduce the mass of the carcass by quartering the meat or boning out the meat. Place the meat in a cooler as soon as possible. Even in cold weather, a carcass should not hang outside for more than 36 hours. Remember: Because game meat contains very little fat, it cannot be aged like beef. The so-called "gamey taste" is caused by spoilage, not because the animal is wild.

• To learn how to field dress a big game animal, see the video at http://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/HuntVideos.aspx.

• Shooting a spike-antlered elk: Hunters who hold a cow elk tag sometimes shoot spike bulls. Be sure of your target. If you are shooting at a long distance or in low-light conditions, it can be difficult to see spike antlers. If you are not absolutely sure, do not shoot.

• Illegally tagging an animal: You can only place a tag on an animal that you shot. You cannot trade tags with other license holders, or use tags of other license holders.

Advice on taking the shot

By Dick Ray

You have drawn that expensive nonresident license that you have waited so long for. You have bought more gear than you probably need.

You are ready for the hunt — or are you? When the moment of truth arrives, will you be able to perform efficiently and capably with your weapon?

The most common complaint from outfitters is that their hunter missed or wounded the quarry.

Here are some points to consider:

• The most important thing that the hunter can do prior to the hunt is to become well-acquainted and proficient with his weapon, rifle or bow.

• After sighting in, practice under field conditions that you might encounter on the hunt.

• The only weapon commonly used off hand, with success, is the bow.

• Unless very, very close, rifle hunters should find a tree, rock, log or something stable to lean against or to sight over, or at least sit placing your elbows on your knees in a stable position.

• Prone is a very stable position, but tall grass, deep snow or steep terrain often makes prone impractical.

• Learn your limitations and stick to those limitations.

• If you choose to use shooting sticks, practice with them as well. Practice a rapid sight picture acquisition. When the moment of opportunity presents itself, you don't want to be fiddling with your sticks.

• Before squeezing the trigger, if sighting through a scope, make sure the horizontal crosshair is horizontal.

• If the rifle is canted, you will shoot high and to the left if you are right-handed, or high and to the right if left-handed.

• Rifle or bow: If you can't make the shot, don't take the shot.

It is a matter of ethical pride and honor.

Snow:
an uncommonly normal event

By Dick Ray

First rifle elk season begins during October in Colorado. The thought summons a vision of golden aspen leaves quaking in an autumn breeze and the music of a bull elk bugling on a distant ridge. In the past, on occasion, early snow has accompanied the first day of elk season. Well, snow is beautiful, too, and has some good positive value, as well, such as easier game tracking, an aid against meat spoilage and it can begin the annual downward altitudinal migration.

But, like fire, snow can be good or bad. A good fire warms your house on a winter night. A bad fire burns your house down. So it is with snow. When an early blizzard dumps 3 to 5 feet, as it has been known to do, you will soon know if you have enough horse feed, gathered enough firewood and just how durable you and your camp are.

Remembering some outstanding early snows in the '70s, '80s and '90s, I can recall storms that turned ordinary elk hunts into stories of survival. In Colorado, late-season elk hunters hope and pray for enough snow to concentrate elk and deer on their winter ranges. However, when early October produces unusually heavy snows, those hunters who have packed into the higher elevations of the wilderness must change focus from hunting animals to simple survival.

In 1971, we packed four hunters from Louisiana into the headwaters of the Chama River — still in Archuleta County, but east of the Continental Divide. The season was nine days long. They went in the day prior and scheduled to come out on the 11th day. They were well provisioned and had a good camp at 11,000 feet. Good thing, because about 3 p.m. the first day of the hunt, it began to snow.

It snowed for 2.5 days depositing about 3.5 feet with some 5-foot drifts. Six days later, the snow had melted and settled enough for us to be barely able to get them out. They were all still friends. Their faith in God and their preparedness had seen them through. This was before the day and age of cellphones. Calling search and rescue was not even an option.

Same location, 1983. A group had packed themselves in and history repeated itself. Early October, early heavy snow. This group abandoned their camp, their mules and walked out to the highway. In a plea that made national news, they raised enough money to have the mules airlifted out to the highway at Cumbres Pass.

Mid-October 1994, a storm predicted to drop 16-18 inches in the high country overshot the prediction, leaving up to 5 feet in its wake.

Everyone in Southwest Colorado was mutually inconvenienced. For high-country hunters, the task was survival. Even the lower-elevation roads were impassable until plowed by heavy equipment. Hundreds were in need of help. The question around town was, just how many fatalities will there be? Many hunters made it out on their own. Many were plucked from this white hell by military helicopter — forced to leave camp, livestock and firearms behind.

One particularly tragic incident occurred northeast of Pagosa Springs in the Turkey Creek drainage. Two hunters from Oklahoma abandoned their camp and two mules, attempting to walk out on Oct. 15. About 7 p.m. on Oct. 18, the older hunter, age 53, died in his wet sleeping bag at a makeshift camp. The younger hunter, age 40, was found and brought out by helicopter on Oct. 21. He suffered severe frostbite. As I recall, the human death toll attributed to this storm was eight, primarily to hypothermia, heart attack or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Nowadays, a satellite phone can call search and rescue from almost anywhere. However, in times of a widespread natural disaster, you may still be days away from help. A simple thing like an ax lost deep in the snow or a collapsed and ripped tent immediately become very significant. Trails obvious before a blizzard tend to disappear when buried under deep snow. Decisions made under pressure must be good ones.

The value of these stories of human pain and suffering is this: Some October, we will again have heavy snows and for those who venture forth, a well-thought-out exit plan is in order.

As the old sheepherders always said, "Quidad" (be careful).

Poaching: a constant problem

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Poaching continues to be a major issue in Colorado. Some studies indicate that poachers kill almost as many animals as legitimate hunters do during legal seasons.

If poachers kill even half that number each year, the problem is serious because they are stealing game from licensed hunters, robbing businesses and taxpayers of revenues generated by hunting, and depriving us all of a valuable resource — our wildlife.

Bob Thompson, assistant chief of law enforcement for Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), said most poachers are not poor people trying to feed their families. Some kill for the thrill of killing, others for trophies. Some kill for money — trophy heads, antlers and bear gallbladders can be worth thousands of dollars.

Poaching is the illegal taking or possession of any game, fish or non-game wildlife. Hunting out of season or outside of the game management unit for which you have a valid license, hunting at night with a spotlight or taking more animals than the legal limit all constitute poaching. A nonresident who buys a resident license can also be convicted for poaching.

Flock shooting big game is tantamount to poaching since it usually leaves multiple dead and wounded animals.

"Hunters who keep shooting into a herd of animals should realize that not every animal goes down right away when it is hit," said Thompson "Not only is it unethical hunting, it leads to a lot of game waste, which in itself is illegal."

Hunters who witness such violations should report them to wildlife officers, local law enforcement or call Operation Game Thief, a nonprofit organization that pays rewards to people whose tips lead to an arrest being made or a citation being issued to poachers. The number to call is (877) 265-6648, which also is printed on carcass tags. Tips can also be made to CPW via email at game.thief@state.co.us.

Rewards are paid for information that leads to an arrest or a citation being issued.

"We depend on concerned citizens to report poaching activity. We need the public's eyes and ears to help catch poachers," Thompson said.

For more information, visit cpw.state.co.us.

Leading way in conservation: CPW's non-toxic bullet replacement program

By Kristin Cannon, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

On May 10, 2024, representatives from the North American Non-lead Partnership (NANP), The Peregrine Fund and Sporting Lead-Free gave a compelling pitch to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff. Hunters themselves made the case for putting a copper round in the rifle when hunting in the field instead of lead. While their logic felt obvious, I hate to say I had not given it much thought before that day.

I was tasked with ensuring that CPW met its obligations under House Bill 23-1036, the Nontoxic Bullet Replacement Hunting Program. As part of this legislation, CPW is required to provide range days to demonstrate the efficacy of non-lead ammunition. I reserved the ranges, ordered lunch and arranged with our nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners, but I still had not yet made the switch myself.

So, why not? I think my reasons were understandable, maybe even relatable to a lot of hunters: I used what I learned with and what I always use. I thought non-lead ammo wasn't as common or as cheap as lead. And, what is the actual harm, anyway?

Photo courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife

The experts fill me in

Neil Thagard, with The Peregrine Fund, has heard all of these same barriers many times. He showed me a spreadsheet of local stores he had visited the previous day. It included lead ammo alongside a variety of available non-lead (copper) alternatives. The prices were comparable; there was a similar selection of caliber and weight. Thagard started telling me about ballistics and he told me that the bottom line is that, for what hunters are trying to accomplish, the efficient and effective killing of the targeted game animal, there was no meaningful difference in price or availability.

Chris Parish, also with The Peregrine Fund and the co-founder of the NANP, recounted his time with Arizona Game and Fish studying the California condor, an endangered species. This species is so endangered almost every individual is tracked and monitored. They could actually look at causes of mortality for the entire population and found lead poisoning was a significant factor. They were able to narrow down where that lead was coming from as largely being from gut piles left in the field by hunters. Arizona Fish and Game then began a program where they encouraged and incentivized hunters in a California Condor Recovery Area to either use non-lead ammo or remove the gut piles from the field. They saw high levels of cooperation and they saw benefits to the condor. While we don't have condors in Colorado, we do have struggling golden eagles and other species susceptible to lead exposure.

Bryan Bedrosian is a raptor biologist and the co-founder and director of Sporting Lead-Free out of Wyoming. Over the years, he has collected some pretty compelling data showing how lead builds up in the bloodstream of raptors and other scavenging birds and how lead levels in these animals spike annually following the fall hunting seasons. Bedrosian and his organization are also after the hearts and minds of anglers to get them to use non-lead tackle (Did you know a lot of wire for fly tying contains lead? I did not.).

Seeing is believing

In the afternoon we went on the range. Parish shot a 6.5 CM Hornady lead round (129 gr) and a 6.5 CM Hornady copper round (120 gr) each into a water barrel and ballistic gel. We recovered the spent rounds and the lead bullet lost 30 percent of its weight in the form of an uncountable amount of tiny fragments. The copper round maintained 99 percent of its starting weight. From the ballistic gel we could see a clear path both bullets took. The lead round split up and fragmented, which is good for causing tissue damage, but all those tiny pieces of lead were spread through the gel, well beyond the bullet's path. In an animal these fragments would be in the meat, the organs, the hide. The copper round's path was equally as large and damaging as the lead's, but no stray fragments were embedded in the gel. In other words, had this been meat it would have been free of extra pieces of metal, especially pieces of toxic metal. It's not just scavengers that end up eating this lead, and lead is toxic to everyone.

Seeing is absolutely believing, and that is really all it took for me. Leland Brown, also with NANP, observed that of the four firearms safety rules, one is that every shooter should "know their target and beyond." Most of us consider that to mean knowing what we are shooting at (elk versus moose, doe versus buck), but also what is behind that animal, what is next to it, is there a safe backstop. Brown challenged us to consider that "beyond" our target meant taking responsibility for the bullet from the time we pull the trigger to the time it hits the target —and after. What unintended harm does that bullet cause beyond?

The next evolution in hunting

Like any hunter, I am also a conservationist. I hunt for many reasons, but primarily to experience the natural world and the wildlife within it in a unique and connected way. When I harvest an animal, I do it with intention and I care about the environment from which it came. I want to take care of the habitats I spend time in and harvest food from. So, for me, that will mean making a different decision when I load a round into the chamber of my rifle this fall. It also means helping to spread awareness on this topic and encouraging other hunters to consider what NGOs such as NANP and Sporting Lead-Free have to tell us.

Just to be clear, this isn't about a mandate — no one I spoke with is interested in that — and it isn't about shame, blame or judgment. It is about information and continuing a long tradition of hunters protecting and conserving wildlife and their habitats. Our tools have evolved over the years, and we have along with them. To me, this is just another step in a long journey of hunters protecting landscapes for everyone to enjoy now and into the future.

Kristin Cannon is the Northeast Region deputy regional manager for the CPW.

Hunters should be aware of bears, lions in the field

By John Livingston, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Each year, hunters in the field encounter black bears and mountain lions and, in rare instances, must be prepared to defend themselves from an aggressive animal. It is important for everyone recreating in Colorado to know how to react and understand the warning signs a large predator may send their direction.

Every encounter with these charismatic creatures can be different. Here is a closer look at the warning signs and what you should do if you encounter a bear or mountain lion while on a big-game hunt.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) asks that anyone who encounters an aggressive bear or mountain lion report it to the nearest CPW office. The Monte Vista office can be reached at (719) 587-6900.

Black bears

Colorado is home to an estimated population of 17,000 to 20,000 black bears. While aggressive behavior is rare, bears may be unpredictable, and there have been three documented bear attacks on a human in Colorado in 2023. With that said, experience has shown that the majority of conflict with wild bears is avoidable, and for hunters that starts with keeping a clean campsite.

"Unsecured food and trash remains the leading cause of human-bear conflict," said CPW Area Wildlife Manager Adrian Archuleta, of Gunnison. "Maintaining a clean camp, and securing food away from camp is the best way to keep bears away from your campsite.

"For successful hunters, meat management at camp is also a good thing to think about. If you can hang your meat out of reach of bears, that really helps. We seem to have instances every fall where a bear drags a quarter out of camp, which leads to problems for the hunters and bears. The last thing we want is for wild bears to associate hunting camps with food rewards."

When encountered in the wild, black bears are usually wary of humans and will look to turn and go the other way. For those without a valid bear hunting license in their pocket, if you find yourself in close quarters with a bear, or happen across a bear on a food source (think elk or deer carcass), simply back away or give them plenty of room to escape. Wild black bears seldom attack unless they feel threatened, cornered or are provoked. Many hunters carry bear spray these days, which is proven to be an effective, nonlethal tool in many conflict situations.

If you surprise a bear on a trail

• Stand still, stay calm and let the bear identify you and leave. Talk in a normal tone of voice. Be sure the bear has an escape route.

• Never run or climb a tree.

• If you see cubs, their mother is usually close by. Leave the area immediately.

If the bear doesn't leave

• A bear standing up is just trying to identify what you are by getting a better look and smell.

• Wave your arms slowly overhead and talk calmly. If the bear huffs, pops its jaws or stomps a paw, it wants you to give it space.

• Step off the trail, keep looking at the bear and slowly back away until the bear is out of sight.

If the bear approaches

• A bear knowingly approaching a person could be a food-conditioned bear looking for a handout or, very rarely, an

See Aware A15

Aware

Continued from A14

aggressive bear. Don't concede to this behavior; instead, stand your ground. Yell or throw small rocks in the direction of the bear.

• Get out your bear spray and use it when the bear is about 40 feet away.

• If you're attacked, don't play dead. Fight back with anything available. People have successfully defended themselves with pen knives, trekking poles and even bare hands.

Mountain lions

Colorado is also home to an estimated 3,000 to 7,000 mountain lions, with studies ongoing around the state to get a better understanding of their density. One such study is currently being conducted in Gunnison.

"Mountain lions are rarely seen, but are common throughout western Colorado," said CPW Senior Wildlife Biologist Jamin Grigg. "They prey primarily on deer and elk and are likely to be present anywhere deer and elk are abundant. They are generally shy around humans, but are also very curious, similar to house cats."

Mountain lion attacks are relatively rare. There have been 25 known attacks of a mountain lion on a human in Colorado since 1990. Oftentimes, protective behavior by a mountain lion can be mistaken with predatory behavior.

Grigg said mountain lions are ambush predators, meaning they rely on stealth and secrecy when hunting.

"If a lion allows you to see it, it's likely not acting in a predatory manner," he said.

What is observed more commonly is protective behavior by mountain lions when they make an effort to direct a human away from a food source or its young kittens. Protective behavior can include bluff-charging — an act in which the lion will behave aggressively by walking toward a person and gesturing with its paws while vocalizing.

"When you see that, a lion likely has a kill or kittens nearby and is simply trying to encourage you to leave the area," Grigg said. "Bluff-charging is a protective behavior."

If you encounter a mountain lion

• Do not approach a lion, especially one that is feeding or with kittens. Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.

• Stay calm when you come upon a lion. Talk calmly and firmly to it. Move slowly.

• Stop or back away slowly, if you can do it safely. Running may stimulate a lion's instinct to chase and attack. Face the lion and stand upright.

• Do all you can to appear larger. Raise your arms. Open your jacket if you're wearing one.

• If the lion behaves aggressively, throw stones, branches or whatever you can get your hands on without crouching down or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly. What you want to do is convince the lion you are not prey and that you may in fact be a danger to the lion.

• Fight back if a lion attacks you. Lions have been driven away by prey that fights back. People have fought back with rocks, sticks, caps or jackets, garden tools and their bare hands successfully. Remain standing or try to get back up.

Photo courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Set your sights on one of these properties!

Lakefront property, 5 bed, 6 bath, oversized 2-car garage, two spacious living areas.
997 Cloud Cap
$2,250,000 • MLS 815563

Mountain contemporary home on 40+ acres, 2 bed, 4 bath, borders national forest.
483 & 357 Whispering Wood Dr
$2,200,000 • MLS 815551

Unblockable mountain views, fully furnished, great floor plan, 3 bed, 3 bath.
620 Lakeside Dr
$622,000 • MLS 815368

Brand new roof, windows, appliances, fenced, garage, 2 bed, 2 bath.
24 Tonto Court • $435,000 • MLS 815541

Beautifully remodeled double wide, great floor plan, some mountain views, close to town.
98 Highland Ave • $335,000 • MLS 814446

Gently sloping lot with nice mountain views, good mixture of trees and pasture.
X E Hwy 160 • $300,000 • MLS 815543

Great hunting getaway close to national forest. Very nice 2 bed, 2 bath manufactured home.
1895 Taylor Lane • $299,000 • MLS 813678

Completely remodeled 1 bed, 2 bath condo, move-in ready.
247 Davis Cup Dr •$237,500 •MLS 815252

Main level unit, plenty of storage, 571 sq. ft., 1 bath
164 Valley View Dr •$224,500 • MLS 815307

Nice gently sloping lot, corners are marked on this 1.48 acre parcel
492 Circle Dr •$65,000 • MLS 810238

Pretty 0.11 acre lot with mountain and valley views, adjoining 2 lots also available.
484 Prospect Blvd • $17,000 • MLS 813276

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Photo courtesy Wayne D. Lewis, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Elk hunters need to be sure to know the difference between elk and moose (pictured above). If a hunter without the proper license shoots a moose, the fine can be more than $1,000 and hunting privileges can be lost.

Tips for hunting elk

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

The popular hunting magazines often display colorful photographs of huge bull elk standing in open meadows presenting easy targets. The reality in the mountains of Colorado, however, is far different.

Stalking the wapiti is challenging, and most hunters won't get easy shots. You're more likely to find elk on a steep hillside, in a dark ravine or in thick timber than standing out in the open.

The hunter success rate for all manners of take in Colorado was 20 percent in 2022, and a total of 40,425 elk were harvested. About 206,496 hunters went after elk that season. It's estimated that there are about 308,901 elk in Colorado, the most of any state.

If the weather is warm, elk stay spread out over vast areas at high elevations at and above timberline. In those conditions hunters need to work extra hard. When snow falls, elk will usually start to move, bunch up and look for food sources at lower elevations or on slopes where vegetation is exposed. However, the snowfall must be significant; usually more than a foot of snow must be on the ground to get elk moving.

Hunters must get off their off-highway vehicles and hunt slowly and quietly far from any road. Elk are very smart, move quickly at any hint of danger and hide in rugged terrain. Compounding the challenge for hunters is the fact that elk typically gather in groups of 10 or more. If one is spooked, they all move, and they can run easily for a mile or more.

Elk are most active during the night and are likely to be grazing in transition areas — meadows next to heavy timber, where different types of vegetation meet and just above or below ridgelines. Hunters should watch these areas at first light and at dusk.

During the day, hunters need to move into the dark timber — cool, north-facing slopes — and not be hesitant to hunt in difficult areas. Hunters should move as quietly as possible for short distances and then scan the woods for 10 minutes or more before moving again. Even in dense forest, it's a good idea to use binoculars so you can discern subtle movement or unusual colors in the trees.

If you find the areas where animals graze at night, it's likely that you'll find them in adjacent areas during the day.

When hunting in areas with roads, move far above or far below the roads to find elk. In areas where two roads are in close proximity, locate the most difficult terrain in between.

Line up your shot carefully because elk are difficult to knock down. The best shots are delivered in the critical area of the lungs and heart just behind and below the front quarters. Never try for a head shot, as this can result in only wounding the animal.

To learn more about hunting elk, check out "Elk Hunting University" on the Colorado Parks and Wildlife website. This program gives extensive information regarding all phases of elk hunting: cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/EHU.aspx.

To learn how to field dress big game and sight-in a rifle, see the videos at cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/HuntVideos.aspx.

Tips for hunting mule deer

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Hunting mule deer in Colorado is always challenging. Hunters can improve their success by understanding the habits of these critters.

During the 2022 seasons, for all manners of take, 88,937 hunters harvested 38,049 mule deer for a 43 percent success rate. Colorado is home to an estimated 416,626 deer.

In the mountains and foothills, mule deer don't spend much time in heavy timber. They are primarily browsers, and prefer aspen and forest edges where there are plenty of low shrubs, small trees, oak brush and varied vegetation types.

Mule deer are most active at night and can often be found in meadow areas during low-light hours. During the day, they'll bed down in protective cover.

In warm weather, look for deer along ridgelines where wind is consistent and helps to keep them cool.

During the low-light hours of evening and morning, hunt in meadows at the edge of thick cover. If you see where they are feeding during times of low light, it's likely they'll move into nearby timbered areas to rest for part of the day. Deer tend to move during the middle of the day toward the areas where they feed in the evening.

A slow stalk is recommended. Spend a lot of time scanning slowly with binoculars — a deer can appear at any time.

Pay attention to the wind direction. If the wind is blowing in the direction you are moving, a deer will likely pick up your scent. Deer avoid going to creeks in daylight, so there is no advantage to hunting near moving water sources during the day.

One advantage mule deer give to hunters is their curiosity. When mule deer are spooked, they'll often run a short distance then turn to determine if they are being pursued. That may give you one good chance for a shot.

A small amount of snow will get deer moving quickly out of high-altitude areas. Usually by late October, migrating herds will move to winter range areas, even if there is no snow.

Hunters should aim at the vital organ area which presents a small target — about the size of a dinner plate just behind the front quarter. Hunters, no matter how good they are at the range, should never try to make a head shot. Many animals are injured and die slowly because of attempted head shots.

For more information, visit cpw.state.co.us.

Photo courtesy Pedro Laumbach, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

A father and daughter share an archery hunt.

Archery elk hunting: Hunting up close

By Alan Hannasch and Jason Garnett , Colorado Parks and Wildlife

For most of us, hunting is a lifelong pursuit. We have developed (over the years) a routine that begins every year around the first of February and, in one way or another, finds us in the Colorado high country in late August and early September. It seems second nature to expect big game brochures to arrive in the mailbox, an "alarm clock" announcing the new hunting season.

After a few planning sessions with our hunting partners, we decide on hunt units and species. Sometime before the April deadline, we apply for our "tags," and after a month or so of anxious waiting, we get draw results off the 'net. We spend the next three months or so scouting our hunting units, usually not as often as we would like (and, at the same time, more often than our better halves would prefer). Two or three days before opening weekend, we are off to the woods. For the next four weeks, we are in our element. Sounds great, right? It is.

Not everybody has had enough experience, however, to develop a routine. Whether you are a longtime hunter new to Colorado, an out-of-state guest or a first-time archery hunter, we sincerely hope this article will help you experience the true wonder of early season hunting in the state that hosts one of the largest herds of elk in the world. Archery hunting can be the most exhilarating experience a sportsman or sportswoman can imagine. The absence of city noise, the hubbub of modern life, the relaxed attitude of animals that haven't been hunted all year and the usually mild weather make for an unforgettable good time.

During the dog days of summer, your pre-hunting activities are kicked into high gear. Final scouting trips should be planned and your maps marked. Target practice is very important at this point, and by now you should be hitting in groups of 4 inches to a maximum of 6 inches at 30 yards. If you plan on using an elk call, you should be comfortable with it; please don't practice on elk while sitting in your car at the side of the road — elk learn fast.

Spend some time looking at the game management unit (GMU) interactive maps. The Elk Migration and Travel Corridors map shows you where to focus efforts and mark GPS points.

As the hunt draws near, spend time in the forest (not necessarily where you'll hunt) and practice making tough uphill and downhill shots (check forest regulations first). It's also a good time to judge distances before pulling out the range finder to verify your guess.

Go back over your hunt plan.

When it comes time to start packing for a hunt, start a couple weeks early to check gear before it's packed and loaded into the camper. The camper is used as a base camp (which can easily be substituted with a tent/wall tent). For this article's "hunt," we did not take into consideration the use of any off-highway vehicles (OHV) or horses.

Making a list and checking it off is helpful; try making a list of all the gear you take and separate it into two categories — gear for a backpack hunt and gear for a base camp or static hunt from a fixed tent. If you decide to use a base camp, you can then configure your pack with essential gear you need to carry and know what weight you are carrying. Knowing weights of items beforehand comes in handy when planning to carry a backpack. Packaged goods are unwrapped and sealed in plastic bags that can be reused for hauling trash back out. Conserving weight by carrying items that serve more than one purpose is a good practice; the multipurpose tool, for example. It has a saw blade that will get you by in the backcountry to cut branches for firewood, elk pelvis and ribs, and a sharp blade that can take care of an elk. Don't forget to bring extra coolers — a quartered elk will fill two king-sized coolers.

No matter how well you plan, you can count on one thing: The elk have complete disregard of your plan. Be flexible. No secret here — elk are where you find them. Sometimes hunting from base camp will keep you in elk range. But you may have to follow the herd. Having a backpack ready to go might be your best option, and planning for more than one scenario can increase your odds of success. My preference is packing a mid-sized backpack to carry emergency items, along with sufficient supplies to field dress an elk, and even having a game bag or two will save an extra trip back to camp.

Archery season can bring hot days and cold nights; don't be surprised by early snow, rain with lightning, sleet — even all of the above in one day. Dress in layers; most days start off frosty cold in the morning to mid-day sun in the 80s. Especially important: These days, you can carry one of a number of devices that allow you to send messages and/or emergency location signals. The peace of mind is priceless.

Your food supplies are a personal choice, and for day hunts be sure to have nutritional bars and plenty of water. During the archery season, you have more daylight hours, which make for a long day in the field. Getting back to camp and cooking a meal and then cleaning up (being bear aware) is a lot of effort. Simple heat-and-serve meals might be considered.

Now it's time to head out to your elk camp; always leave a map and specific information about location, arrival and departure times with someone at home. Pre-arranged call times are a good idea if that can be arranged, as well. Before you leave, get a 10-day weather forecast and print it out. Have a list of phone numbers that you can carry in case of emergencies — and don't forget your hunting license. One last check of the bow and a final practice round before the hunt are in order; by now, your confidence in your shooting needs to be high.

It does not matter where you set up your elk camp — bears will be in the area.

Once in the field, a host of decisions must be made. Should you call to the elk or just move slowly through the woods and hope to intercept them? If you have had time to scout your area extensively, you can try to set up on a wallow, water hole, game trail or elk crossing and wait them out. If your scouting has been limited, spot and stalk may be the ticket. Archery hunters will tell you that all of the tactics listed above work and, more often than not, it is the correct use of all them that leads to a successful harvest.

First things first — find elk. All of the map making, planning and practice are of little use if the elk that were in your "secret spot" a month ago are now one drainage away. Hopefully, you are able to set up camp early enough before the season opens that you have time to do some last-minute

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Archery

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scouting. Of course, you don't want to go stomping around the woods that you're going to be hunting, but you can learn a lot by simply looking and listening.

"Glassing" your hunting area from a high vantage point can gain you invaluable information about elk movement in your hunting area. Elk tend to move up and down the mountains they inhabit early in the morning and also late in the afternoon or early evening. This habit can make it fairly easy to pinpoint travel routes. These routes or trails can be a great place to ambush elk as they move between feeding and bedding areas.

As you sit looking over your area, listen very carefully; elk are the most vocal members of the deer family and, contrary to popular belief, elk communicate back and forth to each other all the time. Bull elk don't have to be in the full swing of the rut to bugle, and the chirps, bleats and mews of cow and calf elk can be heard year-round in the Colorado high country. Elk regularly announce their presence, and the hunter who is paying attention can profit from this apparent lack of restraint.

Now that you have current information on movement and location (even if very general), you will want to put together a plan for the morning hunt. Your plan should put you on course to intercept moving elk. Again, elk will move between feeding areas and bedding grounds. Choosing a spot that, from your scouting, shows the most promise of a well-beaten trail, saddle or a wallow would be ideal. Do what it takes to be not only downwind of the elk, but appropriately up or downhill from them, as well. The cool morning air in the valleys and draws of the Colorado mountains tends to move uphill as it warms. As temperatures drop in the afternoon, the cool air that is at the ridge tops begins to move back down the mountains.

Get into position early — the quickly fading darkness of early morning will afford freedom of movement without detection that daylight hours will not. The key is not spooking the elk out of your area before you get a chance to hunt them. Use every trip in and out of the woods before and during your hunt as a scouting trip. Be mindful of elk sign.

A good sign that elk are using an area is "rubbed" trees. Look for smaller aspen trees or pine saplings that bull elk use to rub against to rid their antlers of drying velvet and to otherwise vent their general frustrations. These trees tend to be stripped of bark 2 to 6 feet from the ground. A bull with a really bad attitude will wipe the tree clean of all branches and bark. Check rubs for freshness; newly rubbed trees will still have a softness to their bark and will still be oozing sap.

Look for wallows. Elk use wallows for several reasons: cooling themselves down in the hot, early days of fall, to control pesky insects and to spread scent, effectively marking their territory. These small bodies of water can be as large as a backyard pool or as small as a kitchen sink. Evidence of fresh tracks in the mud around a wallow is evidence of recent use. But chocolate milk-colored water and fresh hair prints (made as the elk rolls in the mud) near the edge of the wallow is sure proof that elk are near.

As the morning passes, listen for the telltale sounds of elk movement: a twig breaking, rolling rocks, cow calls or possibly a bugle. Once elk are located, it may be necessary to move to the elk or you can try to call them to you. Try a soft cow call, then, if you get a reply, wait a minute and call again. Be patient. It may take some time for the animals to move to you. If your call is not answered, try again just a bit louder. You may even want to try a bugle. Remember, start soft then work louder — don't blow their heads off with your first call.

Calling elk is, for most, a trial-and-error process; listen to the elk and try to sound like them. Listen for a response. It may take just seconds for a "hot" bull to answer, but it can also take several minutes. A bull that doesn't feel that the caller is close enough to be threatening may simply ignore calls. If these attempts fail to produce a response, consider the wind direction and start to move slowly on a course that will put you ahead of the elk. At all times, be mindful of animals that may be present but remain quiet.

Few things in life prepare a hunter for his or her first up-close experience with one of nature's greatest residents. It's hard to imagine that an animal that can hear a pin drop on a feather pillow, see a gnat blink and smell an unscented candle from across a football field can be successfully hunted. Perhaps that's why after all the hard work, planning and practice, even the most seasoned hunters often turn to putty when it all comes together. The chest-pounding increase in heart rate and the seemingly instant lack of oxygen that a close encounter causes can make it nearly impossible to hold steady on your quarry. Take a moment to settle yourself. The unbelievable thrill of the moment can quickly sour with an ill-placed shot. Shoot like you have practiced; pick a spot, draw smoothly, anchor, peep, pin, trigger, breathe and squeeze.

After you release your arrow, you will have one of two feelings — a great sense of accomplishment as the arrow hits the target as you have planned, or great concern that you might not have hit the spot. Mark the spot where you stood at the time the arrow was released, where the elk stood and the direction the elk ran. Most of the time, what you do after the shot will improve your odds of retrieving your downed elk.

Take some time to savor the moment. Most likely, the release of your arrow is the culmination of a year's worth of hard work. Enjoy it. Allow 30 to 45 minutes before beginning your recovery efforts. Generally, big game will travel downhill and rarely in a straight line. Pay attention to every detail and place markers often. If you lose track, circle your last best sign. Tracking after the shot can be the hardest part of your hunt, so be patient and listen — a wounded elk will hold up in the thickest cover you can imagine.

For an archer, every harvest is a trophy and the memory is better shared with a good field photo. Spend a few minutes preparing the animal for the trophy photo; clean up excess blood. If the tongue is hanging out, take pictures from the other side or tuck it in. Look at hunting magazines for good examples of clean trophy photos.

Archery hunting has a relatively low success rate. As with any method of hunting, more times than not you will head back home without an elk. The experience and the fair chase will keep you coming back.

If you do harvest an elk, be aware of the temperature. During the archery season, most daytime highs are well above 60 degrees. You should quarter the elk and pack the meat in coolers for the trip home. You've worked hard to get to this point; proper care of your prize is critical.

And — congratulations.

Photo courtesy Nora Logue, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Setting up an elk camp: Where do I camp? What do we bring?

By Mark Strachan, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

One of the things I look forward to every year is elk camp. It's the time I get to spend with my friends in Colorado's vast and beautiful outdoors. It's also the time I use to reflect on the important things in life while pursuing one of the greatest animals on our continent, the Rocky Mountain elk. We all spend many hours every year in planning, preparation and scouting to make the most of this time in the field. Over the years, we discovered what made our time in the field even more enjoyable: camp.

In this article, I will cover some aspects of camping in Colorado that will make your hunt more enjoyable, too. I'll address topics like: Where do I camp? What do we bring? How to make delicious, quick and easy meals?

I believe in keeping things simple, and simple is always better when it comes to maximizing your time in the great outdoors.

The first topic to cover is the old question, where do I camp in Colorado? Our first choice is always public land. Colorado has an incredible amount of public land throughout the state. We always look for places that allow us to walk out of camp and into the field to hunt. This is not always possible, but has a lot of benefits. Make sure to mark down as many different camp options as you can. If you have the time, visiting the area and marking campsites on your map is a great idea. Look for spots that have good access and level areas for tents. Keep in mind that if you are camping in a forest, beetle-killed trees' roots weaken quickly, increasing the risk that they will fall during wind and snowstorms.

During elk season, there will also be some competition for the best campsites. Many of us will get there a day or two ahead of time to secure our favorite spot. It's also important to research the type of public land you are camping on. Forests, Bureau of Land Management and state trust lands have varying rules and regulations in regards to hunting, camping, wood collection and fires. Once you have identified the type of land you are camping on, you will need to visit that particular agency's website to find out which rules or regulations pertain to your area.

Another option is to identify local improved campgrounds. State or private parties may run these. Finding a camp in your area is typically very easy.

Now that you have established where you are going to camp, it's time to think about what you are going to need. The list can be simple or extensive. The amount of gear you take is often limited by your method of travel. Camping in the Colorado high country during the fall and winter means being prepared for anything. During the hunting seasons, you will see everything from 70 degrees and sunshine to below-zero temperatures with blowing snow. In Colorado, these kinds of variations in weather can even happen in the same day. You will need to be prepared. With this in mind, the first things to think about are shelter and heat.

There are many types of tents on the market, but the most common type in elk camp is the canvas wall tent. Canvas wall tents are durable, sturdy and much warmer than nylon tents. This is not to say that nylon tents will not work, but you will be more comfortable and have more room for your gear in a canvas wall tent. At our camp, we choose to run multiple tents. We use one tent for cooking, eating and storing of gear and another tent for our sleeping quarters. In the sleeping tents, we use catalytic-style heaters attached to 20-pound propane tanks. These efficient little heaters are fantastic for keeping the chill off inside the tents. Two benefits to catalytic heaters are that they take up less space than a wood-burning stove and they do not produce carbon monoxide like other styles of propane heaters. One of the best things about this form of heat is not getting out of bed to stoke a fire in the middle of the night. For planning purposes, you will burn about 2 to 4 pounds of propane per night with catalytic heaters.

In the cook tent, we use a wood-burning stove for heat and for drying out clothes, if necessary. Here is a tip: We use the wax fire logs that come in a paper wrapper. Combine that with a wood log or two and it will give you four-plus hours of easy-starting heat. For planning purposes, we bring two of these instant fire logs per day in the field. Even though we typically only use one per day, the other logs are what we bring for the "what if" factor of camping in the high country.

The "what if" factor of camping in Colorado high country is the scenarios you have to keep in mind that you cannot control. The weather in the mountains can be highly unpredictable. Some years we hunt in T-shirts and others we throw on every piece of arctic gear we own. This may mean packing more, but the year that the "what if" happens, you will be happy to have the gear you need not only to survive, but to continue with your hunt. I have seen many camps get broken down and their hunting ended early because of not being prepared. Things to keep in mind in the "what if" file are things such as axes, chain saws, extra fuel, extra wood, extra clothes, extra food, rope and tarps. We do take a few nonessential items to our camp; we enjoy the additional comforts. It will be your decision as to what to bring and what not to bring.

When it comes to crawling into a nice warm place to sleep, there is nothing nicer than a good-quality sleeping bag and a cot to lie on. While there are those who wish to rough it, this is one of the things I will not leave at home. You work hard hunting during the day, so why not be comfortable at night? My personal choice of sleeping bags is a negative 20-degree bag that is flannel lined. These bags will keep you warm on the coldest nights. You can find these at most major sporting good stores for around a hundred dollars. I also choose to bring several packing blankets to go between the bag and the cot. This gives you a bit more padding and added protection from the cold. One thing not to overlook is a small tarp to cover over the top of your bedroll. Oftentimes, you will get condensation in large tents that can lead to wet

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Just how important is wildlife habitat?

By Dick Ray

As biologists, we were taught that the three tenets of sound wildlife management are habitat, habitat and habitat.

As wildlife advocates, we are told that the three most important components of wildlife management are habitat, habitat and habitat.

As historians, we begin to wonder, just how important is habitat? A foolish question in a way, because good habitat is, of course, vital, but a glance at the recent history of wildlife in western Colorado does provoke the question.

With the settlement of the mountains and valleys of Colorado came the settler's livestock and their livestock's diseases. Disease, coupled with the human population's need for sustenance (game meat) put great demands on Colorado's elk, deer, pronghorn and bighorn sheep.

In 1875, Colorado's territorial governor is quoted as saying, "We must do something about Colorado's vanishing wildlife."

As early as 1861, laws regarding market hunting and fish poaching had been enacted, but with very little enforcement.

With 1876 came statehood and the beginnings of the Colorado Fish and Game Department. In 1885, bighorn sheep hunting was closed and remained closed until 1953. Pronghorn hunting was closed from 1914 through 1945. In southwest Colorado, elk hunting was closed from 1903 through 1937, and deer hunting was closed in 1914 through 1918. In 1903, the first guide and outfitter law was enacted.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, cattle, sheep and other livestock grew to record numbers, heavily grazing many areas. The 1880s through the 1970s saw spectacles like 250,000 lambs being shipped out of the San Juan Basin in southwest Colorado each fall, while the ewes were driven home to winter range. The Craig-Meeker area had some 750,000 sheep on summer range, as another example. The habitat also took heavy hits during the epic droughts of the 1930s and the 1950s.

And, yet, the bighorn sheep recovered to huntable numbers during this period. Mule deer became plentiful and even abundant, with Colorado harvesting 147,000 in 1963. Elk also increased to the point where 20,858 were taken in the 1969 season. No state had ever produced so much game.

We must ask the question, how could this wildlife recovery occur in the face of such degraded habitats? To find the answer, we must look at the rest of the story.

Every stockman defended his livestock against predators — the same predators that also preyed upon wildlife. In 1934, the U.S. Biological Survey joined with stockmen and the Department of Fish and Game to uniformly pursue predators, and, in 1934, the Colorado Legislature placed bounties on coyotes, mountain lions and bobcats.

The rest is history.

We ask ourselves, isn't the habitat actually "better" now than in those halcyon years of mule deer multitudes? Logging was rampant in the 1960s and 1970s, with clear cuts going to timberline in many areas. The largest sawmill in Colorado in 1970 was in Pagosa Springs, and every mountain town had a sawmill (habitat manipulation). Roads have been reseeded and closed, burns have been prescribed, well locations and pipelines have been reseeded, grazing is a fraction of what has been seen, and, at many elevations, we see an abundance of forbs and grasses under a dead and dying forest canopy. Why, then, are we seeing a decline in many prey species in many areas of Colorado?

Is it really "habitat" alone, or are we missing something? (That something being balance.) Ecosystems become out of balance when predator species and scavenger species dominate the decline of a prey species.

Therefore, it is imperative that wildlife managers engage in ongoing studies and research to better understand current predator/prey relationships and numbers. Population dynamics of all species change over time and must be monitored constantly to achieve responsible wildlife management.

Camp

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spots on your bag.

For the last part of this article, I want to share with you a way to prepare food for your next camping trip. Many years ago, I joined a camp with some friends of mine, and their idea of dinner at camp was dehydrated food that you poured hot water into. While some of this stuff is OK, there are much better ways to enjoy a tasty, hot meal without the hassle of actually cooking in camp. In our camp, we use a boil-a-bag method. The weeks prior to hunting, I will cook meals at home. Foods such as pasta, potatoes, meats and even rice will reheat very nicely. Our camp favorites are rigatoni with Italian sausage and marinara, or what I call hunters' hash. Hunters' hash is a combination of diced potato, bell pepper, onion and ground beef. You can take these types of dishes and put several portions per hunter in a vacuum-sealed bag and freeze them for camp. The best way we have found to reheat these bags is with a turkey fryer. These are inexpensive and will boil water fast. Once you have the water boiling, you add your sealed bag of food and, in 20 to 30 minutes, you have a piping-hot bag of great camp food and no pots or pans to clean. We burn our paper plates and throw away the empty food bag. Great food, less trash and virtually no clean up. It doesn't get any easier than that.

Hopefully, these tips and equipment lists will help you enjoy more of your overall elk hunting experience in Colorado. I know my first experiences would have been greatly improved if I had them starting out, and it is my hope that this article will do that for you. Good luck, hunt safely and have a great camp.

Protect your hunting privilege

By Donald D. Volger

Thousands of sincere, well-meaning individuals have concluded that killing is wrong. They don't believe man has the right to take life because all life is precious. They are right; life is precious and murder is wrong.

Murder is killing unlawfully with malice aforethought. However, hunting is not murder because malice is not a factor. Hunters, for the most part, harbor a deep respect and appreciation for the game they pursue.

Man is responsible for what happens to the earth. He must accept his role of caretaker and learn to manage the natural resources wisely. Wildlife is one of this planet's most precious resources.

Wise management is based on the principle that healthy animal populations are limited by the amount and quality of the habitat in which they live. If the number grows too large, the habitat is negatively affected, and animals eventually die of starvation and disease. Therefore, the number of animals must be limited to avoid overpopulation and habitat destruction. In modern times, hunting has proven to be the most efficient and humane method of population control.

Many species have benefited from the establishment of well-planned management programs. Today, whitetail deer, mule deer, antelope, elk, bear, moose and buffalo populations are on the increase in many portions of our country. Nongame species like the river otter and the peregrine falcon also benefit.

How are these programs funded? By sportsmen's dollars. When hunters and fishermen purchase licenses, their money goes to support management programs. When outdoorsmen buy hunting and fishing equipment, a portion of that money is added. When hunters purchase migratory waterfowl stamps, those expenditures help obtain and improve habitat. Dollars from Ducks Unlimited, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and similar organizations are used for buying and upgrading wildlife habitat.

Who is responsible for the healthy wildlife populations? The sportsman and the dedicated wildlife manager.

The hunter, however, has an image problem. Many hunters are viewed as egotistical, macho slobs who get some kind of perverted pleasure from watching things die — and this is not true. But we, as hunters, are partially to blame for the misconception.

When unethical hunters litter, vandalize property, trespass, improperly display harvested game, violate safety rules and commit game law violations, all sportsmen suffer. Outdoorsmen need to be more considerate toward those who may choose not to hunt. If we want to be viewed as informed, intelligent and caring sportsmen, we have to act like it.

Hunters are evaluated by others. Each individual hunter makes an impact. It will either be a positive one or a negative one. We must work harder at making a positive impression on those who watch. A little common sense and common courtesy couldn't hurt.

If you consider yourself a true sportsman, don't just sit idle. Get involved with organizations that support your views. Pass your knowledge and love of the outdoors along to your children and their friends by including them in some of your activities. Evaluate the reasons you hunt and be able to verbalize them. Purchase hunting licenses and duck stamps even if you can't get into the field.

Don't take hunting for granted. If you do, the next generation of sportsmen may not have the opportunity to decide whether or not they are going to hunt. That decision will have been made for them.

Tales of Colorado's last grizzlies

By Dick Ray

Living in Archuleta County, Colo., and Chama, N.M., in the 1970s, it was not uncommon to hear talk about grizzly bears at social gatherings. I was fortunate to be able to hear a firsthand account of the last grizzly known to roam along the New Mexico/Colorado border and the Continental Divide west of Chama. One neighbor to the Consuelo Gonzales Ranch (renamed Chromo Mountain Ranch) was Harry Eaklor. Eaklor was old enough to know the answer to my question, "When was the last grizzly killed in this area?"

He related this story to me.

There was a grizzly that would come down from the headwaters of the Navajo River each spring and kill a cow or two as he made his rounds. This would have been just after World War II. No rancher or cowboy had been able to get him, but the apprehension was growing. The game departments in Colorado and New Mexico suggested that the ranchers around Chromo, Colo., contact the best professional hunter in the region. That happened to be Hugh Harris, who lived near El Rito, N.M.

Harris had been an accountant in New England and had taken several hunts out west, much like Teddy Roosevelt or Zane Gray. However, he also had his own hounds and had hunted many bears in the New England states. He came to the decision to relocate in New Mexico and become a hunting guide during the fall hunting seasons and be an accountant during accounting season.

Harris was very successful, and there is even a location named Harris Bear Camp on the Canjilon Ranger District of Carson National Forest.

Eaklor wrote to Harris and inquired as to his availability to hunt their problem grizzly. Harris replied that he would come in the spring when called. Eaklor wrote back that there were no telephones in Chromo. Harris wrote back saying to just go to the Pagosa Springs Ranger Station and they could call the El Rito Ranger Station and he would get the message. As usual, when the snow melted the old bear's tracks appeared along the irrigation ditch that ran through the Eaklor, Crowley and Shahan ranches.

The call was made. The few residents of the Chromo area eagerly anticipated the arrival of the hunter who lived some 70 miles to the south. About a week passed and here came Harris driving a wagon loaded with camp gear and provisions and drawn by two horses. His pack of hounds followed behind. They came up a rutted road that today is paved and is U.S. 84.

Harris made his way on up the Navajo River to the Eaklor Ranch, where he camped. He rode one of his horses and covered the area around Chromo Mountain. The summit of Chromo Mountain is actually in New Mexico and when the bear was finally found, pursued and killed, it may have been in New Mexico.

But, it was considered a Colorado bear because it spent most of its time in Colorado.

Grizzly talk was still common when I moved to Chama and Pagosa through the 1970s. I had many a breakfast in Chama with TJ Ramsey, the game warden; Bud Brashar, the banker; Mr. Harding, the pharmacist; and Mike Kelly, who owned the Shamrock Hotel and café. Brashar swore that he had actually seen a grizzly in the early '70s on the north side of Chama Peak, which is just in Archuleta County, Colo., and just north of Chama, N.M.

During this same period, when in Pagosa Springs I often had breakfast at the Elkhorn Café with Earl Mullins, the barber who had served on the Colorado Wildlife Commission; Bill Warr, whose family had been very active in mining in the San Juan Mountains; and Lloyd Anderson, who was still active as a government trapper. Anderson had many stories regarding grizzlies in the South San Juan Mountains. And, in fact, the Colorado Division of Wildlife had established an area encompassing the head of the Pine River, located along the Continental Divide northwest of Pagosa Springs, as a grizzly bear refuge. It was thought that that was the most probable location that grizzlies might still be found.

However, at one of our breakfasts, Anderson declared that he had seen grizzly tracks the week before along the head of the Navajo River. There was no question that he was the most knowledgeable and experienced person on the subject in this area. We believed him.

As it turned out, on Sept. 23, 1979, the last grizzly to be killed in Colorado was killed in that very drainage, the Navajo River in Archuleta County, Colo. As it were, I was packing out a party of bowhunters from Dipping Lakes. At the trailhead I loaded up and headed back to Lobo Lodge, listening to the radio, and what did I hear? A hunter had been attacked by a bear along the Continental Divide north of Chama, N.M. — the area I had just come out of. There were no cellphones in those days, so I had to go to Chama to call Dick Weldon, the Colorado game warden who had that area. Weldon had called me to pursue problem bears before, but never a man-eater.

Weldon's wife, Lois, told me that Weldon was on the mountain at the incident location, which was only about 8 miles from where my bowhunters had been camped. Lois also told me that the bear was dead, and that it was a grizzly. The location was in the headwaters of the Navajo River. She also related that the helicopter had crashed on takeoff with no injuries and that there was another helicopter on its way to complete the extraction of DOW men Weldon, Ron Velarde and the bear. Also, she mentioned, neither my dogs and nor I would be needed. There is much more to this story, but this is the crux of it.

Stop and smell the urine

And other helpful elk hunting advice

By Bill Haggerty

How do you know you're close to elk when you can't see them and you can't hear them?

"When you smell fresh urine," said the ever-eloquent John Ellenberger. "It's like a slap in the face. You know you're real close."

Ellenberger knows that smell.

He's been real close to elk.

Of course, part of his job is to know about elk. All about elk. Even about the smell of elk urine.

For years, Ellenberger was the senior terrestrial biologist for the Colorado Parks and Wildlife's northwest region, based in Grand Junction. Before that, he was the district wildlife manager for the Crested Butte area. He is now retired.

He's hunted all his life. He's trapped and released hundreds of elk throughout his career. He's studied them, read about them, counted them from helicopters and small-engine airplanes.

He's been real close to elk.

But does he harvest one every year he goes hunting?

"No. So, what's your point?" he said grinning.

"You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime, you just might find, you get what you need." A good slap in the face.

Let's face it. Most of us don't harvest an elk each and every year. In fact, the state average is about 24 percent success for hunters — that's all rifle seasons and archery.

Ellenberger said, simply, most hunters rush things.

"Most hunters are in too big a hurry. They cover too much ground. Then, when they do blunder into elk, they bust 'em out before they know the elk are there.

"You can boogie if you're in country where there are no signs of elk," Ellenberger said, "but if you're in good country with good signs, slow down. Try to heighten your senses and be aware of what's going on."

Stop and smell the urine.

But, gee, Mr. Natural, how do I know if I'm in good elk country?

Hopefully, you've done your homework prior to the hunt. Ellenberger stressed that hunters should learn as much as possible about life history, habits, habitat and behavior. What kind of habitat do elk use in August? How about December? Which units have high elk numbers? Which units have a lot of public property with adequate access?

Once you've decided on a hunting unit, get the appropriate maps and head out on a scouting trip. Become familiar with the country. Then, stick to it.

"Don't jump from unit to unit each year," Ellenberger said. "You'll never get to know the area, and you really limit your chances of success."

Next, learn how to use your binoculars or spotting scope.

"Glass, glass, glass," the biologist insisted, "especially in the early morning and late afternoon. You'll do a lot better if you sit down and glass. Look for animals bedding down or up feeding somewhere. Once you find them, then you can figure out a plan on how to hunt the animals. But trying to get out early in the morning and run into something without prior knowledge of where the elk are — that's real tough.

"Hunters need to remember that when they're out there hiking around, the animals have the upper hand.

"They have superior sight, smell and hearing. They do this for a living, 365 days a year. They hold all the cards, so you have to do what you can to turn it in your favor."

For example, he said, "Most guys use the bull call lots more than they should. Maybe that has potential when you're trying to locate other bulls during archery or muzzle loading rifle seasons. But, after that, you don't want to sound like the biggest, baddest bull on the mountain. What bull with a harem of cows wants to challenge some bad bull that's going to kick him off his own mountain?"

Instead, Ellenberger suggested cow calls and calf squeals. If you know how to use a cow call or you can squeal like a calf elk, then once you locate a bull, you can try the cow call or the squeal.

"My experience is that when you use it, the bull won't answer, but he's looking. He'll circle and try to get your scent on the wind, so even if he doesn't call back, lots of times elk will move toward you."

Once, Ellenberger recalled, "I had a bull come within 8 feet because I paced it off. I had him close enough to see his nostrils flare when he breathed. I could see his eyelashes when he blinked. He kept coming closer and closer and finally winded me before he stepped on me. Then, he ran away about 30 or 40 yards and I called again. He stopped dead in his tracks, turned and stared and stayed another few minutes."

Of course, Ellenberger practices and practices with the calls. And, he's had good opportunities to see how they work.

"I've even had cow elk in an elk trap walk up to me face to face to see what I was after using a call."

He advised hunters not to use a call if they don't know how.

"If you can use one and if the elk don't know you're there and haven't winded you, you can do some incredible things with a cow call," he said. "Even during the rut, the cow call is deadly on the bulls. They'll come closer to you, especially if a bull has a harem. He may not challenge another bull, but he'll sure chase after another cow."

Once you find the animal and you're ready to take your shot, hunters underestimate how strong and how powerful elk are. Even with big guns and magnum loads, Ellenberger said he's seen elk shot through the lungs, "and you can't even tell the elk has been shot."

The biologist tells hunters to be extra careful shooting into a group of running elk.

"You may be taking lethal shots and not know it. All of a sudden, you have three dead elk on the ground. Make sure where you place your shot, then don't take your eyes off the animal you first shot at. If you shoot in a group and animals start milling around, watch closely. Eventually, your animal will go down. But if you keep shooting, you may end up with more than you bargained for."

How about tracking?

"I've thought at times I was fairly good at reading tracks," Ellenberger insisted. "But I've gotten onto tracks that I thought may have been made that morning, only to find out it was probably made a day before. No sense in following that track."

Nonetheless, the biologist said, "If you see elk 300 or 400 yards ahead of you, it's a good idea to get on the track and go slow, but don't move too quick. You don't want to blow them out."

Just finding track, however, and not knowing how long it's been on the ground, is a different story. "The elk may have run into the next county, and it may not be worth it at all to stay on that track. But if you see the animal from a distance and you can find the tracks, sure, go for it."

Even on the snow, in moist conditions, Ellenberger said, "It's a crap shoot. Maybe you can get on those elk, but, first, the track is probably older than you think, and, second, even if it shows they're not running, elk still move at a fairly rapid rate and you'll never catch them.

"If you get on a track and you haven't jumped animals within about a half a mile, there's not much chance. Change plans."

If you use binoculars and spot elk, and they're not spooked, "analyze terrain and cover. Plan an appropriate stalk to get close enough to the animal for a good shot," Ellenberger said. "Again, keep in mind wind conditions at all times."

Another method of elk hunting, if you don't see the animals, is the time-honored method of stand hunting.

"Large herds of elk reside on public land," Ellenberger noted. "Obviously, this is where large numbers of hunters are found."

If you're in one of these areas, Ellenberger suggested locating a spot frequented by elk. Then, find a good place, sit and be patient. Count on other hunters to move animals to you.

A good place may be a saddle on a ridge where elk may pass or a small park at the upper end of a drainage near a saddle.

"Put yourself near any spot that would offer an obvious escape route for elk," the biologist said.

Another proven elk-hunting method is "the drive." This involves placing stand hunters at strategic locations, such as dense cover, escape routes or openings that can be crossed by moving elk. When the stand hunters are in place, another group of hunters moves through the cover, pushing elk out of hiding or resting areas.

Of course, there are problems with this method. First, stand hunters must make sure of their line of fire. "Safety is a problem because you don't necessarily see all the other hunters you're working with. Also, there may be other hunters in the area that you are unaware of."

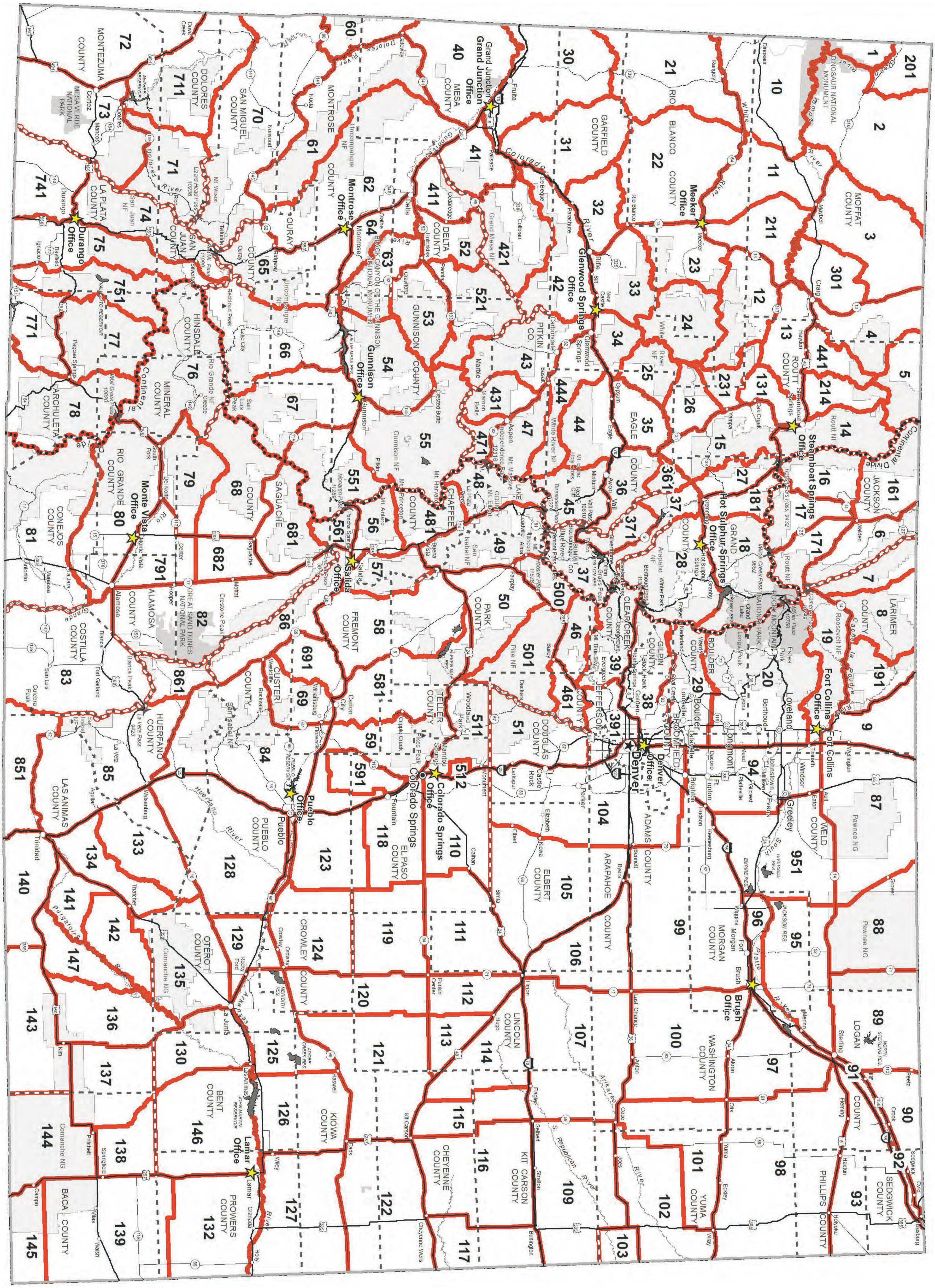
Second, the method may require a larger group of hunters than you normally hunt with. Ellenberger insisted, however, that this method can be successful with one or two stand hunters and one driver hunter.

The third problem is that if you severely spook the elk, "they're long gone and they may not come back to that area for days."

The fourth problem Ellenberger sees with a drive is that the animals are usually running. They have a high adrenaline flow, and you may end up with some tough meat. Worse, the animal may be only wounded and must be tracked for long distances.

Finally, whether you're on a drive, a stand or a stalk, be patient. "It always takes longer than you think."

Stop and smell the urine. It may be the slap in the face you need.



2024 STATEWIDE GAME MANAGEMENT UNIT (GMU) MAP

Please check the 2024 Big Game Hunting brochure for unit-specific regulations. ▪ Colorado Parks and Wildlife ▪ **cpw.state.co.us** ▪ 303-297-1192

The near-death experience

By Justin Cowan

Each year, many hunters have a near-death experience (NDE).

It comes in the form of the after-dark, stayed-in-the-woods-too-long, hiked-way-too-far-into-the-forest-like-my-wife-told-me-not-to-do jaunt back to the truck on a mountain trail, an old mining road, bush-whacking through a north-facing slope of spruce trees void of all light, or through an open meadow with shadows dancing menacingly around you as each blade of timothy grass sways in the night breeze.

It's scary out there. In the dark. Alone. Out of water and beef jerky (you forgot that in the truck). Every twig that pops off to your left is Bigfoot, Jason or a mountain lion stalking you. You regret seeing the movie "Deliverance" (I've never seen it). Is that a banjo playing up the canyon to your right? The bear you see moving in front of you turns out to be a shadow of a squirrel perched perfectly on a spruce limb between you and the moon. In the daytime the pine cone that falls from an evergreen is only an annoyance that breaks the silence of your quiet stalk. At night, that pine cone is a chupacabra.

Out of the blue, your prayer life is alive like never before. Your pastor would be proud (if he remembers you; you stopped attending after that "hunting on Sundays" sermon).

I, too, am one of the NDE survivors.

Regardless of our situation, the NDE is the same. It is sudden. It is expected, but always catches us off guard. No matter how we prepare our minds for it, we never see it coming. But there it is, every time. While it, in itself, is harmless, its effects are not. It is devastating. It shakes us to our core.

What is it?

The "It" I refer to is the immediately ear-splitting flapping of the grouse's wings as this stupid forest chicken takes flight in our faces just before we step on it. The sound is like thunder rippling through the still, dark forest night. We empty every round into the ground ahead of us, we vacate our bowels (just a little), and we grab our souls by the ankles and pull them back into our bodies as we try to escape to heaven.

This is our NDE — every single year.

But, read on. There is another you may recognize.

This NDE is disguised as a friend. On the surface he looks rational, seems friendly and has your best interests in mind. At his best he is the captain of a Star Trek starship caring for the welfare of his crew. He is the father who tenderly braids his daughter's hair. He is the buddy you laugh with over a succulent weekend barbecue as you remember your hunting and fishing exploits.

At his worst, he is maniac mountain man.

He is the hunting buddy who believes "you gotta go high to find the elk" (elk are originally plains animals which frolicked with the bison and pronghorns).

He's never surprised when summiting the peak and not seeing elk: "The other hunters must have already driven them off the backside …" (there are no hunters up here) "… we can probably cut them off on that peak over there if we hurry" (pointing to a peak in the distance I cannot see with the naked eye as he stares into his binoculars).

He wakes before dawn — long before dawn — and wants to enlist you in frivolous activities like cooking breakfast — after you build the fire. I'm fine with a Slim Jim as long as it's the sun that wakes me up.

"Get up! It's already 2 a.m. We gotta be on the peak at sunrise. That's when they're moving."

In his mind, he is in a Marlboro Man commercial when he hunts.

He is Super Hunter; he wears a camo cape under his camo.

He's the Lone Ranger.

He is the ultimate woodsman. His den mother, "Pat," told him that in Cub Scouts.

And, he has the badges to prove it.

I have this friend — maniac mountain man.

Tamer of the wilderness. Conqueror of the peaks. He was a Cub Scout. In fact, an Eagle Scout. I don't know what that means other than to imagine his rank in the scouts is brigadier general (and, I suppose he teaches younger scouts how to tie 6,000 different kinds of knots during their jamborees). He runs marathons. He hikes for the sheer joy of it. He'd have done his own hernia surgery if his doctor would have cooperated and told him how. He was awarded "Ironman" on our football team in high school.

Not me. My coach showed his fondness for my contributions by breaking his clipboard across my helmet every other practice.

I was a running back. I can still hear Coach reminding me of this fact during our mile warm up around the track, "Cowan! You're a flippin' running back! Why are you back there running with the linemen?"

Gasping for life-giving oxygen I'd assure him I knew this, "Coach … gag … cough … I'm just trying … to (God help me) … encourage them," as Richard continued dragging me down the track to acknowledge my encouragement and ensure I hit my 13-minute mile pace. At least the linemen saw my worth.

But, back to my friend the maniac mountain man.

I looked forward to the hunting season. I was mentally prepared for the forest chicken NDE that would invariably happen. What I wasn't prepared for was the maniac mountain man.

As we planned our trip, he suggested a spot not too far from the tip of the 12,000-foot peak where the elk are. "You gotta go high to find the elk."

I gently suggested another spot. "I've already scoped out some elk there. It's only about a 1/4 mile from the road. Easy access, great hunt, easy pack out."

He looked at me like I had never hunted before. "There's no elk in there. It's too low. You gotta go high to find the elk."

Fine. Let's try maniac mountain man's spot first. Humor him. I'm only out there for the camaraderie and outdoors experience, anyway.

We set up our tent under an overcast sky, black clouds ominously looming overhead, grabbed our bows and set out in the "lower areas" (around 10,500 feet).

"Not that there's any elk down here, but we may as well hunt till dark," says the maniac mountain man.

We hunted far into the dense, overgrown spruce forest. It began to rain. The maniac mountain man wasn't phased.

"Nice little sprinkle we're having," as the downpour turned into a cold sleet coming in sideways at a thousand miles per hour, scraping the 5 o'clock shadow off my face with its sheer force.

I suggested we turn around. The maniac mountain man informed me that was just the hypothermia talking; no real hunter would miss this opportunity.

"They won't even hear us coming," he shouted as he marched on, peeling off his clothing because he was getting hot.

As predicted by the one sane person on this hunt, there were no elk. We returned to camp. The maniac mountain man snuggled into his side of the tent he'd set up while I had unpacked the truck. I tugged and pulled at my drenched clothing hoping I'd soon stop shivering and slid into my sleeping bag. With my clothing off, I could see my skin shriveled up as if I'd already been pickled. Immediately, the bag sank and water penetrated the down feathers. The maniac mountain man had set our tent up over a sinkhole a foot deep — except for his side.

His side.

His side was on the high side of the sinkhole. He was already snoring.

I was instantaneously surrounded by enough water to be classified as a small sea. Thrashing and gasping for air, my friend, the maniac mountain man slept on. A brook trout jumped over my face. In one final effort, I grabbed hold of the side of his dry, warm sleeping bag and hauled myself out of the icy abyss. I startled him. He woke up.

"Is it morning? Let's go!"

"No! It's not m… m… m… m… mmorning," I shiver-yelled. "It's time to get out of this place and find somewhere warm. I'm dying. No, really, I'm dying."

He was annoyed. Why wake him because I couldn't sleep. He reluctantly agreed that we needed to find a place to warm up as icicles began forming on my wet body. I dragged my soaking wet, water-logged, 6,000-pound sleeping bag to the truck and threw it in the back.

"C'mon. We can get the tent later," I seethed through the ice particles hanging in the night air.

As I huddled around the one small vent coming out of the dashboard in front of me we drove down a road only the bravest of men had gone before. Men in search of fortune. Narrow, cliff on one side, 90-degree uphill slope on the other. The maniac mountain man let me know the warmth of the heater was making him sleepy. I felt sorry for him.

We found a Forest Service cabin. Door open. Wood on the porch. I rushed in and crammed wood into the stove. The maniac mountain man surveyed the scene. There were bunk beds. He looked them over and claimed the bottom bunk. "Heat rises, you better sleep on top."

I looked at the top bunk. There was a hole in the ceiling above the bed. Pack rat droppings all over the plywood mattress. Before I could protest I heard snoring. The maniac mountain man was in dreamland.

I am deathly afraid of rats. During the time of this particular hunting trip I lived in a guest house on a ranch in southern Colorado while attending college. One semester of rats in the ceiling at night, scratching the walls behind my headboard as I tried to sleep and running across my body at night as they got under the sheets. I caught 60 rats the first night I got traps. I wanted no part of the top bunk and now had my misgivings about this cabin. Did I want to freeze to death or be gnawed to death by ravenous mountain pack rats?

I chose the quick death of being eaten alive over the slowness of freezing to death.

I hung my sleeping bag in front of the wood stove and crawled up on the plywood bunk. The fire was crackling now and I'd soon be warm enough. I lay on my back and stared into the dark hole above my face. I could imagine rats falling out of there by the thousands as they began their nightly hunt for sustenance. They were there, plotting, like a wicked coven of vampire bats waiting for me to fall asleep so they could eat my face off. An owl hooted outside. A mountain lion screamed in the distance.

Unbelievably, my fear gave in to exhaustion and I slowly drifted in and out of consciousness. Just as I stopped the shivering, the thick sheet of ice melting from my body, and beautiful sleep was about to set in I had an NDE.

"There's a rat! There's a rat! There's a rat!"

The maniac mountain man was sitting straight up in his bunk, pointing at the floor in front of the stove. His eyes were filled with terror. His voice was shrill and terrified. Chills went up my spine. I grabbed my soul by the ankles and held on to it for dear life. My heart jumped out of my chest with every beat.

As soon as he'd screamed it, he lay straight back down and snored. He was only dreaming.

Paralyzed, I sat hunkered in the corner of the cabin for the next two hours staring at the shadows dancing around on the floor in front of the wood stove. Each one looked like a rat coming for me.

I watched from my corner as the maniac mountain man kicked the plywood on the top bunk. "Time to get up! It's 2 a.m. We gotta get to the peak. We gotta go high to get to the elk today. Hurry!"

Taking care of big game meat

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Ethical hunters not only make a clean kill, they don't waste what they kill. So, that means taking care of the meat.

It's against the law to waste game meat. If you harvest an animal, it is your responsibility to remove and care for the meat.

Start preparing before you go into the field. Get in shape and be ready to carry heavy loads over rough terrain. Be sure you know how to field dress an animal. Numerous books and websites are available to provide explanations. If you will be hunting with someone who is inexperienced, teach them the proper techniques.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has produced two videos that explain big game field dressing techniques. See "How to field dress a big game animal" on the website; search for videos.

Another video, "Down to the Bone," explains how to bone out the meat of a big game animal in the field. By boning out the meat there is much less weight for a hunter to pack out. You can order the video by calling (303) 297-1192 or by going to the "Buy and Apply" section of the CPW website.

Get your gear organized. Assemble all of the equipment you need for cleaning, hauling and caring for your meat. A short list includes: high-quality knife, sharpening stone, bone saw, tarp, game bags, frame pack, paper towels, rope and rubber gloves.

Get your freezer ready, too. Be sure you have enough room to store the meat.

Make a clean kill

Shot placement can affect meat quality. Try for a quick kill with a shot that will produce minimal meat damage. The best target: the heart/lungs area just behind the front quarter. A shot to that area will drop an animal quickly. Avoid shooting an animal in the gut or hindquarters. Don't try for head shots.

Also, be aware of where the animal might fall. Don't shoot an animal in an area where you will not be able to retrieve it. Make sure you are capable of retrieving all the meat before it spoils, before it attracts predators and before you become exhausted.

If you can't make a clean shot, don't shoot.

The animal is down. Now what?

When you bring down a big game animal with bullet or arrow, you have achieved one immediate goal, but you haven't fulfilled all of your responsibilities as a hunter. You still have to field dress, transport and butcher the meat properly.

Animals must be field dressed immediately. That means removing the guts, heart, lungs, liver, esophagus and other internal organs. If you choose to bone out the meat, you do not need to "gut" the animal.

After removing all the entrails, roll the animal over to drain the body cavity, then use a clean rag to wipe off excess blood, bone chips, dirt, partially digested food particles and other foreign matter.

Only leave the hide on long enough to keep the meat clean while dragging it on the ground or transporting it over dusty roads in the back of an open pickup.

Next, cool the meat as quickly as possible. Skin the animal as soon as you reach camp. Time is critical, even in cool weather. Without air circulating around the carcass, the meat can sour quickly. Bacterial growth begins at any temperature above 38 degrees Fahrenheit. Maggots can hatch within eight hours if the carcass is exposed to flies and other winged insects.

Remove the head, trim as much fat as possible, place the meat in game bags and hang them in the shade. Keep the meat dry. Do not allow meat to hang more than two days in the woods. If the weather is warm, get the carcass into cold storage as soon as possible.

Remember — aging does not improve the flavor or serve to tenderize game meat. Beef can be aged to become more tender and flavorful because the fat on a domestic cow protects the meat from rotting at 38 degrees. Deer and elk are 90-95 percent lean, and the leaner the meat, the faster it deteriorates.

When taking the animal home, keep it cold and out of sight. Do not strap an animal to the top of your car.

Game meat can last for several years in a good freezer if it is well-wrapped. The best wrapping is a vacuum seal. If you don't have one, use freezer paper. It's better than plastic in staving off freezer burn.

For more information, see cpw.state.co.us.

Delicious venison recipes

Venison is the meat of antlered animals, e.g., deer, moose, elk and caribou. It is of finer texture, much leaner, but more watery than beef.

Liver, heart and kidneys are best if eaten immediately while the rest of the meat is still hanging.

The heart can simply be washed, sliced and fried in butter. Liver and kidneys are improved by cleaning and kneading gently in salt water to remove excess blood. They are excellent if pan-fried in butter.

After the carcass has aged several days at 35-40 degrees F, you can easily cut it yourself with only a sharp knife and remove the meat from the bones. Boneless meat takes less freezer space and cooks more evenly. Trim off bloodshot meat and as much fat as you can. The fat is tallow-like and sticks to the roof of the mouth unless piping hot.

Meat high on the upper hind legs and along the backbone is most tender. Slice 1/2- to 3/4-inch thick for steaks and chops.

To freeze, wrap tightly in heavy freezer paper (-20 degree F rated), shiny side in, staple or seal with freezer tape, and label each cut.

You can grind meat as you need it, using scraps or less tender cuts from the freezer. An ordinary home food grinder will do the job. The trick is to use small pieces of partially frozen meat. To make this lean meat more interesting, grind it with fresh sausage (2-3 parts venison to 1 part sausage) or grind with 1 part beef fat to 6 parts venison.

Venison burgundy

Serves: 6-8
Prep time: 3 1/4 hours
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons flour
2 pounds venison, elk or moose stew meat
4 carrots
2 large onions
1 cup celery, thinly sliced
1 garlic clove, minced
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1/4 teaspoon marjoram
1/4 teaspoon thyme
1 cup burgundy, or any dry red wine
1 cup mushrooms, sliced

Blend soy sauce with flour in a 3-quart baking dish. Cut meat into 1 1/4-inch cubes. Add meat to soy sauce mixture and toss to coat the meat cubes.

Cut carrots into chunks, slice onions and celery, add minced garlic along with the pepper, marjoram, thyme and wine to the meat. Stir gently to mix. Cover tightly and oven simmer at 325 degrees for 2 hours.

Add mushrooms and again stir gently. Cover tightly and bake 1 hour longer or until meat and vegetables are tender. Serve with fluffy, hot wild rice, noodles or mashed potatoes.

Pan-frying tender cuts

(Steaks, chops and loin)

Because venison is a watery meat with little fat marbling, the key to cooking juicy, tender steaks and chops is to hold the water in the meat. To do so, cut pieces no thicker than 1/4 inch, fry quickly in a liberal amount of fat and do not crowd in the pan.

1. Heat a heavy frying pan until sizzling hot.
2. Add 2 tablespoons butter.
3. Place meat in the hot pan. Sear on both sides, turning only once.
4. Reduce heat slightly to finish cooking. Turn if necessary. (If water seeps out of the meat, the fire is too low or pieces are crowded.)
5. Remove to a warmed platter when meat is still pink, just before it seems done. Serve.

For a real hunter's feast, serve with lemon butter or hot Cumberland sauce.

Roasting

(Round, loin)

1. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Place on rack in uncovered pan; cover surface with bacon strips.
3. Do not add water; do not cover.
4. Roast in slow oven (300-325 degrees F), allowing 20-25 minutes per pound.

Moist heat methods

(For less tender cuts)

Substitute venison in most moist heat recipes calling for beef. Use extra fat if necessary.

Stewing

(Shoulder, shank, neck)

1. Cut meat into 1-inch cubes.
2. Season with salt and pepper; sprinkle with flour.
3. Brown in hot fat.
4. Cover with boiling water.
5. Cover kettle tightly and cook very slowly until tender. Do not boil. Add vegetables just long enough before serving time so that they will be tender.

Braising

(Shoulder, neck, breast)

1. Season with salt and pepper; rub with flour.
2. Brown in hot fat.
3. Add small quantity of water (about 1 cup).
4. Cover closely.
5. Cook very slowly until tender. Turn meat occasionally. About 2-3 hours.

Venison soup stock

Put bones left from cutting deer in large kettle. Add water to cover. Simmer 2 hours. Cover and cool overnight in refrigerator to harden fat; then remove all fat. Pick meat from bones and return it to the jellied soup stock. Package for freezer storage. Use as base for noodle or vegetable soup.

Easy campfire venison

Save your best steaks and chops for pan-frying. Anything you don't quite know how to cook will do for the recipe, and it's sure to be tender.

4-6 servings venison, sliced 1/4-inch thick
1 package dry onion soup

Arrange meat in a single layer on heavy aluminum foil. Sprinkle generously with dry onion soup. Seal foil packet tightly. Cook slowly in bed of hot coals or in 325 degree F oven about 1 hour, or until done. Serve with buttered noodles or mashed potatoes.

Venison sausage

30 pounds venison, cut
20 pounds fat pork, about 50 to 60 percent lean, cut
1 pound salt
3 ounces black pepper
2 ounces sage, optional

Sprinkle seasonings over meat. Grind through coarse chili plate. Regrind through sausage plate. If sausage is to be frozen, season only half the total amount. Wrap sausage in sizes needed for a meal in moisture vapor-proof paper. Thaw and season unseasoned sausage just before using. Unseasoned sausage will keep fresh five to six months, while seasoned sausage will turn flat and rancid after three months.

Venison roast

3- to 4-pound venison roast
1 package onion soup mix
1 clove garlic, slivered, or garlic salt to taste (optional)
1 can cream of celery soup
2 cans water

Season roast to taste with pepper. Sprinkle with onion soup mix and garlic (if desired) over meat. Spread celery soup over roast. Add water. Cover and cook in 250 degree F oven 2 to 2 1/2 hours. Add more water if necessary. Serves 8-10.

Venison burgers

2 pounds ground venison
1/4 pound ground pork or mild sausage
1 medium onion, chopped
1/4 teaspoon thyme
1/8 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon marjoram
2 eggs, beaten
2 tablespoons melted fat
1/4 cup sweet cider

Blend venison, pork and chopped onion together. Add seasonings and beaten egg; blend well. Form into small patties, about 1/4 inch thick. Brown burgers on both sides in fat. Cover, reduce heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Turn burgers. Add cider, cover and simmer 10 minutes more. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Venison steak marinade

1/4 cup dry red wine
1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
1/3 cup salad oil
3 tablespoons soy sauce

Combine ingredients; pour marinade over deer steaks in glass baking pan. Leave steaks in marinade at room temperature 1 to 3 hours, turning them occasionally. Drain steaks, broil to desired doneness over charcoal or under oven broiler, brushing frequently with marinade while broiling. Yield: marinade for 1 pound of venison.

Venison loaf

2 pounds ground venison
2 eggs
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon pepper
3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
1 small onion, chopped
1 1/2 cups bread crumbs or oatmeal

Mix all ingredients. Turn into greased loaf pan. Bake in 400 degree F oven for one hour.

Venison pot roast

Serves: 4-6
Prep time: 3 hours
2-3 pounds venison rump roast
2 onions, quartered
water
1/3 cup sherry
2 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 teaspoon each dry mustard, marjoram, rosemary, thyme, sweet basil
1 bay leaf
4 potatoes, quartered
4 carrots, sliced lengthwise
flour
salt and pepper
1 pound mushrooms
2 tablespoons bacon drippings
butter

Trim off all fat. Season 2 tablespoons flour with salt and pepper to taste. Dredge roast in flour. In Dutch oven, brown roast on all sides in hot bacon drippings. Season generously with salt and pepper. Add onions, sherry, garlic, spices, bay leaf and carrots. Add water to cover. Cook at 350 degrees for 2 hours, stirring every 1/4 hour. Add potatoes; cook 1 additional hour or until roast and potatoes are tender. During last 10 minutes of cooking, clean, slice and saute mushrooms in butter. Remove roast and vegetables to warm platter. Remove bay leaf. Pour remaining pot juices into 4-cup bowl. Add enough water to make 3 cups of liquid. Mix 5 tablespoons flour in small jar of water to add to pot liquid. Bring to boil in Dutch oven and cook 3 minutes. Cover sliced roast with mushrooms; serve with gravy and beer bread.

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A hunter's tale: 'The day I grew up'

By Dick Ray

The southern Rocky Mountains are rich in the natural history of many species of wildlife, as well the history of the people who affected and were affected by that wildlife, be they hunter, trapper, stockman or explorer.

In the mid 1970s, there were only a few outfitters who kept a pack of hounds trained to hunt bear. I did keep hounds, and, consequently, was called upon from time to time by the Division of Wildlife to pursue a stock-killing bear. One such hunt, in the mid 1970s, caused me to venture high into the mountains above Saguache, Colo., onto the summer range of rancher George Ward.

In order to reach the site of the predation, we had to pack in on horseback to the high country on the north side of Baxter Peak to an elevation of approximately 10,500 feet. I was accompanied by Bert Widhelm, the game warden for that area, a couple of young men who worked for me at that time and the rancher, Ward.

We got to the campsite late in the evening with just enough time to hobble the horses, tie up and feed the hounds, gather some firewood and make camp. After a supper (not dinner) of biscuits, beans and steak came the coffee and Ward's stories.

After a while, he asked me, "You are from Pagosa; don't you know Lloyd Anderson?" I replied, "Of course I do; he is the government hunter and trapper, and a fine gentleman he is." I then asked, "How is it that you know Mr. Anderson?"

Said Ward, "I used to work for Lloyd Anderson, and I'll tell you about the day I grew up. It was back just before WWII, and Lloyd and I were packing into the headwaters of the Pine, northwest of Pagosa, to do some predator work around the many herds of sheep, on their summer ranges.

"Ahead of us, going along the same trail that we were on, we spied a pair of bears. We got off our horses and Lloyd peered at them with his field glasses and then spoke out, 'I believe it is a grizzly.'

"At that, I took my .25-20 from the saddle scabbard and took aim. While Lloyd looked through the glasses, I calculated windage and elevation. I squeezed the trigger and the biggest bear dropped. I jumped up and down with excitement as the shot was several hundred yards long. Lloyd didn't say much except, 'Let's go see what you've done.'

Photo courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Although variable from blond to nearly black, grizzly bear fur is typically brown in color with white tips. A pronounced hump appears on their shoulders; the hump is a good way to distinguish a black bear from a grizzly bear, as black bears do not have this hump. There are no grizzlies remaining in Colorado.

"We mounted and rode on to the dead bear; the other one had run off. I asked Lloyd, 'Have you ever seen a shot like that? And with a .25-20.'

"The bear was a beautiful, adult female grizzly. Finally, Lloyd said, 'Now let me tell you what you have really done. You have killed a bear that didn't need killing and with a gun that is no bear gun and that is much more likely to wound than kill, even at close range. Now we are up here to protect domestic sheep and there has been no report of that bear killing any sheep, so why kill it?'

"Well, as those words sunk in, from a man who I respected so much, well, that is the day I grew up."

Ward went on to speak to us younger men that night about ethics, respect for the animals and self respect.

And so it is with hunting. It is not so much about what you kill as it is about what you learn — about the natural world, the terrain, animal behavior and yourself. I greatly appreciate the time I have been able to spend with men of the quality of Anderson, Ward and all of the others who passed on their knowledge before they, too, passed on.

Defining the word 'trophy'

By Dick Ray

Everything I needed to know about trophy hunting I learned in a small town drugstore in 1958.

What is a trophy?

"Something taken from an enemy and kept as a memorial of victory, as captured arms a deer's head, etc. displayed as evidence of hunting prowess; any memento." (Webster's New World Dictionary)

Many years ago as a teenager growing up in Belen, N.M., there was a drugstore in town that had a number of mule deer heads mounted and hung on exhibit. As boys, we often visited Buckland's Pharmacy to admire the many deer heads and one moose.

On a certain day in 1958, five of us wandered into the store to gawk while drinking Cherry Cokes which we would buy at the soda fountain. As we walked in, Roy Buckland, the owner who had hunted and taken all of the animals on display, happened to be at the front of the store. One boy, who was much more forward than the rest of us, blurted out, "Mr. Buckland, tell us about that buck," and pointed to the biggest one of all.

Buckland, who was a very busy man, halted, gave us a long look, and said, "Come on over here and sit down."

He was walking toward the soda fountain counter and several of us exchanged looks embarrassed to have interrupted such a busy man, but hopeful that he might be going to buy us all a Cherry Coke. Well, he did not buy us a 35-cent Cherry Coke, but all these years later I realized that he gave us something much more valuable on that day long ago.

He began by stating, "Boys, all of these deer — there were 30 or more — represent my life. For years, I have worked here at the store just about every day, all year long. I take a one week vacation with my wife and then I take off a week each November for a deer hunt with my friends."

He began by stating, "Boys, all of these deer — there were 30 or more — represent my life. For years, I have worked here at the store just about every day, all year long. I take a one week vacation with my wife and then I take off a week each November for a deer hunt with my friends."

We were all aware that about 12-15 of the town's businessmen took an annual deer hunt in the mountains of southwest New Mexico.

Buckland continued, "Starting with the one on the right, that is the buck from our first hunt. I was young then and one of the youngest men on the hunt. Going all of the way around the two walls to the last buck, which was taken last year, I am now one of the oldest men still going on the hunt. Looking at each buck I can remember and respect how each one lived and how he died. I can remember all of my friends who were along on each hunt and many of them are now dead and gone as well."

Then our impatient buddy blurted out, "But what about the biggest one, Mr. Buckland?"

Buckland took a keep breath and said, "Son, I just saw him and killed him the first morning and it cut my hunt short that year."

Not satisfied, our young colleague then asked, "Mr. Buckland, why did you shoot that little forked horn?"

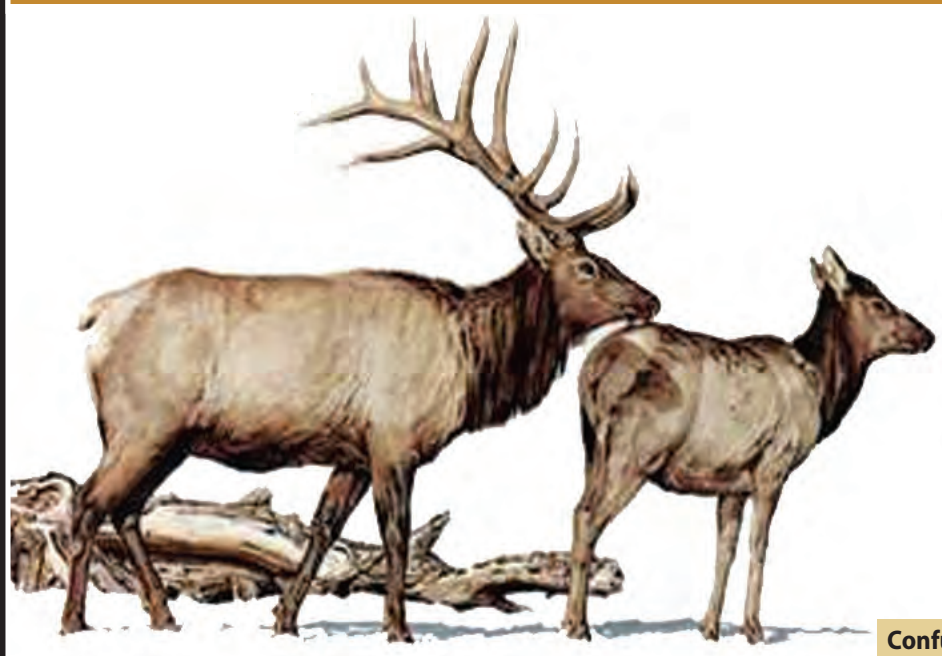
The now somewhat exasperated pharmacist said slowly, "I was sick that year and probably should not have even gone on the hunt. But I did, and I did eventually kill that buck, after great effort. That small buck means more to me than the big one does."

"Tell us about the moose, Mr. Buckland," we continued, still wanting more. Mr. Buckland replied, "I had been wanting to hunt a moose and had been corresponding with an outfitter in Canada. It was expensive, but late that summer I received a letter from the outfitter saying that many of his clients had cancelled and that if I would come, I could hunt for half price. That was the first year of the Great Depression. So, boys, I went to Canada and I killed a moose. That's all there is to it. But I do remember that I missed the deer hunt with all of my friends that year because of the moose hunt."

I've often reflected on the stories Buckland shared with us that day. Some time later, I realized I'd learned from Buckland that a trophy is any tangible thing that keeps alive, for a lifetime, the memory of an experience, the camaraderie and the people met along the journey. I still carry this with me nearly 60 years later and I remain grateful for this realization.

Elk Hunters: Be Aware of Your Target!
Moose can be found in the same habitat as elk in Colorado. Make sure you know the difference between these two species, so you don't accidentally kill a moose. Use your binoculars, not scopes. Don't just look at the animal's antlers; study the entire head before you shoot.

Elk & Moose Comparison



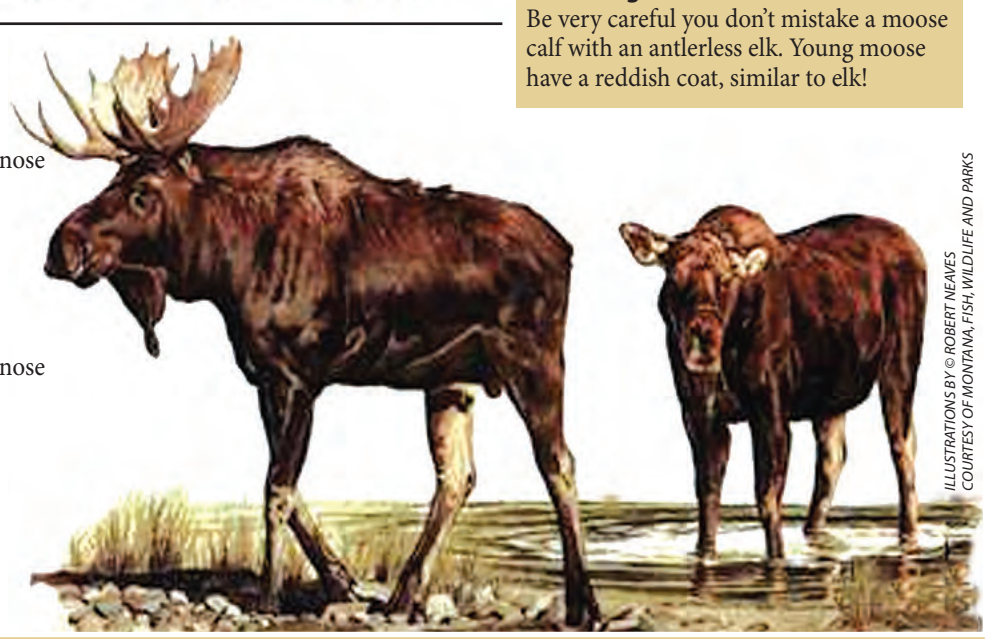
Bull Elk
- Slender snout
- Pale yellow rump
- Chestnut-brown neck
- Reddish, lighter brown body
- Darker legs
- Antlers not palmated
- Obvious brow tines coming off main beam.

Cow Elk
- Slender snout
- Pale yellow rump
- Chestnut-brown neck
- Reddish, lighter brown body
- Darker legs

Confusing Calves
Be very careful you don't mistake a moose calf with an antlerless elk. Young moose have a reddish coat, similar to elk!

Bull Moose
- Dark, black-brown body
- Overhanging snout, bulbous nose
- Larger bell (beard) on throat
- Whitish-gray legs
- Palmated antlers with tines

Cow Moose
- Dark, black-brown body
- Overhanging snout, bulbous nose
- Bell (beard) on throat
- Whitish-gray legs



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Moose or elk?

Be sure to know the difference

By Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Reintroduced to Colorado more than 30 years ago, moose are thriving in many parts of the state. Unfortunately, almost every year hunters inadvertently shoot moose. During the last few years more than a dozen moose have been killed during each season by hunters who thought they were shooting elk.

Elk hunters need to be sure to know the difference between these two ungulates. If a hunter without the proper license shoots a moose, the fine can be more than $1,000 and hunting privileges can be lost.

Moose are the largest members of the deer family and have adapted to a variety of habitats. They favor willows along streams and ponds. But, be aware; some moose also inhabit lodgepole pine, oak brush, aspen, spruce, fir and even sagebrush — in other words, the same areas where elk live. Moose can be found in almost any high-country habitat area of Colorado.

There's no excuse for mistaking these animals. They are vastly different in size, color, antler shape and habits. A mature Shiras bull moose weighs 1,200 pounds — about twice as much as the average bull elk. Moose are dark brown and appear almost black. Elk are light brown — a bull elk can be almost golden — with a pale yellow rump.

A moose has a very large, long and bulbous nose and a "bell" of fur under the throat. An elk's snout is much narrower and it has no "bell." A mature bull moose has broad, flat antlers, unlike the pointed antlers of an elk. But the antlers on some young bull moose have not flattened out yet, so hunters need to look over the entire animal before pulling the trigger.

Moose act very differently than elk when approached by humans. Typically, moose will not flee like elk at the sight of a hunter, which makes them easier to kill. So if it sees you and doesn't run, it's probably a moose.

Despite these readily apparent differences, every hunting season brings a number of illegal moose kills. Circumstances vary from mistaken identity by hunters to blatant poaching. The common denominator in most accidental kills is that the hunter is only using the rifle scope as an optical aid. Always carry binoculars or a spotting scope to help you properly identify the species you are hunting.

The first moose to reach Colorado — 12 from Utah — were transplanted by wildlife biologists in the North Park region near Walden in 1978. More animals were transplanted over the years and now the population statewide is estimated at about 3,200.

For more information about hunting in Colorado, see cpw.state.co.us.

A big lion, like gold, is where you find it

By Dick Ray

He glared at us with golden green eyes that danced with contempt. He had no use for those of us beneath his tree, and we knew it. He was huge by any standard, but I had no need, no wish, no desire to take his life. The day had begun with only the hope to find a lion track that the hounds could trail and, perhaps, catch and release.

The day prior, an outfitter friend, Mark Davies, of Grand Junction, had arrived at our place near Pagosa Springs. Mark had wanted to take a pair of our hounds that might replace a couple of dogs in his pack of lion dogs. Well, a little snow was predicted to fall that night, so my son Mike and I encouraged Mark to stay over and hunt with us the next day. More than half the time, predicted snow fails to materialize, but when we looked out at 4 a.m., sure enough, about 1.5 inches had fallen.

It was Feb. 25, and that late in winter, such a small amount of snow usually melts by 9 or 10 a.m. But if you can find a track early, sometimes you can get a lion treed before the track and scent vanishes.

We left with high hopes, invigorated by the cold, crisp, clear morning and knowing that we had as good a chance as anyone to find a lion track that day. We knew that some of the numerous other hunters in the area were sure to be out and about as well. The quota for this area was almost full, with only one lion left to be harvested. With so many hunters out, that would almost surely happen, closing the season by sundown.

Mike and I chose to try Devil Mountain because we had seen sign of a big lion there about 10 days earlier. Mike made his way up a drainage, while I went up another a few miles west. I found the track of a female lion right away and released my three dogs on it. The snow was already melting, for the steep slopes were composed of black shale that held warmth from the day before. The dogs were able to trail up and onto a ridge for nearly a mile before the sun took the track and its scent away from them. They weren't going to make any progress and I didn't, as I climbed up to them. Catching and leashing them, I headed back.

I went to see if I could find Mike, knowing that our trailing conditions and time were passing fast. Mike had come back down his mountain, and we got together. He had a story. He had found a big lion's track up higher, where there was a little more snow. If we hurried, and were lucky, the dogs might still be able to work it.

It took us about an hour to get up to the track. That which had been a big, beautiful fresh track at daylight was now a pathetic, half-melted, barely recognizable line threading under old-growth ponderosa pines.

Mark took a long look and said, "It's big, but most hunters would say that it's too melted out to work."

I said, "Mark, we would agree, but let's see what the hounds say."

We released all six dogs, and they took the track onward. And on they went, over a ridge and out of hearing. Now, you always hope that a lion has a fresh kill just over the next ridge and that the dogs will tree him not far from the kill. It happens sometimes, but not that day. As we climbed and crested the ridge, we could again hear them in the distance, trailing; then, out of hearing again. A few steep, slick shale slopes more, and then we could hear the dogs bark treed.

As we walked up to the tree, he appeared the same as every lion I had ever seen — splendid, noble and a word that is over-used but should be reserved for the truly special — awesome. We gazed up at him, and he glared back. Both Mark and Mike urged me to take the lion. I had never killed a lion in Colorado and had never planned to. In 1985, Mike and I treed a lion in New Mexico, which I took with my bear take-down bow. I had wanted to take that lion. It scored 15-8/16 and was the New Mexico state record for 11 years. I didn't need another lion.

Mike and I have enjoyed our years of work guiding lion hunters. The first Boone and Crockett lion that I ever saw was the one Father Anderson Bakewell, a Catholic priest, took with me in 1978. Mike's first lion was a Boone and Crockett that he took alone in 1982, just out of high school. How could I justify taking another lion of this class?

Photo by Ken Logan, courtesy Colorado Parks and Wildlife

A mountain lion, also known as a puma, is treed in western Colorado. Pumas are being trapped, tagged and tracked as part of a long-term research project.

Suddenly, it became very personal to me. To be sure, the novice may kill without question, having not done it before — he has not experienced the pondering and twinge of remorse that accompanies the still, lifeless form that the act of killing produces. Why we kill is a mystery, outranked only by the mystery of death itself.

Once again, Mike said, "You may as well take him. If the quota doesn't fill today, someone else will kill him on the next snow. Besides, at your age, this might be the last really huge lion that you ever see."

"True," I thought.

"I don't have a gun," I said.

Mike handed me his .44 from his backpack. I questioned my conscience and wondered if it would be enough to immortalize this creature with humble respect and a life-size mount? And then, at the shot, he fell from the tree, dead.

As I looked at his splendid form, I wondered, "What stories could this lion have told?" He was about 7 years old. Being an obligate carnivore, he had to kill to survive, and at a rate of about a deer or an elk a week, he would have made several hundred kills.

We packed out his hide and his meat in our backpacks and led the dogs back across the canyons and down the mountain. As we walked, I remembered Ray Bailey's Boone and Crockett lion taken with us in 1986. It wore a collar that had been placed on it five years earlier west of Grand Junction. We took the lion about 300 miles south of there in northern New Mexico. It made me wonder, who is this lion? Where did he come from? Has anyone ever laid eyes on him before? Does he have a brother out there? And then I thought, a lion is what we would all like to be — a true free spirit. He goes where he wants, kills when he's hungry and doesn't pay taxes.

My last thought before I came to peace with myself was that I hoped that he had left many sons behind, for all living things will die and be replaced by their own kind. It is the nature of things.

History: Wildlife matters

By Dick Ray

The American colonists had no real hunting tradition of their own as they generally came from countries where commoners were forbidden to hunt.

They had no knowledge of New World wildlife or hunting methods and brought only honest ignorance, faith and the will to survive. The need to survive fosters rapid learning, and survive they did.

In 1875, Colorado's territorial governor was quoted as saying, "We must do something to save Colorado's vanishing wildlife."

Thus bighorn sheep were covered by a total hunting ban from 1885 until 1953. In 1899, the Colorado Game and Fish Department was formed. In 1903, the first guide and outfitter law was passed. Elk season was closed from 1903 thru 1937 in Southwest Colorado; mule deer season was closed from 1914 to 1918. Market hunting and subsistence hunting were eliminated. Pronghorn were not hunted until 1945, and there was no open season on turkeys until 1963.

Predators, lions, bears, coyotes, etc., as well as scavengers such as ravens, crows and magpies, which exacerbate the need for the carnivores to make more frequent kills, were brought under control.

At the same time, additional law enforcement, habitat improvement, restocking to rebuild ungulate species, i.e., conservation, was predominate. Deer and elk flourished.

Now, with deer, elk, turkey, pronghorn and even bighorn sheep being common, they are taken for granted. Public opinions are changing and predators — charismatic megafauna — are revered by Americans in a way that ungulates are not.

Although we must manage and respect all wildlife, preferred single-species management will have negative effects on many other species. We must engage in ecosystem management, where all species are considered in relation to each other and in relation to the condition of their habitat. Our wildlife managers must strive for "balance."

Colorado's hunters are tools of Colorado's wildlife managers, affecting funding, harvest, and providing input and information. By encouraging respect and stewardship, hunters build self-respect and gain respect.

As field naturalists, hunters provide value to wildlife management beyond their economic contribution.

Theodore Roosevelt described conservation as "wise use." He believed that certain natural resources were renewable and might last forever if harvested scientifically and no faster than they reproduced.

This is called sustainable yield. Wildlife matters, too.

A Colorado Bear Fight

Adventures in the high country in Pagosa took on a bit different flavor in days gone by. Read about it in "A Colorado Bear Fight," an account written more than a century ago by Will Price.

"In November 1911, the bears were coming down quite low on the Navajo River hills, after acorns, and Weisel's herder said he was afraid to take the goats up Oak Creek because a bear was acting bold and sassy and would not run at his shouts.

"I rode up there one snowy day and sighted three long-haired bears across a narrow valley. They were fat, their legs seemed short, and they were nosing around under the oak brush. It was hard to guess the distance through the falling snow, but I made three shots. Two of the bears started at once up the hill for the heavy spruce timber towards Price Peak; the third following slower as if disliking to go. A hasty examination showed no bloodstains in the snow where they were rooting, or on their trail.

"When I reached the spruce, the down logs were so bad that I tied my horse under a long, drooping limb of a tree, which made good shelter, and then took the trail of the bears afoot.

"When the bears came to a ridge or knoll, they usually would travel along the foot of it for a while, then double back higher up so as to overlook their trail to see if they were being followed. This gave me a chance to gain on them by short cuts across their zigzags, so that when we got through the timber to the foot of the rocks where the bears den up for the winter, their tracks showed fresh in the falling snow. The outer fringe of timber on the steep mountainside had been burned over and a new growth of small fir trees was coming up. Through this new growth of small fir trees, about a hundred yards ahead of me, I could catch a glimpse of the bears as they passed through one open space to another. I took a quick shot at one.

"Soon after I noticed one coming in my direction and held my gun ready to shoot should he appear in an open space, but he avoided them and made his charge out in the thick undergrowth slightly to the right of where I was facing and was not more than twelve or fourteen feet distant when he came in view, giving me time only to swing my gun around and fire without raising it to my shoulder.

"The shot broke his nose above the two long fangs and went into his throat. He struck me head on, at the waist, and we both slid down hill about twenty feet. When we stopped, I was feet first on my back, dragging my gun by the muzzle in my right hand. He was on top, lying down on me, head at my feet. His first action was to grab one of my feet in his mouth.

"My first thought was to run my gun around and work the lever, but to do that it was necessary to get him off so I could use my left hand. I did my utmost to push him over or around, but he spread out his legs and kept his entire weight on me. After exhausting my strength for nothing, and he was not damaging my feet any, I played 'possum' and laid still, which caused him to stop and sit up and look around. He was sitting on my face and I thought the long hair would smother me, but I managed to turn my head and blow a hole in the snow and breathed easier. After a while, he slowly turned around, shifting his weight to my body, and as soon as he saw my face, he made a quick grab and tried to crush my skull, but his upper teeth would turn back and he could only make scratches. One lower tooth penetrated my nose so that the blood ran down my throat.

"He acted like a dog fighting a cat. He would make a quick grab, then jerk his head back like he was expecting return bites and scratches.

"Of course my playing dead ended when he began biting my face. I had on buck gauntlet gloves, and would grab his nose or jaw with elbows on the ground and hold him back somewhat. His broken bones and teeth made more than fifty scratches on my face and I felt that my face was being eaten away, and when my eyes filled with blood, I thought I was blinded and gave a loud cry, knowing well that there was no one to hear me. The blood in my throat choked me a little, and I gave up all hope. I thought, no one will know where I am. Perhaps a sheepherder will find my bones next June. I felt sorry for my mother; how badly she would feel.

"Presently he ceased operations, and I acted like I was dead. He thought I was done for, so he stood up across me and one of my eyes cleared up so I could see him bleeding from the mouth, and he seemed to be in great pain. Then he started to walk away. When he was about six or eight feet distant, I got to my knees and made a grab for my gun, but he was watching out of the corner of his eye and quickly turned around and made a dive for me. I grabbed him with both hands in the long hair of his jaw and neck, and being on the upper side he could not push me over. He never once tried to stand up or slap me with a paw.

"I noticed that he was growing weaker, and I could hold him away from me, and a thrill of hope passed through me. I said, 'You ___, you have had your chance. Mine will come soon.'

"After trying several times more to push me over, he gave up and started to pull away, but I had my hands full of long hair and could hold him. Then he became very anxious to depart, and when I was sure he would keep going, I released my hold and he walked away, head down, giving me a chance to end the act.

"I pulled my glove from my left hand, which was swelling very fast, coat and shirtsleeves ripped away, and tied it up the best that I could and started for the ranch. I could not find my horse's track, it being covered up by snow.

"When I passed the Kistle ranch, Mrs. Ida Kistle, whom I had known for years, was standing in the doorway. Upon seeing and not recognizing me, she jumped into the house and slammed the door.

"When I reached the Weisel ranch, Mrs. Weisel told her boy, Duane, to call her husband before I washed so he could see me, as he argued once that bears never attacked men."

This story is reprinted from "Remembrances, Volume 1" with permission from the San Juan Historical Society.

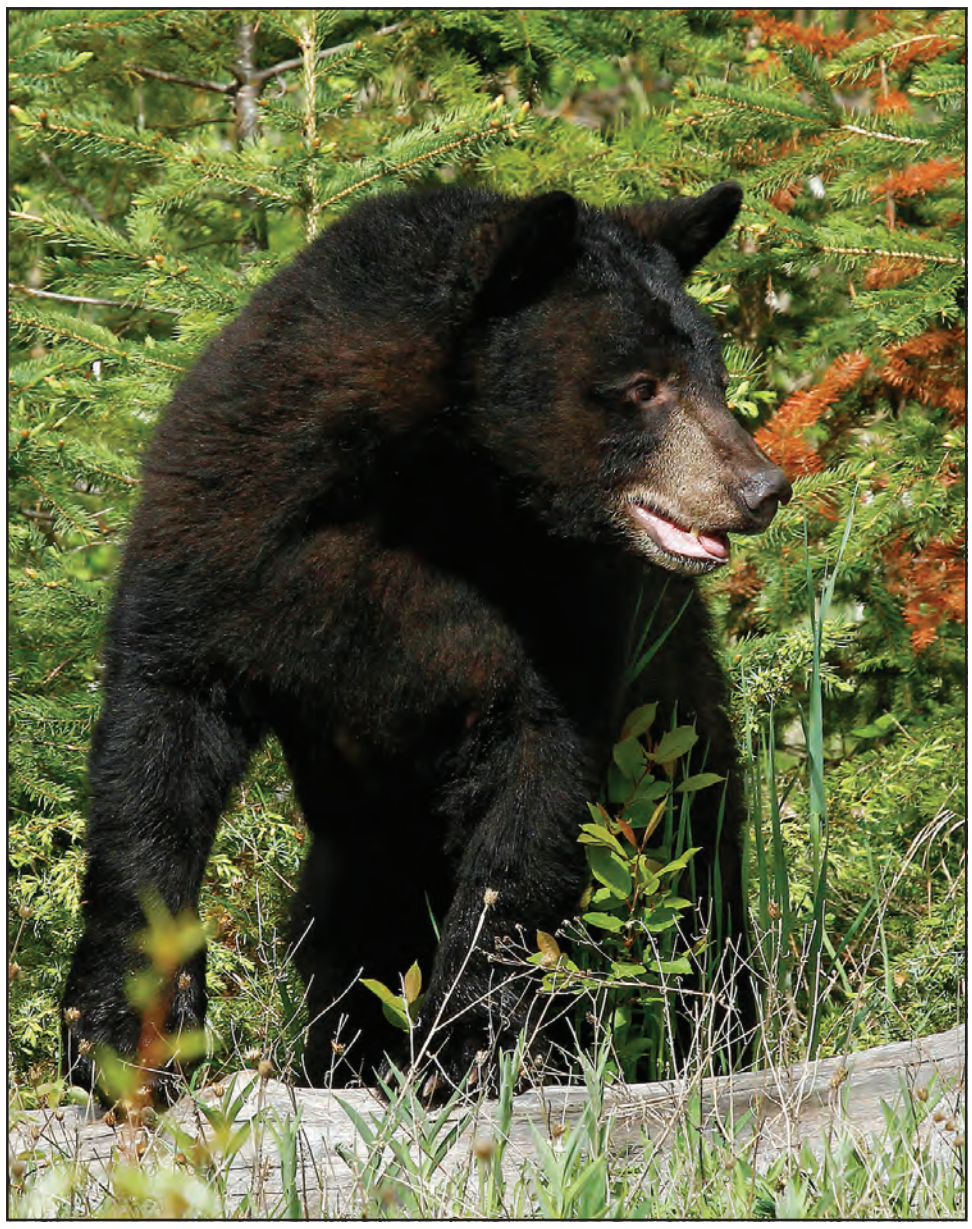

Photo courtesy Vic Schendel, Colorado Parks and Wildlife