

Bulletin Number 16

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Current Legislative Sportsmen Issues in Idaho - Sportsman Access and Bonus Point Drawing

By George Dovel

While researching privately owned Idaho hunting parcels offered for lease in September 2005, I contacted Dee Eldridge of St. Anthony to confirm location and availability of game on several leases in his area. Later I asked Mr. Eldridge, who was formerly president of the largest regional sportsman organization in Idaho, what he thought of the increasing trend of leasing private ranches exclusively to small groups of hunters.

He responded with the following letter, including observations about Montana's Block Management Program based on several years of experience hunting as a non-resident in Montana. His letter accurately reflects the opinions expressed in the letters and emails we have received from sportsmen concerning Idaho's special privilege controlled hunts and its hunter access program.

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

It is my opinion that each passing year there is a growing population that has lost all trust in the Fish & Game Departments of the western states, and therefore many are turning to privately owned ranches. The different access programs all have a major pitfall.

For instance, Montana and its block management units. It is a very small percentage of the ranchers that are participating.

In 2004 in the Dillon, Montana area, the Department had four or five block management units, and a high percentage of the remaining privately owned ranches were posted no trespassing. Come opening morning of the general season the handful of block management units were overwhelmed by hunters.

Within an hour after sunrise, the game had left and entered nearby posted lands. As a result, there were a lot of very disappointed hunters.

Hunting is slowly but surely becoming a rich man's sport. In my opinion, in Idaho our F&G commissioners are absolutely not doing their job that they signed on to do. The commissioners are to fulfill the wishes of the majority of the sportsmen from the area they represent.

Instead the commissioners listen solely to the Department and are constantly under the pressure of increasing revenue. The ordinary grassroots sportsmen

and women of Idaho are being ignored and forced out of their hunting and fishing heritage because they cannot compete in the increasing cost of their sport.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a Commission that held town hall meetings and seriously listened to and represented the wishes of sportsmen and women of Idaho? A handful of special interest groups and the Department are dictating policy with very little checks and balances by the Commission.

No one should receive favoritism in the opportunities given to hunt and fish in Idaho.

Russell Dee Eldridge
St. Anthony

Wyoming is the only western state where a majority of hunters surveyed continue to express satisfaction with the opportunity to hunt every year, ease in locating a place to hunt, density of game and hunters, and overall quality of the hunt. So what's different there?

Instead of offering extended special privilege controlled hunts to a few hunters who pay more as Idaho does, Wyoming manages its deer and elk properly with general hunting seasons in most units. It achieves higher overall big game harvest success than any other western state by offering every hunter a reasonable chance to harvest game during biologically defensible hunting seasons when the animals are less vulnerable.

Instead of blaming farming and ranching practices for declining game populations, Wyoming Game & Fish has encouraged each generation of landowners to continue to allow reasonable hunter access with minimal compensation.

But in Idaho most of the gates to private land are already closed to hunters. Offering the landowners \$1 or so per acre will not reopen most of those gates.

Protected Deer Increasing on Private Land

The continuous hunting pressure on some Idaho public lands resulting from multiple hunting seasons extending from August through December has caused more deer to spend more time on private land. Each generation of fawns learns that private land offers escape from hunters.

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An increasing number of Idaho farms and ranches are being purchased by wealthy individuals or corporations who express no interest in allowing hunter access. Many are opposed to hunting and others realize it makes more sense to receive more money by leasing the hunting rights to a small group of hunters who will take care of the land than to allow unregulated hunters to damage their private roads, fences, livestock and crops.

Big Game Hunter Access

Idaho's "Access Yes!" program was designed by the same group whose affiliate members have joined Jon Marvel in suing the BLM to reduce or eliminate livestock grazing permits on public lands. There is little wonder the program has not been accepted by very many of the ranchers they are trying to drive out of business.

Although Idaho Wildlife Federation and IDFG planners copied the general name given to a group of Wyoming access programs (with an exclamation point [!] added), the two states' big game hunter access programs bear little resemblance otherwise. In order to participate in the Wyoming Hunter Management Area (HMA) program, landowners must provide 1,000 big game hunter days each year - or one landowner in an association of landowners must enroll at least 10,000 acres in the program.

The landowner specifies the number of hunters that will be allowed to hunt each year and Wyoming G&F manages the hunters, patrols the area, and relieves the landowner of liability. The landowner receives a modest fee of \$1,890-\$2,268 for enrolling 10,000 or more acres, while owners of smaller parcels in an association receive up to \$5.53 per acre depending on the parcel size.

Hunters who harvest game on HMA lands are required to fill out a landowner coupon for game harvested on deeded land and leave it with the landowner. This provides Wyoming G&F with an accurate record of date, location, antler points, etc. of harvested game, as well as the success rate for participating hunters in each HMA.

Idaho's "Access Yes!" Has Flaws

Only one of Idaho's "Access Yes!" properties - Potlatch - would meet the 10,000-acre minimum parcel size (by at least one owner) that is required by Wyoming. Most of the Idaho properties are small islands of access to limited game surrounded by an ocean of posted private lands which provide sanctuary once the shooting starts.

Wyoming's cost per acre of HMA access to 2.4 million acres of private and some public parcels averaged only 19 cents while Idaho's reported cost was about seven times that. Unlike Wyoming, Idaho has no record of hunter participation, success, or effectiveness of the program. Our observation of one parcel during the 2005 big game hunting season indicates the cost exceeded \$100.00 per big game hunter day.

Currently most of the cost of all access programs and land administration in Wyoming are funded by

sportsmen donations. When Idaho sportsmen were surveyed about funding for Access Yes!, many said that *donations* by those who utilize the access should be a major source of funding.

When the program was adopted by the F&G Commission, it designated donations and selling raffle chances for "superhunts" as the two permanent funding sources. But the handful of sportsmen who promoted the access program want everyone to share the costs rather than just those who use the access.

What Happened To Idaho Donations?

With passage of SB 1171 in the 2005 session, an additional \$100,000 from the Fish and Game Fund paid by all license holders was added to the other two funding sources. But user donations are not significant and the income falls far short of the amount needed to reach the Department's enrollment goal of one million acres.

During FY 2005 Wyoming distributed **\$645,468** in *sportsmen donations* to landowners enrolled in three different access programs. In return sportsmen received hunting access on the 2.4 million acres, and private fishing access on 273 lake acres and 86 miles of fishing streams.

Idaho's Access Yes! program appears to be patterned more after a combination of Wyoming's Walk-in Fishing Areas and Walk-in Hunting Areas than on big game HMAs. It includes fishing and hunting for small game and birds on smaller parcels, but lacks the controls that are necessary to prevent abuses of the property and over-harvest of big game.

The vast majority of Idaho sportsmen do not use Idaho's access program and many argue that it is unfair to require them to subsidize its cost. They used that same argument when the cost of improving upland bird habitat was shifted from upland bird hunters to all hunters but the vocal bird hunting minority prevailed.

Thirty-seven Million Acres of Access

Idaho hunters who complain that they have no place to hunt appear not to realize that they have **37 million acres** of public land to hunt on if access to that land is preserved. But twenty-five years of adding special privilege big game hunts *extending from mid-summer to early winter* is the major reason for the decline of game species on the 70 percent of Idaho that is public land.

A significant portion of big game losses to severe winters, drought and predators can be biologically traced to depleted fat reserves resulting from the stress of extended late seasons, and to allowing antlerless harvests when there is not a surplus of game.

Even if the goal of signing up one million acres of Access Yes! lands can be achieved, spending an extra \$1.5 million or so each year to provide it is simply applying an expensive Band-Aid to cover up a growing cancer that requires radical surgery to cure. Unless the special privilege extended hunts are eliminated the end result will simply be another million acres with depleted big game.

Why Bonus Point Systems?

In the 1970s when former IDFG Director Joseph Greenley cut deer and elk hunting seasons to 30 days or less with simultaneous opening dates, halted antlerless harvests and *eliminated all special privilege controlled hunts*, there was no need for a Bonus Point or Preference Point system. Informed sportsmen and their legislators who demanded these changes knew they would restore healthy game populations on public lands.

They also knew that limited controlled hunts (LCH) are only used as a management tool to prevent an excessive game harvest in small local populations during periods when animals are extremely vulnerable. In all other circumstances, LCH are used (A) to give extra harvest opportunity to a favored few by taking it away from the average hunter, and/or (B) to increase IDFG license revenue.

It would require an entire bulletin to cite all of the examples of IDFG misuse of special privilege hunts and other unnecessary controlled hunts in 2005. The following are examples of deer LCH that have created the demand for a bonus point system:

1. Mule Deer Buck Bonus Hunts During The Rut – In most units Archery hunters are permitted to kill bucks, does or fawns from Aug. 30 - Sep.30; then any-weapon hunters can kill bucks (either sex for youth hunters) from Oct. 10-Oct. 31; then a few special privilege LCH hunters can kill mule deer bucks during the peak of the rut from Nov. 10 – Nov. 24.

With a handful of exceptions, Wyoming G&F does not allow this and points out that November buck hunts deprive all general season hunters of the opportunity to see and harvest those bucks the following year. Odds against drawing these late buck permits are so poor that a preference point system (not a bonus point system) would be required.

2. Unnecessary Bonus Antlerless LCH - The use of LCH to regulate the entire harvest of several hundred does and fawns in a unit is far less accurate than limiting antlerless harvest to a selected portion of the general season. In many of these units there are fewer applicants than the number of permits available and in others the number of applicants exceeds the number of permits by too small a percentage to affect harvest.

In both cases LCH are used to *increase revenue* rather than regulate harvest. And although there are no applications, drawings or permit processing with Landowner Permission Elk Hunts, hunters are still charged \$14 extra, instead of just the \$1.50 vendor fee for printing and recording the permit.

3. LCH "Trophy" Units – An increasing number of Idaho big game units have been quietly closed to general season mature buck hunting to emulate Utah's exclusive Limited Entry Trophy Hunts. Buck hunting is permitted during the rut in these units and the odds of drawing a permit are so poor that neither bonus nor preference point systems will help.

More than 30,000 LCH deer and elk permits currently exist in Idaho big game units that also have a general season for that same species and sex. These permits, which cannot be justified either biologically or socially, are a major cause of declining hunter numbers.

As we discussed in the Oct.-Nov. Outdoorsman, when the opportunity to participate in a hunt is limited the only fair system is "First come – first served." A bonus point system may not benefit applicants for limited moose or antelope permits and a preference point system will not help applicants for sheep, goats or other scarce permits.

If the legislature adopts either of these systems now it will have to revisit the issue repeatedly to address protests from hunters who are being discriminated against. If it adopts a preference point or bonus point system, it must also address the hunter who applies to hunt year after year and then cannot hunt one year.

Will he or she lose accumulated points, or be allowed to "buy" another bonus or preference point for that year? If so, is that another example of selling the opportunity to hunt to the highest bidder?

Instead of adopting a single system or multiple systems now with the existing hodge-podge of special privilege hunts, wouldn't it make more sense to have the Commission eliminate all of these superfluous hunts first and start over with proper general seasons as Greenley did in the 1970s?

That would also automatically resolve the issue of selling LAP permits since most landowners and their families would then receive Landowner Appreciation general season tags instead of LCH permits. It would also eliminate the extended big game hunting seasons, which are a major complaint of landowners.

IDFG would then have the opportunity to investigate the first-come first-served LCH system adopted by Alaska in 2005. It cost very little and was easy to implement using priority dates rather than a lottery draw.

Expect Resistance

The special interest groups who benefit from special privilege hunts will no doubt resist any effort to level the playing field by restoring equal harvest opportunity for all with responsible management. The wildlife biologists who have been using special privilege hunts to manipulate hunters during the past 25 years will no doubt claim that LCH are being used properly.

There is no evidence to substantiate that claim and overwhelming evidence to refute it. For example when Utah deer hunters killed too many deer during the 2004 deer season Utah biologists accepted a recommendation from an advisory group to reduce the number of LCH "general season" deer permits in two regions by 2,000.

Later the biologists admitted knowing that the <10 percent cut in LCH permits would not reduce the deer harvest and they cut four days from the end of both seasons to reduce the harvest by 15 percent. Over many years, each western state has developed reliable harvest data to allow precise harvest management based on season length and game vulnerability.

Eliminating extended special privilege hunts will resolve most of the problems we face today.

Dispelling the Myth of Too Many Hunters

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

I am the Chapter Chairman of the Lost River Chapter of S.F.W. I am looking for some statistical numbers of the difference between the numbers of deer tags sold at the present time and in the 1980's.

I am under the impression there are fewer tags sold now than then. My chapter says I am full of it and do not believe there are less hunters now.

Please fill me in about the number of hunters now vs. the 80's and also the number of deer tags sold now and in the 80's.

Bill Scouten

When I responded to Mr. Scouten's email, which has been slightly edited to preserve privacy, I sent him a work sheet showing IDFG deer tag sales dating back to 1952. The sheet included a breakdown of resident, nonresident and free resident senior tags, and the multiple extra tags that were available in some years.

Correction

In the July-Aug. 2005 Outdoorsman I erroneously reported that the number of resident hunters who purchased 2003 Regular and CH deer tags was 95,865. Although accurate, the figure was misleading since it inadvertently did not include 18,319 Clearwater Deer tags purchased by all resident classes.

But the 114,184 resident hunters who purchased all ten types of resident deer tags in 2003 were still the lowest number of resident deer hunters since 1957. And the 128,510 regular and extra deer tags purchased by 114,184 residents and 10,370 non-residents was the lowest number of Idaho deer tags sold since 1957.

Although different IDFG records sometimes reflect different tag sales totals, the following totals, provided by IDFG in its report to the Governor and Legislature at the time, reflect the average number of hunters and tags sold in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. They also show the number of hunters and tags sold during certain years for comparison.

Idaho Deer Hunters and Tags Sold or Issued

<u>Year</u>	<u>Resident Hunters*</u>	<u>Total Hunters*</u>	<u>Extra Tags</u>	<u>Deer Tags Issued</u>
1950s avg	112,502**	112,502	3,885	116,387
1959	125,849**	125,849	11,773	137,622
1960s avg	123,599	128,833	16,613	145,446
1969	144,349	152,869	18,697	171,566
1970	147,654	152,571	20,209	172,780
1975***	123,186	132,282	-0-	132,282
1970s avg	142,683	149,038	6,355	155,393
1980	155,061	164,603	-0-	164,603
1992	154,620	170,599	1,900	172,499
2003	114,184	124,554	3,956	128,510

* Individual hunters who purchased one or more deer tags.

** Includes both residents and nonresidents.

*** 20-year low in 1975 – hunters increased when deer increased.

History Repeats Itself

When former F&G Director Woodworth offered thousands of extra tags and special privilege limited controlled hunts lasting into December during the 1960s and early 70s, deer populations steadily declined. Following the extreme 1974-75 winter, deer harvests and hunter numbers were almost as low as they are today.

Woodworth's replacement, Joe Greenley, had already shortened all deer seasons, halted antlerless harvest, set a "permanent" 9,500 cap on nonresident deer and elk hunters, and eliminated the special privilege hunts and extra tags. But it takes years to rebuild depleted deer and elk herds.

When Greenley retired in 1980, Jerry Conley inherited healthy game herds that were increasing statewide. As Woodworth had done in the 1960s, Conley began to expand deer hunting opportunity by selling extra deer tags and extended special privilege controlled hunts.

From 1980-1993, in spite of massive 1992-93 mule deer winter losses, Conley and the Andrus-appointed F&G Commission steadily increased the number of nonresident deer hunters from the 9,500 limit to 17,000. But despite all-time record numbers of deer hunters in Idaho, mule deer were plentiful until 1993 and few people realized how much the number of deer hunters had increased.

As Deer Harvests Decline – Hunters Decline

From 1988-2003 the number of licensed Idaho deer hunters declined from 166,666 to 124,554 or ~**42,000** fewer total deer hunters. During that same 15-year period the deer harvest (which peaked at 95,200 in 1989) declined from 82,200 to a reported 42,200 or ~**40,000** fewer deer harvested.

Yet most deer hunters we talk to express the belief there are more deer hunters now than there were in the 1980s and early 1990s. One reason they believe that myth is that in the 1980s there was a common general season opening date outside of the Panhandle and deer hunters were well distributed, hunting in units close to home. The overall deer harvest success rate was 33-50% and hunters saw plenty of deer.

In 2000-2004 the 10% who hunted in special privilege limited controlled hunts killed three deer for every five hunters. But the 90% who hunted in general seasons, including extra archery and muzzleloader seasons, killed slightly less than 1.5 deer for each five hunters.

In order to kill even that many deer, most hunters had to hunt more days in more units than they did in the 1980s. Seeing these frustrated hunters combing the hills day after day in pickups, four wheelers and on foot trying to get a shot at a legal deer, gives the impression there are more hunters despite the decline in total deer hunters since 1992.

Reductions in Mule Deer Doe & Fawn Harvest

By George Dovel

In a 1994 Idaho legislative hearing by the House Resources Committee concerning mule deer losses during the 1992-93 winter, F&G Director Jerry Conley showed the Committee members an IDFG videotape of a helicopter repeatedly chasing the same small herd of mule deer across the eastern Idaho desert. In response to concerns expressed by Committee members from southern Idaho, Conley told them the videotape proved the deer losses were not as heavy as hunters claimed and he insisted the mule deer population would "bounce back within two years."

Yet annual deer harvests continued to decline and in 1996 Idaho hunters demanded the Commission halt all antlerless harvest and control predators to increase mule deer recruitment. Instead, the Commission approved Conley's recommendation to double the number of antlerless permits, and approved the request for \$630,000 to fund the "Southeast Idaho Mule Deer Ecology" study.

The six-year study was supposed to determine the influence of predators on mule deer and the relationship of habitat quality and composition changes to mule deer recruitment. But, as with most IDFG studies, when it ended on Oct. 1, 2003, the only thing it had determined was the alleged need for more years of study.

To halt the decline in mule deer populations in Southeast Idaho Units 70 and 73, IDFG had ended archery doe harvest and implemented a 14-day 2-point-only buck season. But in 1999 it restored either-sex archery harvest and began a 21-day 2-point general any-weapon season with three days of highly advertised "trophy" buck hunting.

Citizen Deer Management

The impact on formerly protected mature mule deer bucks on opening day was described as "devastating" by hunters and landowners on the west side of Unit 73. In an October 6, 2000 letter to the Idaho State Journal they pointed out the late fawn crop in 2000 resulting from too few mature breeding bucks, and described the Region's failure to keep its commitment to limit the mature buck harvest after several years of protection.

The hunters and landowners then formed the "West Side Sportsmen's Association" and closed more than 96,000 acres of private land to public hunting. For the next four years, they managed the 150 square miles of private land by allowing hunters limited opportunity to kill mature bucks.

Although some of the members have reportedly not harvested a deer themselves for several years, they fed the game during the severe 2001-02 winter and have shown the results of successful mule deer management to others who took the time to visit the area.

They demonstrated that providing abundant deer for youngsters to see when they hunt does a lot more to

insure their becoming a lifelong hunter than discounting the price to hunt depleted deer herds. But despite their successes, IDFG continued to ridicule them, and the F&G Commission ignored their request to implement a 4-point minimum antler harvest to restore mature bucks.

The Straw That Broke The Camel's Back

Southeast Region officials nearly doubled the buck harvest in the two units in 2001 and increased the doe/fawn harvest by 800 percent. This plus the severe 2001-02 winter losses showed up in 2003-04 counts with 9,000 fewer mature does and very low buck-to-doe ratios (only 6:100 in one unit).

When Marcus Gibbs was appointed by Gov. Kempthorne as SE Region Commissioner, he promised to leave biological decisions up to the biologists and simply apportion the hunting opportunity to the various special interest groups. But the helicopter count results were apparently the "straw that broke the camel's back."

In the March 2004 Commission meeting he cited the count statistics and demanded an end to all antlerless hunting in the Region, and the use of 5-day four-point only seasons in units 70 and 73. When Big Game Manager Brad Compton and the Wildlife Bureau Staff declined to comply, Gibbs angrily called for a Commission vote to enforce his action (see Bulletin 2, page 3).

Watts Offers Additional Doe/Fawn Harvest

Southwest Region Commissioner John Watts said he knew Gibbs "does not agree with the restriction, which is not biologically sound," but claimed he was pressured into doing it. Then Watts proposed new deer and elk antlerless traditional muzzleloader seasons in Unit 39 which would increase mule deer doe and fawn harvest far more than the saving realized in the SE Region by Commissioner Gibbs' actions.

The new deer season, which cannot be justified biologically, rewarded the Traditional Muzzleloaders for their support of IDFG fee increases. In return, the group offered IDFG additional revenue from hunters who do not normally shoot deer.

Doe Killing Increased in 2004

In 2003, Idaho general season muzzleloader hunters reported killing 43 antlerless mule deer north of the Salmon River and none south of the Salmon. In 2004 general season muzzleloader hunters reported killing 26 antlerless mule deer north of the Salmon and 163 mule deer does and fawns south of the Salmon.

Of the latter, 135 were killed by 345 muzzleloader hunters in the hunt Watts added. But that represents only a small portion of the extra mule deer doe and fawn harvests resulting from expanded antlerless seasons in 2004.

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The following chart, uses the harvest statistics provided by the Wildlife Bureau to show mule deer doe and female fawn harvests, including the unwarranted increase from 2003-2004. Male fawns are counted as bucks and do not appear in the doe column.

Idaho Buck vs. Doe Harvest 2000-2004

Year	Type Hunt	Total Bucks	Total Does	M.D. Bucks	M.D. Does	MD Does % Ttl Does
2000	Gen.	29699	5843	16928	3331	57%
	CH	3761	4638	3498	4313	93%
	Totals	33460	10481	20426	7644	73%
2001	Gen.	31507	10496	18857	4372	42%
	CH	3591	5178	3192	4420	85%
	Totals	35098	15674	22049	8792	56%
2002	Gen.	26113	11473	15407	6769	59%
	CH	3511	5151	3187	4323	84%
	Totals	29624	16624	18594	11092	67%
2003	Gen.	26801	7788	15701	2749	35%
	CH	3457	4163	2838	3330	80%
	Totals	30258	11951	18539	6079	51%
2004	Gen.	29503	7499	16227	4124	55%
	CH	3381	4352	2806	3612	83%
	Totals	32884	11851	19033	7736	65%

The percentages in the right hand column are the percent of female mule deer harvested compared to the total of both whitetail and mule deer females harvested. The general season reports for 2003 used harvest numbers for each species (rather than calculate the percent of white-tails in each unit) and are undoubtedly more accurate.

What Killed the Mule Deer?

When the 1992-93 winter killed more than half of Idaho's mule deer, Idaho wildlife managers ignored the obvious and continued to destroy the **factories** that provide deer for the future. When the 2001-02 winter killed half of the mule deer in many parts of southern Idaho the 2002 *general season* doe harvest increased by 50 percent!

Hunters who couldn't find a mature buck or even a forked horn to shoot at killed ~11,000 female mule deer that were desperately needed to mitigate the massive losses from the previous winter. When helicopter counts finally revealed the extent of the losses, some biologists denied them and others offered excuses to cover their mistakes.

The losses weren't caused by decadent range and aging CRP or quaking aspen stands, fragmented habitat, livestock grazing or the alleged "inherent failure of emergency winter feeding programs." The losses were also not caused by the hunters who killed the breeding females that survived the severe winter.

The losses were caused by F&G wildlife managers who made no effort to mitigate the abnormal winter losses once they occurred. This includes everyone involved in

recommending the doe seasons from the former IDFG director to the regional wildlife managers.

It also includes every Commissioner who allowed the antlerless mule deer seasons to be established in 2002. And it includes existing commissioners who continue to support killing off the breeding factories, while pretending that the so-called "Mule Deer Initiative" (MDI) will somehow solve the problem.

The Mule Deer Initiative

On pages 2 and 3 of the 19-page MDI, "Improve Mule Deer Numbers" and "Increasing Recruitment Rates" are mentioned as the primary goals of the initiative. But that is where it starts and ends.

The following excerpt from a March 28, 2005 IDFG news release reflects the real emphasis of MDI:

"Big Game Seasons Reflect Commitment to Mule Deer

Fish and Game has also made changes to deer seasons. The seasons have been standardized to open on October 10 statewide. Many hunters have complained that earlier seasons have occurred when conditions were too hot and dry. The standardized seasons are also intended to minimize the impact caused by hunters who move from one unit to another as new seasons open.

"The Mule Deer Initiative is not only about making more mule deer, it's also about providing higher quality hunting experiences" said big game manager Brad Compton "later seasons should provide a better experience."

Adjusted seasons are just part of the Mule Deer Initiative. Big game managers are also focusing on habitat improvements designed to increase mule deer populations."

State Big Game Manager Compton appears not to realize that F&G restored standardized deer season opening dates south of the Salmon River when I served on the Implementation Team back in 1997. Everyone enjoys hunting big game when the weather is cooler, but adding two extra days in the 2005 deer season and extending it to include the entire week of mule deer pre-rut is a tool adopted by the Commission in 1998 to **increase harvests** – not restore mule deer.

(NOTE: Instead of listening to organized special interest groups who seek seasons when the game is more vulnerable, the F&G Commissioners and Legislative Resource Committee members must listen to experienced outdoorsmen whose knowledge of game is reliable. Their motivation is restoring healthy game populations - not pursuing dollars or special hunting privileges.

When private citizens like the West Side Sportsmen are forced to take over game management and bite the bullet to restore healthy deer populations, it should send a strong message to our Legislators and our Governor that the system is broken. The killing of ~40,000 female mule deer that should have been saved to restore healthy mule deer herds during the past five years must not be ignored. - ED)

More Letters to The Outdoorsman Editor

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

I really think putting some other outdoorsman opinions in the bulletin is a great idea.

I Hope I have sent enough so you can include my son on your mailing list (address enclosed). He writes to the Fish and Game quite often.

Wayne Torgerson
Montevieu

(Thank you. We accept donations in any amount and will send issues to anyone the donor designates. - ED)

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

I am sending this donation in support of your effort to inform Idaho sportsmen concerning the important issues they are faced with.

I received Bulletins 7-10 from a friend in Pocatello and would like 1 through 6 if that is possible, as well as the newer issues if possible.

Thanks for all the hard work you are doing,

Alan Monroe
Lewiston

(Before we run out of a back issue, we order several hundred from the printer to maintain a supply for readers who request one or several issues. Thank you for your donation. - ED)

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

Enclosed is my donation to renew my subscription to the "Outdoorsman". Also I've included another \$20.00 to obtain a gift subscription for my friend - I've clipped the coupon and listed his address.

Thank you for your efforts. I enjoy your paper and the information you print.

Please keep up the good work. You're the only good source of information we have in this end of the state.

Craig Schuler
Soda Springs

(NOTE: In the Oct.-Nov. issue of The Outdoorsman we printed a copy of the following letter, without realizing it had been edited. We have since received several requests, and permission from Mrs. Bell, to print the original version. - ED)

Editor, The Outdoorsman:

Handicapped Persons Motor Vehicle Hunting Permit. What does this mean? What are the rules? This has caused much confusion among many holders of this permit. Before I quote you the regulations, let me tell you a story. Gale and his brothers grew up hunting. Not for the trophy antlers, not for the thrill, but for the purpose of

putting meat on their family tables. Don't get me wrong, they loved to get out and hunt. They loved the outdoors as do many of the men that grow up in this area.

Gale hunted his entire life but there came a time when he could no longer hunt from a horse or walk through the fields and trees. He only had one leg and a knee replacement on his other leg. He was getting up there in years (he turned 80 this last year) and so a few years ago he applied and received a Handicapped Persons Hunting Permit.

It was his understanding, as it is for many, that this allowed him to hunt from the road as long as he didn't shoot across a highway (or road) or from a highway. It was his understanding that he could pull off the road onto the shoulder or borrow pit and shoot. Not so.

On the first day of elk season he and his wife spotted the elk in a field. He pulled off the road and parked up next to the fence as close as he could get.

He shot his elk and then drove into the field, and was cleaning it when two Fish and Game officers came along. They didn't witness the shooting but just heard the shots.

They immediately separated them and began the interrogation. That made Gale mad - he didn't do anything wrong and they had just taken his wife to question her.

He showed his permit, they walked around the road where he was parked, and came back and decided he was going to be cited. Their reason - by looking at the tracks they didn't think he was off the road far enough.

They couldn't tell for sure if he was next to the fence or not. They decided he should have been completely in the field before he could shoot.

Of course, by the time Gale could have opened the gate, drove in and parked, the elk would have been long gone.

Unbeknownst to Gale and his family, he had an abdominal aneurism and all this stress and heart pounding wasn't doing it any good. But Gale took the citation and went to court thinking it would be taken care of.

Standing in front of everyone feeling humiliated for something he didn't feel he had done wrong, heart pounding and blood rushing through his veins proved to be too much for his aneurism. The pain hit and it hit hard. He paid his fine and barely made it to his vehicle. He was unable to drive home and two hours later he was dead.

Did their actions kill him? No! But we feel it contributed to the bursting of the aneurism. If it hadn't burst then, would he have had time to feel some early symptoms and get medical attention before it was too late? We'll never know but we want to know the rules of this Handicap Permit so this doesn't happen to anyone else.

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Letters

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This permit is designed to help those that need the permit to keep their dignity and continue to enjoy a lifelong love for hunting.

If you had/have this permit how would you interpret the regulations? The rule is found at IDAPA 13.01.08.411. The rule reads:

(NOTE: Only the following appropriate portion of the rule and of I.C. Sec. 36-111 are included here.-ED)

“411.02 Exceptions. This use restriction rule shall not apply to the following permissible motorized vehicle uses:

- (a) Holders of a valid Handicapped Motor Vehicle Permit may use a motorized vehicle as allowed by the land owner or manager.

Idaho Statutes

36-1101 (b) Except as may be otherwise provided under this title or commission rules or proclamations promulgated pursuant thereto, it is unlawful for any person to:

1. Hunt from Motorized Vehicles. Hunt any of the game animals or game birds of this state from or by the use of any motorized vehicle except as provided by commission rule; provided however, that the commission shall promulgate rules which shall allow a physically handicapped person to apply for a special permit which would allow that person to hunt from a motorized vehicle which is not in motion.

The commission shall specify the form of application for and design of the special permit which shall allow a physically handicapped person to hunt from a motorized vehicle which is not in motion. A person possessing a special permit shall not discharge any firearm from or across a public highway

So how far off the road do you have to be? What if the elk was on a hillside? Would you then have to be part way up the mountain?

From the children of Gayle Bell.

Jerry Henderson

Thelma Bell

Soda Springs

(NOTE: In the interest of preventing confusion, we printed only the portions of the IDAPA Rule and the Code Section that appear pertinent. In these Rule and Code Sections we did not find any legal definition that addresses a borrow pit, road shoulder or any portion of a road or highway right-of-way for the purpose of the handicapped exclusion.

In response to a request from former Senator Lin Whitworth at the Nov. 16, 2005 Commission hearing, F&G Director Huffaker promised to send clarification of what constitutes being “off the road.” – ED)

More Reader Input

In the October 25, 2005 Edition of the Lewiston Tribune, outdoor writer Eric Barker wrote about his interview with Spokane, Washington kayaker Ron LaRue. He described how LaRue had hiked up the Salmon River from its mouth to the mouth of the Middle Fork, and then on to the headwaters at Cape Horn.

LaRue was transported back to Riggins where he planned to paddle an inflatable kayak back to his point of beginning. The unique thing about the trip was that LaRue, who admitted he was not an outdoorsman and had never hunted, planned to live off the land on his trek.

According to Barker’s article, “He figured he would eat things that could be hunted all year like skunks, coyotes, marmots, porcupines, squirrels and raccoons.” Instead he said that the 90% of his diet provided by the land in the first part of his hike consisted of berries, bass, bugs, crickets, snails and rattlesnakes.



No this is not an Idaho rattler. It is a large western diamondback reportedly killed in Texas. It is not protected in any state.

I have no doubt that LaRue killed and ate the Idaho rattlesnakes from his description: "It's a lot like crab, you work it to death and by the time you're done you've hardly eaten anything." Back when I'd kill one on a switchback trail to protect the pack string or the dudes I was leading, they usually wound up eating it as a reminder of their trip.

What was surprising to me is the number of letters and emails we have received from readers concerning this article by Mr. Barker. Several were from outspoken folks who live and work in rattlesnake country, asking why this hiker was not cited by IDFG for repeatedly committing a misdemeanor wildlife offense.

One pointed out that most of the critters he planned to shoot while “living off of the land” are also protected by law – courtesy of the Fish and Game Commission and the Idaho Legislature. Another suggested that the hiker should have been prosecuted for cruelty to pets in his care.

For those who missed the tongue-in-cheek humor in his letter, conviction for killing a rattlesnake, except for protection on private property, is now punishable by a fine or imprisonment. But you are allowed to capture up to four of them and keep them as pets.

According to the Tribune article, by the fifth day of his four-month adventure, LaRue decided that eating tasty food prepared by someone else to supplement his diet of berries, bugs and rattlesnakes was a lot more practical. It was also more legal.

Survival in the Winter

By George Dovel

Readers who have never been in an unforeseen situation where their survival in the outdoors depends on survival skills and making the right decisions, may have read articles on wilderness survival in an outdoor magazine or watched a survivor program on TV. Those who have, probably already realize that wilderness survival in the winter requires a great deal of effort.

Many years ago the Soil Conservation Service in Boise hired me to fly a snow survey specialist by helicopter to several remote locations to measure the snow depth and water content. My Bell helicopter was equipped with fabricated snowshoes, which supported it even on light powder snow, and a winter survival backpack and bear paw snowshoes were always carried for use in emergencies.

Lesson # 1 – Be Prepared

When the SCS employee arrived at the airport with two pairs of skis and his own survival backpack, he insisted I leave mine at the airport because his contained “everything we could need.” Not taking my survival pack and snowshoes was my first mistake.

It was an exceptionally deep snow winter and our final measurement station was located between Deadwood Reservoir and Landmark. I had never seen the station but my passenger thought he had identified it by the tops of several young trees that were sticking out of the snow.

With the potential for unseen streams and trees under the deep snow, this was my second mistake. The small trees he thought he recognized were actually the tops of older trees in 15 feet of snow beside a stream.

On the final pass before we landed, I threw my hat out to mark the spot and prevent the blindness or vertigo that can happen in the “white-out” caused by swirling powder snow when landing. After landing and checking the stability of the snow, I throttled back, locked the controls and reached to shut off the engine.

Without warning, the snow began to cave in under the left skid and, despite my efforts to prevent it, one rotor blade began bouncing off the snow on the left side while the opposite blade hit the tail boom. The ‘copter ended up lying on its left side and I recall my passenger stepping on my face in his haste to exit.

When he jumped into the snow, most of his body disappeared in the powder and I had to crawl out and help him back onto the downed machine. From start-to-finish the incident had taken only a few seconds and I have described it here to remind readers how quickly a routine trip can turn into a survival situation.

If You Leave the Vehicle - Know Where You’re Going

We could not reach anyone on the helicopter’s line-of-sight VHF radio and the closest helicopter capable of picking us up was in Missoula, Montana. It would have taken the nearest snow cat two days to reach us once we were located by airplane pilots the next day so we decided to leave the wreck and ski a dozen miles uphill to a Forest Service airstrip at Landmark.

This violated the common rule of not leaving your vehicle, but was the best choice under the circumstances. With our skis on, we tramped a large deep arrow in the snow pointing in the direction of Landmark and we both packed it down so it would still be visible if more snow fell overnight.

Even with skis we were sinking to our knees in the powder snow and breaking trail on the uphill grade was a real chore. However the other landing strip a few miles downstream was too short for the ski-plane we hoped would pick us up the next day.

Shortly before dark I selected a fir tree with a deep snow cavity under it to spend the night in. When my companion opened his survival pack he found nothing useful except a single mummy bag so, using my pocket knife, I notched and broke fir boughs to line the snow floor of our shelter and provide a makeshift roof.

We broke off enough dead lower branches and gum-soaked bark from other trees to keep a tiny fire going and we took turns, one sleeping in the mummy bag while the other fed the fire. We removed our combination rubber-leather pacs when it was our turn to sleep, and mine were frozen too hard to pull on when the search plane flew over us the next morning.

Although the temperature at the nearest recording station reached 20 degrees below zero that night, we suffered no frostbite or hypothermia. When we reached the Landmark airstrip in late afternoon we skied up the runway

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centerline to show the pilot where the runway was and he arrived shortly to ferry my passenger to McCall. I was prepared to spend another night in the snow but he returned at dark and picked me up.

“Don’t Leave Home Without It”

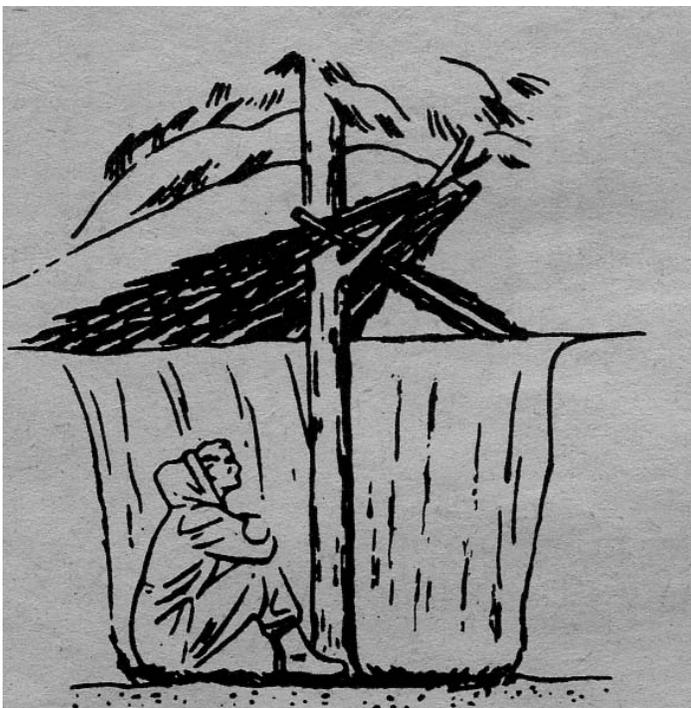
Without the pocket knife, and waterproof matches and pitch slivers I always carried in my coat pocket, surviving even one night in the extreme cold and deep snow would have been far more difficult. But with the saw, space blanket, mummy bags, food and bear paws I normally carried in the winter, we could have survived in comfort with far less effort.

Yet countless Idahoans travel remote roads or trails in late fall or winter without even having adequate clothing in case they get caught out. Carrying at least a multi-tool, waterproof matches and warm clothing should become a habit with every winter traveler, instead of depending on luck or a cell phone to summon help if you get in trouble.

Snow Shelters

During the years I hunted, trapped and lived in what is now the Frank Church Wilderness, I often spent nights sleeping on the trail in makeshift lean-tos. Traveling with lion hunter Rob Donley for a week or more each winter meant occasionally huddling against a log or rock to reflect heat from the fire we kept going all night.

But the shelters required to survive in deep snow and extreme cold require more insulation to preserve body heat. I published the “how-to” part of this article in the Dec. 1969 *Outdoorsman* and described several snow shelters, which are just as effective now as they were then.



Natural snow cavities under trees require less effort to build, especially if you don't have a shovel.

If a tree is available, digging out or tramping the snow cavity under it requires less effort than digging a shelter, especially if a shovel or makeshift digging implement is not available. Line the snow floor with boughs and use the lower tree limbs as roof rafters, adding boughs or peeled bark to finish the roof.

If you plan to build a small fire, line that portion of the floor with green limbs or other insulation to prevent melting the packed snow floor and drowning the fire. When building a fire in any of the snow shelters, it is very important to leave a vent space in the roof to prevent carbon Monoxide poisoning.

If you have a shovel, or can fashion a substitute, you can dig a trench in the snow, cover and line it with boughs, and proceed as with the tree shelter. With a little imagination a snow machine engine cover or other cowl can serve as both a sled and a digging tool.

A snow shelter can also be made by digging a cave on the lee side of a snow comb and using boughs to cover the door. When the snow conditions are right, those with the ambition and the proper digging tool can cut snow blocks and shape them into an igloo.

Shelters With No Snow

If you are stranded away from a vehicle and night is approaching, there are several shelters that will allow you to survive cold nights.

If you are not in snow, try to find a source of drinking water. Then if you can locate a fallen tree, plan to use it as a windbreak and clear a six-foot by two-foot wide area on the lee side of it.

If you have matches or are otherwise capable of starting a fire, gather enough “squaw wood” to build a large fire in the cleared area. Light the fire and spend the next half-hour or so gathering enough boughs, to form two sides and a top to your lean-to.

Keep the fire going long enough to thoroughly dry out and warm the ground. Then move the fire out away from the log and build up a reflector backstop of small logs or rocks.

Construct your bough bed on the warm ground by placing the boughs at an angle with the thick cut-ends down. Add the top and sides to your lean-to using boughs, sticks or bark. If rain is anticipated, make the roof steeper than 45 degrees. A flat roof will hold snow.

A Simple One-man Shelter

A similar but easier one-man survival shelter can be made if you have a hatchet, game saw or knife. Select the largest fir tree you can easily break off or saw with the tool you have available and build a two foot by six foot fire on the upwind side of the tree.

When the fire has thoroughly warmed your bed site, move it to the opposite side of the tree and back cut the tree partly in two about five feet above the ground. Fell the tree over the fire-warmed area leaving it still attached to the trunk.

Remove the lower boughs and use them, and boughs collected from other trees, to thatch the sides and construct your bough bed. Partly breaking off the upper boughs will cause them to lay down as part of the roof.



One-man emergency shelter is easily constructed by partly chopping fir tree and adding boughs.

If you have added enough boughs for insulation the pre-heated ground inside your shelter will keep you warm for several hours. . Rocks can be heated by your reflector fire and placed around your bed for more warmth when you wake up later on.

Two or more people can usually build some type of lean-to with the ridgepole resting on forked sticks, a stump or a log. In a pinch I have used small dead trees or partially decayed logs for the framework while my companion(s) gathered boughs and firewood.

If you can build a fire, all of the foregoing shelters will allow you to dry out damp clothing and survive the night. But suppose you are alone with nothing but the clothes you are wearing?

Use Whatever is Available

If you can't build a fire or make a tool to cut limbs and larger boughs for some kind of shelter to survive the first night, use your hands and feet or sticks to rake the leaves, needles decayed logs and other debris from the ground into a large pile. Add any bark from logs and small boughs you can break off and then burrow into the pile.

The pile of rubble will offer some protection from the wind, cold and precipitation, all of which help cause hypothermia. This killer of most people who die trying to survive in the winter is the lowering of the body's core temperature through a loss of heat.

It occurs very easily in cold, wet windy conditions and is most apt to strike those who are fatigued or out of condition. Most people know that increased wind velocity will create the same chilling effect as colder temperatures but few realize how dangerous getting wet can be.

Prevent Hypothermia

While you have plenty of energy and are generating heat through exertion, your body can produce several times its normal output of heat. But when your energy has been used up you are extremely susceptible to loss of body heat.

The symptoms of hypothermia begin with violent

shivering and progress to eventual loss of muscular coordination and reasoning ability. Unless the victim is warmed, both internally and externally, he or she will die.

Body temperature can be maintained by frequent intake of hot liquids and food. Candy (sugar) is most quickly converted to energy, and fats and proteins have a more lasting warming effect.

Traveling even short distances in snow without proper snowshoes or skis is extremely fatiguing. Staying dry is a must. Remember that shelter and warmth are your most important considerations in winter survival.

Stay With the Vehicle

Unless you are familiar with the route, attempting to head downstream to reach a road or settlement can result in getting bluffed out or injured in an inaccessible area where rescuers can't find you. If you're in a downed aircraft the mandatory emergency locator transmitter will guide rescuers to the crash site if they are searching in the right area.

If you're in a vehicle, including a 4-wheeler or snow machine, tracks or depressions in the snow can usually be followed by aerial or ground searchers. There are many logical reasons to conserve your energy and stay with the vehicle so don't make a rash decision to leave it.

You can start a fire by dipping a stick in a gas tank and arcing the battery terminals or using a spark plug or magneto wire and turning the engine over. Some vehicles and most airplanes have little insulation, but cutting and rearranging upholstery can change that and also provide makeshift clothing. If nothing else, the vehicle can be used for a windbreak as one side of a lean-to.

If you are not rescued immediately, many useful tools can be found by searching the vehicle. These include wire and cables for ropes, snares, and fishing line, and panels and cowling for emergency snowshoes, sleds and shovels.

Crude knives, chisels and hammers can be manufactured using a lug wrench to dismantle or shape them. Adding oil or a spare tire to your fire can quickly create a dense black smoke visible from the air, and on a sunny day, a visor make-up mirror or rear view mirror can be used to signal an aircraft.

Fire Without Matches

Although I have started fires with quartz and mild steel and the traditional bow, it is rare that you find the quartz or the thoroughly dry softwood drill and spindle needed to use these methods in a winter survival situation.

If you have a firearm and shells, you can start a fire by first gathering a pile of dry, fine tinder and sticks and placing it on the ground. Then insert the bullet end of a cartridge into the muzzle and pry the bullet out (this may require using pliers, knife or a rock with some cartridges).

Tear off a small piece of cotton from your clothing and pour a small quantity of smokeless powder on it. Pour

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most of the remaining powder on your pile of tinder, wadding it into a ball, and leave some in the cartridge case.

Then stuff the patch into the cartridge like a bullet and fire it straight up in the air. Fanned by the air it will be on fire as it falls down and you should catch it and place it on your wad of tinder, which you may have to pick up and blow on to get a flame.

During the midday portion of a sunny winter day, you can start a fire by directing the sun's rays through a magnifying lens removed from a rifle scope, camera or binocular onto good dry tinder. Lacking these I am told it is possible to form a makeshift convex lens by painstakingly shaping a piece of clear ice with your hands.

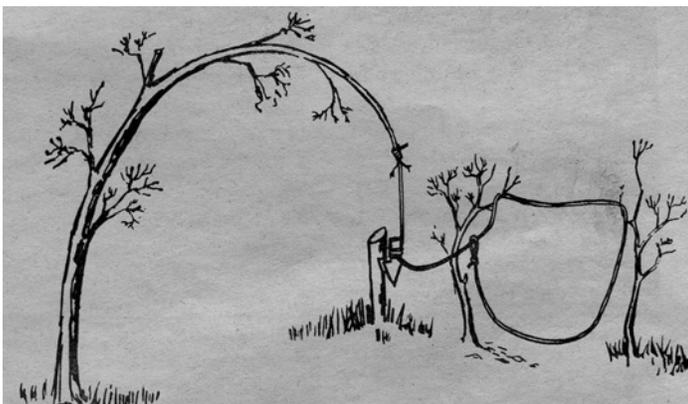
I have never tried it but given the incentive, I suspect I would. The secret to starting fires with all of these methods is good dry tinder, which may include shavings from the inner bark of quaking aspen or cottonwood trees if you're in a location where they are available.

Long Term Survival

Any survival article is boring reading but if you've read this far you may have read something that you hadn't thought of. If you fail to tell people where you are going, or if several days of bad weather limits an effective search, you may need to obtain nourishment to survive.

While a survival rifle or shotgun may provide the opportunity to kill birds or animals, snares often provide better results because they're working at several locations 24 hours a day. Makeshift snares for catching a variety of birds and animals can be made from string, fishing line, steel cable, electrical wire, shoelaces, strips of belt or clothing, tree root ends and strips of animal hides or intestines.

The animal or bird sticks its head through the loop while traveling and when the snare tightens it normally chokes. A simple trigger and bent sapling is sometimes used to hoist the animal into the air away from predators. This also helps kill an animal that might otherwise escape when self-locking snares are not available.



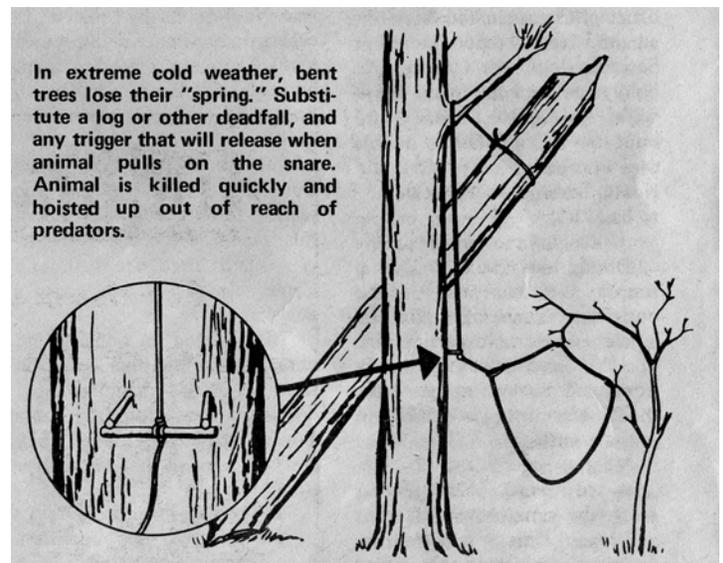
A spring pole and simple trigger is often used when self-locking snares are not available.

Snaring Rabbits

Rabbits or snowshoe hares are available in many areas where most other game is absent and they are easily caught. Locate their tracks and try to find two or more sets indicating frequent usage.

Prepare a spring pole or lifting pole and a simple trigger as shown in the illustrations and tie one end of the snare to these. Tie a loop in the other end so the noose will tighten easily and hang a five-inch diameter loop about two inches above the ground.

Several such snares set about 30 feet apart on the trail are very effective. Natural bait such as aspen bark or twigs may be placed in the trail but don't use bait to support the snare as the animal may try to eat it and disturb the set.



Lifting pole and trigger used in cold weather.

Another excellent set for both rabbits and birds can be made by dropping a small evergreen tree across a trail, removing the branches at several spots and setting the snares at these cleared spots. The snares are anchored to the tree trunk and a lifting pole is not needed.

Remember that the size of the snare loop and the distance above the ground are always determined by the animal you intend to catch. Members of the deer and cat families are easily snared but animals like beaver, bear cougar and porcupine provide fat needed in the winter.

Most fishermen can find a way to catch fish if they are available. A one-way fish trap made by placing rocks or driving limbs close together in the stream bed will work, and a "tailer" resembling a dog catcher's tool can be used to catch larger fish along the bank.

In case you managed to make it all the way to the end of this article without learning anything new, I learned to render lard from a freshly skinned cougar in an empty tin can. Adding a piece of cloth for a wick produced a dependable light and a source of heat to warm my shelter.

Are Predators Killing Your Hunting Opportunities?

By Dr. Charles E. Kay

(Charles Kay has a PhD in wildlife ecology from Utah State University and is an adjunct professor and senior environmental scholar there. As a researcher in the Northern Rocky Mountains for 20-plus years, his 1993 predictions concerning the number of wolves, their impact on game, and de-listing delays have all come true. If you enjoy hunting mule deer, please read this carefully.-ED)

According to published reports and information available on various official websites, there were approximately 3.6 million mule deer on western ranges in 1960; a time when most mule deer populations were at all time highs. While today that number has fallen to about 3.1 million animals, a decline of 14%.

In 1960, hunters in the 11 western states killed 764,000 mule deer, while in 2000 only 287,000 mule deer were taken, a decline of 62%. That is to say, the hunter harvest, or off-take, has declined at a much steeper rate than mule deer populations in general.

Clearly mule deer harvest opportunities have fallen precipitously, but why?

I have been unable to locate an estimate for how many mountain lions there were 45 years ago, but the number was likely very small what with the widespread use of poisons, bounties and the like. During the 1960's, though, cougars were re-classified as game animals throughout the West and, with protection, more than 36,000 cats now occupy mule deer habitat.

For those who think this estimate may be high, I refer you to Logan and Sweanor's book on the "Desert Puma", where they reported there were 31,400 mountain lions on western ranges in the early 1990's.

A number of researchers have estimated how many deer-sized ungulates a single lion will kill every year and, on average, about 50 prey animals must die to feed one cat. Thus, in total; mountain lions are killing 1.8 million ungulates each year. Of that number, approximately 1.2 million are mule deer.

1,200,000 mule deer killed by mountain lions versus 287,000 taken by hunters! If you do the math, it is easy to see that lions are killing four times as many mule deer as sportsmen.

In my home state of Utah, the Division of Wildlife Resources estimates that we have 2,000 to 3,000 mountain lions. Taking the low estimate of 2,000, lions are killing approximately 100,000 mule deer a year. For comparison, Utah hunters harvested approximately 25,000 deer during the last few seasons.

To verify the accuracy of these figures I showed them to a wildlife professor who has spent much of his career studying mountain lions in Utah. He agreed that the numbers looked about right, but then added that I should

"stop ragging on his cats because coyotes and bears were killing more deer each year than lions."

Needless to say I asked if I could quote him on that and his reply was, "Hell no!"

Another indication that predation pressure has increased is the change in the proportion of the deer population harvested by hunters. In 1960, Hunters across the West took home 21% of the over-winter mule deer population each fall, but today the off-take rate has fallen to 9%.

In Utah, the 1960 off-take rate was 35%, but in 2003 it was only 8%.

Biologists in Alaska and Canada have concluded that moose populations subjected to high levels of predation can support a human harvest of no more than 5%. While moose populations in Scandinavia, where large predators are absent, support a human harvest of 55%, i.e. predation can reduce hunter opportunities by 90% or more.

What about habitat? Isn't that the key to increasing hunter opportunities? Unfortunately.....no. The reason is that if predator numbers are not controlled, then habitat is relatively unimportant.

In Alaska, where the Department of Fish and Game has conducted predator-prey research for many years, and where moose are the principal prey and wolves and grizzlies the main predators Dr. Ward Tesla recently concluded: From a management perspective, methods that improve range conditions, and by extension moose productivity, have limited potential to reverse the decline of moose numbers when compared to measures that reduce predation.

In other words the only way to increase hunter opportunities is to kill a lot of wolves and a lot of grizzlies. This study appeared in the scientific journal "Ecology", a publication of the Ecological Society of America which, if anything, is pro-predator.

Habitat largely irrelevant? I have to be kidding – right? Well, Banff and Jasper National Parks in the central Canadian Rockies contain some of the most spectacular wildlife habitat in North America but today it is largely a game-less country due to predation.

Approximately 40 years ago, wolves re-colonized parks that already contained grizzlies, black bears and mountain lions. The addition of wolves to the system has just about eliminated moose and reduced elk populations by 80% or more.

It is important to remember that the wildlife in Banff and Jasper are not hunted. Wolves have also caused elk herds to abandon large portions of their pre-wolf ranges.

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The habitat is still there but the elk are not. And unlike our Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service who contend that predators have little effect on game populations, Parks Canada fully acknowledges what has transpired.

As part of my research in Banff and Jasper, I have gone on four long horse trips into the back country with park biologists. In all, we covered more than 500 miles in 30 days and the number of mule deer we saw could be tabulated on two hands!

One of the deer we encountered was at the head of the Snake Indian River 56 miles from the trailhead. To the north lies the huge Wilmore Wilderness and chances are this mule deer had never before seen a human.

Nevertheless she exploded from her bed beneath a stunted spruce in a huge sub-alpine basin when we were still 300 yards away. Then she ran, and ran, and ran for more than three miles, never stopping to look back!

A wilder mule deer I have never seen! Apparently though she had seen a wolf or two before, for unlike moose that tend to stand and hold their ground when confronted by wolves, a mule deer's only hope is to run like the wind.

Moreover, none of the mule deer we saw had any fawns at heel. Declining fawn to doe ratios are usually another indication of increased predation.

Then too, look at what has happened in Yellowstone. Over the last few years the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and several other conservation organizations have spent several million dollars preserving and improving wildlife habitat in the Gallatin and Yellowstone River valleys north of the Park where large herds of migrating elk winter.

Before wolves were introduced in the mid-1990's, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks issued nearly 4,000 late-season elk permits for the Gallatin and northern Yellowstone. Today that number has fallen to less than 400 all because wolves were added to a system that already contained grizzlies, mountain lions and black bears.

In addition, Montana has indicated that no late season elk permits may be issued in the future. This has led to several guides and outfitters north of the Park going out of the elk hunting business as there simply are not enough elk left to hunt. The habitat is still there but the elk are not and hunting opportunities have fallen precipitously.

To appreciate the magnitude of the problem look at Colorado. Here is a state that has neither wolves nor grizzlies as this is written.

At last report there were approximately 300,000 elk in Colorado, which is three times more elk than exist in all of Canada! In addition, prior to wolf reintroduction there were more elk in the Yellowstone ecosystem than all of Canada!

Canada has some great wildlife habitat but hunting is definitely better in Colorado where hunters took home

nearly 70,000 elk last fall. More elk were killed in Colorado and Wyoming last fall than exist in all of Canada!

But what about the recent West-wide drought? Isn't that one of the reasons mule deer populations have declined?

To answer this question we need to look at some Arizona data. Based on tree-ring evidence, Arizona has experienced the worst drought in the last 700 to 1,000 years and the fawn to doe ratio in Game Management 22 dropped to only 18 fawns per 100 does in 2002.

Drought right? Well, not exactly. Inside a predator-proof enclosure that Arizona Game and Fish has maintained on the Three-Bar watershed since 1970, there were 100 fawns per 100 does! In addition, mule deer density inside the predator-proof enclosure was ten times "higher" than where predators held sway.

Drought may make deer more susceptible to predation, but predators do most of the actual killing. Over the last 35 years, does inside the enclosure have, on average, produced 225% more fawns than mule deer outside the fenced area.

In addition there is the issue of predator-mediated or apparent competition. On many western ranges, elk numbers have doubled and then doubled again since the early 1960's.

You might think this increase in elk numbers would buffer the predation pressure experienced by mule deer, but you would be wrong. Instead, increasing elk populations only increase predation on mule deer.

In a single-predator, single-prey system, as mule deer numbers fall, mountain lion populations eventually decline as the cats run out of deer to kill. But with alternative prey in the system, lions switch to killing elk, thus cougar populations do not fall and the cats drive the more vulnerable mule deer even lower. Counter intuitive, but nonetheless true.

Which brings us to another problem; mule deer have a less efficient anti-predator strategy than other ungulates. Most sportsmen would not consider mule deer to be dumb or stupid, but they certainly are slow compared to other prey species.

In southwest Alberta, mule deer and whitetails occupy the same habitat, termed sympatric, and the main predators are coyotes. Research has determined that the primary mortality factor on both deer species is coyote predation.

But while this caused a decline in the mule deer population, whitetails actually increased, albeit slowly. Since the two deer were sympatric, this difference cannot be due to habitat or weather. Mule deer were simply less efficient at evading coyotes.

Mule deer and whitetails were also sympatric in a British Columbia study, but there, mountain lions were the

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main predator. Again predation was the primary cause of mortality in both deer populations but whitetails were better able to withstand the predation pressure.

In fact the whitetails increased at 2% per year while, during the same period, mule deer numbers fell at 12% per year. This is one reason why predation studies done on whitetails should never be cited as evidence that predators have little or no impact on mule deer.

So is there any good news for mule deer enthusiasts? Well, in Utah, sportsmen were instrumental in passing a constitutional amendment to thwart anti-hunting initiatives. In California, the initiative that banned mountain lion hunting passed by a narrow margin, as did the Oregon initiative that banned the use of dogs to hunt lions and black bears.

Under Utah's new constitutional amendment, wildlife related initiatives must now pass by a two-thirds vote and not a simple majority, which is a standard that no anti-hunting initiative has met anywhere in the country. Subsequent to that constitutional change, Utah sportsmen have pressured the Wildlife Board to liberalize mountain lion hunting seasons and to control coyotes on key mule deer fawning areas.

According to local wildlife groups, these programs in conjunction with ongoing habitat improvements, are starting to pay dividends. Unfortunately, it seems that no good deed goes unpunished, for we now have people, who are actively campaigning to restore wolves to Utah!

In Alaska's Game Management Unit 2, hunters kill around 3,000 blacktail deer a year while wolves kill as many as 12,000 deer a year. Alaska's wolves are subject to hunting and trapping and 40% of this wolf population is killed each year.

Under the Endangered Species Act, wolves cannot be shot or trapped by the public anywhere in the lower 48. In addition, pro-wolf advocates have just won a major federal lawsuit, which, if upheld, mandates large numbers of wolves in virtually every western state. A federal district court has also recently rejected Wyoming's attempt to limit the number of wolves in that state.

To date, the only thing that has slowed the spread of wolves is that "every" wolf pack in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming with livestock in its territory has, sooner or later, turned to killing cattle or domestic sheep and had to be controlled by federal agents. I have this in writing from both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Wildlife Services.

This also gives another reason for mule deer hunters to partner with the ranching community. Only by working with ranchers is there any hope of limiting wolf numbers and thus, of increasing mule deer hunting opportunities in the years ahead.

(NOTE: This article also appears in the 2006 Convention issue of the Mule Deer Foundation magazine and we are

grateful for receiving their permission to also publish it here. With about 10,000 members in 65 chapters, MDF's mission is to ensure the conservation of mule deer, blacktail deer and their habitats.-ED)

Wolf P-R Battle Continues

A November 23, 2005, USA Today article titled, "What's Killing the Elk in Yellowstone?", reported that a new analysis of factors affecting the northern Yellowstone elk herd finds that weather and hunters – not wolves – are responsible for the 50% decline in elk numbers since wolves were introduced in 1995.

The computer analysis was developed by John Vucetich, who is studying wolves and elk on Michigan's Isle Royale, and by YNP wolf biologists Doug Smith and Daniel Stahler. They claim it shows that the elk decline is coincidental with wolf reintroduction, and factors other than wolves are to blame.

According to Vucetich, Most of the elk killed by wolves would have died even if the wolves had not killed them, either from old age, disease or the effects of the drought. Using elk hunter harvest figures from the 1990s and the number of late elk hunting permits issued in 2000, he implied that Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks allowed too many elk to be killed by hunters.

In a Dec. 8, 2005 Michigan Tech. University news release, YNP Wolf Project Leader Smith added fuel to the fire by claiming their analysis indicates wolves may not have had a dramatic impact on elk numbers because elk were declining anyway. Smith added, "This viewpoint has been hotly contested by other researchers and by the states of Montana and Wyoming, who are responsible for elk management."

On December 16, 2005, MNFW&P responded to the claims that wolves primarily killed off the older non-producing elk cows, with a news report titled, "Reading Elk Teeth Reveals Disturbing Trend Among The Elk Of The Northern Yellowstone Herd."

The article described how laboratory researchers have been measuring the annual tooth growth rings from hunter harvested elk for several years and found that, in 2005, the average age of all elk harvested exceeded nine years. "That makes it an exceptionally old elk population compared to others in the state," the article reported.

A January 19, 2006 article in Wyoming's Sublette Examiner pointed out the YNP analysis was actually only a computer population simulation model – not field research.

According to the study, which was published in the ecological journal *Oikos*, the wolf biologists built and assessed population models, "then used the best of these models to predict how elk dynamics might have been realized after wolf reintroduction had wolves never been reintroduced."

Idaho Legislative Update

As this issue goes to press on the morning of January 31, 2006, only three bills have been printed and assigned numbers as follow:

<u>Bill No.</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Committee</u>
S1258	F&G license/long-term care facility,	S Res/Env
S1279	Domestic cervidae, import.	S Agric Aff
S1283	F&G, senior combination license, fee	S Res/Env

S1258 By IDFG. Would simplify the process of obtaining a free fishing license by long term care facilities for patients in State Hospital and VA nursing homes.

S1279 By Resources & Environment. Would forbid the importation of domestic cervidae (fallow deer, elk and reindeer), make it a misdemeanor offense, and allow for confiscation. Hearing on Feb. 2, 2006.

S1283 By Senator Schroeder. Would correct the overcharge last year for a Senior Combination License and reduce it to the 10% increase. The fee would be decreased from \$10.00 (plus vendor fee) to \$3.25 (plus vendor fee) for Senior Citizens age 70 or older.

We sincerely appreciate the donations sent in by everyone who participated in the knife raffle, and the continuing donations we require to pay printing and mailing costs. We accept a donation in any amount you feel you can afford. Donations of \$20 or more will pay the cost of receiving The Outdoorsman for one year plus allow us to continue to provide copies to Idaho elected officials, and continue to increase circulation. Please use the coupon below and/or a separate sheet of paper.

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Of extreme importance to every Idaho hunter, fisherman and trapper is the following proposed Right to Hunt, Fish and Trap amendment to the Idaho Constitution presented by Rep. Clete Edmunson and co-sponsored by other legislators:

“All wildlife within the state of Idaho shall be preserved, protected, perpetuated and managed to provide continued supplies for the citizens of Idaho to harvest by hunting, fishing or trapping for the continued benefit of the people. The taking of wildlife, including all wild animals, birds and fish, by hunting, fishing and trapping is a valued part of our heritage and shall be a right preserved for the people. The exercise of this right by the people shall not be prohibited, but shall be subject to the laws, rules and proclamations of the state.

The rights set forth herein do not create a right to trespass on private property or lead to a diminution of other private rights and shall not be construed to prohibit or in any way affect rights established to divert, appropriate, and use water pursuant to article XV or the statutes and rules enacted pursuant thereto, or to establish any minimum amount of water in any stream, river, lake, reservoir or other water course or water body.”

The language in this proposed amendment to the Idaho Constitution was agreed upon and endorsed by all of the individuals and groups who provided input, including F&G Director Huffaker and the Office of Idaho Attorney General. Please urge your Senator and Representatives to vote yes.

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