WHEN TURKEYS DON'T TALK

CONFIDENCE. PATIENCE. PERSISTENCE.
FROM THE DIRECTOR’S DESK

Building Bridges to the Communities Where You Live, Work and Play

FRED MYERS
USA Executive Director/CEO

(L-R) Nashville Building Trades President Anthony Nicholson, Montgomery Bell State Park Manager Pat Wright and USA Executive Director/CEO Fred Myers at Montgomery Bell State Park new bridge dedication.

“We continually strive to maintain all facilities and services on minimal budgets. There are multiple projects that fall behind other higher priority maintenance issues. The unions and USA provided the materials, a large number of highly skilled volunteers and high quality service. We could not be more thankful,” said Joshua Choate, assistant superintendent of Cedar Hills State Park.

Mr. Choate was referring to one of the USA’s earliest Work Boots on the Ground (WBOGT) park projects, where 72 union members and contractors from the Dallas, Texas area donated their time and skills to refurbish three bridges at Cedar Hills State Park, using money raised at the USA’s Dallas Area Conservation Dinner.

We launched WBOGT with the simple idea of directly engaging union members in conservation. All too often when you begin something with a single focus, there were unanticipated, though immensely valuable, side effects. We discovered that while WBOGT builds bridges between skilled union volunteers and conservation projects that desperately need their skills, it also builds bridges between union members and the communities where they live, work and play.

These bridges are a powerful tool for unions. Union and union members continually give back to national, state and local charities, yet your members rarely receive the recognition they deserve. As a national organization, the USA can utilize Work Boots on the Ground and a variety of communications channels, including a TV show and magazine, to tell your inspiring stories and help reshape the American public’s understanding of unions.

Nearly 40 WBOGT projects have been completed in 16 states since the program was launched in 2010, most of which would not have been possible without union skills. Projects such as roofing a picnic pavilion at Wisconsin’s Horicon Marsh, building a lagoon at Georgia’s Hard Labor Creek State Park, and repairing a wheelchair-accessible walking trail at York River State Park got local union volunteers directly engaged in their communities, leaving a lasting and publicly visible impression.

In other examples, no tools or lumber were used to build bridges into the community. For many of the people who brought their children to the USA’s Special Needs Youth Whitetail Hunt, Take Kids Fishing Day and Got Youth Outdoors Day, it was their first meaningful introduction to the union world.

Most recently, in Ohio, the USA was able to donate $17,000 to Ashland University’s Black Fork Wetlands Environmental Studies Center, thanks to the union members who helped make the USA’s 2015 and 2014 Ohio AFL-CIO Conservation Dinners such tremendous successes (see pg. 69).

Children are our future. Whether casting a line for a bluegill, learning to safely fire a gun, or studying wetlands, these experiences will stick with them for the rest of their lives, and perhaps that early exposure will spark their interest in pursuing one of the union trades.

Through positive media coverage, volunteer recognition plaques at project sites, glowing testimonials from community leaders, and the direct engagement of members of the community, Work Boots on the Ground is changing how union members are viewed—one bridge, one trail, one child’s first fish at a time.

Joan Myers
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Welcome News for Carhartt Sweepstakes Winner

BY KATE NATION

Winning the USA & Carhartt “Rock It Country Style” Sweepstakes couldn’t have come at a better time for Carl Betancourt, a member of Sheet Metal Workers Local 67. Between rising taxes and limited work, he is faced with having to sell the Austin, Texas home he has lived in for the past 20 years.

“The news was a much needed bright spot for my life,” Betancourt said. “Winning reminded me that every moment is new, and good things are always possible even in your darkest times.”

Despite current challenges, Betancourt is looking forward to an all-expense paid trip to Nashville, TN, with his girlfriend, Kathy; this June for the 2015 CMA Music Festival where they will have the chance to meet country artists, get autographs and enjoy live performances. Some of the artists they will be looking for on the schedule are Lady Antebellum, Little Big Town, Sugarland, Florida Georgia Line and Garth Brooks.

“When I called to tell Carl he was the grand prize winner of our national promotion, he told me he didn’t think he would ever win but was just hoping for a shot at winning a U.S. made jacket,” said USA Deputy Director Mike d’Olivera. “I told him that, thanks to our great partner Carhartt, he was going to get that and a whole lot more.”

Already a big Carhartt fan, Betancourt is just as excited about the U.S. made Carhartt canvas/corduroy bibs, pants and jacket he will receive as part of the grand prize package. An avid motorcyclist, he has put his Carhartt Extreme Arctic coverall to the test on cold days—and it passed with wind-blocking color.

“I don’t care what the temperature is; if the bike starts, I’m riding,” he said.

His Extreme Arctic coverall does the job so well that it’s too warm to wear if the temperature gets above 45 degrees, so Betancourt looks forward to wearing his new lighter weight gear when the temperature reaches the 45-65 degree range.

While he won’t be sporting the coveralls at the CMA Music Fest when Nashville temperatures are likely to soar into the high 80s, he may find them very handy for working and fishing in Washington State, where he and Kay have been looking at houses. Betancourt has already researched some of the fishing opportunities in the Pacific Northwest and is excited about the salmon fishing available in that area of the country.

As a fisherman and a union member, Betancourt was happy to join a union-friendly outdoor organization when he learned about the Union Sportmen’s Alliance, and it looks like that decision certainly paid off for him at a time when he needed it most.

Congratulations to Carl on winning the USA & Carhartt “Rock It Country Style” Sweepstakes, we can’t wait to hear about the trip.

UA Father and Son to Share Wyoming Dream Hunt

BY KATE NATION

Howard Thomas followed his father’s footsteps both as a union man and a sportsman. He has been a member of the UA Local 502 Plumbers, Pipefitters and Service Technicians since 1977, where his dad, Donald Thomas, was an active member for 37 years before retiring. His dad also introduced him to hunting, and they continue to share a passion for the sport today, primarily hunting whitetail in their home state of Indiana.

This fall, Thomas will get to pay his dad back in a big way thanks to the Union Sportmen’s Alliance (USA) and Remington Outdoor Company’s “Wyoming Dream Hunt” sweepstakes. After learning that his dad was drawn as the grand prize winner of an all-expense-paid Wyoming antelope hunt at The Ranch at LCR, he didn’t want to pass up any time picking his dad as the lucky guest to join him on the trip.

“I have never even seen an antelope except on TV,” said Thomas, who added that it will be a first for his dad as well. “We always talked about doing something like this, but it’s very expensive and, with kids, there’s no time. This makes it a lot easier.”

When Thomas saw an ad for the USA’s sweepstakes in the UA magazine, he figured he might as well enter, but he couldn’t help wondering “what is this going to cost me?” when he got the phone call from USA Deputy Director Mike d’Olivera. Lucky for Thomas, the answer was nothing, thanks to the USA’s great partnership with Remington.

“This is one of the real perks of the job,” said d’Olivera. “I get to call some hard-working member and let him know that he just won an amazing trip package from one of our great partners. Once they get over the shock, they are always so humble and so thankful for the opportunity.”

In addition to the trip with his dad, Thomas will receive a Remington Model 700 CDL SF in .30 Mag to top off the $7,000 grand prize package. That is “extra sweet icing on the cake for Thomas, an avid Remington fan who has never owned any other brand of firearms and currently owns six Remington shotguns. You can only hunt whitetail with a shotgun in Indiana, so the Model 700 will come in handy for Thomas’ antelope hunt in the fall.

“I never know that Remington was union until Mike told me...that made it even better,” Thomas said. “Tell all my friends to buy nothing but Remington.”

We thank our friends at Remington for helping make a dream trip like this come true, and we wish Thomas and his dad the best of luck on their antelope hunt and look forward to sharing their trip highlights in a future issue of the Union Sportmen’s Journal.

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G. R. Howard Thomas with his father, Donald.
CONSERVATION FOCUS
USA’s Ohio State AFL-CIO Diners Help Fund State-of-the-Art Wetlands Center

BY KATE NATION

Ashland University’s new 1,200-square-foot Black Fork Wetlands Environmental Studies Center in Ashland, Ohio, is now ready for students to research wetlands firsthand thanks to several major donors, including the AFL-CIO’s Crawford/Richland Central Labor Council with funding from the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance and its Ohio State AFL-CIO Conservation Dinners.

Featuring an open classroom, a storage area, skylights and two composting toilets, the “green” environmental studies center will assist Ashland University students as well as local students of all ages in studying the wetlands by serving as a staging area for them to receive instruction and equipment and a place to examine specimens.

Located halfway between Columbus and Cleveland, the 289-acre wetlands provides habitat for fish, wildlife and a variety of critical plants. Prior to classroom construction, the first phase of the Ashland University project saw the development of a parking area, walking trail and 400-foot boardwalk with an observation deck and bird-watching tower.

In order to raise the $135,000 needed to build the Black Fork Wetlands Environmental Studies Center, Ashland University reached out to Ron Davis, president of the AFL-CIO’s Crawford/Richland Central Labor Council.

“I took it to my council; they liked it,” said Davis. “It’s one of a kind...there’s nothing like it in Northern Ohio.”

After taking on fundraising for the facility, the Crawford-Richland Central Labor Council reached out to labor contractors and organizations, including the Ohio AFL-CIO, which contributed $17,000 from funds raised at the USA’s Ohio State AFL-CIO Conservation Dinner in 2015 and 2014 and an additional pledge from the USA.

“We have the proceeds raised thus far with our USA dinners, which are held in Columbus, we have been able to make a substantial contribution to the Black Fork Wetlands project,” said Ohio AFL-CIO President Tim Barga. “The Ohio AFL-CIO is proud that we could be a part of this project and the learning experiences that will be shared on the grounds of Ashland University. I personally want to thank the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance for all they do, not only in Ohio, but across the country.”

“Even when union members put their mind to something, there is no stopping them,” said USA Executive Director Fred Myers. “This new state-of-the-art facility is a perfect example. Between the efforts of the Crawford-Richland Central Labor Council in raising funds for the facility, the Ohio AFL-CIO in hiring two successful USA Conservation Directors, and the union workers and contractors who built the facility in three months, this project was truly a labor of love.”

Photos courtesy of Allison Walt, Ashland University

New Jersey Union Volunteers Stretch Sportsmen’s Dollars

BY KATE NATION

Most sportmen and women know and even appreciate, that their hunting and fishing license support the management of fish and wildlife. Their favorite activity fund fish and wildlife agencies, which then work to maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations, bringing their hard earned money full circle.

In New Jersey, some of those funds are used to operate the Rockport Pleasant Farm and the associated statewide stocking programs. The first pheasants raised at Rockport were released in 1925, and since then, the hatchery has raised more than two million birds. For the 12,000 New Jersey residents who hunt pheasants in New Jersey, the program is invaluable.

Thanks to the USA’s Work Boots on the Ground program and a group of dedicated union volunteers, New Jersey sportmen’s dollars are now stretching a little further.

Following the USA’s 1st Annual Tri-State Area Conservation Dinner in 2013, Tom Mattlingley, a member of IBEW Local 351 and the Tri-State Area dinner committee, contacted the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife to determine how union volunteers could be of use. Using $5,000 of the money raised at the dinner to purchase planted pheasants and other construction materials, a group of union volunteers then built 50 pheasant transport boxes in a woodshop owned by Don Mullins, a retired member of Insulators Local 14.

Amid table saws, planners and Mattlingley’s best drafting tools, the volunteers constructed and painted stackable boxes that fit into the bed of a truck. According to Mattlingley, “they’re a work of art, like bird condominiums.”

“We had been accumulating boxes over the years, but it had been awhile since we had any new boxes due to lack of funding,” said Dave Golden, chief of the NJ Bureau of Wildlife Management. “So when the Union Sportsmen’s Alliance stepped in and offered to build the boxes, it was a big help. Some of our boxes are up to 20-years-old and still in operation.

Meet Ty Brown | USA Conservation Manager

“Outdoors is where my family and I spent a lot of my childhood. The outdoors is a tool used to teach me how to survive some of life’s curves,” said Brown. “Hunting, fishing, camping and fishing melded into the personal territory.”

A hunter, fisherman, country music singer and songwriter, Brown lived on a farm, fishing from camouflage to a cowboy hat and microphone to a gun. He was happy to trade in that suit and tie and join the Union’s Sportmen’s Alliance as Conservation Manager.

Brown leads the USA’s efforts to conserve fish and wildlife, restore the habitats, restore America’s past, improve public access to the outdoors and educate youth about the outdoors.

As Conservation Manager, Brown facilitates all aspects of the USA conservation efforts from identifying, organizing and executing conservation projects to participating in fundraising events. He is also working to institute new processes that will further develop the USA’s Work Boots on the Ground program from new partnerships with government agencies and organizations and implementing many youth events to advocate youth as the future of conservation.

When not working, hunting or fishing, Brown can often be found rebuilding his barn, painting a mural or in a mulch sale. A horse person himself, Brown enjoys visiting various groups and individuals for the greater good.

When not working, hunting or fishing, Brown can often be found rebuilding his barn, painting a mural or in a mulch sale. A horse person himself, Brown enjoys visiting various groups and individuals for the greater good.

Meet Ty Brown | USA Conservation Manager

After the success of the project in 2013, the USA’s 2nd Annual Tri-State Area Conservation Dinner committee decided to replicate it. Using $5,100 worth of building supplies purchased with 2014 Dicesar funds, Mullins and his 64-year-old father, Larry, built 52 pheasant and 10 quail transport boxes, which Ray MacDowell of UA Local 322 delivered to IUPAT DC 711, where they were painted by 3rd year apprentice Steve Atkinson, Reece DiSipio and Herminio Lucinzo.

According to Edward Flanagan, IUPAT DC 711 Apprenticeship Coordinator, the apprentices gain valuable experience by working on a variety of local outreach programs that, in turn, support the community.

“Federal grants can be applied to other things, but the pheasant program is paid for by license and angler license fees,” said Golden. “So every dollar that is donated through the pheasant boxes saves license sales money, so those funds can be used for other things.”

“I think projects like this show what we’re all about,” Mullins said. “We’re not just individuals. We’re a brotherhood that works together to get things done.”

The NJ Division of Fish & Wildlife stocked 63,000 ring-necked pheasants in 2014 and approximately 11,000 quail in wildlife management areas throughout the state. The USA was happy to support the release efforts thanks to these Tri-State Area Conservation Dinner committee members and volunteers: Rob Walsh and Ken Cockrell (IUPAT Local 542), Craig Janda, Mike Richa, Steve Atkinson, Reece DiSipio, Herminio Lucinzo (IUPAT DC 711); Tom Mattlingley, Dan Connor and Ken Lowry, Jr. (IBEW Local 151); Roger Gilberston and Dennis Zanetti (SMART Local 27); Ray MacDowell (UA Local 322); Mike Conry (IBEW Local 164); John Stahl III and Don Mullins (Insulators Local 14); and Larry Mullins.
USA EVENTS

NORTHEAST

It’s going to be a busy spring and summer in the Northeast. From early April through the end of May, volunteers from the North & Central NY Building & Construction Trades, led by IBEW Local 43 Business Manager Don Martin and Roofers Local 195 BM Ronald Haney will repair the reproduction home of President Fillmore's birthplace at Fillmore Glen State Park to make it presentable for the 50th anniversary celebration of the replica. In May, the USA will host the 2nd Annual Central and Northern NY BCTC Conservation Dinner in Syracuse, NY.

The 2015 Shoot Tour will also make its way to this region, beginning with a stop in Port Republic on May 2 for the 3rd Annual SMART New Jersey Sporting Clays Shoot at Red Wing Sporting Clays, owned and operated by SMART Local 27 member Roger Giesler.

For the 7th running, the USA will hold the 2nd IDOA Capital Area Sporting Clays Shoot in Queenstown, MD. The sporting clays course at Pintail Point has been upgraded once again, so we can accommodate a greater number of shooters.

UPCOMING EVENTS:
May 2 SMART New Jersey Sporting Clays Shoot | Port Republic, NJ
May 14 Central and Northern NY BCTC Conservation Dinner | Syracuse, NY
May 29 Capital Area AFL-CIO Sporting Clays Shoot | Queenstown, MD
June 6 Western Pennsylvania Sporting Clays Shoot | Port Republic, NJ
June 28 Labor of Love Sporting Clays Shoot | Port Republic, NJ

In Georgia, volunteers from the Columbus Metal Trades Council (CMTC), spearheaded by CMTC Recording Secretary Dave Hall, are lending their skilled hands to Florence Marion County State Park. In February, they evaluated the park’s boat docks and slips for electrical issues and made necessary repairs to areas owned by the state. This March, volunteers are installing a pump with a grinder and a sand filtration system at the park’s waste water treatment facility to ensure a cleaner facility and protect nearby rivers and streams.

UPCOMING EVENTS:
March 21 Nashville Area Sporting Clays Shoot | Nashville, TN
April 10 West Virginia AFL-CIO Dinner | Charleston, WV

SOUTH

The USA’s 2015 Shoot Tour began with a bang in Lititz, PA, in January, as the 4th Annual Central Florida, Sporting Clays Shootraised $6,000 more than the record set in 2013 for the event. It also set a new participant record with 127 shooters. The USA’s 6th Annual Houston Area Sporting Clays Shoot was also a big success, increasing the number of shooters from 109 in 2014 to 129 this year. We know the momentum will continue as the tour rolls into Nashville on March 21.

The very first USA Conservation Dinner was held in Dallas, TX, in 2012, and $3,000 from that event was used by Work Boots on the Ground volunteers to refurbish three bridges at Texas’ Cedar Hill State Park in 2013. Building on that success, we were excited to hold the 2nd Dallas BCTC Conservation Dinner on March 14.

The USA’s Work Boots on the Ground projects are kicking off in Texas and Georgia this year. By IA Plumbers Local 68 Secretary-Treasurer Mike Cramer and Ironworkers Local 84 Business Manager Ed Varghese, union volunteers near Houston, Texas are constructing a 500 ft. elevated boardwalk connecting the Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge to the city of Liberty, Texas’ longest trail system. A joint effort between the USA and the Department of the Interior, the project is expected to be completed by late March.

UPCOMING EVENTS:
March 21 Nashville Area Sporting Clays Shoot | Nashville, TN
April 10 West Virginia AFL-CIO Dinner | Charleston, WV

Midwest

You would never have guessed the USA’s 1st Annual Des Moines Area Conservation Dinner on January 23 was a first time event. With 420 guests, it was one of our most highly attended dinners, and it set a record for the most money raised, bringing in more than $9,500. Robert Gilmore, BM and Secretary-Treasurer for IUPAT District Council 81, led the charge with a dedicated committee that worked tirelessly to make this event such a success.

Days later, on January 27, the USA’s 4th Annual Greater Lansing Labor Council Dinner had a great turnout. One of the USA’s oldest dinners, this event continues to be strongly supported by the local union community.

Thanks to the state AFL-CIO in Illinois and Ohio, March has been another terrific month for the dinner program with great local participation and support. For our 2nd Annual Illinois AFL-CIO Conservation Dinner on March 2 and our 3rd Annual Ohio State AFL-CIO Conservation Dinner on March 13.

Later this spring, the USA will hold its 2nd Annual Greater Kansas City Conservation Dinner (date to be posted on USA website), and the USA Shoot Tour will make its way to the Midwest in early summer, beginning with a stop in Kansas City.

UPCOMING EVENTS:
Spring TBD Greater Kansas City Conservation Dinner | Kansas City, MO
June 6 Enid Chapter Take Kids Fishing Day | Enid, OK
July 7 Western WI AFL-CIO Take Kids Fishing Day | LaCrosse, WI
July 11 IUPAT No. Ohio Sporting Clays Shoot | Bucyrus, OH
July 18 Illinois State Sporting Clays Shoot | Hainesville, IL
July 20 Madison Take Kids Fishing Day | Madison, WI

In Wisconsin, youth in three cities will get an opportunity to cast a line through USA’s Work Boots on the Ground program in June. Hosted by the Western Wisconsin Building and Construction Trades Council and Greater West Central Area Labor Council, USA’s Eau Claire Take Kids Fishing Day will take place on June 6. It will be followed by the La Crosse Take Kids Fishing Day on June 7, hosted by the Western Wisconsin AFL-CIO. Both events take place during Wisconsin’s free fishing weekend. At the end of the month, volunteers from the Building and Construction Trades Council of South Central Wisconsin will host the first Take Kids Fishing Day event in Madison, WI, at Vilas Park on the north shore of Lake Wingra.

WEST

This past fall saw several impressive achievements by USA members in the West. Lori Kuhn, representing Electrical Workers Local 46, won both the High Over All (HOA) Individual Shooter and HOA Ladies Division awards back-to-back at the USA’s Pigout Sound and Portland-Seashell Shoots with scores of 88 and 81. A little farther south, Ben Courtmarha, representing So. California Pipe Trades District Council 16, took home the HOA Individual Shooter award for the 5th year in a row at the USA’s 5th Annual So. California Sporting Clays Shoot.

We will hold our first USA Alaska BCTC Conservation Dinner on March 6 in Anchorage, and our 2015 Shoot Tour will make its way to the West again this fall.

UPCOMING EVENTS:
March 18 Nashville Area Sporting Clays Shoot | Nashville, TN
April 10 West Virginia AFL-CIO Dinner | Charleston, WV

CONTACTS

USA Shoots
Heather Tazelaar
heather@unionsportsmen.org
(713) 368-6317

USA Dinners
Walt Ingram
walt@unionsportsmen.org
(740) 542-0470

Work Boots on the Ground
Ty Brown
tyb@unionsportsmen.org
(615) 831-6751
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TAKE THE USA YOUTH TURKEY QUIZ

1. What is the flap of skin under a male turkey’s chin called?
   a. gizzard  b. double chin  c. wattle  d. snood

2. What is it called when a male turkey puffs up his breast feathers and spreads his tail feathers like a fan?
   a. flaring  b. strutting  c. feathering  d. puffing

3. Which of the following is not a type of turkey?
   a. Western  b. Osceola  c. Eastern  d. Merriam

4. Which is a turkey’s strongest sense?
   a. smell  b. hearing  c. vision  d. taste

5. What sound does a male turkey make to attract females (hens)?
   a. yelp  b. holler  c. purr  d. gobble

6. How fast can a turkey run?
   a. 5 mph  b. 18 mph  c. 25 mph  d. 40 mph

7. What are baby turkeys called?
   a. poult  b. chick  c. hen  d. flocks

8. Which of the following is not a name for a male turkey?
   a. jake  b. buck  c. tom  d. gobbling

9. What do male turkeys use their spurs for?
   a. clinging to trees  b. breaking acorns  c. picking their nose  d. fighting

10. How many turkeys were left in the early 1900s when they were endangered?
    a. 10 million  b. 1 million  c. 100,000  d. 30,000

ENTRY FORM

USA Youth Turkey Quiz

Youth Name:

Age:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Parent/Guardian Name:

Parent/Guardian Phone:

Write your answer to each question (a, b, c or d) on the lines below:

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Mail completed form to:

USA – Youth Turkey Quiz
3340 Perimeter Hill Dr.
Nashville, TN 37211
5 PRO TRICKS FOR PRE-SPAWN BASS

JONATHAN NEWTON SAYS HUMPS ARE KEYING STANDING AREAS

Some of the best pre-spawn bass action Alabama pro Jonathan Newton finds is around submerged humps near well-known bass bedding areas like creeks, coves and broad flats in sheltered shoreline areas.

But not all humps are the same. A good pre-spawn hump can be up to a half-mile away from a likely bass bedding area. That’s because when conditions become perfect, bass move great distances quickly. Some humps are connected to shoreline areas; others are far out in open water.

An ideal hump tops out at 12 to 14 feet of water, with 20 feet of water or more surrounding it. It should have a hard bottom consisting of shell, gravel or rock. Soft-bottom humps sometimes hold bass, but hard bottom is best. The best humps are small ones, other anglers overlook. They only may be 20 feet across the top—about the size of the average dining room at a home. And a dining room is a good comparison, because that’s what a pre-spawn hump is to schools of staging bass.

Not every hump is consistently good for pre-spawners. It may be great one year, poor the next.

Timing is crucial for pre-spawn bass on humps. Water temperature should be in the upper 50s to low 60s, and there should be an abundance of baitfish in the immediate area of a hump.

Pro Greg Pugh likes lipless crankbaits for pre-spawn bass, burning retrieves to trigger strikes after cold front conditions.

PRE-SPAWN BASS ARE AGGRESSIVE, according to pro Greg Pugh. He fishes “searching lures” to locate bass by drawing reaction bites. Greg prefers isolated cover in creeks and pocket water off main lakes, and he prefers working lures along bottom breaks that quickly jump from 5 feet to 3 or 2 feet deep.

“Usually I’ll work a spinnerbait, a chatterbait, a buzzbait, depending on the weather, water conditions, and what bass tell me they want on that particular day,” says the Alabama angler.

BRETT HITE TARGETS SECONDARY POINTS

Brett Hite loves the pre-spawn. When he pinpoints a hot spot like a secondary point, he knows it can hold an incredible number of good-size staging bass.

“Bass move to the shallows for bedding in waters, so new fish are showing up all the time in key contact spots like secondary points just before moving on spawning sites,” says Brett Hite, a pro and the son of famed angler Davey Hite. “Secondary points also get a load of bass that move back out to them when a spring cold front hits.

“So when you locate a good secondary point, you’re getting fish moving in—and moving out—of the shallows all the time. And that can last for weeks.”

Brett defines a secondary point as a “hump” off the bank in a main cove or fender creek, off a main lake, and well away from larger more discernable primary points where a creek enters the main lake.

“Structure fishing is easy now because of maps on sonar,” he says. “So I want a secondary point that’s not shown on a map, and I zigzag over a likely area with a Humminbird side-scanner sonar unit that gives an exacting picture of the bottom type I’m seeking.”

RUSTY SALEWSKE WORKS STAINED WATER FOR CONSISTENCY

Pro Rusty Salewske has earned a lot of money in tournaments during the pre-spawn period. His trick is to locate stained or off-color water for spring bass concentrations.

A stained water pattern often starts in the backs of creeks following rain, says the California native. Stained water entering the back of a creek is often warmer, and it often brings food into the lake that attracts baitfish and bass.

Stained water can hold a lot more active bass because it maintains stable water temperature from suspended particles. Bass in stained water continue to feed and are aggressive because water temperatures are warmer or remain more constant than clear water.

Salewske said he likes to make parallel casts to cover an area near drop-offs in 6 feet of stained water. He wants to keep lures in the most productive strike zone throughout a retrieve. Parallel casts along a structure element produce far more bass than casts made perpendicularly to it.

Lure speed is important in drawing strikes from pre-spawn bass, he said. Sometimes a moderate retrieve is best, other times a stop-and-go retrieve is most effective. As air and water temperatures rise, much faster retrieves around docks and brush piles in stained water may be needed to provoke strikes.

Abundant baitfish near a hump makes it most productive for pre-spawn bass, says tournament angler Jonathan Newton.

RON SHUFFIELD FOCUS ON CREEK CHANNELS WITH COVER

Long-time and well-respected Arkansas pro angler Ron Shuffield recommends that reservoir anglers look for pre-spawn bass staging and holding along flooded creek channel edges, especially those having at least 60-degree drop-offs. The best pre-spawn hot spots are often where creeks swing in close to a lake bank, often in long stretches of 100 yards or so.

While bass can hold along an entire creek channel edge, the very best spots usually are near the head and tail portions of a channel bend.

Flooded timber can be important to this deadly pre-spawn bass pattern. In clear water, but not in turbid water, timber cut-offs can sink 10 feet, because bass may suspend in flooded timber whenever water is clear. Bass also may prefer channel banks near flooded timber or on channel edges, in depths from 25 to 45 feet.

Wood structure can be an important pre-spawn bass location, according to veteran journeyman pro Ron Shuffield.

The four pre-spawn lures Greg prefers for this style shallow-water fishing are:

1. Tandem-blade spinnerbait in 1- or 3/8-ounce sizes with a chartreuse-and-white skirt. He like a size 3 or 4.5 gold willowleaf blade paired with a size 4 Colorado blade.

2. Swimming jigs in 1/4-ounce, white, black, or blue with a white trailer, or a plain dark color. Greg fishes these needless, bullet-head jigs in visible brush in 3 feet of water or less.

3. Lipless crankbaits, especially after a spring cold front. He hunts the retrieve. It’s a fast way to cover a lot of water to locate schools of pre-spawn bass.

4. Buzzbaits are a great warm weather, pre-spawn bass weapon, Greg says. When fish are up cruising and feeding in spring, a buzzbait is hard to beat.
Small Boats, Great Lakes

The warmest springtime water is usually shallow and near shore. Small boats are all that's needed—just take the proper precautions to be safe.

By Dave Mull

Many anglers don't realize they can enjoy incredible springtime fishing on the Great Lakes out of their trailerable 14- to 18-foot boats. With common sense and a weather eye, smaller boats offer a safe means to get out after the salmon, trout and steelhead that now crowd the shallows of the Great Lakes.

Take these tips to heart, and you can cash in on some great action and fine fillets. This is primarily a trolling game, with the goal of covering water to contact wandering fish. In the spring, coho salmon and brown trout often cruise shallow water near shore, sometimes joined by bigger king salmon and steelhead. It's all about baithook, which are usually in the warmest water they can find after a long winter. The warmest—even if it's just a couple of degrees warmer—is usually right along seawalls and the beach.

All five of the Great Lakes offer ports that can produce great springtime action, much of it along the southern shores of the lakes where southerly winds create favorable conditions by keeping near-shore waters relatively calm.

The southern end of Lake Michigan offers a variety of species and the earliest spring action due to its most southerly location among the big lakes. Action can be found from Milwaukee harbor in Wisconsin through Illinois and Indiana waters and on up to the port of St. Joseph/Benton Harbor. The very earliest fish catching often happens in the waters from Portage to East Chicago, Indiana, where effluents from steel mills provide warm water. While not the pristine fishing experience you soon stop noticing the background of mosquitos when you start loading the cooler with cohos and browns.

Lake Erie, mostly known as a walleye fishery, also produces springtime steelhead for trolls. From Erie, Pennsylvania's Presque Isle Bay through Cleveland to Sandusky, Ohio, steelheads provide springtime targets that are often within a few hundred yards of shore.

Lake Ontario provides multi-species action at the Niagara Bar at the mouth of the river of the same name on the west end, easily accessed from Lewiston, New York. Brown trout provide great action from New York ports eastward all the way to the city of Oswego.

Springtime salmon central on Lake Huron can often be found at Port Huron, Michigan and Sarnia, Ontario, where the St. Clair River starts.

The latest spring action heats up on Lake Superior, most northerly of the lakes. Great fishing can be found from where the St. Louis River comes in at Duluth all the way through Wisconsin and Michigan waters to Sault St. Marie. In this cold-est of the Great Lakes, shallow crankbait spreads can rule the day right into June.

A GOOD SPREAD OF LURES

When the Cohos Are Close

To shore, fishing is fast and furious. When they’re not in, you can often either go out deeper and find them or stay close and target brown trout in the shallows. You often come across a roving steelhead and the occasional king salmon in shallow, too.

Cohos like brightly colored rattling lures such as this Brad’s Thin Fish.

For lures, crankbaits and stickbaits rule early in the year. If you pursue bass or walleyes, you’ll likely have some hard-bodied lures working great for salmon and trout too.

There’s no need to buy a bunch of specialized artificial baits, although a few like the Brad’s Thin Fish are worth adding to the arsenal. Brown trout like a natural looking minnow bait, such as a Floating Rapala and Bomber Long A, while coho attack plugs with high action, bright colors and rattles. The venerable Rat-L-Trap lipless crankbaits and Dave’s Winning Streak are coho killers.

Rat-L-Traps are coho killers.

Rods and reels can be whatever you use for your favorite species. You don’t need super heavy line—even though you might hook into a bruiser that pushes 20 pounds, the big lakes with featureless bottoms don’t offer anything for the fish to wrap your line around. Most anglers spool with 10- to 20-pound test.

Basic trolling gear for your boat starts with decent rod holders. You don’t want to have to hold a rod the whole time, and most states around the Great Lakes allow you to troll with two or three rods at once. A good spread of lures helps contact fish, so the more rods, the merrier. When Kevin Essenburg, an experienced salmon angler from Holland, Michigan, takes his two young daughters trolling in his 14-foot aluminum Sea Nymph boat, he often runs eight, sometimes nine rods. To avoid tangles and increase the width of his spread, he employs inexpensive, off-the-planer boards, which clip to the fishing line in front of the lure and take the lure out to the side.

Brown trout like natural finishes as seen on this Bomber Long A. Note the front hook is removed as a big trout hooked on the rear hook and running can get the front hook caught on its gill plate, which makes the fish extremely difficult to land.

This coho fell for a finger-strap Junior ThunderStick.

The key to avoiding tangles is to run deeper lures and shorter lines closer to the boat and the longer lines with shallower lures outside of them. For instance, you might run deep-divers like Reef Runner Deep Little Rippers directly behind the boat, then run shallower diving lures on longer line, rods pointing directly away from the boat. Shallow, small-lipped stickbaits behind planers boards can then go well to the sides of the boat. When running more than one planer board on the same side, the longer lines and shallower lures should go outside of deeper diving lures, which you should set closer to the planer boards.

Planer boards take your line out to the side of the boat, which helps you cover water.

S A F E T Y  F I R S T

No fish is worth dying for, and if you go into 40-degree water, you won’t last very long. It’s about as dangerous as boiling oil.

If possible, carry a buddy or two to the lake, so someone in another boat can render assistance if need be. Before leaving, make sure your motor is in good running condition after winter storage, and that your fuel pump works—put some water in and make sure it pumps. Sound alone doesn’t mean it can move water.

Safety gear should include a flaf kit, a life-raft, a squawk and or whistle (all required by the Coast Guard for boats 16 feet and longer). Also bring along a handheld marine radio, preferably one that floats. Enter the Local Coast Guard radio numbers in all phones, and make sure you keep your phone dry. A plastic duffel-style sandwich bag works great.

Do we really need to suggest you wear a life jacket? And if you’re even slightly uncomfortable with the waves or weather forecast, head for an inland body of water and fish there instead.
ST. CROIX LEGEND XTREME CASTING ROD

- Xtreme sensitivity, extreme power, lightweight, great design, comfortable handle and U.S. made. What more could you ask for in a rod? With the most advanced technologies and features, the St. Croix Legend Xtreme Casting Rods earned the "Best of Show freshwater Rod Series" at the 2012 ICAST—for good reason. Each rod was handcrafted with St. Croix’s premiere SCV graphite material, a $3,000,000 modulus, high strain graphite that compliments Legend’s core of SCV Graphite.

The Legend Xtreme rods also feature St. Croix’s TET (Taper Enhancement Technology) blank design to provide curved patterns for improved actions with increased sensitivity along with Advanced Reinforcing Technology (ART) for increased strength and power. It’s sensitive enough to feel the thinnest strikes yet strong enough to catch a shark!

FUJI KIT CONCEPT TANGLE FREE GUIDES with SIG rings and exclusive 8-color finish frames are ideal for bass, minnow and fluorocarbon lines, and their slim profile and ring design help them shed tangles. Fuji SK2 split reel seats also furnish the ultimate in lightweight functionality and sensitivity, and Xtreme-Skin handles repel water, fish slime and dirt, while providing superior angular comfort.

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FLAMBEAU BRUSH GUARD FRONT LOADER

- Be prepared to hit the water for whatever is biting this season with the Flambeau Brush Guard Front Loader. Not only can it hold a huge amount of tackle and supplies, it’s also very sturdy. Its top loading open compartment is large enough for those big accessories, and you’ll find plenty of storage in its (2) 4004R and (1) 7004R tuff tainers with enough dividers to arrange all your lures and bait. With outside tool holders molded right into the box, there’s a place for everything. Plus, the front loader’s torque and groove lid to base construction keeps the elements out when the lid is closed. Give it a try, and you’ll know why it’s the best extra-large frontloading tackle box on the market.

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- Deer calls, turkey calls, duck calls, coyote calls...phone calls. What do these calls have in common? They can all be made with a smartphone thanks to the iHunt app by Ruger. Skeptical about how realistic a game call produced from a cell phone can sound? Consider this—iHunt has been the best-selling hunting app for more than three years. The iHunt app is easy to use and navigate, and it offers more than 47 animals and 600 hunting calls. Plus, it features hunt logs, sober times, weather and more. The iHunt app is available through iTunes and Google Play as a free trial or for purchase at just $2.99. When you compare that to the combined cost of all the calls you’ve purchased, it’s a steal. Plus, it’s one less thing to pack.

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GOOD OUTDOOR TECHNOLOGIES KUTZ-ALL

- Ever wish you had a telescoping saw to reach that tree limb obstructing the view from your treestand or blind? Good Outdoor Technologies has solved that problem with its new KUTZ-ALL telescoping saw, one of the innovative products in its Good Outdoors Collection. For safe and convenient transport, the KUTZ-ALL aluminum handle acts as a carrying case for its three, interchangeable pruning, carbide and fiber blades. Simply secure a blade into the handle and go right to work; or extend your reach by cutting a tree limb of any length and twirling the green and into the KUTZ-ALL handle to make the perfect saw/pruning device for any situation you find yourself in. In the KUTZ-ALL is lightweight, waterproof, rustproof, and easily fits into a tackle box, turkey vest, backpack or under your tractor seat.

www.kutzalls.com

WARM-SEASON FOOD PLOTS HOLD DEER ON YOUR PROPERTY DURING THE OFF-SEASON, AND THEY PROVIDE VALUABLE NUTRITION TO YOUR WILDLIFE.

You don’t need a food plot to kill a deer. Hunters have been getting along just fine before anyone thought of planting a patch of clover. Make no mistake, though; Food plots not only attract and hold deer, they can increase your success dramatically. Food plots concentrate whitetails in a small area, and they allow you to practice better herd management. They also attract and benefit other wildlife species like turkeys, rabbits, quail and songbirds.

Cool-season food plots are most commonly planted on hunting clubs and properties. These seeds are put in the ground in the late summer or early fall. They don’t need a lot of care once they’re in, but they do need consistent, regular watering. There’s more to planting a successful food plot or two than turning some dirt and throwing down some seed, though. The best plots are the result of thoughtful site selection, careful design and thorough preparation.

Warm-season food plots are less common, but they may be even more important for a balanced management program to improve the quality of the deer on a tract of land. These plots, planted from April to June depending on the region of the country, provide valuable nutrition as does are having fawns and as bucks are growing antlers.
SPRING FOOD PLOT SEED CHOICES

While cool-season plots are often as basic as a cereal grain or two, like winter wheat or oats, it’s a different palette of potential seeds for plots planted in the spring.

Spring Food Plot Seed Choices

Choose Your Spot

Aside from water, food plots need one key ingredient more than anything else: sunlight. Without it, they will fail to live up to their potential. That’s why it’s critical to choose your plot locations with that in mind. Most food plots need at least four hours of direct sunlight per day. That can eliminate some locations. No deep woods or narrow strips unless you knock down some of those trees.

If you have plenty of locations with suitable sunlight, don’t just plant them randomly. Instead, says forestry and wildlife consultant Art Bumgarner, think like a deer before you build them. For instance, he likes to plant plots adjacent to bedding areas.

“Your deer will feel as comfortable as possible: They don’t have to travel across a field or through open woods, they’re more likely to use your plot during legal shooting hours,” he says. “Like putting plots in the middle of a planted field, which is often prime bedding cover, because the deer feel safe as they walk to the plots.”

Another good location is small in the middle of your property, particularly if you have suitable bedding cover throughout your land. Providing adequate food deep within your boundaries ensures that at least some deer will stay on your property and utilize, on the neighboring farms, travel through your land to get to the food.

Of course, multiple plots are better than a single plot. Build several if you have the options. Place them at opposite ends of your property or build them on the corners or scatter them at strategic locations in relation to bedding cover. That not only gives your options to hunt different, valued directions, multiple plots allow you to spread out hunting pressure.

Shape It

Before you start coming out the plots, consider their purpose. Will they primarily be used for bow hunting or gun hunting or both? Large plots are fine for gun hunting, but even they should be shaped with hunting in mind. Can you make a skid from one end to the other?

A popular and effective rut-breaking plot is called the hub-and-spoke or wagon-wheel plot. As its name implies, this is a hub that is the ideal location to place a blind or shooting tower. The spokes consist of three or more long, narrow strips radiating from the hub.

“Not too long ago to get different plants in each spoke,” says Bumgarner. “That gives the deer different choices throughout the season.”

Large plots may not be a good idea if you are only going to hunt it with a bow. You need to reach all the way across. That’s why smaller or irregularly shaped plots do best.

Bumgarner likes been shaped plots and long, narrow plots because deer will pass closer to your stand as they feed. Just make sure to keep them to 30 or 40 yards at the narrowest point, which is where you should place your two-stand.

Bumgarner’s perfect plots is 125 yards long and 40 yards wide planted close to thick bedding or escape cover. Again, the key is security. If it’s an option, he will leave a few rows in the plot to add to the security.

Keep in mind that a single, small plot may not last long if you have lots of deer. Generally, more size is better, although there is a point of diminishing returns. Opinion vary, but most will agree that 3 to 10 percent of your land should be in food plots with plots ranging in size from a quarter to three acres. Again, your deer density, your land’s available locations and your farm accounting will determine how many plots and how many acres you can plant.

Prep It

Once you’ve mapped out the locations, shapes and sizes of your plots, it’s time to build them. First, use a non-selective herbicide like Roundup to kill off the existing vegetation. Once the field is free of vegetation, the next step is to add a layer of soil. What youow would be a high-quality, and it may take several days and hit it with another dose of herbicide. Sprinkled disking and spraying will cut down on future weed growth, although you’re never totally eliminate unwanted plants.

If you start now, though, you can build a food plot that not only does deer like as a habitat, you can create a plot that you can be proud of if you ever shoot a deer over it.

SPRING PLOT SPRAYING

Start preparing your food plot sites now. It can take several rounds of disking and spraying to reduce the inevitable weed growth.

TEST YOUR SOIL

No farmer worth his John Deere plants a crop without first conducting a soil test.

Whitelit Institute Vice President Steve Scott says a soil test will not only let you know your plots reach their full potential, they can save you money in the long run.

“You may need as much lime or fertilizer as you thought. A soil test will tell you that,” Steve says.

On the other hand, you may need to amend your soil significantly, which will then lead to strong, vibrant and productive food plots.

Test kits are available through your local extension office or through seed companies like Whitelit Institute.
In a perfect world, spring gobblers would sound off on the roost as you settle against the base of a tree 100 yards away. They’d fly down, puff into a ball of feathers and gobble every three or four minutes—or more—as they circled their way through the woods in your direction. You’d be able to follow their every move as they zigged and zagged or even walked the other way. But turkey hunting is far from perfect. Gobblers don’t always sound off when they hit the ground and head your way. Sometimes, they don’t utter a peep at all, even when it seems like the perfect morning.

BE CONFIDENT

When a gobbler doesn’t gobble, that’s where your confidence becomes the most important ingredient of the day. A silent spring morning doesn’t mean the turkeys have vanished, and it certainly doesn’t mean they can’t be called into range. You simply have to believe that gobblers are hearing your yelps, chuck and purrs. And you must believe they will respond, even if they never make a sound.

“I learned a long time ago to be ready for a gobbler every time I hit my call,” says Rick Patterson, a lifelong turkey hunter from central Missouri. “Gobblers will often come without making a sound, especially if they’ve been pressured, so you need to be sitting down with your gun up as if you are certain a gobbler is on his way.”

In other words, don’t just walk down a trail and throw out a few yelps hoping a gobbler sounds off. Expect one to come in quiet every time you call.

“They actually do that a lot,” adds Patterson. “I don’t know how many times I’ve been standing there hearing a gobbler after I made a few calls when I saw one running toward me. Now, I won’t make a call without setting down and getting ready. I expect to see a gobbler every time I call.”

BE PATIENT

Not all gobblers sprint to his calls. More often than not, Patterson doesn’t see anything. Sometimes, people do. It just takes a while. Most silent gobblers are in no hurry to investigate the sounds of a hen. It can take an hour or more for a nearby gobbler to make his way to you. That was another hard but valuable lesson Patterson learned after over 40 years in the turkey woods. He would sit for a few minutes before assuming there was no gobbler within hearing distance.

“It seemed like every time I stood up, I’d see a gobbler running away,” he recalls. “Any more, I’m not working an active bird and I haven’t heard a gobbler all morning. I might as well stay in one place and stick it out. I’ll sit for two or three hours sometimes.”

BE PATIENT

Staying put is much better than simply walking through the woods. In fact, there’s no better way to burn out a tract of land than by constantly walking around. You may not see or hear them, but there’s a good chance you are doing nothing but spooking birds and ultimately decreasing your opportunities the rest of the season.

BE PATIENT

Waiting in a single spot may be a great way to kill a silent gobbler, but it also helps you kill time. That’s important on those silent mornings, according to gobblers often start talking later in the morning, even if they didn’t gobble at first light.

“They may already have hens in the morning, but those hens may leave and the gobbler will start gobbling to attract new hens or to call his harem back to him,” he says.

“If you can stick it out to 10 or 11 or even later, there’s a pretty good chance you can hear one gobble.”

That late-morning activity is even more likely to happen on public land. Although some hunters do stay in the woods throughout the morning, the majority are gone within a few hours of sunrise. Turkeys figure that out. They wait for hunters to leave before resuming their normal breeding activity. They may not talk much, but a single gobble is often enough to lead you to the right general location.

Once you close the distance, you shouldn’t “talk” much. Either. Spend enough time in the woods, and you’ll realize there’s just aren’t that vocal most of the time. They might cluck occasionally and they’ll make a few soft yelps at times, but they are rarely loud and aggressive. You shouldn’t be, either.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

If you can’t find an answer or you never hear a gobble, find a known strutting area, sit down and wait. Fields, ridges, openings in big woods and along river bottoms are all common strutting areas. Gobblers will often follow their hens around for a couple of hours before heading to their strutting zone. If you get their first, there’s a good chance you can punch a tag. It’s a roll of the dice, but if you are greeted by the sound of silence the next time you step into the turkey woods, it’s better than loading up your truck and heading home.

WHAT INFLUENCES GOBBLING ACTIVITY?

A number of research projects have examined gobbling activity and the various factors that influence it. One, conducted on an unhunted area in South Carolina, found a distinct peak of gobbling activity in the early spring when rocks of hens and jakes break up. Gobblers also increased vocalization during the peak incubation period. As more hens were sitting on nests, gobblers were more active in their search for unhatched eggs.

That study looked at activity throughout the spring and developed a trend for the entire season. It didn’t examine daily or short-term factors like weather and hunting pressure. A study in South Dakota did. It examined gobbling activity of a hunting population and nearby, an unhunted population and examined gobbling activity related to various weather conditions and hunting pressure. There was no noticeable difference in gobbling activity related to various weather factors. Temperature, precipitation and barometric pressure don’t seem to dictate gobbling activity, at least not in any way that researchers could tell. However, hunting activity did. The results were obvious. Pressure birds clammed up.
Prize Bucks Priceless Memories

BY LAURA TINGO

Longshoreman wins Texas dream hunt

“It almost didn’t seem real.”

That’s how Justin Lair, a proud member of International Longshoreman Association Local 1351, described the phone call in early 2014 telling him that he won the grand prize in the Union Sportmen’s Alliance’s Remington Texas Dream Hunt Giveaway.

“All that started going through my mind was, ‘no way!’ and ‘it cannot come soon enough,’” said Lair of the all-expenses-paid hunting trip for him and a guest, complete with guides, lodging and a brand-new Remington 700 CDL rifle, made possible through the USA’s proud partnership with Remington.

At noon at Longshoreman wins Texas dream hunt

As soon as the day of the hunt, Lair and his family set out for the day’s adventures.

“Tying the day off, there was no doubt in my mind that I was going to take my dad around the property. We didn’t want to miss out on the opportunity to hunt at a managed ranch of such magnitude and wait for that one.

“We tied the day off, as soon as the day of the hunt, there was no doubt in my mind that I was going to take my dad around the property. We didn’t want to miss out on the opportunity to hunt at a managed ranch of such magnitude and wait for that one.

“To let the moment get here from when we won, and it was over in a blink,” said Lair.

As the two hunters headed home on the Tuesday of Thanksgiving week, their load was a bit heavier than the drive out. They each shot a large buck and a doe. Lair’s measured 130 4/8 inches, his dad’s 132 inches.

“It’s the biggest deer I’ve ever shot,” said Lair. “It’s one of the biggest my dad ever shot.”

While Lair said the deer meat will be shared with friends and family, the head and horns were off to the taxidermy to be mounted.

“By far, this is the coolest thing I’ve ever won,” Lair said. “The hunting part wasn’t about winning or losing. It was being afforded the chance to take my father and pay him back for all of the years he taught me about enjoying and respecting the outdoors.”

Lair joined the USA at the beginning of 2015, and he’s now more of an advocate than ever.

“I tell people about the USA all the time,” he said. “I tell all my brothers and sisters about it. All you got to do is join and become a member. It’s for a good cause; it goes to the future. It’s a great thing.”

Since winning, Lair said he has entered a few more USA contests, “because you never know, and you can’t win unless you play.”

“I entered one time and was not expecting to win anything,” he added. “And the rest is history. The experience is something that both of us will remember for the rest of our lives.”

Foster Farm Pheasant

BY CLAYTON BOLTON, JAMAW IL 646

I’m not a fan of hunting “Foster Farm” pheasants. But I’m not one to turn down an offer to shoot most anything when someone else is paying the bill. They still taste good. Diet sciences for these pen raised birds have come a long way since my first experience with them. The “new” birds actually fly quite well.

One of my brother’s buddies had a lot left on his bird card with little season left. Any leftover birds won’t carry over to the next year, so my brother and I were invited along to help clear the card. It was an opportunity to pop some caps, swap some stories and tell some lies, with the promise of a beer or two afterwards. It didn’t take much to get me to go.

We walked the fields shooting up a storm and stuffing our vests. Suddenly, a strange looking bird with a severe flight disability flitted across the sky. It looked like a pheasant with no tail feathers. Its flight path was in the general direction of a couple walking the road at the end of the field. The man had his shotgun over his shoulder with his woman by his side. As this directionally challenged bird approached, they were oblivious to the football shaped projectile heading their way. We all had the same thought, “that bird is going to hit them!”

Before any of us could speak, the bird crashed into the top of the gun barrel protruding over the man’s shoulder, the barrel hit the man in the head, and down he went. We all turned and looked at each other, knowing we all saw it and still couldn’t believe it.

Never had any of us seen anything like it before. Even the time I was run over by a doe while hunting wild pheasants on an island in the middle of Cut Ridge Slough didn’t compare. We were on our knees crying with laughter. It was just one of those unexpected things that happen in life. The best part was, it didn’t happen to us.
TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT

WIN A BUCK KNIFE!

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/photo to check out additional photos and submit your own.

Enter USA’s Turkey Photo Contest

After you make the shot to drop that gobbler in its tracks this season, take another shot — with your camera, and enter it in USA’s Turkey Photo Contest. Bigger isn’t always better because a panel of USA staff judges will choose the winning photos based on the display of the turkey, scenery, background, style, color and creativity. No, they won’t be judging the hunter’s good looks!

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USA - Turkey Contest
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Nashville, TN 37211

Photo entries must be received by June 7, 2015. Winners will be announced by June 10, 2015. You must be an active USA member to qualify.

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