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NASP® ALUMNI

Sophia Bingham

- Assistant Language Teacher in Japan through the Japanese Exchange and Teaching

  I've been able to talk with my students about NASP® and the differences in the archery I did in school and kyudo, which is traditional Japanese archery. It is really cool that I am able to share these differences in culture with them.

- NASP® archer from 6th grade through high school (2019) at Scott County Middle School and Scott County High School in Georgetown, Kentucky

"NASP® made me a better leader"

Sophia Bingham

Archery is a very mental sport. As a result, I was able to learn to stay focused on things that matter and also maintain a positive mindset. I think it has benefited me in my current profession where I am working with children.

Attitude is everything! That wasn't always easy for me. I remember being really hard on myself when I felt I wasn't shooting well enough. I would be frustrated and upset, which ended up just making me shoot worse. Throughout my time in archery, with help and encouragement from my coaches and teammates, I learned that I can control how I react to situations. Now even if something is not working out, keeping a positive mindset allows me to rationally and calmly resolve any issues. I can also be a good example and fun teacher for my students.

I feel that NASP® made me a better leader. When I joined the archery team in 6th grade I had good role models amongst my upperclassmen teammates. Following in their footsteps I was able to become a leader for my teammates by the time I was a senior in high school. Archery requires patience and attention to detail in order to see results. Having experience with that is helpful in many different ways when working.

If anyone is considering joining NASP® I would say absolutely go for it! Archery is a sport that anyone and everyone can do. It is also one of the most fun. Work hard and you will see results. You'll be able to meet great people and have fun experiences that will last a lifetime.

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Turkey Tip: Top 3 Reasons to Aim for the Head/Neck

Not sure whether shooting a wild turkey in the head or neck is right for you? Spoiler: The answer is "yes."

BY DAVE MAAS

In my opinion, aiming for a turkey's head or neck is far better than the heart/lung area or thighs. Here's why.

1: EASY AIMING POINT

You can spend hours watching YouTube videos from so-called experts on where to aim for body shots on wild turkeys. Let me save you some time: They don't agree on where to aim, especially if a bird is broadside.

Some claim if you take out a turkey's legs, it can't fly. This is true — provided you take out BOTH legs with a shot through both thighs. A bird can take off with the use of only one leg; I've seen it. Try blood-trailing a flying turkey. Ain't gonna happen.

If you shoot a Magnus Bullhead or similar broadhead, then you aim for their head or neck. Simple. Yes, you need to wait for the head or neck to stop moving for a second, but be patient and you'll get your chance. Toms will almost always pause for a second or two before they attack a jake decoy; draw your bow early, track the tom's head or neck as he slips in, and when he pauses, hammer him.

2: NO LOST BIRDS

I finally switched to a head/neck broadhead because I was saddened by losing birds to body shots that appeared ideal. And FYI: I don't condone aiming for the thighs because it isn't quickly lethal every time. Yes, there's a chance that a broadhead through a turkey's two thighs could cause it to quickly bleed to death. But often a follow-up arrow is needed. I'm not okay with this gamble. With a head/neck shot, you either drop them in their tracks or miss.



↑ The author's buddy Bill dropped this South Dakota gobbler in its tracks with a well-placed Magnus Bullhead to the skull.

3: PERFECT BREAST AND LEG/THIGH MEAT

Butcher a turkey killed with a head/neck shot and you're rewarded with unblemished breast and thighs — perfect meat. Birds hit in the body can be nasty to butcher. Mechanicals push feathers and sometimes guts through the breast meat. Ugly! A head/neck shot will leave meat looking like the bird died of fright; a body shot will often leave the meat looking like the bird was run over by a pickup.

This spring, I encourage you to try a head/neck broadhead on turkeys and wait for a shot inside 12-ish yards. It's a close-range thrill! BW

Bowhunting World

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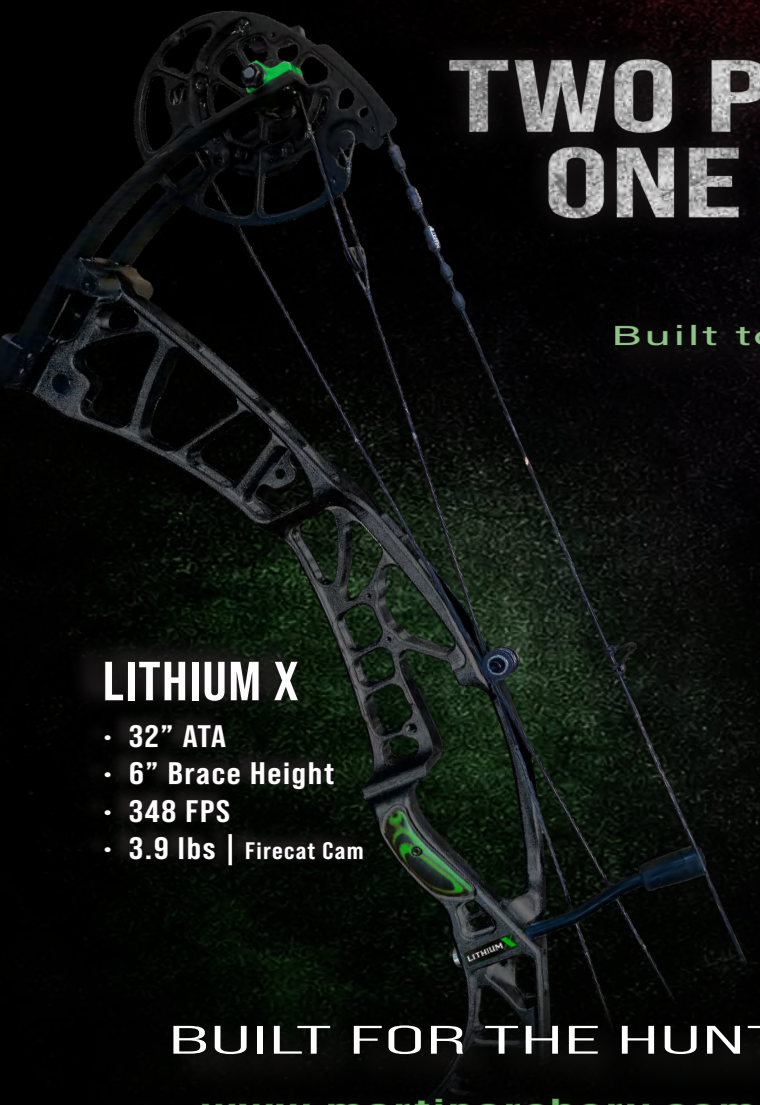


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Make Venison Great Again

The steps you take after shooting a whitetail — all the way from field to table — largely determine whether the venison is spectacular or subpar.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MARK KAYSER



↑ The author preparing to cut up a whitetail and store it for aging in an iced cooler.

Raised in a nonhunting family that supported agriculture (my dad sold farm tractors), we always had steady access to fresh beef and pork. By my teens, my hunting hunger started supplying venison into that mix, and when I left the family nest, venison soon became a staple for me.

I'll admit — some of it was not delectable due to my DIY learning experience of handling meat from the field to table. Nevertheless, as the years passed, my knowledge of venison increased, my own family grew and venison stayed as the main meat source to highlight nearly every meal. Today, my wife prefers venison and my son procures big game whenever possible for his own growing family.

To ensure your venison receives compliments and prominence at every meal, follow a stringent series of actions. The following practices could make venison great again at your table if your guests have frowned upon your earlier venison delicacy attempts. And although this is a whitetail column, the steps to great venison, regardless of the species, are the same.

CLEAN FIELD DRESSING

Prompt removal of the vital organs eliminates a huge heat source and allows meat to cool faster. You may wish to leave the hide on to protect meat while dragging or transporting an animal, but in temperatures above 50 degrees Fahrenheit it pays to remove the hide soon after to accelerate the cooling of meat. On the flip side, a speedy trip from field to camp is crucial in subzero conditions, too. Rock hard meat is difficult to process, and repeated freezing changes the texture of venison.

Why is it important to cool meat quickly in temperate temperatures? Cooling meat, especially when temperatures rise above 40 degrees, is essential for great taste. Above 40 degrees, bacteria grows rapidly and faster as the temperatures rise. It can double in growth every 20 minutes in overly warm environments, so keep that in mind for early season hunts or heatwave autumns. If the bacteria get out of control, it can cause food-borne illnesses, spoilage bacteria, yeasts and mold. Unpleasant flavor and even sickness can result.

Have the proper gear along to speed up your field dressing process. Make sure to carry a sharp knife; I prefer the proven replaceable blade models from Outdoor Edge. A sharp knife ensures you make clean cuts during the field dressing process and to aid in fast removal of internal organs.

Before the first cut, place the head of your whitetail uphill. This allows the organs to spill out easily with the help of gravity. Have a goal to keep all bodily fluids from



↑ Be careful while field dressing to avoid gut matter on meat.

running across exposed meat, and also do your best to minimize meat contact with forest duff while dragging out a deer.

In remote hunting areas, pack game bags. These are crucial to protect deboned or quartered meat. The open weave of game bags allows air to chill meat yet protect it from insects and environmental contamination. Antimicrobial game bags are an upgrade over traditional cheesecloth, but have options available regardless.

FROM FIELD TO CAMP

You've moved your deer from the field to the back of your truck or side-by-side. Stay focused and avoid dawdling. This is the period where many hunters seemingly forget that great-tasting venison is at stake. Instead of straight home or back to camp, the side trips to show off a buck, stop at convenience stores to share success and repeated stops at bowhunting peers' homes adds to the misery of the meat in question.

No doubt you should enjoy your success, but limit your time at each stop. Better yet, share your memories via social media. Remember the rule of hot weather and bacteria. You also may be hunting an hour or more from home and drive time only adds to the chances of venison going bad before you even get the whitetail buck or doe hung.

For those longer drives or travel in hot temperatures, prepare ahead of time. Have a cooler or large tote ready to hold meat. Stock it with ice or have ice purchasing places located. Brush up on your caping skills to at least remove the hide up to the neck if taxidermy is a goal. Then, with the hide off, ice the carcass down or meat portions down to begin the cooling process. On extended trips I bring along a 150-quart cooler that easily holds deer quarters, backstraps and neck meat.

In a bind, a clean tarp can help protect meat with the hide on or off. Fill the deer's chest and paunch cavity with bags of ice, then use a rope to cinch the tarp closed protecting the wrapped carcass. Get on the road and avoid a speeding ticket. At all costs avoid the carcass rolling around in the back of a work truck with gas cans, and by all means don't imitate your great uncle by strapping the carcass to the roof of your SUV.



↑ Venison is great eating . . . but maybe cook it first.

GOOD TASTE COMES FROM AGING

Finally, consider aging your venison. That may not be possible on an extended hunting trip or due to your career obligations. Nevertheless, your favorite steakhouse cannot be wrong by advertising "aged beef."

According to the National Center for Home Food Preservation, cool the deboned meat or carcass to a temperature between 30 and 40 degrees at your earliest convenience. Nature's meat ally, enzymes, aid in tenderizing venison and minimizing wild game flavor from there on. As you prep the meat for aging, estimate how much is going toward burgers or sausage. Prime cuts such as backstrap steaks or roasts benefit from aging, but the process does little for ground products.

Aging can take place in a garage or shed if temperatures stay between 30 and 40 degrees. I have also aged meat on ice in coolers as it maintains that range. Some of my hunting friends have used old refrigerators to hang meat in ideal temperatures. The debate on how long to age varies on who you talk with, but at minimum, age venison for three days. That said, many expert sources recommend aging venison from 7 to 14 days for optimal flavor.

If you've battled with getting family and friends to enjoy venison as much as you do, stick to the basics of meat care. These steps, some classy marinades and recipe masterpieces will soon have guests at your table asking for a second helping. You've made venison great again! BW





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Done well, bowhunting turkeys run-and-gun style without a blind can yield more opportunities to succeed than a stationary setup.



BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

I pulled my Chevy pickup onto the field road, parked, and readied my gear while listening for pre-dawn gobbles. It was my first time stepping onto the property, so I had a few hunches based on my HuntStand app scouting, but no concrete plans. Then, a gobble shattered the silence. The bird was roosting about 300 yards away in the timber off the back of a field. I grabbed my bow and decoys and hustled.

As I closed in on the spot, the forest erupted; several gobblers were roosting together. I crept within 80-100 yards of the roost, plugged my Avian-X HDR Jake and Laydown Hen decoy into the dirt field, then scuttled 12 yards to the field edge and settled in amongst some dense saplings with a narrow shooting window framing the two decoys.

The gobbling action was intense. I issued a few tree yelps, then shut up. In minutes, the gobbling changed pitch. I couldn't see them, but the gobblers had landed on a logging road that leads out to the field corner where I was set up. Another soft call, and they were coming in hard!

Suddenly, two strutting toms ran into the field, and I instinctively drew my bow before they hit my shooting window. At 12 yards, one strutter paused head-on beside the jake decoy, and I released, striking him perfectly beneath the neck. He ran straight away and disappeared over a hill. He was well-hit and wouldn't go far.

↑ Hiding is important, but choosing when to move, especially when to draw your bow, is even more critical to successful blind-less turkey hunting.

Meanwhile, chaos unfolded around my decoys. Now, four other toms were gobbling like freaks and darting at my jake decoy. With those four toms in my lap plus another three or four gobbling a few hundred yards away, I decided

Photos: Rebecca McDougal



to fill my second tag.

With the toms hooked on the decoy, I slowly nocked another arrow, drew back and picked out a second tom. As before, my Victory arrow connected, and the bird fluttered and crashed in a heap a few yards from my decoys. All of this happened at 12 yards without a ground blind.

I've arrowed a pile of toms this way, and it's not only a hoot but effective, too. If you'd like to try it, here are some pointers that consistently help me produce when I leave my pop-up blind at home or in the pickup.

GET CLOSE

Undeniably, the top benefit of ditching a pop-up ground blind is you can be mobile and stay with gobbling birds rather than sit in one spot and wait for them. The second main advantage is you can set up so much closer to birds in many cases because you don't have the commotion and movement of popping up a blind. And you can set up much more quickly.

If the terrain and cover or darkness allow, I like to get within 80-100 yards of a bird, set my decoys, tuck into cover, then begin calling. Sometimes, turkeys respond and come in from hundreds of yards away, but when you've breached their comfort bubble (80-100 yards), I find that they can rarely resist the calling and decoys.

One tip as you plan your approach: If you're hunting an unfamiliar property on the fly, quickly referencing HuntStand's Terrain base map will unveil terrain features that can and should inform your route. In varied terrain, the 3D Mapbox Satellite base map is money.

↑ Bow-killing a gobbler without a pop-up blind allows you to be more mobile, which allows you to stay with birds and sneak in close to them before setting up.



→ The author rarely hunts without a jake decoy. When a tom comes running in, infuriated by the intruder, it is much easier to draw back a bow undetected.

HIDING TIPS

Wearing camo or dull solids that melt into your surroundings is non-negotiable. Next, never make the cardinal sin of setting up with the sun beaming down on you and/or into your face. Your movements will be highlighted when you draw your bow, plus shooting towards a sunrise or sunset can make it extremely difficult to see through your peep and aim well. Always consider the sun before choosing an ambush, especially when setting up before dawn during early morning hunts.

On a similar note, always be aware of any shadows you can leverage to enhance concealment. When setting up against a large tree trunk on sunny days, always try to hide on the side of the trunk that is shadowed. You'll blend in a hundred times better in most instances than if the sun is on you.

It's up for debate whether some front cover or backdrop cover is better. If I can have only one, I'll choose a backdrop. Anything that effectively disrupts the human outline is ideal. I emphasize the backdrop, but if there is an opportunity to enhance my hide with some front cover, I do it using decoy bags and natural vegetation and brush. What I find, though, is that moving at the right times is more important than how well you're hidden.

I've occasionally bowhunted in areas without any decent cover for hiding. When I do, I like to put my Ultimate Predator bow-mounted turkey decoy on my bow and the Avian-X decoys out as usual. It works really well. Important safety note: Should you try this, you do so at your own risk and assume all outcomes. Be sure to read the disclaimers outlined on the decoy.

To really boost your conceal-

Photos: Darron McDougal

ment, consider purchasing and wearing HECS apparel. It blocks electromagnetic frequencies, which birds, including turkeys, are highly sensitive to. My friend Mike Slinkard owns the company, and he runs hunting videos of the apparel in use on the HECS Stealthscreen YouTube channel. Slinkard has killed a heap of gobblers while sitting in the wide open and wearing HECS, and he doesn't get busted when drawing his bow. Watch the turkey hunts on his channel and see.

TIPS FOR GETTING DRAWN

Consistently bow-killing gobblers at less than 15 yards without a blind means you have to draw undetected, which is easier said than done. That's why I rarely ever hunt without a jake decoy. A tom approaching a lone hen decoy might be hooked, but he's often much more aware of his surroundings. That can make it difficult to draw back, whereas a tom infuriated by a jake decoy is very distracted. Usually, I draw when he lunges at the jake decoy.



↑ HuntStand's different base maps can help you choose a route to cut the distance to roosted turkeys by identifying cover and terrain.



Photo: Darron McDougal

↑ The author has killed a lot of gobblers by leaving the pop-up ground blind in the truck and getting after them the run-and-gun way.

Besides using a jake decoy, I make full use of my surroundings. If possible, I want an approaching gobbler to walk behind a tree trunk, hay bale, farm equipment, or another obstruction before reaching the decoys so I can draw my bow unseen. And if the area has no such obstructions, I'll draw back when he hits the decoy or struts with his fan covering his head. When it's time to draw, you might have a split second or two, so commit fully and draw quickly and fluidly.

It's also a smart idea to practice drawing. If there are no birds within view when you are set up, draw your bow and make sure you have arrow clearance over obstacles and that your bottom bow cam isn't in the dirt. Doing this can help you identify potential problems and fix them before a tom shows up.

TWO MORE TIPS

We've covered some of the most important details of blind-less hunting, but I'll present a couple more to wrap up. First, I believe mastering the mouth call can make you a better bowhunter. When turkeys are within view, you'll rarely be able to work box or pot-and-peg calls, then set them down and get your bow ready. With a mouth call, I can be ready with my bow in hand and release attached, yet coax a gobbler if needed. It's a huge advantage.

Second, hunting with your bow on your lap or on the ground beside you isn't ideal. You'll have to orient it upright to prepare for a shot, and your broadhead might get into the dirt and even open up if you're using a mechanical head. Thus, limb sticks are must-haves. I usually shoot a Mathews bow, and the Engage Series Limb Legs keep my bow ready, reducing the movement required to take a shot, and keep my cam and broadheads out of the dirt.

Well, those are the basics. Over the last 18 years, I've bow-killed a pile of gobblers without using a blind, but I continue to learn each year. Try the tips we've discussed here, pay attention to any mistakes that cost you opportunities, and be a student of the game. BW

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Whitetail Season Withdrawals?

Yes, whitetail bowseason is several months away, but in addition to planning ahead, there's plenty to do during the offseason.



BY JOE SHEAD

We dread the last day of archery whitetail season almost as much as we anticipate opening day. Some bowhunters are ready to get back to normal, while diehards may feel lost or empty now that they can't participate in their favorite activity. So, what do you do in the offseason?

For some, whitetails are a year-round pursuit. Spring is a good time to trim major shooting lanes or move ladder stands. Granted, new growth will pop back up in summer, but doing the work right now gives deer plenty of time to get used to the changes. For many landowners, the offseason is time to tackle timber stand improvement projects and plant and maintain food plots. Then there's summer scouting, running trail cameras, creating watering holes and setting up mock scrapes. Whitetail season is practically a full-time job! But there are other ways to pass the offseason, too.

KEEP HUNTING!

If you're not quite ready to trade the bow for work gloves, another option is to hit the road and hunt another state to pursue other species. Maybe hogs in Alabama? Or exotics in Texas? It's pricey and not for everyone, but an African safari might be an option. Safaris are typically conducted from spring through summer, during the offseason back home.

Keep in mind it doesn't have to be anything so exotic. Depending on where you live, bowfishing may be an option. Spring is ideal for bowfishing because roughfish such as carp are in the warm shallow water for spawning.

Of course, then there's always turkey hunting. Spring turkey season has just started in many states, so you can fill the hunting void immediately. Luring a gobbler to in-your-face shooting range is a difficult challenge, especially if you attempt to do so without the aid of a pop-up ground

blind. If you think whitetails are skilled at spotting movement, you need to try drawing your bow — in the open air — on a turkey that is inside of 20 yards.

PLAN FOR NEXT YEAR

Now is also a good time to start planning your next big bowhunting adventure. The offseason is a good time for sitting at a computer and researching which states harbor the best opportunities for the species you want to pursue. Then you can contact wildlife biologists, study draw odds, do some online scouting and apply for tags. It's also a good time to contact outfitters and pick the brains of some of their previous clients, if possible. It's never too soon to plan your dream hunt.

IMPROVE YOUR SHOOTING SKILL AND TEST GEAR

Joining an archery league is another fun way to pass the offseason. It's a good excuse to keep shooting, which maintains muscle tone and shooting form. Plus, you might learn tips from other archers or have a chance to try out someone else's equipment. You'll likely make new friends and perhaps even meet new hunting partners. Depending on the league, you may be shooting at paper targets, 3-D targets or a projected video screen. Any of these options will help keep you in bowhunting shape and keep your form in-tune during the offseason.

It's never a bad idea to make improvements to your shooting form. Have a coach or hunting partner watch you shoot and ask them for an honest critique of your form. It may even be time to tear down your whole system and start anew. Maybe try some blind bale shooting to work on your stance, breathing, muscle memory and release. The offseason is the perfect time to work on any problems with your shooting sequence so you'll be in perfect form when archery season rolls around again.

The offseason is also a good time to analyze your bowhunting gear. Maybe you've been thinking about getting a new sight or release but didn't want to change during the middle of the season. Or maybe now is the time for a new bow. You'll have plenty of time to get used to it before hunting season.

The offseason is also a good time to add accessories or make adjustments. Check over your equipment to make sure everything is in top condition. Wax your string and cables. It may even be time to replace them. Is your string serving unraveling? Are any bolts holding accessories rusty? Give your bow a once-over and maintain or replace parts.



↑ Indoor shooting leagues are great for keeping in shape; it's even better to practice outdoors on lifelike 3-D game targets.



→ Pursuing wild turkeys with a bow is a supreme challenge, especially when done without the use of a pop-up ground blind.

IMPROVE YOUR BODY

Physical conditioning and exercise is always worthwhile, and the offseason is a good time to build a new routine. Now is a great time to stretch, lift weights and do exercises that will improve your strength and agility, which will make you a better bowhunter. A quick internet search can teach you what to do. Just imagine how these exercises could pay off when you have to hold at full draw for an extended period on that buck of a lifetime next fall!

Visit our Store Locator at bowhuntersunited.com/find-store to find a shop near you and get yourself set up with anything you need during the offseason. BW

Photos: Dave Maas

NASP Latest News

NASP 3D announced; Arrowscores scoring platform released; and Apex-Gear announced as medal-level sponsor.

BY STEPHANIE EVANS, NASP PROGRAM MANAGER

NASP 3D ANNOUNCED

The NASP has announced the launch of NASP 3D, the next chapter in NASP's commitment to student-centered archery education. Built on the same familiar rules and structure that educators, coaches, and students already trust, NASP 3D will ensure continuity while offering new opportunities for growth.

NASP will expand its national scholarship series to include 3D student archers and continue to strengthen collaborations with state fish and wildlife agencies to promote conservation and connect students to the outdoors.



To lead this exciting next chapter, NASP has introduced Joel and Christie Zimmer as the new NASP 3D directors, bringing their enthusiasm and leadership to guide the program's continued success. Together, the Zimmers bring 40 years of combined NASP experience as coaches, trainers and event staff. They have spent five years helping organize and run national 3D events as well as state 3D events in 11 different states.

Joel Zimmer said, "Christie and I are honored to help lead NASP 3D into this exciting new chapter. We know how important it is for schools, coaches, and students to feel confident that the program they already love will remain consistent and accessible. At the same time, we are thrilled to help grow NASP 3D opportunities and connect even more students to the outdoors."

Random Scholarships: In 2026, NASP will magnify its popular Random Scholarship program, with awards now offered to both Bullseye and 3D archers. This exciting update means up to 185 scholarships, valued at $500 each, will be awarded to students participating at Western Nationals and Eastern Nationals.. Drawn randomly, these awards ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to benefit. Simply competing in a Bullseye or 3D round will be the only requirement for eligibility.

Scholarship Shoot-Off: In addition to the Random Scholarship program, NASP will expand its Scholarship Shoot-Off at the Championship Tournament, with the exciting addition of a 3D event. The top five male and top five female archers in both Bullseye and 3D — determined from the combined results of Eastern and Western Nationals — will compete for scholarships ranging from $5,000 for first place to $1,000 for fifth place. This expansion helps ensure that outstanding performances in both divisions are recognized and rewarded.

Team Scholarships: NASP further celebrates the collective achievement of entire teams through its Team Scholarships program, growing to include teams in NASP 3D. The top three high-scoring teams in both Bullseye and 3D will be determined at the conclusion of the Eastern National Tournament, based on the combined scores from Western and Eastern Nationals. Up to 24 archers on each winning team will be awarded scholarships.

Upon graduation, student archers can apply these funds to any post-secondary education or training program. This opportunity would not be possible without the generosity of NASP scholarship sponsors, whose support ensures that archers' achievements on the range can also help open doors for their futures.

NASP President Tommy Floyd said, "As a lifelong educator, I've always believed that our greatest investment is in the future of our students. NASP has never been just about archery — it has always been about helping young people discover confidence, discipline, success in education, and opportunities to connect with the outdoors. The launch of NASP 3D represents an exciting new chapter that will engage even more students and families, while strengthening our ties to conservation. By expanding our Random Scholarships, Team, and Shoot-Off programs to include 3D, we are not only recognizing their achievements on the range, but also investing in their dreams and outdoor experiences beyond graduation."

NASP 3D Rules and Resources: To ensure consistency and confidence for educators, NASP 3D rules will remain familiar and accessible. Coaches and teachers can review the full rules and check out all the new resources on the NASP website. State/provincial coordinators will remain available to provide direct support.

ARROWSCORES SCORING PLATFORM

The NASP has announced the development and final release of the Arrowscores Scoring and Tournament Platform. This cloud-based archery tournament registration and scoring software platform is owned and provided by NASP.

The intent of Arrowscores is to provide an affordable and robust scoring platform for organizations outside of NASP to experience similar functionality of the longstanding nasptournaments.org platform that NASP developed and has refined throughout its decades of operation. Last year alone, NASP participating schools and states used the NASP-only scoring platform to conduct more than 2,000 tournaments, with 4,000-plus schools participating, and 500,000-plus scores posted.



The use of the NASP tournaments platform formerly required users and tournament hosts to be NASP certified with at least a Basic Archery Instructor (BAI) certification in good standing. Organizations outside of NASP can now gain access to a similar opportunity and utilize the robust and fully functional Arrowscores scoring platform to schedule, promote, conduct and share results of their tournament events.

NASP President Dr. Tommy Floyd said, "This is yet another example of NASP's commitment to the mission of growing the youth shooting sports. We have long enjoyed and continuously improved our nasptournaments.org platform. Since its inception, we have successfully operated thousands of local, state and national tournaments on this software.

"I cannot thank Patrick O'Connell and Chip Quarles enough for their brilliance, and for their years of patient and thoughtful improvements made to a system that has now been used by millions of NASP BAIs, coaches, state coordinators and even other countries. Taking this proven system and making it available to shooting sports organizations and partners outside of NASP is extremely exciting as we know that other organizations can and will benefit from its simple and dependable usage.

"The User agreements and supporting documents will be on the Arrowscores website, and we will be ready and available for discussions about how Arrowscores can help other shooting sports organizations, even those that shoot something other than archery!"

NASP IT Director Chip Quarles said, "We look forward to being a resource for organizations outside of NASP to help grow the sport of archery and expand opportunities for all archers. Arrowscores.com was built to be flexible and will continue to evolve to support the varying needs of our partner organizations and archers."

To find out if Arrowscores can help your organization, please visit arrowscores.com.

APEX GEAR ANNOUNCED AS MEDAL-LEVEL SPONSOR

The NASP has announced that Apex Gear is the newest Medal-Level Sponsor of the world's largest youth archery program. Apex Gear, as part of GSM Outdoors' broad portfolio of outdoor and shooting-sports brands, brings a strong heritage of product excellence and innovation in archery equipment. GSM's decision to expand its support of NASP underscores a shared value of empowering youth, promoting participation in archery, and growing participation across communities.

"This partnership marks an exciting step forward for NASP and our mission to bring archery, life skills, and positive youth development into schools," said NASP President Dr. Tommy Floyd. "We deeply appreciate Apex Gear's support and commitment to helping us with post-secondary scholarship opportunities for our student archers. Apex Gear is the type of partner we hope our student archers discover as they take those next steps into the outdoors."

NASP Vice President Jeff Rawlinson said, "This new support from Apex Gear not only provides scholarship opportunities, but also that critical link to new outdoor pursuits for NASP student archers as they develop their own pathways that can lead to hunting and other shooting sports, further supporting wildlife conservation efforts across the country."

"We are proud to be a sponsor of the NASP program," said GSM Senior Director of Marketing Josette Colver. "We're helping students fulfill higher education dreams while connecting thousands of student archers to the great outdoors and these time-honored traditions that continue to inspire future generations."

For more information about Apex Gear, visit apex-gear.com.

NASP: Changing Lives One Arrow at a Time

NASP is an activity that doesn't discriminate based on popularity, athletic skill, gender, size or academic ability. It's open to any student — and its biggest supporters are professional educators. NASP promotes instruction in target archery as part of the in-school curriculum in grades 4-12. Through participation in the shooting sports, students are learning focus, self-control, discipline, patience and the life lessons required to be successful in the classroom and in life. For more information, including the four steps for bringing NASP to your school, visit naspschools.org. BW

Whale Tails on the Horizon!

During the 2025 Wyoming elk season, the author tagged two big bulls, and one sported world-class "whale tails."

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY CHUCK ADAMS



As usual, I was too excited to sleep the night before Wyoming's 2025 archery elk season. This is my all-time favorite animal to bowhunt, and anyone who has chased bull elk need not ask the reasons why.

I was fortunate to have two archery elk permits last year—something that is occasionally possible for residents of Wyoming. My favorite elk area is a steep, rough checkerboard of public and private land with very few roads. A couple of rancher friends let me bowhunt on their land, allowing me to move freely across state, BLM, and private tracts.

Elk densities in this place vary from year to year, depending on how much grass and water are present. If spring and summer have been dry, a decent bull can be almost impossible to find. Fortunately, 2025 enjoyed ample rainfall that filled ponds and caused springs to flow. Grass was knee-deep in places—ideal for grazing animals like elk.

The first 10 days of the September elk season were slow. I glassed up several smallish bulls, but the rut had not kicked in and large herd bulls were not gathering cows. But on September 11, I finally spotted a nice 6x6 in a hellishly steep canyon. I managed to circle and ambush him. That bull was a good one for my neck of the woods, with long and even tines.

GLASSING THE BURN

Every set of elk antlers is a unique work of art. But my favorites have what are commonly called "whale tails"—giant forks formed by the fifth and sixth points. Even if lower tines are not exceptional, any whale tail rack looks big. With another bull tag in my pocket, I was hoping for such an elk. My first one was good but lacked eye-popping top tines.

From September 12 on, I routinely left my little Airstream travel trailer and hiked two miles before daylight to reach the same high vantage point. I was camped on public BLM land, but crossed both public and private property en route. Once on top, a huge old

↑ The author's second 2025 Wyoming elk was a bomber, with massive beams and impressive top forks.

burn stretched below me, with long views in two directions. Tall grass waved in the breeze, and sunlight glinted from trickles of water in several draws. I spotted at least two dozen elk each morning, but nothing with oversized antlers, let alone whale tails on top.

Weather was consistently warm, and elk vanished shortly after sunrise in dense thickets or deep and shady cuts. Stalking animals would have been feasible, because escape cover was limited to small places the forest fire had missed. But there was no reason to bust my butt and chase elk before a large one showed up. Wyoming's big game archery season spans the entire month of September, and I had plenty of time to search.

"The giant bull swaggered toward his cows, bugled again, and stepped into full view. He looked immense against the morning sky."

GO-TO GEAR

It's a great feeling to have an accurate bow-and-arrow setup. My 70-pound Bear Alaskan XT compound bow was a real tack driver. The Trophy Ridge React 7-pin bowsight's brilliant fiber optics made aiming easy — even in low light — and the TR Sync drop-away rest tuned easily and placed Easton FMJ 340 shafts with astonishing accuracy.



↑ Another year, another pair of excellent Wyoming elk. The farther bull in the photo — Chuck's second in 2025 — had great whale tails.

My chosen elk broadhead was the popular 4-blade Magnus Stinger — a deep-driving, cut-on-impact design similar to other winners like the Bear Razorhead and Zwickey Black Diamond. With arrow speed over 260 fps and kinetic energy approaching 75 foot-pounds, I knew the 484-grain projectile would slice completely through a broadside elk's chest. All I had to do was find the bull I wanted and get close enough for a shot.

WORLD-CLASS WHALE TAILS

Finally, near the end of the month, I once again planted my fanny above the burn just before dawn. The sun slipped over distant peaks, and two bulls began bugling below me. Minutes later, a dozen cow elk ambled across a ridge and fed uphill in my direction. Seconds after that, a wide-racked bull stepped out. His 6x6 antlers popped into crystal clear focus through my 10x binocular. My heart skipped a beat. The beams were massive, and the top forks were immense. I had never seen better whale tails!

The elk were a half-mile below, but steadily climbing my way. The bull was bugling in a rut-fueled frenzy, pacing back and forth below his harem and pushing them closer and closer. His ivory-tipped rack glittered like the mouth of hell in the early morning rays.

Two hundred yards below me, the group vanished in a cut. I waited, waited and waited some more. Thirty minutes later, I was still waiting. Had the elk bedded, or had they stayed in the ravine to feed? I finally stood for a downhill sneak and peek.

I had barely taken a step when a cow elk poked her head over a rise 40 yards away. I dropped like a heart-shot duck and crawled behind a bushy pine. The female had not seen me, and fed into a gentle swale. Soon, all 12 cows were fanned out in solid bow range. But where was the bull?

A piercing bugle nearly knocked the cap off my head! The bull had circled to the left about 50 yards east of his harem. I nocked an arrow and rolled to my knees. An instant later, whale tails floated over the horizon. The giant bull swaggered toward his cows, bugled again, and stepped into full view. He looked immense against the morning sky.

I yanked back the bowstring, planted the 30-yard pin behind his shoulder, and squeezed the release trigger. The bow plunked, and the Magnus fixed-blade broadhead plunked again a split-second later. The arrow vanished in the bull and clattered in rocks somewhere beyond.

The whale-tail bull swapped ends, galloped uphill, and veered out of sight behind me. I ran to the top just in time to see him flip upside-down 50 yards away. Despite severe slopes in three directions, he dropped on nearly level ground with access for my four-wheeler!

Never mind the solo butchering chore, the hike back to camp, and the white-knuckle ride in and out on the quad. Two hind quarters strapped to the front kept it from flipping over backwards on a couple of scary slopes. I had all the meat plus a gorgeous set of antlers back at camp just before dark. Those antlers later scored just under 350 record book points — an awesome animal that stalked ME instead of the other way around! BW

NEW GEAR

BY GORDY KRAHN

SIGHTRON SV 10X42MM ED SWA BINOCULAR



The Sightron SV 10x42mm ED SWA Binocular was engineered to meet the demanding optical needs of archers and firearms hunters. It features an expansive apparent field of view exceeding 70 degrees, supported by a field flattener that delivers exceptional clarity and sharpness from edge to edge. ED objective lenses minimize chromatic aberration, while phase-corrected prisms and fully multicoated lenses provide bright, high-contrast images with accurate color reproduction. Built around a lightweight magnesium die-cast chassis, the binocular is nitrogen-filled, waterproof and protected by a durable elastomer armor for secure handling in harsh environments. Long eye relief, twist-up eyecups and a glove-friendly metal focus wheel enhance comfort and precision. All Sightron binoculars are backed by a lifetime performance guarantee. MSRP: $949.99. **sightron.com**



SEVR BROADHEADS 1.5 HYBRID ROBUSTO BROADHEAD

The SEVR Broadheads 150-grain 1.5 Hybrid Robusto Broadhead was designed to deliver added strength, FOC accuracy and more penetration. It combines a 1.5-inch pivoting main blade with a .75-inch fixed bleeder blade for a total 2.25-inch cut. The Robusto boosts FOC (front-of-center balance) for greater arrow stability, improved energy transfer and enhanced long-range accuracy. The hardened, one-piece Robusto Steel ferrule provides maximum impact strength and durability, while the compact 1.5-inch main cut ensures deep penetration on even the toughest game. The new 1.5 Hybrid Robusto is built for hunters who want uncompromising toughness and accuracy, and can be used with vertical bows and crossbows, giving hunters a single solution for any setup. MSRP: $19.99/Each. **sevrbroadheads.com**

TINK'S SCRAPE SLUSHIE SYSTEM



Tink's Scrape Slushie is a slow-release scrape attractant designed to help hunters create, enhance and maintain active scrape sites throughout the season. Scrapes function as communication hubs for whitetail deer, and Scrape Slushie delivers a long-lasting scent that mimics natural deer behavior. Designed for mock or active scrapes, it can be applied directly to the ground or beneath an overhanging licking branch to encourage interaction. Scrape Slushie joins Tink's Scrape System, working alongside products such as the Naturally Primed Scrape Rope to simplify scent communication and turn scrapes into reliable hotspots. Easy to deploy for both experienced and newer hunters, Scrape Slushie helps eliminate guesswork while supporting proven scouting, land management and trail camera strategies. MSRP: $19.99/12-ounce container. **tinks.com**



EASTON ARCHERY GENESIS MAX BOW CASE

Built for competition and everyday bow protection, the Easton Genesis Max Bow Case is purpose-built for NASP competition bows. Engineered for protection, organization and value, the Genesis Max provides a secure fit for the Genesis bow, with dedicated compartments for arrows and accessories. Designed for daily use by students and archers in training, the case features a durable exterior, main bow compartment, arrow pocket and exterior accessory pocket. The Easton Genesis Max bow case is available in Gray, Red, Blue and Mossy Oak Original Bottomland camo finishes. MSRP: $59.99/Solid colors; $64.99/Camo. **eastonarchery.com**



NEW GEAR

OL'MAN EAGLE EYE STEEL HANG-ON TREESTAND

Ol'Man Treestands has introduced the Eagle Eye Steel Hang-On Treestand, a lightweight, no-nonsense solution for mobile bowhunters who prioritize speed, stealth and reliability in the field. Weighing just 17 pounds, it is built to pack in easily and set up quickly on a wide range of suitable trees, making it ideal for run-and-gun hunting styles and deep-access locations. The Eagle Eye features a rugged steel frame with a textured powder-coat finish that enhances durability while minimizing noise. A spacious 26- by 20-inch platform provides secure footing, while the flip-up, heavy-duty fabric seat allows for fast deployment and compact transport. With a clean, low-profile design focused on essential performance, the Eagle Eye delivers stability and comfort without unnecessary bulk. MSRP: $109.99. **olmanoutdoors.com**

PROIS GREANN GOLD INSULATED PARKA AND BIBS

Designed by women for women, the Prois Greann PrimaLoft Gold Insulated Parka combines 133 grams of PrimaLoft Gold Insulation with 100 grams of PrimaLoft Next insulation to lock in heat without creating bulk. Taped seams, adjustable Velcro cuffs and a cinchable hem and hood keeps the elements out. Functional details include YKK Aquaguard dual-zippered handwarmer pockets and tree harness capability. Pair the jacket with Greann Insulated Bibs, which are equally tough and deadly quiet. YKK Aquaguard zippered thigh pockets keep essentials dry and within reach and the zippered lower leg openings allow for ventilation and ease of use while wearing boots. An incorporated chest handwarmer pocket bag is a great spot to add heat where it matters most. MSRP: $379.99/Parka; $329.99/Bib. **proishunting.com**





WRC GOLDEN ESTRUS SCENT STICK

Wildlife Research Center's Golden Estrus Scent Stick is a premium, weather-resistant attractant designed to trigger the mating instincts of rutting whitetail bucks. Crafted with fresh doe urine enhanced with estrus secretions, it is carefully collected from whitetail does and converted into a solid stick formula for easy, mess-free application. The durable design delivers extended scent release and consistent performance in harsh weather and demanding conditions. Whether it's leading up to the rut, peak rut or late season, the Golden Estrus Scent Stick delivers the proven Golden Estrus performance that hunters trust — providing long-lasting effectiveness in a convenient mess-free format. Available this hunting season at authorized retailers — in store and online. MSRP: $16.99/2.5-ounce stick. **wildlife.com**

RINEHART TARGETS CENTERSHOT CORE ARCHERY TARGET

Rinehart's new cube-style CenterShot Core Target serves as the interchangeable core for the TAC LRS (Long Range System). It is constructed from Rinehart's self-healing foam, allowing repeated use without degradation and easy arrow removal. It features multiple shooting faces — including 8-inch pie-plate, 1/2-scale (4-inch), 1/3-scale (2.5-inch) centers, crosshair alignment and angled panels for treestand practice. The black TAC LRS target bodies (not shown) come in two sizes: 24 and 36 inches. Integrated foam locking points securely hold the Core with the target body. MSRP: $139.99/Core only; $289.99/TAC LRS 24-inch body with Core; $429.99/TAC LRS 36-inch body with Core. **rinehart3d.com**



12 TOP NEW CROSSBOWS FOR 2026

In the market for your first crossbow, or maybe an upgrade from an older one? Here are a dozen new models that you should consider test-driving prior to the upcoming big game seasons.

BY JOSH HONEYCUTT

Crossbows are the source of many debates in the archery world. But there's no denying these are here to stay, and they help hunters get into the field that otherwise couldn't or wouldn't. That's why, each year, the latest unveiling of new crossbows always creates exceptional buzz.

Perhaps the most impressive element of the current archery market, though, is the elevating crossbow space. These bows continue to improve, and competition keeps pushing each brand to new heights. Read on for looks at new offerings from Barnett, Excalibur, Killer Instinct, Ravin, TenPoint and Wicked Ridge.



TENPOINT TX ULTRA 26.5

TENPOINT TX ULTRA 29.5

TENPOINT TRX ULTRA

1. TENPOINT TRX ULTRA

The TRX Ultra is TenPoint's 2026 flagship crossbow. It comes with numerous technologies. The Reverse-Draw Advantage improves balance, boosts speed, and flattens arrow trajectory. The Zero-Torsion Technology comes with the new 8mm axles, which is 175% stronger and 215% stiffer than standard axles. Plus, the new X-Wide Limbs are 20% wider and 120% stronger than standard limbs. This pairing eliminates all torsional movement along the limb axis. Additionally, it comes with the new ACU-X RD arrow with snap-on nock, new brushless machined aluminum arrow rest, and new premium string. Interestingly, the brushless machined aluminum arrow rest secures to the barrel and updated riser rod, which isolates it from SDS vibration and eliminates shift and improves accuracy. The package includes a 100-yard EVO-X Marksman Elite Scope, three-pack of premium crossbow bolts, quiver, bow hanger, and more. Get it in Vektra Camo or Moss Green. Its MSRP range is $3,549.99-$3,649.99. Learn more at tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 515 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 6 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 11.75 inches
LENGTH: 29.5 inches
WEIGHT: 8.4 pounds
POWER STROKE: 16.25 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 242 foot pounds of kinetic energy (410-grain Pro Elite 400 carbon arrow)

2. TENPOINT TX ULTRA 29.5

The TenPoint TX Ultra 29.5 includes some of the same tech as the flagship TRX Ultra, including Zero-Torsion Technology, ACU-X Arrow with snap-on nock, ACUslide Maxx, new premium string, and more. It implements the forward-draw format.

"It has the split riser and shoots 460 fps," said Randy Wood with TenPoint. "It features the wider-set limbs, going from a 6mm axle to an 8mm axle, making the bow a lot more rigid, more stable, and a lot quieter when you pull the trigger. The crossbow also incorporates the ACUslide Max built into it. You can crank back the bow, and if you don't shoot, de-cock it at the end of the day."

The crossbow comes with the EVO-X variable power scope. MSRP ranges from $2,549.99-$2,649.99. Read and hear more about it at tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 460 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 6.5 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 11 inches
LENGTH: 29.5 inches
WEIGHT: 8 pounds
POWER STROKE: 13.5 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 193 foot pounds of energy (410-grain Pro Elite 400 Carbon Arrow)

3. TENPOINT TX ULTRA 26.5

The TenPoint TX Ultra 26.5 is a great, compact crossbow that shooters should love. This crossbow is ideal for tighter spots, such as ground blinds, saddle hunting (closer to tree trunks), and more. It continues the theme as the remainder of the 2026 lineup, and packs in several new technologies. Benefit from the previously noted Zero-Torsion Technology, ACUslide Maxx, TriggerTech precision, premium string upgrade, ACU-X Arrow with snap-on nock, and more.

"The TX Ultra 26.5 is an ultra-compact crossbow," Wood said. "It's 26.5 inches long. It has the built-in string dampening system, ACUslide cocking and de-cocking, and it shoots 410 fps. It comes with the RangeMaster variable power scope."

It comes with the cocking and de-cocking system, scope, quiver, three-pack of premium bolts, bow hanger, etc. The price tag ranges from $2,049.99-$2,149.99. Check it out tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 410 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 7 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 10.75 inches
LENGTH: 26.5 inches
WEIGHT: 7.7 pounds
POWER STROKE: 10.25 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 153 foot pounds of kinetic energy (410-grain Pro Elite 400 Carbon Arrow)



TENPOINT TITAN X DE-COCK

TENPOINT PHANTOM DE-COCK



BARNETT RAPTOR GTX SERIES

4. TENPOINT PHANTOM DE-COCK

The Phantom De-Cock by Phantom is another excellent selection. It carries many of the technological advances TenPoint is known for, such as the Reverse-Draw Advantage, silent ACUdraw cocking and de-cocking system, D1 Trigger, and more. It's built for lower vibration and noise, which deer hunters who pursue cagey whitetails will appreciate.

"This crossbow shoots 400 fps," Wood said. "It has the reverse draw technology, shoots very quietly, and has the SDS string dampening system built into it. It safely cocks and de-cocks with the ACUdraw system. Plus, the crossbow is very lightweight, has the rubber butt plate, and rubber grip. This compact bow balances really well."

The crossbow comes with a new stock and barrel, 70-yard Pro View 400 Scope, three arrows, quiver, bow hanger, and more. It's $1,049.99-$1,149.99. That's a great price-point for a reverse-draw crossbow. Check it out at tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 400 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 8.4 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 12.4 inches
LENGTH: 28.5 inches
WEIGHT: 7.4 pounds
POWER STROKE: 16 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 146 foot pounds of kinetic energy (410-grain Pro Elite 400 Carbon Arrow)

5. TENPOINT TITAN X DE-COCK

Rounding out the new TenPoint crop of crossbows, the Titan X De-Cock is another excellent choice for those in the market for a new bolt slinger. As with the others, it comes with patented TenPoint technologies, such as the D1 Trigger, Silent ACUdraw cocking and de-cocking system, new stock and barrel, lighted scope, and more. It sports solid accuracy, durability, reliability, and more. It comes with the cocking/de-cocking system, Pro-View 400 Lighted Scope, three carbon arrows, quiver, bow hanger, etc. Get it for $849.99-$949.99. See it and more at tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 400 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 9.75 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 13 inches
LENGTH: 33 inches
WEIGHT: 7.3 pounds
POWER STROKE: 12.75 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 146 foot pounds of kinetic energy (410-grain Pro Elite 400 Carbon Arrow)

6. BARNETT RAPTOR GTX SERIES

Barnett is another reputable name in the crossbow business. This year, it released the Raptor GTX Series. The Raptor shoots 425 fps, has 142 foot pounds of energy, and is very accurate. The 3-pound TriggerTech system is a breeze to shoot. Most will like the step-through riser, and Halo System, which eliminates cable crossing and cam lean.

"It's upgraded from the old 410," said Austin Taylor with Barnett Crossbows. "It has new limbs, upgraded cams, upgraded color, and of course, it's faster."

Taylor points to how great this new series is for whitetail hunters. According to Taylor, you can get this new crossbow in the Buk Ops X-Factor Rangefinding Scope, Buk Ops Cycloptic X Prime Time Color Vision Scope, or more traditional scope options, such as the 2-7x36 Speed Dial with locking ring and illuminated scope. It comes with a quiver and three bolts. Get it for $1,199. Learn more at barnettcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 425 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 7.5 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 15.6 inches
LENGTH: 32.5 inches
WEIGHT: 6.9 pounds (without accessories)
POWER STROKE: 14 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 142 foot pounds of kinetic energy



KILLER INSTINCT NEO-X

EXCALIBUR REVX TD

7. EXCALIBUR REVX TD

The Excalibur RevX TD is a recurve-style crossbow that allows for partial disassembly. The Quick-Loc Technology is the linchpin for easy disassembly and reassembly — all with one button push. Plus, the CeaseFire Technology boosts safety, because the crossbow cannot be fired unless an arrow is nocked, safety is off, and trigger is pulled. It even features the ChargerX integrated crank.

"The RevX is most known for the integrated Charger X crank system," said Jeff Baker with Excalibur Crossbows. "It shoots 400 fps. New for this year, it has the Take Down feature, which allows you to quickly take off the front end of the crossbow and store it in the case that comes with the bow. Fitting it inside the case makes it easy to throw it in the back of the truck or ATV when going to the stand. It allows the bow to travel in a way that's really compact. Then, it clicks right back in, locks into the same position, and doesn't change your point of impact."

Without question, this has a crisp, clean-breaking trigger. It also comes with the Overwatch scope, three-bolt quiver, and the case. It's available in Mossy Oak Bottomland camo or Stealth Gray. Get it for $1,999.99. Read more at excaliburcrossbow.com.

SPEED: 400 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 21 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 25 inches
LENGTH: 33 inches
WEIGHT: 7.5 pounds (without accessories) / 9.6 pounds (with accessories)

8. KILLER INSTINCT NEO-X

The NEO-X comes with the new DC trigger box, which makes for safe and easy cocking and de-cocking. The synchronized X-Cam System (with 56% let-off), reverse limb design, and overall build, elevates performance. A 3.5-pound trigger pull makes for sweet shooting.

It comes with two premium 20-inch, 390-grain bolts. The crossbow is topped off with an illuminated Lumix XLR 4x32 scope, three-arrow quiver, Max-Pad foot stirrup, and more. Pick it up for $649.99. Check it out at kicrossbows.com.

SPEED: 415 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 6.75 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 10.75 inches
LENGTH: 28 inches
WEIGHT: 8.2 pounds
POWER STROKE: 15 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 141.53 foot pounds of kinetic energy

9. KILLER INSTINCT STX PRO SERIES

The Killer Instinct STX Pro Series is loaded up with good tech, including the MRX Trigger Box, Focus Point Arrow Retention System, Gear-X Autobrake Drive System (start and stop cocking or de-cocking at any point), anti-dry-fire safety, 3-pound trigger, and more. The crossbow comes topped off with the MaxView

How to Optimize Crossbow Treestand Locations

It's common for a firearms deer hunter to purchase a crossbow instead of a compound when wanting to extend his or her whitetail season. But proven techniques used for gun hunting don't always translate well to in-the-field archery success.

For example, specific treestand locations that work great for gun hunters often aren't the best choices for archery. There are several objectives to complete to make spots better suited for crossbow hunters. Some of these include:

1. Choose setups that put deer in crossbow range (funnels, pinch-points, saddles, the right trails, etc.).
2. Place stands on the downwind sides of anticipated deer travel routes and patterns.
3. Orient stands for the primary shooter's strong-side shot opportunities.
4. Shooting back behind the stand (tree trunk) is very difficult, so hang the treestand accordingly.
5. Clear shooting lanes in various spots at varying yardages.
6. Buy treestands that are more suited for gun hunting than compound bowhunting.
7. Use treestands and ladders that have integrated shooting rails or other rests.
8. Place yardage marker tape for situations when there isn't time to use a rangefinder.
9. Choose trees with trunks offering adequate profile cover and add additional back cover as needed.



Optics MV-36 scope, three premium bolts and quiver. Get it for $1,099.99. See it at kicrossbows.com.

SPEED: 405 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 6.75 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 10 inches
LENGTH: 31.25 inches
WEIGHT: 9.9 pounds
POWER STROKE: 13.5 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 134.78 foot pounds of energy

10. RAVIN R470

One of the most respected brands in the crossbow space, it certainly didn't disappoint with the Ravin R470. It prioritizes accuracy and speed. The HexCoil Cam System is a great feature, which rotates the cams 300 degrees and makes the bow ultra-narrow. It comes with a 100-yard illuminated scope, three arrows, removable draw handle, quiver (and mounting bracket), and more. Take it home for $2,549.99. Learn more at ravincrossbows.com.

SPEED: 470 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 4.3 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 7.6 inches
LENGTH: 26.75 inches
WEIGHT: 8.4 pounds
POWER STROKE: 13 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 196 foot pounds of energy

11. WICKED RIDGE COMMANDER 400

An excellent pick from Wicked Ridge, the Commander 400 is a surefire bet. It's loaded up with great tech, including the built-in ACUdraw cocking device. The MDX Cam System is reliable and effective (elongated power stroke and increased rotation for better speed). The Gordon Glass double-laminated limbs are big factors, too. Elevated ergonomics are features as well, with a better comb height, length-of-pull, grips, and more.

This crossbow comes topped off with a 70-Yard Pro-View 400 Lighted Scope, three carbon arrows, quiver, etc. The crossbow comes pre-sighted at 20 yards. It's built in America and only $599.99 off the shelf. Visit tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 400 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 11 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 14.5 inches
LENGTH: 35.75 inches
WEIGHT: 7.3 pounds
POWER STROKE: 12.5 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 146 foot pounds of energy (Wicked Ridge Match 400 Carbon Arrow)

12. WICKED RIDGE WARRIOR 400

The Wicked Ridge Warrior 400 is one of the best options in the "budget" category and offers solid numbers for the price-point. Incredibly, the Gordon Glass Double Laminated Limbs isn't something you typically see on a $500 crossbow, but this one has it. It's arguably the best budget crossbow currently available.

This crossbow comes with several beneficial features, including an adjustable butt stock with 2.5 inches of extra adjustability. Tack on the Pro View 400 Scope (illuminates red or green), three carbon arrows, quiver, and rope cocker, and it's the total package. It's built in America. Get it for $499.99. Head over to tenpointcrossbows.com.

SPEED: 400 fps
AXLE-TO-AXLE (COCKED): 11 inches
AXLE-TO-AXLE (UNCOCKED): 14.5 inches
LENGTH: 33.5 inches
WEIGHT: 6.4 pounds
POWER STROKE: 12.625 inches
FOOT POUNDS OF ENERGY: 146 foot pounds of energy (410-grain Wicked Ridge Match 400 Carbon Arrow)

FINAL THOUGHTS

Blown away by the 2026 crop of crossbows? Take your pick. Sift through the offerings and visit your local pro shop to find the one that's right for you. And remember: Be sure to spend some time with it during the off-season to ensure that you are completely prepared for the fall hunting seasons. These will be here soon enough. BW



THE FUTURE OF HUNTING DEPENDS ON WHAT WE DO TODAY

HUNTING IS CONSERVATION®

Since 1984, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) has **protected 9.1 million acres** of wild habitat and **opened 1.6 million acres** to public access. But there's still more work to do, and we need you.

When you join RMEF, you're making sure America's wild places stay wild and accessible. Your support protects elk habitat, expands public access, and keeps hunting traditions alive for generations to come.

RMEF.ORG/JOIN

The Impact of Your Membership

- Maintaining America's wild places for elk and other wildlife
- Keeping hunting traditions alive and accessible
- Ensuring our public lands stay open for all

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!



2026 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

As we've done for decades, we asked readers like you of *Bowhunting World* magazine to vote for your favorite hunting and archery brands. The manufacturers highlighted on the following pages were chosen as Readers' Choice Awards winners in 54 categories.

BY BOWHUNTING WORLD STAFF

Last fall we asked readers like you of *Bowhunting World* — printed four times per year by Grand View Outdoors — to vote for your favorite hunting and archery brands. For convenience, readers could place votes for the 2026 Readers' Choice Awards via an online submission system.

To ensure we tapped into as many hunters as possible, we promoted the voting process heavily on all of our Grand View Outdoors websites, as well as associated e-newsletters and dedicated e-mail lists. Like in the past, the response this year to our call for votes was outstanding.

Here are the top products in 54 categories based on the collective voice of *Bowhunting World* readership. Perhaps some of the results will surprise you. If so, maybe it's time to update your current gear list?

P.S. If you took the time to vote during the 2026 awards period, we say "thank you." If you missed your opportunity, then be sure to keep an eye out for next year's awards. We want your opinion to be heard.



COMPOUND BOW
GOLD: Mathews
SILVER: Hoyt
BRONZE: Elite

QUIVER
GOLD: TightSpot
SILVER: Mathews
BRONZE: Hoyt

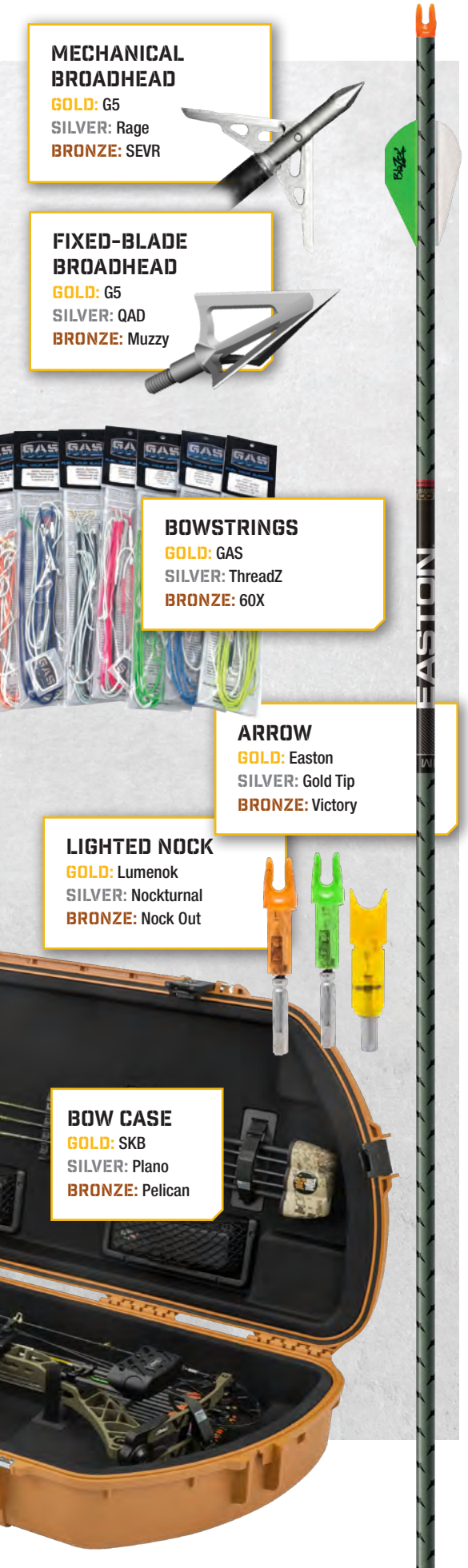
HUNTING RELEASE
GOLD: T.R.U. Ball
SILVER: Scott
BRONZE: TruFire

ARROW REST
GOLD: QAD
SILVER: Hamskea
BRONZE: Vapor Trail

MOVABLE BOWSIGHT
GOLD: Axcel
SILVER: HHA Sports
BRONZE: Spot Hogg

FIXED BOWSIGHT
GOLD: Axcel
SILVER: Spot Hogg
BRONZE: Trophy Ridge

STABILIZER
GOLD: Bee Stinger
SILVER: Mathews
BRONZE: Shrewd



2026 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS RESULTS

MANUFACTURER	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
Bow (Compound)	Mathews	Hoyt	Elite
Bow (Traditional)	Bear	Hoyt	Black Widow
Crossbow	TenPoint	Ravin	Excalibur
Bow Case	SKB	Plano	Pelican
Hunting Release	T.R.U. Ball	Scott	TruFire
Target Release	T.R.U. Ball	Scott	Stanislawski
Arrow Rest	QAD	Hamskea	Vapor Trail
Arrow	Easton	Gold Tip	Victory Archery
Feather Fletching	Trueflight	Gateway	Ozark Feathers
Vanes	AAE	Bohning	TAC Vanes
Quiver	TightSpot	Mathews	Hoyt
Lighted Nock	Lumenok	Nockturnal	Nock Out
Fixed-Blade Broadhead	G5	QAD	Muzzy
Mechanical Broadhead	G5	Rage	SEVR
Bowstring	GAS	ThreadZ	60X
Peep Sight	Hamskea	Specialty Archery	G5
Fixed Bowsight	Axcel	Spot Hogg	Trophy Ridge
Movable Bowsight	Axcel	HHA Sports	Spot Hogg
Stabilizer	Bee Stinger	Mathews	Shrewd
Bow Silencers	Limbsaver	Mathews	Bowjax
Camo Pattern	Mossy Oak	Realtree	Sitka
Clothing Manufacturer	KUIU	Sitka	ScentLok
Boots	LaCrosse	Muck	Danner
Safety Harness	Hunter Safety Systems	Muddy	Tree Spider
Pack	Badlands	Alps OutdoorZ	Mystery Ranch
Bino & Spotter	Vortex	Leupold	Bushnell
Rangefinder	Vortex	Leupold	Bushnell
GPS Unit	Garmin	Magellan	Kestrel
Hunting App	onX	HuntStand	HuntWise
Trail Camera	Spypoint	Moultrie	Browning
Cellular Trail Camera	Spypoint	Tactacam	Moultrie
Hang-On Treestand	Millennium	Lone Wolf	Summit
Climbing Treestand	Summit	Millennium	Hawk
Ladder/Tripod	Big Game	Millennium	Muddy
Climbing Sticks	Muddy	Hawk	Tethrd
Saddles	Tethrd	Lattitude Outdoors	Hawk
Ground Blind	Ameristep	TideWe	Primos
Deer Call	Primos	Extinguisher	Flextone
Elk Call	Primos	Phelps	Rocky Mountain
Turkey Call	Primos	Woodhaven	H.S. Strut
Wild Turkey Decoy	Avian-X	Primos	Flambeau
Deer Decoy	Flambeau	Montana Decoy	Dave Smith Decoys
Scent/Lure	Wildlife Research Center	Tink's	Code Blue
Odor Eliminator	Dead Down Wind	Wildlife Research Center	ScentLok
Mineral/Supplements	Big & J	Trophy Rock	Lucky Buck
Food Plot Seed	Whitetail Institute	BioLogic	Domain Outdoor
Feeders	Moultrie	Boss Buck	Wildgame Innovations
3-D Target	Rinehart	Delta McKenzie	GlenDel
Foam Target	Delta McKenzie	Rinehart	Block
Bag Target	Morrell	Delta McKenzie	Rinehart
Knife	Outdoor Edge	Buck	Benchmade
Cooler	YETI	RTIC	Grizzly
E-BIKE	Rambo	QuietKat	Bakcou
Best New Product in 2025	Spypoint Flex Dark Cell Cam	Axcel Driver Bowsight	Darton Sequel ST2 Bow



CROSSBOW
GOLD: TenPoint
SILVER: Ravin
BRONZE: Excalibur



SADDLES
GOLD: Tethrd
SILVER: Latitude Outdoors
BRONZE: Hawk



CLOTHING MANUFACTURER
GOLD: KUIU
SILVER: Sitka
BRONZE: ScentLok



CELL TRAIL CAM
GOLD: Spypoint
SILVER: Tactacam
BRONZE: Moultrie

SCENT/LURE
GOLD: Wildlife Research Center
SILVER: Tink's
BRONZE: Code Blue



CLIMBING TREESTAND
GOLD: Summit
SILVER: Millennium
BRONZE: Hawk



RANGEFINDER
GOLD: Vortex
SILVER: Leupold
BRONZE: Bushnell



ODOR ELIMINATOR
GOLD: Dead Down Wind
SILVER: Wildlife Research Center
BRONZE: ScentLok



BINO & SPOTTER
GOLD: Vortex
SILVER: Leupold
BRONZE: Bushnell



GROUND BLIND
GOLD: Ameristep
SILVER: TideWe
BRONZE: Primos



BAG TARGET
GOLD: Morrell
SILVER: Delta McKenzie
BRONZE: Rinehart



BOOT
GOLD: LaCrosse
SILVER: Muck
BRONZE: Danner



PACK
GOLD: Badlands
SILVER: Alps OutdoorZ
BRONZE: Mystery Ranch

SUBMIT YOUR VOTES NOW ONLINE BY NOVEMBER 1, 2026

Bowhunting WORLD



VOTE ONLINE:
GRANDVIEWOUTDOORS.COM/READERS-CHOICE

Official Ballot

	BRAND	MODEL
COMPOUND BOW		
TRADITIONAL BOW		
CROSSBOW		
BOW CASE		
HUNTING RELEASE AID		
TARGET RELEASE AID		
ARROW REST		
ARROW		
FEATHER FLETCHING		
VANES		
QUIVER		
LIGHTED NOCK		
FIXED-BLADE BROADHEAD		
MECHANICAL BROADHEAD		
BOWSTRING		
PEEP SIGHT		
FIXED BOWSIGHT		
MOVEABLE BOWSIGHT		
STABILIZER		
BOW SILENCER		
CAMO PATTERN		
CLOTHING MANUFACTURER		
BOOTS		
SAFETY HARNESS		
PACK		
BINO & SPOTTER		
RANGEFINDER		

	BRAND	MODEL
GPS UNIT		
HUNTING APP		
TRAIL CAMERA		
CELLULAR TRAIL CAMERA		
HANG-ON TREESTAND		
CLIMBING TREESTAND		
LADDER/TRIPOD		
CLIMBING STICKS		
SADDLE		
GROUND BLIND		
DEER CALL		
ELK CALL		
TURKEY CALL		
WILD TURKEY DECOY		
DEER DECOY		
SCENT/LURE		
ODOR ELIMINATOR		
MINERAL/SUPPLEMENT		
FOOD PLOT SEED		
FEEDERS		
3-D TARGET		
FOAM TARGET		
BAG TARGET		
KNIFE		
COOLER		
E-Bike		
2026 BEST NEW PRODUCT		

SUBMIT YOUR VOTES NOW ONLINE BY NOVEMBER 1, 2026

HAVE A NEW BOW? THEN DON'T SLEEP ON SPRING

How to use spring hunts to jump-start your new bow relationship.

BY MARK KAYSER

Smacking foam with arrows flung from a new bow excites you for fall hunts ahead, but why waste spring? Many of you follow the release of new bows from late fall into the new year and have a budget ready to pair up with a new bow-friend. Six months or more may pass from these early marketing launches to fall hunting seasons. Instead of endlessly perforating your 3-D buck target, consider breaking up the monotonous bonding with a spring hunt.

DIY and affordable options abound for a test run with your new bow. Nothing tops the true connection you have with a bow than trials in the real world. From treestand tryouts to squished conditions in a ground blind and then add in weather, plus some backwoods' bumps, the testing excels beyond what a standard archery range can deliver. If your view includes only a foam target at the end of your shooting distance, consider one or more of these hunts to buddy up beyond the norm with your new bow.



Photo: iStock / Jens_Lambert_Photography

"New or veteran hunters alike should never take for granted the adrenaline rush delivered by a strutting, gobbling gobbler."



Photo: iStock / Jens_Lambert_Photography

TURKEY FOR THE ADRENALINE RUSH

New or veteran hunters alike should never take for granted the adrenaline rush delivered by a strutting, gobbling gobbler. For years I've advocated that wild turkeys deliver one of the best introductory hunts for young hunters, plus furnish ongoing buck fever hunts for seasoned bowhunters.



↓ *Bowhunting World* Editor Dave Maas with a recent spring gobbler taken on South Dakota Walk-In land.

You cannot go wrong with wild turkeys simply due to their success of populating nearly every niche of the nation. Currently 49 states — all but Alaska — offer turkey hunting seasons. Many of those licenses are available over the counter. That adds up to a hunt you can DIY or even seek out an affordable outfitted hunt. Turkey hunting outfitters abound with some of the best deals for a guided hunt of any game species.

With turkeys oftentimes found in your backyard, a spring hunt doesn't have to be laboriously planned. Sight in your new bow, purchase a license and begin watching the weather during hunting season. When you see a forecast with agreeable weather, launch your hunt.

Although the term "bird brain" may be tossed around to someone lacking intelligence, you will not say that to a pressured tom. Turkeys survive due to suspiciously questioning everything and changing behavior when things don't look right. They sport vision that is five times better than your own and obviously see colors due to the vividness of a tom's tail, plus changing head color during breeding sessions.

Sharp eyed, wild turkeys rarely miss any movement in their surroundings to test your stealthiness. Their hearing nearly matches their eyesight and research estimates it is four times better than your own. They'll hear calls from a long distance, plus catch you accidentally snapping a branch.

Hunting near home on a whim when the weather cooperates is possible due to long spring seasons. Many states offer seasons that extend nearly two months, and a handful have archery seasons that open before the general shotgun season, such as the popular turkey state of Kansas. And you may not be limited to just one turkey — consider Alabama with its one gobbler per day and four gobblers during the season. South Dakota offers an archery turkey license, plus you can research tribal hunting scattered across the state for additional hunting



↑ Shooting at targets is good, but spring hunting truly helps archers build confidence in their gear for upcoming fall pursuits.

opportunities.

What makes turkey hunting stand out as a true test of your new bow is the ability to hunt in a controlled or freelance setting. Scouting roost or loafing areas gives you the ability to stake a pop-up ground blind beforehand. Hunting from a blind offers comfort in inclement weather and a cloaked setting to draw. Add in the use of decoys and calls to create a studio production of a turkey soap opera, and the stage is set for a close shot. You need those close shots as turkey vitals are small. Close shots also boost confidence and that's the goal of getting in step with your new bow.

Maybe you live on the wild side and would rather stalk a wild turkey? Moving through the turkey woods, calling to locate a bird and then hastily setting up a decoy while you melt into the backdrop also spikes internal adrenaline. Regardless of how you wish to close the distance to your arrow comfort zone, add wild turkeys into your spring calendar. They provide an easy option to get to know a new bow.



↓ For years the author has used spring black bear hunts to help bond with a new compound.



← Black bears can grow to gaint size, but most of the ones killed by hunters weigh 150 to 300 pounds, meaning a typical deer bow setup works well for bears.

BLACK BEAR FOR THE SCARE

Have you completed your bucket list hunt for bears? It's an ideal hunt to knock off your list as you connect with your new bow. Although not as unpredictable as a grizzly bear, black bears are an apex predator and have been known to attack on odd occasions. Set those worries aside and plan a spring black bear hunt. The reasons abound why a spring black bear hunt makes sense.

First, black bear populations have been expanding from coast to coast in the United States with stable populations throughout Canada. Not only have hunting opportunities expanded due to expanding black bear populations, but the nuisance factor of too many bears grows with the population in many areas. Peruse the news and you will see many black bear stories about urban encounters, spring and fall, of bears leaving the woods to consider new homelands.

Black bear hunting strategies vary from state to state and province to province so do your research. My home

Photos: Mark Kayser

state of Wyoming allows baiting while next door in Idaho you can bait, plus use hounds in some areas. Just to the north sits Montana, which prohibits bait and hounds, leaving you strictly with the challenge of a spot-and-stalk hunt. And states with burgeoning black bear populations may not even hold a spring season. I recently hunted whitetails with a landowner from Vermont overwhelmed with black bear depredation with bears targeting their cornfields. Laws allowed them to kill the destructive bears but yet no spring season to add more control over an obviously thriving population.



↑ Most top-notch black bear outfitters boast nearly 100% shot opportunities at an adult bear.

I've been on baited plus spot-and-stalk hunts enjoying all. That said, I must give a slight nod to baited hunts. Areas such as Alberta or Saskatchewan, with high bear numbers, offer a circus of bear activity around a bait. You can often shop for the bear of your choosing, weed out sows with cubs, and are almost guaranteed a good broadside shot as a bear investigates the bait. Ground blind or treestand hunts give you the familiarity of a whitetail hunt with 20-yard shots being the norm.

Regardless of the hunting method you choose, do your research. Some areas may have unlimited licenses, but quotas, primarily with the taking of female bears, can quickly close a season. Talk with conservation officers in your top choices to see how quickly a quota may fill to help plan your spring hunt.

If you already have an uneasiness about black bear hunting, I'd suggest looking into an outfitted hunt. Like turkey hunts, black bear hunts don't have the high price tag of a species such as elk. You can easily book a black bear hunt for under $4,000 and sometimes less than $3,000. Many Canadian hunts include fishing with black bear hunting packages, and some areas in Alberta still offer two bears per hunter … been there and done that!

The reasons are many to consider black bear hunting as a spring adventure with your new bow. You get a rush on a game animal that equals the size of many of the species you will hunt later in the fall. And oh yeah, it could eat you, but doubtful!

VARMINTS GALORE

It's easy to overlook simple spring hunts that could challenge you in ways that do not break your budget, especially after doling out a considerable amount for a new bow. An outfitted hunt may not be in your future, but think small. Varmints inhabit every nook and cranny of North America. Some irritate you to the point of pest control while others offer a big enough target to launch an arrow from your new bow. You can target varmints close to home or plan a distant DIY trip to test your bow, test your camping gear and possibly even scout for a future big game hunt.

Are you having trouble conjuring up which varmints to target? Think "Little Critters on the Prairie." The irritating, yet comical antics of the black-tailed prairie dog immediately offers an archery challenge. These plentiful varmints irritate ranchers by gobbling grass for livestock





The author tuning in a new bow with spring prairie dog hunting.

and with their barking yip, provide entertainment while you stalk in close for a shot. Prairie dog colonies are found across the Great Plains and throughout Western basins. They thrive on many public lands including National Grasslands and Bureau of Land Management tracts. Do a bit of hiking from roads and you can easily find unpressured prairie dogs that may be joined by young of the year later in the spring. It's an ideal way to practice long shots, too. And to avoid losing arrows, consider a judo-style point that catches, not burrows, into brush and soft ground.

You don't live near a prairie dog, nor have time to travel to their ZIP code? No worries. In the East you can pursue Punxsutawney Phil's brethren in farm fields north and south. Farmers appreciate the removal of these diggers. Varmint hunters of the northern tier of America can seek out the Richardson's ground squirrel. Midwestern varmint hunters visit pastures to place crosshairs on the small thirteen-lined ground squirrel. Even California has a varmint problem with its abundant California ground squirrel.

All of these, including prairie dogs, offer vital zones measured in millimeters, but the whop of a judo or old broadhead stuns them with a hit almost anywhere. These critters will positively test your shooting ability.

Some of you may skip the rodents altogether and keep summer busy with hog hunts in states where the problem allows hunting year-round. Those varmints even offer a chance to feed your grill with choice cuts. (I can't say the same for a plump prairie dog.) Finally, even if you cannot plan a spring varmint hunt, remember that there are no seasons. Put your varmint hunt on hold until summer or the month of your choosing.

A varmint-sized species may not seem like much of a challenge, but when you combine long shots with their eagle eyesight, yes evolved from dodging winged raptors, you may find yourself in the stalk of a lifetime. I admit, some gophers may not require a ghillie suit, total camouflage and a crawling approach, but Punxsutawney Phil and his cousins have been known to run for the hills when they see a vertical shape approaching. My experience with pressured prairie dogs is the same. Put yourself in stealth mode and practice the stalk to get your mind in the hunting season mode.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Firearm and crossbow bonding has merit, but a vertical bow requires a tad more intimacy. Your familiarization with a new bow's feel, recoil and melding your own shooting form into the new platform takes hours of arrow flinging at the range. Break up those hours with a spring hunting break for you and your bow. BW

Prime Archery Divide Bows

My newest date for the woods with a year full of hunting ahead is the Prime Divide compound. Like its brethren, the Divide incorporates Prime's Center Grip riser. With the grip in the center of the bow, more mass is moved below the grip, improving stability and aiming accuracy.

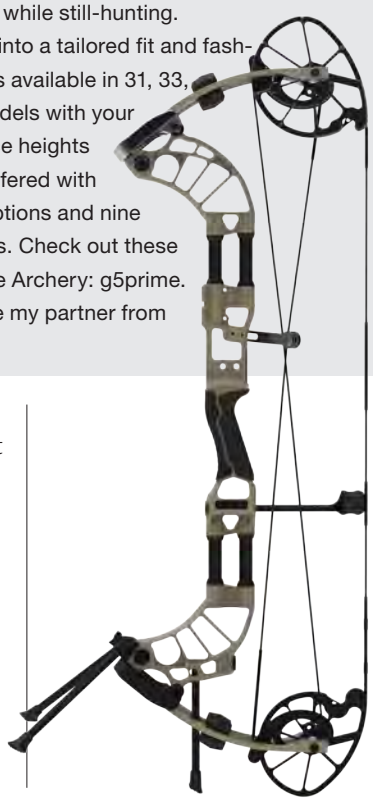
Prime's Divide also utilizes Advanced Structures Technology (AST) that brings lightweight carbon rods into the riser structure for a lighter, stiffer bow. Stiffness is increased by 47.5 percent while decreasing overall weight of the bow series by a half-pound. The Divide 33 I'm shooting weighs only 4.1 pounds (bare bow) making it ideal for whitetails and Western hunts alike.

Like its predecessors, the Divide also includes the NANO Technology grip. It's ergonomic and ultra warm due to Aerogel technology created by NASA to protect our astronauts from the extreme cold of space.

Prime's Core Cam System is all about adjustability and allows for draw length specific mods for efficiency at every length. That also adds up to a smooth draw every time and let-off adjustability from 83 to 65 percent.

The Divide offers no hassle accessory mounting with its popularly accepted picatinny sight mount system. New for 2026 is the Trilite TM Bow Stand Mount. It's available in either a two or three leg option making bow readiness a breeze in ground blinds or while still-hunting.

Finally, for those of you into a tailored fit and fashion, read this: The Divide is available in 31, 33, 35 and 37 axle-to-axle models with your choice of 6- or 7-inch brace heights at each length. Plus, it's offered with nine different limb color options and nine different riser color options. Check out these reasons and more at Prime Archery: g5prime.com . The Divide 33 will be my partner from this spring through fall.



6 TIPS FOR PURCHASING YOUR FIRST COMPOUND BOW

As a newcomer selecting a first compound bow, spending a fortune isn't necessary, and the best bet is to try multiple models through a pro shop to determine which setup is right for you.



BY KYLE S. LIPKE

Often, people who are looking to get their first compound bow ask me, “What bow should I buy.” Well, that’s a broad question that doesn’t have a single, simple answer. The question is akin to asking who you should date, where you should go to college, or what truck you should buy. It depends on a lot of different factors, as well as what you are personally looking for. Additionally, there is not a perfect answer for each person looking to begin their journey with a compound bow.



Rather than conforming to one specific bow brand or model, a new archer is better off choosing a bow based on their wants and needs, as well as a bow's fit and feel. You want to start your archery journey off the right way, regardless of whether you keep the new bow for only a year or two or a decade.

This article details my six top tips to consider when selecting your first compound bow. Following these suggestions will help ensure that your first experience with a compound is a pleasant one, rather than one filled with difficulties and frustrations.

1 CONSIDER YOUR GOALS

Determining why you want a compound bow and what your goals are is a good place to start before you ever begin looking at different models. Do you want to start off target shooting just to get your feet wet, or do you want to also start bowhunting? Are you planning to bowhunt whitetails primarily from a treestand, or elk and other big game in the mountains of the West?

Often, the answer is some combination thereof but knowing specifically what you are hoping for will narrow down your search. If your goal is to just learn the process of shooting a bow and begin 3-D shoots at your local archery club, your choices may be different than if you are planning your first big game hunt. Once you have determined what you are planning to accomplish, you can begin looking at different bow options.

2 SET A BUDGET

The next step in the bow buying process is deciding your budget. Before you start your shopping spree, think about how much you want to spend because these days it's not unheard of to spend $2,000 or $3,000 on a fully rigged top-of-the-line compound setup. Don't fret though because you don't need to spend thousands to get into the game of archery. In fact, there are plenty of brand-new setups available on the market today ranging from $400 to $900.

Setting a budget that is realistic and obtainable will set the bar for your expectations when going into the process of finding your first bow setup. Obviously, knowing how much you are willing to spend will weed out some bows right off the bat. When setting a budget, keep in mind that you will need to purchase more than just the bow itself. You'll also need multiple accessories, which will quickly increase your total at the checkout counter.

These accessories, at a minimum, will include a bowsight, arrow rest, stabilizer, quiver, mechanical release and arrows. While it may be your preference to hand select each accessory, a great option for starting out is one of the many ready-to-shoot bow packages available on the market. These bows come fully loaded with all the necessary accessories to get you started except for arrows and a release aid, which will need to be purchased separately. These setups provide a great way to get started



← When calculating your new bow budget, keep in mind that in addition to the bow itself, you'll have to factor in the price of an arrow rest, bowsight, stabilizer, mechanical release and arrows.

The Proof Is in the Pudding



You don't need high-dollar equipment to be a successful bowhunter. A recent example: On a New Mexico mule deer hunt, my sister Megan (above) slipped in on a bedded mature buck. After a long time of waiting for him to stand, she decided to take the broadside bedded shot. At 50 yards, a distance she had practiced over and over again, she settled her pin and released a perfect arrow, which passed completely through the buck's chest.

In total, her entry-level bow setup cost less than $600, which goes to show that dollar signs and brand labels aren't what lead to bowhunting success. Time and practice developing proficiency behind a well-tuned bow with a sharp broadhead is what results in notched archery tags.

4 First-Bow Picks for 2026

The following are several bows on the market for 2026 that are great options for first-time bow purchases. Adhering to my advice, don't simply go with one of these four bows because I listed them here. Again, go shoot several models and find what works best for you. This simply provides a springboard for you to begin the search for your first compound bow.

DIAMOND ARCHERY INFINITE EDGE PRO LEGACY
Draw Weight: 5-65 pounds (adjustable)
Draw Length: 13-31 inches (adjustable)
Bare Bow Weight: 3.3 pounds
Axel-to-Axel Length: 31 inches
Brace Height: 7 inches
Letoff: 80%
Fully Loaded: Yes
MSRP: $379

BEAR LEGIT MAXX
Draw Weight: 10-70 pounds (adjustable)
Draw Length: 14-30 inches (adjustable)
Bare Bow Weight: 3.8 pounds
Axel-to-Axel Length: 31 inches
Brace Height: 6.25 inches
Letoff: 75%
Fully Loaded: Yes
MSRP: $499

MISSION RANGE
Draw Weight: 30-50, 50-70 pounds
Draw Length: 22-30 inches (adjustable)
Bare Bow Weight: 4.06 pounds
Axel-to-Axel Length: 31 inches
Brace Height: 7 inches
Letoff: 80%
Fully Loaded: No
MSRP: $699

ELITE TERRAIN
Draw Weight: 45-60, 55-70 pounds
Draw Length: 25.5-31.5 inches (adjustable)
Bare Bow Weight: 3.9 pounds
Axel-to-Axel Length: 32.5 inches
Brace Height: 7 inches
Letoff: 85%
Fully Loaded: No
MSRP: $749

in archery, for both target shooting and bowhunting alike. As you develop your shooting process and skills, you'll learn what you like and dislike, and these accessories can be changed/upgraded as you progress.

3 YOU DON'T NEED THE VERY BEST

As a rule of thumb with most new pursuits, beginners shouldn't — or rather, don't need to — start out with the best of the best. Just like with a baseball glove, a set of skis, or a bolt-action rifle, it takes time to discover the intricacies of basic equipment versus the high dollar stuff. While you are learning, you will not know the nuances of a top tier bow vs. an entry level bow. So, why spend thousands of dollars on a new setup when you're just starting out?

You're better off to start with an entry or mid-level bow and then upgrade as you learn. This will help you get into the sport at a reasonable cost while also making sure you're committed to such an investment before you dive all in. Just like with any of your archery accessories, you can always upgrade your bow in the future.

4 SHOOT MULTIPLE MODELS

The best way to try out different models is to go into your local pro shop where professional



↑ Visit a pro shop to ensure you're properly fitted for a new compound. You won't shoot well if the draw length is too short or long.

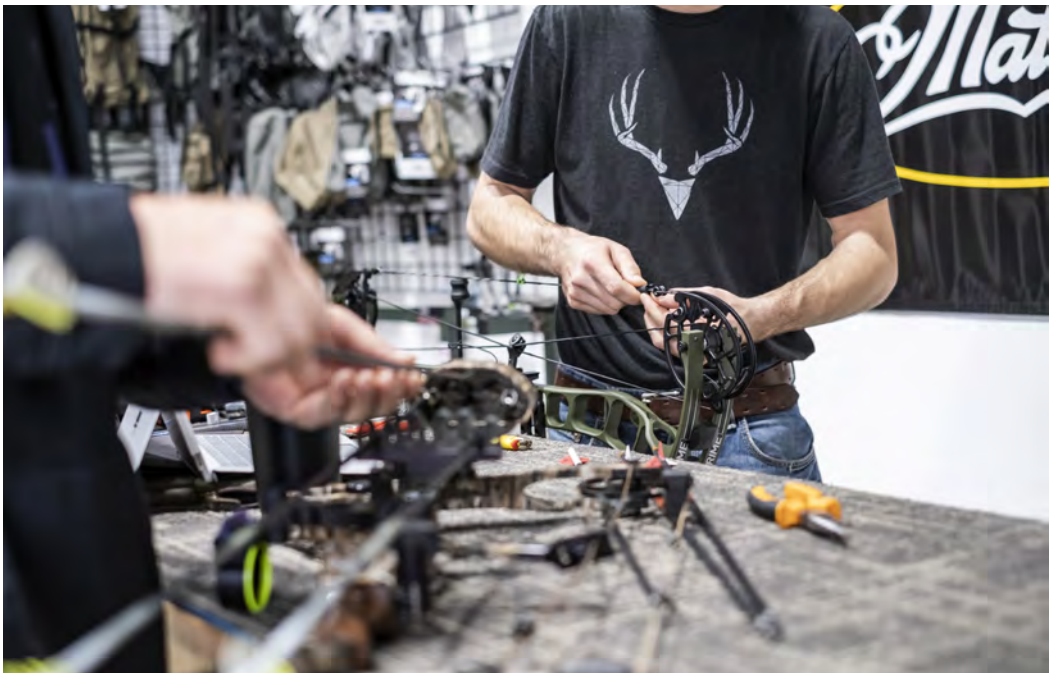
bow dealers can assist you in testing out numerous makes and models of compounds. Trained bow technicians will make sure the draw length is fitted correctly and you're not over bowed, meaning you are not pulling too much weight. Then, you'll be able to try as many setups as you'd like that are within your budget.

I recommend putting at least three or four different models to the test. This will allow you to compare draw cycle, bow balance, weight, grip and overall feel. Doing so will allow you to narrow down a bow that you are happy with. And working with a pro shop will ensure you are properly set up while also getting all your questions answered about your various options.

5 GO WITH WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

Even when you're starting out, it is tempting to want to be like "the cool kids" and shoot what your family and friends are shooting. However, that may not be what is best for you. What model feels good to your buddy may not feel good to you. A bow or accessory that a certain bowhunting influencer recommends, you may not shoot well. It is important to make your bow and accessory selections because they work for you, not because everyone else is telling you that's what you should use.

Following this, don't limit yourself to specific brands or models. This is another reason why I recommend testing out multiple bows and accessories to determine what fits you well and feels good. Base your decision on what your shooting experience was and what you like. Ignore any naysayers who tell you otherwise.

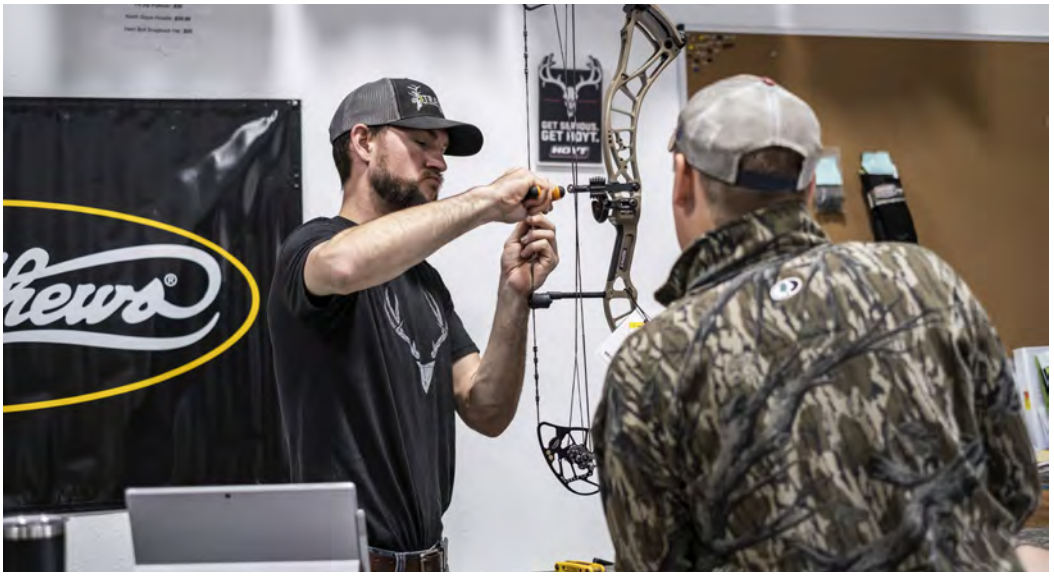


6 BE CAREFUL WITH USED BOWS

A question that often comes up with new compound buyers is, "What about a used bow?" It seems like a good way to save money when just getting started in archery.

When I was in high school, I had the same idea. I didn't have much money, and I was saving up for a particular new setup that I had my eye on for a while. I had been to my local pro shop multiple times, lusting over the new bows hanging on the rack. I talked to multiple bow techs about the pros and cons of the setup and even tested it out multiple times. After determining that it was the one I wanted, I continued pinching my pennies. When I finally scraped enough cash together to make the purchase of the new bow, I changed my mind and ended up buying a used model off the internet in an effort to spare some of those hard-

↑ The relationship you start with a local pro shop will be vitally important on your path to becoming a successful archer and bowhunter.







↑ One benefit to purchasing a used compound bow is you're paying pennies on the dollar for all of the included accessories.

earned dollars. However, instead of saving some extra cash to spend on better accessories, I ended up spending it on new cams, strings and cables. Because I hadn't seen the used bow in person, I didn't know these parts of the bow were completely shot and needed to be replaced. I would have been better off buying a brand-new model from the dealer. Dang!

Who owned the bow and how did they treat it? Was it abused in the woods? Was it ever dry-fired? Does it have the correct modules for your draw length? Are you going to have to spend more money to replace parts? If you buy a used bow on Facebook Marketplace from a private party, you really have no way of knowing the answers to these questions.

You should also factor in the time given to your local bow shop, asking them questions, and testing out their line of new bows. If you're going to be using their services anyway, the courteous thing to do is to also support their business by purchasing a bow from them.

The minimal money you may save by buying a used model is likely not worth the headaches that can come with used bows, especially if you don't know the owner and how they treated the bow. If you're making your first bow purchase, I highly suggest purchasing a new compound at your local pro shop and having their technicians set it up properly. Your overall experience will be better in the end.

If you've decided a used compound is the way to go, then be smart and buy one from your local pro shop. They are the experts and know whether a used bow is in good shape or a lemon. Not all pro shops deal in used bows but many do.

FINAL THOUGHTS

When it comes to purchasing your first compound bow, you don't need to spend thousands of dollars. Start by determining what your goals are, as well as a budget. Then take some time to try out a handful of models at an archery pro shop. Make sure to test several setups side by side that are properly fitted to you before making a final decision. Lastly, if you've been on the fence about getting a compound, don't delay any longer. You don't have to have the best setup to get started. Just pick something and start shooting.

Archery is a constant game of learning. Things will change as you go. Enjoy the process as you develop your skills. The sooner you start, the more you will learn. And I believe you will be glad you did. BW



4 Ways To Whitetail Adventure

Tired of hunting the same old haunts but still need to feed your whitetail addiction? Here's a look at four very special hunts ready to whet your appetite for adventure.

BY MARK MELOTIK

One of the neat things about bowhunting for whitetails? The challenge to outwit our most popular big game animal never seems to grow old. Conversely, you can't say the same about some of our hunting areas. Sudden land sales, leases, logging operations, tree-damaging winds and tornadoes, or maybe a sudden influx of pressure on lands we've hunted for years can leave us frustrated and reeling — and looking for greener pastures.

Then, too, maybe you are lucky enough to tag out early in your home state and find yourself with vacation days left to burn. Or maybe you simply have a taste for adventure. If you could fit it in, who would argue against another week of whitetail hunting in their fall? Whatever your situation, here are four fun whitetail bowhunts you might want to consider.


Old Town

BOUNDARY WATERS CANOE AREA WILDERNESS (BWCAW) — MINNESOTA

Experiencing a top-notch bowhunt in Minnesota's BWCAW is all about timing. A severe winter can really wreak havoc on the deer population in this far-northern area that borders Canada, but the news for 2026 is promising indeed. The area's mild winters of '23-24 and '24-25 got the deer-recovery ball rolling, and the early word on this past winter is that things weren't too severe. Color me excited.

Like its name suggests, access into this expansive 1.1-million acre wilderness within the Superior National Forest is by foot or paddle-powered boat only, virtually guaranteeing solitude and a true wilderness experience for those up for the challenge. And likely, it will be just that. This hunt can really test both you and your gear choices. You might see more wolves, moose and martens than deer, but very likely, no other bowhunters.

Gear-wise you must be ready to hunt in most every weather condition including rain and snow, while also packing a good tent, and your choice of a lightweight portable treestand or saddle system. I'd also pack some netting for a makeshift ground blind. Don't forget food (freeze-dried wins for convenience), a stove, water filter, and zero-degree-rated (or lower) sleeping bag. A compact cot also helps ensure a good night's rest.

Two of my best BWCAW hunts occurred in late October/early November. During the first, I found a promising rub-marked deer trail across the lake from where I was camped, and one foggy pin-drop morning I rattled in a beauty northwoods 5x5 to point-blank range. After a brief standoff, it appeared the buck had busted me up in my portable stand; I pulled my recurve to full draw as the buck walked slowly away, behind a good-sized pine. As the buck emerged, I released; the shot felt true, but a deflection helped that rutty monarch live on.

Two years later, I paddled back to the same area with a like-minded buddy with the goal of bowhunting just before and during the first weekend of the Minnesota firearms season, which hits the first weekend in November. During the first day, while setting a treestand along the wooded edge of a large low-grass swamp, I froze. A large, mature 5x4 had suddenly appeared in the swamp in front of me, and I tried to look small. No dice. In the next instant we locked eyes; the jig was up. Awestruck, I watched as that brute of a buck, out cruising for does, bolted directly away from me — his heavy, tall rack bobbing and swaying with every long bound.

Later that same day, I listened as my longbow-shooting camp mate detailed how he'd narrowly missed a young buck from a natural ground blind he'd built from downed branches. That buck was also out cruising for does on that crisp morn. To my mind there isn't a better place to be when the local bucks are on the prowl.



↑ In the BWCAW you'll be chasing wilderness whitetails that see virtually no hunting pressure aside from wolves.

Another cool thing about the BWCAW is that its permit system sets up nicely for hunters. I feel the most prepared for this unique deer hunt during the years when I also take time in April for boots-on-the-ground scouting of a promising area. In the past, I've been clued-in to spots via e-scouting with my HuntStand app, as well as





"Awestruck, I watched as that brute of a buck, out cruising for does, bolted directly away from me — his heavy tall rack bobbing and swaying with every long bound."

advice from a friend.

From October 1 to April 30, BWCAW permits are free, self-issued, and do not require advance reservations. During this time period, visitors are merely required to fill out a self-issued permit (available at entry point kiosks or Forest Service offices) for all overnight trips. That's in stark contrast to the heavily sought-after quota permits required for entry from May 1 to Sept. 30, which must be purchased online beginning in late January. Contact: fs.usda.gov/r09/superior/recreation/boundary-waters-canoe-area-wilderness

Trip tip: If you don't own a state-of-the-art ultralight Kevlar or carbon-fiber canoe designed for easy portaging, know that you can rent one (and any other specialized camping gear) at very reasonable week-long rates from one of the many local outfitters in nearby Ely, Minnesota.

REFORM CONSERVATION AREA — MISSOURI

Fans of public access bowhunting lands know one of the constants in that game is change, and central Missouri's Reform Conservation Area is a prime example. A good part of this unique chunk of land in Callaway County that holds the Callaway Nuclear Power Plant, has been leased and managed as a bowhunting-only area by the Missouri Department of Conservation since way back in 1978. Yes, we're talking a managed bowhunting-only property for 48 consecutive years!

Historically, and maybe as you might guess, the 7,200-acre public bowhunting-only tract was extremely popular for its reputation for churning out trophy bucks — one of the best hunting areas in one of the heaviest deer harvest counties in the state. Now the unfortunate news: As of July 2025, the area is now more than 4,000 acres smaller, due to the Power Plant owner deciding to reclaim the northern portion of the state's lease. The silver lining for adventurous bowhunters moving forward? There are still 2,900 acres of public bowhunting-only land still left to roam.

"The biggest thing is, this area still has the potential to grow big bucks," said Jeff Demand, wildlife biologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation. An avid bowhunter himself, Demand in February told me he has managed the area for the last 20 years and has also hunted it, taking a fine 135-inch buck there in 2011.

Demand says the recent land reduction has greatly changed the area, removing virtually all of the more-open habitat to the north that included some MDC-managed crop fields and edges, and larger overgrown fields.

"The portion we have now is all forested, it's a typical oak/hickory forest. We've got rolling hills, and deep hollers; it's close to the Missouri river bluff hills. There



are now just a few open fields, we probably have just 150 total acres of smaller fields scattered on the property."

Demand said the area was inundated with hunters last fall but guessed that was likely because many — despite the circulation of several press releases — had not heard about the new boundaries. Currently there are five different marked parking lots surrounding the perimeter of the property, allowing good access. Maybe the best news for bowhunters in 2026 is nothing has yet been done with the adjacent, recently closed areas.

"Right now [the owners] have not begun any construction there, it's idle, so it's almost like a refuge right now," Demand said in February. "But the current 2,900 acres certainly offers quality hunting. The size class of whitetail is certainly there, and if timber hunting is your style, you'll be fine."

Demand said that most bowhunters hunting the property, which does not allow any camping, typically stay in the neighboring communities of Fulton and Kingdom City. For more info go to mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/places/reform-conservation-area

LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES NATIONAL RECREATION AREA — TENNESSEE/KENTUCKY

Few things get traveling bowhunters as excited as the

promise of hunting mature whitetails. A prime example? The huge chunk of public land sandwiched between Kentucky and Tennessee known as the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area (LBL).

This vast area encompasses 170,000 acres of rich soil and prime whitetail habitat; the tract is actually a long narrow peninsula of land surrounded by Kentucky Lake to the west, and Lake Barkley to the east. Two entry points allow access from Tennessee to the south, while three roads allow access from Kentucky to the north.



↑ A Forest Service law enforcement officer holds a 14-point deer mount which was recently seized from a hunter who poached it within Land Between the Lakes.

In addition to local hunters, the area annually attracts bowhunters from all over, according to longtime U.S. Forest Service staff officer Jamey Thweat, who has worked in various capacities at LBL for the past 24 years, and in July 2025 was appointed to head up its land and game management duties.

"We see a lot of hunters from Georgia, Florida and Alabama, as well as North and South Carolina. The attraction is the quality of deer; the antler size, good age classes. We take some pretty nice bucks here; a Boone and Crockett-class deer or two comes off here every year."

As testament to that, federal officials in February 2026 posted on the LBL website that after an investigation, they'd arrested the poacher of an LBL buck scoring a whopping 187 inches.

"I would say if you put in your time, it's possible to see a buck scoring in that 130- to 150-inch range, and they're spread out throughout the property," Thweat said.

The area is not without its challenges. Thweat said an exploding feral hog population a few years ago began deterring local farmers from participating in a special-use permit within LBL, thereby reducing the amount of ag fields within its boundaries. Historically, Thweat said, about 2,600 acres have been planted in beans and corn, a total that had dwindled greatly in recent years. And maybe because of that, recent hunter feedback has not been positive. But some changes that began in 2025 should turn things around quickly.



↑ The BWCAW offers a huge network of established camp sites; be sure to pack lightweight, specialized tents and other dependable camp gear. Rentals are also available locally.

"My goal is to make this a destination again," Thweat said. "Hunter feedback has not been great the last few years, we're aware of that, and we're doing lots of habitat improvement to help change that."

Thweat said recent trapping and aerial gunnery efforts to reduce the hog population have been "quite successful." In addition, Thweat said LBL ag lands in 2025 grew to 1,000 acres, with 1,500 acres planned in 2026. More ag expansion is planned.

Also, the LBL has partnered with the National Deer Association and National Wild Turkey Federation to help improve the local habitat. Some ongoing projects include reclaiming overgrown fields and removing stands of non-native, invasive Loblolly pine.

"The Loblally pines out-compete the local oaks and hickory that are beneficial to wildlife," Thweat said, explaining that the area offers plenty



→ Saddle systems and ultra-compact hang-on stands are ideal for hunting the BWCAW; packing some camo mesh for ground blinds is another option.



"We learned that the buck — a big-bodied mature non-typical — was arrowed on one of the nearby Apostle Islands. I was instantly hooked by the possibilities for a unique adventure there."

of food for its deer herd. "Last fall, our mast crop was ridiculous. We've got lots of good white oaks, lots of acorns, which could be why people are not seeing a lot of deer; they don't really have to move a lot."

As far as where the best hunting is, Thweat said the LBL deer population is generally heavier on the southern end near Tennessee, while the larger-bodied deer are found in the northern section near Kentucky.

The area sets up nicely for nonresident hunters with its 450 miles of interior roads, with numerous campgrounds offering a whopping 4,000 campsites. In addition, a backcountry permit ($25) allows you to simply camp off the side of the road; vehicles cannot travel more than a car length off the road.

Nonresident bowhunters must buy and use their archery license from either Kentucky or Tennessee, with an additional $25 LBL Hunter Use permit required. Thweat said the LBL hunt season structures generally follow the two neighboring states, but all hunters are urged to check the LBL website in June, for the official upcoming dates. For more info go to landbetweenthelakes.us/outdoors-recreation/hunting-fishing/

APOSTLE ISLANDS NATIONAL LAKESHORE — WISCONSIN

This hunt leapt onto my radar several years ago, while bowhunting with a few buddies in far northern Wisconsin. I'd just tagged out with a nice bigwoods 8-point during the peak of the Badger State rut, and a few of us were in the yard of our remote rental cabin when a guy rolled up with a beauty buck in his truck bed. Turns out the lucky bowhunter knew the owner of our rental who lived next door; he'd stopped to share his own recent success. We learned that the buck — a big-bodied mature non-typical — was arrowed on one of the nearby Apostle Islands. During our discussion, I was instantly hooked by the possibilities for a unique adventure there.

And a unique hunt it is. A total of 21 Islands comprise the scenic Apostle Islands National Lakeshore just off the northern tip of Wisconsin in Lake Superior. In addition, the park includes a strip of land along Wisconsin's northernmost coastline, but the real draw here are the islands. Several hold deer and black bears, and a whole host of



smaller mammals including pine marten, fisher, fox and occasionally wolves. Only a few of them are ideally suitable for deer hunting; according to the park's website (nps.gov/apis/index.htm) the three islands with the largest deer populations are Basswood, Oak and Stockton. So these are likely your best options.

A hunt on the islands starts with obtaining a current Wisconsin deer archery license; you'll need that number to apply for a free park access permit and two harvest authorization tags — one buck and one doe. Campsite reservations are also required ($15/night, 1-7 people). For management purposes, the Apostle Islands prefers bowhunters to shoot a doe before a buck, so if the first deer you see is a buck you can shoot it — but you are required to use your regular statewide deer tag. Then,

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if you continue hunting, your next deer must be a doe on your Apostle Islands doe tag, which would then authorize you to fill your remaining Apostle Islands buck tag. And if you bag a doe first, you can still fill your two buck tags.

Now for a reality check: Before you get too excited about returning from your Apostle Islands adventure packing two bucks and a doe, there is a friendly hunter warning on the Apostle Islands website. It states that the deer densities on the islands are "much lower than the mainland deer population" and that the likelihood of a single hunter bagging two bucks and a doe is "extremely low." My own thoughts? Bowhunting success like that over a week-long hunt would be a long shot most anywhere, and the right bowhunters for this hunt are those who value a truly unique experience over filling a freezer. But hey, things just might tip your way.

Maybe one of the biggest challenges for bowhunters is the unique Apostle Islands hunt season structure. Archery deer season runs mid-September to September 30, then reopens from November 1 to the first weekend in January. The entire month of October is relegated to muzzleloader hunting only — no bowhunting is allowed.

One more challenge is accessing the islands. One option is using your own Great Lakes-capable watercraft (Lake Superior in fall is no picnic). Another, easier and likely safer option is hiring one of several local shuttle services to haul you and your gear to and from your island of choice.

I've been a fan of bowhunting remote stretches of the northcountry from a very young age, and for me, an Apostle Islands hunt would take that experience to the next level. Much like Minnesota's BWCAW, the Apostle Islands is a somewhat gear-centric adventure requiring most all of what you'd typically bring on that similar water-access hunt. Make a list, then check it often. Because once that drop-off boat leaves, it'll be just you, your gear, and a remote, pristine island holding some high-quality northcountry whitetails. For some of us, that's a little slice of bowhunting heaven. BW

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COMPOUND BOWS

A new year, a bevy of new compound bows that redefine performance for today's bowhunters.

BY GORDY KRAHN

Lightweight, maneuverable and with lightning speed, today's compound bows come packed with fantastic features that make serious bowhunters weak in the knees. Engineered with cutting-edge materials and refined cam systems, these bows deliver smoother draws, faster arrow speeds and rock-solid stability when it matters most.

Every detail — from balanced ergonomics to ultra-quiet performance — is designed to support controlled, lethal shots and consistent accuracy across the gamut of real-world hunting conditions. The newest generation of compound hunting bows marks a new standard in precision, efficiency and confidence in the field.

There are several things to consider when purchasing a new bow — one that's a custom fit for your body, shooting style and hunting applications — so it's uber important to do your homework before heading to the local proshop.

Draw length and weight adjustment: These are critical for proper fit and feel, and modern bows allow customization to match your body and strength. There's no one-size-fits-all here.

Axle-to-axle length: Short bows, many with sub 30-inch axle-to-axle length, are perfect for hunting from tight places such as treestands and ground blinds. Longer models can offer smoother draw cycles and are favored by hunters who hunt the wide open spaces of the West.

Let-off percentage: Higher let-off means the archer holds less weight at full draw, which can be critical when waiting for a buck or bull to step into the shooting lane.

Ready-to-hunt packages: Some bows come equipped with sights, rests, quivers and arrows included. If not, your local archery pro is well-versed on these important items. Having a pro staffer properly set up your bow at the time of purchases will pay huge dividends.

If you've been holding on to "Old Faithful" for several years, or even decades, it's definitely time for an upgrade, and be sure you get outfitted properly by visiting your local archery proshop. Here are eight new compound bows that are sure to put you on the path to better shooting — and better hunting.



BEAR ARCHERY LEGIT MAXX RTH+

With a draw weight range of 10 to 70 pounds and an adjustable draw length spanning from 14 to 30 inches, the Bear Legit Maxx RTH+ caters to any archer. Its 75 percent let-off ensures smooth and effortless shooting, while the IMS rest and Picatinny sight mounting locations offer unparalleled customization options. An improved dual cam system delivers a flawless draw cycle, ensuring consistency shot after shot. The Bear Legit Maxx features a 30-inch axle-to-axle length and a generous 6.25-inch brace height, providing a solid platform for superior accuracy. This bow features the Trophy Ridge Ready-to-Hunt package, with an IMS V-Biscuit rest, Picatinny four-pin sight, five-arrow quiver, stabilizer, peep sight and wrist sling. MSRP: $599.99; **beararchery.com**



APA ARCHERY SUMMIT

APA Archery has ascended to new heights with its all-new Summit compound bow. Built on the company's new Pro Lite riser, this bow is packed with the highest level of innovation, including APA's Pro-Connect sling, Pro-Connect stabilizer and all-new Shift Tune technology, which allows archers to tune their bows effortlessly with no tools required. Weighing in at only 3.4 pounds, and producing velocities up to 340 fps IBO, with a forgiving 7.375-inch brace height, the Summit is built for maneuverability and function. Other standout features include a compact 28-inch axle-to-axle platform, draw weights of 40, 50, 60 and 70 pounds, draw length range from 25.5 to 30.5 inches, and a let-off of up to 80 percent. MSRP: Starting at $1,230; **apaarchery.com**

BOWTECH ALLIANCE/ ALLIANCE 33

The Alliance Series of bows represents Bowtech's most intuitive and finely balanced system to date, built to deliver unwavering stability, DIY accuracy and a custom-fit feel. The all-new Alliance and Alliance 33 (30.5 and 33 inches axle-to-axle respectively), is a next-generation platform engineered for hunters who demand complete confidence in every moment. Fast, smooth, accurate, lightweight, balanced and silent, every inch is crafted so hunters can trust their bow completely, no matter the game, or pressure of the moment. Both models share a reimagined lightweight aluminum frame and refined ergonomics. The Alliance 30.5 weighs 4.09 pounds and offers compact maneuverability ideal for tight quarters. The Alliance 33 weighs 4.25 pounds and delivers long-range stability for open country encounters and precision-focused shot execution. MSRP: $1,499; **bowtecharchery.com**



DIAMOND ARCHERY INFINITE EDGE PRO

Diamond Archery has announced the return of a true industry icon with the Infinite Edge Pro Legacy Edition. With more than 1 million bows sold from the Edge Series, the Infinite Edge Pro remains one of the most trusted bows in modern archery history. The Legacy Edition maintains the core DNA that made the original a best-seller: an ultra-adaptable draw length range from 13 to 31 inches, a generous 60 pounds of draw weight adjustment and a smooth-drawing cam system with a solid back wall, making it ideal for youths, beginners, recreational shooters and hunters alike. The Infinite Edge Pro Legacy Edition is available in limited quantities at authorized Diamond Archery retailers and online while supplies last. MSRP: $379; **diamondarchery.com**



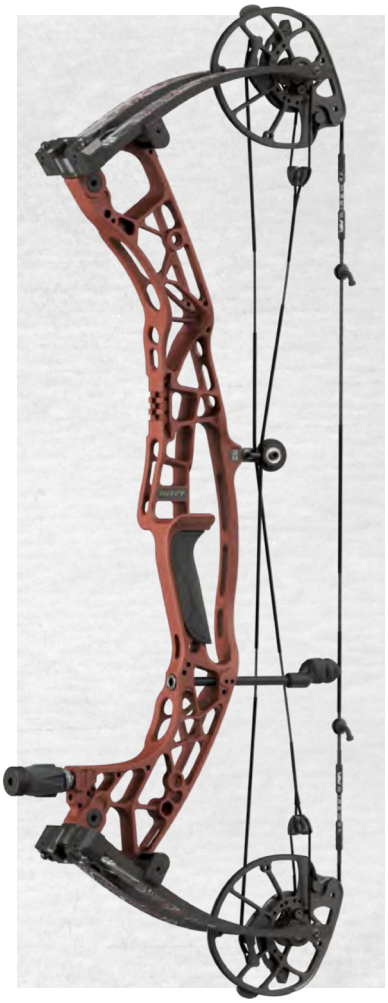
ELITE ARCHERY VAROS

Built for hunters who demand uncompromising performance, the Elite Varos blends speed, control and confidence in a refined, purpose-driven platform. Anchored by Elite's SP2 Cam System, VX Mods and all-new Micro Splitters, the 4.75-pound Varos delivers intuitive tunability, precision and comfort in every shot. At 32 inches axle-to-axle and reaching IBO speeds up to 338 fps, it's compact enough for tight spaces yet powerful enough for any hunt. With S.E.T. technology, a forgiving 6.625-inch brace height, draw length range from 25.5 to 31 inches and up to 90 percent let-off, the Varos was engineered for smooth performance and reliability when it matters most. Right-hand and left-hand models are available. MSRP: $1,299.99; **elitearchery.com**



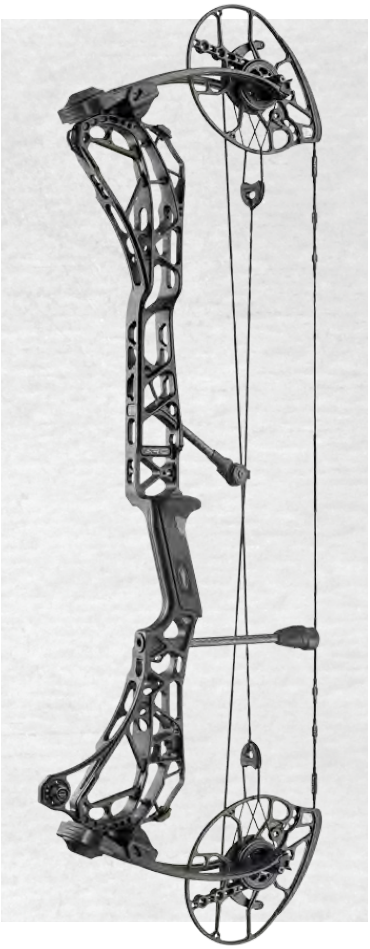
HOYT ALPHA AX-3

The third generation of Alpha X compound bows from Hoyt is the best yet, thanks to the XTS Tuning System, which addresses both left/right and high/low tuning issues, providing a complete tuning solution that can be used without a bow press. The Alpha AX-3 provides rock-solid aiming, boasts a silky-smooth draw cycle, is equipped with the In-Line Accessory System attachments and balances perfectly in hand. It's available in four model options: AX-3 29 and AX-3 33 (340 fps/ATA, 6.375-inch brace height); AX-3 33 LD (355 fps/ATA, 7.625-inch brace height) and AX-3 SD (310 fps/ATA, 6-inch brace height). MSRP: $1,499/AX-3 29 and AX-3 SD; $1,599/AX-3 33 and AX-3 33 LD; **hoyt.com**



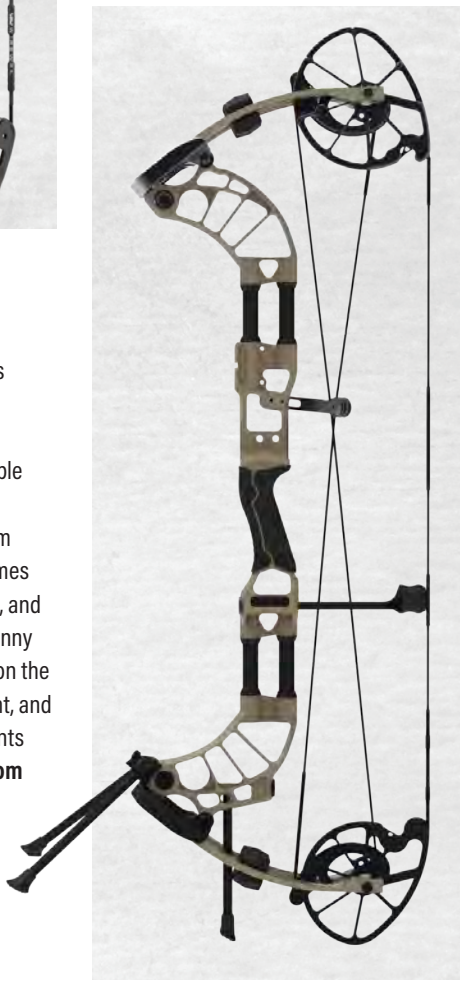
MATHEWS ARC 30/34

The new-for-2026 Mathews ARC 30 and ARC 34 flagship compound bows combine enhanced stability, efficiency and versatility in a lightweight, high-powered platform. Every system within the ARC platform has been scrutinized to retain velocity across hunting setups, including the company's most advanced riser design to date, a new SWX-2 cam with perimeter weight technology, and a redesigned limb cup and limb geometry. The ARC 30 has an IBO rating of up to 348 fps and a brace height of 6 inches. The ARC 34 has an IBO rating of up to 343 fps and a brace height of 6.5 inches. Both have draw weights of 55, 60, 65, 70, 75 and 80 pounds. MSRP: ARC 30/$1,459; ARC 34/1,569; **mathewsinc.com** BW



PRIME ARCHERY DIVIDE

The all-new 2026 Prime Divide compound bow series utilizes Prime's Center Grip riser, for a bow that is strong, stiff and extremely accurate — available in 31-, 33-, 35- and 37-inch axle-to-axle models, with 6- and 7-inch brace heights available for each length. The Prime Divide uses Advanced Structures technology (AST) for stiff, consistent risers, and the Core Cam System allows for draw length specific mods. The Divide comes with an adjustable stop from 83 percent down to 65 percent, and optional performance mods are available. The popular Picatinny sight mount that Prime introduced in 2024 comes standard on the Divide, which allows for easy mounting of a favorite bowsight, and Prime's integrated SherpaLite Quiver System leaves no mounts when removing the quiver. MSRP: $1,699-$1,799; **g5prime.com**



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INTERNATIONAL BOWHUNTING ORGANIZATION **IN•TUNE** INTERNATIONAL BOWHUNTING ORGANIZATION

BOWTECH ALLIANCE

Expect tunable precision, vast customization, pinpoint accuracy and workhorse dependability.

BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

Before buying a big-ticket item, you must understand its features. That goes for electronics, automobiles, and yes, compound bows. How do the features work, and how do they enhance your experience?

In today's advanced state of compound bows, keeping up with all of the features, how they work, and the benefits they deliver isn't easy, especially when visiting archery shops to check out bow brands. Thankfully, Bowtech simplifies this for consumers and dealers. On its website, each bow model is anatomically dissected by its features. Hover the cursor over a feature, and a window appears with the feature's name and a description of what it does. There are also video components for each bow and some of the features to help further expand your knowledge of the bow and its workings. It also helps that every Bowtech feature has a definitive purpose — no marketing fluff here, just benefits to the end-user.

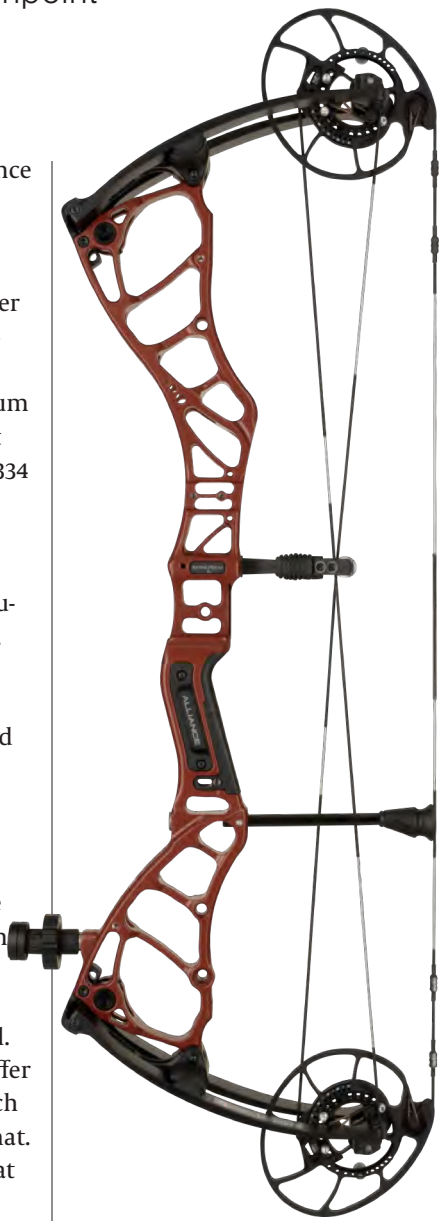
When a pro shop employee puts the new-for-2026 Bowtech Alliance in your hand, I'd be surprised if you don't get out your cash or card. The Alliance was rated the best new bow at the 2026 ATA Show, and after running it through its paces on my snowy, frigid Wisconsin testing grounds, I'm honestly not surprised.

The Alliance is available in two sub-models. The 30.5-inch Alliance is ideal for mobile bowhunters or those hunting in tight confines, while the 33-inch Alliance 33 is ideal for archers with longer wingspans and those who bowhunt the West, where long shot opportunities demand maximum stability. The Alliance is rated at 338 fps, while the Alliance 33 is 334 fps. Now, let's dive into my test.

BUILDING THE ALLIANCE

Setting up the Alliance was virtually a plug-and-play experience. I grabbed last year's Virtue off the hook, removed the Ripcord Ratchet IMS-compatible rest and Bowtech CenterMass Dual Trac sight, and had them anchored to the new Alliance in no time. It was a convenient and seamless transition. I absolutely love these accessory mounts, but I'm particularly entertained by the Gen 2 CenterMass sight-mount because it's completely original. While most other companies offer Picatinny sight mounts, Bowtech blazed its own path. I respect that. Plus, it's a solid sight mount that effectively positions the sight weight at the center of the bow, optimizing balance.

One caveat: The CenterMass mount is compatible only with Bowtech CenterMass sights, meaning you cannot use it with other sights. However, a conventional bolt-on sight will adapt to



TEST BOW SPECS

AXLE-TO-AXLE LENGTH: 30.5 inches

BRACE HEIGHT: 6.43 inches

DRAW LENGTH: 28 inches

DRAW WEIGHT: 70.4 pounds

LET-OFF: 80/85%

BOW-ONLY WEIGHT: 4.09 pounds

ACCESSORIZED TOTAL WEIGHT: 5.6 pounds (including sight, rest and stabilizer)

VELOCITY: 278 fps (with 468-grain Easton 6.5mm Acu-Carbon 340 arrow); 281 fps (with 456-grain CX Maxima Triad 350 arrow); 284 fps (with 441-grain Victory VAP SS 350 arrow); 304 fps (with 388-grain CX Predator 350 arrow)

KINETIC ENERGY: 80.33 foot-pounds (Easton); 79.97 foot-pounds (CX); 79 foot-pounds (Victory); 79.64 foot-pounds (CX Predator)

TEST-BOW FINISH: Mossy Oak Bottomland

MSRP: $1,499.99

CONTACT: bowtecharchery.com

In-the-field photos by Becca and Darron McDougal



↑ Rated the best new bow at the 2026 ATA Show, the Alliance lived up to its standing in the subzero Wisconsin weather.



↑ FlipDisc offers two distinct draw cycles, including Comfort or Performance.



↑ GripLock is a consumer-friendly adjustable grip that provides a just-right fit and feel.

the standard sight mount. The only downside is that conventional sights must be mounted to the outside of the riser, which yields a counterbalancing dilemma.

If you didn't know, CenterMass is part of Bowtech's Stability and Balance System, which also includes the lower Stabilizer Dampener, which mounts just above the lower limb pocket. The net result is a completely equalized system that balances like a boss.

CUSTOMIZATION

As with previous Bowtech models, rotating the clearly labeled FlipDisc modules to my draw length was a slam dunk. First, I tried the FlipDisc in Comfort. The draw cycle is silky smooth. I'm a tough guy, so I flipped the modules to Performance. The draw cycle is certainly more difficult, but it's manageable and delivers a harder-hitting arrow. The main difference is at the hump right before the cam breaks over into the valley.

I left the FlipDisc set to Performance for most of my test, which was conducted in single-digit temperatures. With snow flying sideways at times, I was bundled in my winter apparel but found no trouble with drawing the bow. I also did some testing in even colder temperatures in the Comfort setting. If I were doing lots of cold-weather bowhunting, I'd favor Comfort over Performance. The good thing is that FlipDisc gives hunters two different draw cycles, which is sort of like two bows in one.

Everyone is slightly different in terms of grip preference. Some folks love everything about a particular bow except the grip. Bowtech's GripLock solves the dilemma. Simply loosen the grip's two locking screws, adjust the grip to your preferred angle, and tighten the screws. I also love the small rubber inset at the grip's throat, which provides just enough hand traction.

I'm a proponent of starting with a fairly lightweight bow and

adding weights where they are needed. The Alliance is outfitted with multiple stabilizer locations so you can add what you want, where you want it. It's just one more level of customization that helps users dial in the bow to their exact preferences.

HEAVY-DUTY WITHOUT THE HEAVY

Every time I hold onto a Bowtech bow, I feel like I'm ready to go sheep hunting. And that has been true throughout the bow company's existence. The Alliance is no different. I'm amazed that a 4.09-pound bow (30.5-inch model) can feel so tough yet be so lightweight and balanced. That's engineering at its finest.

Speaking of engineering, the Alliance features a reimagined riser. As with previous riser designs, the Alliance's riser focuses on durability, first and foremost. However, weight savings and weight distribution are clearly at play in this sleek and more skeletonized design. It feels as tough as a tank, but it's also lightweight and well-balanced. It looks awesome, too.





↑ The DeadLock System steps up the game with a new axle position to optimize efficiency, and beefier screws plus laser-etched reference marks deliver finer adjustability.

Making a virtually seamless transition from the riser to the limbs are the wide but minimal locking pockets. These bury all worries, plus they widen the lateral profile, yielding a stabler aiming experience. My level of confidence in the riser, pockets, and limbs for unforgiving backcountry hunting is indescribable. From top to bottom, the bow simply feels bombproof.

DEADLOCK REIMAGINED

Next, the Alliance's DeadLock Cam System has some updates. On the Virtue, the axle is positioned behind the limb tips. On the Alliance, the axle is directly on top of the limb tips. The new positioning is designed to boost efficiency. The beefier DeadLock tuning screws are more user-friendly than the previous design, and the adjustment system allows for finer adjustments with the ability to positively track adjustments by referencing the laser-etched marks. Bowtech has had DeadLock for years, and this advanced iteration steps up the game.



↑ The Stabilizer Dampener helps anchor the Bowtech Alliance at full draw and reduces vibrations.

HOW IT PERFORMS

I already touched on the draw cycle, so I'll begin this portion by saying that sighting in was a slam dunk. Even in the brutally cold weather and wind, I was nailing 10 and 12 rings with little trouble at 60 yards within 20 minutes. That level of accuracy out of the gate is outstanding. I assume the Alliance

33 would naturally be even more accurate at extended ranges, and the obvious choice for those who hunt the West and/or hit Total Archery Challenge's double black diamond courses.

I noticed more noise while shooting the Alliance than some of the other bows I've recently tested. Granted, it doesn't come with limb or string dampeners. Honestly, I think most of the noise came from the Dual Trac sight. On the sight, the connection point where the scope bracket clamps onto the elevation bar has a little bit of slop. It doesn't affect accuracy, but I hear it when I shoot. Also, when I smack the riser with my fist, I hear that same connection point buzzing. And that's with everything locked tight. This is my only complaint from the test.



↑ CenterMass is a genuine sight-mounting medium that doesn't mimic the competition and prioritizes accessorized balance.

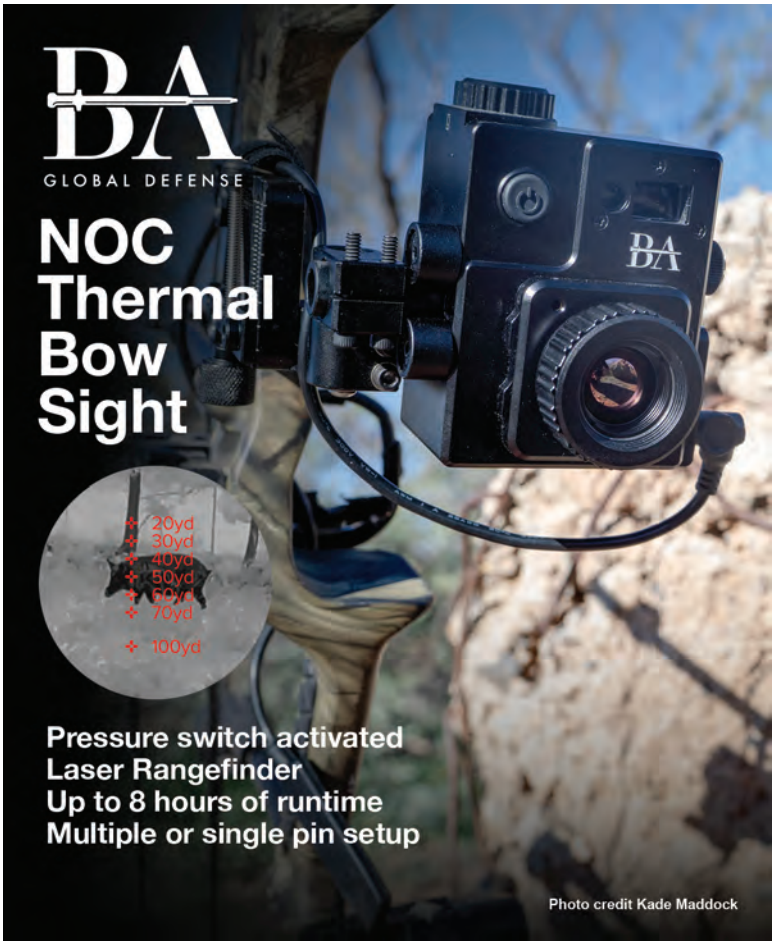
FINAL THOUGHTS

In short, the Alliance's reimagined riser and updated DeadLock Cam System combine with tried-and-true Bowtech features to yield a sweet-shooting hunting bow that's built for sheep country but just as nice to carry to a ladder stand in the whitetail woods. Bowtech has made your life as a consumer easy as far as understanding the concepts behind the bow and how it can enhance your experience in the field. Visit your local Bowtech dealer and check one out soon!

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

The Alliance was set up using a Last Chance Archery EZ Green Bow Press and EZ Green Bow Vise, and the draw weight was calculated using Last Chance Archery's Digital Bow Scale. A Caldwell Ballistic Precision Chronograph measured the arrow velocities. Other products used were Easton's Nock and D-Loop Pliers and Pro Hex Fold-Up Allen Set. Arrows were weighed on Last Chance Archery's Pro Grain Scale. BW

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TENPOINT TX ULTRA 29.5

This rig eliminates the guesswork and delivers to-the-yard precision out to surplus distances.

BY DARRON MCDOUGAL

Saquon Barkley, a running back for the Philadelphia Eagles, once said, "Perfection is impossible, but you don't stop aiming for it." Every time I test a TenPoint crossbow, it becomes clear that the crossbow giant shares that philosophy. Case in point: When my wife and I tested the TX 440 two springs ago, it checked every single box a hunter could ever expect from a crossbow. I've tested loads of crossbows in my professional life, and I didn't see how it could be improved upon. It's that good.

TenPoint's engineers could've stopped there, but they keep aiming for perfection and finding a little bit more excellence each year. Their aim for perfection again moves the needle with another technological leap this year. To that end, please welcome the TX Ultra 29.5.

There are some top-notch crossbows from several manufacturers, and deer hunters with high-end budgets face a steep challenge when shopping for new crossbows. But here are some reasons why folks will gravitate towards the TX Ultra 29.5 in 2026.

THE NEW

Let's not beat around the bush and get right to the good stuff. TenPoint claims that the TX Ultra 29.5 can achieve 3-inch groups at 100 yards. That standard in accuracy isn't an accident; some key innovations are to thank.

New to TenPoint is Zero-Torsion Technology. It consists of a new 8mm Axle, which increases strength by 175 percent and

TEST CROSSBOW SPECS

MAKE/MODEL: TenPoint TX Ultra 29.5

FINISH: Moss Green

MASS WEIGHT: 8 pounds (with ACUslide MAXX)

OVERALL WIDTH: 11 inches (uncocked); 6.25 inches (cocked)

OVERALL LENGTH: 29.5 inches

DRAW EFFORT: Not listed

POWER STROKE: 13.5 inches

BOLT LENGTH AND WEIGHT: 20 inches; 440 grains with 100-grain tip (measured with Last Chance Archery Pro Grain Scale)

MANUFACTURER LISTED VELOCITY: 460 fps

TEST VELOCITY: 443 fps with 440-grain arrow (found with Caldwell Ballistic Precision chronograph)

MANUFACTURER LISTED TRIGGER PULL: 3 pounds

COCKING DEVICE: ACUslide MAXX

SCOPE: EVO-X Marksman Elite

MSRP: $2,549.99-2,649.99

CONTACT: tenpointcrossbows.com

In-the-field photos: Becca McDougal



↑ Optimally balanced, the TX Ultra 29.5 is easy and comfortable to shoot off-hand.

"I can confidently say the TX Ultra 29.5 is the quietest 'fast' crossbow I've tested. The silence is largely due to the riser stiffness and string cushions."



↑ Twin-Riser Technology notably increases benchmark stiffness while reducing weight.

stiffness by 215 percent over conventional axles, optimizing cam, axle and limb alignment. It also boasts X-Wide Limbs. These are 20 percent wider and 120 percent stronger than conventional limbs. Aptly named, Zero-Torsion Technology thwarts torsional movement along the limb axis, and the net is enhanced accuracy and efficiency.

When you create a crossbow harnessing as much power as today's high-end models, bowstrings and cables are subject to punishment. With Ultra Series crossbows, TenPoint's engineers set high goals for accuracy and string longevity. Better materials and processes survived rigorous testing, and that's how the Premium String found its way onto the TX Ultra 29.5. The undeniable wear point of a crossbow string is the center serving, and the new Premium String, combined with new ACU-X Nocks, increases string life by 200 percent over previous strings. Unreal!

I just mentioned the ACU-X Nock, but it requires a little more preface. TenPoint has newly launched the ACU-X 20 arrow. With a 100-grain tip, it weighs 440 grains. Not only does it have a .001-inch straightness tolerance and +/- 1 grain weight tolerance, but it also features spine indexing technology. That's a fancy way of saying the vanes are positioned optimally in relation to the arrow's flex point, maximizing accuracy over previous crossbow arrows.

Make no mistake about it, these new technologies make the TX Ultra 29.5 a whole new level of lethal at long ranges, which I'll discuss more in a moment.

THE TRIED AND TRUE

Now, let's run through some recent TenPoint mainstays that have carried over. TenPoint outfits the TX Ultra 29.5 with a TriggerTech Precision Trigger. It breaks cleanly with 3 pounds of pressure and zero creep. It's outstanding. I also love the AR-style ambidextrous safety, which is easily accessible, quiet and super-smooth to operate.

Twin-Riser Technology is a TenPoint hallmark that pushes the

limits in the strength-to-weight ratio. It's 18 percent lighter and twice as stiff as traditional risers, reducing flex and limb torque by 70 percent, resulting in repeatable accuracy and benchmark dependability.

TenPoints Zero-Trac Barrel, paired with the Guide-Lock Arrow Rest System, lets the string free float just like a vertical compound bow, alleviating rail-induced friction and bowstring wear. Two ball-bearing rollers and a top brush support the arrow. Cleaner arrow departure and bowstring longevity are the takeaways.

ACUslide MAXX is a streamlined, integrated cocking mechanism that screams perfection. With it, you can silently cock and de-cock the crossbow, and you can even let it go to swat a mosquito in mid-draw without the handle spinning dangerously out of control, thanks to the effective Auto-Brake Gear System.

The ACU-Lock Scope Bridge features geometric bridging at several points, boosting strength and dependability. In fact, it's 25 times stronger than traditional scope rails. As well, the extended length offers users a rainbow of scope-mounting positions to optimize eye-relief and target acquisition.

HANDLING AND SHOOTING

As fast as crossbows are, I don't believe it's possible to make them as quiet as today's top vertical bows. Most crossbows are fairly loud. I don't use a decibel meter, but I can confidently say the TX Ultra 29.5 is the quietest "fast" crossbow I've tested. I'm impressed, and the silence is largely due to the riser stiffness and string cushions.



↑ The premium TriggerTech trigger breaks cleanly with 3 pounds of pressure, and the AR-style safety is conveniently located to minimize movement required to take a shot afield.



↑ The EVO-X Marksman Elite Scope is user-friendly from top to bottom.

While preparing for each shot, I love the simplicity and ease of the ACUslide MAXX cocking system. I also find the AR-style ambidextrous safety's placement easily accessible and clearly labeled. Both are great features that streamline the experience.

I'm not sure if TenPoint sights in the scope before shipment, but mine was dead-on at 20 yards. As I backed up, I made some minor tweaks to the magnification wheel, making the hold points accurate at longer yardages.

I found the lightweight crossbow's weight distribution and comfort exceptional. I love the ventilated, rubberized fore-grip and the rubberized pistol grip. Acquiring the target is easy and seamless. I don't conduct my crossbow tests from a bench. I shoot crossbows off-handed and rested on a Primos TriggerStick, and the Ultra 29.5 felt outstanding on both fronts. Placing a kill shot from 40 yards off-handed was very doable, even in the Wisconsin cold. This crossbow is a joy to carry and shoot.

Speaking of accuracy, I shot out to 80 yards in the limited time I had for testing due to the almost immediate editorial deadline. At close ranges, the arrows just go where you want them to. At longer distances, individual skills, weather conditions, and shot execution all are at play, but with snow flying sideways, I can say that a deer or pronghorn at 80 yards would be in serious trouble, even with a hunting-realistic rest, such as the TriggerStick.



I'm not promoting 80-yard shots to bowhunters; again, individual skills vary greatly, but the crossbow itself is extremely capable out to and beyond that distance. I can easily see how it could produce 3-inch groups at 100 yards if shooting from a rock-solid bench.

Rated at 460 fps, TenPoint touts the TX Ultra 29.5 as its fastest forward-draw crossbow ever. I tested it using a Caldwell chronograph, and the highest reading I got was 443 fps. That is a non-issue for me because I know what my 295 fps compound bow does to deer, but if all models leave production and shoot 17 fps below the listed velocity, a few hunters may be disappointed. Again, this difference is a non-issue for me.



↑ The ACU-Lock Scope Bridge features geometrical bridging at several points, boosting strength and dependability while maximizing scope- and accessory-mounting options.

CREDIT ROLL

The TX Ultra 29.5 is available in two options, which are Moss Green and Vektra Camo, priced at $2,549.99 and $2,649.99, respectively. The Ready-to-Hunt Package includes the ACUslide MAXX, EVO-X Marksman scope, three ACU-X 20 arrows, Integrated String Stop System, quiver, bow hanger and bubble level. The accessories are top-notch, and the package is competitively priced. Aesthetically, the TX Ultra 29.5 is sleek, tactical and flawless with high-end finishes. And TenPoint is American-owned and -operated, and its crossbows are designed and built in Ohio.

Yes, perfection is impossible. But striving for the impossible is how marvels like the TX Ultra 29.5 come to be. BW

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ARichmond

As Long as I Can

Recovering now from shoulder replacement surgery, my future bowhunting seasons will take on a much different look.

BY BOB ROBB

As far back as I can remember, hunting has been a way of life for me. After a couple of short years right after college working for the government, I built my professional life around communicating about the outdoors. There was not, and still is not, much money in it for most who choose this path, but since the late 1970s it has let me spend more than half of every year in the woods and on the water. The memories have been priceless.

My fascination with hunting began when, as a towheaded boy growing up behind Dad's fire station, I was allowed to enter that man's world only when I needed a haircut. Then, if I didn't make a fuss while Dad gave me a buzz cut, I was allowed to open the rickety old fridge, toss a dime in a battered cigar box, take out a real Coke in a glass bottle, and go sit in the corner and read the dog-eared copies of the sporting magazines that lay on the table. I could stay as long as I had some Coke left and didn't make any noise.

I loved the adventure stories of hunting wild, faraway places. Even though we didn't have much money, I remember thinking, Why can't I do this, too?

And so, I have. But that philosophy was sorely tested in 2025. I've suffered some serious hunting-related injuries over the years — thanks to a fall off a mountain in Alaska that required a helicopter evac, horseback rodeos, skiffs sinking, airplane wrecks, early Baker treestand disasters, and on and on — but last year tested me to the core.

WEAR AND TEAR

It all began during fall 2024, when I noticed some serious soreness in my right shoulder. By spring 2025 it hurt so badly I had to quit shooting my compounds, give up sports, and start a lengthy and often frustrating journey through the medical system. Finally, in July, I was able to see a sports medicine orthopedist, who informed me that the MRI showed, along with some tendon damage, that the advanced osteoarthritis could be repaired only via arthroplasty. In laymen's terms, the shoulder joint was worn out, and I needed a new one. The surgery was performed mid-October.

It's the result of a lifetime of competitive sports and shooting high-powered firearms, but a big part of it is the result of shooting all those arrows through high-poundage compound bows. I've always believed that to be an effective and ethical bowhunter, you need to practice your bow shooting on a regular basis. After all, archery is an athletic activity that requires proper and consistent practice to both develop and maintain the skill. Taking the life of any animal is very serious business. To ethically shoot at one, you must be prepared — and that means proper practice.

"I did some quick calculations and came up with somewhere in the neighborhood of 350,000 arrows shot since the mid-1980s."

An old coach once told me that practice doesn't make perfect, it makes permanent. I always practiced with compounds several times a week, shooting a few dozen arrows each time over an hour-long session. This helped me stay mentally focused and to shoot with minimal physical fatigue.

During hunting trips I'd shoot a few arrows pretty much every day. I'd pack a 12x12x3-inch foam square in a bush plane so I could shoot every day on remote hunts in Alaska. On hunts where I wasn't afield dawn to dark, I'd shoot arrows in camp every day at lunchtime. It was not unheard of to shoot a couple of practice shots in the headlights of a truck before daylight in camp, then a judo-tipped arrow out of a treestand before climbing down at the end of the day.

The surgery got me thinking: How many practice arrows have I shot over the decades through high-poundage bows? I never kept a logbook, so I'm not really sure. Many months I shot every day, some only a few days a week. Some sessions were 50+ arrows, some half that, and during hunting season maybe only a couple of shots a day. Many days I shot both mornings and evenings. So, I did some quick calculations and came up with somewhere in the neighborhood of 350,000 arrows shot since the mid-1980s. I loved it so much, I never thought of it as work.

Sadly, that's over for me now. At 74 years old, the risk/reward ratio of shooting the volume required to keep me dialed in to be an ethical bowhunter isn't there. Going forward, to hunt archery-only seasons I'll have to use a crossbow. I'm going to miss my regular compound practice sessions terribly. I'll miss all the times I wasn't able to get the bow drawn without fear of being busted, the constant tinkering required to keep my bows shooting lasers, the attempts to stretch my maximum effective shooting range. Crossbows require practice and maintenance, but let's be honest, it just isn't the same.

I missed the entire 2025 fall season. It was the first time in 50 years I didn't put venison in the freezer. This year I'll be back after it, starting with spring turkeys, where I'll chase gobblers in multiple states. The one thing I won't do is give up archery season — I'll keep hunting as long as I can. After all, it's only a flesh wound, right? BW

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