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New Membership Model Makes Joining the USA Easier

After careful deliberation by USA’s board and staff, I’m happy to announce that the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance has adopted a new membership structure. A no-cost USA membership is now available to members of USA Charter Unions, a $45 three-year membership is available to members of all other AFL-CIO Unions, and a $60 three-year membership is an option for Union-friendly partners.

The no-cost membership is an added benefit provided by Charter Unions to their members, and the $45 three-year membership represents a savings of $30 over our previous $25 annual USA membership.

Already a USA member? If you’re a member of one of the USA Charter Unions, you will remain a USA member for life, as long as you maintain your Union membership – you don’t have to do anything. If you’re a member of another AFL-CIO Union, you will receive a USA renewal notice at the $45 three-year membership level when your current membership expires.

The bottom line is the USA and Union leadership are committed to building a community of Union sportsmen and women that will help ensure a bright future for our outdoor traditions. We want to enable as many Union members to join the USA as possible, so we’ve taken a concrete step in that direction by lowering the barriers to becoming a member.

Does that mean the USA won’t need your financial support? The answer, of course, is no. We’ll continue to need your support through voluntary donations as well as your participation in our shooting events, fundraisers, and Boots on the Ground conservation projects.

Research indicates that more than six million Union members in North America hunt, fish and shoot. This new membership structure will enable the USA to grow more quickly and begin realizing our goal of becoming a more influential voice for hunters, anglers and conservationists in North America. With an expanding membership, we can secure more benefits, influence conservation policy to a greater degree, offer more USA activities, and establish a true outdoor brotherhood that will strengthen our Unions and serve as an example of good citizenship to our local communities and the nation as a whole.

The membership insert following page 12 of this magazine provides additional details about joining the USA at these new levels. You can also visit www.jointheusa.com or call us toll-free at 877-872-2211.

When signing up, I urge you to elect to receive your quarterly Union Sportsmen’s Journal by email. You’ll be amazed how easy it is to access and read. By choosing to get your magazine digitally, you’ll demonstrate your commitment to conservation by helping save valuable natural resources. You’ll also get timely updates and information not available to non-digital subscribers.

With the full support of the AFL-CIO and our Charter Unions, the USA is leaping into a new era. I invite you to be part of it and spread the word; we need you and you need the USA.

You are Union. You are Sportsman. You Belong in the USA!

Fred Myers
Executive Director/CEO
Union Sportsmen’s Alliance
Laborers Take Support to the Next Level
By Ken Barrett

From its formation in 1903 to winning its members an 8.5 hour workday in 1906 to establishing a Health and Safety Fund in 1988, the Laborers’ International Union of North America has been a stalwart for Union ideals and principles for generations of working men and women.

Now LIUNA has joined forces with the AFL-CIO and nine affiliated Unions to help the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance provide Laborers and all Unions members who hunt, fish and recreate outdoors with their own organization…the USA.

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. That old proverb sums up what happens when we work too much. The restorative and creative powers found in the outdoors are a great counterbalance to time on the job. LIUNA leadership understands that and recognizes that a high percentage of Laborers, both active and retired, enjoy hunting, fishing, and spending time in nature when not at work.

New USA staff members Randy Mayhew and Travis Sadler, both avid sportsmen and members of LIUNA Local 773, are good examples. Having served as the LIUNA National Director of Organizing before retiring in 2010, Mayhew is now using his 27 years of organizing experience to establish USA provisional chapters across the country.

I’d won a hat or something, but instead, it was the grand-prize.”

On May 2, Conry and his friend, Paul, arrived at the 180,000 acre ranch in quest of Conry’s first Merriam turkey. Much to their surprise, they woke the next morning to at least five inches of fresh snow on the ground.

Sadler was a journeyman laborer before joining the USA as the Recruitment and Events Specialist to schedule and attend Union events and recruit new USA members.

“Getting the Laborers on board with the USA is a real boost because Laborers know how to work hard and play hard, and that’s what the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance is all about,” said USA Executive Director Fred Myers.

Congratulations IBEW Local 164 member Mike Conry from Jersey City, NJ.

The Ponderosa Pine forests of New Mexico are a far cry from Jersey City, NJ, but that’s where IBEW Local 164 member Mike Conry found himself this spring.

With his finger on the trigger of his Remington 870 12-gauge and a handsome Merriam turkey in his sights, he never dreamed a split second decision would lead to an all-expenses-paid, five day turkey hunt at the Express UU Bar Ranch in Northeast New Mexico.

An avid outdoorsman with more than 35 years of fishing and hunting under his belt, Conry was floored when he found out he’d won a hunt co-sponsored by the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance and Chevy with support from the National Wild Turkey Federation.

“I really didn’t know the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance existed until the day I entered the contest,” Conry said. “I saw the promo, filled out the form online and forgot about it. When I got the call, I figured

Outfitted in more than $500 worth of gear provided by Cabelas and Ol’ Tom Technical Gear, Conry bagged his turkey—a Merriam with a 7.5” beard and .75” spurs—just before the sun set on the first night of the hunt. Congratulations to brother Conry!

By Laura Bliss Morris
USA 2nd Annual Spring Turkey Contest
By Laura Bliss Morris

USA members from 17 states entered their spring gobblers in the USA’s 2nd Annual Spring Turkey Contest for a chance to win top-notch gear for next season. Scores were separated into four subspecies: Eastern, Merriam, Osceola and Rio Grande.

Highlights of the 2011 contest include AFSCME Local 2910 member Glen Krankowski’s Eastern, which scored top marks with 58.1 points, and USW Local 5 member Chris Palacio’s back to back win in the Rio Grande category with a gobbler scoring 48.6 points. BAC Local 1 member Todd Harrington was drawn randomly from among all participants as the grand prize winner—taking home a U.S. Made Mossberg Turkey Thug shotgun.

“I’m a huge turkey hunter and couldn’t believe I missed last year’s contest,” Harrington said. “This year it rained on me on the first day of the hunt. The second day, I went out at 2:30 p.m. and bagged my bird at 3:15 p.m. before it started pouring. I didn’t know if that was a good sign or not but submitted my bird anyways—never expecting to walk away with a new Mossberg.”

First place winners in each category received a Primos Crusher Blind ($399 value). Second place winners received an Ol’ Tom Time and Motion Vest ($85 value). Third place winners (10 per category) received a Primos Chick Magnet ($44.99 value).

Congratulations to our winners and a special thanks to our partners and members who participated!
Win a Nevada Trophy Elk Hunt

A Western backcountry elk hunt complete with wall tents and mountain savvy mules is the ultimate North American hunting adventure and the dream of many big game hunters.

The Union Sportsmen’s Alliance and the International Union of Elevator Constructors have joined forces to give AFL-CIO affiliated Union members the opportunity to win a Nevada trophy elk hunt while raising funds for the USA’s new Boots on the Ground (BOTG) conservation program.

The lucky Union winner will join noted guide and outfitter Shad Leeder of Leeder Hunting for a 7-day, pack train hunt in Nevada’s Schell Creek and Snake Range areas, where bulls typically score 330-360 and can exceed 400 Boone & Crockett points. In addition to the guided hunt, the $18,000 prize package includes a highly coveted landowner elk permit, licenses, roundtrip airfare to Las Vegas, ground transportation, meals and lodging.

No purchase is necessary for entry in the sweepstakes, but donations will be accepted to help build Boots on the Ground. BOTG is creating a community of skilled Union volunteers to tackle projects across North America that create and expand hunting and fishing access and wildlife habitat – something we can all take pride in.

When you make a donation, you’ll be investing in a treasured outdoor legacy, and we’ll thank you for helping get BOTG on its feet with multiple entries in the trophy elk hunt sweepstakes.

The Nevada trophy elk hunt sweepstakes runs from May 1 through Sept. 23, and the winner will be drawn on Sept. 28, 2011. The hunt will take place from Nov. 12-18, 2011.

See back cover for more details or visit www.UnionSportsmen.org/elkhunt.
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Actual union sportsmen
Fishing for Smallies in All the Right Places

By Beau Beasley
IAFF Local 2068

“
The popper had only been on the water for a few seconds when the river seemed to open up and swallow it.”
My friend and guide, Mike Smith of New River Fly Fishing (www.newriverflyfish.com), set the hook immediately, and the rod bent over from the strain of a hefty fish.

"Smallies love hitting the surface," Mike said, as he quickly landed the moss-colored brute. We took a few shots with my camera and then let the fish go to fight another day. On a previous trip, I set the hook on a good smallie, but he got upstream of the raft I was in and used the current against me. In the end, I watched a lot of line go out, but the fish never came to hand. I'd been outsmarted by the king of the river, the venerable smallmouth bass.

Smallies are very popular in Virginia, but you can find them in nearly every state in the country and in parts of Canada as well. Though originally native to waters like the Mississippi and Saint Lawrence rivers and Hudson Bay, enterprising smallies struck out on their own and rode the rails to the wide open spaces. In a manner of speaking, anglers working on the country’s burgeoning railroads would often transport fish from their local rivers to other river systems, where they quickly adapted.

Smallies thrived because, unlike their largemouth cousins, they are comfortable in cooler water and, unlike trout, they can also adapt when the water temperatures begin to climb. As dams began to dot the country’s waterways, and waters consequently grew warmer, area trout began to recede; smallies promptly moved in as replacement game fish.

Tenacious fighters and jumpy when the mood strikes them, a smallie’s average lifespan is 15 years. Although they start feeding on zooplankton when they’re born, they quickly move on to larger prey. Still, smallies tend to grow fairly slowly. A 12- to 15-inch fish might be five years old or even older. Many states consider a trophy smallie to be 20 inches or more, and if you’re the teen angler who lands such a prize, your catch might well be older than you are!

Traditional anglers can score well with smallies using live bait like shiners, mad toms, and worms. Crayfish are also prime bait, as they make up as much as 40 percent of an adult smallie’s diet.

In the late summer months and into fall, anglers can also score with live crickets. Some smallie fans prefer spinner baits as well as topwater buzz baits and plugs.

Fly anglers love smallies because they’ll often reward a well-cast popping bug or other surface pattern with one of their trademark vicious strikes. Fly anglers casting under tree limbs and near brush piles will often stumble upon smallies. They’re particularly partial to structure. Besides the dependable popping bug, smallies will fall for streamers and minnow imitations and flies that mimic crayfish and damselflies. Hellgrammite patterns and sculpin patterns are also quite effective.

Prime time varies throughout the country, of course, but March seems to be the fishing season kickoff, as anglers head out to catch smallies during their pre-spawn feasting. The females put on weight to help with delivery, and males doggedly guard the nest without moving for days at a time, so the extra weight is important to them as well. Only a rookie dad leaves his young to fend for themselves, as he knows they are liable to become a snack for a catfish, large bluegill, crappie, or even another smallie. Fishing continues to improve from May right up to late October for most of the country.

If you head out in pursuit of smallies, concentrate on areas where fast and slow currents meet and where structures like boat docks, blow downs, rock piles, bridge abutments, and even beaver dams abound. Smallies can be quite territorial, so if you’ve had good luck in one spot before, chances are good you’ll get lucky again. They are also wary fish, so keep boat motors—and your own movement, if you’re wading—to a minimum.

Smallies are rarely the biggest fish in the river, but what they lack in size, they make up for in spunk. If you’ve turned up your nose at smallmouth bass fishing, you don’t know what you’re missing. Your local general tackle or fly shop can point you toward a likely waterway and outfit you with the tackle or flies you need to bring a feisty smallie to hand. And remember, don’t underestimate the humble smallmouth bass, or you’re likely to find yourself on the riverbank looking at a broken line and wondering what just happened.

Beau Beasley is a member of IAFF Local 2068 and a captain with Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department. His latest book, Fly Fishing the Mid-Atlantic: A No Nonsense Guide Top Waters, was just released.
More than 150 Alaskan Union members, contractors and their families took part in the first USA Boots on the Ground (BOTG) fundraising dinner on March 19 in Anchorage. They raised more than $28,000 for the USA’s new conservation program, which connects Union members with conservation projects in need of skilled volunteers, and officially launched the first BOTG project in Alaska.

The event was a huge success thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of many Union members, including event co-chairs Gerry Andrews, a member of Operating Engineers Local 302 and the Alaska Department of Labor, and Chris Gregg, Business Manager of Painters Local 1959. As master of ceremonies, Vince Beltrami, President of the Alaska State AFL-CIO, set the tone of the night, while a jazz band provided entertainment. Guests enjoyed a Hawaiian pulled pork dinner prepared by the family of Sheet Metal Workers Local 23 member Thomas Eli and won everything from guns to artwork to tools.

Guest speaker Kris Abshire, chairwoman for the Alaskans for Palmer-Hay Flats, described the wildlife viewing tower to be built by Union members on the Hay Flats Wildlife Refuge as part of the USA’s BOTG program. The tower is a key project for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Palmer-Hay Flats non-profit, and both groups are excited about getting help from skilled Union members.

Alaska Union members interested in helping on the Hay Flats project should call Bob Buch at 907-243-7563 or Greg Kucera at 907-522-8299. To learn how to get involved in the BOTG program, call BOTG Manager Jim Klatt at 612-331-0270. A big ‘Thank You’ to everyone involved in making the fundraiser a success.
Other Boots on the Ground Projects:

Texas
The Texas Division of Parks and Wildlife submitted a list of 31 infrastructure projects where they could use skilled Union volunteers, and two projects are underway. Sheet Metal Workers Local 54, led by Assistant BM Trey Berryman, is building two fish stocking transportation tanks for the TDPW inland fisheries branch.

For the second project, IBEW Local 479 Assistant BM Robert Siau recruited a crew of journeymen, apprentices and retirees to upgrade electrical service to a historic fish hatchery built by volunteers in Jasper, TX, in the 1930s and to rewire two homes on the site.

Washington
Locals in Seattle will soon begin a walk-in access project with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Department is required to build and install lockable, heavy gates on access roads entering private forest lands that have become part of the state hunter walk-in program. Building and installation will involve multiple Union skills from welding to heavy equipment operation. Led by Randy Scott, Secretary/Treasurer for the State Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters, the project will start with UA training centers delivering materials and building the gates.

Wisconsin
The first BOTG project with Unions building deer traps for the Wisconsin DNR proved successful for the state. When trapping ended in mid-March, the DNR research staff had caught and put radio collars or ear tags on more than 300 whitetails in the two test areas. The project will continue for the next three years.

South Dakota/North Dakota
Members of IBEW Local 1250 in Rapid City, SD, began working with the State Game, Fish and Parks staff in June to repair or install walk-in access signs, starting on a large ranch in Western SD. BM Randy Stainbrook is heading up the state-wide effort through the state AFL-CIO and its President, Mark Anderson.

In ND, the state Building Trades met with Randy Kriel of the ND Game and Fish to discuss plans for two projects. One duplicates the SD walk-in access sign repair and replacement work, while the other will help build high fence hay enclosures for farmers and ranchers to reduce deer damage.

USA’s Boots on the Ground Program Has a Logo

The USA is proud to unveil the logo for its Boots on the Ground (BOTG) conservation program. The logo features a boot print, symbolizing the hard work of Union men and women, and images of the game species that appear in the USA logo. These species represent America’s rich fish and wildlife resources that thrive because of the actions taken by generations of conservation-minded sportsmen and sportswomen.

We believe it’s an appropriate and meaningful logo for USA and Union members who are volunteering their time and unique skills to carry out the USAs mission to expand and improve hunting and fishing access and wildlife habitat throughout North America.

Boots on the Ground projects are currently underway or being planned in Maine, South Dakota, Texas, Alaska, and many states in between. The new logo will soon be displayed on signs at project sites and seen on shirts and hats worn by BOTG volunteers.

“We’re extremely proud of the Union men and women who are rolling up their sleeves, lacing up their boots and joining together to get the job done,” said USA Executive Director Fred Myers. “The invaluable partnerships formed between BOTG volunteers and state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation groups help guarantee that America’s wildlife legacy and hunting and fishing traditions remain strong.”
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- Access to Members-Only section of the USA website
- Monthly e-newsletter with special offers and tips
- Opportunity to participate in USA’s Boots on the Ground conservation projects

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Please visit www.jointheUSA.com for other membership options, and a complete list of rules and regulations. Current members are already entered.
This Land is Your Land

Summertime Fishin’ is Easy - Especially on Public Water

By Ken Barrett

Many of us have fond memories of family summer vacations to the lake or beach. Fishing was often a big, if not the most important, part of those vacations. The whole family got involved, from launching boats and stringing up rods with favorite lures or baits to catching and cleaning fish to preparing fish fries. There are literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of snapshots in family albums around the country showing kids and parents holding fish they caught, accompanied by big smiles that attest to our love of summer vacations and family fishing trips.

These vacations were and remain a great way for families to spend time together, building memories that will last a lifetime. And the best part is they don’t need to be expensive. With the economy still a bit dicey and gas prices in the stratosphere, it might be time to think about a family fishing trip to a nearby stretch of public water.

Kids don’t need exotic and costly destinations to get them excited. All they really want is your attention and to catch a few fish. Throw in the opportunity to help set up a camp, run a boat and spend time around a campfire talking and telling stories, and you’ve set the stage for a lifetime of wonderful memories.

We’re very fortunate in the U.S. and Canada to have a wealth of good publicly accessible places to fish, boat, camp, play and hike, including national and state parks, U.S. Forest Service lands, wildlife refuges and more. Information about all of them can be easily found on the Internet.

So whether it’s a week long trip to a national forest for muskies, pike or salmon or just an overnight trip to a nearby state or county park for pan fish, round up your family and friends and get out there. Some of our parks and forests have cabins you can rent, and others have campgrounds. If you’re not familiar with what’s available, the Internet is a great source of information.

Just go to Google or another search engine and type in key words like: fishing, campgrounds, public access, public boat launching sites, etc. If you don’t have the Internet at home, why not head to your local library and ask for help. There’s no time like the present to join the 21st Century and see how the “Information Highway” can help you find more and better places to hunt, fish, camp and more.

Here’s to a great summer getaway and lots of tight lines! Send us a picture of the big one that didn’t get away, and we’ll post it on the USA website for your Union brothers and sisters to see.

Great Sources for Public Fishing and Camping Information

State Fish and Game Agencies
www.fws.gov/offices/statelinks.html

U.S. Forest Service:
www.fs.fed.us/recreation

Bureau of Land Management:
www.blm.gov/recreation

Another great fishing site:
www.takemefishing.org

Brock Dalton, 10-year-old son of Mark Dalton of the AFL-CIO Council

Liz Vallas, daughter of Ray Vallas of IBEW Local 34

AFTER THE CRACK OF THE RIFLE,

my son Cole turned to me with a sly grin. The prairie dog he was aiming at nearly 150 yards away was suddenly absent from terra firma. It was a good shot and deserved an “atta boy” backslap. It also brought back memories of growing up in the Midwest.

We didn’t have the beefy prairie dogs, but the adventure of stalking 13-lined ground squirrels in my grandfather’s pasture was just as endearing. The sly, snaky rodents were everywhere and proved to be worthy targets for my scoped .22 long rifle. Always busy with chores, I worked fast so I had extra time to grab the rifle and cartridges and roam the rolling hills looking for rodents.

Summer is peak season for varmints, and that’s good news for hunters looking for something to do during a time when few hunting seasons are open. Varmint season is open year-round in most states, and there are more than enough species to create weekend hunting opportunities. Woodchucks, prairie dogs, ground squirrels and the like are found in high densities from coast to coast.

Varmint rifles and gophers make for a great summer outing.
Most of these animals are fine in moderate populations, but when densities swell, so does their destructive nature. These rodents are notorious for digging large underground complexes and dappling pastures with dozens, if not hundreds, of holes. When they’re not digging, they are eating. Prairie dogs can denude a pasture of grass needed for livestock and other wildlife when numbers explode. Woodchucks and ground squirrels can raid agricultural fields, including produce, and damage crops in certain cases.

That’s where varmint hunters come into play. Through targeted shooting, varmint hunters can reduce populations without hurting the overall survival of the species.

**GEARING UP**

More than likely, you already have an arsenal in place for varmints. The explosion of the predator market in recent years has put .22-caliber rifles back on the map with the ever popular .223, .22-250 and the Ruger .204.

My two favorite varmint rifles at the moment are my TC Encore Pro Hunter Predator chambered for the flat-shooting .22-250 and my Smith & Wesson M&P15 in the classic .223. In nearly all instances, the smaller calibers are the best, and factory ammunition, such as Hornady’s Superformance lineup, provide shooters with hot loads for the sizzling calibers.

Other accessories to make your hunt more successful include good optics. Binoculars and a spotting scope allow you to scan for peeping rodents and zoom in to analyze the shot of your partner. You’ll also want a good rangefinder, such as the Nikon RifleHunter 1000, so you can help judge bullet drop at extreme distances.

Finally, don’t forget shooting rests. If you’re more into lightweight and versatility, try bipods like the XLA series manufactured by Caldwell. The same company also makes lightweight shooting benches and a new shooting rest with super stability in a tripod format called the DeadShot FieldPod.

I don’t have enough space to list every rodent available for summer hunts, but the granddaddy of all is the black-tailed prairie dog. You can hunt them on national grasslands in South Dakota, Indian reservations throughout the West and by asking ranchers who deem them competition for their livestock. Nebraska, South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming are top of the list for prairie dog vacations.

West of prairie dog country is ground squirrel real estate, and the king deed holder is the California ground squirrel. Also a big ground squirrel hitting two pounds, this rodent basks in rocks and raids pastures and grain fields throughout most of California and southern Washington. Coincidently, these are the two best states for hunting this abundant critter.

Finally, for those of you on the East Coast chomping for a rodent adventure, you live in the neighborhood of the all-time giant, the woodchuck. From the Carolinas north, you’ll find these big chompers along wooded edges and roaming fields for forage. A big male can weigh in at 13 pounds and cause eyebrow-raising destruction for landowners. They can also be wary, so it may require a stealthy stalk to sneak up on an unsuspecting woodchuck.

Regardless of your favorite varmint species, don’t let summer pass by without a weekend of varmint hunting. It’s available in every zip code, affordable and provides a service to landowners. And best of all, it’s a great memory maker.
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The elevator’s bell rang a sharp brassy ding. The doors opened to a view of downtown Albuquerque through the huge plate-glass windows. Outside in the cold spring winds around the corner from my office, Union Ironworkers were hard at work.

Passing by, I turned up my coat collar and heard the men hollering. One gave orders to a crane operator. The thud of mallet on metal filled the air. Like a sculptor shapes clay, these guys turned a tangle of iron and concrete into a downtown building. A young man, probably 10 years my junior, worked near the street. He heaved heavy rebar onto his shoulder. His tool belt hung low on his waist from a spud wrench, and his clothes were flecked with burns from welding. His hard hat sported the Ironworkers’ Union emblem, and my heart swelled with pride.

My dad was an Ironworker with Local 44. Ernest Springer walked the I-beams in the Cincinnati skyline for 35 years. As a youngster, I couldn’t fully know how hard he worked, but I appreciate my dad now more than ever.

In the summer, dad would come home from work, lunch box in hand, covered in dirt and no doubt tired. Still he somehow had the energy to take me fishing in the evening. Spending time outdoors was always a priority for us. I recall summer evenings on nearby Indian Creek, the shadows getting longer while we hoped for one last smallmouth bass. Dad made it a point that I know the sporting life. When I got big enough, he introduced me to quail and rabbit hunting. He was right there with me on a steep hillside when I took my first game, a fat bushy-tailed fox squirrel. Those small moments became everlasting.

And those fleeting moments are all I have now of my dad. He is heavy on my heart with Father’s Day having recently come and gone. He passed away the day before Veterans’ Day in 2009, leaving me with many memories and a dearth of answers to questions I never got to ask. Some of those questions arose after his passing.

Sixty years ago, dad was on the front lines in the Korean War, a member of the U.S. Army’s famous Second Division. It was a meat-grinder, vicious and unspeakably violent, heightened by brutally cold weather. Korea was an experience he simply wouldn’t discuss in detail.

Dad went from a soldier’s steel pot to an Ironworker’s hard hat after the war, and he loved his work. Even to his last days, dad showed his fidelity. He identified himself in two ways—a Second Division soldier and an Ironworker. He commonly wore a Korean Veteran hat and an Ironworker jacket.

A Seoul-born pastor, whom dad admired, officiated his military committal at the Santa Fe National Cemetery. He read Psalm 23 from the snow-stained Bible dad carried in combat. The preacher remarked that dad had walked through “the valley of the shadow of death” carrying an M1 carbine and noted that, without the sacrifice of Americans, there would be no South Korea.

According to the American Battle Monuments Commission, 54,246 Americans died in the 37 months of the Korean War; the number is engraved on the Korean Veterans War Memorial in Washington D.C. The monument also has these words etched in polished stone: “Freedom is not Free.” Freedom comes at a tremendous cost, and its color is crimson.

Dad was proud to have served in the Second Division, and he was a dad second to none. Now a father of three children myself, dad’s devotion to country, family, and labor sit with me. I am reminded of what Gifford Pinchot, the founder of the U.S. Forest Service, wrote in his book, Fishing Talk, “Whenever you go, and whenever you can, take the youngster along.” That’s a good guidepost for fathers. Remember, those small passing moments, rightly made, will become everlasting.

The Second Division fought in rugged mountainous terrain that typified Korea. With great reserve, dad once shared that during a month-long battle known as “Heartbreak Ridge,” a grenade exploded in his squad, wounding he and another, while two men next to him gave their all; 3,700 Second Division soldiers died on Heartbreak. The brutal weather of 30-below-zero made a bad experience worse. Dad remembered that his Thanksgiving turkey and mashed potatoes froze solid before he could sit down and eat.

He couldn’t hide his limp. Grenade shrapnel earned him a Purple Heart. Only on the day of his military committal at the Santa Fe National Cemetery did we learn he had earned a Presidential Citation for Extraordinary Heroism. Like most real heroes, he remained tight-lipped. Through streaming tears 59 years after the fact, he once simply remarked, “It was so cold.”

The Second Division soldiers are currently deployed in Afghanistan and Korea. Craig Springer is editor of Eddies magazine. www.fws.gov/eddies.

by Craig Springer

My father Claude Sadler, Director of Southern and Central LECET of the Laborers’ Union, walked into the living room in 2007 holding the right side of a shed he found in our bottom field. It was amazing with eight scoring points. The G-2 was split into a triple point, and the main beams were long, sweeping and carried mass all the way through.

This was a giant deer. That same season, my dad caught a glimpse of it chasing a doe, but it was 200 yards away. The next couple years produced no sheds, pictures or sightings, and we all figured he was gone.

In the spring of 2010, my dad decided to change some things around our property. We would turn all the tillable ground into year-round food plots. In late September, we had our trail cameras over the plots, and the big buck showed up in two pictures. Before, he was a giant buck, but thanks to our trail camera, we figured he was going to surpass the famous 170 mark.

My dad woke up early on November 5, 2010, and walked to our front porch. He had planned to hunt on another property, but with the wind coming from the northwest, he decided to go to his lock-on stand in our bottom field. We all knew something was going to happen that morning. The rut was in full swing, the bucks were cruising and we had stayed out of that spot all year, knowing it was going to be hot once the bucks started chasing.

The first deer that came in was a fawn; it bedded down about 20 yards from my dad’s stand. As the fawn bedded down, my dad saw something coming in behind him—a mature doe. She had her tail tucked and appeared to be looking for her fawn. She walked right in front of my dad’s stand at about 15 yards. My dad was watching the doe when he heard a noise behind her.

With his bow in hand, he turned to see a giant mass of antlers coming down the trail. A trick my dad has always used with big deer is not to look at the rack more than you have to. Focus your attention on that crease behind the front leg. Had he paid more attention to this deer’s rack, who knows how shaken he’d have been.

Following the same trail as the doe, the buck would pass directly in front of my dad’s stand at 15 yards. My dad turned slightly toward the front of the stand to get in the right position. When the deer went behind a tree, he came to full draw. The deer was only eight yards away and headed toward the front of the stand, but then he turned and started walking toward the back.

This gave my dad two choices: sit tight and hope the doe would lead the buck to the front side or turn around. He tucked up tight to the tree and started to turn very slow, while still at full draw. When he got in the right position, the buck was 12 yards away and slightly quartering to him.

My dad raised his bow just to get it over a limb, and the buck spotted him. But he was too late; my dad had the pin of his bow sight settled on the spot he wanted. When he touched the trigger of his release, he saw the arrow bury to the fletch-
ing in the crease behind the buck’s front shoulder. The buck took off running in the direction he came from.

“I JUST SMOKED A GIANT!” was the text I received from my dad. I can’t tell you who was more excited. Since my dad didn’t see the deer go down, he decided to slip out of the woods to give him some time. He knew he’d made a great shot.

My dad and Zach ran over, and dad knelt down and picked up the deer’s rack; no one said a word for a long time. When my brother and I got home, it was like looking at something from a video; no one could believe the size of the deer. A good friend and certified scorer for Boone and Crockett came out to score it—181 5/8 Band C gross.

My dad has been bow hunting whitetail deer for 30 years. He taught my brother and me everything we know about hunting. His most important saying is, “I have never killed a deer sitting on the couch!” If he has a spare moment, he is hunting, planting food plots, moving stands or shooting his bow. He lives and breathes hunting and is ethical and appreciative of the sport. No one deserves that deer more than my father, Claude Sadler.

CAMO CALAMITIES

The Cold Shoulder

I was on a June fishing trip in Canada with my father, a retired union sheet metal worker. We were about seven miles from camp, and a nasty storm blew in with rain, high winds and even snow! We weren’t dressed for the cold weather, but we did have raingear. We got out of the path of the storm, temporarily, and decided to clean our walleyes on an island that had cleaning benches set up. There were so many mosquitoes buzzing around us, we could barely clean the fish.

I was dancing around, trying to avoid getting bit, looking like a crazy fool when I dropped a dandy fly in the dirt. I went down to the lake’s edge to rinse it off. The rocks were very slippery, and I went in right up to my neck! I had to ride the rest of the way back to camp freezing and lying on the floor of the boat to stay out of the wind.

Jerry Rausch, SMWIA Local 18

June Bug Delicacy

I was in my living room one warm evening when I was much younger. In those days, we had no air conditioning and often left the windows open. This particular evening, my younger siblings and I were enjoying a pizza when I noticed the bite I had just taken had an unfamiliar crunch. Upon inspection of the remaining pizza, I discovered the partial remains of a June bug.

Michael E. Cramer, UA Local 68

Aerial Assault

Two years ago, I was fishing along the Fox River, west of Yorkville, Ill. After fishing all day and catching nothing, I decided to take a shortcut up a hill and through a grassy field to get to my truck. In the process, I must have awakened every fly and mosquito for a square mile. Aerial assaults didn’t let up until I reached the safety of my truck. That night, my kids counted more than 200 mosquito bites on top of fly and chigger bites. Never again will I take a shortcut through that area.

Steven Zach, IUPAT Local 1285

Blood Transfusion

Last summer, we attempted to fish all night on the Texas Gulf Coast. Talk about getting eaten up. I think we were close to requiring a blood transfusion. I bet we fed ten thousand families of those biting little b******. Have you ever tried to scratch a bite inside your ear? A pencil came in handy the next morning. I guess I’m to blame because I had OFF spray but didn’t want to take a chance of killing all the bait.

David Eisman, SMWIA Local 67

Love at First Bite

Mosquitoes absolutely love me, I mean LOVE me! In the summer of 2001, I was working for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game conducting a king (Chinook) salmon research project on the Stikine River in Southeast Alaska. It was a blazing 75 degrees, and even warmer inside the rubber raingear and gloves I was wearing. Covered in salmon slime and sweat, mosquitoes congregated around me in hordes so thick it looked like black clouds. Swatting madly at these pests only seemed to attract them to me more. One swat to the air easily killed 50 of these little pests, as they stuck to the slime on my gloves.

Looking down at my raingear, I noticed I was wearing a mosquito blanket. A swath on each leg killed another 100 of them. Soon I felt the unmistakable pin-prick sensation of a mosquito probes sinking into my shoulder through my t-shirt. Several more mosquitoes probed my neck, arms and forehead. I had to retreat. I was outnumbered, so I ran for cover. Several mosquitoes darted onto me while I was running for the cabin. I used an electric bug zapper to kill these ones and enjoyed the sizzling pop sound as they fried to their deaths.

Nicole Zeiser, AFSCME Local 52

Send your camo calamity story to: USAmembers@unionsportsmen.org
So what’s included in this kit? There’s an arrow, usually made of solid fiberglass to penetrate through the water. This arrow may or may not have fletching, so it’s important to ensure your bow is set up for the heavier arrow. The kit will include a reel to retrieve your catch or arrow and a length of line, which attaches to the arrow and the reel. That’s it—no treestand, no cover scent, no camo.

I don’t often get a chance to travel for exotic game; basically anything that doesn’t live in Missouri is out of the picture. And once the spring turkey season goes out, it’s a long wait until deer season. Sure, I shoot 3-D, but it’s just not the same. But there is a cure for the summertime blues.

In many parts of the country, the rivers, streams and lakes are teeming with bowhunting opportunities in the form of common carp, grass carp and several varieties of gar. And that’s only the beginning. In the big river systems, the invasive Asian carp provide more fun than should be allowed.

If you’ve always wanted to bowfish and own a bow, I have good news—the expensive part is over. Not much equipment is needed to get started. In fact, complete kits ready to bowfish can be had for less than $40.

So what’s included in this kit? There’s an arrow, usually made of solid fiberglass to penetrate through the water. This arrow may or may not have fletching, so it’s important to ensure your bow is set up for the heavier arrow. The kit will include a reel to retrieve your catch or arrow and a length of line, which attaches to the arrow and the reel. That’s it—no treestand, no cover scent, no camo.

The weather can change your equipment list too. I like to bowfish early, when the water is still too cool to wade in shorts. I wear chest waders, but that’s the extent of the additional equipment. As you progress in your bowfishing endeavors, you might opt for a different bow and a fancier retrieval reel.

Currently, I use a recurve bow with a 42-pound draw weight and a Zebco 808 reel spooled with 80-pound-test Spider-Wire. The reel seat attaches in the stabilizer insert of the bow. With this rig, the only thing you have to remember is to push the spool release button before you launch an arrow.
**Bowfishing the High Seas**

Freshwater isn’t the only game when bowfishing. Many coastal bowfishers have taken their sport to the open water. A vast array of species can be taken with archery gear. Becky Vannes of Open Season TV was visiting family in Florida when she hooked up with a mutual friend and Wounded Warrior, Kelly Anderson, and the gang from Tink’s Deer Lures for some stingray action.

Vannes is an accomplished hunter and archer, but it was her first attempt at bowfishing, and she admitted, “It took me a long time to figure out how much to hold under the ray to connect.” First time bowfishers often learn the hard way—the light refraction of the water’s surface necessitates the need to aim below your intended target. “I was aiming three feet under the ray to hit them.”

By slowly cruising the flats in the shallow water, much like bowfishing freshwater species, Vannes and her crew stood on elevated platforms keeping an eye peeled for telltale signs of a ray.

“It’s a lot like hunting in the woods. You really need to pay attention to what’s going on. It’s not like they are swimming around, and we are flinging arrows at them. They are so well camouflaged on the bottom of the channel, it’s difficult to see them,” said Vannes. “I looked for their shape, and occasionally I’d see a shadow that gave away their position.”

**Taking It to the Next Level**

Keith Riehn and the crew of AimLowTV.com specialize in bowfishing.

“Many bow anglers convert their old hunting bows for bow fishing, but most turn the poundage down to about 40 pounds,” said Riehn. “You can get as many as 100 shots in an afternoon of bow fishing or you might go all day without a shot. It depends on the species you are after.”

Riehn’s quarry is often the Asian carp that live in the Mississippi River system, but he and his partner Robin Parks travel to Texas each year to battle the giant gar that dwell there. It was from their specialized boats, equipped with shooting decks and bright lighting for night shooting, the duo arrowed a behemoth alligator gar on Sam Rayburn Lake. The fish was a new lake record and possibly the second largest ever taken with a bow and arrow. The gar weighed in at a whopping 244.5 pounds and measured more than eight feet, a true monster.

**Good Tasting Table Fare**

Though looked upon as trash fish, many of the species can be quite tasty at the dinner table. Carp were introduced to North America by the Europeans as a source of food and, if properly cleaned and prepared, will rival many sport fish. Vannes claimed stingrays are a delicacy and taste very much like scallops.

If you are looking for a challenge, some off season practice and fun, give bowfishing a try. But don’t say I didn’t warn you, it can be very addictive.
**Burris Black Diamond 3x-12x 50mm with E1 Reticle**

For many of us – our eyes ain't what they used to be. So it's a relief to know that many of today's off-the-rack rifles are guaranteed to shoot minute of angle groups or better. Plus, the truly superb glass available from manufacturers like Burris can help us all shoot like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone.

Based in Colorado, Burris just added a real winner to its U.S. Made Black Diamond line with the new 3x-12x-50mm featuring a Ballistic Plex E1 illuminated reticle. The E1 is ideal for extreme shooting—allowing you to adjust not only for distance but also for wind, using a series of cascading dots to the left and right of your reticle.

The scope retails for $679, which is comparable to many good entry-level rifles. Mount it on one, and for a total of $1,200 to $1,400 dollars, you'll have one heck of a shootin' iron. But keep in mind that if you miss, you won't have the rifle or scope to blame!

[www.burrisoptics.com](http://www.burrisoptics.com)

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**Pro Ears Pro Hear Digital Amplification Series**

Want to hear the rustle of leaves and still block out the ear-deafening blast of that 12-gauge or .300 Win Mag? Want to hear the sound of the first wing beat as a grouse flushes behind you. Want to sit in the woods and listen to the sounds of birds and other critters for the pure joy of it?

For those adventures where sound amplification is essential but the noise reduction of ear muffs is not, the Pro Ears Pro Hear Amplification Series is the answer.

The Pro Hear II and Pro Hear IV fit comfortably behind the ear and deliver perfectly clear hearing enhancement and protection. All three products are fully digital to lower total harmonic distortion and unwanted feedback. Plus, each model delivers 180 hours of battery life, provide a wind screen and come with a one year warranty.

A successful hunt often depends as much on sound as sight. And who among us, especially those whose hearing isn't what it used to be, couldn't use a little help in the woods? Pro Ears is proud to offer USA members a **10% discount** on merchandise purchased online. Visit [www.unionsportsmen.org/deals](http://www.unionsportsmen.org/deals) for your special discount code.

[www.proears.com](http://www.proears.com)

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**PSE Pro Series – X-Force Omen Pro**

In celebration of its 40th anniversary, PSE has unveiled an innovative and exciting U.S. Made Pro Series line, which includes some brand new bows along with some upgrades to great performers.

Among the upgrades is the lightning fast X-force Omen Pro, shooting up to 366 fps. Of course, speed is nothing without accuracy. That's why the Omen Pro incorporates the new Planar Flex Riser design and Centerlock Pocket System to create one of the most consistent and accurate bows you'll ever shoot.

The B.E.S.T. Raptor Grip of the Omen Pro promotes consistent hand placement to reduce the chance for hand induced torque. It also features 4th generation X Technology split limbs and the UltraFast Hybrid Cam System.

Put all the features together, and the X-Force Omen Pro is the baddest bow on the market. It's available in 1/2” draw lengths and 50, 60, 70 and 80 pound draw weights. And you can choose between three sharp, fade-resistant finishes including Mossy Oak Break-up Infinity, Skulz Camo and Black.

[www.pse-archery.com](http://www.pse-archery.com)
**Buck PakLite Field Master**

As they say, once your game is down, the real work begins. But it won’t feel as much like work if you have the right tools for the job. Developed by hunters, the PakLite Field Master kit is the newest lightweight addition to the Buck Knives broad line of hunting knives. Weighing in at just 12 ounces total, the 141 PakLite Large Skinner, 135 PakLite Caper and 499 PakLite Guthook pack in easy and gives you the ability to field dress like a surgeon.

All three tools are carried in one durable, compact nylon sheath with removable liners that can be easily washed to protect your meat and extend the life of your gear. For added convenience, the sheath has zippered storage pockets to keep your licenses and other necessities safe and secure. Not only is the kit Made in the USA, it also comes with Buck’s Forever Warranty. The ease of the PakLite Field Master is the perfect payoff for a good shot.

[www.buckknives.com](http://www.buckknives.com)

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Creating jobs for our brothers and sisters is just as important as protecting over 1,500 labor organizations across the USA. Support your Union’s choice to use a 100% organized insurance agent and help us infuse real capital into the union economy with your claims repair dollars.

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888-200-4545
The editor and I agreed this article would probably stir up a bit of a fuss. If you don’t agree with me, that’s fine—roast me over the coals. But I’m going to make a stand here and honor my favorite cartridge, the .300 Winchester Magnum, and say it’s the best North American big game cartridge ever.

I don’t think any of us can argue the .300’s versatility. You can shoot a 150-grain Ballistic Silvertip that is a small, flat shooting grenade on contact or step up to a 200-grain, deep-penetrating Trophy Bonded Bear Claw that will do some serious damage on the largest of North American game.

A lot of folks think a .300 is going to be a kicking machine. I hate recoil and still love my Win Mag. A good recoil pad and a rifle that fits you correctly, a .300 is not a thumper. I do have an old Browning Safari Grade .300 made in 1958 that has a high cheek pad and doesn’t fit me well. It almost knocks a few teeth loose when I shoot it, but my TC Pro Hunter single shot with a quality recoil pad that fits properly is just a joy to shoot. I am talking two or three boxes at a time!

So you want to hunt a lot of different animals, but you aren’t into owning a complete battery of rifles? The pronghorn and whitetail are two of the smallest and most popular big game animals in North America. The moose and grizzly are a couple of our biggest. You might even want to sneak over to Africa or New Zealand to do a hunt, right? The .300 Win Mag is your caliber.

The 150-grain loads in a .300 are smoking. With an average velocity hovering around the 3,200 to 3,300 fps mark, these light-weights are great for deer and antelope, really any game that inhabits open country where shots might come at 250, 300 yards or beyond. The Winchester Power Max Bonded has a ballistic coefficient .325, which is pretty good and typical of bullets in this weight class. There won’t be nearly the drop compensation needed as with some of the heavier loads, so long shots become much easier with a 150-grain bullet.
My all-time favorite load for 90 percent of the animals I have hunted worldwide is the 180-grain load. For almost everything, I shoot a 180-grain Accubond or E-Tip. These bullets have a superb ballistic coefficient (.509) and still get 2,950 fps at the muzzle. Their accuracy and controlled expansion in game animals is unequalled in my opinion.

With a 180-grain bullet out of my .300 Win Mag rifles, it would be tough to count the big whitetails, mule deer, bears, elk, and African plains game up to kudu I have taken over the years. I am going on two safaris in the next four months, and a .300 will be one of two rifles on both trips.

If we look at the biggest North American game, mainly the moose, brown bear and polar bear, the .300 will still stand in there and do us proud. A 200-grain, premium bullet like the Nosler Partition will be plenty sufficient to bring down any moose or bear that walks the grounds of North America, if properly placed in the heart and lungs. I would also submit that the .300 Win Mag is an inherently accurate cartridge. My half dozen or so .300s all shoot extremely well with multiple bullet weights and types.

I have hunted much of the world’s big game in one form or another, and besides elephants, buffalo and elands, the .300 Win Mag with the right bullet would far and away be my choice for almost any game animal that can be hunted. An added benefit is that you can own one gun that you are intimately familiar with and shoot vastly different loads. Agree or not, you have to admit I have a pretty good case for the .300 Win Mag!
USA Unveils Shooting Truck and Trailer at Biggest Shoot of the Year

By Kate Cywinski

As nearly 180 Union members and supporters arrived at the USA’s 3rd Annual Capital Area Sporting Clays Shoot in Maryland, they couldn’t miss the USA’s brand new, custom wrapped shooting events truck and trailer.

The truck and trailer, which will serve as a rolling billboard for the USA and its Union and corporate partners as it travels around the country to shooting events, was just a dream last fall. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the USA’s Union partners and financial support from AFL-CIO Building Investment Trust, Buck Knives, Chevrolet, The Kelly Companies, Lincoln Electric, the Mechanical and Allied Crafts, Sportsman Channel, ULLICO and Union Insurance Group, the truck and trailer came together in time for the USA’s biggest event of 2011.

Between the new truck and trailer, the temperature, and participation, this year’s Capital Area Shoot was hot—raising more than $95,000. Special guest Diane M. Sorantino, a member of the National Sporting Clays Hall of Fame and holder of many impressive titles, was on hand, courtesy of Beretta, to provide tips and help shooters bust more clays.

On the 16 station course, participants competed for the Lewis class titles. The high overall shooter for the day was Clive Watson, who broke 94 out of 100 clays. Mona Robinson broke 88 clays and earned the title of highest overall female shooter.

A team representing the Roofers International Union (President Kinsey Robinson, Chen Sun, Chuck Wyvill, Joe Cunniffe and Clive Watson) earned the highest overall team score with 445 out of 500 shots. They were followed closely by a team representing the Women’s Shooting Sports (Mona Robinson, Dee Orr, Wendy Miller, Andrew Bradley and Tim Keagy), who achieved the Lewis Class A title with 426 points.

After lunch, winners were drawn for an array of outdoor gear, including five firearms. A team representing the Wounded Warriors received a standing ovation from the large crowd, and Wounded Warrior shooting team member Landon Becker was drawn as the winner of a Beretta White Onyx 686 shotgun.

The 3rd Annual Capital Area Shoot was a tremendous success thanks to the participants and our many sponsors. Check out the list of upcoming USA events on page 27 and watch for the USA’s truck and trailer heading your way.
UPCOMING EVENTS

For more event details and to register, visit: unionsportsmen.org/events

Saturday, July 23
N. Illinois Sporting Clays Shoot
Hainesville, IL

Saturday, Aug. 6
Minneapolis Area Sporting Clay Shoot
Clear Lake, MN

Tuesday, Aug. 23
Juneau Trap Shoot
Juneau, AK

Saturday, Aug. 27
Anchorage Area Sporting Clays Shoot
Wasilla, AK

Saturday, Sept. 17
St. Louis Area Sporting Clays Shoot
St. Louis, MO

Saturday, Oct. 8
Kansas City Area Clay Shooting Triathlon
Kansas City, KS

Thursday, Oct. 13
Puget Sound Area Sporting Clays Shoot
Puyallup, WA

Saturday, Oct. 15
Portland Area Sporting Clays Shoot
Gervais, OR

Saturday, Oct. 29
Reno Area Sporting Clays Shoot
Reno, NV

Saturday, Nov. 5
Las Vegas Trap & Pistol Shoot
Las Vegas, NV

Saturday, Nov. 12
N. California Sporting Clays Shoot
Dunnigan, CA

Friday, Nov. 18
Northeast Ohio Dinner
Richmond Hts., OH

Saturday, Dec. 10
S. California Sporting Clays Shoot
Corona, CA

For information on sponsoring or helping organize a USA event near you, contact:

Nate Whiteman
Director of Recruitment & Special Events
Phone: 440-867-2732
Cell: 440-867-8229
natew@unionsportsmen.org

Tim Bindl
National Events/Fundraising Coordinator
Phone: 608-397-1023
timb@unionsportsmen.org
Share your best shots with your brothers and sisters of the USA, and you could win a Buck knife engraved with the USA logo. Visit www.unionsportsmen.org/photos to check out additional photos and submit your own.

Valon Koss, 4-year-old grandson of retired Local 1368 Mine Worker Jeffrey Koss, caught this golden trout in Ebensburg, PA, on May 7, 2011.

Doug Bachman of Sheet Metal Workers Local 19 joined Brotherhood Outdoors host Tom Ackerman for some late season waterfowl action in the Mississippi Flyway.

Todd Harrington of Bricklayers Local 1 in MN shot this Eastern Tom on Friday the 13th and was later drawn as the winner of a Mossberg shotgun in the USA’s turkey contest.

Jacob Crismon, a member of Sheet Metal Workers Local 36 from Holts Summit, MO, enjoyed a morning hunting in Eagle Bluffs, MO, with a friend and Union brother.

Bob Barteck, a member of Fire Fighters Local 425 from Wisconsin Rapids, WI, caught this 48” Musky in Nepko Lake, WI, in May. His whole family had a hand in catching the fish.

Todd Heustis of Sheet Metal Workers Local 9 and his family invited Brotherhood Outdoors host Tom Ackerman on a Wyoming pronghorn hunt last fall.

Marc Hertig, a member of Electrical Workers Local 890 from Eau Claire, WI, caught this 19” smallmouth bass in Lake Superior’s Chequamegon Bay using a crankbait in 6 feet of water.

Jessica Strickland, a member of Fire Fighters Local 4518 from Globe, AZ, tagged her first whitetail in Globe in Oct. 2010 on the second day of her hunt. It scored 98 3/8.

Jeff McClean, a member of Electrical Workers Local 24 from Baltimore, MD, shot his first black bear in Thornloe, Ontario. It weighed more than 300 pounds.
It was a hunt that wasn’t supposed to happen—at least not like this. My friend Bill and I were supposed to be chasing bull elk from our spike camp three miles deep into Montana’s backcountry. Instead, we were 30 minutes from downtown Bozeman, straining to hear bugles over the sound of traffic on the highway below us. Wilderness hunting it was not, but I didn’t mind the short pack out when I connected with my bull.

The afternoon hike was to be a trail run, something to stretch the legs before we packed in to Indian Creek the next morning. All that changed when I caught a glimpse of a white rump flashing over the hill ahead of us. We quietly slipped into position, not sure what we were calling to other than an elk of undetermined sex or size.

In what seemed both like agonizingly long minutes and fleeting seconds, a big 6 x 7 bull responded to Bill’s calls and paced the ridge above me. When he stopped to thrash a tree, asserting his dominance to the satellite bull we were pretending to be, I stepped from around a small pine and sent an arrow through him.

In certain circles of hunters, bowhunting elk falls somewhere along the same plane as nirvana, a near-mystical experience worthy only of the dedicated and devout. And while there is a grain of truth in the church of the wapiti, I’m more than happy to agree with the old adage it’s better to be lucky than good. Either way, the experience of having a big bull elk bugle so close you can feel it hooked me worse than any drug on the streets ever could.

Many hunters liken bowhunting bugling bulls to turkey hunting, with the same call-and-response hunting technique. And while I get a surge of adrenaline when a gobble rolls through the woods, it’s nothing compared to the growling chuckle of a 700-lb. bull as he creeps into your cow call or the locomotive-like charge of an angry bull coming to run off the spike you’re pretending to be.

When that happens, the challenge isn’t in keeping steady for the shot. No, the hard part is not turning to run screaming from the woods in the face of such an awesome animal. It’s that fight-or-flight factor that keeps me returning to the mountains year after year, humping those hills that seem to get higher in direct correlation to me getting older.

Elk hunting is never easy, neither is it impossible or nearly as out of reach as some would have you believe. In fact, with a few hundred-thousand elk roaming throughout the West (and now across the Midwest too), I’d argue we’re experiencing a Golden Age of elk hunting, and there’s no time like now to start planning your do-it-yourself hunt.

Among Western states, Colorado ranks the highest in numbers of elk, with an estimated 285,000 animals, many of which spend most of their lives on public land. In the northern half of the state, both the White River and Routt National Forests offer access to two of the state’s largest migratory elk herds. Archery elk tags in Colorado are sold over the counter for nearly all game management units, and the state boasts a 20% success rate among archery hunters over the last five years. Idaho and Utah also offer over-the-counter elk tags, though options are limited.

First-time elk hunters might be overwhelmed when they first enter the elk woods, but once the initial shock of the size of the country wears off, hunting elk becomes a manageable affair. Tim Meagher of Northern Colorado Outfitters says a little homework goes a long way toward success.

“Using online mapping technology such as Google Earth, I can learn in 20 minutes what used to take me years of hiking and hunting,” Meagher said. “Hunters should look for saddles, wallows, small meadows surrounded by dark timber, anything that might hold or attract elk. Find the right terrain, and you’ll know elk are there before you even get there.”

There are few hunts on the continent as adventurous and accessible as an archery elk hunt. Alaska and Northern Canada offer plenty of adventure, but they’re not easy to get to and can be downright expensive. In contrast, prime elk country is within a day or two drive from most of the U.S. population, and licenses are moderately affordable. With a little research and a bit of boot leather, DIY hunters have a reasonable chance of punching their tag on what I consider the ultimate big game animal – the Rocky Mountain Elk. Just remember to pack your rabbit’s foot.
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