

American HUNTER

December 2020

NRA Official Journal of the National

KNOW-HOW

CONVINCE
DUCKS TO
DROP INTO
LOW-VIS SETUPS

REWARD A
YOUNG DOG'S
PERFORMANCE

MAKE SNOW
GOOSE PÂTÉ

**SEE IT: A DUCK
HUNTER'S DREAM
MORNING IN
LOUISIANA**

**HOW TO HUNT COYOTE
COUNTRY AGAINST
THE COMPETITION**



IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR A PHEASANT HUNT

Tips & Tactics
To Bag
December
Birds

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Colt Python
5 Red Dot Sights
Holiday Gift Guide



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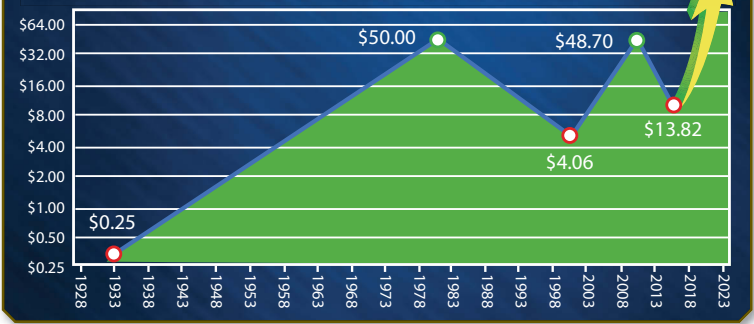
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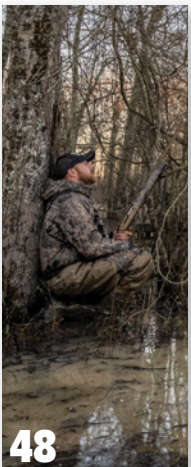


**40****HOW TO GET YOUR COYOTE FIX**

If you find a hot spot where coyotes come to your calls and the shooting is good, you can bet other hunters also know about it. That doesn't mean you should quit and go home. Here's how to hunt that kind of landscape amid stiff competition.

BY MARK KAYSER**40****A DUCK HUNTER'S MORNING, IN PICTURES**

The duck hunting must be pretty bad if a group of hardcore hunters abandons the "duck capital of the world." Indeed they hit pay dirt after traveling south on a hunch. In Louisiana, they watch in awe as a thousand mallards, pintails and teal swarm around them. The shooting is good. The camaraderie is even better. This is duck hunting at its best. This is why we wake in the middle of the night to set decoys and settle in before first light.

BY JON DRAPER**48****48****COVER STORY
IT'S NEVER TOO LATE FOR A PHEASANT HUNT**

Only a fanatic would hunt pheasants when the wind howls and the snow flies—and that's exactly how the author identifies himself. He learned to love it when he was too young and masochistic to know any better. Today, more than 50 seasons later, he still loves winter ringneck action. Here's how he does it.

BY RON SPOMER**56****SPECIAL REPORTS****PROTECTING THE PLCAA**

Attempts to strike down the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act have the potential to destroy the firearm industry and gun ownership in the United States.

BY JASON QUIMET**18****NRA WOMEN: BLAZING HER OWN PATH**

NRAWomen.com, published by and for women, embraces the thousands of women who experience a powerful sisterhood and shared values. It's for first-timers at the range, lifelong gun owners and freedom-loving patriots who defend the Second Amendment.

BY NRA STAFF**38**

The NRA, the foremost guardian of the traditional American right to "Keep and Bear Arms," believes every law-abiding citizen is entitled to the ownership and legal use of firearms, and that every reputable gun owner should be a member of the NRA.

Wayne R. LaPierre, Executive Vice President

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FIRST LIGHT CAN FAMILY FARMS HELP REKINDLE AMERICA'S HUNTING SPIRIT?

24 Many families have returned to the land in the 21st century—and many of them are considering agritourism as another means to make their family farm pay for itself. Many American hunters benefit from this new market. It may not be hunting like many of us used to know, but plenty of our peers are finding good fits for the way they want to hunt and for their budgets.

BY JOHN ZENT

JOIN THE HUNT 10 REASONS TO BECOME A HUNTER

30 Do you know a family member, friend or neighbor who may consider joining the hunt? Here's a long list of reasons that may convince them to do so. Pick the one that fills the bill then watch the drive to hunt kick in after the pursuit begins.

BY MARK KAYSER

KNOW-HOW PULL DUCKS IN LOW VISIBILITY

32 Filling your strap with ducks can be difficult if you can't see the birds and they can't see your spread. Consider this advice when hunting brush-choked ponds, wooded creeks and flooded timber and even in fog to convince ducks to drop in.

BY JEFF JOHNSTON

GUNDOG-SEASON SMARTS

35 Don't let hunting season become your dog's "backsliding season." Remain alert for opportunities to reinforce good performance, and be sure to avoid reinforcing the bad. Here's how to focus on the right moments after the shooting starts.

BY RON SPOMER

RECIPE: SNOW GOOSE PÂTÉ

36 Pâté is French for "paste" not "liver," regardless what most people think of the recipe. Here's a great way to make the white birds taste great.

BY BRAD FENSON



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NRAWomen.com

is the National Rifle Association's website dedicated to the fastest-growing community of firearm owners, hunters and defenders of freedom. The website offers expert information for women at all levels of their Second Amendment journey, whether they seek to further their knowledge of firearms, personal protection strategies, or the guns and gear that reflects participation in the shooting sports. NRAWomen.com promotes the outdoor lifestyle, and also gives voice to women who walk steadfastly into ongoing battles where gun rights hang in the balance.





6 Fascinating Facts About Antlers



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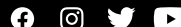
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Solo Elk Hunts

Mark Kayser's article in the September issue ("4 Days for Elk") brought back some pleasant memories for me. In the fall of 2005 I participated in my first Western elk hunt at the age of 65. I contracted an outfitter in Montana to take me into the backcountry on horseback and set me up in a spike camp because I like to hunt alone. On the third day of the hunt, I shot a 5x5 bull that somersaulted several times down a very steep slope. When I finally got to him, his antlers were tangled in a small pine tree and his neck was twisted around to a point that I could not extract him. I took my belt saw and cut down the small pine tree to free him, but when I did he started sliding down the slope again. I grabbed his antlers and dug in my heels, but he pulled me about 10 yards until his butt stopped against another small pine. I then took a small piece of rope from my pack and tied him to another pine so I could gut and quarter him. When I turned the gut pile loose in the dark, it started rolling down the slope and out of hearing. The outfitter came in the next morning with pack horses but it was too steep for the horses so we had to wrestle the quarters uphill about 200 feet to a flat spot where the elk was standing when I shot him. Mark's article took me back to those great memories.

Carl Brehm, Springwater, N.Y.

WE NEVER 'SAUSAGE' A THING

Article in the October issue on p. 36 on sausage making refers to the "front shoulder of a hog" just had me chuckling ("Intro to Sausage Making," "Know-How"). Lots of hunters use the term but obviously the only shoulders on a quadruped are on the front. Never have heard about the rear hams, though. Still a good article—and thanks to Brad Fenson.

Allen Rhodes, via email

PARTIES IN THE POTHOLES

Scott, as an avid waterfowler I must comment on your October issue that promoted the great Saskatchewan pothole country waterfowl hunting ("Party in the Potholes"). Your photo of the hunt success on p. 82 disappoints me with the number of hen mallards and hen gadwall shot. You discuss the duck factory and you and your hunting party shot too many hens—poor judgment in such a great place to hunt. I've hunted Sas myself in early October at Cudworth and Moosejaw. Next trip please enjoy the hunt but shoot the drakes, there are plenty of birds. Come and join me on the Upper Mississippi Refuge to hunt cans in November—all public lands. Enjoy the hunt.

Garold Becker, Stoddard, Wis.

HOORAY FOR QUAIL

The article on quail came at a very good time ("A Visit with Gentleman Bob on the Black Belt Prairie," October). I have hunted since I was 12 years old. My dad taught me "safety first." I enjoy the outdoors, and I always look forward to hunting season. We had a very hard storm the last of June, and when things cleared I was amazed to see quail in my back yard. I live in the country with farms around so there is plenty of food for all. To hear the quail's call was a joy to my ears.

I always enjoy all the articles and read *American Hunter* from cover to cover. Thanks to the NRA for all you do so we can enjoy our freedom. I will turn 81 years old soon, and I look forward to many more years. It is great to see more women interested in hunting, as I am myself.

Kathryn Armagost, Leechburg, Pa.

A RABBIT-HUNTING TIP

I haven't seen any articles lately about still-hunting rabbits without a dog, so here's a tip for readers that I learned 72 years ago, when I was only 11 years old. It was 1948 in Akron, Ohio, when my father got me a used .22-caliber Savage Sporter Model 23A. About the same time, the Bledsoe family, originally from Kentucky, moved in next door. Their son, Dale, was around my age, and he became my best buddy. His father, Orphard, told me this: While still-hunting rabbits, "every time you stop, study the area closely, looking for the round, black, beady eye of the sitting rabbit, and its head will come into view." All I know is it works, so I hope readers use this tip to get more game.

William C. Mallardi, Barberton, Ohio

The editors welcome your letters. Mail them to:

Says You, American Hunter, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030-9400.

Or email us at americanhunter@nrahq.org. Letters may be edited for the sake of brevity.



Hunting may be called many things: a necessity, a pastime, a sport, a living, an escape. At times, it has been the most important or the least important factor in my life. At times, while facing stress or suffering the duress of heartache, hunting has been the only thing I wanted to do. Conversely, at times hunting has been the last thing I felt like doing.

Right now is not one of those times. Right now, I look forward to hunting most of all—and why not?

This year has been unlike any in my lifetime. In a world with COVID-19, throughout the uncertainty and trepidation and alarm and yes, even the boredom it has caused, I have reminded myself that I am blessed to hold a job and remain healthy and loved.

Now, as I write this it is Oct. 12. Deer season lies before me, and I relish the opportunity it represents. Virginia regulations allow me to take as many as five deer in a year, and this fall I intend to do just that between bow season, early and late muzzleloader seasons and centerfire season. My wife reminded me we don't really need five deer in the freezer—we just don't eat that much. But I'll worry about that if and when I actually bag five deer. It'd be a good problem to have, right?

This year, my deer season represents the ultimate escape—a great chance to get outside, breathe deep, forget politics and focus on a singular goal. Whatever else hunting means to you, I hope your deer season offers an escape. This year, we all could use one.

J. Scott Olmsted
Editor in Chief

NRA HUNTER'S CODE OF ETHICS **1.** I will consider myself an invited guest of the landowner, seeking his permission, and so conducting myself that I may be welcome in the future. **2.** I will obey the rules of safe gun handling, and will courteously but firmly insist that others who hunt with me do the same. **3.** I will obey all game laws and regulations and will insist that my companions do likewise. **4.** I will do my best to acquire those marksmanship skills which ensure clean, sportsmanlike kills. **5.** I will support conservation efforts which can ensure good hunting for future generations of Americans. **6.** I will pass along to younger hunters the attitudes and skills essential to a true outdoor sportsman.

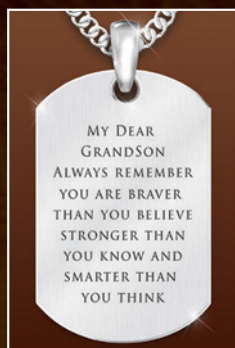
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On Aug. 2, the Klamath Falls, Ore., police department responded to a 911 call of a shooting outside of a convenience store. Upon arrival, they found a 29-year-old man shot in the leg and shoulder. Witnesses said the wounded man had been shooting at a vehicle his girlfriend was driving. A legally armed citizen witnessed this and intervened, shooting the assailant twice and instantly stopping the rampage. The wounded man then tried to hide his weapon, which was nonetheless recovered by detectives at the scene. The woman was not injured in the incident, though her vehicle was struck multiple times. After being released from a nearby medical center, the attacker was charged with attempted murder, felon in possession of a firearm, unlawful use of a weapon and reckless endangering. (klamathfallsnews.org, Klamath Falls, Ore., 8/3/20)

A tattoo shop owner responded to a notification from his shop's security alarm on the morning of Aug. 16. Once inside, he saw a man trying to open drawers behind the counter with a knife. The shop owner, who had a Maryland concealed-carry permit, drew his 9 mm Glock G48 and ordered the intruder to drop his knife and to sit down until the police arrived. During the police investigation, surveillance footage shows the intruder pulling on doors, trying to gain entry into other businesses in the same shopping center. He is then seen making entry at the side door of the tattoo shop. The investigators were able to verify the shop owner's account of the incident. The intruder is facing felony criminal charges that include second- and third-degree burglary. (cecildaily.com, North East, Md., 8/16/20)

A 29-year-old Adrian, Mich. man stabbed and killed an 85-year-old man in the automotive section of a local Meijer grocery store on Sept. 16 before being stopped by a woman with a concealed-carry firearm license. According to surveillance footage and witnesses, the suspect and the victim entered separately and the younger man stabbed the older man multiple times in the head and neck, killing him. During the altercation, a woman noticed what was happening, drew her firearm and ordered the suspect to the ground, where he was held until police arrived. The attacker was arrested and faces charges including murder. (freep.com, Detroit, Mich., 9/16/20)

A woman in Mesa, Ariz. was outside doing yard work on the afternoon of Sept. 18 when she heard a loud noise from inside her home. She went inside to investigate and found a 29-year-old man, who threatened her with a knife. This action forced the homeowner to defend herself and shoot the intruder once in the chest. After being

released from the hospital, the suspect was charged with first-degree burglary and aggravated assault. According to police, he also had two outstanding arrest warrants. (azfamily.com, Mesa, Ariz., 9/18/20)

A Turtle Creek, Penn. woman endured hours of domestic abuse in the early-morning hours of Sept. 26. According to police records, a 24-year-old man held the woman (his girlfriend) against her will and repeatedly assaulted her while threatening to kill her. The woman was finally able to get to her legally purchased firearm and defend herself, shooting and killing the man. First-responders found the man with multiple gunshot wounds and pronounced him dead at the scene. (post-gazette.com, Pittsburgh, Pa., 9/26/20)

A man was approached and threatened while putting groceries into his car outside of an Arvada, Colo. store on Aug. 28. The suspected car thief reportedly pointed a gun at the man's stomach and demanded his keys. Instead of handing the keys over, the victim tossed the keys several feet away, causing the thief to go after them. During the distraction, the vehicle owner, who is a concealed-carry permit holder, was able to draw his own firearm and scare the thief off. Police arrested the suspect a short time later after he crashed a stolen truck into a nearby McDonalds. (wane.com, Arvada, Colo., 8/28/20)

In the early-morning hours of Sept. 21, a Pembroke Pines, Fla. man walked into a Valero gas station, pulled out a gun and tried to rob the business. However, the clerk was able to draw his own firearm and shoot the would-be robber several times. The assailant fled the store and crossed a road before collapsing on the sidewalk. The Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue took the man to a local hospital where he later died. (miamiherald.com, Miami, Fla., 9/21/20) **dh**



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Our Fight Is A Battle For The Right To Survive



By Wayne LaPierre
Executive Vice President

You and I have never lived through a moment like this one. In the past several months, we watched an unprecedented wave of violence sweep across our nation—fueled by a deep-seated hatred for mainstream American values, and actively encouraged by politicians who openly despise America's founding freedoms.

Across the nation, the same governors who want to disarm law-abiding citizens have unlocked prison cells and released tens of thousands of violent felons onto our streets. Murder rates have skyrocketed in our big cities and small towns.

Wanton destruction blazed across our TV screens for months on end, while law enforcement officers were forced to stand down in the face of firebombers, looters and armed, violent thugs.

And as our cities have burned and lives have been cut tragically short, gun-ban politicians have painted a bright-red target on freedom's back—claiming that *your* values and *your* political views and *your* lawfully-owned guns are the root cause of this anarchy and bloodshed that *they* enabled.

I never thought I'd see this level of insanity in the United States of America. I never thought we'd see major political leaders openly advocating for mob rule while declaring that American freedom should be killed off like a rabid dog.

In Chicago, gun-hating Mayor Lori Lightfoot allowed her city to be transformed into a war zone, with more murders on May 31st of this year than on any other day in recorded history.

Countless Chicago businesses have been destroyed by arsonists and looters. Twenty-five thousand felons have seen their charges dropped. In the most gun-controlled city in the United States, citizens are sleeping on the floor in fear of stray bullets from so-called "peaceful protesters" and warring gangs.

Instead of getting tough on criminals, Lightfoot diverted more than 100 police officers to protect her own residence—declaring, "I have a right to make sure my home is secure"—and then called for more gun control aimed at disarming those who obey the law.

In Virginia, extremist gun-ban governor Ralph Northam signed multiple "gun-control" bills into law this past year. Next, he slashed penalties for assaulting police officers and set thousands of convicted felons free, including one who'd executed a law enforcement officer.

In Portland, Ore., anti-gun Mayor Ted Wheeler apologized to the mobs when law enforcement officers tried to intervene after more than 100 straight days of rioting. But when protesters arrived in his own neighborhood, he put his tail between his legs and fled the city.

In Philadelphia, District Attorney Larry Krasner has allowed seven times as many

criminals to walk free compared to the previous DA—including gun criminals. Krasner openly boasts that keeping criminals out of prison and on the streets is his "proudest accomplishment." In the meantime, Philadelphia is suffering a historic crime wave—and law-abiding citizens are waiting *one full year* just to apply for a Right-to-Carry permit and the chance to save their own lives.

In Minneapolis, the city council voted to dismantle the police department—then used taxpayer dollars to hire private security for protection of their own homes and families.

In New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio—anti-gun extremists to the core—have unleashed a crime wave like New York City hasn't seen in 50 years. They've teamed up to eliminate cash bail, empty prisons and dissolve the 600-member anti-crime unit that was getting criminals and their illegal guns off New York City streets.

Yes, this is the same Governor Cuomo who—in his own words—tried to "put the NRA out of business" by hounding and harassing financial institutions who refuse to sever ties with us. His Attorney General Letitia James has filed a dangerous lawsuit threatening to dissolve the National Rifle Association, motivated by her own personal view that NRA is a "terrorist" organization.

That's right. In Cuomo and James' insane world, violent criminals are victims, and the real enemy is "terrorists" like you because you join together under the NRA banner to protect your right to survive.

It's beyond crazy. However, in every one of these states and cities where criminals are running rampant and honest citizens are now living in abject fear, the leftist playbook to destroy freedom is wide open for anyone to see:

Empty the prisons.

Ignore the mayhem.

Hamstring the police.

Surrender the streets.

Build an armed wall of defense around their own homes and families.

Then, hold freedom hostage, and demand that honest citizens give up their guns as *the price for ending the anarchy and bloodshed.*

We've never seen anything like this in the history of this nation.

For 150 years, NRA has stood like a rock to make sure that law-abiding Americans will always enjoy the freedoms that were enshrined for us in the United States Constitution.

But this time, it's not just our Second Amendment rights at stake. It's our country as we know it—and literally our own right to survive.

Anti-gun politicians are trying to hold freedom hostage until we submit to their list

continued on p.75 >>



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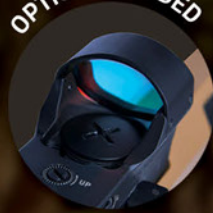


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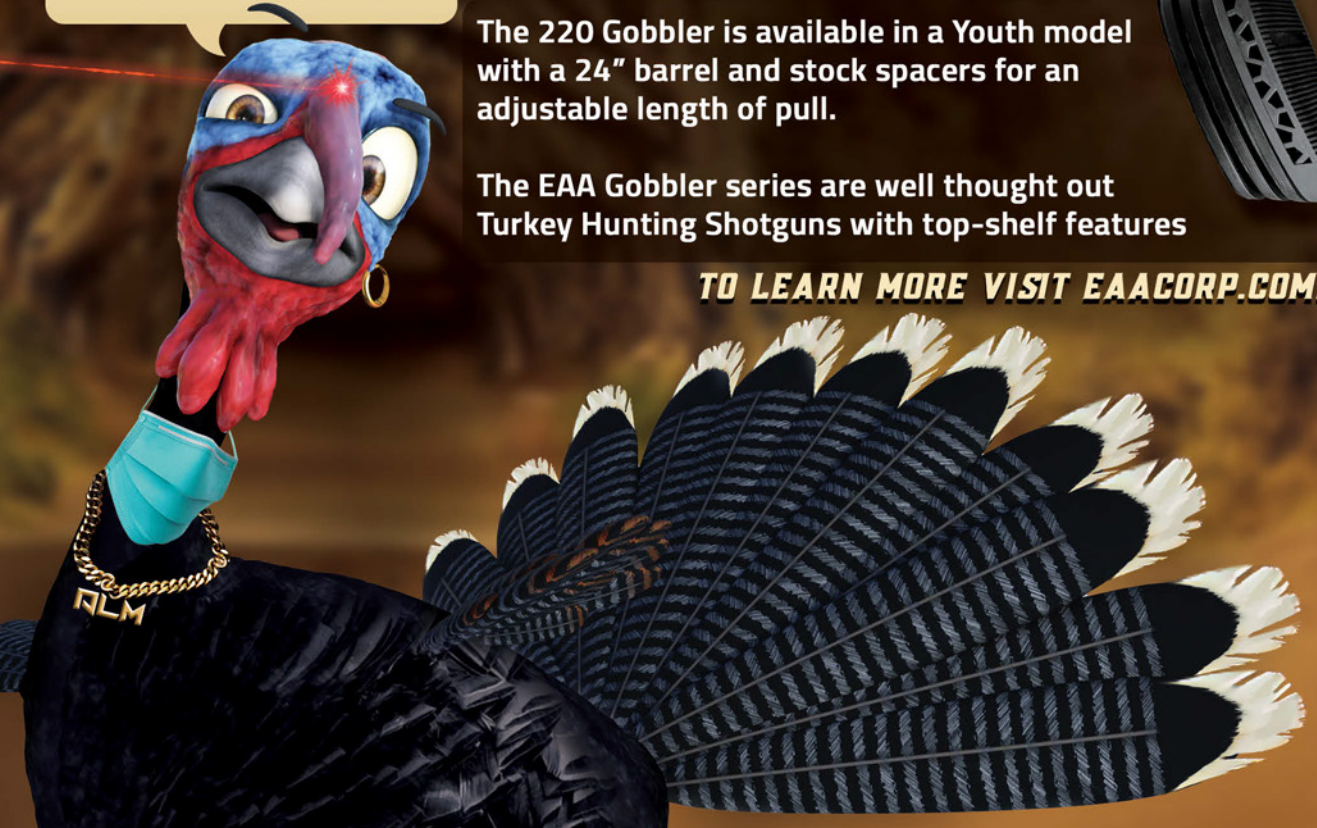
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We Vow To Remain Vigilant

As we head into December and the end of a year that has challenged America like no other, we are provided a stark reminder that time doesn't stand still. As the one-year mark approaches since the arrival of the COVID-19 virus to these shores, and as violence and disorder continue to plague our cities, we pray for those individuals and families touched by these troubling events. We pray for God's mercy. We pray that He will help our elected officials, medical professionals, law enforcement, business leaders and others find solutions to our nation's ills.

By the time you read this, another milestone will have passed, as the 2020 election cycle will have taken place. The magazine's production schedule precludes me from being able to comment on the results of the presidential and congressional races, but at the time of this writing, our country was in the throes of the most vicious political battle in recent memory, with our American way of life hanging in the balance. It is my sincere prayer that in my first column of 2021, I am able to celebrate the news that Donald J. Trump has been deservedly re-elected for a second term, thereby ensuring that our Second Amendment rights—and our entire Constitution—will remain intact for future generations of Americans.

Whatever the outcome, President Trump earned the votes of freedom-loving Americans, as his mantra of "promises made, promises kept" was realized on more fronts than can be enumerated here. NRA members have been especially grateful for his stalwart defense of their gun rights and have every reason to believe he will continue to make good on his promises. Proof of this can be found in his selection of two honorable U.S. Supreme Court justices—and in his nominating a third as of this writing. Each is committed to applying the law of the land consistent with our Founding Fathers' original intent, in accordance with one of the greatest documents ever written, the U.S. Constitution, and in deference to the unalienable rights endowed by our Creator. That law of the land includes the Second Amendment to the Bill of Rights: the Right to Keep and Bear Arms.

The end of the election cycle, however, does not mean an end to the unceasing attacks on your freedom by those statist who believe you have no inalienable rights. In fact, the assault on your freedom is guaranteed to worsen regardless of who holds the political power on Capitol Hill.

Many of the Left's misguided intentions can be accomplished by nothing more than the stroke of a pen signing an executive order.

That is why, now more than ever, NRA needs your support. It is critical that NRA has the energy and resources to fight 365 days a year to protect your Second Amendment rights. You can trust NRA leaders never to let down their guard, and we vow to remain vigilant on your behalf in the defense of our Constitution.

We have evidence that the fight continues to pay off. Earlier this year, a Los Angeles judge rightfully blocked an ordinance that would have required companies to disclose connections with NRA in order to receive government contracts. This ruling was counted as a First Amendment victory for NRA and those who value our constitutional freedoms. In early October, the City of Los Angeles was ordered to compensate the NRA almost \$150,000 in legal fees incurred from this suit. This is just one example of many in which, regardless of who holds the highest office in the land, the NRA will continue to hold accountable government officials and politicians who take actions hostile to the NRA and its members.

With your continued support, there is no doubt in my mind that we will be able to guarantee more victories like this in 2021. We will continue to defend our Association and what it stands for against those who conspire to take us down through baseless accusations and backdoor maneuvers because they dislike our politics and our commitment to the God-given rights of our members.

I am sure you will agree there are countless events from 2020 that we look forward to putting in our collective rearview mirror. What the pandemic and criminal anarchy stole from us will never be forgotten, but we must also look ahead to brighter days. NRA observes its 150th anniversary in 2021, and we are excited to celebrate that milestone in a big way during the upcoming NRA Annual Meetings & Exhibits in Houston, Texas, in May. We also hope to resume many member services and programs for which NRA has long been known. And we are especially enthused to welcome the millions of new American gun owners into our organization, make them aware of training opportunities with NRA instructors and encourage them to contribute to our mission of keeping freedom alive.



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By Jason Ouimet
Executive Director,
NRA-ILA

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Thank You For Your Efforts In 2020; Now Is The Time To Look Ahead

The year 2020 will be remembered as one of many ups and downs, both for gun owners and for the country at large. Yet as I reflect on the year gone by, two feelings are uppermost in my mind: gratitude and pride.

I am grateful for the tremendous effort the National Rifle Association and its more than five million members have put into preserving our most fundamental rights: the right to protect our lives and the lives of those we love.

And I feel enormous pride that through every circumstance that 2020 could throw at us, we—the members and personnel of the NRA—have never stopped fighting for the goal that unites us all: the protection and preservation of the Second Amendment.

Those are the feelings I will carry forward into 2021, come what may. While much still remains to be determined about the conditions and political landscape gun owners will face in the new year, the gratitude and pride that comes with striving alongside our membership in this righteous struggle will motivate us to keep fighting.

NRA members represent the best of America.

You have a deep and abiding appreciation of our freedoms and what it takes, and has taken, to protect them.

You are stewards of a great body of knowledge about firearms, gun safety, history, the management of our country's precious natural resources, and the most effective forms of civic and political engagement.

Your commitment is demonstrated not just by words but by resolute deeds. You are the nation's leading firearm instructors, sportsmen, hobbyists, hunters, hunting guides, gunsmiths, gun sellers and gun collectors.

You are a political force that has changed the shape of American politics. No one engages in the political process with more fervor, savvy or consistency than the men and women of the NRA.

Politicians understand that you are highly knowledgeable about issues that affect your right to keep and bear arms, and that these issues have a direct impact on the votes you cast.

They understand you will hold them accountable at the polls. They know you unfailingly cast votes in election after election.

Some people merely complain when they see things heading in the wrong direction.

You, the five million members of the NRA, on the other hand, act decisively.

Over the course of the 2020 general election cycle, you came out in droves to support President Trump and candidates like him who pledged to protect the Second Amendment and who backed up those pledges with their actions in office.

Besides your votes and the votes of friends and family who cast their ballots with your encouragement, in addition to all the yard signs and bumper stickers you displayed on your property, you were the foot soldiers in a massive campaign to elect pro-gun candidates.

Preliminary numbers show that in concert with our field organizers, you knocked on over 1 million doors to get out the pro-gun vote.

You made over half a million calls to remind gun owners to vote freedom first.

You sent a staggering 10 million election-related texts with information supporting pro-gun candidates.

With all the millions of dollars billionaires like Michael Bloomberg and George Soros spent to curtail your rights, with the combined forces of the legacy media, Hollywood, and social media platforms all united against your Second Amendment freedoms, you showed up and did the hard work of freedom. All their dollars, their smug self-regard, and their casual dismissal of you and your values could not suppress your enthusiasm or your determination.

There are never any guarantees when it comes to politics, except that you cannot win by being idle. You showed the winning spirit with your investment of time, energy and passion.

This article will go to the printing press before we have learned all the outcomes of the November elections.

But I don't have to know those outcomes to feel gratitude and pride for what we accomplished together.

There will undoubtedly be struggles and opportunities ahead of us. No matter what the pundits or pollsters would have you believe, the future remains up for grabs. There is no predetermined trajectory to the trendline of American freedom.

So while I extend my heartfelt "thank you" for your unselfish and unyielding efforts in 2020, I encourage you to look ahead and imagine the future you want for yourself, your children and your grandchildren.

What that future looks like depends on who is willing to work the hardest for it.

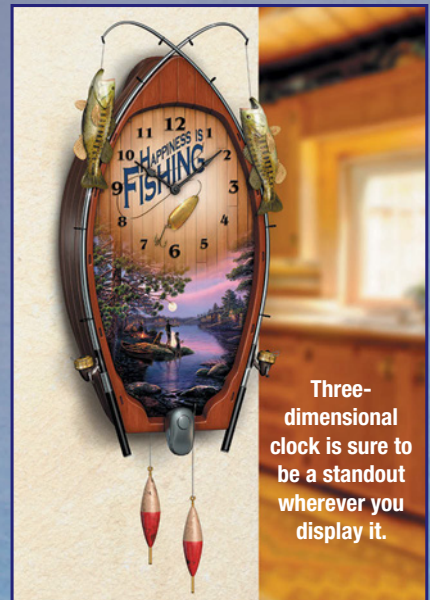
And I would never bet against the men and women of the NRA when it comes to that.

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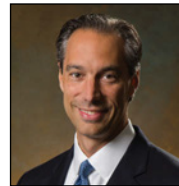
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Getty Images photo by Andrew Harnier/Bloomberg

By Jason Ouimet
Executive Director,
NRA-ILA



Protecting the PLCAA

Those who advocate to repeal or overturn the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (“PLCAA”) are advocating the annihilation of our Second Amendment. That may sound alarmist, but a right to keep and bear arms without any way to lawfully manufacture, sell, or purchase those arms is no right at all.

The PLCAA generally protects licensed firearm manufacturers and sellers from frivolous lawsuits brought to recover damages for the criminal misuse of their products. This protection should have been unnecessary because our legal system generally does not punish anyone for the criminal actions of others, but a group of attorneys and politicians in the 1990s set out to use the tort system to achieve the gun-control policies that had been rejected by state legislatures and Congress.

These suits, though they were of little merit, posed a grave threat to the industry; and in turn, America’s gun owners. In 1998, Executive Director of the anti-gun U.S. Conference of Mayors was quoted by *The New York Times* as stating, “[t]he lawyers are seeing green on this issue ... they think they can bring the gun industry to its knees.” One of those attorneys “seeing green,” John Coale, was quoted in a 2000 *Washington Post* article remarking, “[t]he legal fees alone are enough to bankrupt the industry.”

Andrew Cuomo, who is certainly no stranger to using the courts to punish his political rivals, described the legal campaign against the firearm industry as a “death by a thousand cuts” when he worked as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Imagine if Louisville Slugger could be punished for attacks by criminal assailants using their bats, or if Ford or GM were liable for damage when someone intentionally crashed one of their cars. No industry could survive in such a legal landscape, and that is exactly what the lawyers bringing these cases and Cuomo banked on: the death of the American firearm industry.

My first experience working on the PLCAA came in 2004 when working in the office of former Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.). The bill failed that year when Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) attached a version of her perennial gun ban to the PLCAA. But, in 2005, after beginning my first year at the NRA, I had the privilege of working to help pass this extremely important piece of American law.

While passage of the PLCAA saved the firearm industry, and with it every law-abiding American’s right to acquire a firearm to protect themselves and their families, the PLCAA itself is now under attack.

Political attacks on the PLCAA have claimed that it provides “unique” protection to firearm business and that it protects them from liability for damages for which they are at fault. These claims are simply false.

First, the immunity provided to the firearm industry is in no way unique. Vaccine producers, Internet platform providers, and small aircraft manufacturers, to name a few, all enjoy similar or even more expansive liability protection under federal law.

Second, firearm businesses remain fully liable for injuries caused by their products and not by the criminal actions of a third party. Suits against the industry for knowingly unlawful sales, negligent entrustment, and those predicated on traditional product-liability grounds are all also still permitted.

Legal attacks on the PLCAA have been no less meritorious, but they have, unfortunately, seen more success. While these attacks initially focused on using one of the PLCAA's several exceptions to allow limited cases to proceed, most recently, a Pennsylvania appellate court ruled on September 28 that the PLCAA is unconstitutional.

This sets the stage for a possible deluge of court cases against firearms manufacturers and dealers. The ruling came in the case of *Gustafson v. Springfield, Inc.*, a lawsuit that seeks to hold Springfield Armory and Saloom Department Store liable for the criminal misuse of a handgun that Springfield manufactured and Saloom sold.

Although it is unlikely this ruling will hold up on appeal, it does provide a strong argument for the necessity of the PLCAA, as well as a bit of irony.

First, the irony.

The lead counsel for the plaintiffs that filed the lawsuit is Jonathan Lowy, who also happens to be vice president of one of America's oldest anti-gun organizations, the Brady Campaign. His organization was founded as the National Coalition to Control Handguns, and one of its early leaders, Nelson "Pete" Shields, made clear the organization's goals. "The first problem is to slow down the increasing number of handguns being produced and sold in this country," he said. "The second is to get handguns registered. And the final problem is to make the possession of all handguns and all handgun ammunition—except for the military, policemen, licensed security guards, licensed sporting clubs and licensed gun collectors—totally illegal."

As part of the goal to "slow down" handgun manufacturers in America, the Brady Campaign has long been a driving force behind reckless lawsuits against the firearm industry.

In January, a lower court correctly dismissed *Gustafson v. Springfield, Inc.*, finding that the PLCAA protected Springfield and Saloom, as neither had violated any law, and the firearm was used illegally by a third party. When the case was appealed, Lowy argued that the PLCAA itself is unconstitutional, and his argument appears to have succeeded, for now. However, if the latest ruling were to be upheld, the court's reasoning could lay the groundwork for overturning most federal gun-control laws.

**POLITICAL ATTACKS
ON THE PLCAA HAVE
CLAIMED THAT IT
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PROTECTION TO FIREARM
BUSINESS AND THAT IT
PROTECTS THEM FROM
LIABILITY FOR DAMAGES
FOR WHICH THEY ARE AT
FAULT. THESE CLAIMS ARE
SIMPLY FALSE.**

Ironic, no?

The suit claimed the firearm itself, a Springfield Armory XD-9, was a "defective handgun" because it did not include a magazine disconnect, which would not allow the firearm to be fired if the magazine is removed.

Not having a magazine disconnect is not a "design defect," however, as the suit alleges. Some semi-automatic firearms have them, and some do not. For those who desire this feature, they can purchase a firearm with it. Those who do not desire it will purchase those firearms that do not have them. But the purchaser knows exactly what he is getting, and firearm owner's manuals included with semi-automatic firearms include warnings that the firearm is capable of firing without a magazine inserted.

Despite the technology existing for more than 100 years, magazine disconnects remain relatively

uncommon. Many gun owners simply don't want the added complexity and do want a firearm that's capable of firing if the magazine is dislodged during the tense moments of a defensive gun use.

While suits seeking to have gun manufacturers add "features" that gun buyers don't want are common, the court's reasoning in this case makes it an outlier.

In order to come to the conclusion that the PLCAA is unconstitutional, the three-judge Superior Court panel ignored or misconstrued precedent and numerous cases upholding the constitutionality of the PLCAA in order to justify their decision. Reading various passages of commentary and analysis in the decision, it would be easy to get the distinct impression that the panel was predisposed to come away with a ruling that could be harmful to the firearm industry.

It remains to be seen what will come of this Pennsylvania case. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported, "Legal experts remained skeptical that the opinion released Monday would have far-reaching implications for potential plaintiffs in other suits—with some going as far as to describe the court's reasoning as 'provocative' and 'aggressive' in a way that would almost certainly result in an appeal and likely end up with the decision being overturned."

Notably, anti-gun organizations haven't been celebrating the decision as loudly as one might expect. Perhaps they realize that nearly all federal gun laws would be vulnerable if the court's ruling were to be applied more broadly.

The case does, however, illustrate the importance that elections can play even in a judiciary that is supposed to be bound by the law and not partisan or personal beliefs. And, that's doubly true in Pennsylvania where judges are directly accountable to voters.

While we have enjoyed many pro-Second Amendment wins, this case makes clear that all of the hard work that NRA members and other gun owners put into passing laws like the PLCAA could be dismantled if we don't remain vigilant and continue to work together as the most powerful grassroots force in America! **dh**

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By Todd Grable
Executive Director of
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FINAL CALL: WIN a Truck that YOU Get to Choose

As I finish this column just before our press deadline, I have no way of knowing the outcome of the national elections on November 3rd. But I can tell you – on behalf of the entire NRA – how grateful I am for your support, each and every day of this historic campaign battle.

And as one more way to celebrate your extraordinary commitment to freedom – and to say thanks for all your hard work and effort this past year – I'd like to offer you a chance to be a big winner in our NRA Win This Truck Sweepstakes.

This is an opportunity you don't want to miss. That's because you get to choose the truck you want to win most – the Ford F-150 Lariat or the Chevrolet Silverado 1500 LTZ!

Plus, if you're drawn as our Grand Prize Winner, you'll be rolling down the highway in the truck you choose with over \$11,000 in GUNS and GEAR! These are fantastic prizes from top brands like Spike's Tactical, Kimber, Nightforce Optics, and Cordova Outdoors to name a few. And... on top of the truck of your choice, and tons of guns and gear, you'll also receive \$50,000 in cash if you're our big winner!

So please don't wait. In order to lock in your chance to win, you must enter by January 29, 2021 at 11:59 PM ET. Just visit NRWinThisTruck.org to choose the truck you want to win most, and get your

entry in before this January 29th deadline (see Official Rules for details).

And when you enter, I hope you'll also make a voluntary contribution of just \$10 for each entry you choose to submit. *No contribution is required for entry and a contribution will not improve your chances of winning.*

But you know as well as I do that, as difficult as this election battle has been, the toughest fights we'll ever face are still ahead. Over these past few months, we've seen gun-hating politicians try to shut down gun shops, release hardened criminals onto our streets, and force law enforcement to stand down in the face of arsonists, looters and anarchists.

In all of American history, there's never been a more important time for law-abiding Americans to have an ironclad Right to Keep and Bear Arms, and to defend our loved ones and our lives. But to preserve and defend that precious freedom, we need your help to rebuild NRA's fighting strength and do it fast.

So please don't wait. Please enter today for your chance to be a huge winner in our NRA Win This Truck Sweepstakes – and take home not only the truck of your choice, but a load of gun and gear prizes and \$50,000 in cash. Remember, this sweepstakes closes at exactly 11:59 PM ET on January 29, 2021, and you can't win if you don't enter!

Thank you again for your commitment to freedom. I wish you the best of luck in our NRA Win This Truck Sweepstakes, and a very happy holiday season to you and your family.

Todd Grable

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I'D LIKE TO OFFER YOU A CHANCE TO BE A BIG WINNER
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NO PURCHASE OR CONTRIBUTION NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. A PURCHASE OR CONTRIBUTION WILL NOT IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING. Sweepstakes is open to legal residents of the United States and Washington D.C., age 21 years or older at time of entry who are licensed drivers. To qualify for the random drawing, online entries must be received by 11:59 PM ET on 1/29/21. See Official Rules for details, including fast entry deadline dates, entry limits, and how to enter without a contribution.

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On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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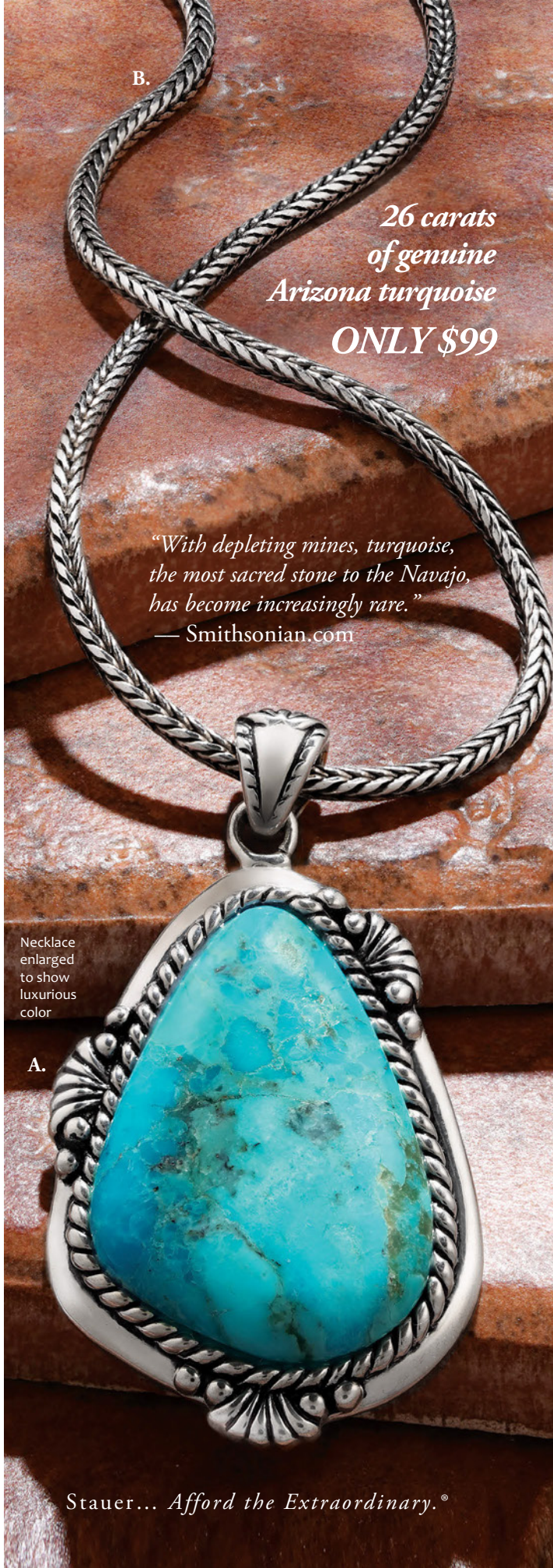
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Can Family Farms Help Rekindle America's Hunting Spirit?

By John Zent, Editorial Director



Ryan Newkirk grows the grapes for his family vineyard and also guides visiting deer hunters. His work at the skinning tree (here with grandad Howie Steinbeck) often draws tasting-room patrons. "Its a great outreach," says Newkirk.

Back around 1980, at the peak in the number of licensed hunters in the United States, many of us headed out to family farms to pursue our game. You could look for deer or pot a few rabbits, and afterwards visit grandma and grandpa. However, that All-American scenario had already begun to change along with ownership of the land. As the total number of U.S. farms fell gradually during the ensuing decades, big farms got bigger, small farms got smaller and the number of mid-sized farms (100 to 250 acres) declined.

Along the way lots of former family-farm hunters found themselves scrambling for alternatives. The transition was tough. Along with public lands, those unable to gain permission elsewhere could turn to the growing lease market, including farmlands formerly reserved for family and friends. But some resented having to pay for what had always been free, and consequently they started dropping out. By 2010, hunting license sales had dipped 13.5 percent

from its high of 16.75 million in 1982, and the USFWS reported that in 2016 just 11.5 million adults hunted. It's troubling news for all of us who want to continue to hunt and to pass the tradition along to future generations.

Fortunately, the hunting community is countering with the R3 movement (recruit, retain, reactivate) and with promotions like "Join the Hunt" in this magazine. But it's going to take a lot of good ideas to save hunting, and an underlying factor will always be: Where do I go? Ironically, it may be time to take another look at family farms.

Among the 21st century's curious developments is that a new breed of family farmer is emerging. These hard-working folks may be focused on traditional crops like corn, beans and cattle, or they may focus on growing vegetables, nursery stock, goats or grapes. Some have farm backgrounds, while others are new to country life. Along with their love of the land, many are also

Photo: Windigo Images

Photos: Author



Photo: Author

When hunters come to his Nebraska grain farm, Marvin Breighel looks forward to making new friends and showing off his world-class cartridge collection.

increasingly seeking additional revenue from a category that didn't even have a name in the 1980s—agritourism. According to the USDA, agritourism earnings more than tripled between 2002 and 2017, and now account for around \$1 billion annually even though wineries were excluded from its 2017 survey. The good news is that a growing number are hosting hunters.

So, no, it's not hunting your family's farm, and yes, quite likely you will have to pay. But in today's market, some of our cronies are finding good fits for the way they want to hunt and their budgets.

Farmers Are Conservationists Too

■ Ryan Newkirk is the seventh generation in his family to till the fertile ground near Paso Robles, Calif. What was started with cattle and grain in the 1880s eventually transformed into a vineyard as it became evident that the area's "Mediterranean climate" is better for growing grapes than fattening cows. Celebrating its 100th anniversary at its current location, Steinbeck Family Vineyard (steinbeckwines.com) is now a partnership involving Ryan's grandparents, Howie and Bev Steinbeck, and mom, Cindy Steinbeck. In addition to annual production of 600 acres of grapes and running a busy tasting room, the Steinbeck clan added guided deer hunting to the operation in 2013. If this family story sounds familiar, it's because Field Editor Bryce Towsley told it in our November 2019 issue, and so we won't rehash a lot of that here.

While we might call Ryan by a fancy term like viticulturist or oenologist, he'll tell you he's a farmer who stresses over his soil and vines every day of the year. And he self-identifies as a hunter, though after guiding me to a mature coastal blacktail, he said that mentoring guests—including some who've hunted worldwide—is

Agritourism Hot Spots and Cold Spots

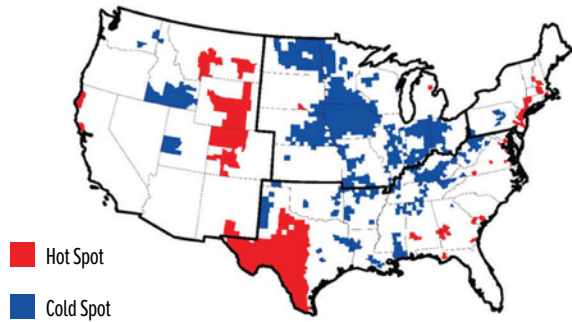


Image: USDA

The USDA attributes the nation's biggest agritourism hotspot in West Texas to the region's brisk business in outfitted hunting.

more satisfying that pulling the trigger himself. What's also been gratifying is sharing the experience with winery patrons who are often non-hunters. Without fail, they'll cross the small parking area between the tasting room and his skinning tree when they see Ryan dressing a deer. "It's kind of messy, you know, but their response is always positive when they get that this is food, that this is another natural product from our vineyard. It's great outreach to show them what we're all about."

■ Marvin Breighel grows wheat, corn, beans and feeder calves on his farm in south-central Nebraska. If you visit at the right time, you'll see the "amber waves of grain" famously envisioned in "America The Beautiful." Or perhaps a few weeks later, you'll watch scores of whitetails trooping into his harvested fields, including some great bucks.

For many years, Marv has welcomed hunters through leases with prominent shooting-industry clients Knight Rifles and Hornady. Along the way he's hosted media figures like Jim Shockey, Jim Zumbo, Mark Kayser and others. Marv is never shy about telling them how to hunt his place, and based on my time there, he's usually right. Though he certainly counts on his leasing proceeds, the crusty old farmer shrugs off the fact that it barely puts a dent in the abundance of deer and turkeys on his place. Despite the crop damage they bring, he appreciates their presence and keeps a close watch. The big draw bringing in hunters, he's told me, is having company and making new friendships.

■ Ron is a west Texas cattle rancher whose high-desert spread is way bigger than farms found elsewhere, but still remains very much a family business. His homestead is kept in immaculate condition, and when I met the man, he'd been grading ranch roads, which were also in great shape. For additional income, Ron works with outfitter Jim Breck Bean (highwestoutfitter.com) to bring in visiting hunters seeking trophy game, and for the record, this is not a high-fence area. Along with the local mule deer, pronghorns and javelina regulated by statewide seasons and licenses, the region is also home to introduced species like elk, desert bighorn and aoudad. For them, Ron and his neighbors are allotted tags based on state-conducted population surveys, which can then be sold as the landowners see fit. Ron talked enthusiastically about having wildlife on his land, but acknowledged it's important to keep their numbers balanced with the carrying capacity in this arid landscape.

Interestingly, a USDA map of agritourism hot spots and cold spots from 2012 survey data shows how significant the additional revenue is thereabouts, as the Trans-Pecos region was the nation's

Photo: Author



Photos: Russell Graves / RussellGraves.com



High West Outfitters' Jasper Klein and Jim Breck Bean tend a trophy aoudad, one of several big-game species that compete for resources on West Texas cattle ranches.

biggest hot spot, which "... was driven primarily by hunting recreation" according to the accompanying text.

While the aforementioned are all examples of lease arrangements, there are alternatives that make it viable for more of us to hunt private farmland. Centered in the mid-Atlantic region, Outdoor Access (OA—outdooraccess.com) is a tech-based service that connects landowners and outdoorsfolk seeking places to hunt, fish, camp and more. OA properties range from just a few acres to several hundred, and include working farms. Some places are offered on seasonal leases, but even more can be had for short-term entry, as short as a single day. Pricing varies, but exclusive use of good spots can be had for \$50 or less, on par with what you'd pay for other kinds of recreational outings.

■ In Northern Virginia not far from the D.C. suburbs, the Strother family's 500-acre Valley View Farm has embraced agritourism in a big way. Patrons come nearly year-round to pick their own fruit; to play in a hay-bale fort or a corn maze; to sample wines, cider and mead featuring homegrown ingredients; and for the past three years, to hunt the property's hilly terrain. Hiking there in early October, I witnessed this varied but cohesive approach to land use ranging from family recreation to a busy grape harvest to bowhunters breaking for lunch. "The hunting's just about all booked up for this fall," said Phillip Strother, "and it is critically important to controlling depredation in the orchard and the vineyard. We're definitely going to continue working with Outdoor Access. I'm a hunter myself, I get it.

"We're stewards of the land. Our goal is to practice sustainable agriculture that makes little impact on our valley's scenic beauty. It's something we've been doing, just like my father and earlier generations going back to the original 1730s land grant."

Also worth noting are online "farm-stay" portals. Primarily their listings are aimed at families seeking a down-home getaway



Photos: Author

Not far from Valley View Farm's busy market, Virginia bowhunters Mike Ross and Kimberly Dodson recap their morning for farm owner Phillip Strother.

where they stay in cabins or other on-site lodging and take part in various activities—riding horses, hayrides, pick-your-own produce, even helping out with the farm work. Not a lot of listings include hunting, but some do. This sort of thing might appeal to budget-minded hunters who'd like to sample DIY deer, turkey or other pursuits away from home base, but within driving distance. Possibilities can be found at farmstayus.com and redtri.com/family-farm-vacations, among others.

The Conservation Coalition

After the 2016 election, Farm Journal Media reported that nearly 70 percent of farmers voted for President Donald Trump, and in fact, farm votes frequently mirror gun-owner/hunter votes in congressional, gubernatorial, state legislature and other elections. It's no stretch to say an informal coalition between ag and gun-owner interests already exists. Both voting blocs must be on guard for preservationist policies that would block effective land and natural-resource management, often cooperative efforts by property owners and resource agencies. Such proposals threaten wildlife conservation and particularly the funding that is generated through taxes and user fees paid by shooters and hunters.

Beyond the immediate need for unity in electoral politics, hunters and farmers both face an equally pressing cultural shift. Government, education and media progressively marginalize our values and way of life in favor of urban culture. We need to fight against that, too. If not, it'll grow increasingly difficult to maintain public respect for conservation and hunting and to raise our children to inherit our values. One way to nurture our coalition is by being business partners. Conservation succeeds best where and when there's vested human self-interest. I'd like to believe that if we can help our landowner partners succeed financially, they will help ensure hunting and wildlife remain part of American life. **ah**

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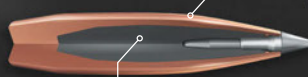
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MEMBERS' BEST

Hunting season is upon us—surely *American Hunter* readers have not been idle. This is a good time to remind everyone we are calling for entries in our annual “Members’ Best” feature collection, published every June.

Be it bucks or ducks, bulls or boars—if you bagged a trophy this year, we want to hear about it. And to be clear, remember a trophy is in the eye of the beholder. Your trophy could be your first whitetail buck, or your child’s first buck; it could include a bucket-list adventure to parts unknown; or it could simply be an afternoon bird hunt in the back 40 with your favorite gundog.

Regardless, we hope you didn’t forget to pack your camera.

If you’d like to enter your trophy for consideration in our annual “Members’ Best,” send us a picture and a 200-word description of when, where and how you filled your tag by March 1, 2021, and we’ll consider it for the annual celebration of our members’ best moments. Remember your photo could land on the cover, so send us your best. High-resolution trophy shots with clean backgrounds and good lighting are ideal.

Email entries and accompanying high-resolution photographs (1MB or larger) to americanhunter@nrahq.org. Mail entries to: *American Hunter*, Members’ Best, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030. Please include your name, address, phone number and NRA membership number with every entry, in case we need to contact you to verify hunt details to include in our coverage. Photos will not be returned.



Photo: Mike Murphy



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Top 10 Reasons to Become a Hunter

By Mark Kayser, Field Editor



Some of you may not have the instinctive, internal drive to dive into hunting. Your spouse, a friend, family member or even an inquisitive child of your neighbor could be of the same mindset. They may be hinting at dipping a toe in the hunting water to test the experience, yet not quite sure of a reason to launch. Give them a reason. In fact, give them 10 reasons or more. An instinctive drive to hunt will likely kick in once the pursuit begins, but make the case with these top 10 reasons.

Healthy Eats

You need protein in your diet, so why not skip the bean aisle in the grocery store and consider wild game? Maybe you are concerned with the use of antibiotics and hormones found in some farmed animals. Wild game provides an organic, lean, renewable and tasty alternative to protein raised in a mass production setting. Whether you target squirrels, waterfowl, upland game, deer or even feral hogs, you can be assured of a meal that has lived a free-range life. Depending on the wild game, it can contain 50 percent less fat and nearly 10 percent fewer calories than

beef. There is nothing wrong with binging on a fast-food burger, but for most of your meals, wild game offers too many healthy attributes to ignore.

Appreciate Nature, Support Wildlife

If not for hunters and their commitment to financially supporting wildlife through the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act, a self-imposed excise tax on the sale of sporting goods, America's wildlife backdrop would look drastically different. As a hunter you help fund this continued comeback and personally help manage flourishing species. In the process you acquire a front seat to appreciate nature that benefits from your support. Although certain management schemes may be focused on targeted species, all wildlife, great and small, profits from habitat restoration and wildlife projects.

Understand Animal Behavior

You may not have had the opportunity to take "Animal Behavior 101" with your economics degree, but you can acquire that class while hunting. To be a successful hunter you need to fully understand

animal behavior. Many videos found online can get you started on what you need to know for a successful hunt. Nevertheless, you will be in school on every outing seeing firsthand how nature works. Watching a whitetail buck make a scrape or seeing the grace of a flock of teal settling for a pond landing is not only captivating, but gives you insight on how to successfully take a particular species.

Hone Survival Skills

The pandemic was an eye-opener in many respects. One important lesson learned should be your personal survival—it is up to you, after all. You likely noticed the toilet paper shortage, but how about the empty shelves of food? That should shock you back to your senses. Hunting provides you a means to supplement those shortages, and along the way you may also hone camping skills and clean water acquisition. Food, water and shelter are your three essential needs and all three are basic components during hunting pursuits. Fill your freezer with healthy wild game and perfect your survival skills in preparation for the next pandemic.



What drives any of us to join the hunt? It may not take long to discover someone's motivations. Communing firsthand with nature, adventurous recreation, honing survival skills and taking home healthy protein are just four good reasons.

Physical Activity

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 40 percent of adults are obese. Those who are obese and overweight nudges over 70 percent. That means a good portion of Americans land in either category. Finding time to hit the gym or walk around the neighborhood is not always easy. Hunting can be an answer to combine protein procurement and physical activity into a single endeavor. Preseason scouting, placing hunting stands, building blinds and hiking to remote hunting parcels all add up to calories burnt, and muscles toned. Fuse that with a lean meal of wild game and you are on the way to a better you.

Perfect Shooting Skills

Have you ever wanted to shoot like the legendary Navy SEAL Chris Kyle? A hunting focus forces you to perfect your shooting skills. Your goal is to humanely kill your targeted species with precision. That requires practice with your firearm of choice. Time at the range and shooting in real-world conditions can help you achieve this goal. And besides, shooting

skills for personal defense are always worthy of your time—it's the essence of the Second Amendment.

Help the Climate

You may fall into a group where climate change is important to you and your lifestyle. Whether you embrace the fact that beef and modern agricultural processes are contributing to a changing climate, hunting can help you sleep better at night. By attaining your protein from wild species during a hunt you are relying less on the livestock industry and fossil fuels for agricultural endeavors.

Save Money

Don't kid yourself. Hunting can be expensive. Despite this basic statement, your initial test doesn't need to break the bank. You may be able to acquire cheap hunting gear at a pawn shop, online or from an uncle eager to see you succeed. You don't need to kickstart your hunting career with elk or wild sheep either. Backyard species like whitetail deer, Canada geese and cottontails are found in nearly every ZIP code in appreciable numbers for pantry fodder.

COVID-19 Escape

Hunting is a notable escape from the infected world. Hunting separates us from the crowds, exposes us to volumes of fresh air and clears our mind of the world's issues as we focus on the goal at hand. If this pandemic lockdown has you stir-crazy, give hunting a try to evade madness.

Recreation

Lastly, hunting is entertaining recreation. You may have tried golf or spent a few months on a summer softball league. You cannot deny the laughs and camaraderie created; hunting includes that aspect and more. You are immersing yourself in the real world, not an online game of fantasy. You have an actual quarry with a worthy goal of feeding yourself and your household. Climatic conditions, like a wind-driven snowstorm, challenge you during the season. Still, with skill and luck, you could create a hunting memory and a nutritious meal via an authentic adventure. Share these 10 reasons to hunt with anyone showing a glimmer of interest and you may discover a new hunting friend. **dh**

Photos: Author

PULLING DUCKS IN LOW-VIS SITUATIONS

By Jeff Johnston, Field Editor

Volumes have been written about the pitfalls of over-calling and about the benefits of minimalist, small-water setups. But that doesn't apply to all ducks in all situations. Some scenarios require giving birds all you've got to attract their attention and coax them into places they might otherwise fly by.

Recently I witnessed a great example of the art of decoying ducks on historic Beaverdam Lake in the heart of the Mississippi River Delta. I was amazed to witness high-flying birds that I otherwise wouldn't have known were there had they not dropped through the treetops seemingly out of nowhere and into our hole after our guide blindly hailed them. Certainly, flooded timber hunting amid Mississippi's blackwater swamps is specialized, but it proves successful hunters must employ tactics based on the given scenario rather than preconceived notions of how one should call ducks based on habit or tradition. Consider the following tips for scenarios with limited overhead visibility, perhaps on brush-choked ponds, wooded creeks, in flooded timber and during foggy days just about anywhere.

Give Ducks a Landing Zone

While there is truth to the fact that ducks go where they want to go, it's also a fact birds only land where they can land. They fly overhead along their journey searching for a desirable place to feed, dabble and rest away from danger. Under vast canopies of timber, ducks may not be able to see the water or other ducks, nor do they have room amid the leaves and limbs to land if they did.

"If you are hunting private land," says Duck Commander's Justin Martin, who knows a thing or two about flooded-timber hunting, "cut key limbs or even a few undesirable trees such as water hickory or elm to create a small pocket of open water.



Photo: Author

Birds don't need a big hole to be able to land, but they do need a hole. If you can't cut trees, look for natural openings and set up there."

Birds overhead will see this open water amid a sea of green jungle and naturally focus on it to take a better look. When they do, you must be ready to coax them both audibly and visually.



Photo: Author



Photo: Jon Draper

Calling

In timber, you can't always see birds at which to call. So while you might feel a little silly in front of your buddies when you call blindly or call before you see ducks, you should do it anyway. Give random highballs, quacks and chuckles to attract high-flying birds or birds that you simply can't see due to the trees.

Beaverdam Hunting Services' Lamar Boyd utilized this strategy with fantastic results, despite my skepticism while looking through the blind's portholes at seemingly nothing but trees. Two-by-twos and three-by-threes, ducks would obviously hear the calls, drop over the trees, see the decoys and helicopter down into our hole and waiting shotguns.

"Start out calling on the soft side—unless birds aren't responding or if you're hunting public land and competing for birds," says Martin. "And don't be afraid to call often."

If and when you find a sound and volume at least one group of birds likes, keep doing it. Chances are, others will like it too.



Photo: Author

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If you're a weekend-per-year duck hunter, you probably don't need the best duck call money can buy. But if you're serious about calling ducks and obtaining a quality duck call with a tone that matches your style, a volume that matches your needs and with a consistency that won't let you down in the moment of truth, you won't regret buying a high-end call like one from **737 Duck Calls**. The central Oklahoma, small-shop callmaker produces hand-tuned acrylic and wooden duck and goose calls. While it offers specialized calls for specific scenarios, its acrylic, No. 1 single reed call features a blend of range, smoothness and volume for most any situations, from low guttural chuckling to reach-out-there hailing and all quacks in between. I grew up hunting ducks with 737 proprietor Kyle Sanders, so I know just how dedicated to duck hunting and duck calling he is. Such a custom-engraved call also makes a great gift. \$150; 737duckcalls.com

Decoys

Once birds see a hole of open water and hear other ducks, they begin scanning for danger as they drop lower and circle to take a look. One indication of safety is if other ducks are already there feeding. Birds overhead will spot copious decoys easier even though many might be shielded from view by the canopy of trees. Perhaps even better than seeing the actual decoys, overhead birds lock in on motion; they can see ripples within the reflections on the water. Motion adds a giant element of realism, because living ducks are never stark-still. Adding motion to your set is critical in low-visibility situations.

"I like to have all my decoys moving," says Martin. "Whether jerk strings, rippers, or splashers, I just want a bunch of commotion."

Don't forget about Mojoes, or spinning-wing decoys; they can be deadly for deep-timber birds where lack of light and backgrounds make decoys—and ripples—tougher to see.

Although there was not an overwhelming abundance of ducks in the sky that day in Mississippi as perhaps there were during Buckingham Nash's historic time there—or even the day before I arrived—we used great decoy placement, hole preparation, motion and aggressive calling to turn a slow day into a great one, because we made the most of the birds that flew over. **ah**



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Photo: Author

“But you can prevent all that. It just takes dedication and attention. You’ve got to play the long game here. The reward for maintaining proper performance that first year or two is eight or 10 more years of trouble-free field performance.”

So, first decide the level of performance you want. “I like a dog rock steady until the bird flushes. Then I don’t mind if the dog breaks to get a jump on the retrieve. If you insist on steady to wing and shot, you’ll need to pay a lot more attention and pass up a lot more shots that first year or two.”

“It doesn’t matter the breed or type,” says Pippitt, “Whatever your dog was bred and trained to do must be carefully nurtured and maintained during the first season or two. So don’t reward him by shooting a bird he’s busted. Don’t let a Lab cough up a bird at your feet. Don’t let him whine and pace around the blind because you’re too focused on incoming ducks to bother with dog control. Only shoot birds to reward the level of performance you want for the life of that dog.”

An easy way to stay atop your dog without missing shooting opportunities is to work with a partner. You run the dog, he concentrates on the bird. Then trade places. “Takes some discipline and dedication, but it’s truly worth it,” Pippitt insisted. “A good hunting dog is a major investment, a long-term investment, and too valuable to compromise on a few moments of inattentiveness. Make your dog’s compliance ‘job one’ those first two seasons and you’ll reap rewards for the next decade. But get sloppy, let him backslide, and you’ll fight it for the next decade.”

Hunting season is backsliding season. For you and your dog. But it shouldn’t be.

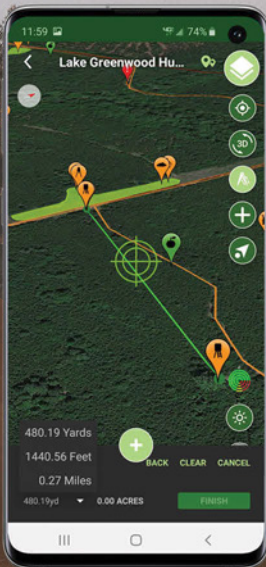
“The problem with hunting a young dog is backsliding,” said pro trainer Ethan Pippitt of Standing Stone Kennels in Kansas. “You trained all summer, but once the points are real and you’re in the grips of hunting fever, it’s all too easy to focus on the shooting and forget about your dog.”

And a forgotten dog is a backsliding dog.

That isn’t a big deal with an older, experienced dog, but a 1- to 2-year-old? “Big problem. The excitement of the hunt, a strange location, the rush of wild birds and sometimes lots of them ... it’s all too easy for a young dog—and his owner—to forget all that training.”

The dog breaks, the bird flies, you shoot and you’ve just rewarded pup for doing the wrong thing.

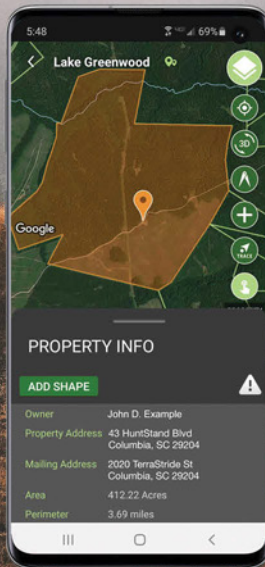
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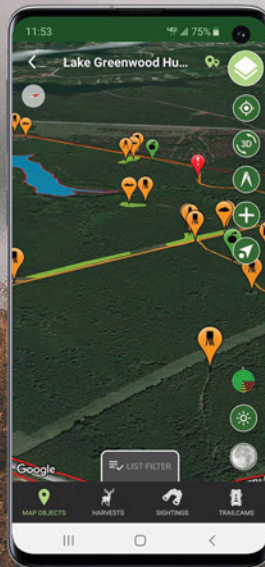
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Snow Goose Pâté

By Brad Fenson

When most people hear the word 'pâté,' they immediately think of liver. However, pâté can be made from any meat and does not have to contain any liver at all. The word pâté is French for paste, and the easiest way to make it is with a food processor. The pre-cooked meat will be broken down, or emulsified, into a paste that can then be spiced up.

Snow geese get a bad rap as being difficult to prepare in a tantalizing recipe. This snow goose pâté proves that white goose is great on its own.

Goose pâté makes a great appetizer and can be taken to the blind in a cooler, along with some cheese, crackers and pickles, and will make you and your crew want to shoot straight, and often. With the spring snow goose conservation hunt in full swing, waterfowl hunters should make some pâté for their next snack in the blind.

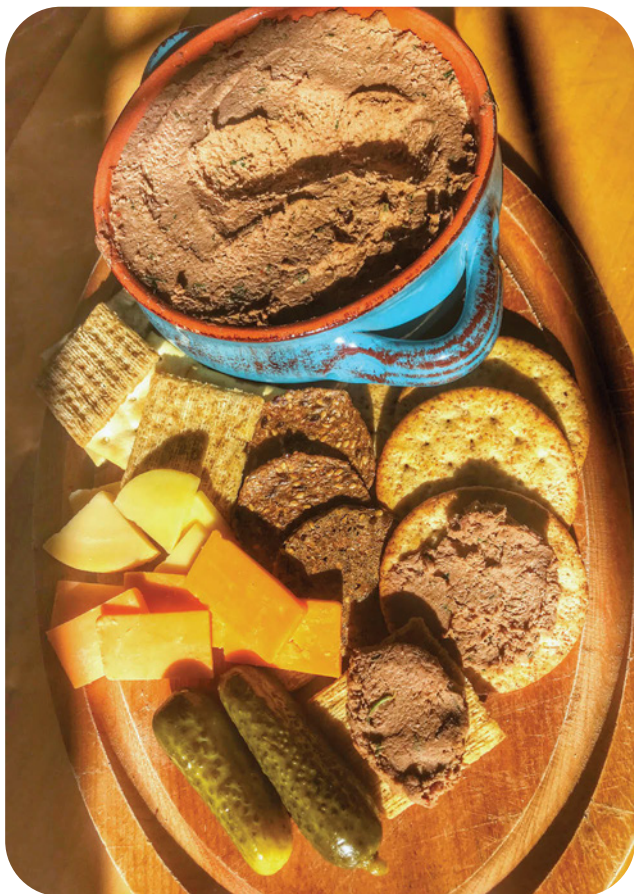


Photo: Author

INGREDIENTS

- 4 goose breasts, skinned
- 6 slices thick-cut bacon, diced
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1/3 cup walnuts, pecans, or cashews
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 jalapeño, seeded (or replace with 1/4 red bell pepper if heat sensitive)
- 2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp smoked paprika
- 2 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp pepper
- 1 tsp crushed red pepper
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- olive oil, if required

DIRECTIONS

1. Place bacon pieces in a frying pan and cook till brown over medium heat. Set aside to cool.
2. Place the goose breasts into an Instant Pot with the chicken broth and cook on high for 30 minutes. A crockpot can also be used, simmering breasts for 4 to 6 hours. Remove the cooked breasts, shred with a fork and set aside to cool.
3. Place the shredded goose meat, bacon and any bacon drippings in a food processor and blend to a fine paste. Add the nuts, onion, jalapeño, soy sauce, smoked paprika, Worcestershire sauce, salt, pepper and garlic powder to the mix and process to blend

ingredients. If the mixture binds and is too thick, add chicken stock or olive oil to loosen.

4. Add the mayonnaise in small amounts, as you continue to process the mixture into the desired consistency.

5. Transfer the meat mixture to a chilled bowl. Refrigerate the pâté for 1 hour, then serve with crackers, baguette or rye bread.

.....
**If you have a small food processor, emulsify the goose mixture in batches and mix them together at the end with the mayonnaise.*

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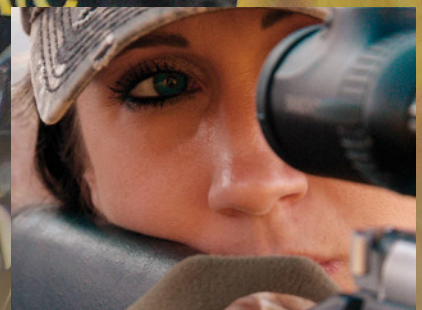
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Find Your Coyote Nirvana

The best coyote-hunting spots should hold lots of coyotes—and they may host lots of hunters. Here's how to spot the spots then hunt them against the competition.

By Mark Kayser, Field Editor

All coyote hunting locations are not created equal. That statement rang true as I watched a coyote poke its head from a grassy ditch five minutes into the first set of the morning. The location was Kansas, where I'd taken a morning break from bowhunting December whitetails to try my hand at coyote hunting. Wildlife property real estate friend Greg Gilman had bragged about the coyote density here, and his unrelenting marketing finally forced me to bring a rifle along for a timeout from whitetail hunting.

Gilman operated the calls while I rested my rifle over the top of a large round haybale on a field edge. The inquisitive coyote retreated into the deep ditch, gone as fast as it appeared.

No worries, I thought. It was early in the set. There was plenty of time to lure another one onto the harvested soybean field. Scanning across the field in the dim light of dawn, I glanced back and the ditch coyote was back with boldness. My rifle was already pointed in that direction from the previous encounter. Settling on the chest, I sent a suppressed 6mm Creedmoor bullet for a silent end to that Peeping Tom coyote.

On and off, Gilman continued squalling like a peeved toddler demanding more screen time. Approximately 20 minutes into the set my early-morning wakeup was causing my eyelids to droop when another dark object trotted across the field from the opposite direction. Suddenly wide-awake, I shifted my point of aim toward the coyote. It swapped

ends, obviously eyeing my movement, but a quick bark stopped it long enough for a Hornady Match bullet to complete a morning double before the Kansas sun hit the frosty field. I had found coyote nirvana.

Proof of the Promised Land

It's rather simple to confirm a coyote hot spot after a morning of successful stands. We called in another coyote on the following stand that only gave me a fleeting glimpse in a close-quarters setting. Regardless, my appraisal of the area was leaning toward a five-circle rating on Tripadvisor before I returned to whitetail hunting. Coyotes howling in the distance and tracks on every trail were proof aplenty that my buddy's whitetail mecca was also coyote bliss.

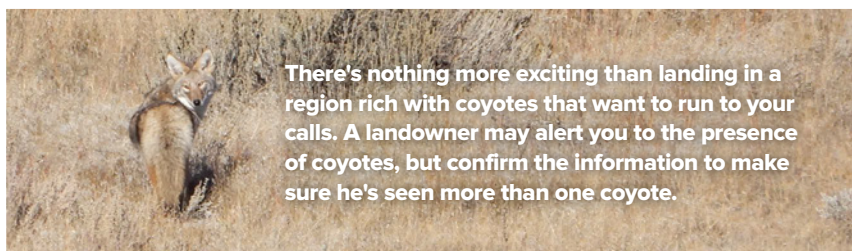
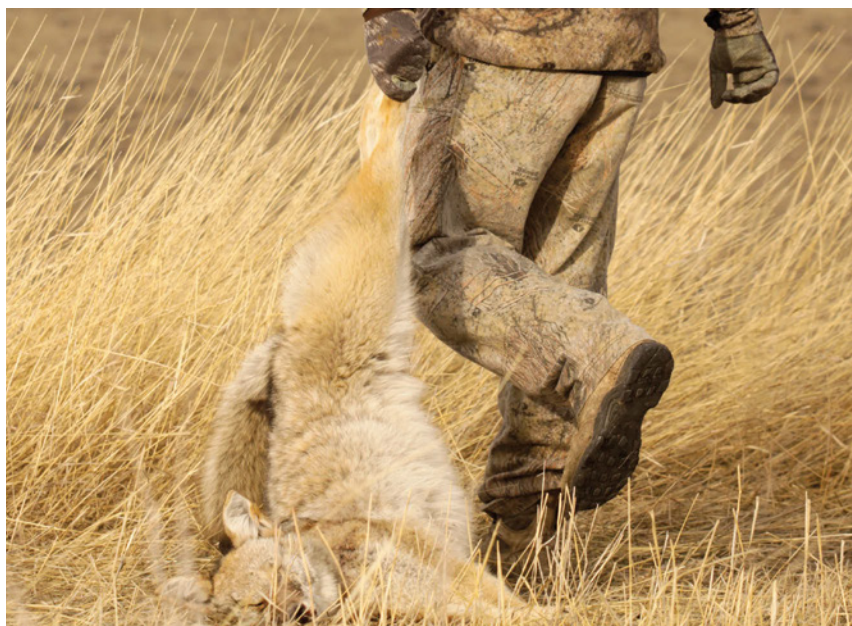
LIP SERVICE

Most coyote hunters utilize the Energizer Bunny to call in coyotes. Electronic callers provide many advantages, but on clear mornings coyotes may be able to hear the tinny-ness in speakers depending on models and quality. To bring back nirvana, consider a hand call. Utilizing a hand call that is powered with your lungs sends a realistic sound of a wild animal without using electronic volume control.

Hand calls can also be incorporated with electronic callers to mix and match messages, plus to keep it real. Oftentimes I'll combine lung power with digital sounds. The advantage of being able to control sounds with a coyote in view is another real-time advantage that doesn't require pushing multiple buttons while looking down at a screen. Check out Rocky Mountain Hunting Calls' Atomic Predator Calls series and Stealth Yipper Yapper Howler. buglingbull.com

Such a firsthand experience may be preceded by hearsay, bragging from hunters, complaints by landowners or convenience-store chatter. My informative buddy was right. Your informant may have a hot lead too. It's up to you to determine if the information is sound or loaded with more hot air than a brick pizza oven. On a handful of occasions, I've run into landowners complaining about coyotes only to test the waters and discover they likely saw or heard one coyote, not a plethora of predators hiding in the wings. On the other hand, one landowner and I were talking hunting one morning and his blue heeler limped up with an obvious head wound oozing goop. I inquired about the "Rocky" look of his dog and he explained how coyotes had ganged up on the dog right in the ranch yard under cover of darkness. The landowner heard the ruckus and was able to break up the fight before the dog's demise. It wasn't the first time coyotes had ventured close to his outbuildings, he said. His daily coyote count had him concerned about the upcoming calving season. I asked for permission to hunt and was greeted with several great weekends of calling.

While scouting another time, I ran into a biologist wrapping up some field-work



and we started discussing big-game population densities in the area. He explained deer numbers were down due to a variety of reasons including climatic conditions and habitat changes, but he also pointed a finger at the expansion of coyotes in the area. I returned in the winter and confirmed his coyote hypothesis.

Sorting through the armchair experts and weekend assessors may require additional outreach if you don't stumble across a biologist in the field. Or you may get lucky and talk to a landowner with intimate knowledge of wildlife trends.

If you can't put boots on the ground, you may want to reach out to a regional conservation officer or biologist for coyote insight. Another vetted resource may be an animal damage-control official in the targeted hunting area. Most state wildlife agencies have divisions for nuisance animals or even specific predator control. Some counties even employ predator control agents to manage coyotes and other predators that may have an effect on livestock, crops or other agricultural exports.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also employ personnel to survey and oversee

the management of nuisance predators. You might not get invited along on an aerial hunt, but their field experience and willingness to share observations could go a long way in confirming coyote chit-chat from unsubstantiated sources. You don't want to drive all night only to discover the hunting in a Texas location is no hotter than what you left in Arkansas.

Forewarnings for Worry

Even if you don't do a deep-dive thesis on the contemporary state of coyotes at a waypoint, you can come to some conclusions with simple observations. Coyote nirvana should have lots of coyotes. Despite having ample targets, it could also host a glut of hunters. Even with a steady population of coyotes, excess hunting pressure can educate local coyotes faster than an online enrichment course.

While testing the waters on new public land last winter, I was impressed with the coyote tracks coursing up every drainage. That enthusiasm waned quickly. The few coyotes I called in held up beyond 600 yards as they stared toward my sounds in the open country. All turned and walked away after their sagebrush peeping. While checking gates along the parcel's

Photos: Author



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Determining just how much competition you face in your so-called sweet spot may key certain strategies. Coyote derbies, and government agents and private contractors engaged in predator-control could be putting a dent in your success rate.

perimeter, I discovered boot and truck tracks at nearly every corner of the property. The coyotes had been badgered previously by weekend-warriors like me.

Seeing hunters and experiencing minimal success in calling obviously don't define nirvana. Nevertheless, pay attention to all coyote clues. While you're purchasing another box of ammunition at your local sporting goods store, scan the posters pinned near the front door advertising coyote-calling contests. I have no disdain for these contests since they add excitement to possibly spur new hunters, plus they help manage coyotes. Nevertheless, the very nature of shooting as many coyotes as possible within an abbreviated window can be a training course for coyote evasiveness.

Hunters typically shorten sets in an attempt to call in easy coyotes then move on to the next window of opportunity swiftly. Wise coyotes may hold up and take their time evaluating the situation. Whether they see, smell, hear or sense hunters, any or all events add to their survival, evasion, resistance and escape training. When I'm hunting in regions where I know there's previous contest pressure, I increase sets from 30 minutes to nearly an hour. Shooting coyotes at 30 minutes and beyond is routine. Few are hard-chargers; most plod in warily.

There's another group of competitors out there who may be the reason for a nirvana letdown. Government and private enterprises operate varied duties under

the definition of animal damage control defined previously. From the USDA to the USFWS and state wildlife agencies to county predator control boards, there's a small war being waged on predators that could transform nirvana to below par. Reports from the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service show they killed nearly 70,000 coyotes in 2018. That doesn't include problem coyotes killed by state personnel and hired guns many livestock-rich counties employ.

These services come in handy for a cattle or sheep producer experiencing a killing spree on his future income, but they can quickly reduce coyote numbers and educate survivors. To put a quick dent in populations, these professionals often employ aerial hunting that can be unbelievably efficient after a fresh snow with a trained shooter. Nirvana takes a back seat until the following year.

A final nirvana spoiler comes from the very architect of the realm itself: Mother Nature. The natural world dictates many factors of wildlife population dynamics. For example, climate and weather could alter habitat to the point it simply can't support the prey base predators require for survival. Extreme floods, droughts, hurricanes, hail, temperature variances and other Weather Channel newsmakers wreak havoc on environments. Animals feel these changes, and research concludes that coyotes even decrease litter size to allow a higher survival rate for remaining pups. They also increase



JUST SHUT UP

Sometimes the fastest route to a nirvana morning is to simply shut up. Utilize your coyote scouting and experiences from the past deer season to set an ambush. Recall where you've seen coyotes in the past along trails, field edges and in funnels of timber. Treestands, ground blinds and old barn lofts can serve as your vantage for a shooting opportunity.

Keep your trail cameras from deer season in play, with a slightly lower aiming angle, to confirm coyote corridors and to survey densities. You can use coyote urine in front of the camera to make passing canines pose for the image. For trail-camera help 365 days per year, consider using a curiosity product like **Wildlife Research Center's Active-Cam**. It makes nearly every animal with olfactory senses pause at the scent for the picture-perfect moment. wildlife.com

litters in good times or when recruitment is demanded.

If dry or drought conditions persist, it can lead to wildfire, another instantaneous game changer.

In 2019, the nation experienced only 50,477 wildfires compared to more than 58,000 in 2018. The 2018 season was also

Photos: Author



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disastrous because it burned twice as many acres as in 2019 with nearly 9 million acres blackened. Although many of those areas rebound into Gardens of Eden a year later with sufficient rainfall, they can turn a hot coyote location into a ghost town. Surviving animals must migrate out for the time being to find nutrition.

Mother Nature also gets the boot from humans occasionally. Overgrazing by livestock, clean farming, suburban expansions and other man-made influences affect coyotes. Livestock could graze a pasture to the point it doesn't offer prey or predator haunts. Efficient harvesting could also leave a cupboard bare, causing coyotes to change ZIP codes.

Although not as blazing fast as a wildfire, disease could send your hot spot into an unrecoverable spiral for the fur season. Refer to the list your veterinarian gives you for your own dog on what coyotes could catch. Distemper, hepatitis, parvo virus and mange are some of the most common culprits affecting coyotes. Coyotes are also susceptible to strains of rabies across North America.



It didn't take a long break from bowhunting Kansas whitetails for the author to learn he'd found a coyote hot spot. Only minutes into his first setup, he doubled. The next morning, after tagging out on deer, he tagged two more coyotes on the property.

Heartworm disease, caused by parasitic worms, affects coyotes as do common fleas, ticks, mites, worms and flukes that could irritate Rex.

One of the most noticeable diseases, mange, becomes a killer as winter approaches. It causes coyotes to lose their fur. In Southern zones they can

survive for longer periods of time, but I've walked up to numerous mangy coyotes curled up in a ball that look up seemingly begging for a bullet. I oblige. Mange rarely affects an entire state, but it can crash populations in specific areas with efficiency since it is often spread by direct contact. Coyotes love to socialize,

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SING A DIFFERENT TUNE

Despite having more sounds uploaded to a digital predator caller than a Gen Zer has songs on their playlist, many hunters still backslide to the basics when they call coyotes. Nirvana could be lost on these sounds that your hunting competition utilizes. Put the dying rabbit on hold and scroll through your library to look for sounds like high-pitched rodents or prairie dogs. Swap basic coyote howls for fighting canines and pups in distress. Finally, add in confidence sounds like bickering jays and gathering crows to bolster the approach of any coyote. Check out Lucky Duck and Primos Alpha Dogg callers. **cabelas.com**

especially in winter when they pack up for hunting and later for breeding.

The coyotes I doubled on in Kansas were not mangy. Prime fur billowed on the first pair of my trip. Later that evening I tagged a mature whitetail with my bow, green-lighting more coyote hunting.



Greg had a business trip, leaving me alone to battle the coyote oversupply solo. Before daybreak the following morning, I crawled into one of his permanent shooting houses in the middle of a food plot. With shooting light arriving, I opened a window and began squawking a rodent message of dire straits. Ten minutes into the setup a streak of gray raced across the field. As the coyote swung downwind, I barked and it slowed to a lope. The suppressed crack of my Bergara didn't end with a pile of fur as the coyote sped off. I'd missed! Jacking another Match cartridge into the chamber, I led the coyote a nose length and this time my aim was true.

With one coyote down and plenty of morning left, I pulled up the property on

my HuntStand app and saw a deep valley below me with a broad opening. I was happily on my way. As I slipped along a downwind edge just 100 yards from where I hoped to set up, I spotted a coyote trotting away. Dang, I must have bumped it crossing the opening.

Thinking I had nothing to lose, I hit my location and started calling, believing more than one coyote called this valley home. Minutes later I was shocked to see a coyote trot from the very opening where the bumped coyote had disappeared. Was it the same coyote? Who knows? But five minutes later it made its way inside 100 yards and this time my first shot was true. I'd found coyote nirvana. For me, it was a small corner of the Sunflower State. **dh**

Photos: Author



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Storm Chasers

By Jon Draper, Executive Editor





They say there is a calm before the storm. Duck hunters feel it as headlight beams strafe across bobbing decoys in the darkest hours of early morning. The cool, crisp air smells of mud and decay as heavy waders churn through the water. Faint splashes, whistling wings, a dark shadow zooming overhead. These are all signals of good things to come. Anticipation is a feeling we've come to live and breathe, more necessary to wake a hunter's soul than a thermos full of coffee. In the silence we wait, searching distant treelines for a coming storm. If we hunt long and hard enough, with a healthy dose of God's grace, sometimes we get lucky and find it.

After striking out for two days in the flooded oaks, we reluctantly departed the "duck capital of the world," leaving Stuttgart in our rearview, and pointed the truck—laden with damp waders, Realtree Timber camo and unfired Browning A5 Sweet Sixteen shotguns—south across the Louisiana border. We'd trade the draw of floating acorns for flooded rice fields, if only for a day, because at this point we had nothing to lose.

Photos: Andrew Murray/Realtree



Stepping into the flooded ditch early the next morning forced a large group of birds off the water, clearly audible, but too far ahead to locate in the constricted illumination of our flashlights. Even so, it was a positive sign, and we eagerly pushed our way through the boot-sucking, gumbo-thick mud, stopping only to avoid a fall in the waist-deep water. As the last of six dozen decoys splashed, we positioned ourselves within and around the blind and timber that bordered this flooded “X,” and the calm set in. We were hopeful.

There’s rarely a time when an avid duck hunter allows hope to take full hold, we’ve too much experience for that. Hope is always present—we wouldn’t put in the effort unless it was—but it’s reassessed throughout a morning, growing and, more often fading as birds make or break your spirit. Letting hope take over requires more promise in a single morning than most hunters will ever experience. On this morning, just as the trees began to take shape, a small group of ducks returned, black birds silhouetted by the blueing gray, and splashed down mere feet from our



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blind. Hands tense, eyes darting, we felt a stiff December breeze stretch out over the expanding waters in front of us as the birds began to dip, dabble and quack. A half-dozen picked up, but quickly set down once more as the faint sounds of an incoming storm pulled our eyes higher toward the skyline.

They trickled in slowly at first, hitting the water like sparse drops of rain from an approaching front. Steady and continuous, the sound of wings cutting the wind and splashing birds increased in intensity as every second ticked by. As we looked out over the black water, a single mallard hen appeared out of the noisy abyss within arm's reach and hung in the air for a few frozen moments before keying on our wide eyes, backpedaling and vanishing in a wave of descending ducks. But there was no stopping them. Like a migrating herd, the flowing train of birds extended across the horizon, disappearing as a dot in the distance as the rising sun brought to light the incredible spectacle of a thousand mature mallards, pintails and teal setting all around.



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There's a certain magic in watching the world wake over unfamiliar water, waiting for the clock to strike shooting time. This was Copperfield at his best. It took considerable effort to pull myself from the moment when "pick the drakes" was called out. The water exploded with a fury of escaping birds as the first shots broke, creating a wall of wings so thick you almost couldn't see through it. Focusing on a single bird, let alone a drake within the pulsating tornado, was beyond difficult. Finally locked on to a bull sprig, I raised the A5 only to have the duck crumple before the shotgun hit my shoulder. I continued the motion anyway, mounting just as the empty space the pintail once filled was replaced with the green shimmer and sharp white collar of a mallard drake.

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For the next half-hour we battled the storm, picking our shots with a far-from-calm yet collected intent, watching more with wonder than with a haste to pull the trigger. Only the fattest greenheads and pintails with sprigs like cattails were attempted, along with every screeching swarm of teal to prove our worth.

As with most great experiences, the magic was over too soon. Like a summer squall in Florida, the storm cloud vanished nearly as fast as it had arrived, leaving clear blue skies above, empty of all but a few pinfeathers riding the wind, and a group of hunters below, joyfully dumbfounded by the phenomenon as they retrieved the bobbing birds left in its wake.

This is why we hunt ducks. We chase the storm, hoping to be caught in a downpour. **dh**



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Why a Pheasant Hunt Is Better Late Than Ever

*... especially if it snows and blows
and it's really cold.*

By Ron Spomer, Field Editor

“Rooster!” Tom shouted over the familiar, disgruntled cackling of a ring-necked pheasant. I turned toward the thunder of wings just in time to spot a bronze-breasted rooster crest the snowy boughs of a red cedar. I’d just brought my 20-gauge to my half-frozen face when the bird crumpled. The wind blew away feathers and the snow-muffled thump of Tom’s 16-gauge.

“I’ve got him!” I shouted. The colorful bird, its warm feathers all out of sync with the wintery day, had fallen just a few steps from me. It joined two others already in my game bag and put a welcomed if uncomfortable strain on my shoulders.

“Where next?” my hunting partner asked when we joined up at the end of the tree strip we’d been walking.

I handed him his bird. “I saw several

flying toward that draw,” I said. “But let’s take this fence line to that plum thicket first then angle across the CRP to those young cottonwoods. Then, I don’t know. We’ll decide when we get there.”

“From the looks of these tracks,” Tom kicked at the snow littered with three-toed prints, “more ran into the CRP than flew.”

His Brittany came ‘round, sniffing. With that assurance of concentrated ring-neck abundance, we stepped from the shelter of the cedar grove and into the teeth of the blessed Kansas wind.

“Blessed Kansas wind” isn’t something I say often because I hate big winds. And all Kansas winds are big, there being nothing but a few strands of barbed wire between the Sunflower State and the Arctic. However, when that wind blows below-freezing temperatures across grasslands and grain

Photo: Lee Thomas Kips / TheRawSpirit.com

fields, fair-weather hunters shelter in place. This leaves the pheasants to tough, some would say slightly demented, enthusiasts like Tommie and me.

Yes, you have to be a pheasant-hunting fanatic to appreciate this brand of winter work. Hunting deep, cold and snow in late season isn't exactly a secret tactic so much as a masochistic calling. You either appreciate the enhanced hunting more than you dislike the miserable weather or you stay home. I learned to appreciate winter ringneck action way back when I was too young and full of fire to let a little wind, snow and finger-freezing weather hold me back. Tommie must have drunk the same Kool-Aid because now, with more than 50 pheasant seasons under each of our belts, neither of us can resist a good thing. We don't just tolerate miserable weather, we plan for it. We embrace it. As do most of my bird hunting partners.

"Rooster! Behind you!" I heard my brother's warning shout, but I was too focused on my footprint to the South Dakota rooster I'd just shot. Its tail feathers protruded from the snow. It was late November.

Fish-and-game data show that the vast majority of the hunter-killed roosters each year will have been tucked into bellies and freezers by late November. That's okay because a radical change in habitat concentrates those that remain. When it comes to finding late-season roosters, it's not birds per square mile so much as birds per patch of cover that matters. Roosters from 2, maybe 3 miles away can and will gravitate to the best combination of dense reeds, weeds, grasses and brush near a handy grain field.

No more than 200 yards from the truck, we seemed to have found such a place. When that first rooster went airborne and my 20-gauge interrupted his flight, two hens and another rooster launched from the matted CRP grasses. Bob couldn't shoot because I was in the way, running beneath the second bird's flight path in my hurry to claim the first. I could have left it for my dog, but she was young with only eight or 10 roosters notched on her collar. I wasn't quite trusting her yet with a late Dakota ringneck.

My shot had lured our old friend Brad from the opposite end of the little CRP field where he'd been blocking with our shared dog, Cricket. Late-season birds know all



Photo: Author

Sometimes tracks are the best evidence of ringneck travel. This time of year, birds from as far away as 2 or 3 miles may gravitate to the best cover near a grain field.

about running away from disturbance, so a hunter or two standing in or sliding across their escape path can stop or surprise them. Bob and I had just resumed walking toward Brad when that very thing happened. Repeatedly. Like popcorn—no, more like balls of Roman candle flame—two russet roosters leaped from the snow. Instantly, several hens joined them. Brad's old 16-gauge pump boomed and one rooster tumbled. That unnerved a third that made the mistake of filing an escape flight past Bob. His 20-gauge double popped and his first ringneck of the year plummeted. By this time—a solid minute or two since I'd shot my bird to start this circus—I was feeling left out. So I picked up my pace toward Brad and two unnerved roosters launched from their snowy hide—and I got both!

Less than an hour into my first South Dakota pheasant hunt of the year I had my limit.

How does that happen? How come some lucky guys like Bob, Brad and I get ringneck limits late in the year when most hunters, according to statistics, get one or none?

Experience. Coupled with endurance. And the right gear that helps you endure.

For example, after our first day's easy limit, we faced rain instead of snow. Rain at the ragged edge of being snow, but wet either way. Yet we faced the wind and marched through public hunting areas open to any licensed hunter—and again pocketed limits for the second day in a row.

This was not due to inside knowledge of a secret spot ferreted out over our decades of hunting South Dakota. This was a quarter section of ground we'd never hunted before. We found it in the South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks hunting atlas. It was a relatively new game management area near a big cattail slough we used to hunt in the 1970s. Can you believe that? We're still hunting the counties we hunted in our 20s, but back then, this 160 acres was an overgrazed pasture. Now it was a tangle of prairie grasses with a dense thicket of planted trees. We stomped it all, enduring the windblown rain, putting up a bird here and there, but finding no pattern, no concentrations. Some in the tall grass, some at the cattail edges, some in the trees. By the time we'd bagged four, our hands were on the verge of malfunction

"What say we fuel up, warm up and regroup?" Bob proposed.

Notice he did not say something like,

“This sucks. I’m wet and cold. Let’s go home and watch football.”

This is a key difference between a pheasant hunter and someone who sometimes tries to shoot a pheasant. Embrace your role! Be the predator. You don’t see foxes and coyotes hiding in the house when it’s cold and wet. When it’s time to hunt, they hunt.

The rain was no lighter after lunch, but we hit more public hunting fields. I can’t remember it blow for blow, but a half-hour before closing time Bob and I had limits and Brad needed just one rooster for his. His mother, Thelma, was already preparing a couple of the previous day’s birds for our supper. We were sitting pretty regardless whether Brad got his third bird. But you know how it is when you’ve waited 12 months for your annual crack at pheasants and you have just five days to pull it off. You don’t quit when you still have a tag left to fill.

So into the CRP grass went Brad and our German shorthair, Cricket. We had to run the windshield wiper to watch them.

“Doesn’t look too birdy to me,” I said. “Not enough grass.”

Bob agreed. “They’re more likely to be in some cattails or trees.”

But then we saw Cricket stiffen. Pointing at full draw. Brad stepped up, a long-tailed rooster bounced up, Brad pointed his 16-gauge—and the bird kept flying.

“I didn’t even hear the shot,” Bob said.

We didn’t hear the next one either, but we noticed Brad waving at us. Cricket pointed again. Brad stomped over. Another rooster flushed. Our old hunting buddy held both arms out and waved up and down.

“Is he waiting for one with Boone & Crocket antlers or what?”

“Maybe he’s working on Cricket being steady to wing or something.”

“Maybe he just wants us to come out and get as wet as he is.”

Actually he was signaling us to bring him a functioning shotgun. The old Remington pump he’d inherited from his grandfather had stopped working, proving that a tough old hunter can outlast a tough old shotgun in wet, cold weather.

But enough of our adventures. I could go to novel length with tales like these. What you should be more interested in is doing this for yourself. And you can.

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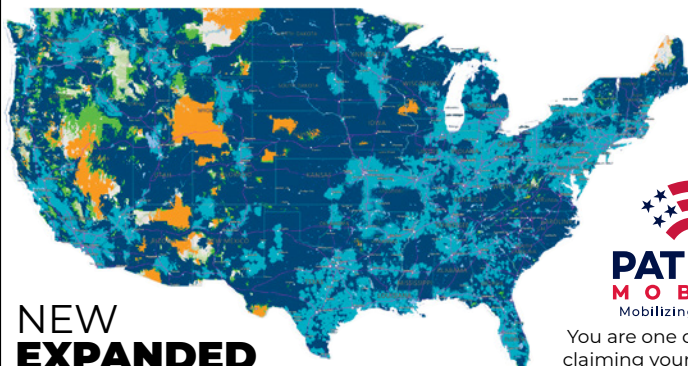


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We've already emphasized endurance, so let's touch on the right gear to help us endure. Then I'll give away some secret tactics discovered over my more than 50 years at this invigorating game.

GEAR

Boots: Emphasize protection, then comfort, then minimal weight. You can't have them all, but a good compromise is all-leather with a fairly flexible rubber sole, 6-inch- to 9-inch-tall uppers to keep out seeds, Gore-Tex liner (to fend off rain, puddles and dewy grass) and a lacing system you like. Watch out for hook eyes that might catch the lace loop of the opposite boot and trip you. It happens. I like boots with high rubber rands, especially over the toe. Otherwise grass can abrade the leather through in a single season. Moc toe with stitching lets in more water, I don't care how good or how many layers of Gore-Tex. Once boot leather is saturated, your feet get wet. I pack at least two pairs and rotate.

Pants: Choose a tight weave to fend off burs and thorns. Wool is great because it's durable and keeps you warm even when it's



In varying weather it pays to dress utilitarian. Trousers with a tight weave resist burs. Layers up top are best. A ball cap and stocking cap may both be worn.

wet, but it also gets heavy. Cotton jeans get heavy plus cold when wet. Various polyesters do surprisingly well, but the soft nap versions will snag every leaf, twig and seed in the county. I've found a nylon or tightly woven, hard-surface polyester works well especially if I pull waxed cotton chaps over

them. These are "must-haves" for me. I've been wearing the same Filson chaps for a decade, so that's my benchmark.

Socks: Whatever works with your boots to keep you blister-free. In my experience no sock or combination of socks offers much warmth because they quickly fill with perspiration. But a light merino wool or polyester base layer under a thick wool-nylon-poly blend of some kind works best. Ideally, pack a second or third pair and switch throughout the day.

Shirt: Whatever works for you. Keep it loose so you can move without binding. A pullover sweatshirt of wool or polyester may be the comfort king, but I stick with traditional button-down shirts and chest pockets for versatility. I can vent by opening buttons and rolling up sleeves, turn up a collar to block wind, store compass, fire starter and lighter and lip balm in pockets, etc.

Base Layer: Again, whatever fabric you like, but don't overdo it. I usually find that an active pheasant hunt with temps into the 20s keeps me warm-to-hot with no or thin base layer. Base drawers make

Photos: Author



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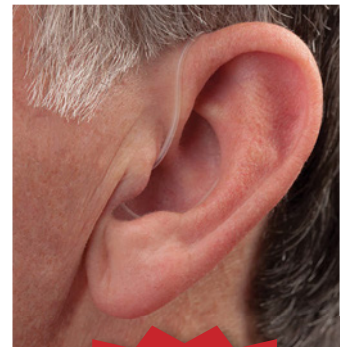
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me feel constricted and tired. If colder than 20, I can tolerate the base drawers. Base layer shirts don't seem to slow me down, but I often peel off one if overheating. Much of this depends on your personal thermostat and how fast you hunt.

Jackets: The layering system is best. I start with a vest over the shirt, then a long-sleeved insulated jacket of some kind. I like a poly-filled nylon for the slick surface and free movement. Fleece drags too much and sometimes binds my arms. I need those arms to operate that shotgun quickly. But a loosely cut fleece jacket can work if worn alone. Cold winds inspire me to pull a light windbreaker over the insulating jacket. Rain or snow usually brings out the heavy-duty raincoat, a high-quality, multi-layer Simms Gore-Tex.

Bird/Shell Vest: A simple strap vest with deep pockets and a deep bird bag on the back works best. Full-shoulder vests pull too much on my neck, especially with two or three birds aboard. Bird jackets aren't versatile enough. Where's your bag if it gets too hot to wear the coat? I don't like external shell loops/holders. They interrupt my gun mount, shells fall out when I run and often, the shells scratch the gun. I don't even bother with shell loops inside the pockets. Just a few loose shells in each pocket seem to suffice.

Hat: I find a brim essential for shading my eyes. Keeps rain off glasses, too. I like a full-brim hat for the ear and neck shade, but in late season, no need. A ball cap works well because you can wear it over or under an insulating, stretch fleece balaclava or watch cap. When it's really cold I'll stack balaclava, ball cap, then knitted or fleece watch cap.

Gloves: Warm but not too bulky. You have to be able to feel your gun, safety, trigger. Waterproof and insulated are good

Photo: Author



Experience and endurance are key this time of year—and that goes for Dog, too. Feed fields near dense-cover hiding areas should never be overlooked.

when conditions are brutal, but when dry, try something thin. Gore-Tex linings always help. Wool is nice, but too slippery. Look for wool with some kind of “grabby” material on the palms.

Gun: Books could be written on this. And dozens have been! Mainly you just need a gun that fits well and shoots where you look. You can fool around with chokes as conditions suggest, but after 50 years I’ve found an improved cylinder my best option. Late-season birds in heavy cover sometimes call for a tennis racket. I like a double-barrel with IC and modified chokes. As for gauge, you know the 12 is king, but I actually shoot better with a 20- and often even a 28-gauge, suggesting that gun fit and pattern are more important than volume.

Shells: Whatever patterns best in your gun. Don’t buy into all the hype about Krypton-resistant roosters needing 3-inch magnums at hyper-velocity. Even in late season I find that No. 6 lead, bismuth or tungsten hammers the toughest rooster if I put an even pattern on them. You might find No. 4 or No. 5 better in your gun. I wouldn’t entertain any larger shot or heavier loads unless roosters were consistently flushing at 40 yards. We see plenty of those, but just as many inside 25 yards.

TACTICS

First, understand that pheasants walk or fly to feeding areas shortly after sunup, feed an hour or two then hide out in a safe place (usually dense cover,

continued on p. 72 »

ATTENTION!

Safety Warning and Recall Notice for Henry Single Shot Rifles and Shotguns



Henry Repeating Arms Company has recently discovered a potential safety issue wherein, under certain conditions, it is possible that some of these models may discharge without the trigger being pulled if the hammer is partially cocked and released.

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Springfield Model 2020 Waypoint

By J. Scott Olmsted, Editor in Chief

It's a safe bet most gun cranks, especially NRA members, know all about Springfield Armory. The company has for years advertised its firearms in NRA Official Journals. Included in that list is the M1A, the SOCOM 16, the XD series of handguns and, lately, the Saint—all fine firearms. Now, hunters can take heart: Springfield has introduced something explicitly for them: the Model 2020 bolt-action hunting rifle.

The Model 2020 Waypoint is offered in two stock configurations, two finishes and the customer's choice of carbon fiber or stainless steel barrels in four popular hunting calibers—and it's a doozy.

The heart of the rifle is a proprietary, Model 700-style round, stainless steel receiver made in Geneseo, Ill., by Springfield. It is a dual-lug design including dual cocking cams; an integrally machined recoil lug; a low-profile bolt stop; a fluted, nitride-coated bolt with a throw of 90 degrees; an oversized, removable bolt handle; and a factory-installed Picatinny rail including two recoil pins ready to accept a rifle scope.

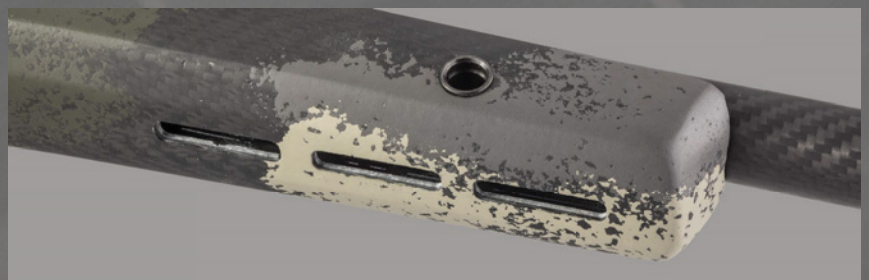
I fired five different loads through the rifle: two from Barnes and one each from Berger, Federal Premium and Remington. It liked the Berger loads best; the smallest group measured a scant .375 inch and the largest spanned 1 inch. The Federal Premium load was second-best—not surprising since it featured the same Berger Hybrid Target match bullet as the Berger Match Grade load.

Springfield boasts its receiver-and-trigger design delivers a lock time 45 percent faster than competitive models—a factor that should deliver less deviation from point of aim due to movement during the shot. It also guarantees

the Waypoint will shoot .75-MOA groups with match-grade factory ammunition. Our tests confirmed this boast with one of two match loads. Other loads would do the same if the barrel was allowed plenty of time to cool between groups.

A TriggerTech trigger features a no-sag, two-position safety along the tang and Springfield's Frictionless Release Technology. It is adjustable from 2.5 to 5 pounds' pull weight with a patented, free-floating roller for a crisp, repeatable squeeze.

An AICS-pattern, single-stack, removable magazine feeds the rifle. The trigger guard is made of aluminum.





SPRINGFIELD ARMORY MODEL 2020 WAYPOINT

springfield-armory.com

- **Type:** bolt-action centerfire rifle
- **Caliber:** 6mm Creedmoor (tested), 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .308 Win.
- **Receiver:** chrome-moly steel
- **Barrel:** 20" (6mm, .308), 22" (6.5 CM) or 24" (6.5 PRC); steel bore jacketed in carbon fiber (tested) or fluted stainless steel; SA Radial removable muzzle brake threaded $\frac{5}{8} \times 24$
- **Magazine:** removable; AICS-pattern single-stack; polymer; 5-rnd. capacity
- **Trigger:** TriggerTech; adjustable pull weight 2.5-5 lbs.
- **Sights:** none, one-piece Picatinny rail factory-installed
- **Safety:** two-position toggle
- **Stock:** AG Composites, carbon fiber; 1" Pachmayr Decelerator recoil pad; LOP 13.75"
- **Metal Finish:** Cerakote; nitride-coated bolt
- **Overall Length:** 41.5"-45.5"
- **Weight:** 6 lbs. 12 ozs.—7 lbs. 14 ozs.
- **MSRP:** \$1,699–\$2,399

The unit we tested was fitted with a carbon-fiber-wrapped barrel, produced by BSF Barrels in Wisconsin. Its steel bore is jacketed in a roll-wrapped carbon fiber sleeve loaded under tension. This construction method means 95 percent of the carbon-fiber sleeve never contacts the steel barrel, providing cooling air gaps to promote warm-bore to cool-bore repeatability during rapid fire. Additionally, fluting beneath the sleeve reduces weight and provides even more surface area to speed cooling. An SA Radial muzzle brake is removable; the muzzle is threaded $\frac{5}{8} \times 24$ for use with a standard-thread suppressor.

Customers who prefer a traditional barrel may choose a Waypoint with one made of fluted, stainless steel. In fact, I would. The carbon-fiber-wrapped barrel I fired at the range heated too quickly for my taste, and groups opened quickly because of it. The first three shots, fired through a cold barrel—they're money. But after that ... well, 20 minutes between groups to allow the gun to cool completely might do the trick. Bottom line: With its carbon-fiber-wrapped barrel, the rifle is not built best to place a dozen rapid-fire rounds within an inch-plus. A standard steel barrel would do this better. It would take longer to cool, but it would



hold zero better as it heated. Either way, every Waypoint barrel is free-floated. Barrel lengths measure 20, 22 or 24 inches depending on chambering.

Two stock configurations are made by AG Composites. Either stock is made of hand-laid carbon fiber and is pillar-bedded. Either includes reinforced, integral M-Lok sections to allow for direct attachment of accessories like bipods and slings—but you won't find many better options for sling attachments than those already present, including five flush-cup, quick-detach points to produce a variety of right- and left-hand carry options.

Accuracy Results* Springfield 2020 Waypoint 6mm Creedmoor

Load	Weight (grs.)	Velocity (fps)	Group Size (inches)		
			Smallest	Average	Largest
Berger Hybrid Target	105	2959	.375	.775	1.0
Federal Premium Gold Medal Berger	105	3025	.625	.925	1.125
Barnes VOR-TX LR	95	3150	.875	.975	1.125

* Outdoors | Sandbags | 50 Yards | 3-Shot Group

continued on p. 79 »



Colt Python

By Dick Williams

Not all handguns achieve the status of icon. Interestingly, the two most successful iconic handguns both came from Colt. They are the 1873 Peace-maker revolver and the 1911 semi-auto pistol. Both have stayed in production worldwide for well over 100 years with early models commanding impressive prices in the collectors' market. Colt is betting that its Python revolver will achieve that same elite status. Terminating production has resulted in the price of original Pythons skyrocketing, and the company believes that reopening a production line with a more modern copy will ensure that the classy double-action revolver will ultimately pass the test of time.

An external inspection showed that the new stainless 6-inch Python is a close copy of the older model with the distinctive ventilated rib, full-length underlug and wide hammer spur. Fit and finish of the highly polished stainless-steel components are excellent with an attractive set of walnut grips that shame the

chunky wood blocks furnished on the older, custom-fit Pythons. The large hammer spur has lateral serrations rather than the original checkered surface but was just as easy to thumb cock for single-action shooting. The crown is a recessed cut, as opposed to the original rounded muzzle shape on vintage guns, but appears to offer the same protection. The adjustable rear sight is mounted in a slot machined into the top of the frame while the front sight, with its new orange insert, fits into a slot at the muzzle end

of the ventilated rib and features a set screw that allows the shooter to change blades if so desired. I prefer the black Eliason sights on my older Pythons for daylight hunting but will admit there is an advantage to the colored insert for possible defensive shooting.

The newer, slightly smaller walnut grips fit my hand much better than the original Python panels. Not perfect, but definitely better. It's impossible for a factory gun to have a set of grips that will fit everyone, particularly on a revolver





COLT PYTHON

colt.com

- **Type:** double-action revolver
- **Caliber:** .357 Mag.
- **Capacity:** 6 rnds.
- **Barrel:** 6" (tested), 4.25"; stainless steel; 6 grooves, 1:14" LH twist
- **Trigger:** 7-9.5-lb. pull weight (advertised, double-action)
- **Sights:** fully adjustable rear target, ramped front with interchangeable colored insert
- **Grip:** walnut target stocks
- **Metal Finish:** semi-polished stainless steel
- **Overall Length:** 11.5"
- **Weight:** 46 ozs.
- **MSRP:** \$1,499

that may be fired both single- and double-action. That said, the newer grips allowed me to fire both single- and double-action with the kind of control that allows for rapid follow-up shots. The face of the narrow trigger features vertical serrations, kind of a compromise between a wide target trigger primarily meant for single-action shooting and a smooth narrow "combat" trigger meant for double-action shooting. I think it's a reasonable compromise, at least for me, since I usually use revolvers of this length for hunting where a precisely placed first shot (where I cock the gun) is critical, but a fast follow-up shot (double-action) on wounded game can be important.

One of Colt's major objectives in building the new Python was to make the gun more durable. Original Pythons had the reputation of shooting themselves loose and requiring tune-ups to reset timing and lockup. Internally, the newer models have been "beefed up" to withstand sustained use of heavy magnum loads. I've not run a torture test having

fired no more than 300 magnum rounds, but I am impressed with how well the cylinder locks in place when the trigger is pressed. And while the .357 Magnum does not produce the brutal recoil of its big brothers, that 46 ounces of steel will make an extended shooting session much more pleasant, which equates to you becoming more proficient.

The only real issue I have with the new Python, or at least with my test gun, is the trigger pull. The Colt spec says the triggers leave the factory with a trigger pull between 7 and 9.5 pounds. The double-action pull on my gun averaged 10, pounds 9 ounces while the single-action pull measured 5 pounds, 13 ounces. Other new Pythons I've fired did come in under the 9.5-pound limit and felt good. And though the double-action trigger pull on this test gun felt even heavier than the more than 10 pounds it measured, it was the almost 6-pound single-action pull weight that bothered me more. With a reasonably steady rest on the range, I could muscle through the extra weight

and still produce reasonable groups. Shooting offhand, a common experience in the field, I experienced some serious shakes before the hammer fell. Many of my personal revolvers have had their actions improved after purchase, and it's not a particularly difficult or expensive job. But it's not something one expects when purchasing a new revolver that's billed as an improved replacement of the venerable Colt Python.

I'd have no qualms heading out for a hunt with a new 6-inch Python. Yes, on this particular gun I would get the trigger worked first, but keep in mind the big picture. The new Python is a good copy of the original with the internal structural improvements that should provide you and your kids years of service. And though many of us old-timers miss the beautiful blue finish of the originals, I know I was very careful regarding weather conditions when I ventured afield with my blue Pythons. The use of stainless steel in the new guns is authentic since Colt did offer the old guns in stainless. After your first hunting trip in wet weather, I think you'll really appreciate the new heavy-duty models in stainless steel. *ah*



Accuracy Results* Colt Python .357 Mag.

Load	Weight (grs.)	Velocity (fps)	Group Size (inches)		
			Smallest	Average	Largest
Hornady LEVERevolution	140	1440	2.25	3.5	4.5
Federal American Eagle JSP	158	1240	2.5	3.1	4.0
DoubleTap Hardcast Solid	180	1280	2.0	2.8	3.25

* Outdoors | Sandbags | 50 Yards | 3-Shot Group

Photos: Forrest MacCormack

5 RED DOT SIGHTS

By Jeff Johnston, Field Editor

About 100 years ago, optical engineers discovered that by using the reflection of an aiming point rather than the point itself, an airplane gunner could move his eye position in relation to his sight without changing the bullet's point-of-impact. In other words, this reflective, or "reflex" sight eliminated the need for a rear sight. In the 1970s, red dot sights incorporated battery-powered aiming points so they could be used in any or no ambient light. Today there are four basic types of red dot sights, including contained reflex sights, mini reflex sights, prismatic and holographic red dot sights. Here are five—at least one of each style—that make precise aiming of your rifle, shotgun or handgun faster, easier and more accurate in most lighting conditions. *ah*

Aimpoint CompM5

This contained—also called protected or tubular—reflex sight is probably the world's best in reliability and battery life. In essence, it's a fully enclosed, waterproof red dot optic that weighs just 8.4 ounces, features a 10-level, simple (and large), dial-style rheostat. Perhaps most notable, its "ACET" electronic system draws so little power that one AAA battery lasts for five years with its brightness set on low power and one year on high. It also features superior sun flare mitigation thanks to its anti-reflective lens coatings, something that cripples mini-reflex sights. For negatives? It's adjustment turrets are difficult to dial with the provided-but-easily-lost scope cap tool; and it's expensive.



AIMPOINT COMP M5

aimpoint.com

- **Type:** contained reflex
- **Reticle:** 2 MOA center dot
- **Reticle Color:** red
- **Magnification:** 1x
- **Brightness Settings:** 10
- **Eye relief:** unlimited
- **Weight:** 8.4 ozs.
- **Mount Type:** Picatinny
- **Battery Type:** AAA
- **Battery Life:** 50,000 hrs. (7 setting)
- **MSRP:** \$900

Photo: Forrest MacCormack

Leupold Freedom RDS

This contained reflex sight features a 1 MOA dot and push-button on/off switch (rheostat) with eight brightness settings. I love the Leupold's big, finger-adjustable dials that are just like dials on a regular riflescope. Optically, it's probably the best red dot out there in terms of clarity and sun-flare mitigation. It's waterproof and comes with a robust mount for a Picatinny rail. As for negatives, with its 34mm main-tube and 12-ounce weight with mount, it's a little bulkier than some, and its battery life at a touted 1,000 hours is questionable.



LEUPOLD FREEDOM RDS

leupold.com

- **Type:** contained reflex
- **Reticle:** 1 MOA dot
- **Reticle Color:** red
- **Magnification:** 1x
- **Brightness Settings:** 8
- **Eye relief:** unlimited
- **Weight:** 7.2 ozs.
- **Mount Type:** Picatinny
- **Battery Type:** CR2032
- **Battery Life:** 1,000 hrs. (4 setting)
- **MSRP:** \$389.99 (w/mount)

Photo: Forrest MacCormack

Holosun HS507C X2



At a mere 1.5 ounces, this mini reflex sight is small enough to fit on a handgun, yet it'll also do just fine on a turkey-hunting shotgun or deep-woods deer or dangerous-game rifle. Its battery life is stellar at 50,000 hours, but perhaps the x2's best feature is its Solar Failsafe solar panel and an auto mode that provides power even if the battery craps out—something that seems to happen with battery-powered optics when you need them most.

HOLOSUN HS507C X2

holosun.com

- **Type:** mini reflex
- **Reticle:** 32 MOA circle w/2 MOA center dot
- **Reticle Color:** red/green
- **Magnification:** 1x
- **Brightness Settings:** 10
- **Eye relief:** unlimited
- **Weight:** 1.5 ozs.
- **Mount Type:** Picatinny
- **Battery Type:** CR1632
- **Battery Life:** 50,000 hrs. (6 setting)
- **MSRP:** \$364.69-\$399.99

Its smaller buttons mitigate the chance of inadvertent presses, and to ensure this it features a lockout setting that requires a long press to unlock. The unit can be purchased with a green or red reticle, but unfortunately both come in only a 2 MOA circle/dot reticle that may be too big for some shooters' liking, especially at distance.

Sightmark Wolfhound 3x24 HS-300



The Wolfhound's prismatic lens system features a prism (like a binocular) that flips and clarifies the image so it appears normal. Its advantage is that this red dot sight features magnification of 3x—perfect for mid-range shots with a crossbow, handgun, rifle or turkey gun. Its other advantage is that complex reticles—in this case a ballistic reticle set up for a .300 Blackout—can be etched into its prism. Choose between .223, .300 BLK or .308 Win. I like that its machined aluminum housing is rubber-armored and waterproof to 10 feet. For a magnified red dot optic, it's

SIGHTMARK WOLF HOUND 3X24 HS-300

sightmark.com

- **Type:** prismatic
- **Reticle:** advanced Horse-Shoe ballistic/w .5 MOA center dot
- **Reticle Color:** red/green
- **Magnification:** 3x
- **Brightness Settings:** 5
- **Eye relief:** 2.83"
- **Weight:** 17.2 ozs.
- **Mount Type:** Picatinny
- **Battery Type:** CR2032
- **Battery Life:** 200/4,000 hrs. (hi/low)
- **MSRP:** \$199.97

a great value. Concerning negatives, the HS 300 is heavy for a red dot sight at 17 ounces, and it has little eye relief at 2.83 inches.

continued on p. 79 »



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Muck Wetland Pro Snake Boot

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bootie; \$180; muckbootcompany.com



**Silver Stag Cascade
Hunter Knife**

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handle, handmade
leather sheath; \$159;
silverstag.com



**Kuiu Pro LT
4000 Full Kit**

3.8-pound pack,
carbon-fiber
frame; \$479;
kuiu.com



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legs, two side shelves; \$440;
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pheasant *continued from p. 63*



but sometimes surprisingly light cover if hunting pressure moves them there). They move toward feed again about two hours before sunset. So don't waste time walking grain fields from about 10 or 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. Hiding cover within a half-mile of feed will hold more birds than more distant cover, but they'll move a mile, maybe as many as 2 miles if necessary. For some reason, they like to hide tight to or even in soggy ground or shallow water.

Second, hunt the right places.

Study the area, looking for feed fields near dense-cover hiding areas. Use one of those mapping apps like HuntStand, onX and BaseMap. Then try to decipher which cover is least likely to have been hunted recently. The more dense and distant the cover, the more likely no one's bothered it. Birds in feeding fields will probably be wild and flush well out of range. In heavy cover they usually hold much better.

Third, hunt smart.

Don't just walk. Consider where a pressured bird might run. Because most will run. Even through the thicket-from-hell. I've had them run out of choking cattails and across barely frozen water to hide in another cattail thicket 50 yards away. You can stop their running ways by blocking them. They run from a threat to assumed safety. If they hear a threat in the direction they're running, they'll stop, maybe try running around it. So surround them. Just two hunters can put on the squeeze. So can cover. A barren field is likely to stop a bird. It will hold at the edge or run back into the cover or flush.

Fourth, Super Secret: During the last two hours of each day, hunt the seam, the edge of heavy cover abutting feeding cover. Virtually every pheasant in the area will be in or near this strip, especially if the weather is bad. And that's good. For you! *ah*



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2020 Gift Guide

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NY Hospital Study: Shilling For The SAFE Act?

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IN MEMORY NRA-ILA CONTRIBUTIONS September 1 - 30, 2020

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NRA-ILA

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NRA-ILA website: nraila.org

Northwell Health, the largest health system and largest private employer in New York State, has announced a research study called, bizarrely, "We Ask Everyone. Firearm Safety is a Health Issue." The project will require, as part of routine screening of emergency room patients, asking questions about firearm ownership and guns in the home. Implementation will begin at three Northwell hospitals initially (two on Long Island and one on Staten Island), with plans to expand the program to include "inpatient and ambulatory settings" across all of its facilities.

Northwell Health has reportedly refused to disclose what the questions will be, although the responses will be "scored and embedded into the patient's electronic health record" and used to "establish next steps for care."

It's not clear how this squares with the Affordable Care Act, 42 U.S.C.A. § 300gg-17(c), and the prohibition against a health care provider, a wellness and prevention plan manager, or a health, wellness or prevention services organization requiring disclosure of or collecting information on lawful ownership of firearms or firearms stored or kept in a residence, but the program is being funded by a \$1.4 million grant from the National Institutes of Health.

Residents of the Empire State need to understand how "We Ask Everyone" dovetails with an existing law on mandatory mental-health reporting and disarming gun owners.

Under 2013's SAFE Act, the drastic gun-control legislation passed by the New York State Legislature and signed into law by Governor Andrew Cuomo, an amendment to the state Mental Hygiene Law created a mandatory reporting requirement for mental-health professionals. Physicians, psychologists, registered nurses and licensed clinical social workers providing treatment services are now required to report any client who, in the exercise of reasonable professional judgment, the treatment provider considers "likely to engage in conduct that would result in serious harm to self or others." If a local government official agrees with the report, the report must be shared with the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services to disarm persons in possession of a state firearms license and guns.

The law confines the use of the report exclusively to the question of the person's ability to own or possess firearms; it is not used for treatment or to safeguard other persons who may be at risk.

Persons who have been reported do not have access to the report or to the name of



Governor Andrew Cuomo at Northwell Health Imaging at the Center for Advanced Medicine.

the reporting treatment provider. There is no due process, hearing, adjudication of mental illness or determination of dangerousness, or a requirement for a court order. Once the division of criminal justice services is notified, if the person has a firearm license or has applied for one, the license is automatically revoked, and the person must surrender the license and all firearms, or the firearms will be confiscated by law enforcement. The whole scheme rests on an assertion by a treatment provider that cannot be challenged by the person affected.

Many in the mental-health care community resented being transformed into agents of the state and questioned the effectiveness of the law. The New York State Psychiatric Association, an association representing psychiatrists practicing in the state that "supports gun-control measures in general," opposed the reporting requirement and its focus on guns rather than mental health: "Following discussions with OMH [New York State Office of Mental Health] staff, it has become clear that the intent of the SAFE Act reporting requirement is solely to limit access to legal firearms and not to protect individuals from imminent risk of harm to self or others."

A *New York Times* article published the year after the requirement became law confirmed there were significant failures in design and implementation. First, the "threshold for reporting is so low" that "frontline mental

AP photo by Ron Adar / SOPA Images/Sipa USA

Doug Gray Is

Music lovers—especially those in the South—know the Marshall Tucker Band for their definitive blend of rock, rhythm & blues, jazz, country and gospel. Lead singer Doug Gray and the band influenced major country acts like Alabama, Confederate Railroad and Travis Tritt and developed a 50-year friendship with NRA Life member Charlie Daniels. In fact, the Marshall Tucker Band was slated to tour with the Charlie Daniels Band in 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic derailed those plans. Having earned the rank of an Army sergeant E-5 in Vietnam, Gray is quick to honor and recognize fellow veterans and understands the importance of the Second Amendment. Gray recently answered a few questions for NRA Country's Vanessa Shahidi.

VS: The Marshall Tucker Band has traveled the country extensively. As you play to fans all across our nation, what makes you proud to be an American?

DG: We have the 2nd Amendment which gives us the right to defend ourselves against those who threaten our way of life. It's our constitutional right. I'm very proud that people were smart enough to assemble our Constitution that still stands today. It's the fabric that holds us together.

VS: Do you have a favorite personal firearm?

DG: I'm a fan of a variety of firearms and own several handguns.



Photo courtesy Doug Gray

VS: Who taught you how to shoot?

DG: My uncle Bobby, my mother's brother. I was 10 years old living in Spartanburg, S.C. He helped me to understand how to shoot and maintain firearms. He and my Uncle Carl really taught me the ropes of the great outdoors!

VS: What's ahead for you and the band?

DG: The Marshall Tucker Band's mission is to play for our fans. We can't wait for the pandemic restrictions to be lifted so we can hit the road again. We have many dates in the works. In the meantime, we're busy preparing our buses and trucks to again see the world.

Be sure to catch all the news and announcements about Doug Gray and the Marshall Tucker Band online at **MarshallTucker.com**.

NRA Country is a lifestyle and a bond between the country music community and hard-working Americans everywhere. It's powered by pride, freedom, love of country, respect for the military, and the responsibilities of protecting the great American life. Visit nracountry.com and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

health workers feel compelled to routinely report mentally ill patients brought to an emergency room." The resulting volume of reports meant that local health officials were rubber-stamping reports, with no effective oversight or review before a report was passed on to the division of criminal justice services. There was also no way to verify independently whether the law was being applied appropriately and whether the individuals being reported did, in fact, pose a risk of serious harm.

By 2014, over 34,000 individuals had been reported under this SAFE Act provision; another source suggests that as of late 2015, about 2,000 New Yorkers a month were being added to the database. The *Times* article observed that "the overwhelming majority of reports from mental health professionals are coming from hospitals ... with an emergency room and inpatient psychiatric services."

Under the Northwell project, regardless of the reason a person presents themselves at the emergency room—food poisoning, car accident or COVID-19—the patient will face questioning about guns. In a public-health context where firearms are viewed as unhealthy and gun ownership as pathological, it isn't terribly hard to imagine how this information may be used to support a claim that a gun owner "is likely to engage in conduct that would result in serious harm to self or others."

While New York's website advises that the SAFE Act "should not dissuade any individual from seeking mental health services they need," the reality is that it forces gun owners to choose between getting such treatment and retaining their gun rights, and makes everyone less safe. "We Ask Everyone" perpetuates the same dysfunctional dynamic. **dh**

standing guard *continued from p. 12*

of demands. That criminals be set free. That police stand down. That the right to self-defense be reserved only for government officials and wealthy elites. That regular citizens like you and me give up our guns and our right to protect our own lives.

But let me tell you, right here, right now and for the record:

We will not submit. We will not surrender our freedom. In fact, we have our own list of demands—with no middle ground and no compromise.

We demand that civil society be restored according to the rule of law. We demand that criminals do hard time for hard crime. We demand that taxpaying citizens get the police protection they deserve.

And we demand that every single law-abiding American have the sacred right, guaranteed by our Constitution, to keep and bear arms **for our protection** when violent criminals leave us no other choice.

Our demands are for justice—for the law-abiding people of this country, not for the lawbreakers who want to burn America to the ground. Our demands are deeply rooted in the Constitution and the guiding principles of freedom that made America the greatest nation in the world.

I'll be honest with you—I didn't see this coming. I had no idea, at the beginning of this year, that our cities and towns would be overrun by anarchists, and that so many political officials would simply desert their posts and renounce their duty to keep American citizens safe.

I didn't see it coming—but our Founding Fathers did.

Our Founding Fathers knew, nearly two-and-a-half centuries ago, that there would come a time in this nation when the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness would depend on the continued right of the people to keep and bear arms.

If you and I stand shoulder to shoulder, I believe with all my heart that the free citizens of this nation will continue to have that right. If you haven't already, I sincerely hope you'll renew your commitment to our cause today by visiting **NRA2021.org** or by calling **833-NRA-2021**.

I know we can defend this most sacred freedom in the tough days ahead—but only if we continue to fight together under the NRA banner.

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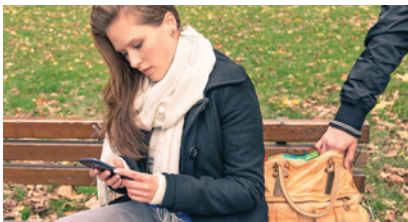


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gunshows.nra.org

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The "NRA Regional Report," a service for NRA members, is an up-to-date listing of NRA conducted and/or sponsored events scheduled in your region for the current month. Call to verify event dates and locations before traveling.



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By Joseph P. DeBergalis, Jr.
Executive Director,
General Operations



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NRA Members Can Give Thanks By Donating Surplus Venison

This year it may be important for hunters to plan ahead.

The last two months of the year represent a traditional time for all Americans to reflect on the blessings in their lives, even amid a pandemic. During this time, many of us give thanks for all we have received. NRA members who hunt certainly reflect on their blessings every time they bag game. American hunters are thankful for the bounty. In such moments, they become even more acutely aware of how much they have received, leading to a question many hunters ask themselves today: Does my family need this meat? Can someone else benefit from this healthy, organic protein more than me? If the answer to question two is "yes," hunters may donate their game to Hunters for the Hungry.

Through the program, more than 2.1 million pounds of meat donated by hunters every year produces 8.1 million meals annually. That's a lot of giving—and it's a lot to be thankful for regardless of in which end of the line you may find yourself standing.

Hunters for the Hungry is an initiative supported by the National Rifle Association to give back to communities by supplying healthy, organic game meat across the country. This is possible because the NRA works closely with state programs/affiliates to connect interested individuals with programs in their area and to foster awareness of this activity through education, fundraising and publicity. NRA Hunters for the Hungry plays a key role in this nationwide charitable effort by maintaining a state-by-state database of processors and supporting groups at hfth.nra.org, where an easy-to-use website guides hunters to donate healthy venison.

Virginia, Missouri, Iowa, Pennsylvania and Ohio are the states where deer hunters are known to give the most on average. But you don't have to live in or hunt in any of those states to donate game meat. Across the nation, American hunters' generosity regularly goes to homeless shelters, soup kitchens and food banks. Visit hfth.nra.org to learn how you can donate venison to families and individuals in need.

While we discuss this topic, it's important to note that this year it is more important than ever to plan ahead if you use commercial processors to render your game for the freezer. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a bottleneck at many commercial meat processors, and this problem could affect hunters who plan to donate venison.



Photo by NRA

One NRA partner in this worthy cause, Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH), a venison-donation ministry based in Hagerstown, Md., is now advising would-be donors to any hunters-for-the-hungry program—along with those who opt to have their own deer processed professionally—to avoid frustrating surprises by checking with their local butchers for any changes in their operations.

"The impact of COVID-19 on some of the larger commercial processing plants across the country has had a trickle-down impact on many local butchers and meat markets," said FHFH Executive Director Josh Wilson. "There are some meat-processing locations that are completely booked with livestock until well into the new year—and, as a result, some have opted to pause the deer-processing portion of their business until they are caught up. With more people than usual depending on food-assistance programs and ministries due to the pandemic, we are encouraging all hunters to plan ahead and make sure they can continue to donate their deer this season." Since 1997, FHFH (hfth.org) has distributed nearly 21 million servings of nutritious food.

While the situation is not expected to impact all areas, hunters who learn their local butcher may no longer handle deer this season should consult hfth.nra.org to search for an alternate donation location in their area.

2020 NRA BOARD ELECTION RESULTS

The following members have been elected Directors of the NRA for three-year terms ending in 2023:

Jay Printz	81,112
J. William Carter	79,466
Charles L. Cotton	78,678
Linda Walker	78,584
Judi White	77,898
Leroy Sisco	77,270
Howard J. Walter	76,790
Graham Hill	75,123
Mark E. Vaughan	74,421
Thomas P. Arvas	74,313
Ted W. Carter	74,287
Barbara Rumpel	73,981
Phillip B. Journey	73,605
Steven C. Schreiner	73,352
Todd J. Rathner	72,950
Richard Figueroa	72,520
J. Kenneth Blackwell	72,488
Carl Rowan, Jr.	72,119
Curtis S. Jenkins	72,024
Herbert A. Lanford, Jr.	71,677
Allan D. Cors	71,389
Clel Baudler	69,146
Robert E. Mansell	69,141
Patricia A. Clark	69,001
Mark Keith Robinson	68,753

and for a two-year term ending in 2022:

Paul D. Babaz	67,840
Todd R. Ellis	66,520
Dave Butz	66,282
Ronald L. Schmeits	66,062

and for a one-year term ending in 2021:

Niger Innis	65,025
Anthony P. Colandro	64,930

The remaining candidates on the ballot, who were not elected, are as follows:

R.B. Rocky Marshall, Jr.	62,581
Robert J. Wos	62,156
John L. Cushman	62,087
James L. Wallace	61,412
Craig Swartz	59,268
Kevin P. Hogan	55,865
Frank C. Tait	55,462

Nominees for the election of the 76th Director were those candidates who had been nominated previously for the mail election of Directors but failed to be elected. The one NRA director elected for the one-year term by those members present and voting at the Annual Meetings was:

(name to be provided on October 24)

Friends Of NRA Continue Charitable Fundraising Amid Pandemic Challenges

Nationwide shutdowns from the pandemic in 2020 have challenged the Friends of NRA, a 100-percent grassroots fundraising effort benefitting the shooting sports, but organizers have found ways to keep the momentum going.

"We are thrilled we can hold Friends of NRA events again," said Sarah Engeset, Director of Volunteer Fundraising Administration. "Thanks to our dedicated volunteers and staff, we continue to raise critical funds for the NRA Foundation and the shooting sports programs throughout the country."

Friends of NRA events are still being held both online and in person. One of the most important fundraising options, the sponsor program, is going especially strong right now. Sponsors benefit by receiving custom products from national corporate sponsors. A KA-BAR knife with Mark "Oz" Geist's signature and 'NRA' printed on the blade has been an especially popular option lately.

Women on Target, the NRA School Shield Program, the Eddie Eagle Gun Safe Program and 4-H shooting sports clubs are just a few of the many local and national programs that benefit from the Friends of NRA's fundraising efforts. Every program receiving funding is a way to keep our communities safe, promote the safe handling of firearms, introduce new gun owners to the sport and educate Americans about the importance of the Second Amendment.

To find out more about the Friends of NRA events and sponsorship programs, go to FriendsOfNRA.org *dh*



NRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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(Name of Board member), NRA Office of the Secretary, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030; or nrabod@nrahq.org; or (703) 267-1021. Please include your name, contact information and NRA membership I.D. number, as only communications from NRA members will be forwarded.



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The non-adjustable stock weighs just 1 pound, 15 ounces. The adjustable stock, which includes a cheekpiece that may be moved up or down and right or left, weighs just 2 pounds, 11 ounces. Either is clad in Springfield's custom-painted Evergreen or Ridgeline camo patterns. With the stock's 1-inch Pachmayr Decelerator recoil pad, the rifle's length of pull is 13¾ inches.

Overall weight of the Waypoint ranges from 6 pounds, 12 ounces to 7 pounds, 14 ounces depending on configuration. The rifle is chambered in 6mm Creedmoor, 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC and .308 Winchester. In 6mm and .308, barrel length is 20 inches. In 6.5 Creedmoor, barrel length is 22 inches. And in 6.5 PRC, barrel length is 24 inches.

The overall look of this rifle clearly is a nod toward recent trends—that is, precision shooters should like it. Note the one-piece Picatinny rail, the fat bolt handle. Heck, just look at the stock. Its deep pistol grip screams “control.” It and

the adjustable cheekpiece and the cartridges the rifle chambers all encourage long sessions on the range.

On the other hand, the magazine extends beneath the belly of the rifle, and the one-piece rail extends across the ejection port. Both factors prevent me from carrying it “suitcase-style,” with my hand wrapped beneath the belly, my thumb riding along the right side of the action or wrapped over the bolt/beneath the scope. The rifle cradles decently in my left arm, and I like it in the high-ready or low-ready position. The deep pistol grip adds another angle. I don't think this gun will slide best in and out of a tight scabbard. I also wish length of pull was a quarter-inch shorter. A gun chambered in mild cartridges like the Model 2020 would handle a bit better, in my hands at least, with an LOP of 13.5 inches.

But that's quibbling. I like the lines of this rifle, and I certainly like its performance on the range. We'll see how it does in the field. But I'm confident Springfield has built a heckuva nice addition to the ranks of hunting rifles, and it's all made in America. **A**

EoTech HHS II



provides the best of both worlds. For negatives, battery life isn't great at 1,000 hours or less; its large sighting pane is vulnerable to dirt and sun flare; and its control buttons can be difficult to operate in gloves or cold weather. **AH**

For many hunters and home defenders alike, an EoTech holographic-style red dot sight combined with an EoTech pivoting magnifier—in this case a EXPS2 and a G33 Magnifier—is the ultimate setup for a shotgun or rifle for hunting and/or home defense. With the magnifier pushed aside via its pivoting STS (switch-to-side) mount, the shooter is allowed a huge field of view for fast shooting of close or running targets; yet in a split second the 3x magnifier can be used for shooting at longer distances or where more precision is required. As such, this holographic optic—wherein a detailed reticle image is projected on a large pane—combined with its magnifier

EOTECH HHS II

eotechinc.com

- **Type:** holographic w/magnifier
- **Reticle:** 68 MOA ring w/1 MOA center dot
- **Reticle Color:** red
- **Magnification:** 3x (w/magnifier)
- **Brightness Settings:** 20
- **Eye relief:** 2.2"
- **Weight:** 22.4 ozs.
- **Mount Type:** Picatinny
- **Battery Type:** CR123
- **Battery Life:** 1,000 hrs. (12 setting)
- **MSRP:** \$1,169

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Sweet Redemption

By Frank Julian, Waterford, N.Y.

Nov. 14, 2019, was the middle of what we consider to be the best week in the Adirondack Mountains for chasing whitetails. I left my house around 4 a.m. to meet my dad at our camp a few miles from where we would hunt. It would be my eighth day in the woods, and through the first seven I had yet to see a deer.

With fresh snow on the ground, I knew the area I wanted to be in. We arrived at the trailhead, discussed our plans for the day and started off. As I moved through the woods, I cut a few sets of smaller tracks but nothing that really caught my attention. Just before 9 a.m. I stopped to look around and caught movement directly in front of me. I realized the movement was a deer, so I froze and prepared for a potential opportunity. I was unsure whether the deer was a buck until he lifted his head and nicked a branch and I saw a small portion of antler. He began walking and managed to get just over a hump with a large tree between us. I slowly stepped to my side and looked through my scope only to see him staring back at me. I couldn't see his antlers or his vitals, only his face and neck,

and I wasn't sure it was even the same deer. After what felt like an eternity he began slowly walking. I lost sight of him for a moment, quickly regained it to my left and moved the rifle on to his vitals after confirming he was a shooter. I thought I found a clear shot, set my crosshairs and pulled the trigger. At the shot the deer spun and took off seemingly unharmed. I watched him run over the ridge in front of me and out of sight. With fresh snow on the ground I knew blood would be easy to spot, so I combed the area but found nothing. I had missed and was disgusted with myself, knowing how rare this opportunity was. I talked to my dad on the radio, told him what happened and tracked the buck for the rest of the day without seeing him again.

We agreed to return to camp early and check my rifle, and with no issues found I had some dinner and spent a restless

night on the couch. I woke the next morning with little to no ambition and a knot in my stomach. I contemplated skipping the day but after some convincing from my dad I decided to head out. We were joined by my uncle and a friend, and together we headed to the trailhead before sunrise. To be honest, my spirits were not the highest.

I decided I was going to head back to the same area where I had missed the buck the day before and sit for the day; something I find difficult as I enjoy moving. I set up and watched the woods come to life. The first few hours of the day were pretty mundane. I found myself nodding off and watching the occasional chipmunk. At 9 a.m. I tried our crew on the radio and could hear them but was unable to transmit. I decided to go for a short walk to warm up and returned to sit around 9:30, hoping for a shot at redemption. At 10:20 a.m., that shot presented itself. I turned to my right to see a deer making its way in my direction. I quickly turned on my seat to get ready for a shot, and after seeing his antlers, shouldered the rifle and pulled the hammer back. He turned broadside at

about 50 yards, I stopped him, and the rest is history. I quickly got on the radio and called my dad and the others and they headed my way. When my dad arrived he noticed a mark on my buck's front right leg. After inspection we realized this was the same buck I had missed the day before and that I had taken the hair off the back of his leg, just under his shoulder. You just can't make this stuff up.

Wrapping my hands around the antlers of my first Adirondack buck was one of the greatest feelings I've ever experienced. I knew at that moment that all the hard work, miles on my boots and early mornings were worth it. Having my dad, my uncle and our lifelong hunting partner there with me only made it that much sweeter. I can't wait to proudly display this buck next to the others at my camp and seal my place on the wall of big-woods hunting memories. **ah**



Photo: Author

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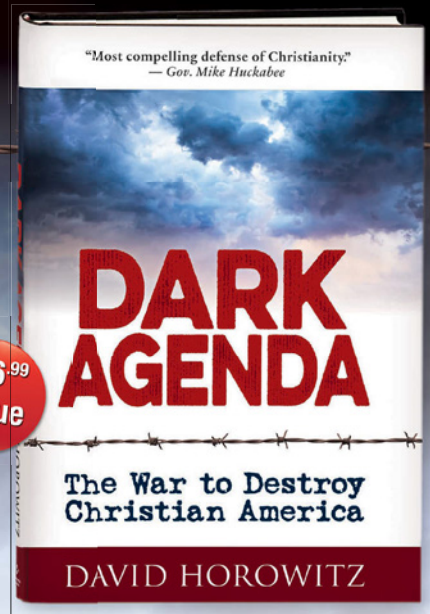
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