

Hunting Guide 2020

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Pondering the necessity of bird dogs willing to put up with their owners

By Ralph Bartholdt

I heard a story about a bird dog that couldn't be trained, and usually ran off flushing pheasants and Huns a quarter mile away in the wrong direction. One day the dog, an English pointer, sprinted off after scent and its owner sighed, realizing he would get rid of the darned dog as soon as he returned to the ranch. Maybe trade him for a weaner pig, a lame ewe or a one-legged hen.

Then, just when the dog was barely visible on the horizon, it flushed a brace of pheasant. The roosters flew up, cackled and caught a breeze. They flew toward the man who was unprepared for this bouquet of good fortune. He kneeled by a fence-row of wait-a-minute vine and the birds kept coming. He jacked a shell into the chamber of his gun. The birds kept coming. They quit pumping their wings and set them instead, into a glide. They were heading directly toward the field edge and cover where the man kneeled, and he shot both of the birds as they passed over like ducks coming into a set of decoys.

It was a good day.

He kept the dog.

Paging through gun dog magazines I am often attentive to the names of the canines and their ostensible cunning, pleasant demeanor and lack of flash. Just plain solid dogs, obviously well mannered, with instincts as sharp as razor wire and photogenic even at full leap into water bristling with fragile ice. They are dogs my pals and I could hope to find maybe once in our lives for a season, if luck held out, until their real owners

come to claim them.

We found a chocolate lab in a field once with a farmhouse a half mile away and hunted with it for the day before taking it home.

Poor lost baby. Not a bad pup. Fair nose. Par on the retrieve. We fed it cans of veal and liver Alpo and probably would have named it Lancelot or Bruiser if the farmer hadn't called to ask for his dog back. We awkwardly tottered in his driveway, hands in our pockets, moving in and out of that gray shade that seeks to decipher perverse or good intentions until the farmer generously adjudicated, "Feel free to come hunt with her anytime. She needs the exercise."

A friend of mine named his English pointer for the first game it flushed. We hunted an overgrown logging road when the pup nosed into a stand of alder and kicked out a cow and calf moose that trotted our way on high legs, apparently miffed. "Moose!" My friend yelled, and the dog came running.

This scenario repeated itself and turned into a habit. He yelled, "Moose!" And the pointer, ears pinned back and tail tucked, beat a path to its owner's side — as the owner beat a path for cover.

Moose, the pointer, grew up big and he liked to hog the front seat of the Jeep Wrangler that my friend drove to hunting spots in Eastern Washington, Idaho and Montana. Like a lot of dogs of this breed, Moose became a nonconformist as a teenager preferring to range far from adults and he may have hunted all three states by himself in an afternoon, but we could

never tell for sure. The practice continued into his later life. He usually returned to us worn out, dragging his tongue, but in good spirits. A few quail feathers stuck to the side of his mouth, and he slept the entire drive home.

This was before my buddy had children. Children consider a working dog a digit of their extended family, which prevents its sale no matter how inept the mutt is in the field. When my friend traded his dog for an over-under shotgun, I noticed the blood pressure pills disappeared from his medicine cabinet and he took a certain pleasure hunting over other people's dogs. When their pooches displayed bad form, ate birds, failed to fetch or forgot their *raison d'être*, he did not offer advice or critique. Without a dog he had become a gentleman, almost a squire, who held his gun gracefully at port arms ready for a flush, instead of

swinging it about like a bull rider as he had when he used to scan the horizon for his errant bird hound. He now chatted amicably and astutely. Even his vocabulary changed.

But that was years ago.

When I spoke to him the other day, I noticed a sharper edge to his usually tempered demeanor and just a modicum of grit, hearkening back to the old days when Moose disappeared into the next county until suppertime.

A heard a whimper in the background.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Not a whole lot," he pined. "Got a new dog."

"Really? That's nice. How's it hunting?"

There was a pause like the one when we stood in the farmer's driveway with our hands in our pockets.

"The kids really like it," he ventured.

It's a Lab, he said. And it's already become a digit of the extended family.

Hunting column

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First deer

Megan Otis with her first deer in Paradise Valley from Emigrant taken in the 2018 season.

Photo courtesy of Jason Otis

An advertisement for Spur Line Ranch and Pet Supply. The background is a photograph of a man in a cowboy hat riding a horse through a forest, with several pack animals (mules or horses) following him. The text "SPUR LINE" is prominently displayed in a large, serif font. Below it, "Ranch and Pet Supply" is written in a smaller font, followed by the tagline "From the Backyard to the Barnyard". The "DRYSHOD WATERPROOF FOOTWEAR" logo is also present. At the bottom, the text "Dry Shod Boots", "Packing Supplies", and "Certified Hay and Feed" is listed. The contact information "406-222-7712 • thespurline.com • 1370 US Hwy 10 West • Livingston MT 59047" is at the very bottom.

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Winter's Tales

By Bruce Auchly

FWP Region 4 Information Officer

It is alleged that when Rogers Hornsby, a baseball star of unbelievable talent 100 years ago, was asked how he got through the winter, he responded:

"People ask me what I do in winter when there's no baseball. I'll tell you what I do. I stare out the window and wait for spring."

When it comes to hunting and fishing and many other outdoor pursuits, that's many of us.

Yes, yes, there are exceptions to everything. There are elk shoulder seasons, for example. And ice fishing. Even ice climbing.

Equally, there are excuses for everything. I don't need elk meat bad enough to struggle through deep snow drifts in below zero temperatures.

Occasionally, there is a sunny, calm day on a frozen lake when big fish are biting like crazy. Occasionally.

And ice climbing or winter mountaineering? Oh, forget it.

In northern latitudes like Montana, winter is time to meet, plan and spend. Gather friends and family to plan va-

cations, long and short, for the coming year. Then figure how best to spend money to reach those goals.

It's also time to clean and repair equipment. At the end of last summer did you remember to replace the frayed line on your fishing reel? Or did you put it away quickly, thinking you would get around to it, meanwhile grabbing the gun for a trip to the hills.

Speaking of firearms, how clean is that antelope, or deer or elk, rifle fired last fall?

Cleaning and repairing sure is cheaper than replacing. And that's not even considering the big-ticket items like a boat, pickup or camper.

Perhaps fly-tying or reloading ammunition is your thing. Those winter past times are low tech and can yield fun, educational and rewarding equipment that eventually helps fill the freezer.

Making one's own equipment is also a way to bypass expensive, high-tech gadgets that may tempt our ethics.

All of which brings us back to baseball and an ethical discussion fit for a midwinter's night.

Recently, Major League Baseball has been in an uproar over the use of modern technology to cheat, tipping off the batter to what a pitcher is going to throw.

What is cheating in hunting? Of

course, it's illegal to use drones, night vision goggles and remote operated cameras to hunt game.

There is also ethical hunting that looks askance at legal but unfair equipment. Once upon a time, it was considered unfair to use a scope on a hunting rifle. How quaint.

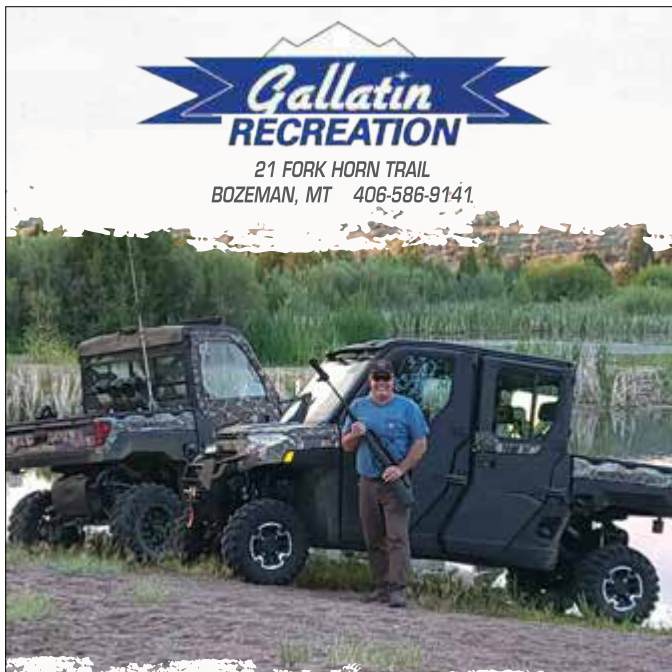
In today's world we have at our disposal every technological advantage: fish finders, GPS units and bow sights that glow in dim light. And that does not even touch stuff like no-scent, lightweight, waterproof and windproof clothing.

Let's be clear. Advances in gear and clothing are wonderful. It's up to the individual whether they are fair. The problem is not technology but what it does to us. It can lead us to believe that conveniences are a shortcut to knowledge and practice.

Perhaps an invisible line is crossed when we no longer use mechanical aids but are used by them.


Trying to hit a major league curveball without advance knowledge is tough. On a different level, hunting and fishing can be tough, too. And they should be.

Somewhere lies the invisible line between too much technology and not enough ethics. And that's something to ponder on a long winter's evening.



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Photos courtesy Brittany Sukhbir

Gathered around a couple of harvested bull elk are, from left, Raelyn Sukhbir, Kyle Sukhbir and Wyatt Sukhbir with Jeremy Yoakam and Chad Yoakam with Kyle and Chad's 2018 bulls. This was Chad's first bull harvest.

Family hunt fills the freezer

By Brittany Sukhbir

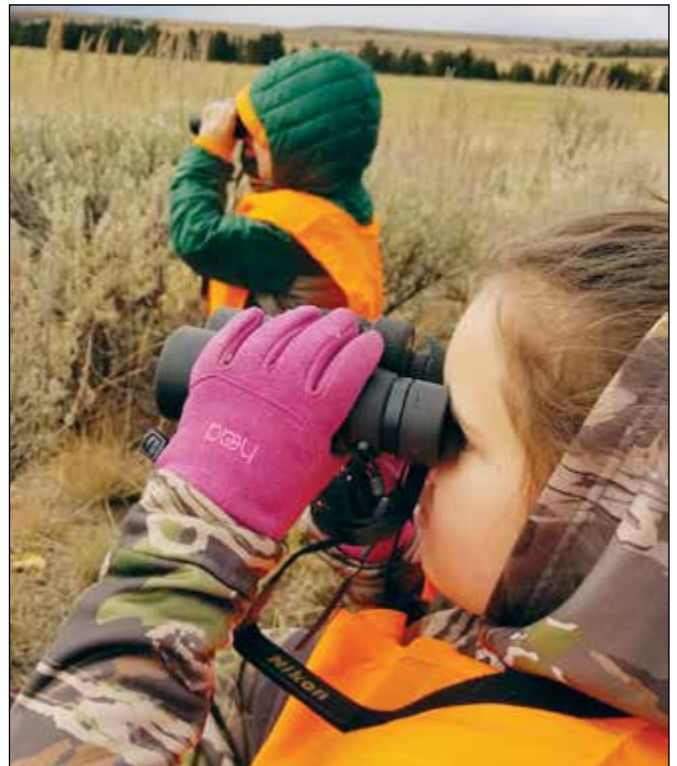
My husband, Kyle, and I believe that hunting is more than a hobby or sport. For us, hunting is a way to provide natural meat for our family.

I've been hunting big game my whole life. Growing up in Colorado, it was a yearly family tradition to set up hunting camp in the Gunnison National Forest near Saguache, Colorado — a location that my family has been hunting since the 1960s. It was there, alongside my Papa Dick and Dad, that my love of the sport blossomed.

Kyle, growing up in Canada and Michigan, did some light deer hunting with his friends throughout the years. It was not until we wed in 2009 that his passion for big game hunting came into fruition.

Joining in on family hunts in Colorado showed Kyle that it wasn't about killing animals as much as it was about the time spent with loved ones, ethical harvesting of animals for the year's meals and exploring the beautiful world we have been blessed with. When Kyle and I started a family of our own, we knew that hunting would be an important part of the dynamic.

We moved to Livingston in 2012 and have enjoyed the opportunities to recreate in Montana. Hunting has allowed us to make great friends in the area who are now hunting partners and our "Montana Family."



Raelyn Sukhbir, front, and Wyatt Sukhbir scout for antelope.

See **Family**, Page 15

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Archery 101

By Ryan Peerboom
Yellowstone Newspapers



Terry Maninger, in the archery department at Yellowstone Sporting Goods in Livingston, practices shooting at the Park County Rod and Gun Club.

Enterprise photo by Nate Howard

By **Ryan Peerboom**
Yellowstone Newspapers

When hunting season approaches every year in Montana, bow hunters are the first to take their mark. Bow hunting season is the first to open in 2020 as the season begins on Sept. 5 and runs through Oct. 18.

With the COVID-19 pandemic changing everyday lives around the country, it's no surprise that hunting season will also see changes.

Terry Maninger and Sid Amaro, who both work sales in the archery department at Yellowstone Sporting Goods in Livingston, said they have seen an increase in interest for bow hunting while they get hunters ready for the fall.

"This year, I suspect we're going to see an increase," Maninger said. "The archery sales have kind of been crazy for the last couple months because it's almost been the new social distancing tool."

Maninger added that a lot of their clientele has been new to bow hunting.

"We've had a lot of people — first-time archers — come in (and we) set them up with equipment," he said.

Amaro, who also serves as the chairman of Archery at the Park County Rod & Gun Club, said difficulty in finding ammunition might also push people toward archery.

"Ammo is hard to get (right now) so they're looking for other things to do," he said, adding, "An arrow, I can shoot it, go pick it up and shoot it again."

Some prospective archers may not know where to begin, and both Maninger and Amaro agree there are a lot of steps to take before heading out to hunt with a bow.

The bow

"First thing you're going to have to do is you're going to have to get set up for a bow," Maninger said.

Bows vary in draw weight and draw length and have many different adjustments that can be made, which might scare off new hunters. Maninger said the key is establishing base measurements and finding a bow that won't put stress on the user.

"We've got some good entry-level bows that have got a lot of adjustability to them," he said. "So we can start you out with a reasonable draw weight so that you're not having to pull a lot while you're trying to establish your form, because your form is the biggest key."

Amaro said it's important not to get overzealous when finding the right bow.

"Don't get overbowed. Don't be trying to pull more than what your body can handle," he said.

Try different bows and choose the one that feels right, Amaro added.

"Go into a place and try several bows. Don't let the salesperson talk you into a specific bow. Try several bows if you can," he said.

Maninger warned that hunting with a bow isn't cheap, but a beginner can get the right setup with adjustability as the hunter improves.

"This can be an expensive sport to get into, so we try to make the entry-level stuff affordable," he said. "I've got entry-level setup we can put you into and keep you well below \$1,000 to start out with."

Maninger said he and Amaro have developed a good sense of the right bow for hunters.

"Sid and I have been doing this a long time," he said. "I can usually look at somebody and be within an inch of their draw length."

Maninger said the normal draw length for hunting is about 60 to 70 pounds for men and 45 to 50 pounds for women. However, some hunters will likely need to work their way up to that weight.

"The first thing you're going to find out is God gave you a whole lot of muscles that you've never used before, and as soon as you start pulling a bow back, you're going to feel it," he said. "That's why we like to keep the poundage down low to begin with, so that you're not really putting yourself in any kind of harm while you're doing that."

Draw weight can be increased as hunters gain experience.

"As you start developing the strength through those muscles, the poundage can go up," Maninger said.

The arrow

After the right bow is picked, the next step is finding the right arrows.

"What we try to do is match and the arrow to you," Maninger said. "What's going on with this bow?"

Bow selection is important, but outlying factors play a role in picking the right ones.

"That falls into a personal preference and a pocketbook," Maninger said.

Some arrows can be expensive, like \$200 for a dozen. Some are more affordable and can range from about \$45 for a half dozen.

Maninger said no particular brand sticks out, as personal preference is a large part of the decision process.

"Bows are like firearms, cars and everything else — some of them prefer this brand of arrow and some of them prefer a different one," he said.

More importantly, Maninger said the broadhead plays a large role in success.

"The biggest factor is broadhead," he said. "There are so many different choices out there. We can make recommendations."



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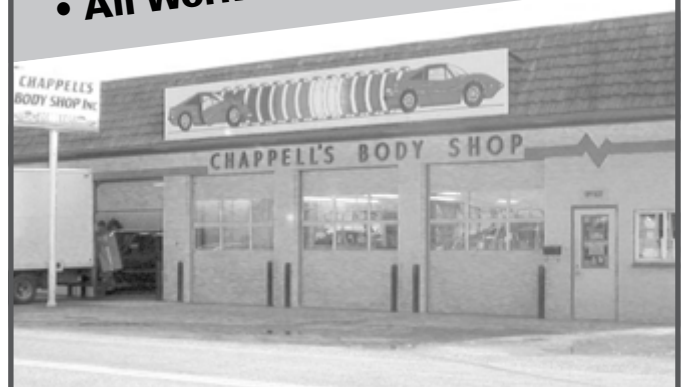
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Landowners keep land open for hunting with Block Management Areas

By Nate Howard
Enterprise Staff Writer

Andrea Sarrazin wakes before 6:30 a.m. during the hunting season to greet hunters at her door in the foothills of the Crazy Mountains in the Shields Valley.

Most of the hunters are pursuing deer with firearms, a few are archers. Some are new faces, some have been hunting the Sarrazin's land for decades, some come from out of state but all are welcome.

Andrea said she likes meeting the hunters and hearing their stories.

She explains the rules, including no smoking, walk-in only and where they may and may not hunt as a safety precaution from shooting their home, outbuildings and livestock.

Sarrazin said her father-

in-law often welcomed hunters to the family's ranch and she's continuing the tradition with a little more structure through the Block Management Area program of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

Sarrazin said they receive \$10 per hunter from the FWP and they limit the number of hunters to six per day. But it's not for the money. It's about tradition and supporting the hunting culture, especially for the youth hunt.

Hunters also help keep wildlife from feeding on their crop or damaging hay bales, she said.

"If you don't open up your land to hunt deer or elk, you can't complain about crop damage," said Sarrazin.

Andrea and her husband Joe Sarrazin have been enrolled in the program for

17 years.

They are one of about 100 landowners enrolled in 529,000 acres of 87 Block Management Areas in Region 3, which includes Park and adjacent counties.

FWP Region 3 information and education manager Morgan Jacobsen said in an email Region 3 has held steady at around 100 cooperators enrolled in the Block Management program, which started in 1985.

Jacobsen said the program was an idea from FWP with support from hunters, landowners and legislators — to provide additional access opportunities for hunters throughout the state.

Compensation for the landowner

Landowners may receive a complimentary

sportsman's license, limited liability protection, live-stock loss reimbursement, and compensation based on hunter days (up to \$15,000) to offset potential public hunting impacts. FWP also provides signs, maps, permission books, and on some BMAs, staff to patrol and assist hunters. Program funding comes from the sale of various licenses, including the resident and nonresident base hunting license fee, non resident upland game bird licenses, nonresident combination deer/elk licenses and SuperTag license revenue.

Landowner rights

Landowners in the BMA program receive limited liability protection by participating in the program.

See **BMA**, Page 18



Landowners enrolled in the Block Management Area hunting program post signs to notify hunters of the location and where to seek permission.

Enterprise photo by Nate Howard

Family, from Page 8

Our children, Raelyn, 9, and Wyatt, 6, are included on all of our hunting excursions. Kyle remembers me being "very" pregnant with Wyatt and harvesting a cow elk.

He says watching me trek out into the hills in large amounts of snow, spotting an animal and laying prone to shoot with a substantial baby belly as a barrier, was fun to watch.

It was a bonus that I was able to harvest an elk that day, though, granted, Kyle had to pack it out!

When I think back to some of my favorite family hunting memories, I recall a time when Raelyn was only 3 years old and we went archery hunting near Clyde Park.

Raelyn was a trooper hiking in, never complaining.

It was a beautiful fall day. Once we reached our destination and were sitting quietly for 30 minutes or so, I looked over at Raelyn who was peacefully napping all covered up in my camo jacket.

My thoughts immediately drifted to how blessed we were to be in the company of nature's complete silence and in a space that Raelyn felt safe to nap.

Safe spaces for my family are important — just as equally important are safe spaces for wildlife. Our family owns a small parcel of land just outside of Livingston.

We know how important it is that the local wildlife feel safe on our land. When it is not hunting season, we enjoy watching the deer bring their fawns down to the creek for a drink.

Being able to appreciate the beauty of the animals we are harvesting is important to this family. Showing our children that the animals they are harvesting are more than just a steak on the table, but a life that is sacrificed so another can be nourished is frequent conversation.

I hold a great appreciation for how beautiful the wildlife are outside of hunting season and an equal appreciation for what they provide for my family during the hunting season.

This year, Raelyn will turn 10 in September. She is anxiously awaiting being able to participate in the apprentice hunter program that is offered in Montana.

Kyle has been working with Raelyn on shot placements, ethical

shooting distances and other areas of teaching to prepare her for her hopeful first deer harvest this fall.

While Wyatt is still too young to harvest a big-game animal, he enjoys target practice and trekking around the hills scouting for the fall hunts.

Kyle is the owner of Freedom Weaponry, a local gunsmith company in Livingston. Firearm safety is a common topic of discussion and something that we hope to pass down to our children.

We hope the tradition of family hunting will be one that sticks with our kids and future generations to come.

These days, Kyle is the more prominent hunter of the family. He enjoys hunting elk, deer, bear and an occasional waterfowl excursion. During season, it is rare to see him at home but rather in the woods exploring and hoping for a harvest.

He pours his heart and soul into making sure the freezer is full for his family each fall. Knowing where your food comes from is of high importance, and you don't get any fresher than big game harvests!



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BMA, from Page 14

Montana code 70-16-302 states: A person who uses property, including property owned or leased by a public entity, for recreational purposes, with or without permission, does so without any assurance from the landowner that the property is safe for any purpose if the person does not give a valuable consideration to the landowner in exchange for the recreational use of the property.

In addition, landowners in Block Management do not forfeit any private property rights by enrolling land, including the right to deny access for cause and the right to enforce ranch rules. Every BMA has rules specific to that BMA. It is the hunter's responsibility to know the rules for the BMA where they're hunting.

Region 3 2019 Block Management Program



Is the amount of land enrolled limited?

These are limited only by available funding, but there is no cap on acreage or number of cooperators.

Where does the public get a map to find BMAs in the area?

Hunters are highly encouraged to consult FWP's online Hunt Planner for block management information. They can do this by visiting <http://fwp.mt.gov/gis/maps/huntPlanner>. FWP's hunt planner contains mapping tools and other information that can help hunters prepare before they go afield. The hunt planner will also provide the most current Block Management updates and help regional FWP offices maintain social distancing. Current printed maps and Hunting Access guides are also available annually at FWP offices around Aug. 15. These can also be mailed to you by request.

Who does a landowner contact if interested in enrolling in the BMA?

Contact your district biologist, game warden or regional FWP office.

Is BMA land focused on any particular game, elk or deer?

Each BMA is unique in rules and opportunity. But statewide, opportunities exist to hunt mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, pronghorn, black bear, bighorn sheep, moose, upland game birds, waterfowl and turkeys, with the applicable license(s).

The numbers (2019):

Region 3 consists of over 11.5 million acres in southwestern Montana, or 12% of the entire state land base. Public land, including the Forest Service and BLM, accounts for over 6.9 million acres in the region.

A total of 4.6% of Region 3 is enlisted in the Block Management Area program.

The BMA program has opened over 529,000 acres to form 87 Block Management Areas in Region 3.

Most block management areas in Region 3 provide opportunity for deer and elk hunting. However, upland birds, antelope, moose and waterfowl are also available. Approximately 50% of the elk harvest in the state occurs in Region 3.

There are two general types of BMAs:

Type I BMAs:

Areas where hunters administer their own permission. This includes areas that use sign-in boxes, places that do not require hunters to obtain specific permission, or places where some other method of self-administered permission is used. Typically, Type I BMAs have no limits on the number of hunters using the area, although certain parking areas may impose limits on the total numbers of vehicles per area.

Type II BMAs:

Areas where someone other than the hunter administers permission. This includes areas where landowners issue permission

slips, department staff administers permission, or some other permission method is used. Reservations, pasture assignments, limits on hunter numbers, and other hunter management methods are often used on Type II BMAs.

BMA Rules

As you enjoy the hunting access provided by this program, be sure to obey the rules the landowners have requested. This is a voluntary program designed to benefit you. Enjoy this opportunity and respect landowner rights.

Sign-in boxes

It is important that all hunters register at access points on the BMAs that use sign-in rosters before hunting. This provides important hunter use information and serves as a permission slip to be on the property to hunt. Be sure to fill out all information completely and accurately.

Current information

Map boundaries, rules or permission information may change from year to year. Be sure to obtain current maps and permission information every year.

Reservations

Reservations are available on some BMAs. No reservations will be accepted or issued prior to Aug. 22. Failure to show up for a reserved slot on a BMA denies other hunters opportunity. Make every effort to cancel reservations if you are aware you will not be able to make your arranged time. Be aware that on some BMAs, failure to show without prior notice is grounds for exclusion from further hunting opportunities in the area. Making reservations on multiple BMAs at the same time is grounds for exclusion from hunting any BMA.

Weeds

Noxious weeds are becoming a serious concern to landowners. Please do your part to limit the spread of weeds. Try to keep equipment clean and avoid driving, parking or walking through weeds.

For more information, contact:

Morgan Jacobsen, Region 3 Information and Education Manager, Bozeman office, phone(406) 994-4042 or <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/hunterAccess/blockman>.

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Fish, Wildlife and Parks plans for shoulder seasons

By Dwight Harriman
Enterprise Staff Writer

There will be an elk shoulder season for hunting districts in, and in the general region of, Park and Sweet Grass counties this year, according to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The following hunting districts in the region will have some sort of shoulder season: HD309, HD311 (North of Highway 84 only), HD312, HD313, HD317, HD390, HD391, HD393, HD570.

Just what is a shoulder season and why are they held?

"The primary purpose of elk shoulder seasons is to reduce elk populations in areas that are over population objective as outlined in the Montana Elk Management Plan," the FWP website says.

"A shoulder season is a firearms season that occurs outside the 5-week general firearms and archery seasons," the website continues. "While most shoulder seasons focus on antlerless elk harvest on private land and are not intended to replace or reduce harvest during the existing archery or 5-week general firearms seasons, a few are meant to address problematic distribution of elk."

"Shoulder seasons will vary in timing and function from hunting district to hunting district," the site says. "In some districts the shoulder seasons will start as early as Aug. 15 and go as late as Feb. 15."

Shoulder seasons were first introduced during the 2015-16 hunting season, Morgan E. Jacobsen, Information and Education Program manager for FWP's Region 3, said in an email.

While there aren't shoulder seasons for deer, "there have been 'late seasons' for deer previously," Jacobsen wrote.

Shoulder seasons, which are established by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission, seek to bring elk populations to objective within three years, but that can be shorter or longer if necessary,

Jacobsen said in a recent interview.

Biologists carefully monitor shoulder seasons and work with landowners to balance private property rights with public trust management, Jacobsen said.

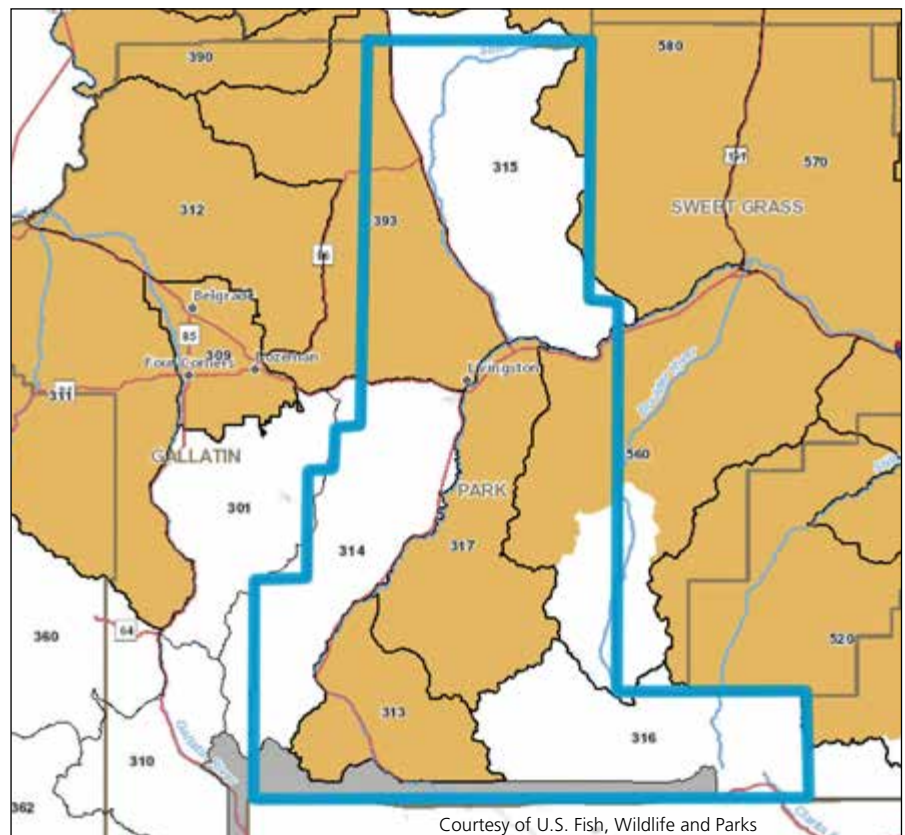
"It does provide additional opportunity for hunters who are looking to put meat in the freezer" and helps landowners where numbers are especially high, he said of shoulder seasons.

The FWP website sums it up: "Shoulder season success will depend on landowners, hunters and FWP working closely together in a cooperative and respectful fashion."



Photo by Jacob Frank/National Park Service

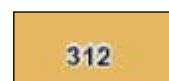
A cow elk grazes in snow of the Madison Mountains.



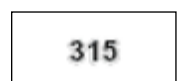
Courtesy of U.S. Fish, Wildlife and Parks



Park County Boundary



Districts with shoulder season.



Districts with no shoulder season.

Archery, from Page 11

The prep

"Practice, practice, practice," Amaro said when asked about the next steps after getting the right gear.

Maninger shared similar advice. "One of the things that you're going to have to do is you're going to have to spend time in the field learning them," he said.

Rifle hunters will also have to take the time to practice, as their skills won't necessarily transfer over.

"If you've shot with a rifle before, you're two, three, 400 yards," Maninger said. "Well now, you've got to bring this thing in to 30 to 40 yards, and it takes some work. It takes patience."

Maninger also recommended getting a better knowledge of the lay of the land before heading into unknown territory.

"Just drive the county roads," he said. "Get out in the fields and talk to your farmers and ranchers and kind of coordinate with them. Some do allow bow hunting and some don't — it just happens all over the place. But you need to establish contact with them so you can find out whether he would let you in and then keep

up the communication with them."

Maninger left interested hunters with one final piece of advice — avoid trends.

"Don't get caught up in the big fads," he said. "There's a lot of them out there. Just because you walk into a bow shop, don't feel that you should drop a large amount of money to get started."

Similarly, Amaro said hunters should be fully aware of what they are purchasing.

"Ask questions," he said. "Some people feel if they get to asking too many questions they get to being a pain or feel foolish, but it's not. No matter how little the question is, ask it."

The game

"Everybody's after the elk," Maninger said when asked about the type of animals bow hunters should aim for.

However, the easiest for hunters to both find and kill would be a whitetail doe, he added.

"Probably the easiest thing for an archer to start off with is a whitetail D-tag, because there are does everywhere," he said.

Maninger said hunters will need to use all of their knowledge gathered while picking equipment to properly impale an animal.

"The ability for penetration comes down to shot placement and draw weight and arrow weight and arrow speed," he said.

Some of the newer technology has made it easier for bow hunters to look toward bigger game.

"The technology on the arrows and the broad heads is just changing so dramatically anymore that they're finding out that you really don't have to have an 80-pound bow anymore to be effective on an elk," he said.

The license

All bow hunters must be properly licensed before heading out to hunt. All information for acquiring a license can be found at fwp.mt.gov/hunting/licenses/all/requirements.html.

Due to COVID-19, bow hunters are able to take their hunter education courses online, without in-person instruction. For more info on the online course, visit <http://fwp.mt.gov/education/hunter>.



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Elk in the Crazies

By Elias Baer
Yellowstone Newspapers

The Crazy Mountains are host to some of the best elk hunting in southern Montana and, according to local wildlife biologists, are a key element in maintaining the ecological health of the area.

According to Justin Paugh, wildlife biologist for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' District 3, home to the Crazy Mountains, none of the biological or ecological factors have put stress on the Crazy Mountain elk herd.

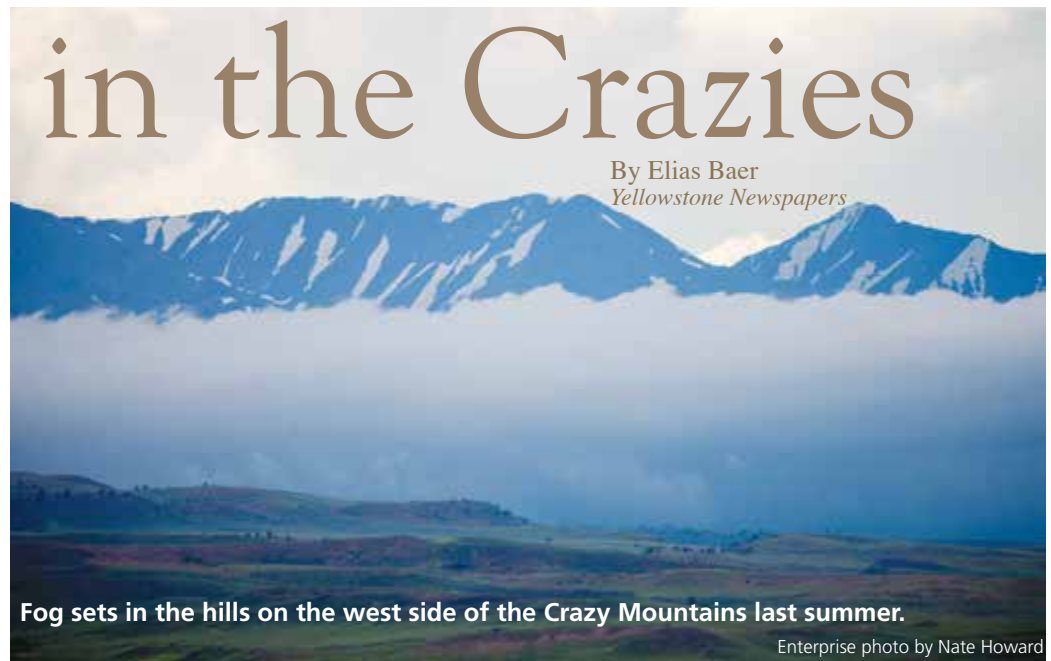
"Rather, the elk herd is putting stress on the habitat in some cases," he said.

Weather is one of the major ecological factors that can put strain on an elk herd, but, according to Paugh, that hasn't been a problem for Crazy Mountain elk, and usually isn't.

"Winters with above-average snowfall and colder-than-average temperatures cause more overwinter mortality on elk than mild winters. We typically don't see much winter mortality on adult elk in the Crazies," Paugh said. "We can, however, see some mortality in calves with more severe winters."

According to the National Weather Service in Billings, this winter was by no means severe in the Crazy Mountains. In fact, temperatures were close to normal, weather station observers located in the region have said, and snowfall was slightly below average.

Summer precipitation is another important limiting



Fog sets in the hills on the west side of the Crazy Mountains last summer.

Enterprise photo by Nate Howard

factor on elk herds, as it affects the forage available for elk to eat in the summer and fall.

"More summer forage means larger calves going into the winter with a higher chance of surviving the winter," Paugh said. "It also means healthier adult cows going into the winter which are more likely to have a healthy calf the following spring."

According to Joe Lester at the NWS in Billings, "It's been drier than usual for the summer. In general, for the water year, we've seen 1 to 3 inches below normal, which is 80 percent of normal. For the summer months in particular we're running 2 to 3 inches below normal, which is between 70 and 80 percent of the normal summer precipitation."

The dry season could potentially affect the health of the elk herd going into the upcoming winter and might lead to hunters seeing a somewhat weaker harvest in future years if calves struggle to

survive the winter.

Biological factors, like predation and disease, are another limiting factor for elk herds, but according to Paugh, that doesn't seem to be a problem for the Crazy Mountain herd.

"Currently, predation and disease don't appear to be limiting elk numbers. Hunting is the primary factor with the potential to manage elk numbers," Paugh said.

The Crazy Mountains host a full suite of predators, including mountain lions, wolves, black bears and smaller predators like coyotes and even the occasional badger. Despite the presence of these predators, the elk population has shown a steady increase for the past 20 years.

"Predation is not holding elk numbers in check. From a resource standpoint, the Crazy Mountains provide the habitat and forage to support higher elk numbers than

we currently have," Paugh said.

But the resource standpoint is not the only important factor for biologists. Social attitudes also play a heavy hand in determining the desirable number of elk in a given area.

The Crazy Mountains may be able to host even more elk than currently inhabit the area, but FWP "management goals" are based largely on local tolerance for the animal. The management goal set by FWP is a total of 1,975 elk in the Crazies, less than one-third of the existing population.

"That (management) goal is based heavily on social tolerance for elk. When elk numbers get high, they can cause extensive damage to agricultural operations on private lands," Paugh said. "These include damage to standing alfalfa and grain crops, standing pasture grass and haystacks."

See **Elk in the Crazies**, Page 24



A herd of elk migrate along a ridge in southwest Montana.

Photo by Jacob W. Frank/National Park Service

Elk in the Crazies, from Page 23

In the Crazies, elk hunting is an important limitation on the herds in the area that can help maintain a healthy ecosystem by limiting the potential for spreading disease and over-foraging. In fact, according to Paugh, hunting is "the primary tool" available for managing elk numbers in the Crazies.

"In some parts of the crazies there are large concentrations of elk during the hunting season and throughout the winter months. Up to 1,000 elk can sometimes be found in a single herd. Having large concentrations of elk creates an ideal situation for diseases such as brucellosis or CWD to spread quickly through the population," Paugh said. "When these large concentrations of elk stay in the same area for long periods of time they could also cause damage to forage resources through overgrazing."

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) and brucellosis are the two diseases that wild-

life biologists find most concerning in terms of elk and deer. As for brucellosis, elk and deer throughout Montana have been found to be positive of the disease. Cattle catch brucellosis from wildlife and the disease causes cattle to miscarry, which is concerning to local ranchers. However, as of 2018, ranchers in Sweet Grass county have been required to vaccinate all cattle over 12 months old. Rigorous testing and vaccinations have reduced concerns for ranchers.

CWD is a different story altogether. Although the disease has not yet been detected in Sweet Grass County, Paugh said it is only a matter of time. CWD is mostly prevalent in deer and the FWP is more likely to detect it in deer before it is found in local elk.

"A recent detection near Bozeman and past detections between Billings and Red Lodge are our (Sweet Grass county) closest cases.

However, the disease will continue to gradually spread across the state. Unfortunately, there is no way to stop the disease," Paugh said. "All we can do is implement actions to try and slow the spread and keep prevalence as low as possible in areas where the disease is present."

The most recent aerial surveys conducted by the FWP shows about 6,200 elk in the Crazy Mountains, and that population has been increasing steadily over the past two decades. In the year 2000, there were roughly 2,200 elk in the crazy mountains, according to the FWP, a 300 percent increase in ten years.

"The Crazies are made up of two hunting districts. Within those districts we have a variety of licenses available for hunters to harvest either-sex or antlerless only elk. We have a long hunting season starting with archery season in early September and running all the

way to January 15th in some portions of the mountain range," Paugh said.

Throughout the general hunting season a high percentage of the Crazy Mountain elk population reside on private lands, meaning hunter harvest of elk on private lands is a key element to successful elk management.

In some areas, specifically in the Crazies, special "damage hunts" are held in places where elk are causing significant damage to standing crops. Damage hunts can sometimes begin as early as August 15 and run as late as February 15.

"These damage hunts can only be conducted on private lands that offer public hunting access during the general season to a level that meets statutory requirements. The long hunting seasons and high numbers of antlerless elk licenses are available as a tool to try and reduce elk numbers," Paugh said.

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Photo courtesy of Brittany Sukhbir

Kyle Sukhbir scouts for elk in southwest Montana.

Hunting in a pandemic

By Elias Baer

Yellowstone Newspapers

It's no secret that Montanans enjoy spending time taking in the beautiful slice of paradise they call their backyard, from camping to skiing, fishing and hunting. In the midst of a global pandemic, that's one thing that hasn't changed.

According to Chris Blueher, co-owner of Yellowstone Sporting Goods in Livingston, COVID-19 has people literally running for the hills.

"Sales on everything is up," Blueher said. "We're seeing a lot more people trying to get outside across the board," saying that people are purchasing everything from camping equipment to hunting and fishing gear.

At The Fort in Big Timber, owner Jeff Cowell said sales in the sporting goods department are "pretty close to where we were last year. Gun and ammo sales

are way up, but I think that's more of a political issue," he added.

"We're seeing a lot of people trying to subsidize meat costs since the price of meat is so high at the grocery stores," Blueher said. "License sales are the same as a normal year, maybe a little higher."

Meat prices have indeed skyrocketed since the pandemic began sweeping the nation in March. On average, national beef prices have grown from \$3.94 per pound in March to \$5.65 in June, according to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But expensive meat isn't the only reason people are running for the hills — there also isn't much else to do with free time these days. Dinner and a movie? Canceled. Dinner and an evening float down the Yellowstone? Go for it.

See **Pandemic**, Page 28

Pandemic, from Page 27

As fishing season winds down and the rivers begin to get low, many outdoorsmen are looking forward to the start of hunting season in the fall. With license sales staying around normal in Montana, it is safe to assume that hunters are still hunting, but outfitters are feeling pressure.

Local hunting outfitters rely largely on out of state customers to keep their business running, so a local love for hunting isn't enough for them.

Craig Neal, owner of Broken Hart Adventures in Livingston, said his company relies almost solely on out-of-state visitors and most of his reservations have been canceled due to the pandemic.

"We had 20 elk hunters scheduled and in the books, ready to go, and so far I've had to refund all but four of them," Neal said. "That's a \$100,000 loss right there."

Out-of-state travel is certainly down in Montana compared with previous years, but hunting guides like Neal have been hit especially hard by the pandemic. Hunting trips are expensive and require a lot of planning and scheduling, which Neal said has been hard to accomplish as things continue to change frequently.

"The government has made it pretty much impossible for us to have a normal hunting season. No one can make a schedule because things keep changing. People that were here are getting scared away," Neal said. "I've seen a complete lack of leadership and because of that, no one's going to do anything in Montana as far as hunting goes this year. You can ask any outfitter and he'd tell you the same thing."

According to FWP Licensing Business Analyst Neal Whitney, out-of-state hunters are still purchasing licenses at the same rate as previous years, even if they aren't actually hunting with a licensed outfitter.

"There is an online application process for non-residents seeking a license, and we received roughly the same number of applications compared with previous years, and maybe even a few more," Whitney said. "One thing we have seen is a large increase in the number of fishing licenses sold this past spring when compared with previous years," and that includes both residents and non-residents. While outfitters may be suffering from the loss of customers, which could lead to the local economy feeling a blow as well, the good news is that from a psychological standpoint,

getting outside is healthy for an individual's mental well being, and states like Montana could see an overall happier general population than other states with less recreational options.

"Engaging in outdoors activity has been widely accepted for years as being beneficial for our physical health, but getting out into nature is also beneficial for our mental health, especially during this pandemic," said Nicole Rosenwald, SWLC, of Delich Counseling Services LLC.

"Spending time outdoors in nature can improve mood and focus, bring an elevated sense of calm, and help to reduce anxiety, stress and depressive symptoms. To increase the benefit of being outdoors, engage with nature in mindful ways with slow, deep, measured breathing. Also, really take time to connect with your surroundings by putting away electronic devices and intentionally focus on your senses of what you are seeing and hearing."

Hunting is a great way to interact with the natural world on a primal level, allowing one to intimately interact with the circle of life. Montanans suffering from boredom and depression have the opportunity to recreate in ways other people in the U.S. do not, and they ought to take advantage of it for their own sake.

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Good hunting stories are always easy on the palate

By Ralph Bartholdt

The elk hung tight in the tangled growth and downed trees, snapping limbs, whining and chuckling out of sight and far enough below us that any approach would end in a bust.

Down there in the murky hollow, the tall brush was laced with snaky vines that wrapped around hunters' legs, tangled their bows and provided the cover for a bull to watch unseen anything sneaking in.

The elk stuck to the safety of the blowdown and the snag backwards dank of wait-a-minute vines, the sweaty bottom of the canyon where your pupils looked like nickels as they adjusted to the lack of light.

We waited for him on the high ground where Ponderosa pine mixed with the clumps of ocean spray and syringa that provided hiding spots in the otherwise open glade.

If he decided that our bugles and cow calls had overstepped the line of civil discourse, and their insults overcame his fear of injury, the timid bull would likely sneak up the draw of an old stream bed to have a look.

Because it was grass and duff covered, the overgrown stream bed would be quiet under foot, thick with fallen needles, rotting leaves and grass, so that is where I set up.

I had snuggled into a pocket of fir just below the glade as I waited for the bull to pass within 40 yards, or close enough to offer a shot with my bow.

I had made the decision after much deliberation that happened in about 3 seconds.

At first I was in an open, sloping meadow hidden behind the heft of a big



Ponderosa. But my mind started smoking because the bull had hung up down there in the black hole for an hour or more while my efforts to slide down on my belly and sneak in after the anxious bull had me sweating like a fry cook.

My noise and movements had quieted the bull as limbs snapped under the soles of my ratty Danner good-luck boots before climbing quietly back up the hill to JP my long-time hunting pal.

JP is a man whose patience and calm in the face of invariable defeat is countered by the sack of Juju he carries when he hunts with me. The bag of

seasoning, small bones and Chicklets, I think, is supplemented by occasional chants, dances and eye rolls depending on the decisions I make in the heat of the moment.

These are the decisions that decide whether tags are cut or the ride home is filled with an awkward, 100-yard silence.

I scrambled back up to where JP sat like a pile of pine cones, stroking a bugle tube with a vacant look as if he had resigned himself to the fact that he would not be home in time for his kid's piano recital. Camouflaged and grease-painted, he sat in the shade of the piney hill 100 yards

above the estranged bull elk that we assumed was a raghorn given his squeals and flustered appeals for us to just go away.

When the bull stopped squealing we heard hooves stomping up the hill.

"Here he comes," JP said blankly, already aware that nothing good could happen from here forward.

I stumbled downhill toward the big yellow pine in the overgrown meadow and waited there as thoughts ricocheted off the walls of my skull.

Over there is better!
No, here! Wait! Maybe!

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Elk, from Page 29

Then I dove into the shady draw and slid down behind a clump of fir certain the bull would choose the draw as a safe shortcut to reach JP's calls.

The six pointer — bigger than we had anticipated — clomped uphill like a climber knocking his toes into the dirt to get a better grip. He huffed hard with each breath and fueled by adrenaline, the bull focused on the place where he thought an adversary was messing with him, and maybe running off with one of his cows.

There was a problem. The bull, after having spent an hour or more being teased and prodded, ridiculed maybe, by what seemed to be an out-of-town bull frolicking with a few of the neighborhood girls decided enough is enough. He had spent the time massaging his confidence into a honed fury. He shunned cover now and walked deliberately uphill through the open scab brush of the overgrown meadow and directly past the fat trunk of the yellow pine that I had left for this place.

As I watched from the shady draw, the bull cut a wake through the September sunlight too far away for my arrow, but very near the abyss of my sanity.

JP is a journalist and former roofer. There are times when he considers trading in his white-collar job for what he once knew: the dirty T-shirts, blistering suntans, tepid water bottles, fat paychecks, and aching knees on a broiling incline three stories above residential subdivisions.

He is mostly undecided about the outcome of this tug of war. Sometimes when left alone, his past endeavors are burdensome and worthy of deep reflection.

On this afternoon on a

mountain in the Western elk woods, hunkered in the shade playing with an elk call JP's seemingly-idyllic past met head on with red-eyed sinew and bone.

The 6-point elk found JP a hollow image of the bull he had come all this way to fight, but better than nothing at all.

I lost track of the bull as it stomped uphill but when the cow calling and grunts and squeals with which JP had entertained himself stopped rather suddenly, I

behind clumps of fir, waving his arms, but the elk kept coming.

"This way!" I encouraged.

It happened too fast to enjoy, or soak up, but not to reenact later as a simple pleasure.

What took place in the clump of fir out of sight I cannot say, but JP finally emerged, sweating, shaking displaying an emotional frailty usually reserved for the finish line at Saratoga.

Elk hunting in heavy fog one morning, another hunter's frustration won out after an hour of calling. The hunter stood and turned to see what he described as "the Hartford bull," standing calmly 30 feet behind him in the mist and the man almost exited his boots. When he pulled himself off the ground, the elk was gone as soundlessly as he had sneaked in.

As archery elk season approaches in parts of



A hunter brings his harvest of elk into Gardiner in this Yellowstone National Park photo taken circa 1949 by R. Robinson, staff photographer for the park.

stood up.

There came a yell.

"He's right behind me!"

Running out from behind a knoll of trees on the ridge overhead was JP and the 6-point bull, just as JP had intimated, was not far behind.

The scene was a sad vaudeville. Both man and elk appeared like an old-time movie of a farm animal chasing a grain bucket.

"What do I do?" JP yelled frantically.

He made brief stands

"Did you see that?"

"He was in your pocket," I said.

"He chased me. I had to throw sticks at him to make him leave," JP said. "I thought I was going to die."

The pocket elk made it a memorable hunt.

A man told me of shooting a raghorn bull at 5 yards that was being chased by a wolf in Idaho. When he saw the hunter, the wolf made a somersault in its efforts to stop and reverse course.

Central Montana, scads of hunters will meet their own opportunities and make do with their own successes and failures, naming them whatever they choose.

I'll remember the pocket bull, and the Hartford elk, but there were others.

Steaks in the freezer and another set of antlers, if it comes to that, are a sound compromise, but the memory of a good elk hunt provides its own nutrition.

It's reusable and often gets better with age.



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Here are a few treasured pictures of our son Sterling with friends and family in the wilderness. I encourage parents to spend time in the outdoors with their family and friends.

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