

SPECIAL KAYAK FISHING SECTION, P. 74



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MAY 2023

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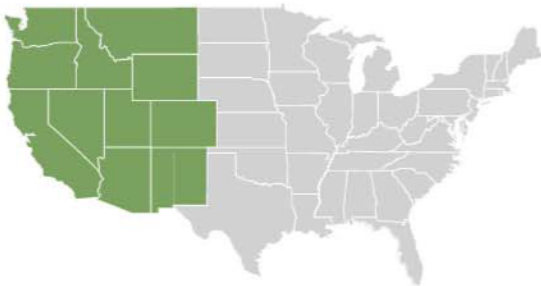
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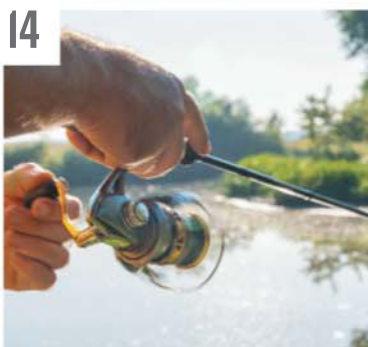
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WOODSMANSHIP

Whether you call it fatwood, pine knot, heart pine or pine “lighter’d,” as the guy who showed me where to find it did, the resin-rich heartwood at the center of old pine stumps might be the best natural firestarter in the woods. As a kid fascinated with anything to do with fire, I was amazed at how quickly splinters of the pungent wood burst into flame, necessitating just a single match to create a roaring blaze for roasting hot dogs.

Using pine lighter’d or birch bark to start a warming fire even when most of the surrounding forest is dripping wet or covered in snow is something I pride myself on. It’s just one of the dozens of little tricks I’ve picked up from older, wiser outdoorsmen in the four decades I’ve been roaming around the woods. They don’t necessarily make me a better hunter or fisherman, and while some certainly have a survival application, they’re just generally useful things to know how to do. The traditional term for skills like these is woodsmanship; a younger crowd might call them outdoor hacks.

Terminology aside, writer Scott Linden makes a great point about these skills in this month’s Do-It-Yourself department before sharing nine of them that he’s put to use over the years. These days, we count on devices to do or show us so much that it’s easy to forget the older, but maybe better, ways of getting along in the woods. Skills like knot tying, map-and-compass navigation and knife sharpening on a good ol’ whetstone are perishable. Quick, tie a bowline knot ... See what I mean? Linden’s piece is a good reminder to keep our woodsmanship skills honed for when we need them.

How to tell the difference between poison ivy and Virginia creeper (“leaves of three, let it be”), an effective and painless way to remove a tick (rotate it around its axis with a cotton swab) ... the list goes on. If you have an outdoor hack to pass along, share it with us on Facebook or Instagram. It’s never too late to learn a new one.

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The Regional Outdoor Guide

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SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
23 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	24 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	25 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	26 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	27 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42	28 am 6:06 to 8:06 pm 6:30 to 8:30	29 am 6:54 to 8:54 pm 7:18 to 9:18
30 am 7:42 to 9:42 pm 8:06 to 10:06						

MAY 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 am 8:30 to 10:30 pm 8:54 to 10:54	2 am 9:18 to 11:18 pm 9:42 to 11:42	3 am 10:06 to 12:06 pm 10:30 to 12:30	4 am 10:54 to 12:54 pm 11:18 to 1:18	5 am — to — pm 12:06 to 2:06	6 am 12:30 to 2:30 pm 12:54 to 2:54
7 am 1:18 to 3:18 pm 1:42 to 3:42	8 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	9 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	10 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	11 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	12 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42	13 am 6:06 to 8:06 pm 6:30 to 8:30
14 am 6:54 to 8:54 pm 7:18 to 9:18	15 am 8:30 to 10:30 pm 8:54 to 10:54	16 am 9:18 to 11:18 pm 9:42 to 11:42	17 am 10:06 to 12:06 pm 10:30 to 12:30	18 am 10:54 to 12:54 pm 11:18 to 1:18	19 am — to — pm 12:06 to 2:06	20 am 12:30 to 2:30 pm 12:54 to 2:54
21 am 1:18 to 3:18 pm 1:42 to 3:42	22 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	23 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	24 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	25 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	26 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42	27 am 6:06 to 8:06 pm 6:30 to 8:30
28 am 6:54 to 8:54 pm 7:18 to 9:18	29 am 8:30 to 10:30 pm 8:54 to 10:54	30 am 9:18 to 11:18 pm 9:42 to 11:42	31 am 10:06 to 12:06 pm 10:30 to 12:30			

JUNE 2023

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1 am 10:54 to 12:54 pm 11:18 to 1:18	2 am 11:18 to 1:18 pm 11:42 to 1:42	3 am — to — pm 12:06 to 2:06
4 am 12:30 to 2:30 pm 12:54 to 2:54	5 am 1:18 to 3:18 pm 1:42 to 3:42	6 am 2:06 to 4:06 pm 2:30 to 4:30	7 am 2:54 to 4:54 pm 3:18 to 5:18	8 am 3:42 to 5:42 pm 4:06 to 6:06	9 am 4:30 to 6:30 pm 4:54 to 6:54	10 am 5:18 to 7:18 pm 5:42 to 7:42

The moon's phases are listed as New, First Quarter (First Q), Full and Last Quarter (Last Q). Times listed represent the peak activity times for game and fish each day.

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By Richard Mann



Many hunters think of bears as big nasty critters that are hard to kill. Bears can be big; an Alaskan brown bear can weigh more than a half ton. Bears can also be nasty. Across North America black bears kill—on average—at least one person each year. But bears—most bears—are not hard to kill, and their size varies greatly by location.

Most black bears weigh less than 500 pounds, with the average being closer to half that. And while a 500-pound black bear might be twice the size of a 250-pound black bear, it's not twice as hard to kill. So, given their average size and the potential for danger, what are the best loads for bears?

First, we must set some parameters because brown bears and grizzlies are a whole different animal than black bears in both size and temperament. They're

also much more expensive to hunt and are nowhere near as widely dispersed. So, here we're going to focus on black bears and what guns and loads are appropriate for them. The other parameter we must set deals with how the bear will be hunted, which is typically with dogs, over bait or by spot-and-stalk. The ideal guns and loads for each type of hunting situation vary.

SPOT-AND-STALK

If you're planning to spot-and-stalk a black bear, and if you have a deer rifle, chances are that you're already well-armed. I killed my first bear in Montana with a .358 Win. and a 225-grain Nosler Partition; the shot was about 200 yards, and that bear weighed about 200 pounds. I also took a West Virginia bear of about the same size with a .30 Remington AR and a 150-grain Nosler

AccuBond at around half that distance. The farthest distance I've taken a black bear was on a hunt in Idaho. The range was just a bit beyond 400 yards, and I used a Steyr Scout Rifle in .308 Win. All three rifle-cartridge combinations worked perfectly.

At most sensible shooting distances, any cartridge delivering similar ballistics to the .308 Win. is ideal for black bears. If you're going to stretch the distance, it's advisable to step up to something like a 6.5 PRC or .300 Win. Mag. Hornady's new 7 mm PRC should be perfect for a spot-and-stalk black bear hunt where long shots are anticipated. To maximize penetration, which is never a bad thing, a partitioned, bonded or mono-metal bullet is a good idea, especially with smaller calibers or if you need to take a close-range shot with a high-velocity cartridge.

Bears sometimes look mean, and they can be. However, many common deer cartridges work just fine on black bears—even very large ones.



OVER BAIT IN THICK COVER

When bear hunting over bait, you don't need a gun with a lot of reach. Just as with a spot-and-stalk hunt, a good deer rifle will work just fine here, too. But when I'm hunting bears over bait, especially in thick cover that I might have to wander into to recover the bear, I like hitting them hard with the hopes of anchoring them on the spot. I've taken bears over bait with a varied selection of guns, including a 6.5 Creedmoor, a .45-70 Govt. and even a 12-gauge shotgun with slugs.

A 12-gauge slug hits hard and makes a big hole. However, my preference for hunting bear over bait is the .45-70. This is partly because there's a wide selection of loads that offer a broad power range, delivering from around 1,000 to nearly 3,700 foot-pounds of muzzle energy. Pick your power level; most .45-70 loads are suitable for bear. I also prefer the .45-70

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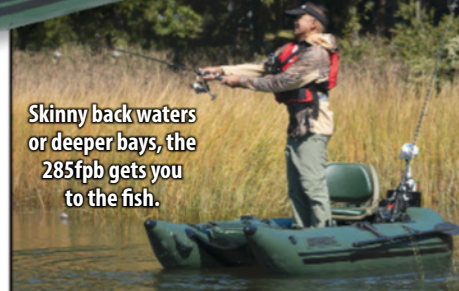
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to a shotgun slug because—given the 25- to 75-yard shot distances—I can place the bullet from the .45-70 with more precision. And, too, most .45-70 lever guns are compact and easy to handle from a blind or in a tree stand.

Handguns can also be effective over bait. With the best deep-penetrating loads, the .357 Mag. or 10 mm Auto should work well, but neither can compete with the .44 Mag. With any handgun cartridge, avoid self-defense loads that might lack adequate penetration, and stick to hunting-specific loads like those from Federal that feature the Swift A-Frame bullet.

If you do choose to use your deer rifle, pay particular attention to bullet selection. The range will be close, with bullets impacting at near muzzle velocity. This can overstress some common cup-and-core bullets that have worked to perfection for you on deer at distance. When hunting over bait with cartridges that have muzzle velocities faster than 2,800 fps, lean toward the premium bonded, partitioned or mono-metal bullets to ensure you get the penetration you need.

WITH HOUNDS

When hunting bears with hounds, shot distances are very short—often measured in feet instead of yards—because you’re shooting your bear out of a tree. Just as with spot-and-stalk or hunting over bait, a good deer rifle will get the job done. But here again, be practical in your bullet selection. Making a good shot and killing the bear as quickly as possible is essential in this scenario. You don’t want a wounded, angry bear at the base of the tree in the middle of



This big boar black bear fell to a downloaded .375 Ruger, but most cartridges offering ballistics similar to the .308 Win. will work.

a pack of dogs and a bunch of hunters. Once that happens, taking another shot becomes treacherous.

If your standard deer rifle is a bit on the heavy side, then weight is another consideration. You’ll very likely have to cover a lot of ground in a hurry, and the ground you cover is often some of the roughest in the area. Chasing after—and especially leading—a pack of hounds with a traditional long gun slung over your shoulder can be a challenge in these situations.

Pair cartridge choice for black bears to the conditions. Options vary from classics—.30-30 Win., .308 Win. and .45-70 Govt.—to the newer 6.5 Creedmoor and even some handgun loads.



If there were ever a perfect time for a takedown lever-action rifle, this would be it. I have a custom takedown Marlin 336 in .35 Rem. that separates into two 16-inch pieces. It easily fits into a backpack and can be assembled in about 20 seconds. Browning offers its BLR in a takedown version, and it’s chambered in a good selection of bear-capable cartridges.

BEAR MEDICINE

For most, the age-old cliché, “loaded for bear,” means you have a powerful gun with a lot of ammunition. If I were going to fight it out with a bear—brown or black—that’s what I’d want. But there’s a difference between going to combat with a bruin and hunting one. Sure, a wounded black bear can be dangerous, but a deer rifle with the right ammo will sort it out just fine.

If we’re talking grizz, well, that’s a bear of a different color. A good friend had to stop a charging bear on Kodiak Island. He brained it with a .35 Whelen and dropped it on the spot. When I asked him about it, he said he’d have not felt over-gunned had he been armed with a German 88 mm anti-tank cannon. 

RICHARD MANN (2)

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SPIN TO WIN

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Story and Photos By Dr. Jason A. Halfen

Stream trout are perhaps angling's most perfect finned adversary. Gifted with exceptional eyesight—perfect for their gin-clear habitats—trout are ever wary and watchful for predators on the wing and the foot. Trout possess a powerful sense of smell; one their anadromous cousins use to return to the streams of their birth.

Stream trout are quick to detect (and reject) offerings that are tainted with synthetic materials such as insect repellent or sunscreen. Sporting streamlined bodies strengthened by life in the current,

trout make long, powerful runs toward the gnarliest cover and leap acrobatically into the air to throw lip piercings forged from sharp metal.

For trout enthusiasts, opportunities to catch these truly amazing fish across much of the country are plentiful. These range from rainbows and cutthroats patrolling classic freestone fisheries of the mountain West, to behemoth browns prowling the meandering streams of the Midwest's Driftless Region, to beautiful native brookies teeming within Appalachian creeks.

ROD SELECTION

Trout “purists” wielding long rods of bamboo, wispy monofilament tippets, and dainty assemblages of feather and fur might scoff at the notion of spinning tackle being the best method for catching trout. However, for most anglers, it is the best option for most stream trout angling situations.

Indeed, chasing trout with a spinning rod in hand can be just as technical a pursuit as any other, and often, quite rewarding in terms of both quantity and quality of trout brought to hand.

Effective spinning techniques for trout start with carefully matching the tackle setup to the fish and the conditions.



Many of the advantages of chasing trout with spinning tackle lies within the rods themselves. A dazzling array of spinning rod lengths, powers, and actions are available to support quests ranging from small-stream brook trout to migratory steelhead and everything in-between.

On a narrow, technical river, where abundant obstructions in the form of weeds and trees may abound, select a light-power, fast-action rod less than 6 feet in length. These attributes allow for precise, short-range cast placement and a fun, sporting experience with smaller

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brookies and browns. When venturing onto a wider, more open river with fewer overhead and streamside entanglements, step up to a longer rod—perhaps up to 7 feet long—with a medium-light power and fast action. These attributes enable you to cast heavier lures longer distances while successfully managing battles with resident browns and rainbows into the 20-inch class.

Spinning rods in the 8- to 9-foot range, with medium power and fast or moderate-fast actions, are appropriate on flowing tributaries that support runs of large, migratory steelhead or browns. These rods support highly effective presentations for big trout—like casting large spinners or drifting spawn sacs—and have the perfect blend of power and forgiveness to handle anadromous trout pushing the 30-inch mark.

If you're looking for a good place to start your trout rod collection, the Trout Series from St. Croix—based in the beautiful Northwoods of Wisconsin—are handcrafted, trout-specific spinning rods that offer the optimum blend of durability and performance.

PERFECT PAIRINGS

Complete your trout spinning rig with the appropriate reel. Shorter rods used to target smaller trout balance well with a 1000-series spinning reel. Step up to a 2500-series reel for medium-length rods and a 3000-series reel when fishing the longest rods for the largest trout.

In all cases, select reels with durable, lightweight construction, smooth, high-quality drags and some sort of water-proofing system to enhance reel performance and longevity. Remember, stream trout fishing is often a full-contact, in-the-water experience where gear, quite simply, gets soaked.

Unlike bass or walleye angling—where braided main lines and fluorocarbon leaders have become the norm—most stream trout fishing applications are best served using monofilament. Select 6-pound-test line for your smallest combos, 8-pound-test for medium-duty tackle, and up to 12-pound-test when chasing large, migratory fish.

The stretch of monofilament is an asset when battling strong trout in tight quarters, while its chemical composition provides for near-neutral buoyancy—rather than floating like braid or sinking

Practice good conservation by keeping only those fish you plan to eat. Gently handle and release others to fight another day.



like fluorocarbon. In situations where slower, natural presentations are offered to highly-pressured or negative fish—like drifting a spawn sac beneath a float to winter steelhead—a two or three-foot section of a light fluorocarbon leader is often appropriate to ensure near-invisibility of the line at the bait.

LURE THEM

In many trout rivers and streams across the country, a well-focused selection of classic lures will often provide many seasons of success. Begin with in-line spinners—like those offered by Mepps or Rooster Tail—that provoke strikes from lurking trout by combining flash with vibration.

I like a smaller, slightly heavier spinner in many inland trout waters, as these characteristics allow me to fish spinners fast, while maintaining the lure close to the bottom. Don't be dainty when chasing migratory fish; rather, select a spinner that is well-suited for bass

or smaller pike. Remember, trout are apex predators in most of their natural habitats and won't hesitate to attack a lure that seems to be too large to anglers.

Fold in some floating, minnow-profile baits like original floating Rapalas in sizes 7, 9 or even 11 for the largest trout. Carry a selection of split shot weights to help pull the Rapala toward the bottom, where current is reduced, and trophy trout lurk.

Complete your tackle trifecta with some 1/16- and 1/8-ounce jigs. A black or brown marabou, or sparsely tied bucktail jig, expertly mimics many of the prey items that stream trout browse upon, and are excellent choices to fish through long, deep pools.

What else do you need for trout success with spinning tackle? Hopefully a pair of waders that don't leak, a net with a reasonably long handle, and a pair of quality polarized sunglasses. Of course, don't forget a creel when planning to invite a few trout home for dinner. **G-F**



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LESSONS LEARNED

TIPS AND TRICKS
FROM EXPERTS
IMPROVE YOUR
EFFICIENCY IN
THE OUTDOORS.

By Scott Linden

Guides and other experienced outdoor enthusiasts often share their knowledge during downtime in camp. Better pay attention.

I'll never forget watching someone's tent wheeling its way across the blustery desert because the guy lines were tied with granny knots. It was another reminder that as with most things in life, there is a right way to do something once, and plenty of wrong ways to do it then re-do it. The problem is, in this modern world, gadgets and gewgaws will do many things better than we ever could in city and suburban life, but "out there," not so true. And even if you were a Boy Scout, those useful skills and knowledge have a way of falling out of your mental filing cabinet.

So, here are some tricks I learned from guides, cowpokes, grizzled trappers and other folks smarter than I, who probably learned the hard way, too. Some will make your day afield more productive. A few will make you the "cool uncle" in the field and around camp.

SHARPEN A KNIFE

Chuck Buck, founder of Buck Knives, taught me this. Grip the knife, extending your index finger along the "spine," on the top edge of the blade. Try for a 10- to 15-degree angle of blade to whetstone—the key is maintaining the same angle for both sides of the blade—so

note where the spine lies in relation to the pad of your index finger.

If you have sharpening stone oil (or any other oil), use it. It keeps the friction (and blade-damaging heat) to a minimum. Be generous, because it also carries away the bits of stone and blade that gum up the sharpening process. Water or saliva will do in a pinch.

Make about a dozen strokes on the rough-grit side with moderate pressure on the blade. Stroke as if you're trying to shave a bit of the stone off, not back and forth, just the one direction. Swap hands, check your finger-spine angle, and repeat for the other side of the blade. Turn to the fine-grit side and do the same. Unless you're performing surgery, that'll do.

TELL TIME

Extend your arm to full length, palm vertical to the ground. Cock your wrist so you can see your palm with fingers stacked atop each other. Raise your hand until your index finger is just under the bottom of the sun. Count fingers between the bottom of the sun and the horizon. Each finger is about 15 minutes of remaining daylight (go ahead, there's time for one more cast).

WALK THIS WAY

Avoid twisted ankles—or worse—by stepping to the low spots in rocky terrain, rather than teetering on the tops of rocks. They could roll, you could slide. This works well when wading a boulder-strewn river, too. Save your leg muscles for the pack out when encountering tangles of big logs, by stepping over, not on, them. Wheezing and puffing up a steep slope? Take a hint from Himalayan sherpas who stop for a second as each leg is fully extended on the "up" step.

TAKE BETTER PHOTOS

If you want to make a statement, go to art school. To take decent shots to share with friends, read on. After a few establishing shots to create a sense of scale (tiny guy at the foot of monolithic cliff), fill the frame with your subject: friend holding trophy bass, dog with pheasant in his mouth, backpackers loaded up and ready to go.

Most magazine-worthy shots are a bit asymmetrical. Move the subject just a bit to the left, right, toward one corner. On most phones, remember to focus on your subject before you de-center it. The eyes really are the window to the soul,

and if they are invisible due to shadow, your photos have less personality. Have your subject push up his hat brim and take off his sunglasses.

LEARN A FEW KNOTS

The ability to tie a few helpful knots separates the men from the boys. You'll find a multitude of uses for a trucker's hitch, taut line hitch, bowline, square knot and two half hitches. Hint: Make knots easier to tie, from fishing line to cargo rope, by giving yourself more "tag" end to work with. To learn how to tie knots for specific tasks, watch them in action at animatedknots.com

CRACK A COLD ONE

Open a beer or soda bottle without an opener. Grasp the bottle's neck with your non-dominant hand like a baseball bat, so only the cap shows above your grip. With your other hand, insert a spoon, cigarette lighter base or other rigid tool under the cap edge, using the knuckle of



When sharpening a knife, try to maintain a blade angle of 10 to 15 degrees to the whetstone, and make smooth strokes in one direction.

your thumb as a fulcrum. Carefully lever the cap off; you don't want to waste any.

STAY WARM IN A SLEEPING BAG

Wear dry sleeping apparel. The clothes you wore all day likely are full of perspiration and will wick internal heat from your body. Eat or drink something warm before bed (I prefer hot buttered rum). Buy a sleeping bag with enough room in the foot area; toes compressing insulation are a sure route to misery. Use a sleeping pad to insulate you from the cold ground or air circulating below your cot. Put a waterproof ground sheet (vapor barrier) under you or your

tent to prevent bone-chilling moisture from seeping into your sleeping bag.

SAVE YOUR ROD TIP

When busting brush hiking to that favorite stream, turn your rod around so the tip is behind you. You'll tangle less, and minimize chances of catching your tip-top on the ground, in the bushes or

against a tree trunk. Once you get to that honey hole, you'll have one less excuse for not catching fish.

USE A BINO BETTER

Keep your eyes on the prize. When you see a big buck, for instance, slowly lift the binocular up to your eyes while they remain focused on the target. He's still there, isn't he?

Most of these tips won't help you wiggle out of a survival situation, catch more fish, or connect with that 8-pointer you've been hunting. But you'll be the envy of your peers in the outdoors—even if they won't admit it. 

SCOTT LINDEN



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ACCESSING PRIVATE HUNTING LAND

FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FOR LANDOWNERS ARE KEY TO ENSURING MORE HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES.

By Andrew McKean

One of the more head-turning results of the National Deer Association's latest report on the status of wild deer and deer hunting in North America was the revelation that nearly 90 percent of deer killed by hunters in the Midwest, Southeast and Northeast last year were tagged on private land.

That's astounding, especially considering the mantra of "Public Land Hunters" and "Keep It Public" that's resounded through various conservation groups over the past couple of years.

The reality is that, for most American whitetail hunters in the crucible of deer hunting, private land is where it's at, or at least where the deer are at. The NDA report didn't detail how hunters secured access to this bastion of buck habitat, but I can guess it was a combination of paid leases, land owned by friends and family, and old-fashioned door-knocking.

Not one of those access solutions is particularly durable, which is why I maintain we need to pay closer attention to how we hunters both retain and grow access to the most perishable commodity in rural America: private-land hunting access.



Sign of the times? Opening private lands to public hunting is one of the tools federal and state agencies are using to manage deer populations.

The NDA report suggested a couple of solutions. One, widespread adoption of the sort of private-land access brokerage programs that are so popular in the western U.S. Montana's Block Management Program is a good example. In that case, private landowners are paid a lump enrollment plus additional money for every day a hunter accesses their land. The payments are derived from a portion of hunter license fees, which has created a sort of perpetual motion machine of access generating more license fees, which then pays for more access.

Surprisingly, only a handful of states east of the Mississippi River have adopted this sort of user-pays/user-benefits system. The NDA report indicated that only three of 13 states in the Northeast offer a formal private-land access program, and, unfortunately, the trend is negative. Just nine years ago, six of those Northeastern states had access programs.

The trend is slightly more positive in the American Southeast, where four of 11 states surveyed offered formal access programs last year.

The lack of participation in formalized access programs might be because Eastern landowners aren't especially interested in allowing just anyone to hunt their land. That's borne out by a concurrent survey of hunters conducted by the American Hunting Lease Association that found that 80 percent of respondents had a prior relationship with the landowner before accessing the land for hunting.

That same survey indicated that most of the hunting access was granted for free, without expectation of either a cash payment or in-kind gratuities. Some 69 percent of respondents told surveyors with the American Hunting Lease Association that they were not worried about losing their private-land access, but also that they were resistant to paying for hunting access.

One way to read these two surveys—one focused on supply of and the other on demand for hunting access—is that American deer hunters have a lot to lose. One generational change can turn a free hunting spot into a pay-to-play property. That's where access programs can take some of the uncertainty out of this arrangement that's helping wildlife agencies manage deer populations across the eastern U.S.

But there's another player on the field. It's the United States Department of Agriculture, which delivers provisions of the Farm Bill, revised every five years or so. The Farm Bill for the last couple of iterations has included a provision that allows farmers to get additional federal payments for providing hunting access to their land. The program is called Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), and it has opened some 3 million acres in 15 states to free public hunting.

The federal program increases payments going to farmers for conservation benefits if they allow some public

hunting. It's not a huge acreage (considering Montana's Block Management Program provides hunting access to more than 6 million acres), but a provision in this year's Farm Bill would reauthorize the program at no less than \$150 million over five years. That investment could double or even triple the scale of the program.

Congress will debate provisions of the 2023 Farm Bill this summer, and there's never been a better time to help shape the outcome to ensure federal funds work for hunters, landowners and wildlife managers. Here are a few provisions to push for as VPA-HIP is renegotiated:

- Extend the duration of these access contracts from annual to five-year awards. That longer-term arrangement would ensure program continuity.
- Pay premiums for small parcels of high-quality land. Many of these Farm Bill payments go to large-scale farmers who receive other USDA program benefits. But smaller landowners, like many of

those in the East and Northeast, would be more willing to participate if the rental rates increased. Surely access to an acre of prime Ohio whitetail habitat is more valuable than access to an acre of South Dakota wheat stubble.

- Allow states and private groups to match Farm Bill payments. Imagine how many more participants we could have if local conservation groups contributed to a kitty that doubled or tripled the VPA-HIP payments local farmers received.
- Consider a "known participant" roster for hunters who access private land enrolled in Farm Bill programs. One of the barriers to entry for some private landowners is they'd like to know hunters who access their land will be ethical and responsible. State programs that certify participants through advanced hunter education courses could ease those concerns and put more public hunters on private land, ensuring this vital link between landowners and hunters remains intact well into the future. 



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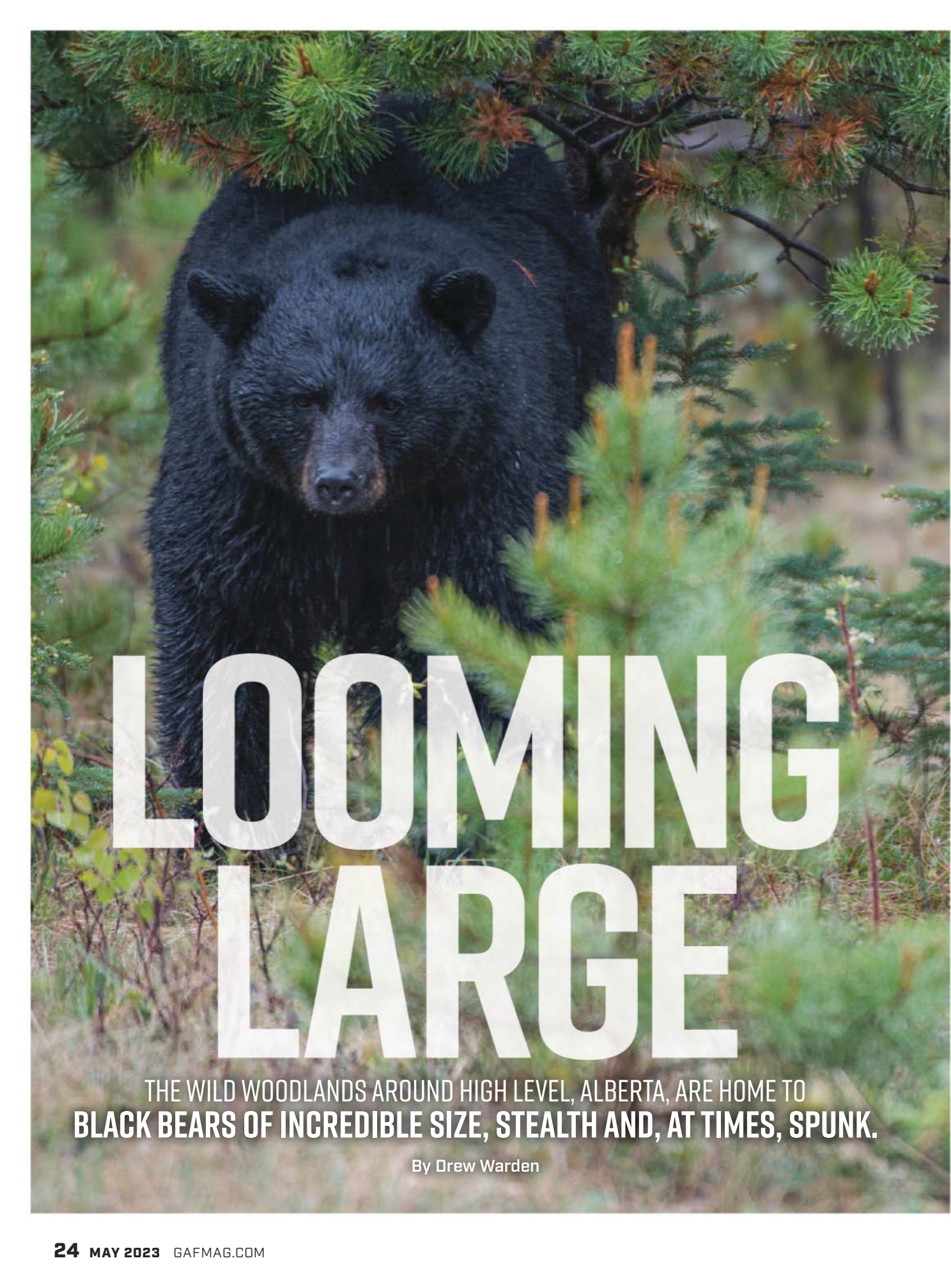


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A black bear is the central focus, standing amidst green pine branches. The bear's dark fur is textured and detailed. The background is a soft-focus forest scene. Large, bold, white text is superimposed over the lower half of the image.

LOOMING LARGE

THE WILD WOODLANDS AROUND HIGH LEVEL, ALBERTA, ARE HOME TO
BLACK BEARS OF INCREDIBLE SIZE, STEALTH AND, AT TIMES, SPUNK.

By Drew Warden



NICK TREHEARNE PHOTOGRAPHY

Bouncing along on the ATV through northern Alberta's mixed stands of poplar, birch and spruce among wide-open muskeg swamplands, I felt it: the unmistakable excitement—and unease—of venturing into an unknown wilderness. Shawn Mack, a guide at W&L Guide Service and son of owner Wally Mack, expertly drove us on the scant path he and his brother Kristen, another guide, had carved out in the bush weeks earlier with chainsaws.

The route saw us juking fallen trees, bounding into and out of small depressions and cruising through open stretches among grassy bogs. Each minute, it took us deeper into the region's wild public land (crown land, as the locals call it), which seemed to extend indefinitely. In one open spot, Shawn stopped the ATV, peering down at the soft mud.

"That's a bear," he nodded, gesturing toward an impression in the dirt. "Decent one, I think."

Black bears were exactly why my traveling companions and I had journeyed thousands of miles into another country amidst a global pandemic. The trip itself had already been delayed two years running due to COVID. Meanwhile, in that time, the bears hadn't been hunted at all by outsiders, and we'd be among the first to do so this spring.

I was excited for the opportunity—and nervous. It was my first bear hunt, and other hunters' stories had stoked an already-overactive imagination. In the months, days and even hours leading up to this, I'd envisioned countless ways I might perish by claws and teeth deep in the Albertan hinterlands.

The previous day at camp, roughly 10 miles outside the town of High Level, fellow hunters spoke of various hair-raising first- or second-hand encounters. The wildest involved a hunter shooting a black bear that had climbed all the way up his stand until it had one paw on the very platform where the hunter stood. However, the most dangerous scenario, all seemed to agree, was having a cub in the tree above you with an angry mama bear on the ground below.

I hoped to avoid both situations. As Shawn and I veered off onto a different track toward the stand I'd be hunting, my heart thumped along in excitement mixed with a bit of fear.

SETTING THE TABLE

W&L Guide Service operates 35 baiting sites spread across roughly 200 kilometers (124 miles) of crown land outside of High Level. The typical site is quite the spread. A rotting beaver carcass inside a plastic bucket is hung on a ridgepole between two trees. Cabled to another tree, meanwhile, is a 55-gallon drum filled with bait, which bears can access through a small opening in the side. The bait is an array of oats, chips, doughnuts, bread, syrup, grease, pop and more, which guides blend with a concrete mixer in camp. They also slather some icing on the barrel and often on a nearby log or fallen tree. Depending on the spot, the hunter sits in either an elevated, hand-built, triangular wooden platform between three trees or a more conventional metal ladder stand.

My first evening sit (bears are most active then, and High Level's May sunsets often occur around 10:30 to 11 p.m.) would be on the triangular-shaped variety. However, after pulling into the bait site, I'd barely noticed the stand before my eyes spied something dark and formidable in the woods beyond. A black bear was already there and tentatively advancing toward the bait through the trees.

Shawn left the ATV running and started rebaiting the site. As he worked, he had me watch the bear with my gun in hand. While he strung up the beaver, another bear approached from our right, a singular mass of black fur partially obscured by the spruces. I was immediately on edge.

Any time the first bear came too close, Shawn bluffed him back. The second, meanwhile, seemed content waiting at a distance for dinner. Once Shawn finished with the bait, he had me get in my stand.

"Should be an interesting sit," he said, grinning knowingly before throwing a leg over the four-wheeler and leaving me alone amongst the trees.

JUMPING RIGHT IN

Shawn's statement was a prescient one. Hours passed like minutes as the two bears performed an elaborate show, which I observed from my front-row seat. It proved a healthy mix of comedy and drama.

The first bear struggled mightily—and eventually successfully—to get at the hanging beaver. He'd scale a ridgepole tree, latch onto the bucket with



W&L Guide Service uses metal ladder stands as well as hand-built wooden stands. Bears have been known to climb into both.

JEFF JOHNSTON

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BEAR NECESSITIES

Take good gear for Alberta bruins.

On my hunt, I used the synthetic-stocked **Mossberg Patriot Predator in .450 Bushmaster** (\$568; mossberg.com) and the walnut-stocked standard **Patriot in .308 Win.** (\$669). Their spiral-fluted, dual-lug bolts and detachable box magazines proved utterly reliable. Meanwhile, the user-adjustable LBA trigger broke perfectly. Both guns have hassle-free optics mounts and are great for bear and other big game.

A wide field of view and good light transmission in low light are key for baited bear hunts. Shots are often close, and most activity happens late. **Swarovski's Z8i 1-8x24** (\$3,188; swarovskioptik.com) and **Z8i 1.7-13.3x42 P** (\$4,166) both offer a wide field of view and have the new Flexchange 4A-IF reticle, which I loved. The illuminated dot reticle has a switch for bright daytime or low illumination. Hold the top intensity switches for 3 seconds, and you also get an illuminated circle around the center dot. It's great for seeing your aiming point on a bear's black fur.

For baited bears in thick forest, you want loads that penetrate deeply and carry ample energy. The **.450 Bushmaster 250-grain FTX Hornady Black** (\$40; hornady.com) and **.308 Win. 165-grain SST Superformance** (\$44) loads delivered. The FTX's one-piece, high-antimony lead core, mechanically locked to the jacket with the InterLock ring, worked flawlessly on my 7-foot black bear. And the Superformance's progressive powders and SST (Super Shock Tip) bullet provided rapid expansion and a devastating wound channel in my second bear, which collapsed inside of 15 yards.

A hardy case to securely and legally transport firearms, like **Plano's Field Locker Element Double Long Gun Case** (\$299.99; planooutdoors.com) is crucial on long journeys. Its high-density, customizable foam offers custom-fit protection, and the wheels and reinforced padlock gates make safe transport through airports easy. It also has a heavy-duty waterproof Dri-Loc gasket and a pressure-release valve to equalize pressure due to altitude or temperature changes. The hard case held up over six flights and lots of rough handling, and the rifles inside remained perfectly zeroed.



the beaver, fall on his rear and then get right back after it. Sometimes, he'd be suspended in the air, with nothing but his teeth clamping down on the bucket.

Meanwhile, the inevitable confrontations between the two bears over food provided ample drama. Whenever the second one came too close to the bait, the first would run him off, the brief foot chases serving as cautionary reminders of the bears' speed (up to 30 mph, according to some sources). Several times, I worried the dominant one would drive the submissive bear right up my tree, but thankfully he didn't.

Then there were clashes when both would rise on hind legs, slap and nip at each other, all while bellowing a series of guttural clicking noises. At one point, after winding me, the dominant one—curious of my presence—put his front paws on my stand tree before I shouted him back down. A third bear even joined the mix later.

It was like sitting inside a Planet Earth documentary, except with a 360-degree view and a real, though minimal, risk of bodily harm. Incidentally, Shawn later described this as his favorite part of hunting black bears over bait: watching them interact with the goodies, each other and the world around them.

Many people have reservations about hunting animals over bait. The typical argument is the method isn't as sporting as, say, spotting and stalking an animal from a distance. To the contrary, though, setting up and managing bait sites is a ton of work. Plus, hunters get ample time to watch and judge a bear, which helps prevent shooting a sow with cubs or taking a younger male.

Before we left camp, we'd all been encouraged to take only bigger boars—those larger than 6 feet. As a newbie, I didn't want to make a mistake on a smaller bear, especially on the first sit. So, I exercised perhaps more restraint than needed. It didn't help, as I discovered, that bears can be difficult to field judge, as even veteran bear hunters in camp admitted.

Despite the built-in reference points of the hanging beaver (roughly 8 feet off the ground) and the barrel itself (about 4 feet tall), I never felt fully confident in taking a shot. I ended my night without notching a tag, but I'd seen three bears and some of the most incredible wildlife viewing of my life. Hardly an unsuccessful sit.

DREW WARDEN (BOTTOM); RON SPOMER (OPPOSITE)

Two evenings later, however, I was still coming up empty. Subsequent sits had been in different stands than the first night. The second passed uneventfully, with nothing but a raven to occupy me. On my third sit, a bear came in late, but did so timidly, which made me question his size; the bigger bears, I was told, usually approach with some swagger. Unfortunately, not long after I was able to compare his size against the 55-gallon drum, he plopped down on the ground and didn't move the rest of the night, despite my yelling.

Others in camp found success, though. Linda Powell, Mossberg's director of media relations, took an excellent 7-foot-7-inch boar the second evening. Meanwhile, fellow hunter and writer Mike Dickerson shot two 7-foot-plus bears less than 30 minutes apart—from the same stand—with his biggest matching Linda's in size. Sean McGee, Hornady's director of operations, also shot a 7-footer, while another writer, Chad Adams, took one measuring 6 feet 8 inches. I was beginning to feel a little left out, and the pressure to tag a bear was slowly mounting.



How a bear approaches bait provides clues to its age and size. Younger, smaller bears often come in more cautiously. However, sometimes large bruins will sneak in, too.

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The author took his first-ever black bear with Mossberg's Patriot Predator in .450 Bushmaster and Hornady Black ammo.



FINDING REDEMPTION

My fourth sit would be in a stand called "Tolko," due to its proximity to land owned by Tolko Industries, a large lumber company. The stand was another hand-built platform, like the first night, but had rails on which to rest my rifle. It also had more limited firing lanes between trees, and to my right, past a few poplars, was a large clearing with another thick stand of spruces beyond it.

The first few hours passed without action. Around 6 o'clock, out of the corner of my left eye, I saw a bear ease in stealthily from the trees. The disparity between approaches was incredible.

Some bears you could hear ambling through the woods a football field away, ungracefully snapping branches and rustling leaves. Others, like this one, walked almost noiselessly, silent black masses sliding through the forest.

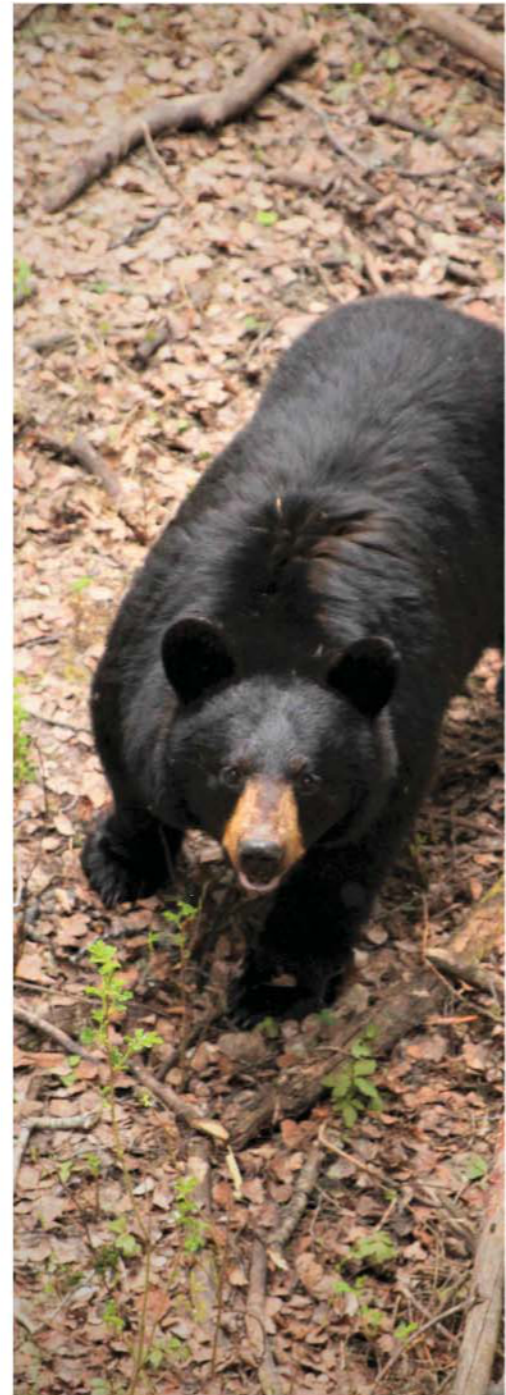
The bear made a big circle around the bait, coming within 15 yards of me, before finally sauntering into the site. He licked at some icing on a log for a while, but a tree blocked my shot. Then he moved past the bait barrel briefly and started pawing at the hanging beaver. When I saw that he could reach it standing on his hind legs, I knew he was big, and when he'd passed by the drum, his back had been just a little below the top.

This is a shooter, I told myself. If he gives me a chance, I'm taking it.

I settled my scope's illuminated reticle near his vitals and flicked off my rifle's safety. I just needed him to cooperate now.

Eventually, he did, placing his right front leg far enough forward for a comfortable broadside shot. I took up the trigger's slack, then pressed gently, touching off a Hornady 250-grain FTX bullet from about 20 yards away.

The bear bucked at the impact and darted off to my right. He took a few



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steps into the clearing as I cycled the rifle's bolt and chambered a fresh round. Then he ran along the timber's edge before angling back into the same stand of trees he'd left. I saw him stagger and go down, then try to run again, before ultimately collapsing near some fallen trees 40 yards ahead in the forest. I sat back in my stand, incredulous and trying to fully take in the moment.

Back in camp, the mood that night was quite celebratory. Every hunter in our group now had at least one bear down,

Hunting over bait allows hunters to watch bears for long periods, which helps ensure females with cubs and young males aren't taken. It's also quite the show.

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

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.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our *Sedona Turquoise Collection*. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork.

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and Linda and Mike had both tagged out on two each. The fourth night had been a great success.

In the end, after six evenings of hunting, our group would score six bears over 7 feet, including the one I'd shot from the "Tolko" stand. The rest were all around 6 feet or better, with some approaching 7 feet.

I finished filling my tags on the last night by returning to the same stand I'd hunted on the first one. With less than two hours of legal hunting left on the whole trip, I took that very first dominant boar I had seen on my initial sit with a well-placed 165-grain Hornady SST from a Mossberg Patriot in .308 Win. at 15 yards. Upon impact, the bear spun away from the bait, blood dumping from his exit wound, and piled up about 6 feet from the base of my stand. It was a perfect end to a great week of hunting.

All told, our group took 11 bears with four different cartridges—.350 Legend, 6.5 PRC, .308 Win. and .450 Bushmaster. Even better, all were large boars—a testament to the sound judgment from hunters and the impressive size of the bears that roam Alberta's woodlands. 



BACKWOODS BASECAMP

Ample creature comforts may come as a surprise at these remote quarters for bear hunters.

Wally Mack's W&L Guide Service (wlguides.com) pursues black bears from a comfortable camp just outside High Level, Alberta. The perfect staging ground for outings into the wilderness, the camp has an assortment of cabins with cots, mattresses and pillows as well as wood stoves or heating units. There's a separate kitchen and dining area where Wally's wife, Louisa, prepares fabulous homecooked meals. Hunters will also appreciate the shower facility with on-demand hot water.

While the camp's look has changed significantly in its history—beginning first as a wall-tent camp more than 25 years ago—it's always been set up near High Level. According to guide Shawn Mack, this is due to the area's phenomenal bear population and the abundance of huge black bears. The camp's biggest spring black bear measured 8 feet, 6 inches and weighed more than 600 pounds. Shawn also says the camp has had a 100 percent success rate, aside from hunters who've passed on really good bears in pursuit of true giants. Overall, it's an exceptional place to stay and hunt if you're looking for lots of action and a trophy black bear.



The author's second bear fell on the last evening of the hunt. The feisty boar dropped less than 15 yards from where he was shot.

PHOTO: WALLY MACK

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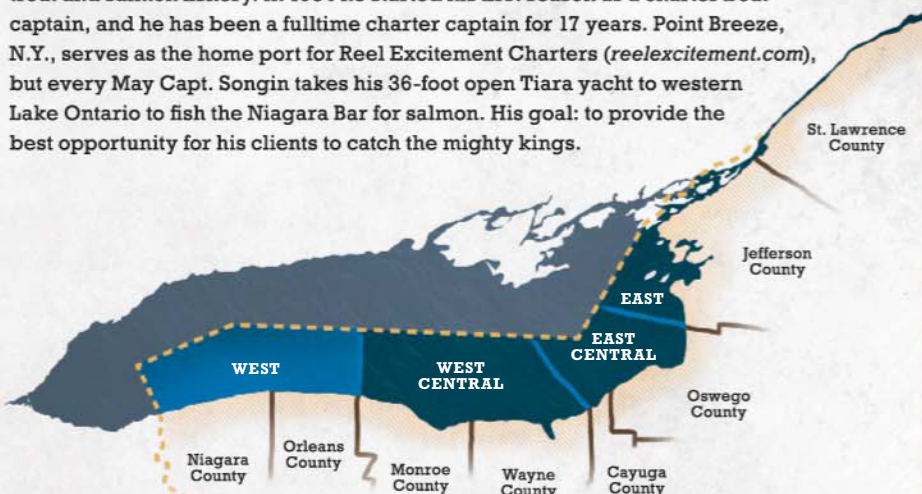
FLUOROCARBON

BRAID

MONOFILAMENT



Although Capt. Bob Songin used to be an avid smallmouth bass fisherman, a friend took him to Lake Ontario in 1980 and “that was the end of my bass career.” Capt. Songin quickly became enamored with the lake’s trout and salmon fishery. In 1984 he started his first season as a charter boat captain, and he has been a fulltime charter captain for 17 years. Point Breeze, N.Y., serves as the home port for Reel Excitement Charters (reelexcitement.com), but every May Capt. Songin takes his 36-foot open Tiara yacht to western Lake Ontario to fish the Niagara Bar for salmon. His goal: to provide the best opportunity for his clients to catch the mighty kings.



ON THE WATER

with **Capt. Bob Songin** of Reel Excitement Charters

Name your favorite fishing tactic for May.

I like to fish the top 60 feet of water, typically with spoons, focusing on kings with some cohos mixed in.

What’s your go-to lure when targeting salmon?

A gold 42nd spoon [such as that offered by Dreamweaver] works well in the color of water we’re fishing in May. It’s a dark-green, emerald spoon on a gold blank with a gold and silver ladderback on it. The primary food source for salmon in the lake is alewives, and that’s what this spoon imitates.

Describe a typical day on the lake in May.

We’re looking for eight kings and four cohos [a four-person limit for Lake Ontario]. We leave the dock at 6:30 a.m. and return to the dock at 2 p.m. Usually at that time of the year, though, the fishing is so good that we don’t have to spend that much time out there.

What surprises anglers most about Lake Ontario?

The strength of the salmon—it’s the truth! First-time lake anglers don’t expect a salmon to bite a lure and run off 500 or 600 feet of line. A lot of time after the fish makes that first run, the client is too tired to land the fish. I’ve seen a lot of “community” fish landed where one guy hands the rod off to another on the boat because he’s tired of fighting it.

How long does the fight last?

An average king weighs 15 to 19 pounds in May, and it will take a good 25 minutes to land one. The water is colder in May, and salmon are cold-water species, so the fish fight really hard right to the boat.

Why is booking a charter a good way to get into the action?

Especially for people new to the fishery, booking a charter gives them an idea of what’s going on in terms of the fish’s habits and what we’re doing to catch them. All they have to do is bring something to eat and drink—that’s important when we’re out there for eight hours—and they get a lot of enjoyment and knowledge without having to do much of the work.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAPT. BOB SONGIN

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AROUND THE WEST

A SAMPLING OF THE REGION'S BEST HUNTING AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES THIS MONTH

By Andrew McKean



Black bear hunting in May is one of the best-kept secrets in the interior West. Snow is vanishing by the week, bears are active and visible, and Forest Service roads are largely open, allowing access into high country that hasn't been visited since elk season. Bear densities are relatively low everywhere, and both hunting success and tactics vary widely from the Northern Rockies through the canyonlands of the desert Southwest. Baiting is effective in those states that allow it, while calling with distressed-prey wails can bring in bears on the run. Spot-and-stalk tactics work just about everywhere, especially in areas with steep, greening avalanche chutes that attract bears like bees to honey. After you've filled your hunting tags, chase some fins. This is a great month for just about any fishing, from coastal steelhead to reservoir panfish and pre-runoff trout in the West's rivers.



CALIFORNIA PIGS

Yes, the best Golden State hog hunting is on private lands and with commercial outfitters, but you can do pretty well on public land. The state's most consistent hunting is on the Cow Mountain and Laguna Mountain management areas, but don't neglect military installations, some of which are open to public pig hunting. Consider Camp Roberts and Fort Hunter Liggett, where about 35 percent of California's public-land pigs are harvested. Be prepared to hunt low-light conditions when hogs are most active.



MONTANA BEARS AND TURKEYS

Take both a rifle and tightly choked shotgun to the Mount Silcox Wildlife Management Area. Bears and turkeys are available in the mid-elevation forest ground above the Clark Fork River, but open timber between 3,000 and 5,000 feet will produce good action on fur and feather alike from the Idaho line east to Superior. The Kootenai National Forest is a great destination for turkeys and black bears, too. The Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway will put you on both opportunities, and for cross-state hunters, the Highway 95 corridor north of Bonners Ferry, Idaho, offers excellent bird and bear hunting.



MOSES LAKE CRAPPIES

Better known as a walleye destination, this mid-sized lake in Washington off I-90 between Ritzville and George has become a sleeper crappie spot. It's a structure bite; hit either docks or submerged timber with curly-tail jigs or quarter-ounce spinners like Roadrunners or chartreuse Stump Jumpers. Deeper fish will hit smaller jiggling spoons. The secret to taking panfish limits is to fish on weekdays when the considerable boat traffic is subdued. Parker and Pelican bays are both hot spots for hand-sized-and-better crappies.



ARIZONA UNIT 22 BEARS

Head to the driest parts of the Mazatzal and Four Peaks wilderness areas for big Southwest bears in Arizona's Unit 22, one of the few general units open to spring bear hunting. Just don't wait too long, as the unit can close when the female sub-quota is met. Add a Merriam's turkey to your bag if you managed to draw a tag for the area. Good spots for both include the vicinity of the little mountain town of Tonto, the sun-drenched hardwoods below the Mogollon Rim and the Strawberry area. Water is the big draw here for bears from late May into June, so set up around water holes and try blowing a fawn-in-distress wail to see what comes running in.



ROARING FORK STONEFLIES

The enemy of trout angling this month is runoff, and you'll have to look hard to find fishable water on any river that's not controlled by a dam. Memorial Day is traditionally the window for stonefly hatches around the West, and Colorado's Roaring Fork has a prodigious golden stone hatch that will come off around the second week of May and stay steady until replaced by a strong terrestrial bite in July. Pitch Plan B Goldens, Water Walker Goldens and even Willy's Ant Goldens to take advantage of both stonefly and ant action.



OREGON FERAL SWINE

Combine your passion for hunting with your responsibility for public service and try killing as many feral swine in southwest Oregon as you can. All you need is a valid hunting license to clean up on these invasive creatures. Josephine, Jackson and Curry counties are the hotbeds for hogs that originated across the border in northern California. Coincidentally, these are great counties for Rio Grande gobblers, too.

BEAR

BREAKDOWN

BLACK BEAR MEAT IS DELICIOUS—BUT IT MUST BE PROPERLY CARED FOR.

By Scott Haugen

Immediate field care after the shot is one of the keys to preserving the excellent taste and texture of bear meat.

Bear is one of my favorite big-game animals to eat. If you smiled at this comment, you know why. If you scoffed, keep reading.

When my wife was writing a big-game cookbook, she had multiple families taste-test her dishes, and nearly everyone mistook the bear recipes for beef. The key to attaining tasty bear meat begins the instant you pull the trigger. Recipes and cooks are often blamed for the gamey taste and texture of bear, but improper field care is most often the culprit. Bears have thick fur, a tough hide and big bones, and can carry a lot of fat during certain times of the year. Their bodies are built for insulation and strength. If you want to optimize the quality of meat from your next bear, follow these steps.

1. HIDE REMOVAL

Snap your photos quickly and immediately start skinning the bear. Avoid the urge to load it into the truck and then drive around to show friends. The longer the hide stays on a bear, the more the quality of the meat is compromised. Even if I've taken a bear near a road where it can be loaded whole, I'll skin it out on the spot, not wanting to drive even a short distance with it unskinned. That's how much heat the hide and big bones retain.

2. GO GUTLESS

I use the gutless method when breaking down bears because it's fast, and when the hide is laid flat it provides a clean work area. Start by laying the bear on its back, then make a cut from the base of the tail to the base of the neck. Cut across the inside of the front legs, from

paw to paw. Do the same for the back legs. The leg cuts will meet at the mid-section cut you initially made.

Lift the hide at any point where the initial cuts were made and start skinning. If there's tension, don't force it; simply move to another part of the hide. Keep a sharpener handy, as bear fat, thick skin and fur can quickly dull a blade.

3. JOINT WORK

As you skin your way toward the back of the bear, remove the paws at the ankle joints. This will allow you to rotate the carcass on the hide, keeping the meat clean as you go and loosening the skin on both sides. Continue removing the hide until the only place it's connected to the carcass is the head. Skin around the neck to the base of the skull and sever the head at the atlas joint. The



NICK TREHEARNE PHOTOGRAPHY (MAIN, TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT); SCOTT HAUGEN (MIDDLE RIGHT)

head can be caped later or taken to a taxidermist. No saw is needed, as every cut is made at a joint.

With the hide free and lying flat, remove the hindquarters. The only blood that will be released during the gutless process will come from the femoral arteries when they are severed. Be sure the bear's hind end is slightly slanted downhill so the blood runs off the hide.

4. HINDQUARTERS

Once a hindquarter is free, remove all the fat from it. Place the fat in a breathable fabric game bag, as it renders down nicely to cook with. With your knife, separate the muscle groups of the hindquarter, starting at the ball joint atop the femur, keeping them in their silver-skin lining and unfolding them as you go down to the knee, but leave them attached at the knee

joint. Tie rope to the femur right below the ball joint, then hang it in the shade so the meat can start cooling quickly. As mentioned, bear bones hold a lot of heat, and this process ensures the meat gets cooling from both the inside and outside. Repeat with the other hindquarter.

5. MORE MEAT

Remove the front quarters and backstraps and fillet off the neck meat. The neck meat and the shanks are great when slow-cooked. There's no need to separate the sinew from these muscles, as the meat will cook off them. Remove rib and brisket meat for stew, jerky or sausage.

6. TIME TO DEBONE

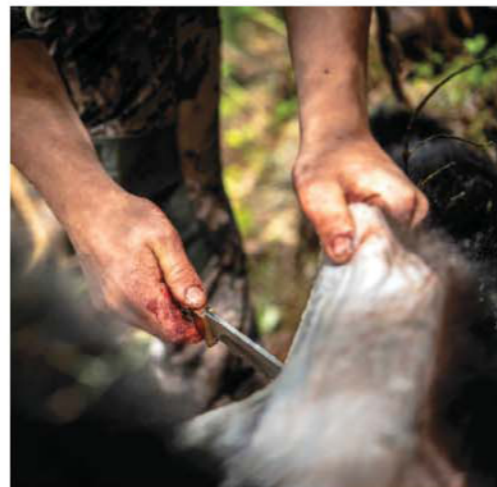
Once all quarters are removed and all the fat is off them, debone them. You can use the bear hide to work on. Cut the individual muscles away from the bone, placing them in fabric game bags, never in plastic. With all the meat removed from the carcass, roll the carcass off the hide, clean the hide of any blood, fold and roll the hide skin-to-skin and get it cooling as soon as possible.

7. NO AGING NEEDED

Bear meat is the only wild game I do not hang to age. The oily fat and the ability of the muscles to retain heat can result in off-putting flavor and texture, which is where much of bear meat's bad rap comes from. Instead, wrap the meat in packages, label it and get it in the freezer as soon after the kill as possible. When it comes time to cook bear meat, plan ahead. Remove it from the freezer two to three days prior to cooking and let it slowly thaw in the refrigerator. Trying to quickly thaw it in the microwave will result in a gaminess.

When tended to quickly and properly in the field, bear meat is delicious. I've eaten many black bears—even grizzly, brown and polar bears—and they all can be skinned, broken down and handled the same way. Go into your next bear hunt expecting success, as this will allow you to work efficiently once an animal is down. With timely, proper field care, you'll be amazed at how tasty bear meat can be. **GF**

Editor's Note: To see the gutless method performed on a bear, order the author's latest DVD, *Field Dressing, Skinning & Caping Big Game*, at scotthaugen.com.



Skin the carcass as quickly as possible to start the cooling process. Hide, fat and bones hold body heat that can make the meat taste gamey.



When using the gutless method, the hide makes a clean work surface for removing the quarters and the rest of the meat.

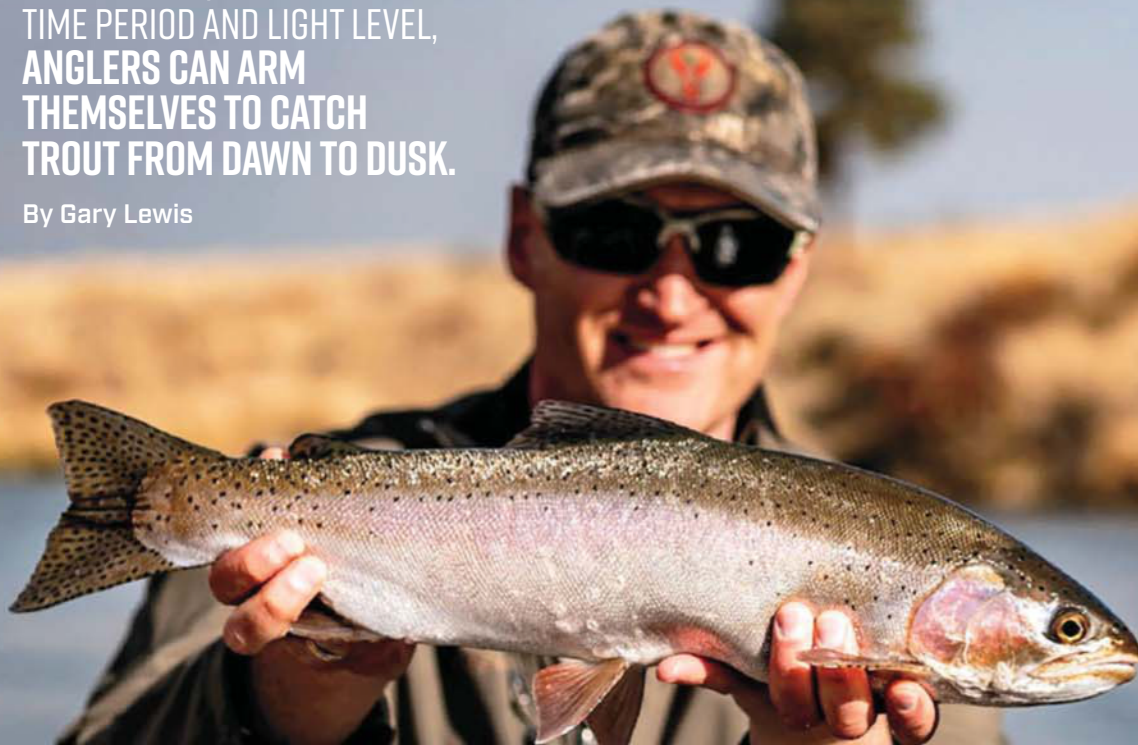


Hang hindquarters in the shade by a rope tied below the femurs' ball joints. Separate muscle groups, but leave them attached at the knees.

TROUT ALL DAY

WITH TECHNIQUES TUNED TO EACH TIME PERIOD AND LIGHT LEVEL, ANGLERS CAN ARM THEMSELVES TO CATCH TROUT FROM DAWN TO DUSK.

By Gary Lewis



Trout typically move from shallower to deeper water as sunlight levels increase. Successful anglers change tactics to stay on the fish.

If April is the time to explore the edges and fish the shallows, May is when we prospect for trout far and wide. Trout are on the prowl, less selective than they will be in the summer months and easier to reach, too, with a variety of methods. In May, we can fish all day long.

Daylight hours are longer now, and long casts and light lines are the order of the day. A 7- to 8-foot spinning rod rated for 4- to 8-pound test is a finesse weapon for rainbows. Top up the spool with fresh mono (lighter line casts farther) and finish with a 3- or 4-pound-test leader, the length of which will vary based on water clarity, the size of the fish you are targeting and other factors. Connect the leader (mono or fluorocarbon) with a blood knot, which will slip through the guides easily, allowing for the use of longer leaders.

Trout are on the move throughout the day. Factors like temperature, predators, pressure and food sources dictate whether trout are found in the shallows, around stream mouths or suspended in deeper water. The trick to taking more rainbows and browns in May lies in understanding what makes trout tick.

THE FIRST TWO HOURS

Early in the morning, because of the angle of the light, trout can feed in the shallows with little chance of being nailed by an osprey. This is their opportunity to crush insects and baitfish with abandon. As the sun moves higher and raptors come off their nests, rainbow and brown trout become the prey and retreat to deeper water for the balance of the day.

Rather than using heavy flashers and spinners tipped with bait, troll in the first two hours of the day with a fly or an action plastic.

Action baits trigger the hottest fish. In a river situation, the fish at the tailout typically are the most willing to chase a lure. Tie on a plastic like a Teaser Minnow from XFactor Tackle in toad magnet, green pumpkin or baby perch colors. It's not a bad idea to put a small, sliding red or black bead and/or a sequin in front of the bait.

One of the new flies I'm going to be fishing this month is Justin's Chironoleech from Rainy's Flies. It blends fishy characteristics of the chironomid and leech and can be trolled or fished in place. A sink-tip or slow-sinking fly line is a better option than a floater

because trout might be anywhere in the top several feet of the water column. In a pinch, a floating line can be modified by adding a split shot at the line-leader junction. Optimal trolling speed will be between .8 and 1.2 mph—about the speed of a slow walk. Establish a trolling circuit to follow a contour line or to hit a dozen rocky points, then feed out 30 to 50 feet of line behind the boat.

Vary speed and change direction by zigzagging over the trolling circuit, which changes the action of the fly or plastic. A lot of strikes come on deceleration or on the outside of a turn.

BEFORE NOON

Picture a large trout beside a small trout, both hovering at rest in light current 6 to 12 inches off the bottom. The big trout will more often be in a position to grab a morsel drifting toward the pair since its huge mouth can displace far more water than that of the smaller fish that might try to steal a bait.

However, there are a thousand or more "legals" for every one trophy-class fish. The challenge is to present the bait or fly in the zone where that one big fish can grab it before a 10-incher does.



MIKE CLINGAN (OPPOSITE); GARY LEWIS (RIGHT)

Trolling with downriggers lets you present baits in deep water to target suspended fish, which is a productive tactic during the middle of the day.



Casting crankbaits, spoons and small spinnerbaits is a good way to locate schools of trout when fishing from shore.

For the bait angler fishing from the bank, the leader length is critical when targeting rainbows. The bait is presented with a sliding sinker to a swivel and a 2- to 4-pound leader. At rest, the biggest fish's eyes are going to be 15 to 25 inches above the bottom. Since resting trout tend to look upward, and even the lightest leader is probably not going to be completely vertical, a leader length of 20 to 36 inches should present a floating bait on a light hook in the prime feeding zone for the bigger fish.

Cast and let the bait splash down and sink with an open bail. When the weight touches down, turn the reel until the weight bumps against the swivel. Put the rod in a rod holder and wait. Watch the rod tip and the line for any signs of light bites.

LUNCH HOUR

A couple of years ago, Bend, Ore., resident and bass angler David Swendseid introduced me to the Duo Realis Spin spy bait, touting its ability to catch big bass. Since then, I've found it to be equally effective on big trout. Spy-baiting is an ultra-finesse technique for targeting suspended fish. After splashing down, this lure sinks fast and shimmies with each pause. Its rear tail spinner can attract fish from 10 feet or more in clear water.

I sometimes confuse people when I talk about trout fishing and spinnerbaits. Picture a bass spinnerbait, with a tie-to connection on a V-shaped bent wire, a spinner blade or two on a swivel on one side of the lure and a soft-plastic minnow body or other offering threaded on a hook on the other side. For trout,

TWO RODS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Double up to increase your odds of catching a lunker.

If you've been looking for a reason to get a two-rod license (offered by most Western states), this is it. With two rods, a bait fisherman can anchor off a point of rocks and cast one bait to one side of the point and another offering to the other side.

Sometimes one color of floating bait works better than another. Two anglers, each with a two-rod license, can try four different colors to dial in the bite more quickly.

A solo angler can troll for legals with a Mack's Lure Trout Spin on one rod and a fly with a sinking line on the other rod to target bigger fish. Another angler might fish jar bait on one rod and cast a chironomid with another.

When a state stocks a lake with 10,000 legals, biologists might also plant 10 or 20 or 50 fish that look like salmon next to a limit of 10-inchers. These fish weigh between 2 and 15 pounds. Somebody is going to catch them. With a two-rod license and a well-placed bait or fly, it could be you.

downsize the configuration of a traditional bass spinnerbait to something like the new 1/8-ounce spinnerbaits from Trout Wizard Lure Company, based in Bend. Also check out the Spro Larva Micro and the Micro Spinnerbait line from Dynamic Lures.

MID-AFTERNOON

Fishing with spoons can be an afterthought for many trout anglers. Sure, we keep a few Triple Teasers and Thomas Buoyants in our boxes for trolling or casting, but it is the rare individual who specializes in spoons. However, it's a deadly technique for big browns, rainbows, brookies and cutthroats.

Micro spoons, weighing from 1/8 ounce to less than a gram, can be fished on spinning rods, fly gear and

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even Tenkara rods. They can be trolled, sometimes with bait tipped on the hook, but they are very effective when cast to cut banks and woody cover. Consider the Daiwa Crusader and Shimano Slim Swimmer series, as well as the smallest spoons in the Acme Kastmaster Tungsten Micro Series. Try the fire tiger, rainbow, brown and chub patterns.

Use a light line and a soft-action rod for easy casting. Replace treble hooks with single hooks for quick catch-and-release of smaller fish. Attach the spoon to the leader with a nonslip loop knot or a snap or split ring to enhance the action.

Look for places where minnows school up. Fish deep or off to the side. In the absence of large groups of bait fish, cast to cover and let the lure sink and flutter next to the structure. Let the current take it and try for a slow, erratic retrieve.



The author trolled a floating, sink-tip fly line with a Mack's Smile Blade Fly to catch this trout from deeper water on a sun-splashed day.



When the light starts to fade in late afternoon, cast a twitching jig near riprap, log jams and drop-offs to find cutthroat trout relating to structure.

THE TWITCHING HOURS

In those last two hours of light, the whole cycle begins again as trout stage in edge habitat prior to moving back into the shallows. With daylight coming from the side rather than overhead, trout feed with renewed confidence in 1 to 10 feet of water. As the light fades away, they'll inhabit depths from 1 to 6 feet.

Big brown and cutthroat trout live on the edge of drop-offs, hunker into log jams and hang out in riprap near the dam and in slough-like side channels. These are the places where mice fall in, crawfish dig into the mud and sculpin scoot from cover to cover.

Twitching jigs are a good choice in these situations. They have heavy heads and are tied with rabbit-strip bodies in a wide variety of colors, with olive, brown and orange imitations of crawfish or baitfish being top selections for trout. Cast so the jig splashes down inches from the targeted structure. Close the bail but let the jig hit bottom by extending the rod. Lift and let the current take it. Try to let it tap the bottom. Move the rod tip from side to side. The strike can be arm-wrenching, or it can simply feel like a "tick" on the line as the fish expels water and sucks in the lure.

Time of day, the angle of the sun and changing light levels are a few of the factors that drive trout action in May. Using specific techniques, an angler can catch trout at any time of the day. 

GARY LEWIS (TOP), MIKE CLINGAN (BOTTOM)



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LATE IS GREAT

WHEN IT COMES TO HUNTING SPRING BLACK BEARS, THE LATER IN THE SEASON IT GETS, THE BETTER THE ACTION ON BIG BRUINS.

Story and Photos by Scott Haugen

As black bear seasons wind down, bear activity ramps up. In late May, boars go on the hunt for both food and sows in heat.

It was early afternoon when I reached the ridgetop where I wanted to glass for the evening. It was four hours earlier than when I needed to be there, but it was a nice, sunny day and I just wanted to be in the mountains.

I slipped off my pack, set up my spotting scope, grabbed a snack and

looked forward to taking a nap. But before I could finish my sandwich, a bear slithered out of the creek bottom below me.

Looking through the binocular, I saw it was a dandy sow. Then a massive boar popped out from behind, hot on her trail. The boar dwarfed the sow, and without looking through the spotting scope, I

knew it was a monster. Its back end gyrated when it walked, its front legs were thick all the way to the wrists and the divot atop its head glistened silver in the midday sun.

They were more than 800 yards away, moving through a brushy creek bottom that ran through the middle of a fresh clearcut. If they kept moving in the



CALLING SPRING BEARS

*Crank up the excitement
by convincing them
to come to you.*

I've had the best success calling black bears after I spot them. This allows me to adjust my calling to their behavior and interest level. If I can see a bear approaching, I'll continue calling to keep it moving my way. If it loses interest, I'll switch sounds and call more intensely. Sometimes they come on the run, sometimes they take their time. Sometimes, more than one bear will appear out of nowhere. I'll use a mix of mouth calls and electronic calls, with rabbit, bird and fawn distress sounds being my favorite. Bear cub distress sounds are good starting in late May.

If I see fresh droppings and tracks, I'll call into a thicket in an effort to pull a bear out. When doing this, I use an electronic call and keep it running nonstop for at least an hour. After every 10 to 15 minutes, I'll change up sounds. Bears have a short attention span, and keeping the sounds rolling increases their level of interest.

If bowhunting, have an arrow nocked and be ready. Things can happen fast, especially if calling blindly into thick cover. If the wind changes and moves toward the bear, you might as well quit calling. You can trick a bear's ears, but you'll never fool its nose.

direction they were heading, they'd run out of cover and give me the shot I was looking for.

By the time the bears emerged, my .338 Lapua was in the shooting sticks. First the sow wandered on to the opposite hillside, then the giant boar. They had no clue I was there. The boar kept trying to mount the sow, but she wouldn't have

it. Finally, she stopped, and so did the boar. That's when I shot.

It was late May, with less than a week left in the season, and the black bear rut was in full swing. The bear I'd just taken was one of the biggest I'd ever seen. Tipping the scales at nearly 400 pounds, the 16-year-old boar carried a record-book skull.

BEAR MOVEMENT

I'd hunted several days that spring season, and based on years of bear hunting experience, I knew boars would go on the move that last week of May. But it's always hard to pass bears early in the season because you simply don't know what will happen with the weather or bear movement in the final days of the season.

Late in the spring throughout the West, the weather might be so cold with blowing snow that bear movement will be limited. Then again, it might be 80 degrees and bears could be active all day.

I've taken black bears on opening day in freezing temperatures with snow on the ground, and late in the season when it's in the mid-80s with green grass standing 3 feet tall. Overall, there's no question that the later in the spring it gets, the more bears you'll find on the move. This is due to two reasons: the rut and increased food availability.

RUTTED UP

The rut puts the male of any big-game species on the move, and bears are no exception. The black bear rut peaks during the month of June throughout the West, with pre-rut movements becoming noticeable in late May.

I once accompanied a biologist with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife into the Cascade Range, where an extensive radio collaring project was taking place. I learned many things, but one of the biggest takeaways was when the biologist showed me on a map the

path boars traveled during the rut. It was some of the most rugged country in the entire West, yet boars were scaling rocky mountain cliffs and heavily timbered ridges like it was nothing, covering 25 miles a day. They weren't just sticking to draws, gentle slopes and logging roads. They were plowing through terrain that would test the most fit hunter.

That isn't to say that bears can't be found in more accessible areas. I've noticed wooden road signs along logging roads that get chewed on by boars during the rut. The first time I saw a shredded signpost I thought someone had vandalized it with an ax. Then I looked closely and saw the unmistakable tooth and claw marks of a bruin. While bears will certainly maul trees and stumps, you rarely see those in the vast forest. However, when driving logging roads, look to wooden posts for sign of bear.

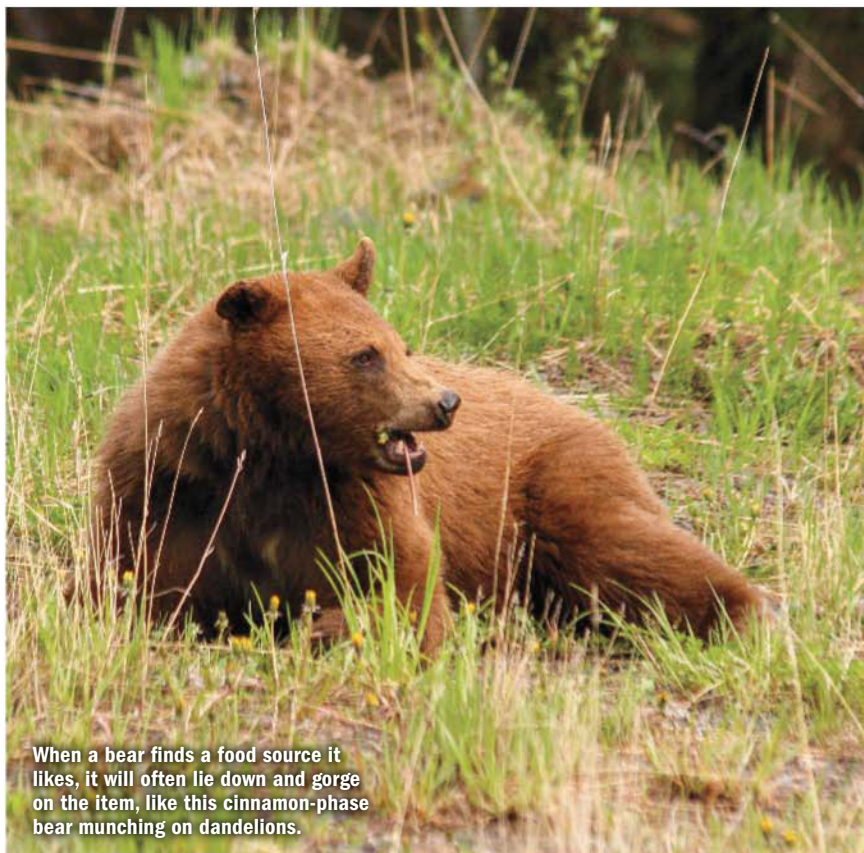
Bears often tear up sign posts where two or three dirt roads converge, usually where multiple ridges connect. Bears will travel roads because it's quick and easy and food grows along the edges, so look for tracks and scat. The sign chewing is a way of marking the area.



Bears typically don't digest their food completely. Droppings can provide hints as to what they've been eating.



During the rut, bears will mark their territory by biting and clawing trees, stumps and even signposts.



When a bear finds a food source it likes, it will often lie down and gorge on the item, like this cinnamon-phase bear munching on dandelions.

Bears have an incredible sense of smell. When I lived in Alaska, polar bear research was going on in the village where I lived on the Arctic Coast. A biologist told me they'd tracked boars hunting on the pack ice for over 20 miles, following the smells of a seal it had detected. Imagine having a nose so powerful you could smell food cooking 20 miles away.

Combine the bear's sense of smell with its physical ability to cover rugged ground, and it makes sense that they'd travel ridgelines and canyons to be where airflow could carry the scent of a sow in heat.



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FOOD SOURCES

Bears have a short intestinal tract and can't digest food very efficiently. This becomes obvious when looking at fall droppings, where full, undigested berries are present. This means they have to eat a lot, and increased photoperiodism drives them. The more sunlight there is in spring, the more vegetation will grow.

Bears love gorging themselves on green grass, clover and dandelions. They'll also dig for wild onions, celery, balsamroot and a range of bulbs and tubers. They'll eat the fresh corn out of the center of flowering skunk cabbage and dig for the lush, white roots. South-facing slopes that receive more sunlight in the spring, below the snowline and under rocky hillsides where runoff is high are good places to search for bears feasting on the bursting new growth of spring.

As squirrel dens grow active, bears will root them out. They'll also dig up hornet nests and tear up old stumps and logs infested with termites. Though these aren't food sources on which to concentrate hunting efforts, look for the signs of bears feeding on them to confirm they're in the area. Often, boars on the move hit these food sources as they happen upon them when searching for a sow in heat in late May.



Spring bear habitat is vast. Narrow your focus on favored food sources and places like ridgelines, where a boar might catch the scent of a sow in heat.

ON THE HUNT

There are three approaches I rely on when hunting spring black bears. First is the one I used to take that monster boar described at the beginning—get to a place where bears are known to travel, set up and glass for bears emerging from cover. The second option is to cover ground and glass, and the third is to call.

Last spring, I tried sitting and wasn't seeing any bears. So, I went on the move and located six bears in two evenings; they just weren't the big boars I was hoping to find.

If sitting and glassing, be patient and keep covering ground with your eyes. Set up overlooking key food sources and keep glassing with binoculars. Once a bear is spotted, size it up with a spotting scope. Calling bears can also be effective, especially as the peak of the rut commences (see sidebar, page 47).

No matter how you choose to hunt spring black bears, pay attention to sign and food sources. The habitat they call home is vast and dense, and they rarely show themselves compared to deer and elk. The more time you put in, the better the odds of filling that bear tag. 



Things can escalate quickly when calling bears in thick cover. If you're bowhunting, keep an arrow nocked and ready.



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MAY IS FOR



Late in the season, when hens are tending their nests, gobblers will still respond to calls as they search for any available late breeders.

TRY THESE PLOYS IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO TAG A LATE- SEASON GOBBLER.

By Darron McDougal

As my truck window rolled down, an unmistakable Merriam's gobbler carried across the prairie to my well-trained ear. The source? A dark ornament on a dead cottonwood's bare limb. Another gobbler, still on the ground, soon roosted, and I left with a solid game plan.

As I parked my truck in the predawn darkness the following morning, lightning

intermittently lit the prairie. More than 10 seconds after each flash, distant thunder boomed, followed by shock gobblers. The radar showed the storm was moving north, missing the chunk of public dirt I was standing on by at least 10 miles. Confident I was safe, I beat feet toward the cottonwoods.

With dawn impending, I hunkered against a tree 50-some yards from the

MERRIAM'S



roosted birds. While I waited, they gobbled, double-gobbled and triple-gobbled. Eventually, the two rope-chested birds flew down, landing at the edge of shotgun range.

Immediately, their fans blocked their heads as they strutted away. Beside me, a deployed Montana strutting tom decoy lie flat in the grass. Slowly, I propped it upright (I had great visibility and

was certain no one else was hunting the property). By the time I raised my shotgun and peeked around the decoy, the toms were already within range. My Benelli made its own thunder, claiming the larger bird.

If that type of hunt sounds like something you'd enjoy doing yet this spring, let's discuss some tips for late-May Merriam's success.

FIND LESS-PRESSURED BIRDS

Hunting for Merriam's turkeys wasn't always so publicized, but social media has made chasing the "birds with the white-tipped fans" the thing to do. Merriam's flocks are seeing way more hunting pressure than they ever did in the past, as droves of Easterners flock west for a "gritty" spring adventure in the Western wilds.

Knowing that, it takes a creative edge to find birds late in the season, particularly if you're hunting on public lands or private lands open for public hunting with walk-in access. It takes even more creativity to find birds that haven't been pestered all season long. With that in mind, I have some ideas for you.

First, don't try to tackle this task without a good phone app. I like HuntStand Pro since it not only denotes property ownership with a satellite view, but I can identify areas with prime turkey habitat by alternating between a few different layers. I use the Crop History layer to locate all agriculture in the vicinity, even if it's on adjacent private land. Next, I like to use the Tree Cover layer to determine possible roosting options. Then, I reference the Terrain layer to see what ridges and benches are available that might facilitate roosting. Water nearby is crucial, too. Basically, I'm looking for areas rich with turkey necessities.

After analyzing turkey habitat on the app, I try to identify locations that I believe other hunters are either too lazy to reach or will overlook. Typically, if you're willing to hike 1 to 3 miles from parking areas (I know, it's a long way to go for a turkey) you'll usually have said location to yourself. On large parcels, I specifically seek the fringes where private and public lands adjoin, especially if the private lands have farming or cattle operations (which appeal to turkeys) and the public features classic roosting habitat. You also might consider the roadless and trail-less areas deep in the public land. And don't forget the small parcels with very few trees, as

TOP SPOTS FOR MAY MERRIAM'S

Pack the truck and hit the highways for a turkey road trip.

CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST, MONTANA

The Long Pines area of the Custer National Forest in southeastern Montana is a popular destination for turkeys. It encompasses more than 65,000 acres of pine timber with ranching operations on the outskirts. Nonresidents can scoop up an OTC license; the season runs through the end of May.



KANIKSU NATIONAL FOREST, IDAHO

Way up in Idaho's panhandle is the sprawling Kaniksu National Forest, which is home to plenty of Merriam's gobblers. Look to the fringes of the forest where agriculture is common on adjoining private lands. Camp on federal lands or stay in a motel in any of the nearby towns, including Priest River, Idaho, and Newport, Wa. Nonresidents can purchase a general spring hunt tag and/or apply for a controlled hunt tag. The season runs through May 25.

THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLANDS, WYOMING

Wyoming's pine-timbered hills and riparian habitats southeast of Upton are home to turkeys, and there is plenty of land open to public access via the Thunder Basin National Grasslands, walk-in areas and lands operated by the state of Wyoming and the BLM. Focus on isolated pockets of pines or along Turner Creek. Camp on federal lands or grab a motel in Newcastle. Some Wyoming areas can be hunted with a general OTC tag, though Hunt Area 1 is a limited-draw area with a January application period.

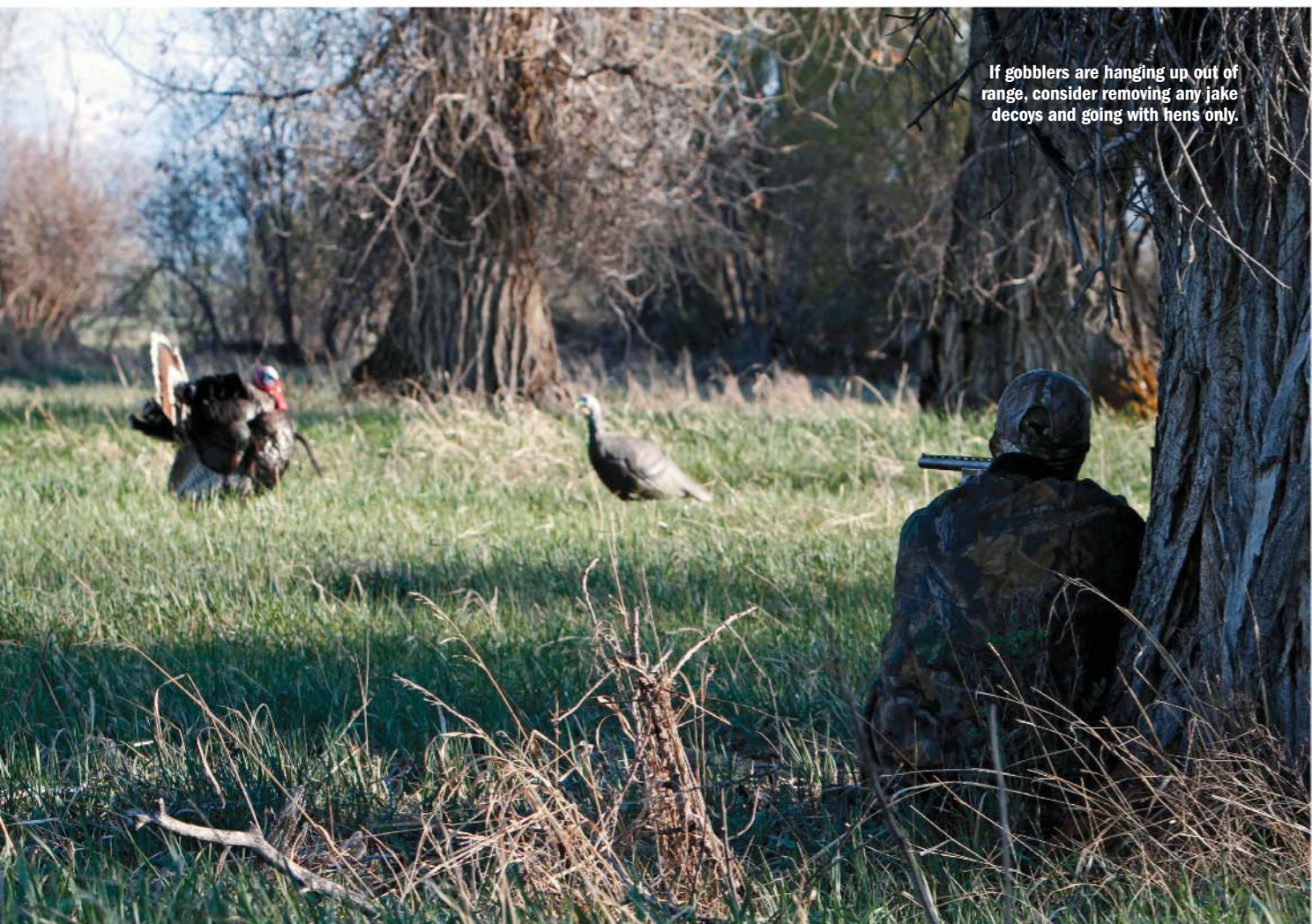


MESA COUNTY, COLORADO



Merriam's thrive in Mesa County, where hunters can pursue tags on BLM and forest service lands, as well as a couple of state wildlife areas. This is big country, and Merriam's are nomadic, so this hunt will test your physical fitness. Nonresidents can purchase an OTC tag and hunt through May 31.

Cottonwood stands are obvious roosting areas, but Merriam's gobblers can cover miles of ground in a day. Don't overlook open prairie.



If gobblers are hanging up out of range, consider removing any jake decoys and going with hens only.

I've taken a couple of Merriam's gobblers—including the one mentioned in the opener—from such locales.

Once I mark several options, I drive around and glass. Spotting scopes aren't just for elk and mule deer; one can prove extremely valuable for Merriam's hunting, too. While you can't see everything from the road, the combination of binos and a spotting scope can help you spot birds at distance. Then, you hike in knowing—not hoping—that you'll have birds to hunt.

Obviously, not seeing birds in your optics doesn't mean they aren't there. Merriam's are travelers, especially during the final stretch of the spring season. They can be skylined on a ridge one minute and out of view moments later. If your scouting gives you reasons to believe the property holds turkeys, lace up your boots and try to locate one.

If your public-land spots aren't producing birds, or the birds you're finding are running the other way when you call, try finding turkeys on private land from the road, then ask the landowner for permission. This is far less daunting for turkeys than it is for big game, as folks tend to be less protective of turkeys than deer and elk.

Most hunting apps will give you the landowner's name. From there, I typically look up the individual on whitepages.com (I pay for the premium version so my search results reveal cell numbers). Then, I either call the phone number(s) listed in my search results or I visit the associated address (if local).

Finding un-pressured birds is hugely advantageous this late in the spring. And while it's difficult to do with the influx of hunting pressure, using the steps we've covered so far helps your cause.

CALLS AND DECOYS

During my first hunt in a given location, I use my calls and decoys to the fullest extent (if the situation allows), and I usually have quick hunts with birds coming to the call. Once, I ranged a tom and jake at 1,000 yards. After making a few calls on my box call, they came running and were in my decoys within minutes.

Not all Merriam's are so responsive, however, so change up your calling and/or decoys as needed.

If I have a bird responding, but not coming closer, I shut up and let the turkey's curiosity build. If birds are seeing my decoys but hanging up, I might pull the jake decoy and leave just the hens.

In some cases, nothing you do will bring Mr. Merriam's in on a rope. When that's the case, it's time to burn some boot leather and put on a stalk.

KNOW THE TERRAIN AND GO

Terrain is almost always involved when hunting Merriam's turkeys. If you simply move within 100 yards and set up, you might miss the mark. With roosted birds, reference where the tom is roosted on your app's terrain layer. Next, try to determine possible landing strips where he'll pitch down. Try to avoid setting up downhill of a landing strip, as calling gobblers downhill is notoriously difficult. Instead, set up level with or even above where you think he'll fly down.

Also, know the terrain before moving in on birds that are on the ground. Whether I'm trying to run down a gobbler that evaded my calling and decoys or trying to close some distance before setting up on a bird for the first time, terrain is my friend or foe. If I use it well, I'll make my maneuver undetected, but even a small oversight can expose me and instantly end my hunt.

I'm constantly reminded just how much ground Merriam's can cover. Be in shape and never foster the "tomorrow's another day" philosophy. Keep after birds as long as you can. I've hiked nearly 8 miles in a morning to kill a tom. Tomorrow isn't guaranteed, plus you don't know for certain that he'll roost in the same location. Go get him today.



After setting up, determine distances to decoys and surrounding objects so you'll know when gobblers are in range.



Glassing from the road is an inconspicuous and effective way to find gobblers, especially in prairie habitat with lots of visibility.

CLOSE THE DEAL

Elk hunters who routinely get within archery range of elk are great hunters, even if they don't kill. Closing the deal is the most difficult part. Many things can go wrong the moment that elk is in range.

When hunting Merriam's turkeys, your greatest challenge with closing the deal is yardage. Inclined and declined angles mixed with varying habitat and terrain can complicate yardage estimation, and it's common for hunters to miss due to underestimating distances.

Always carry a rangefinder. You might not be able to use it on a bird, but you can use it as soon as you set up. Zap different objects and memorize the yardages. Then, when a tom pops his head above a rock or around a tree, you'll know if he's in range.

These tips might not guarantee a 20-yard shot at a gobbler, but they've helped me take several. Use them, and you might be slinging a late-May Merriam's over your shoulder for the hike back to the truck. **GM**

DENVER BRYAN/IMAGES ON THE WILDSIDE (TOP); DARRON MCDUGAL (BOTTOM)



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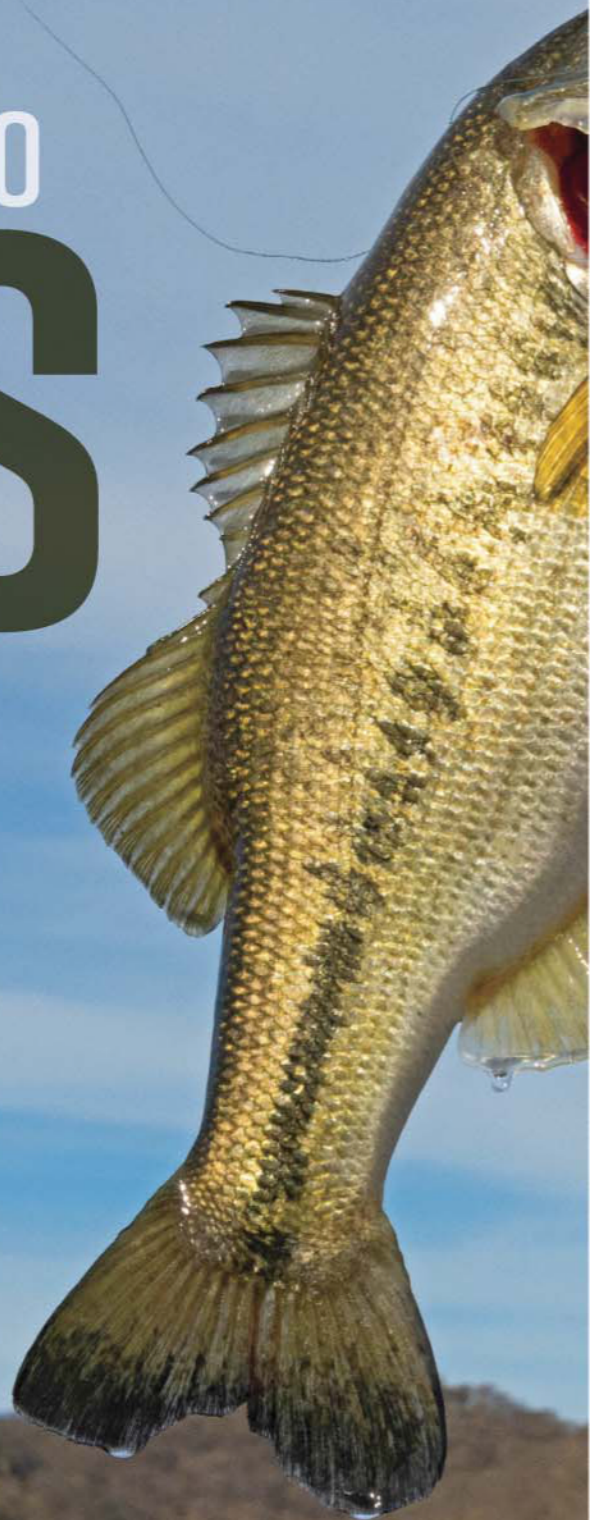
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SPRING INTO BASS

AS WATERS WARM, IT'S TIME TO GO
FLASHY, SPLASHY AND NASTY FOR
**BIG LARGEMOUTHS AND
FEISTY SMALLMOUTHS.**

By Andrew McKean



GARY KRAMER



A spinnerbait with a white skirt and a single Colorado blade offers both the visual appeal and the vibration needed to entice spring bass to bite.

The story of Western bassing isn't a single narrative. Instead, it's at least three different storylines with a shared conclusion: fish the month of May for fast action on shakers, but also your best chance at lunker bass.

With apologies for ignoring the nuances of Western bassing, the three predominant storylines are: post-spawn reservoir largemouths, river smallmouths that will hit just about anything and pre-spawn reservoir smallmouths that respond to surprisingly sophisticated finesse tactics.

A bonus storyline is the human dimension: We Westerners have so many different fish to catch and bites to track this month that we often treat bass fishing as a distant distraction. That's a shame because, at its best, Western largemouth action is as hot as on any famous largemouth water in the Southeast, and our slab smallmouths will rival any Great Lakes trophy.

The West's combination of place-specific forage, temperature variability, unique structure and water management considerations can make any quality bass fishery west of the 100th Meridian worth your attention.

RESERVOIR LARGEMOUTHS

California leads this category, with any of a score of lakes up and down the I-5 corridor capable of producing 10-pound largemouths, and a number of lakes on tap to give up 13- to 15-pound bass at any time. It should be noted that March, not May, is the best time to coax one of these double-digit bass into biting, but this month is good for numbers of post-spawn bass—and for tactics that can result in a career fish.

Let's start with the classic California reservoir bite. While the lower-elevation lakes in the Sacramento and San Joaquin deltas are already getting muggy and weedy, the lakes in the Sierra Nevada foothills are cheating time, fishing throughout the month of May like lower-elevation bass lakes do in late March. Lake McClure, Lake Tulloch and New Melones Lake will all give up 15-plus-pound bucketmouths this month. Catch them by pitching big trout-pattern swimbaits and gliding them right onto nests in order to aggravate male bass.

Work a big trout swimbait over a nesting male enough times and either he'll strike at it or the nearby female will take over nest protection, storming in and attacking the bait herself.

This type of fishing requires smart timing to avoid crowds of jet-skiers and recreational boaters that will put fish down. Good polarized glasses to see underwater targets through the clear water are also a must, as are light line and pin-point casts and retrieves in order to get your bait lip-locking close to those bass nests.

The benefit of these Sierra-foothills reservoirs is that the water temperature and structure vary significantly within any given mile of shoreline. Early in the month, work the vertical structure like rock faces and sunken humps. Later into May, you'll find better action on transitional fish on the flats between current and slack water in the upper ends of these reservoirs.

California doesn't have a monopoly on this bite. Idaho's Snake River reservoirs (C.J. Strike, Bruneau and even American Falls) will give up brawny largemouths to swim and glide baits that imitate stocker rainbow trout or panfish such as crappies and pumpkinseeds. Ditto Utah's Lake Powell, lakes Meade and Havasu in Arizona, Pueblo Reservoir in Colorado and South Fork Reservoir in northern Nevada.

Most big-bass anglers deploy a two-rod approach for these agitation bites. First up is the oversized reaction bait, such as an articulated trout swimbait. However, the minute a big female blows up on the bait but avoids being hooked, trophy bassers switch to a smaller tube jig or creature bait. The idea is that the smaller bait leads to more hooksets and fish in the net because you're not fighting the 9-inch imitation along with the 20-inch bass.

Later in the month, the early topwater bite kicks off in earnest, and big fish will ambush surface lures worked across shallow flats. Frog imitations are far and away the regional favorite, though standard walk-the-dog poppers like the Zara Spook and the 3-inch Berkley Choppo are topwater killers. Chug baits and double-prop torpedo baits can also take fish in the first light of the morning or the last light of the evening this month.

LEGIT LARGEMOUTH LAKES

1. New Melones Reservoir, CA:

This impoundment of the Stanislaus River only rarely gives up 10-pounders, but it's a great destination for 4- to 6-pound largemouths. You'll need a boat, as shore access is lousy, but working creature baits along the vertical structure is good for post-spawn largemouths, along with smallmouths and even spotted bass. During holiday weekends, go deep with wacky worms and swimbaits, as recreational boat traffic can push fish into deeper waters.

2. Tenmile Lake, OR: It's not a reservoir so much as a freshwater impoundment just off the Pacific Ocean between Coos Bay and Reedsport. But the productive Clear, Eel and Tenmile rivers provide enough nutrients and cool-water flowage to give this lake a ton of variability through May. The Blacks Creek arm and east-side Templeton arms are both good spots for 6- to 10-pounders that can be found in deeper water adjacent to shallow, warmer water flats. The go-to bait here is a clatter-trap spinnerbait with a frog-pattern skirt. When the reaction bite slows, switch to slow-sinking plastics such as Slug-Gos and 5-inch Senkos.

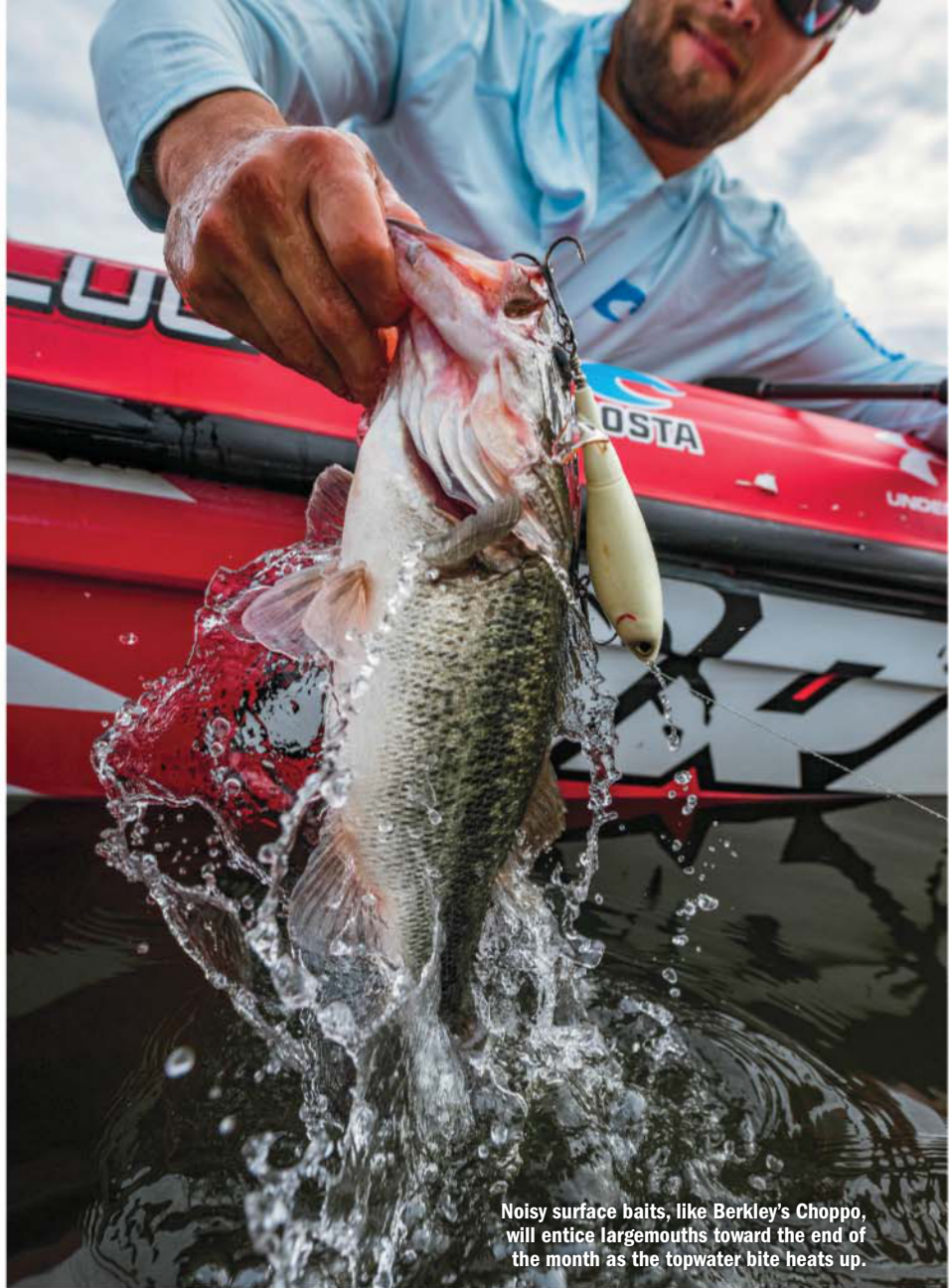
3. Noxon Rapids Reservoir, MT:

This warmwater gem of northwest Montana has enough flow, warm flats and forage to produce the best largemouth of the Intermountain West. It's one of the few lakes that can give up trophy bucketmouths *and* host a decent ice-fishing bite. This month, work the submerged timber on the railroad side of the lake, and sink slow-descending Slug-Gos along river-channel drops.

4. Lake Havasu, AZ: This big Colorado River reservoir fishes best at its upper end, where the river enters the lake. Pitch weedless frogs into the tule reed mats in Catfish Bay and Jops Harbor or work the shallows at first and last light with spinnerbaits and ChatterBaits. A Mojo-rigged soft plastic is a good finesse bait when the sun comes out and the fish go deep.

RIVER SMALLMOUTHS

If there's a bass bite that defines the West, it's big-river smallmouth bass that devour just about anything that fits in their mouths. A big articulated trout



Noisy surface baits, like Berkley's Choppo, will entice largemouths toward the end of the month as the topwater bite heats up.

streamer? No problem. A 5-inch Senko plastic? Same. A splashy topwater plug? Smallmouths will rip out of the current to take it. River smallies will even hit backtrolled herring plugs intended for steelhead and salmon. That's all to point out that they're opportunistic feeders, a pattern established by a population of predatory fish, strengthened by the relentless current, that doesn't know when the next meal will drift past.

I'll take the Snake River at the lower end of Hells Canyon as the best example of this fishery. Smallmouths in this stretch of river are competing with salmon, sturgeon, rainbow trout and any number of suckers, peamouths and northern pikeminnows, so they don't

mess around when a lure swings by their snout. Just about any jig, swimbait or spinner will take smallies in the Snake below Hells Canyon Dam, but that same dynamic characterizes smallmouth fishing in the lower Arkansas, Yellowstone, Colorado and Columbia rivers, too.

The secret to consistent action in these rivers is to work your lures along vertical structure, whether that be the basalt chutes of the rivers of the Snake River Plain or the inundated rock humps of the prairie reaches of the Missouri, Yellowstone, Bighorn and Platte rivers. A curly-tailed jig will work fine, but you'll get fewer snags and more bites with a weedless creature bait such as a 5-inch lizard or even a wacky-rigged worm.

SUPER SMALLMOUTH RIVERS

1. Black River, AZ: This impoundment of the Salt River is chock-full of 2- to 3-pound smallies, and you might tangle with some in the 5-pound class. Spinners and small crankbaits will tempt these fish, along with just about any lure that resembles a crawfish. The key to catching these bass is to work your lure convincingly in deep-water pools and any oxygenated current break. Fly-fishing with crawfish patterns and standard Double Woolly Buggers is also a good option.

2. John Day River, OR: This gem of a bass fishery in northeast Oregon will get better through July, but May is the time for larger fish in slack water from Spray down to Cottonwood Canyon. The name of this game is slow retrieves. Let your neutral baits soak in prime water, and if you pitch hard baits, give them plenty of time in the strike zone before

slowly winding them back. Above all, concentrate on slower water for the best big May smallies.

3. Willamette River Sloughs, OR:

On the wet side of the state, the backwaters of the Willamette River south of Portland hold an intriguing mix of largemouths and smallmouths. You'll find the largemouths deeper in the sloughs' warmer water, and feisty smallies in the main-river structure.

RESERVOIR SMALLMOUTHS

In much of the West, water temperatures in bigger reservoirs are just now hitting 60 degrees. Fish will be sluggish, but moving to their June spawning grounds. Cover lots of water with searching baits; diving crankbaits are hot, as are smaller spinnerbaits. Before vegetation spreads fish out, work sunken humps, vertical shorelines and temperature breaks near the inlets of these big run-of-river reservoirs.

SUBLIME SMALLMOUTH LAKES

1. Lake Washington, WA: While largemouth numbers are down here, smallies are up. Work the galaxy of docks for 5-pound slabs.

2. Fort Peck Reservoir, MT: This is the region's sleeper trophy lake, and the best big-bass bite is out of Hell Creek Park. Go uplake to the narrows and fish drop-shot rigs around sunken humps just off main-lake points.

3. Brownlee Reservoir, ID: This is a vertical-wall bite. Sink crawfish-imitating creature baits or rip lipless cranks over structure. The mudline of the North Fork Clearwater is known to produce big fish.

4. Lake Powell, UT: The dewatering of this warmwater gem means fish are concentrated. It also means sunken humps are especially visible. 

As the water warms over shallow flats, wading anglers using spinning gear and finesse techniques can connect with hungry smallmouth bass.





Apache trout are thriving in Christmas Tree Lake and White Mountain streams thanks to restoration efforts of federal, state and tribal agencies.

COMEBACK KIDS

EASTERN ARIZONA'S NATIVE
APACHE TROUT FISHERY
IS ON THE RISE AGAIN.

Story and Photos by Tony Martins

Apache trout are officially designated as Arizona's state fish, and are one of only two trout species native to the Grand Canyon State. Once near extinction, this beautiful trout has been restored to much of its historic range of the White Mountains in the east-central part of the state.

They were listed as endangered in March 1967, down-listed to threatened in July 1975 and recommended for

Endangered Species Act (ESA) delisting in August 2022. After a half-century of collaborative restoration and recovery efforts between federal, state and tribal agencies, as well as private organizations, the Apache trout will likely be another success story of a species being removed from the endangered list before becoming extinct. Today there are multiple recreational fishing opportunities for this historic native trout on both state and tribal lands.

THE HISTORY

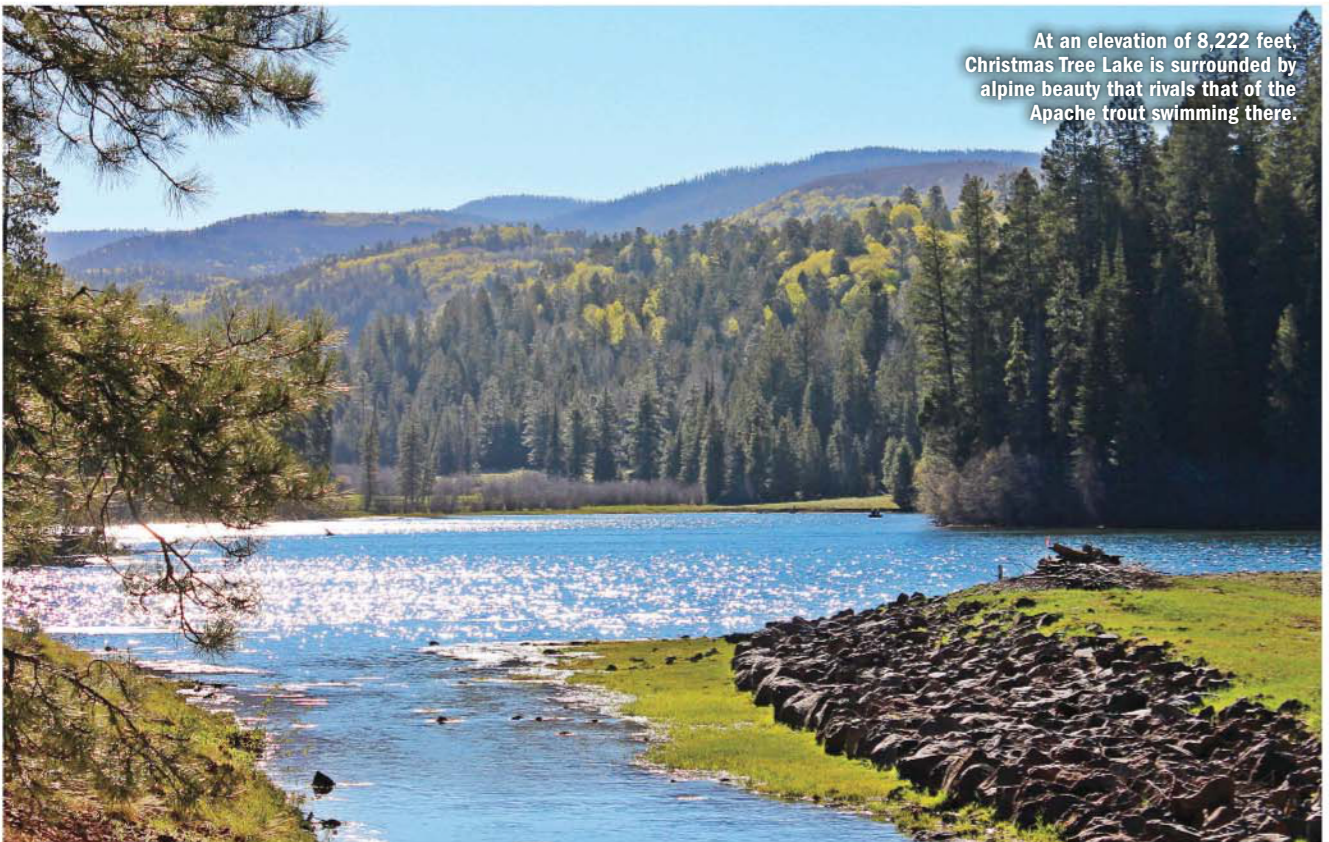
Apache trout were originally found only in the headwaters of the Black, White and Little Colorado rivers at elevations above 6,000 feet. In the late 1800s, they were abundant in Arizona's White Mountains, inhabiting more than 800 miles of streams. Over the succeeding 50 years, these beautiful and unique trout were decimated. Unchecked early land-use practices, including livestock grazing and timber harvest, caused erosion.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Regulations and more for Christmas Tree Lake

Christmas Tree Lake is managed as a trophy Apache trout fishery. As such, only single barbless hooks may be used in order to facilitate catch-and-release. The possession limit during the regular season, which runs from the middle of May through Labor Day weekend (some years through Sept. 15), is five trout, no more than one of which may be an Apache. The lake holds a good population of brown trout, including some real rodbusters. Regular-season access is limited to 20 anglers per day, with permits issued on a first-come, first-served basis. Contact Hon-Dah Ski & Outdoor Sports (928-369-7669) for current pricing and reservations.

Fish Camp is operated the first two weeks in May, immediately prior to the lake opening for regular-season daily access. This program is a fully-outfitted, overnight experience. Permits include dinner and lodging the night before the reserved fishing date; breakfast, lunch and dinner the day of fishing; and the use of boats with electric motors to access the lake. For additional Fish Camp information, contact the Game & Fish office in Whiteriver (928-338-4385).



At an elevation of 8,222 feet, Christmas Tree Lake is surrounded by alpine beauty that rivals that of the Apache trout swimming there.

Construction to facilitate irrigation for a growing human population, as well as flood-control measures, further degraded the once-pristine, cold-water, gravel-bottomed streams Apache trout require. By the mid-1950s, only 30 miles of suitable stream habitat remained, and the White Mountain Apache Tribe closed these streams on reservation lands to fishing, likely saving the species.

Attempting to improve a declining fishery, federal and state wildlife

agencies introduced nonnative trout species. Brown, brook, rainbow and cutthroat trout easily out-compete the natives for food and cover, and they prey on their young. Similar genetically to Apache trout, rainbows and cutthroats hybridized with the natives, essentially issuing them a death warrant.

Then, in 1975, the Apache Trout Recovery Plan was formed by representatives from the Arizona Game & Fish Department, White Mountain Apache

Tribe, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service. Early conservation work in the 1960s included construction of fish barriers on several streams to prevent upstream migration of nonnative trout, and stocking of pure Apache trout following stream restorations. These included fencing along stream banks, livestock grazing restrictions and local elk herd management, stabilization of stream banks with new vegetation and road closures—especially at stream crossings.

Ongoing fishery surveys and the establishment of a successful controlled propagation program at the Williams Creek National Fish Hatchery after years of failure have given the species new life. By 2020, this hatchery was successfully spawning 700,000 Apache trout eggs per year and providing 225,000 of these annually to Arizona's Silver Creek Hatchery for rearing and stocking in state waters.

FISH CAMP

Christmas Tree Lake is truly a crown jewel of the White Mountain Apache Reservation (officially known as the Fort Apache Indian Reservation). This historic and stunningly beautiful 41-acre lake, constructed at the junction of Sun Creek and Moon Creek in 1965 at an elevation of 8,222 feet, lies at the heart of the eastern third of the reservation. It was named for a giant spruce tree that was cut at the site in 1965 and given to President Lyndon Johnson by the tribe to serve as the official White



Apache trout in Christmas Tree Lake eagerly attack small offerings, including bead-head nymphs and spoons.



WHAT APACHE TROUT EAT

Load up your boxes with these flies and lures.

During my outing to Christmas Tree Lake last May, Apache trout would seemingly eat anything gold. Spin-fishermen scored regularly with small, gold Kastmaster spoons, gold Acme Phobes and Zona Z-rays—both trolled and cast. Small spinners like the Panther Martin were also effective.

Fly-fishermen found success with traditional favorites like the Woolly Bugger, Peacock Lady and Prince Nymph. Black ant and cricket dry flies are two of my personal favorites, and although I tried hard for a couple of hours, I could not entice any bites on dries. Capitalizing on the preference for gold, I switched to a Woolly Bugger with a gold bead head and immediately began catching fish. Bead-head leech patterns were also effective.

Small hook sizes (14 through 18) are best for stream fish, while larger hooks (sizes 6 to 8) will work for lake fish. Black and purple worked best early and late in the day, while yellow and silver/gray worked best in midday brightness. Fish would often rise from weedy growth on the bottom to strike a foot or so below the surface.

House Christmas tree that year. This was the first time that any Indian tribe had been asked to provide a tree to grace the White House lawn. Christmas Tree is also known as the lake where many world-record Apache trout have been caught.

May 1 marks the unofficial opening of spring fishing season on the reservation each year, and I was privileged to be among the first to fish Christmas Tree Lake at “Fish Camp” last year. It was truly a top-flight experience. The camp was comfortable and well appointed, with heated wall tents and oversized cots, a clean mess tent, sanitary facilities and spacious 15-foot aluminum boats outfitted with electric motors, seat cushions, oars and anchors. Food and drink were both excellent and plentiful, and the Apache trout were colorful, feisty and cooperative.

I hadn't fished Christmas Tree for several years prior to making my most recent visit, and improvements in the fishery, the camp and the surroundings were notable and accommodating. White Mountain Apache Game & Fish Department Director Stuart Leon and his staff are to be commended for the tremendous progress they have made,

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2023 South African Krugerrand: The Krugerrand continues to be the best-known, most respected numismatic coin brand in the world. 2023 is the Silver Krugerrand's 6th year of issue. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the South African Mint.

2023 China Silver Panda: 2023 is the 40th anniversary of the first silver Panda coin, issued in 1983. China Pandas are noted for their heart-warming one-year-only designs. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the China Mint.



2023 British Silver Britannia: One of the Royal Mint's flagship coins, this 2023 issue is the **FIRST** in the Silver Britannia series to carry the portrait of King Charles III, following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. Struck in 99.9% fine silver.



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despite setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic. The camp was festive and well run, with Tribal Game & Fish Ranger Josiah Amos presiding over activities. Camp staff handled a variety of duties, from assisting anglers with gear and boat launching, to charging boat batteries and fueling campfires and wood stoves. The kitchen staff whipped up some tasty meals that undoubtedly added an inch or two to our waistlines.

APACHE ACTION

A week or so prior to opening, the lake was stocked with Apache trout from Williams Creek, including fish up to 20 inches. Any concern over recently transplanted fish not biting was almost immediately dispelled. We were on the lake less than 5 minutes before my fishing partner, New York veterinarian George Pinkham, hooked and landed his first Apache trout. And the action continued for almost all the of eight-plus hours we fished. Although Apache trout often do not survive the winter in high-elevation reservation lakes, we caught a number of husky “holdover” fish that

OTHER APACHE TROUT WATERS

WHITE MOUNTAIN APACHE RESERVATION WATERS
Sunrise Lake, Hawley Lake, Earl Park Lake, Pacheta Lake, Hurricane Lake, Horseshoe Lake, Bog Lake, Shus Be Tou Lake and Shus Be Zahze Lake, as well as hundreds of miles of streams. A tribal fishing permit or special lake fishing permit is required. Be sure to ask for a reservation map that identifies closed areas.

ARIZONA STATE WATERS
East Fork and West Fork of the Black River, Upper Fork of the Black River near Big Lake, West Fork of the Little Colorado River (below Mt. Baldy, as well as in the town of Greer), Upper Silver Creek and Lee Valley Reservoir. A state fishing license and trout stamp are required. Contact the AZGFD regional office in Pinetop (928-367-4281).

were easily identified with more vibrant colors of yellow on the belly, rose on gill plates and midline, and peach on pelvic, pectoral and anal fins. This is a testament to the health of these hatchery-reared fish.

We made the drive to the lake east from Pinetop-Lakeside on State Route 260 to State Route 473, then south 10

miles to Hawley Lake. From there, we followed the signs south on Indian Route 26 for about 15 miles. The drive went smoothly, as the roads were in surprisingly good shape. George and I were treated to numerous sightings of elk and mule deer and amorous Merriam’s turkeys, so keep an eye out for action above the waterline, too. 



Christmas Tree Lake is stocked with Apache trout from Williams Creek National Fish Hatchery, and holdover fish are present.

EXCLUSIVE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK \$2 BILL



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STRIKING GOLD

AT LA ZONA ON THE URUGUAY RIVER,
**MENACING DORADO WITH MONSTER
MAWS TEST THE STRENGTH**
OF BOTH TACKLE AND ANGLERS.

Story and Photos by Larry Larsen

The author's 52-pound dorado was the largest he caught at La Zona, and he had thrilling encounters with several other fish weighing more than 40 pounds.



I heaved the 6-ounce spinnerbait and trailer as far as I could toward the dam and let it fall toward the bottom. Powerful currents from the hydroelectric power plant's 14 open gates quickly swept the bait downstream and away from our boat. The offering started tumbling through huge rocks some 10 to 12 feet below the surface. I began a slow crank, keeping the bait at a depth where it bumped into the boulders about every 5 seconds or so.

The boat continued its drift downstream in the tailrace area as I retrieved my first cast of the day. I tossed it again as far upstream as possible and engaged the reel after the lure's 8-second free fall. On the second handle revolution, I felt the spinnerbait tick a rock, then a giant golden fish slammed it and took off pulling drag.

"Set the hook! Set the hook!" yelled my guide Elbio. "Again!"

I complied and the big fish took to the air, trying to shake free of the heavy lure. Three more surface-clearing leaps and a few reel-screaming runs treated us to a show of the force and tenacity that have made the Uruguay River's dorado famous. My hook stayed implanted in the fish's jaw, and I gained line after each jump. The guide finally used the BogaGrip to end the battle and weigh my first big dorado, a 32-pounder.

After that fish on my second cast ever at La Zona, the world's premier giant dorado fishery, my fishing buddy, Peter Kim, and I thought it was going to be easy. With the fish feeding even in the cold, muddy water, we figured we were going to catch the big guys all day long. Wrong. We caught only three more small fish under 20 pounds in that first "slow" morning session of four hours.

We headed for a big steak lunch at the lodge with our two other fishing buddies, experienced La Zona anglers Gary Clark and Hank Szopinski. After a full stomach and short siesta, we went out in two boats for another four hours. Activity improved substantially. Only eight dam gates were open, resulting in slightly slower currents. Peter and I caught a couple of 28-pounders and two more fish that weighed 30. His biggest dorado of 42 pounds beat my 40-pounder for top fish of the day. Clearly, we had come to the right place to find gold.



Battles with feisty dorado usually include several jumps and line-stripping runs. Stout, quality tackle is a necessity.

TOOTHY RIVER TIGERS

La Zona, a restricted tailrace area on the Uruguay River, lies below the massive Salto Grande Reservoir Dam and its 14-turbine hydroelectric facility. The catch-and-release fishery is located close to Concordia, Argentina, about 270 miles north of Buenos Aires. The river forms an aquatic border separating Uruguay and Argentina. Like the power-generating dam and lake above it, La Zona is shared by the two countries.

The dam acts as a barrier to the dorado's upstream spawning runs and concentrates the fish below the outflow. The permitted La Zona fishing area is about 3,000 yards wide and extends downstream about 700 yards. The turbulent tailwaters are born from the rocky topography of the river bottom and the varying dam releases through massive gates. The spillway water levels below the dam may fluctuate from 1 to 10 meters. Currents and surface chop also vary greatly, depending on power generation, weather and reservoir volume needs above the dam.

At extremely low water, the craggy outcropping is easily visible and a stark reminder of the hazardous habitat to be considered when gearing up for battling these giant fish. Dorado reach incredible sizes in big numbers due to the dam barrier, abundant food availability, unpredictable water levels and very limited fishing pressure. Boga, a carp-like fish, migrate up the river, and dorado love to feast on them, particularly in warm and shallow water.

Fishing access to the tailrace area at La Zona is by official permit only and patrolled by the dam police of the two countries. The area is open only four days per week, Friday through Monday. Currently only four boats can fish at one time. La Zona Lodge has the Argentina permit for two boats, and Uruguay has issued a similar permit to an outfitter operating in that country.

The freshwater dorado is unique to south-central South America. Waters in Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil are home to the so-called river

tigers. In five trips specifically to dorado land, I've fished four of those countries. I am convinced La Zona offers the world's best fishing for trophy-size dorado.

The dorado has a muscular, salmon-shaped body cloaked in distinctive golden scales and appointed with orange fins. Conquistadors who ransacked South America looking for gold reportedly gave the dorado its name, which means "golden." The fish has superior speed paired with crunching, vice-grip jaws. They are lined with twin rows of conical-shaped, tiger-like teeth, which make sharp, extra-strength hooks imperative. Pre-made 12- or 18-inch stainless wire leaders or 200-pound-test Trik Fish monofilament leaders are necessary to avoid cut-offs.

La Zona anglers must be careful when lifting the monster-jawed behemoths for a photo. Appropriately, the dorado (*Salminus maxillosus*) is a member of the tenacious *Characidae* family. Its illustrious-toothed relatives (which I've also caught) include the fierce tigerfish in Africa and both the Dracula-fanged payara and razor-toothed piranha in South America.

The strong dorado strike with ferocity and entertain with explosive and memorable jumps. There are no better jumpers in the neighborhood. The fish is an acrobat when hooked and usually immediately erupts through the surface to dislodge the lure. I fought one dorado of about 40 pounds that jumped eight times. I had another surprising strike right at the boat, just 10 feet off my rod tip. I set the hook into the 24-pounder, which leapt skyward four or five times beside the gunwales during the intense 5-minute battle. Fortunately, it never landed in the boat.

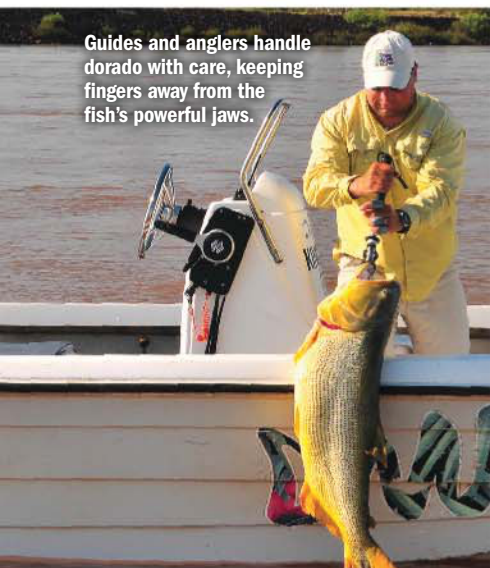
Gary and Hank had an even more intense La Zona battle when they tangled with a couple of trophy-size aggressors one morning. Gary hooked a



Dorado concentrate below the Salto Grande Reservoir's hydroelectric dam to feast on other fish in the strong current.

monstrous 48-pounder, and Hank hooked a 42-pounder within a few seconds of each other. Their lines crossed several times during the fight, and the anglers brought the often-airborne twosome to the boat at the same time. The circus-like action was certainly memorable.

Guides and anglers handle dorado with care, keeping fingers away from the fish's powerful jaws.



CHANGING CONDITIONS

As the power generation and dam discharge conditions change at La Zona, so does the fishing. Our second day was even better than the first as the dam gates were all closed and the still-muddy waters had dropped about 8 or 9 feet. A few rocks were even protruding above the surface. In the shallower water, Peter and I switched to gold spoons and caught a 42- and 24-pounder, respectively. We switched back to the giant spinnerbaits an hour later and added two more in the 20-pound class and a 34-pounder. Topping that, Peter landed a monster 49-pound dorado, the biggest of the morning, and Gary had a 48-pounder.

That afternoon, the temperature hit 90 degrees and 14 of the 20 dam gates were again wide open. The water level had risen 6 feet during our lunch recess, but the hungry dorado were still active. I caught and released 34-, 42- and 44-pounders on my favorite spinnerbaits. In the other boat, Hank had four trophy fish up to 48 pounds.

The following day was a literal blow-out, preventing us from fishing. Day-long

winds up to 40 mph, pouring rain and a 30-degree temperature drop hit the area. We were fortunately prepared for the harsh cold front and dressed for it the following day. Air temps started out in the 40s, but giant dorado were still on our minds. The muddy water had risen back to earlier heights, and most of the dam's gates were still open.

Downstream currents over the rock field and upstream winds around 30 mph prevented us from safely casting from the boat's bow and stern decks. We caught 16 fish on our spinnerbaits including a 40-pounder, but two battle royales topped the day. A 46-pound golden flash gave me all I could handle for about 15 minutes in the rough waters, and my final catch was the fish of my dreams!

The monster fish struck my falling spinnerbait and immediately cartwheeled above the surface with a secure grasp of the jingling bait. It then bulled down into the depths, pulling drag. After 20 minutes, the giant had circled the boat four times. The powerful fish peeled braid from my Shimano Tranx baitcaster frequently and performed additional

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aerial acrobatics. My guide for the day, Alejandro, finally placed the BogaGrip in the bruiser's mouth. The beautiful dorado weighed 52 pounds and was our biggest fish of the week.

TROPHY TIME

The fishery at La Zona has not always produced the monsters of today, according to longtime friend Bob Daly, who has made about 30 trips to the area since 2006. He is arguably the world's most experienced La Zona angler. Bob has caught and released around 250 dorado weighing more than 40 pounds and has eight topping 50 pounds to his credit. His

largest weighed 53 pounds, not far from the world record of 55 pounds, 11 ounces.

"When I first started fishing down there," Bob recalls, "we fished hard right up next to the dam and caught lots of smaller fish between 20 and 35 pounds, but 40s and 50s were rare. Then governmental regulations changed, and we had to start fishing 150 yards downstream from the dam. That's when we started catching more of the monsters. Starting the boat's drift a little farther away from the dam walls put anglers in an even better position to catch true giants."

Gary agrees with Bob about the improving trophy production. He has fished

La Zona more than a dozen times in the past 12 years and has dozens of dorado over 40 pounds to his credit. He had never broken the 50-pound class until a fantastic trip in 2019. He caught his first 50-pound trophy plus three more that size in the same week!

In the last few years before the COVID "time out" and since La Zona reopened, Bob estimates 400 dorado over 40 pounds and 25 over 50 pounds have been caught at the spot each year. An average catch may be 10 to 12 fish per boat per day. Typically, dark, tannin-stained water with a visibility of around 2 feet is ideal for catching these fish. Muddy and cold waters negatively impact such averages, according to La Zona experts.

Fishing at La Zona goes on year around, but few American anglers go during Argentina's cold winter months of mid-May through mid-August. During the spring season, mid-August through November, the river is at its normal flow and huge schools of big dorado migrate to the dam to spawn. Some of the largest fish that are hooked and released in October and November are heavy with spawn.

The period from December through mid-May is typically when the Uruguay River is at its lowest level. Drought conditions reveal the rock fields that encompass most of the tailrace area, and wise anglers fish them. Water levels may vary a lot in May and September through November.



With six private bedrooms and a large gathering area, La Zona Lodge impresses clients with both accommodations and meals.

TRIP PLANNER

La Zona Fishing Lodge is just 5 minutes from dorado.

La Zona Fishing Lodge owner Hector Bradanini began as an area guide offering day trips in 2002 and then added overnight cabin accommodations in 2013. In 2019, he completed the lodge hotel. American Airlines offers two 9-hour overnight direct flights from Miami to Buenos Aires' Ministro Pistarini International Airport. Upon arrival, anglers are met by a La Zona representative who transfers them to the lodge near Concordia, Argentina, via a 5-hour van ride.

The lodge offers six air-conditioned bedrooms with private baths and a main building with a comfortable lounge room above an extra-large dining room and kitchen. Excellent and overly abundant food and beverages are provided at breakfast, lunch and a three-course dinner by Chef Santiago Cattani. Since 2018, Chef Cattani has been a premier asset to the operation. His creative main-course dishes and desserts, complemented by Argentine wines, are similar to what is found in upscale restaurants.

The fishing area is only 5 minutes from the lodge. Each morning, anglers meet the guides and board 21-foot fiberglass, center-console boats on a canal leading to the Uruguay River. The lodge also provides excellent fishing equipment for those not bringing their own. The typical guided fishing package at La Zona is five nights' accommodations and four days of fishing. About 80 Americans in small two- or four-person groups fish these waters each year, according to Giuliana Bradanini, lodge manager.

Most U.S. bookings are from November through April, which are the warmer months of the year in Argentina. To secure a reservation, most anglers book their trips far ahead of time. For more information, check out La Zona Fishing Lodge on Facebook and Instagram (@lazonalodge).

TOUGH TACKLE

The primary lures that accounted for most of the dorado we caught in the muddy, 12- to 18-foot-deep waters during our trip were giant, 12-inch, 6 1/2-ounce GD1 Magnum spinnerbaits. The rugged K-Lures spinnerbaits are custom-built by owner Kermet Adams and designed specifically for 40- and 50-pound dorado at La Zona. The articulated head weighs 2 3/4 ounces, and the wire is heavy stainless steel that's .062 inch in diameter. Two large No. 8 spinner blades and the massive 8/0 hook are attached with Spro No. 6 swivels rated at 560-pound test. The double 10-inch silicone skirts in firetiger color and a beefy 8-inch chartreuse curly-tail grub enhance the monster bait's profile and attract hungry dorado.

Gary Clark was the first angler to discover the effectiveness of spinnerbaits on the giant dorado in La Zona 12 years ago. On his second visit to the area, he

caught several fish on spinnerbaits, but none of the baits commercially available then were heavy enough to stand up against the powerful fish. Gary started making his own heavier, more durable spinnerbaits for personal use at La Zona. He then started working with the guides there on developing the best techniques for success. The most effective retrieve turned out to be a very slow roll, bumping the rocks along the bottom.

Today, GD1 Magnum spinnerbaits are typically the most effective lures in La Zona waters when depths are beyond a couple of meters. K-Lures' slightly smaller 5-ounce GD spinnerbait is more appropriate for bouncing through the emergent rock fields in the shallowest water. The single hook of a spinnerbait penetrates the dorado's toothy jaw better than a treble hook on some other big lures.

K-Lures also custom-builds La Zona 4 1/2-ounce shallow-cup poppers for use above the rocks in shallow waters. The dorado there brutally strike the 8-inch-long September Pop topwater poppers. At La Zona, cast big poppers as far as

possible and then reel as fast as you can. Use a high-speed, large-capacity reel and keep the rod tip high. Dorado tear after the wake-throwing plug and explode on it, according to Gary. If your arms are still in their sockets after the wrenching strike, hang on and continue cranking!

La Zona dorado can be destructive, so durable baits are vital. Big, strong crankbaits or metal-billed, deep-diving plugs are good options in mid-depth waters. Heavy-duty spoons, such as the 5 1/2-inch, 2-ounce Gold Papa Doc Big Game, tossed to shallow rock fields are also productive. Each day's top-producing lures depend on the water levels and water visibility.

Quality 7 1/2-foot rods with medium-heavy or heavy actions and baitcasting reels, such as the Shimano Tranx 400HG, spooled with 65- or 80-pound-test high-visibility braid are ideal for La Zona dorado encounters. La Zona is a bucket list destination for good reason, and you need to be prepared for memorable battles when you strike gold—or it strikes you. **B+**



Big bait, big fish certainly applies to dorado. The K-Lures GD1 Magnum spinnerbait this fish chomped weighs 6 1/2 ounces!

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BEYOND ^{THE} BEATEN WATER

A CREATIVE KAYAK LAUNCH
IS OFTEN A BIG PART OF
**PLUCKING BASS FROM
HARD-TO-ACCESS PONDS AND LAKES.**

By Thomas Allen | Photos by Scott Niska

Kayaks are easier to get into the water than larger, trailered boats when a ramp isn't available. That's an advantage that opens access to less-pressured ponds and lakes.



The early June day was absolutely perfect. You just don't get many like that: high skies, 80 degrees, nearly flat calm, and the bass were a special kind of hungry as the spawn was winding down. Conditions were ideal for a kayaking largemouth slugfest—or so we hoped. It was to be an exceptional day based on company alone; my son Tommy, who has become quite the hammer on bass waters, was in tow, along with my two friends Alex Sherbinow from Old Town and renowned Yooper photographer Scott Niska, who was pulling double duty with the camera and rod and reel.

The goal was to conduct a road launch with a fleet of Old Town Sportsman kayaks on a beautiful lake that didn't offer a modern public ramp. Both Alex and Scott are fully capable anglers, and they were certainly impressed by the abundant bass habitat in the small lake before we even pushed the kayaks back. In fact, while we were still launching, Alex hooked up on a nice fish mere yards from the drop point. Of course, that initiated the trash talk that would last the entire day.

Right off the bat, we found a few top-water biters, caught some on crankbaits and got a couple on a Texas rig. The grand slam proved to be flipping reeds with a 1/2-ounce Strike King Denny Brauer Structure Jig dressed with a Rage Craw, green pumpkin across the board. The fish were shallow and feeding heavily on crawfish in pencil reeds wherever the pea gravel met larger chunk rock. We were literally calling our shots.

A jig and trailer, like the Denny Brauer Structure Jig and Rage Craw from Strike King, is a must-have combo in a minimalist tackle arsenal for fishing remote bass waters.



One of my favorite moments was watching my son pin down the pattern for himself. He backed out of the section of reeds we were fishing together and moved down the shoreline to an area we hadn't hit yet. He nosed his kayak to the edge of the vegetation, confidently stood up, and on the first flip lowered his rod tip and set the hook with gusto. He managed to keep his center of gravity while fighting the fish to the boat, unhooking a fine 3-pound Minnesota green bass.

There's nothing like untouched largemouths in a healthy fishery. Not only

was the lake full of lush weeds and ideal habitat for spawning bass, but it also set up right for the kayaks. Small, untouched waters like this offer excellent proving grounds for a developing angler or anyone looking for a great day of fishing.

AVOID THE CROWDS

I love where I live. There are countless farm ponds, small to medium lakes and even some renowned large lakes where the bass fishing is as good as anywhere on the continent. The Upper Midwest offers dedicated bass-angling

kayakers more places to find and catch largemouths and smallmouths than they could possibly fish in a lifetime.

The truly best options, however, often require research by evaluating maps, navigating private-land access or utilizing road launches, and in my experience the fishing can be life-changing. As a kayaker, I relish the added adventure that comes with accessing hard-to-reach waters. The extra effort adds an element of satisfaction much like that of a DIY project seen through to fruition. This isn't unique to the chunk of country I call home, of course. Kayaking lesser-known waters for bass is a rewarding option anywhere the fish swim.

I won't pretend that catching fish isn't a huge part of why we go, but most kayak anglers likely enjoy the process as much as anything. The size and quantity of fish caught is certainly of value, but the part of the story most often relived during post-experience cold ones is how the kayaks were launched. The level of accomplishment directly correlates to the degree of difficulty in slipping a kayak into the drink.

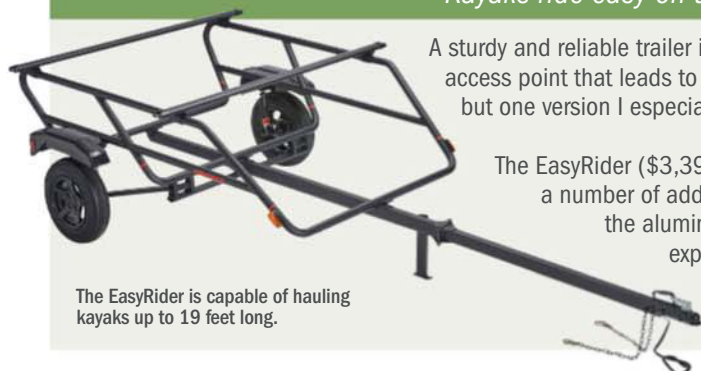
Customizing a kayak to your unique specifications then hauling and launching it is certainly vindicated by successful fishing—especially when getting there takes extra effort. Nothing proves the value of a kayak more than when you've located the right body of water that seems impossible to get to; you just know it's full of unpressured fish. I got into kayaks by accident but quickly realized that no matter how simple or extravagant the rigging, they provide a platform to fish water that most larger boats simply can't access.

Use an app like OnX that provides landowner info to secure permission to cross private property with kayaks and gain access to water.



SAFE TRANSPORT

Kayaks ride easy on this trailer from Yakima.



The EasyRider is capable of hauling kayaks up to 19 feet long.

A sturdy and reliable trailer is critical for getting your kayaks down the road safely and to the access point that leads to the water's edge. Yakima has you covered with several options, but one version I especially like is the EasyRider.

The EasyRider (\$3,399; yakima.com) can carry from one to three kayaks rigged with a number of additional Yakima accessories, or up to four bare kayaks total. Plus, the aluminum trailer is more than capable of long-distance, cross-country expeditions on paved and gravel roads, thanks in part to its shock absorbers. It features a 500-pound capacity, and the tongue folds for easy storage.



Sometimes launching right from the road is the best option. Parking will likely be limited, so have a plan for shuttling kayakers and people.

MANAGE THE LAUNCH

Bass fishing from kayaks in backwoods lakes—or simply small waters without ramps—often requires hiking to the water. Some of the best lakes don't have ramps, and they demand creativity. Launching in these waters certainly takes more work, but some planning will make your off-grid experience more manageable.

Many of the smaller bodies of water without hard ramps are often landlocked by private landowners, farm ponds especially. It's critical to garner permission

to cross someone's property to access a lake or pond. I use the OnX app on my smartphone for locating a landowner to request hunting permission, but I've found it handy for kayak access, too. I've also found most property owners are usually willing to allow kayak access. Just do the right thing: knock on a few doors, be respectful and ask. The worst they can say is no. You might also find an opportunity to make new friends.

Unless you're planning to launch from the road, a kayak cart of some sort will

not only protect the hull during the haul, but also make it easier on your back. With today's larger fishing kayaks, you need a sturdy cart, and it needs to be simple. The new Railblaza C-Tug R with Kiwi Wheels (\$169.99; railblaza.com) fits the bill for many scenarios a kayaker might encounter. It's highly adjustable, lightweight, breaks down and stows in seconds, and will support up to a 220-pound load. It's an ideal cart for navigating a gravel road, someone's yard or a maintained trail.

For the trail-blazing kayaker, the Wilderness Systems Heavy Duty Kayak Cart with no-flat or balloon-style wheels (\$239.99 or \$269.99; wildernesssystems.com) will help you get over rough and extra-soft terrain. This cart will support a loaded kayak up to 330 pounds. I've also seen anglers rig up a lightweight trailer that connects to a bicycle and run it a couple miles deep on a local bike trail to access a small creek that feeds into a nearly impenetrable lake (word was the bass fishing was second to none). No matter your objective, you must be able to cover some ground without dragging your kayak on it.



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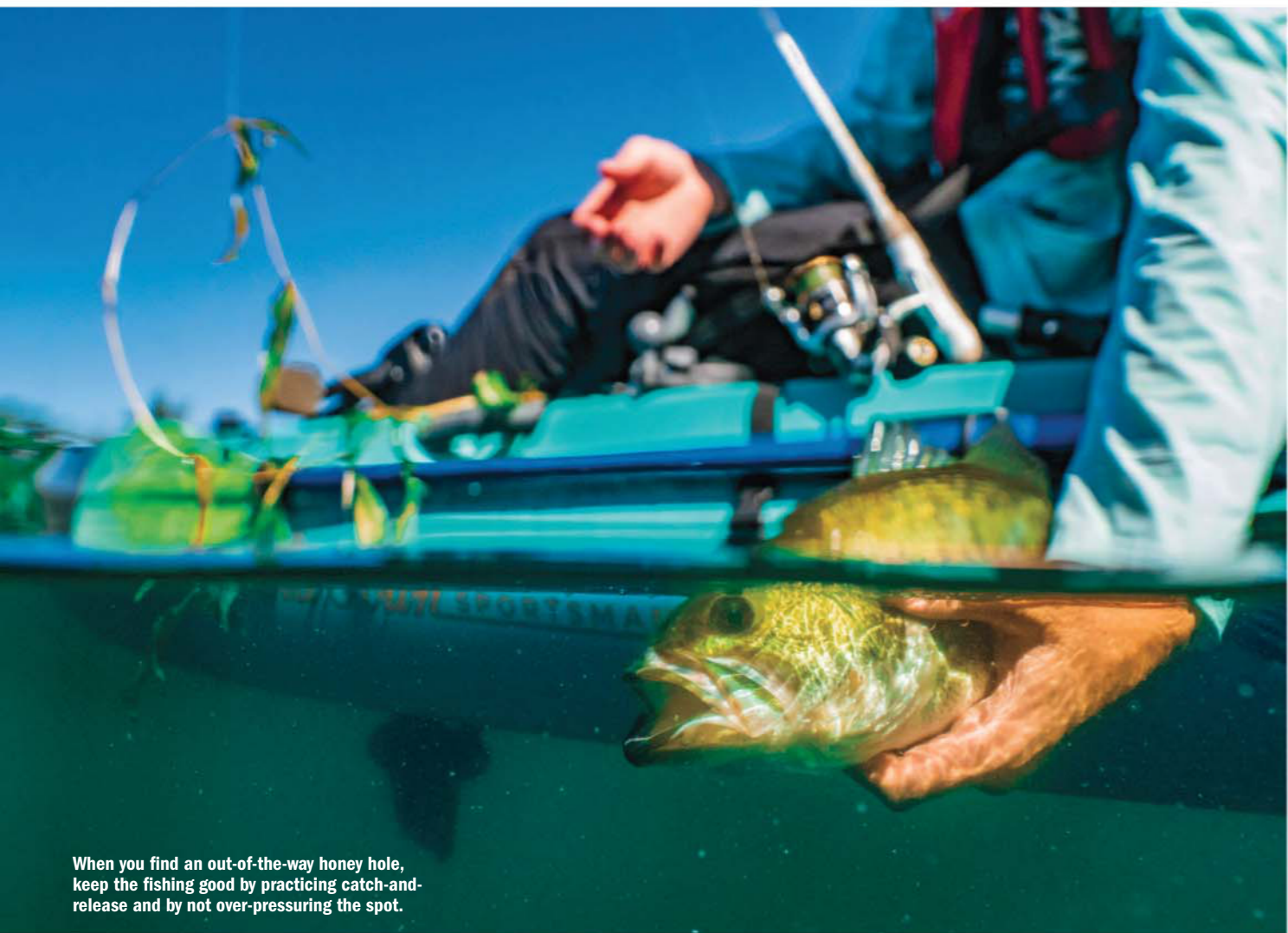
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When you find an out-of-the-way honey hole, keep the fishing good by practicing catch-and-release and by not over-pressuring the spot.

If you're road launching, suitable parking may not be available. That may mean someone else might have to drop you off and pick you up. It takes some coordination, but if you plan ahead, it's not hard. On the day I described earlier, we had to quickly drop off the kayaks at the launch site, drive the truck and trailer to the family cabin, and then get a ride back to the launch.

Bass anglers totally go overkill when it comes to being prepared—I carry well over 30 rods and just as many tackle trays in my bass boat. It takes asserted discipline to not overpack for a kayak trip. I'm still learning. I have a set-aside kayak tackle box that has one or two of everything I'm likely to need for the conditions, and maybe five or six Lew's rods and reels at the most. The time of year and bite will

determine the specific combos and gear I'll pack. I've found that I fish smarter with fewer options. Make an educated decision before you leave. If it's a primitive launch back in the woods, downsize even more and focus on two or three likely presentations. For a lighter load, my go-to baits include a jig and trailer, vibrating jig like a Strike King Thunder Cricket and Strike King Rage Swimmer, a mid-depth diving crankbait and a topwater option or two. That's the bare minimum.

The final piece of advice I have is to not divulge your secret kayak honey holes. If you've found a magical place, keep the details under wraps and don't overshare images or video that may reveal obvious landmarks on the social networks. Some things are best left to memory and imagination. I can attest

to how frustrating it is to show up at your top-secret bass lake and find some other person there who didn't put in the blood, sweat and tears that you did to find the place.

Finally, when you find amazing spots, don't forget about conservation. In my neck of the woods, it doesn't take much to damage a fishery, and it may take years to recover. I've worked diligently over many seasons to keep up to a dozen hard-to-reach lakes in rotation for launching the kayak. I'd rather not hit the same place more than two or three times a year. They stay good because of that. Be conscientious, and practice catch-and-release. Paddling or pedaling on pristine waters to catch piles of big bass from a 'yak is truly as good as it gets—especially on a place you have all to yourself. **GF**

New Blood Flow Breakthrough Helps Men Enjoy Strong, Long-Lasting Intimacy – At Any Age

Men across America are raving about a newly enhanced potency supplement that helps achieve healthy blood flow on demand

After age 40, it's common knowledge that performance begins to decline in many men. However, a new, performance empowering pill is showing that any relatively healthy man can now enjoy long-lasting, and frequent intimacy – at any age.

This doctor-designed formula, created by leading anti-aging expert Dr. Al Sears, has already helped men overcome low and sinking libido -- and has recently undergone a potency-enhancing update -- with remarkable new results.

When the first pill -- **Primal Max Black** -- was first released, it quickly became a top-selling men's performance helper, promoting intimacy across America.

It worked by supporting healthy testosterone levels. However, Dr. Sears soon realized that this isn't the only challenge men face with performance. That's when he turned his attention to blood flow.

And this became **Primal Max Red**.

THIS PROVEN SOLUTION IS MORE MECHANICAL THAN HORMONAL

Truth is, once blood flow slows down for men, no matter how exciting it is, it won't be enough without the necessary amount...

So enjoying intimacy without healthy blood flow becomes difficult for most men.

Luckily, a Nobel prize-winning scientist discovered the simple answer to help support performance strength and confidence -- by boosting vital blood flow --

and enhancing this essential performance function.

Using this landmark Nobel Prize as its basis, **Primal Max Red** enhanced healthy blood flow for untold millions of men around the world with the use of strong nitric oxide boosters.

While **Primal Max Black** helped maintain optimal testosterone, **Primal Max Red** tackles a lesser-known challenge.

Director, Al Sears MD, who has authored over 500 scientific papers and has appeared on more than 50 media outlets including ABC News, CNN, ESPN, Discovery, Lifetime, and many more say, *"Less than optimal blood flow can be part of a huge problem that affects a lot of men. And it needed to be addressed once and for all, so men would not dwell on it. Then, once we optimized it and had a great deal of success, we set out to see if we could do even better."*

The former formula had excellent results. However, new research showed that for even faster, anytime, anywhere results, increasing the dose of a key compound was needed.

So, one of the three nitric oxide boosters in the new **Primal Max Red**, L-Citrulline, was clinically boosted to 9000 mg, and the results were astounding. Which is no surprise considering that 5000 mg is considered a "normal amount" -- giving the new version nearly doubled the blood flow boosting power.

Men who had previously been unsure about their power and stamina were overjoyed to be back to their



A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven to boost blood flow 275% - resulting in improved performance.

old selves and to get and maintain a healthy bloodflow when they needed it.

BETTER BLOOD FLOW, STRONGER RESULTS

The best way to promote healthy blood flow throughout the body is with the use of **Primal Max Red**. By using it, when exciting signals leave the brain, blood flows much faster like it used to.

This critical action is how men across the country are enjoying full and satisfying performance at any age. No need to bother with testosterone-boosting shots, blue pills, or shady capsules that have no effect.

Primal Max Red can effectively promote healthy blood flow that most men can use for maximum intimacy. This is leading to more greater capacity and satisfaction, coupled with long-lasting performance.

"There was a time when men had little control when it came to boosting their blood flow," Dr. Sears said. "But science has come a long way in recent years. And now, with the creation of nitric oxide-boosting **Primal Max Red**,

men can perform better than ever, and enjoy intimacy at any age."

Now for men across America, it's much easier to stay at their performance peak as they get older.

HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX RED (AND FREE PRIMAL MAX BLACK):

To secure free bottles of **Primal Max Black** and get the hot, new **Primal Max Red** formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at **1-800-906-7152** TODAY. "It's not available in retail stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer." Dr. Sears feels so strongly about **Primal Max**, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back."

Call NOW at **1-800-906-7152** to secure your supply of **Primal Max Red** and free bottles of **Primal Max Black**. Use Promo Code **PMAXGF423** when you call. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered!

FIT FOR

FISHING

WHETHER YOU FOCUS ON LAKES OR RIVERS, FRESHWATER OR THE SALT, THERE ARE KAYAK MODELS DESIGNED TO MEET YOUR SPECIFIC NEEDS.

By Outdoor Sportsman Group Editors

Kayaks built with fishing-specific features make time on the water more productive for anglers seeking small-craft adventures. From ample storage and electronics-rigging options to smart mounting solutions for accessories, kayaks designed for fishing help us find the bite and make the most of it—all while remaining easier to transport and store than larger boats. Our colleagues at *Florida Sportsman* recently put the latest kayaks to the test on the water, and the following models stood out for a variety of fishing situations. **GF**



OLD TOWN SPORTSMAN AUTOPILOT 136

LENGTH: 13'6" | **WIDTH:** 37"

WEIGHT: 158 lbs. including motor

CAPACITY: 660 lbs.

MATERIAL: single-layer polyethylene

PROPULSION: Minn Kota trolling motor

(45 lbs. thrust) with i-Pilot; paddle

MSRP: \$4,849.99

oldtownwatercraft.com

TOP FEATURES: Among other specialties (including the famed PDL pedal drive), Old Town Sportsman was an early leader in optimizing electric propulsion for fishing kayaks. The Minn Kota units built for certain boats in the Sportsman lineup are fitted amidship, keeping the bow and stern clean and uncluttered for fishing. The AutoPilot series kayaks (which includes a smaller

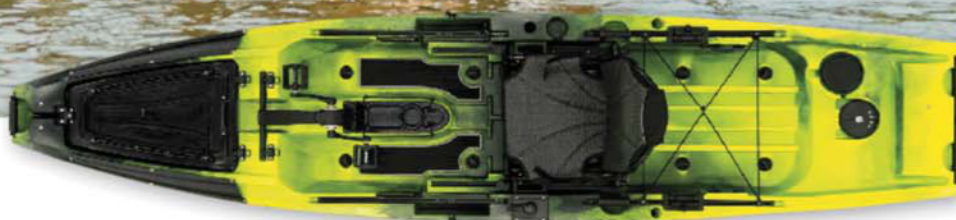
cousin to the 136, the 120) benefit from Minn Kota's GPS-guided Spot-Lock technology, which holds the vessel in precise position in wind and current—super helpful in moderate rivers, coastal tides and breezy lakes. A smaller kayak, the 106, also has Minn Kota power but in a manual configuration only.

WORTH NOTING: The AutoPilot models are the first and only fully integrated motorized kayaks that feature GPS autopilot (Minn Kota i-Pilot).

FISH IT HERE: Well suited and rigged for the tournament angler, the AutoPilot 136 is built to fight wind, current and waves. The ultra-stable hull is perfect for standing and hands-free fishing, plus it features hands-free (and totally snag-free) GPS anchoring.

'YAK GUIDE

For reviews of more kayak models and gear, plus how-to articles on rigging and fishing from them in all types of water, check newsstands for the exclusive *Kayak Fishing Fun* issue.



NATIVE SLAYER PROPEL MAX 12.5

LENGTH: 12'6" | **WIDTH:** 34"

WEIGHT: 125 lbs. fully rigged

CAPACITY: 500 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: pedal; paddle;

capable of being motorized

MSRP: \$2,999

nativewatercraft.com

TOP FEATURES: The rotomolded bow hatch reveals a bucket well positioned for installing a battery and access for

running transducer wiring. Bow-and-stern mounting provisions accommodate a power anchor or electric motor. Heavy-duty BMX style grips offer comfortable transport. The 2023 model includes a new spring-blade rudder. The Max 12.5 has dual horizontal rod storage with tip covers, three molded vertical rodholders (two behind the seat, one at your right hand beside the seat) and paddle storage. Sidekick wheel transport system is a likely upgrade to consider; the self-contained cart offers a simple route from your vehicle to the water.

WORTH NOTING: Dual electronics panels on either side of the angler are replaceable if you want to change your setup without drilling into your boat.

FISH IT HERE: The Max 12.5 is at home in freshwater and saltwater environments, making it a versatile kayak fishing platform. The Propel Pedal Drive 701 series offers smooth, lively, hands-free propulsion. Stability and capacity are strong suits, and both are departments of particular interest to any angler downsizing from a powerboat.

HOBIE MIRAGE PASSPORT 12.0 R

LENGTH: 12' | **WIDTH:** 34"

WEIGHT: 73 lbs.

CAPACITY: 400 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: Hobie MirageDrive GT pedal system with Kick-Up Fins; paddle

MSRP: \$1,999

hobie.com

TOP FEATURES: A good entry-level kayak in Hobie's line of MirageDrive boats, this is the new rotomolded edition of the popular Passport 12.0. It's a durable, lightweight kayak outfitted with all the basic features you'll need to enjoy a variety of freshwater and

saltwater fisheries, with numerous points for customizing and upgrades. Rudder is included, and control is positioned to the left side of the aluminum-frame, breathable-mesh seat. The 12.0 R would be a good choice for your first boat or one to add to your fleet to bring a new fishing buddy. Seagrass green, slate blue and ivory dune colors are available.

WORTH NOTING: A transducer cavity makes for simple installation of a

fishfinder. The Passport 12.0 R also has a Power-Pole Micro bracket indent, and a sail kit or Bimini sunshade (sold separately) may be easily added.

FISH IT HERE: Sturdy construction makes the 12.0 R suitable for all waters, and it's configured for accessorizing to accommodate nearly any fishing tactic. The speed and efficiency of MirageDrive propulsion are benefits during full-day or long-distance fishing trips.





BONAFIDE RVR119

LENGTH: 11'9" | **WIDTH:** 35"

WEIGHT: 85 lbs.

CAPACITY: 425 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: paddle; capable of being motorized (Torpeedo)

MSRP: \$1,649

bonafidefishing.com

TOP FEATURES: The RVR119 comes with channels at bow and stern to accommodate and quiet a bow anchor or stern drag chain. The stern tankwell is designed to hold a 13x13, 13x16 or 16x16 BlackPack Pro. Providing a



means to pull the kayak, tie down bags or organize rods for transport, the Triple Action Bow Strap is located just behind the forward Boss Strap rod and paddle stager. Fore and aft access plates allow entry into the hull for installing lights, wiring or other accessories. Aluminum foot braces may be converted into steering for a stern-mounted electric motor. Inserts are pre-installed on the gunnel for a YakAttack RotoGrip or LockNLoad Track Base. Groove tracks astern of the seat are provided for installing a Sidekick Wheel System for convenient transport.

WORTH NOTING: The removable DryPod for installing fishfinder, battery and transducer is interchangeable with other Bonafide kayaks. Also included are integrated Anchor Wizard pulley landings.

FISH IT HERE: The river-specific hull partnered with a uniquely designed skeg system allows tracking, maneuverability and stability in moving water. Trout, smallmouth bass, stripers, muskies—any moving-water target is on the hit list for this new rig.

CRESCENT ULTRALITE

LENGTH: 10'2" | **WIDTH:** 30"

WEIGHT: 49 lbs.

CAPACITY: 280 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: paddle

MSRP: \$799

crescentkayaks.com

TOP FEATURES: The UltraLite is one of the lightest rotomolded kayaks with true fishing capability in existence, but it's no lightweight in performance. This exact boat was used by tournament champion Drew Gregory to win the Bassmaster Kayak Series event on Grand Lake, Oklahoma, last year. A full-length keel delivers incredible tracking for a 10-foot craft, and it paddles and handles effortlessly, without getting blown around on open waters.

WORTH NOTING: Two YakAttack MightyMounts are located behind the adjustable seat for rod holders, visibility flags or lights.



FISH IT HERE: Remote backwaters, brush-lined creeks, winding rivers and far-flung locations away from launch sites are all spots where this rig shines.

JACKSON KAYAK COOSA X

LENGTH: 11'8" | **WIDTH:** 36"

WEIGHT: 98 lbs.

CAPACITY: 425 lbs.

MATERIAL: rotomolded polyethylene

PROPULSION: paddle

MSRP: \$1,899

jacksonkayak.com

TOP FEATURES: With high-low seating, a bow and stern designed to accommodate electric motors, and adjustable foot braces and paddle clips, the Coosa X takes comfort and convenience into account. There are ample gear tracks in logical points around the hull, including two small tracks at the bow for cameras or anchor accessories, plus Jackson's unique TriTrack multi-functional top-load track port and starboard in the cockpit.

WORTH NOTING: The Coosa X is equipped with a molded "drift chamber," a channel for drag chains and anchors to be used smoothly without installing any additional parts.

FISH IT HERE: With added volume in the bow for rivers and other moving waters, the Coosa X is designed to be Jackson's premier river and small-water fishing kayak.



Chevy's Bel Air-inspired truck!

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This iconic Chevy truck wows again in flawlessly engineered die-cast metal.



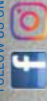
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- Sturdy die-cast metal
- Hood, doors and tailgate open
- Vintage Bel Air styling
- Accurate chassis & interior

Presented by Hamilton. Manufactured by Round 2, LLC, who holds the license with GM.



Die cast measures approximately 10-³/₄" long!

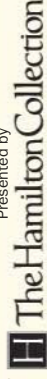
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200 PARTS!

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TOP FEATURES: With a bit more side-tube diameter than the NRS Kuda series, adjustable foot braces and a rigid keel insert in the bow, the inflatable Pike fishes very much like a conventional kayak, paddling surely and smoothly alongside any rotomolded model. Options for different skegs (fins), YakAttack accessory mounts, bungee webs and numerous tie-down points make it easy to add what you need for a day of fishing.

WORTH NOTING: The Pike combines a high-pressure, 4-inch drop-stitch deck that inflates to 8 PSI with 10.5-inch side tubes to create a super stable platform for sitting, standing or moving around as you cast.

FISH IT HERE: Unique design elements for enhanced on-the-water performance make the Pike inflatable rigged and ready to catch adventure in remote waters.

ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES

Make your 'yak more fishable with these add-ons.

DAKOTA LITHIUM BATTERIES 1

As kayak and accessory evolution continues to occur, the need for more condensed power containment has been the motivation for many of the latest battery innovations. Companies such as Dakota Lithium have answered the call and continue to innovate as anglers seek new levels of rigging and simplification within the hulls of their fishing kayaks. Take, for example, the company's new 12V, 46Ah battery (\$399; dakotalithium.com), which weighs just 10 1/2 pounds and has a smaller footprint than two 23Ah batteries together. Lightweight lithium batteries are safe and reliable, and with the long list of amp hour options and overall footprint measurements, they make perfect sense. But they aren't cheap. Dakota Lithium offers an impressive 11-year warranty that provides confidence across the board. In the long run, it's less expensive to make a 100 percent transition to lithium power—a worthwhile investment.



BERLEY PRO BUMPER BRO 2

Perhaps the first aftermarket addition every kayak owner should look to is hull protection. Rotomolded kayak hulls are indeed tough, but you want to keep the hull as pristine as possible for the life of ownership, optimizing trade-in and resale value when upgrading or passing the kayak on to another angler. For the bow, a favorite off-the-shelf solution is Berley Pro's famous Bumper Bro: a thermoformed, ABS abrasion-resistant plastic keel/nose protector that is custom-formed to fit perfectly on most of the popular kayak models currently made (\$49; mariner-sails.com). It simply glues on the bow keel of your kayak, and you have a tough, good-looking, sacrificial nose cap that can withstand the worst of rocks, concrete, gravel, oyster beds and more.

KAYAK KUSHION 3

Available in square and round shapes to pad most seats, the Kayak Kushion (\$65; kushionkompany.com) provides lightweight comfort during long sits on the water. Straps with anti-slip cam buckles ensure quick and secure attachment. The Kushion is made from breathable, non-collapsible material in two levels of firmness, and the removable cover is offered in numerous colors and patterns.

NRS CHINOOK FISHING PFD 4

A Type III, medium-profile life jacket delivering 16 1/2 pounds of flotation, the recently upgraded Chinook (\$159.95; nrs.com) combines PlushFit foam and a high-back design in a comfortable vest compatible with any kayak seat. Two large, zippered pockets hold tackle boxes and feature updated internal organization based on angler suggestions. Smaller pockets on the front offer quick access to tools and spools. The Chinook also includes a rod holder, strobe attachment point, reflective accents and a knife-lash tab.

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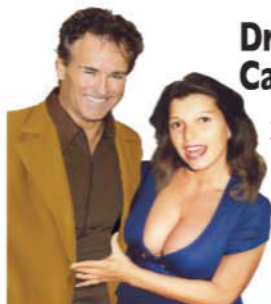
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FEAR, PRIDE AND NAPS

SOMETIMES THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH TAKING A SNOOZE.

Shane and his father had a three-day weekend near the end of turkey season, and they planned to hunt hard for all of it. They figured that with luck they'd both tag out, but after a tough Friday and Saturday chasing wary birds, neither had a gobbler in the bag. They were both tired, but Shane was optimistic about Sunday morning. That is, until lightning lit up the dark sky like fireworks on the Fourth. Soon thunder crashed, and boy did it rain! As they pulled off the highway to enter their hunting property, Shane's father could hardly see the road.

"I get one measly weekend to really hunt hard this year, and it pours," bemoaned Shane. "Just my luck."

"There's no pouting in turkey hunting, boy," the old man said jokingly. "It'll probably ease up in a couple hours, the sun will come out, and the big boys with the long beards will be fired up. And I'll be good and rested by then."

"Maybe," said Shane. "But you always tell me I can't catch a bass without a line in the water, right?"

"That's a fact."

"It's also a fact that I can't kill a turkey while sitting in this truck. God gave us rain jackets for a reason, so I'm heading out at normal time. Sounds like you're wimping out to me," Shane teased back.

"Suit yourself," said Shane's father, "but I can tell you there are few things in life better than a guilt-free snooze. Waiting out a storm isn't wimping out—you'll understand that one day. Sure,



turkeys can be taken in the rain, but I wouldn't know because I like napping in it better than hunting in it."

Shane's father eased the seat back, folded his arms over his chest and pulled his hat brim over his eyes. He was already snoring lightly when Shane opened the truck door, uncased his shotgun and sloshed off into the dark downpour.

An hour later the young man was soaked to the bone. Rainwater had seeped down the back of his jacket collar and piped through the length of his pant legs before making reservoirs of his boots. He began to realize that even if he could hear a turkey in this rain, he likely couldn't see one well enough to shoot. About that time a bolt of lightning flashed just above the treetops, and a clap of thunder rocked Shane from his watery seat under an oak.

Shane's father didn't even look up as his defeated son opened the truck door and splashed into the passenger seat. With great struggle Shane overcame the suction of his boots, finally pulling them off, before fishing around in the back seat for a dry t-shirt. Meanwhile the rain continued to pound the Chevy's hood as if it were angry at American automobiles.

"Well ..." said the older man finally. Shane could almost feel his father smirking underneath his hat brim. "What did you get ... besides wet?"

"Cold," said Shane.

"I don't doubt that, but I'm proud of you anyway."

"For what?" asked Shane.

"For having the courage to march out into the darkness alone when it was much easier to sit right here in this truck. That, and for having

the sense to turn around when you did."

Shane was puzzled.

"You see, son," said Shane's father without opening his eyes, "a man's biggest enemies are often his own fear, pride and guilt. You already overcame two of those things this morning. Now you just have to deal with guilt.

"Guilt about what?" asked Shane.

"The guilt hunters sometimes feel when they don't go hunting but they know they could have, maybe even should have."

"I guess I do feel that sometimes," said Shane. "Kinda weird. So what should I do?"

"Ease your seat back, pull your hat down and enjoy the patter of the rain as you dream about the two giant toms we're going to hammer this evening."

Shhhhh. No wake zone.



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