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See Page 4





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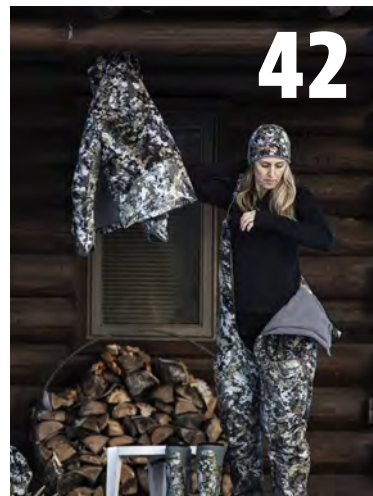
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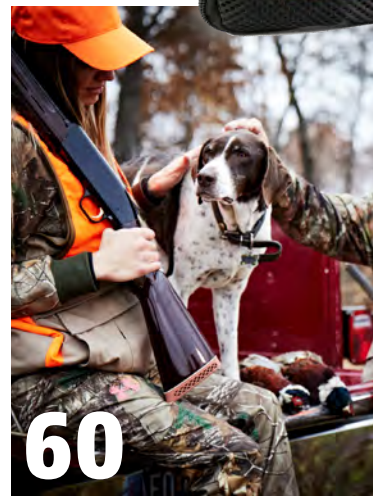
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ZEISS Conquest HDX – A New Family of Binoculars with Premium Optics and Robust Design.

ZEISS is excited to announce the new Conquest HDX family of binoculars. They are available with three objective lens diameters (32 mm, 42 mm and 56 mm), each with 8x and 10x magnification. The 56 mm model is also available with 15x magnification.

Thanks to the high-definition (HD) concept and up to 10 lenses, the Conquest HDX delivers great optical quality and 90% light transmission, resulting in vibrantly sharp images, even in low light conditions. ZEISS FieldFlattener Technology ensures high resolution over the entire field of view. The T* lens coating guarantees brilliant, high-contrast images even in adverse light conditions, and the multi-layer coating and phase-corrected roof prism ensure clear and true-to-life images.

With the robust mechanical construction and durable, lightweight magnesium housing, the Conquest HDX are designed to deliver confidence in the toughest conditions and are dependable in any situation. The full rubber armoring of the binocular housing ensures protection and provides a secure grip, even in humid and rainy conditions. Thanks to the hydrophobic ZEISS LotuTec® lens coating, water rolls off effortlessly and dirt and fingerprints are repelled. In addition, the nitrogen filling prevents moisture inside the lenses, so that the Conquest HDX can also be used safely in humid environments. Whether in extreme temperatures, in wet conditions or in direct sunlight, the Conquest HDX is durable, waterproof, fog proof

and shockproof and is reliably rugged in the field.

The Conquest HDX focuses quickly and precisely, even when wearing gloves. The balanced ergonomics enable fatigue-free observation, and the locking diopter prevents unintentional adjustments and makes it easy to maintain the desired settings. The durable and easy-to-clean eyecups can be adjusted to four different positions for further customization and comfort. Thanks to the easily accessible interface for a tripod adapter, quick attachment of the binoculars for stable observation is ensured.

For more information, please visit www.zeiss.com/hunting/conquest-hdx.

ON THE COVER: ZEISS welcomes two new SKUs to the Conquest V4 riflescope family: a 3-12x44 with a Z-Plex reticle (#20) and 3-12x56 with a Plex-Style illuminated center-dot reticle (#60). They feature a Ballistic Stop for an absolute confirmation of zero, multi-turn turrets, and zero stop. The riflescopes include enhanced engravings for fast and accurate adjustments, .25-MOA-per-click settings, and capped windage. Both models offer best-in-class optical quality with a 4x zoom ratio, providing exceptional versatility in the field.

For more information about the new Conquest V4 models, please visit www.zeiss.com/consumer-products/us/hunting.

WWW.ZEISS.COM/HUNTING/CONQUEST-HDX

THIS IS YOUR SHOT



The SHOT Show® is all about YOU and YOUR BUSINESS. This is your opportunity to connect with the industry's top manufacturers, distributors, and experts who can help any retailer or range, both large and small, better serve its community. Whether you're looking to expand your product offerings, improve your marketing strategies or enhance your range facilities, the SHOT Show has everything you need to succeed.

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Sierra, Barnes Appoint New CEO

Sierra Bullets and Barnes Bullets announce the appointment of Jim Bruno as CEO. Jim has been in the outdoor industry for 30 plus years, most recently holding the position of President at Bushnell (a Vista Outdoor brand segment). Prior to Bushnell, Jim held roles of increasing responsibility throughout his career, culminating with leading and managing Sales, Sales Operations and Customer Service for the Vista Outdoor Hunt/Shoot brands, including Federal, CCI, Speer, Remington and Hevi-Shot.

Jim said, “Sierra and Barnes have an amazing brand recognition in our industry of being the highest quality, premium products that serve the competitive shooting, hunting and defense markets. I’m honored to be chosen to lead these two amazing brands, people and products.”

Andrew Sparks, VP of Marketing, praised the hiring, “...we are excited for his strength in leadership and strategy. Jim receives high praise and recommendations by many industry peers and competitors and we look forward to him leading our businesses.”

Visit the Archery Business Pavilion at the 2025 SHOT Show

The Archery Business Pavilion was a new-for-2024 exhibit area for the archery industry at the SHOT Show. More than 55,400 industry professionals packed the 13.9 miles of SHOT aisles eager to view new, innovative products used for hunting, shooting and outdoor recreation.

The 2024 Archery Business Pavilion (located in Caesars Forum) featured exhibits from leading manufacturers and suppliers in the archery industry. The new area of the show provided a focused environment for archery retailers and industry professionals to explore the latest trends, products, and business opportunities in the archery sector.

For 2025, the Archery Business Pavilion will be bigger and better, with more booths from manufacturers you want to do business with. You can learn more about it on page 30 of this issue. Be sure to stop by during the 2025 SHOT Show.

Gridiron Capital Agrees to Sell GSM Outdoors

Investment company Gridiron Capital recently signed a definitive agreement to sell its controlling interest in GSM Outdoors — Good Sportsman Marketing Outdoors — to Platinum Equity, a global private equity firm.

Headquartered in Irving, Texas, GSM Outdoors is an industry-leading branded outdoor enthusiast company with a diverse and growing portfolio of more than 50 rugged outdoor brands. GSM provides a comprehensive range of consumable accessories, gear, and subscription services, making it a one-

stop-shop for both consumers and retail partners. GSM sells through a diverse mix of channels, including online retailers, sporting goods stores, mass merchants, outdoorsman retailers, farm and fleet stores, and dealers and distributors across the United States and Canada.

“In 2020, Gridiron Capital partnered with Eddie Castro and the GSM management team to build an industry-leading outdoor enthusiast platform,” said Gridiron Managing Partner, Kevin Jackson. “Over the course of our partnership, GSM has grown significantly

through strategic expansions into fishing and other rugged outdoor categories, while dramatically scaling the cellular and app subscription business, completing 18 acquisitions of iconic brands, and driving consistent organic growth through new product development. The GSM team’s passion for serving their customers and winning in the marketplace is contagious, and we are incredibly proud to have been GSM’s partner during this exciting time. We are confident that GSM is positioned for even greater success going forward.”

GSM CEO Eddie Castro and the entire management team will continue to lead GSM post-transaction. Castro said, “Since the first day, Gridiron has been a great partner in helping us accelerate our M&A engine and expand GSM into new subscription and outdoor categories. The Gridiron investment team and Centers of Excellence have truly been value-added partners through this exceptional growth phase for GSM.”

The acquisition is expected to close in Q3 2024.

American Outdoor Brands Promotes Kersker to VP of Sales

American Outdoor Brands (AOB), an industry leading provider of products and accessories for rugged outdoor enthusiasts, announced that Pete Kersker has been promoted to Vice President of Sales - Outdoor Sports. In this newly created position, Kersker will lead domestic sales of the company’s outdoor sports product categories: personal protection, hunting, shooting, fishing, camping and cutlery products.

“Pete joined AOB nearly a decade ago as a sales manager in cutlery, and since that time he has expanded his scope and responsibility in our sales organization,” said Brent Vulgamott, Chief Operating Officer for American Outdoor Brands. “Pete has established strong relationships with our customers and has meaningfully contributed to both the establishment and the execution of our sales strategies. We’re proud to announce this promotion which recognizes his contributions, and which underscores the importance that the outdoor sports product categories play in our long-

term growth strategy.”

Kersker joined AOB in 2016, as a Sales Manager, and was later promoted to Director of Sales. Most recently, he served as Senior Director of Sales, a role in which he oversaw sales for multiple product categories across the company’s portfolio of brands. Kersker earned his BS degree at Keene State College in New Hampshire.

AOUT is a provider of outdoor products and accessories, including hunting, fishing, camping, shooting, outdoor cooking, and personal security and defense products, for rugged outdoor enthusiasts. The Company produces products under brands including BOG; BUBBA; Caldwell; Crimson Trace; Frankford Arsenal; Grilla Grills; Hooyman; Imperial; LaserLyte; Lockdown; MEAT!; Old Timer; Schrade; Tipton; Uncle Henry; ust; and Wheeler. For more information about all the brands and products from American Outdoor Brands, Inc., visit www.aob.com.



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Vibrantly sharp. Reliably rugged.

ZEISS Conquest HDX.



NEW

The ideal premium versatile binoculars



Introducing the all-new Conquest HDX family of binoculars. Combining outstanding optical performance with a rugged design and great ergonomics, the new Conquest HDX binoculars provide the ultimate versatility in the field of high-performance optics.

The ZEISS HD concept delivers 90% light transmission with true-to-life color fidelity and edge-to-edge sharpness. Built with a durable and lightweight magnesium housing, the binoculars are waterproof, fogproof, and shockproof. Featuring a fast and smooth focus wheel, locking diopter and easy-access tripod interface, HDX delivers superior functionality and reliability for every hunt.

ZEISS Conquest HDX – Vibrantly sharp.
Reliably rugged.

www.zeiss.com/hunting/conquest-hdx



You Have a Negative Nellie on Your Team. What Now?



Follow these action steps to get your problem employee back on track and make those around him or her happy campers.

BY KEN WYSOCKY

Few workplaces are total negativity-free zones. Even the best places to work can suffer from the occasional corrosive effects generated by drama queens, whiners, gossipers and bullies.

But all too often, managers go into denial mode when they encounter such behavior. They either don't know how to confront the problem or figure that it's just impossible to change peoples' behavior and thus

soldier on, which only makes other employees resentful about the lack of action. Or perhaps the problem employee is, ironically enough, a top performer, which gives the manager little motivation to confront the issues at hand.

The end result? Good employees leave, unable to bear the toxic environment created by a problem employee. Morale sinks. Productivity declines. And word gets around,

which can derail employee recruiting efforts.

"Negativity is counterproductive in almost every way," says Marie G. McIntyre, a nationally known management consultant, employee coach (www.yourofficecoach.com) and the author of *Secrets to Winning at Office Politics: How to Achieve Your Goals and Increase Your Influence at Work*. "The shame of it is that the employees that leave usually aren't the negative



ones. So the irony is that by not acting on the problem, you end up keeping just the complainers and whiners.”

WHAT'S A RETAILER TO DO?

One of the biggest culprits in this vicious circle is managers ill-equipped to handle problem employees for lack of training, or that are so weak-willed that they'd rather just avoid confrontation. “There are just too many wimpy managers out there,” McIntyre asserts. “They're usually nice people, but they're afraid to use the authority conferred by their position when they need to.”

Some small business owners or managers even inadvertently encourage further bad behavior. As evidence, McIntyre recalls a manager who complained that she often had to do the work of an employee who was a total on-the-job slacker; she was also upset because she couldn't convince her boss that there was a problem. “Of course she couldn't — all the work was still getting done,” McIntyre says. In another instance, a manager told her that he actually let a problem employee vehemently complain about various and sundry issues for an hour and a half.

“That only encourages someone to complain even more,” she points out. “You should always listen to your employees, but once you get tired of hearing them complain, you've probably been listening to them too long. You've got to figure out a better way to have a conversation.”

To deal with negative employees, McIntyre suggests adopting six strategies aimed at changing behaviors and creating a more positive workplace for other employees:

Stop rewarding behavior you don't want. See examples above. Address problems as they arise. If you don't, odds are they'll turn into something even worse. And failure to deal



decisively with problem employees only weakens other employees' faith in your managerial skills.

Be a coach, not a critic. “Coaching is one of the most important skills a manager needs,” McIntyre says. “You're responsible for getting results from employees, just as the coach of a sports team is responsible for getting results from players. But few people are born to do this — it usually requires training.”

Describe problem behaviors specifically. Just telling someone that they're negative is too general; they may not know what that means, which prevents them from doing anything about the problem at hand. As such, it's critical to provide specific examples as well as the resulting negative side effects.

Focus on the business angle. Don't center the discussion on personalities; that's a no-win proposition. Instead, point out how certain behaviors may damage relationships with customers, for example, or curtail teamwork and

collaboration with others on your crew.

Keep your cool. If you get angry or upset during a meeting, you're acting like a child, too. “You need to snip the wires to your hot buttons,” McIntyre suggests. “You need to act like an adult and deal with things in an adult manner. If they push your buttons and you react, you've lost control of the situation.”

WORK TOGETHER

Most of these strategies can be employed during what's known as a two-way problem-solving discussion. “It's not a forum for criticizing or lecturing,” McIntyre explains. “It's about sharing observations about what you've noticed and putting them in the context of business issues — don't make it personal.”

The meeting should include an explanation of what things have to change; setting clear expectations is critical. Then develop some strategies that can be used to make things

different going forward. It's also essential for you and the problem employee to agree on these action steps as well as arrange follow-up meetings where you can discuss how things are progressing.

“Follow-up is critical,” McIntyre says. “Too many managers view these coaching sessions as one-and-done things. But people just don't change their behaviors that easily or quickly, so follow-up is essential.” Furthermore, a lack of follow-up may prompt the employee to think you don't take the issue seriously, which removes any incentive to change.

What if this strategy doesn't work? Even closer supervision and more frequent coaching sessions may be required. And if things don't improve after that, and the issues are serious enough that the person can't get the job done and hampers others in your company from doing so, too, more drastic action is required. “Maybe they're just not a good fit for the job,” McIntyre says. **HR**



3 Hot New Compound Bows For 2024

These three compounds will tempt any bowhunter to upgrade.



BY MARK CHESNUT

Bowhunting has brought me some of my best hunting memories over the past half century. I'll never forget two specific bowhunting trips. One was my first archery deer, which I stalked on my knees through a sandbur patch in a 30 mph wind and put an arrow right through the boiler room. Talk about exciting! The other was my last compound bow kill, when I tore the ligaments in my right shoulder drawing the bow with my body turned at a very odd angle. The deer went down, but so did I, and I later had to have that shoulder replaced because of the damage that began that day. Still, it was an unforgettable memory.

There's just something about bowhunting that is especially intriguing to many hunters. Not only does it yield the thrill of getting up close and personal with a big-game animal, but it also allows hunters to use tools not quite so advanced as a centerfire rifle to bring home the venison.

Of course, at the center of bowhunting for most archery hunters is a good compound bow. Buying a new compound bow for hunting can be quite an investment. As with other kinds of hunting gear, there tend to be two main types of users: those who upgrade their hunting bow every year or so and those who are content to hunt with their trusty 20-year-

old bow that they swear they'll never give up.

What the latter hunters might not realize is that compound bows get better each year. Bows are faster, smoother, quieter and more accurate, all leading to a better experience in the field and more venison on the table.

Let's take a look at a few new compound bows introduced by some of the best archery equipment manufacturers this year. These might be just the bows that pique the interest of the new-bow-every-year hunter, while also getting that hunter with an old bow off the fence and pulling out his credit card heading into this fall's hunting seasons.



BOWTECH

Bowtech has been making and selling very high-quality compound bows for 25 years, and the Core SR introduced this year definitely fits into that category. Engineered to deliver extreme speed, an incredibly smooth draw and unparalleled accuracy, the Core SR, according to Bowtech, sets the new standard for high-performance bows.

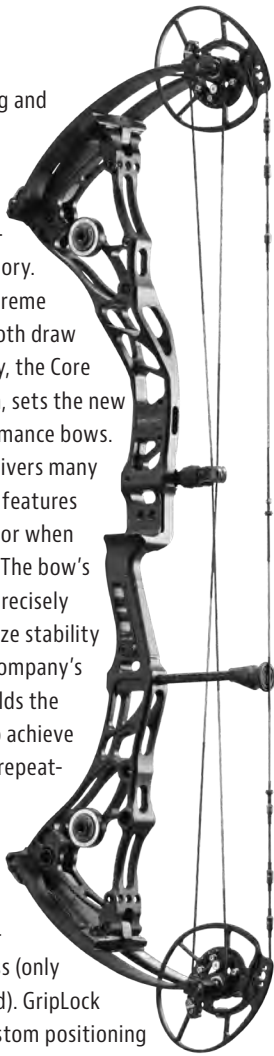
In fact, the Core SR delivers many of the high-performance features bowhunters are looking for when shopping for a new bow. The bow's CenterMass technology precisely aligns the sight to optimize stability and accuracy, while the company's DeadLock technology yields the quickest, simplest way to achieve perfect arrow flight and repeatable accuracy.

Additionally, the Core SR's TimeLock technology allows for quick and easy cam position adjustment without a bow press (only an Allen wrench is needed). GripLock technology allows for custom positioning of the grip angle to fine-tune the bow to an individual bowhunter's preference.

As far as specifications, the bow has an axle-to-axle length of 33 inches and weighs in at a svelte 4.5 pounds. It's available in 50-, 60- and 70-pound draw, and adjustability allows max draw weight to be reduced by about 10 pounds.

Faster bows deliver more downrange accuracy, and the Core SR has hunters covered there, also. It slings arrows at 344 feet per second (fps), offering more forgiveness on the shot compared to slower bows. Brace height is 6 inches, and the draw length can be adjusted anywhere from 25 to 30 inches, fitting the majority of archery customers. It's also available in 11 different finishes, including seven camouflage patterns.

With an MSRP starting at \$1,399, the Core SR isn't a budget bow. But shoppers will certainly get what they pay for if they choose this model for their next tree-stand companion.



PRIME ARCHERY

Prime Archery knows a thing or two about building a great hunting bow. And this year's Prime RVX takes their technological savvy at building bows to a new height.

The RVX features the company's CORE Cam system, the smoothest Prime has ever developed, to give bowhunters an outstanding shooting experience. The only system on the market that actively works to reduce cam lean, the CORE Cam system's balancing technology brings the strings and cables in line with each other, making the cam perfectly balanced throughout the entire draw.

Additionally, the RVX features Prime's Quik Tune technology so users need not add extra modifications to their bow to perfectly tune it. This system allows for the cam to be shifted left or right very precisely and rigidly without extra weight or complexity in a straight-forward way without needing to pull the axle.

The Prime RVX is available in three different length models: 32, 34 and 36 inches. It has an adjustable draw length of 26 to 30 inches and a draw weight of 40 to 80 pounds, and it flings an arrow at 340 fps. The RVX34 has a draw length of 26.5 to 30.5 inches, draw weight of 40 to 80 pounds and 342 fps velocity. The longest model, the RVX 36, has a draw length of 27.5 to 30.5 inches and a draw weight of 40 to 80 pounds, and it shoots 332 fps. All have a let-off of 80%

The Prime RVX is available in 19 different finishes and carries an MSRP of \$1,299.



BEAR ARCHERY

Bear Archery has been packing their hunting compound bows from axle to axle with industry-leading technologies and designs for decades. The company's flagship model for 2024 is the Bear Persist, a bow that with just one look will have customers wanting to give it a try.

The Persist is made for stealth and features strategically placed in-riser dampeners, an innovative string stop with built-in dampening and new silent shelf technology to make errant arrow contact with the riser undetectable. A new Picatinny mount for the user's preferred sighting system and the Integrate Mounting System for the arrow rest make streamlining the bow easier than ever.

With treestand hunters in mind, Bear equipped the Persist with an integrated limb pocket for quick, secure connection of a pull-up rope. And a convenient, quick-disconnect shoulder sling attachment point makes the bow easy to carry on a long trek.

With an axle-to-axle length of 31 inches, the Persist has a draw length range of 26 to 30 inches. And with up to 90% let-off, the bow's EKO cam system can generate velocities of up to 340 fps. Draw weight is available in 45 to 60 pounds or 55 to 70 pounds, and the bow weighs in at 4.6 pounds.

It's available in five finishes: olive, stone, Mossy Oak Break Up, Mossy Oak Bottomland and Fred Bear camo. Similar to the other two bows, the MSRP isn't cheap at \$1,249. But the Persist is a lot of bow for the money and should last for years.



WRAPPING IT UP

Thanks to advanced technology, hunting bows just keep getting better, and these three new-for-2024 compound bows should turn a few heads with shoppers this fall. Consider stocking one, two or all three of them in your inventory to bolster your bottom line heading into this year's archery hunting seasons. **HR**



11 Upland Hunting Apparel Products to Help Sales Take Flight

Outfit your upland hunters properly with the season's best gear.

BY KEVIN REESE

George Bird Evans wrote in *An Affair With Grouse*, "...for the gunner who feels as I do, each shot is enough to lift him for a day; and for that one moment of glory when he hits, he is the point, the flare of fan, the roaring gun and the slant and the falling bird while that moment lasts."

As Evans so eloquently depicts, few moments in our outdoor lifestyle are as exhilarating as flushing a pheasant or covey of quail and feeling the rush of excitement from shot to retrieval. While shotgun hunting for birds can be traced back to the 16th century, upland bird hunting in America, as we know it, took flight late in the 19th century. It remains one of the most popular forms of hunting today, ranking third behind big-game and small-game hunting. Based upon the 2022 National Survey of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, more than 14 million Americans hunted (2.8 million for migratory birds), spending over \$45 billion. Of the 2.8 million migratory bird hunters, the most popular species pursued was the ringneck pheasant, and wingshooting enthusiasts tallied more than 23 million days afield.

What does this mean for retailers? Latest estimates put migratory bird hunting spend at \$2.2 billion annually — yes, billion! Check out this short list of upland bird hunting apparel to help your sales take flight!



ALPS OUTDOORZ UPLAND GAME VEST X 2.0

Over the past 12 years or more, I have put Alps Outdoorz products (from bowhunting and waterfowling to upland hunting and even camping) through rigorous field tests and have always been impressed with the results. Quality, reliability, innovation and affordability are all cornerstones. Of course, since Alps Outdoorz's founding in 2007, this has been Dennis Brune's focus. For wingshooters, a great representation of these cornerstone qualities is the Upland Game Vest X 2.0.

More than just another bird-hunting bag, the Alps Outdoorz Upland Game Vest X 2.0 is a multipurpose hunting vest perfect for wingshooting as well as small-game pursuits. Designed for carrying and shooting comfort, the Upland Game Vest X 2.0 features a vented back, thin shoulder straps, magnetic shell pockets with non-slip flaps, expanded game bag, a roomy rear pocket and a coyote-brown/blaze-orange finish. An industry first, the Upland Game Vest X 2.0 also includes a removable waist belt with MOLLE straps, and an adjustment range of 26 to 62 inches. www.alpsoutdoorz.com



FILSON MESH GAME BAG

For more than 125 years, Filson has been the brand of choice for countless outfitters nationwide, especially in the northwest, and for good reason. C.C. Filson moved to Seattle, Washington, in 1890, and soon after, in 1897, he began supplying prospectors heading out to the Klondike Gold Rush. Founded that same year as Filson's Pioneer Alaska Clothing and Blanket Company, Filson maintains a reputation as a premium brand that discriminating outfitters trust. Of course, offerings have grown quite a bit to include top-shelf upland bird hunting gear like the Mesh Game Bag.

Constructed of 11-ounce cotton oil finish Shelter Cloth, polyester mesh and nylon webbing, the Filson Mesh Game Bag is the perfect combination of lightweight to mid-weight for hunting in warm and cold climates. The mesh back keeps your customer dry and allows the vest to breathe. Two oversized front pockets are perfect for holding a box of shotshells and other gear, and the rear game bag is large enough to hold a full limit of birds. Side pockets are sized to hold water bottles, while adjustable shoulder and waist straps allow hunters to get the perfect fit when adding or removing layers. The Filson Mesh Game Bag also features daisy-chain web-strapping to hold additional gear and a blaze-orange finish on front pocket flaps, sides of the game bag and throughout the mesh back. www.filson.com



GAMEHIDE SHELTERBELT UPLAND JACKET

Founded in 1994, Gamehide, operating in Minnesota, is devoted to producing affordable, innovative, premium-performance hunting apparel designed to "enhance your hunting experience." For decades, Gamehide has made good on its mission, ensuring hunters remain comfortable and dry in tough climates — cool on warmer days and warm when temperatures plummet. Of course, Gamehide apparel also is purpose-driven — and the Shelterbelt Upland Jacket is an example.

Made from ripstop cotton, the Gamehide Shelterbelt Upland Jacket is ready for gritty hunting in tough environments. The Shelterbelt Upland Jacket boasts a full front zipper, large zippered front pockets, an oversized front shell pocket and a rear, blood-proof game bag with zippered top. Traditionally styled, the Shelterbelt Jacket includes blaze-orange on the front pockets, shoulders, upper arms and throughout the back. Sizes range from medium to 4X. www.gamehide.com



BROWNING UPLAND JACKET

John Moses Browning needs no introduction to industry professionals. While he founded Browning in 1880, he produced his first single-shot rifle two years earlier — it was patented in 1879. Now owned by Herstal Group, Browning has produced firearms consistently for 144 years; however, arms manufacturing is only part of Browning's story. After acquiring Barth Leather Company and Caldwell Lace Company in 1968, the company set its sights on hunting apparel. For more than 55 years, Browning has applied its "Best there is" approach to quality and reliability to hunting clothes in every niche, upland wingshooting included. A fan favorite your hunting customers are sure to appreciate is Browning's Upland Jacket.

Designed for comfort, durability and warmth on cold days in the field, the Browning Upland Jacket boasts a 12-ounce cotton canvas shell; over 400-square-inch, blaze-orange polyester overlay; soft, brushed Tricot lining; two-way front zipper with storm flap; and adjustable cuffs. Other features include a large blood-proof front-load game bag, shell pockets, D-rings for hunting dog accessories and two zippered front pockets. The jacket's shoulders accommodate Reactar G3 pad pockets, and sizes available range from small to 5X. www.browning.com



DSG UPLAND PERFORMANCE FLEECE JACKET

Founded by outdoor enthusiast Wendy Gavinski, DSG (Doing Something Group) Outdoors is headquartered in Wisconsin. Like other apparel lines, DSG was founded out of frustration over the lack of outdoor apparel for women, especially skiing and snowmobiling; however, the company quickly migrated to other niches of outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing. Today, DSG Outdoors offers a full line of hunting apparel for women for every pursuit, including upland bird hunting. An upland hunting garment most popular among women hunters is the Upland Performance Fleece Jacket.

As the name implies, DSG Outdoors' Upland Performance Fleece Jacket is made from soft, durable fleece, perfect as an outer layer to keep hunters warm on cool days, or mid-layer when it gets downright cold. The Upland Performance Fleece jacket's styling is a quarter-zip pullover with long sleeves, complete with thumb holes. The jacket features zippered chest and handwarmer pockets and two-tone stone and blaze-orange finish. Sized and styled for women, the Upland Performance Fleece Jacket is available in sizes from XXS to 4X. www.dsgouterwear.com



DUCK CAMP SHORT SLEEVE UPLAND HUNTING SHIRT

Founded by Sim Whatley in 2018 and headquartered in Austin, Texas, Duck Camp grew legs out of "frustration with the quality and fit of hunting clothing." As a guy with a handful of Duck Camp shirts in my closet, I can attest to their light weight, breathable material, comfort, durability and quality. Even today, with scores of hunting-brand shirts to choose from, my Duck Camp shirts still get wear-time at least once per week. Don't let the brand name fool you though — Duck Camp caters to more than just waterfowlers. Case in point, the Short Sleeve Upland Hunting Shirt.

Constructed entirely of nylon supplex fabric, the Upland Hunting Shirt is quick-drying and breathable, soft to the touch and exceptionally durable. Additional features include pin-oak-colored styling; blaze-orange shoulders, upper back panel and chest-pocket flaps; mesh ventilation system and UFP 30+ protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. Duck Camp's Upland Hunting Shirts are available in standard shirt-length sizes small to 3X, as well as tall profiles, large to 3X. www.duckcamp.com



MCALISTER MST UPLAND TECH SHIRT

Drake Waterfowl, established in 2002 by Tate Wood and Bobby Windham, was founded with a singular mission: to offer the industry's best waterfowl hunting gear and apparel. Based in Olive Branch, Mississippi, the company has been led and operated by diehard waterfowlers since day one. A year later, Drake Waterfowl purchased McAlister Hunting Clothing. In September 2021, Drake Waterfowl was acquired by Ohio-based Weinberg Capital Group; however, the same holds true — Drake Waterfowl products are designed by hunters for hunters, and the McAlister line remains quite popular! One exceptional McAlister offering is the MST Upland Tech Shirt.

Designed for comfort, durability and robust movement, the McAlister Upland Tech Shirt is constructed of khaki-colored, 97% nylon and 3% Spandex, with brown, 100% polyester abrasion-resistant forearms. The traditionally styled, long-sleeve, button-up MST Upland Tech Shirt also features blaze-orange shoulder patches, a left-chest vertical Magnattach pocket, right-chest vertical zippered pocket and integrated lens cloth. Size offerings are small to 3X. www.drakewaterfowl.com



GAMEHIDE HEAVY-DUTY BRIAR-PROOF UPLAND PANT

Heavy thickets and thorns are no match for Gamehide's Heavy-Duty Briar-Proof Upland Pant. Constructed of rugged, 1000-denier nylon with a reinforced seat and crotch, Gamehide's Briar-Proof Upland Pant is designed for comfort in extreme upland bird hunting environments and features front slash-pockets and a rear pocket. A heavy-duty hook and D-ring keep hunters' hands free and working-dog controls close by. To keep your customers dry, Gamehide's Briar-Proof Upland Pant also boasts a water-repellent coating. Waist sizes range from 32 to 48 inches with a 32-inch inseam.

DANNER SHARPTAIL BOOTS

Charles Danner set out to build boots as tough as the Northwestern adventurers and blue-collar workers who depended upon them. Since 1932, Danner boots have represented the Great Northwest well, morphing into a legacy brand trusted by millions of demanding adventure seekers and workers. Today, nearly 100 years later, Danner Boots ranks among the top hunting boot brands worldwide, and Sharptail Boots are great examples of the kind of footwear heritage-minded retailers must carry for serious upland bird hunters.

Exceptionally dependable and comfortable in the roughest, wettest terrain, Danner 8-inch Sharptail Boots are built to handle whatever your customers' upland hunts throw at them. Danner's Sharptail Boots boast full-grain leather and 900 Denier nylon uppers, waterproof and breathable Gore-Tex liners, Terra platform for lightweight stability and support, OrthoLite footbed, TPU shank and an all-terrain, slip-resistant rubber outsole. www.danner.com

IRISH SETTER WINGSHOOTER BOOTS

Since 1950, Irish Setter has self-labeled their boots "finest in the field." Not without merit, like Danner, Irish Setter is a legacy brand steeped in nearly 75 years of a heritage-rich reputation built step-by-step by America's extreme adventurers and backbone laborers. Irish Setters' most readily identifiable attribute is the reddish-orange Oro-Russet leather present in the company's earliest boot models, and still present today. True to the Oro-Russet leather hallmark for upland bird hunters is the Irish Setter Wingshooter.

True to Irish Setters iconic look and style, Irish Setter Wingshooter Boots are "the original boot," constructed of genuine Oro-Russet leather with a comfortable, all-terrain, self-cleaning, white-wedge rubber sole. The Wingshooter also boasts Irish Setter's popular UltraDry weatherproofing system, steel shank in the midsole for better foot support. For hunters who recognize just how important foot protection and comfort are on the hunt and on the job, Irish Setter's Wingshooter Boots, available in 7- or 9-inch styles, are a top choice. www.irishsetterboots.com

LACROSSE UPLANDER BOOTS

Originally launched in 1897 and based in its namesake of La Crosse, Wisconsin as the La Crosse Rubber Mills Company, La Crosse Footwear drew immediate popularity with its Grange rubber boots. Interestingly enough, in 1994, the company acquired Danner Boots. In 2012, LaCrosse and Danner were acquired by ABC-Mart, a Japanese company, and both brands are now headquartered in Portland, Oregon. As one might hope, ownership by ABC-Mart hasn't seemed to affect build quality. LaCrosse boots continue to be recognized worldwide as a leader in outdoor recreation footwear, hunting included. For upland bird hunting, your hunting customers are sure to love the aptly named LaCrosse Uplander Boots.

With an iconic styling nod to decades past, LaCrosse Uplander Boots are constructed of a genuine, distressed, full-grain, oiled leather upper and dark-brown rubber lower. The sole is a premium, handmade, natural-colored rubber with vulcanized construction and a slip-resistant, Rope Cleated, all-terrain outsole. Boot-height is 10 inches. Great for hunting in tough conditions, the Uplander Boot also features a steel shank, air-cushion footbed and a waterproof lining. www.lacrossefootwear.com



Zeiss

What's new at ZEISS these days, and what does the company have planned for the future?



BY HR STAFF

Hunting Retailer spoke with Barton Dobbs, ZEISS's head of hunting and nature sales for North America, about what's new at ZEISS, what the company has planned for the future, how retailers can best sell Zeiss optics, and more.

Can you talk about the company's history and its place in the industry today?

ZEISS has a long and storied 178-year history in the optics industry, making it the oldest consumer optics manufacturer still in operation. With

this history comes a sense of pride that we work for a global leader in all things optics. However, history and pedigree only takes us so far in today's market. Dealers and especially consumers want to purchase products from companies that possess a high level of optical and mechanical capabilities but also show the ability to keep pace with rapidly changing technology and fluid consumer expectations. ZEISS has maintained that balance well in recent years by expanding our excellent portfolio of classic optics while also introducing a

steady stream of digital and technology-driven optics. It is clear that we need a portfolio full of both in order to excel and grow in this market.

What sets ZEISS apart?

Optical integrity, no doubt. Every product we produce begins with a dedication to make that product the top optical product in its category. No corners cut and no excuses. Dealers and consumers can always know that whichever ZEISS product they buy, from the V4 rifle scope to the SFL binocular to the Harpia

↑ Barton Dobbs, head of hunting and nature sales for North America



spotter, will always be an industry leader in optical performance. This has always been ZEISS's reputation in the market, but in recent years we have also enhanced our feature sets in new products, as well. So now the ZEISS customer knows their product is a top-performer optically and it also contains leading features for the North American hunter, shooter and birder.

What specific optics category have you seen the most growth in recently?

It is not necessarily a category, per se, but we have seen strong growth in our uber-lightweight products like the SFL 40 and SFL 30 binoculars. Hunters are constantly looking to shave weight and bulk while in the field, so our SFL binocular, being



Our hottest product right now is the LRP S3 first focal plane riflescope, no doubt. We launched the S3, as we call it, back in fall of 2022, and shooters have absolutely swarmed

tending PRS events over the past two years, where the number of shooters with a ZEISS LRP S3 atop their rifle has grown exponentially at nearly every match we attend.

Do you have any predictions on what we can expect out of the shooting industry in general in the next year? The next five years?

The shooting industry seems to be caught in a cyclical, up-and-down pattern, and I think that will likely last through the remainder of calendar year 2024. The election cycle certainly sways opinions and affects consumer behavior, but our industry is extremely resilient, so I think sometime in 2025 we will see more collective growth and expansion than we have in the past few post-Covid years. This is what ZEISS is planning for.

Where does ZEISS see potential for growth? How about non-growth? Is there part of the industry that's shrinking?

As mentioned before, we will continue to focus on uber-lightweight products like the SFL binocular, and

we think there is a lot of market share to be taken with that product and that lightweight approach. And we still have so much room to grow with our LRP series of scopes, the LRP S5 and LRP S3. Competitive shooting remains a high growth area for all things optics, firearms, ammunition and accessories, so we will continue to feed that market.

The potential for non-growth will come from aging product families, so we have to continually manage the life cycle of every product family to add new and relevant features to keep it fresh and atop consumers' minds. We're working hard in this area to ensure our entire portfolio is innovative and competitive.

As far as where the industry is at risk of shrinking, my concern continues to be younger hunters and the type of gear they use, or that their parents/mentors/family purchases for them. Many times, a young hunter will start off hunting with something like a standard .243 rifle for deer hunting or other mid-sized game. If we don't engage more young hunters, those types of rifles and ammo we all grew up with will likely continue to drop in popularity. To combat this, our industry as a whole needs to



20-30% lighter and more compact than competing products, has really scratched an itch in the market. We plan on expanding these categories and becoming a leader in lightweight, feature-rich scopes, binos, spotters, etc.

Is there a specific product that's just on fire for you right now?

to this product. I constantly hear phrases like "this thing punches WAY above its weight class," and "That's my next purchase for my new PRS or competition rifle." Both the 425-50 and 636-56 LRP S3 models provide the user with so much value that they are really difficult to deny, even when compared to some of the industry's heavy hitters in competitive shooting scopes. The proof has come while at-



advocate harder to ensure that more young people get into the field and hunt, shoot, fish, and learn.

What can we expect out of ZEISS in the second half of 2024? What products have you most excited for the future?

ZEISS will continue to push our innovative products for the remainder of 2024, and we have a handful of new items up our sleeve. New additions to the Conquest V4 and an exciting set of new features for the V8 family will broaden the appeal of the lines as well as create new customers for us. Both are exciting prospects. I'm most excited about our continually evolving riflescope portfolio and what we can do with it. We have a few projects in the pipeline that should catapult ZEISS



↑ The DTI 6 is a thermal imaging camera designed to be functional and simple to use afield.

.....
 into a new level of the industry, and this motivates me and my sales team every day.

What sort of product testing do you do?

ZEISS has an extensive product testing process, most of which we execute in our German facilities. While optical integrity is very important, as I've mentioned, the mechanical integrity of your product is just as important, and we test our products to maintain the highest level possible. For example, we recoil-test our rifle scopes to 1500 G's of force in mul-

.....
 ← The ZEISS Hunting app integrates with some of the company's products for high-tech hunters.



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multiple directions. That is just one example of the levels we go to at ZEISS to ensure your scope, binocular, rangefinder or spotter will perform when it matters most in the field.

How does ZEISS support its dealers?

We always strive to be a true partner with our dealers. I tell my sales team all of the time, “We are not here just to move boxes, we are here to find, create, and nourish partnerships with our stocking dealers.” A partnership is a full-circle support program. We provide competitive pricing and term sets, but we try to deliver much more than that.

Our ZEISS Points program has expanded and remains a great way for behind-the-counter sales staff to earn points and free ZEISS product for selling our products. We also look

“ZEISS dealers that expand their assortments almost always increase turns and watch their ZEISS business flourish.”

for ways to help ZEISS product on the shelf stand out so that the dealer increases turn and increases their margins. One example is a DTI thermal display which includes a small tripod and a tablet for presenting our DTI thermal cameras at retail. It’s a relatively low-cost package for dealers, but it has increased our retail turns of DTI by a large amount. We



↓ ZEISS Conquest V4 riflescope



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are also working on expanding our digital capabilities to allow dealers and their sales staff to connect with ZEISS digitally and reduce the amount of time-consuming manual tasks. All of these things are helping us remain in closer touch with our dealers and making all of us more efficient and effective.

Do you have any advice for retailers about selling quality optics and ZEISS products specifically?

My advice would be to invest in inventory and ensure you have a solid assortment of products. Carry more than just the top-selling two or three SKUs. ZEISS dealers that expand assortments almost always increase turns and watch their ZEISS business flourish. We will work closely with you to ensure your assortment fits

your customer needs, and we'll provide a detailed sales plan to assist with sell-through.

What's your personal favorite ZEISS product, and why?

I love my V6 3-18x50 riflescope with ZMOA-2 reticle. I've had that scope on my mule deer and elk rifle for seven years now, and it has never let me down. The FL glass and overall optics are fantastic, the ZMOA-2 reticle is simple but gives me enough information to take care of business, and the 3-18x magnification is perfect for Western big-game hunting. This scope is my absolute go-to.

Another favorite is the SFL 10x40 bino. It's crazy lightweight, and the optics provide that "wow" factor right when I bring the bino to my eyes. I will take the SFL 10x40 on many

more hunts in the future.

Is there anything you'd like retailers to know about ZEISS and its products?

I would ask retailers to review what optics they are currently selling and take a deep dive look into ZEISS, as we likely have many more products in more categories than the average retailer knows about. Retailers might think ZEISS is the company we were five to 10 years ago, but man, have we changed a lot during that time! We have turned over 80% or so of our portfolio in the past five years and will continue to innovate and bring best-in-class optical and mechanical products to market. We also have a really great team of people that are a pleasure to work with and focus on building long-term relationships with retailers, which is paramount. **HR**

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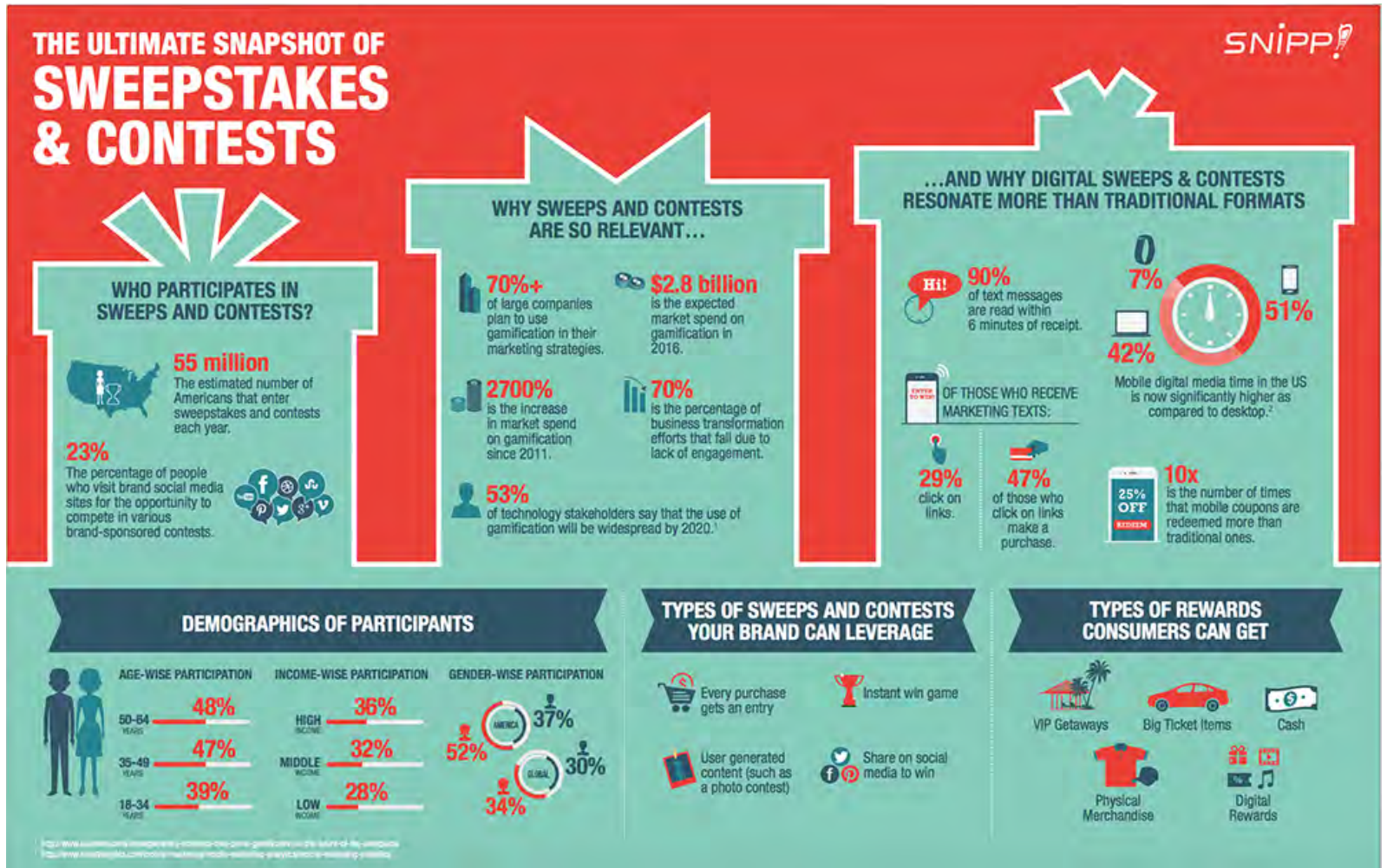


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Giveaways Still Work



Everyone loves free stuff, but if you're going to do a giveaway, don't waste the effort: Here's how to do it right and achieve your goals.

BY LAURIE LEE DOVEY

In the independent retail realm, finding new customers can be a challenge. Between tight marketing budgets, increased online shopping, and competition from the big-box stores, just getting noticed can be an uphill battle. Enter the giveaway, a game changer.

What's in a freebie and why does the simple act of receiving something without a price tag make us so happy?

"The reciprocity principle says that

our minds tend to place a higher value on items that are offered for free compared to other promotional discounts," writes SaaS marketing consultant Jessica Perkins. "When someone does something for us, we naturally want to return the favor. In the business world, a freebie can be an initial gesture that motivates customers to reciprocate through loyalty, repeat business, brand advocacy, and word-of-mouth advertising — the most powerful marketing tool of all."

Additionally, when customers have a positive experience during a promotion, they're more likely to remember you and consider your shop in the future.

Giveaways have long been, and still are, an effective tool in retail marketing. Traditional methodologies of developing and marketing contests and giveaways still hold. However, retailers who also utilize social media to promote in-store promotions can enjoy even bigger dividends.





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Promote Your Giveaway Online

Mohammad Yaqub, founder of BusinessDIT, reported data on the effectiveness of promotions on social media in his report "Do Giveaways Increase Sales? (8+ Statistics and Data)". The numbers are staggering and a clear sign your shop's giveaway should also be promoted through your social media pathways.

Here's a look at some of the numbers:

- Giveaways have a conversion rate of nearly 34%, which is higher than other types of content.
- An average of over 34% of new customers are acquired through contests.
- Landing pages running a contest giveaway increased email leads by 700%.
- 45% of digital marketers agree that social media contests give them a good return on investment (ROI).
- 62% of businesses use giveaways to increase brand awareness.
- Instagram accounts that host giveaways grow 70% faster than those that do not.
- 32.5% of brands host one monthly giveaway, and 16.1% host two or three.
- 55.8% of brands run giveaways on multiple social media platforms, mostly Facebook and Instagram.
- 28.6% of brands run multiple contests per year but less than one giveaway per month.

The key benefits of retail giveaways are creating customer engagement, generating interest in products and services, and getting the customer to act. The increased engagement builds a deeper connection with customers and fosters loyalty and long-term relationships.

Beyond engagement, you can increase brand visibility, generate a

buzz that attracts attention, expand your reach to potential new customers, and realize sustained business growth. Giveaways also help you gain a competitive advantage, stimulate impulse purchases, and gather customer insights.

Giveaways come in all shapes and sizes, from gifting customers logoed goodies to offering a sweepstakes

to win a \$2,000 rifle. The path you choose to take is based on your goals for the giveaway and the amount of effort you require of participants. A wide range of other factors also come into play.

GIVEAWAY BLUEPRINT

Follow this blueprint to develop your giveaway. Each element is important

to the success of the promotion.

Set clear goal(s). Whether you want to collect customer data (such as email addresses or shopping preferences), promote a new product or service, or increase social media followers, always begin with a clear objective. The more specific your purpose is, the easier it will be to plan and implement a successful campaign. Understanding your audience's preferences, interests and demographics, and tailoring your giveaway to capture their attention and resonate with them, is critical.

Determine the metrics. Metrics include items like store and/or website traffic, conversion rates, sales, social media engagement, hashtags, referrals, and email signups. Your metrics will most likely be driven by your goal(s) and will be the elements you look at to determine success of the campaign.

Pick the prize. When choosing



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your prize, it's important to balance budget, customer appeal, and relevance. You must know your target audience and understand what they are willing to do to win. The prize must also be proportional to the amount of work involved in participating. Even though the prize is free to the winner(s), it still needs to offer value. If you're looking to increase

and when the giveaway takes place, prize value, number of participants, how winners are selected, and more. When presenting the giveaway instructions/participant rules, be clear and concise, yet appealing. Most of all, make them easy to understand.

Launch and run the contest.

Image really is everything. So, select a striking image that's highlighted

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foot traffic, you may want to focus on a more substantial prize than you might if using a social media giveaway to get more followers. For driving store traffic, a rifle or optic giveaway will be enticing. Online, a simple \$50 gift card to your shop may get the job done.

Determine your format. The format is nothing more than the type of giveaway you choose. You have several choices of giveaway formats. Review the list provided by Nerdwallet.com and choose the one that fits your goals and style of marketing.

Set up the giveaway rules. Participation rules must be based on what is legal in your state (see list from Varnum Law) and should include the giveaway time frame and entry deadlines, who may participate, age requirements, how to enter, where

in all your communications. The image should draw attention and tap into your customers' and potential customers' interests. Thus, a great promotion image will not be a generic giveaway image or graphic. Use a striking, storytelling image. Consider

Make Social Media Generate Buzz and Increase Reach

Prompt people who see your giveaway on social media to take action to enter or garner extra entries. Ask them to:

Like the post: This is the most common and easiest way for folks to participate in your giveaway. By asking followers to only like your post, it is more likely that there will be a greater adhesion, but it doesn't generate any buzz or reach. So we suggest that you associate it with another action. For instance, to enter, please like this post and comment below to tag a friend for a second chance to win.

Follow your page: This step is crucial, as it translates into an increase in followers. When you're garnering new followers, it's also important to have a distinctive and constant presence on the platform. You want to create a positive impact on new followers and make it easier for them to remain connected to your brand.


Tag friends in the comments: Requiring entrants in the giveaway to tag their friends in the comments, usually for extra chances to win, builds visibility and buzz and attracts more new followers.

Leave a comment: The more comments your post has, the greater the reach. Ask a question with your promotion to prompt comments. Many giveaways even require a comment to have a chance to win. Make them realize you're interested in them and their opinions.

Share the post: Ask your followers to share the post and tag it using a unique hashtag that you pick. It's an excellent way to reach a larger audience, but once again, it is important to consider the number and type of tasks requested from participants.

Make a post: Ask followers to make a post and tag you on their profile to increase reach. This requires much of the follower, but loyalists often will do it. Asking your followers to take bigger steps requires a bigger prize that pays off the effort required.

Use your hashtag: Combined with some of the previous items, creating and encouraging the spread of your hashtag, or a giveaway-specific hashtag, to increase notoriety and establish a bond with the public can be effective. Creating a unique and exclusive hashtag for your giveaway is important. It should be catchy, innovative, funny, and, of course, easily associated with your brand.



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a standard rifle image, the gun on a white background vs. a beautiful advertising-style image of the same gun. Which garners attention and generates excitement?

With all the above completed, marketing the promotion becomes the focus. And no, your in-store display alone won't get you anywhere. Utilize all avenues to promote the giveaway. Email existing customers, place signage and a great display in the store, and promote it on all your online platforms, websites, blogs, and social media.

This multi-channel approach ensures that the promotion reaches a wide audience, increasing brand exposure and visibility. As a result, more people become aware of your brand, products or services, and its value proposition.

Also, encourage sharing. Nothing is more powerful in marketing than word-of-mouth promotion. Thus, it's important to find ways for those entering the giveaway to share it with others. In-store selfies customers can post, hashtags specific to the promotion, and share buttons on posts are



just a few avenues you can take (see Make Social Media Generate Buzz and Increase Reach).

Also ask outdoor influencers to share the giveaway on their platforms to generate more buzz and expand reach. These influencers can be local range owners/instructors, well-known

local hunting guides or lodges, your staff, and other well-known personalities.

Consider advertisements in highly focused publications too. They allow you to have greater control of your target audience. An ad in the "Your Town Today" newspaper/magazine

Legalities

"When planning a giveaway, companies should exercise caution and thoughtfulness regarding what the giveaway will entail, how customers will be expected to participate, the value of the prize, and where the giveaway will be applicable," says the Varnum law firm. "If done carelessly, an innocent giveaway can subject a company to a wide range of civil and criminal liability, all in the name of a product or service promotion."

"First, a company should know whether it intends to run the giveaway as a sweepstakes or a contest," Varnum adds. "This distinction is important, as each requires consideration to avoid liability related to lotteries and gambling. Generally, the difference between sweepstakes and contests is how the winner is selected. Sweepstakes involve prizes that are awarded based on chance, while contests award prizes based on knowledge or skill."

While every state is different regarding the exact information that should be included in the official giveaway rules, Varnum says the consensus is that the official rules should include the following:

- A statement that no purchase is necessary and that a purchase will not enhance the chances of winning.
- Information on how a party will enter the giveaway and how many entries will be permitted.
- A clear statement regarding the number of prizes available and the number of entries permitted.
- Information regarding entry eligibility (i.e., age and states of residence).
- Information regarding the verified retail value of the prize (i.e., if the prize is a grill, the rules should identify the verified value of the same in dollars).
- A statement regarding the odds of winning the prize based on the number of estimated and completed entries received.
- Information concerning the free method of entry if there is a method of entry that requires a purchase (i.e., alternative forms of entry that do not require the entrant to make a purchase or incur a cost for entry).
- Information regarding the name of the giveaway sponsor, including the name and address.
- Information about where the official rules can be accessed.

Most importantly, free options must give entrants an equal opportunity to submit an entry and win. In some situations, even a call and/or text message requirement may act as an entry for purchase, as the cost to call and/or text may be viewed as a fee to enter. To avoid potential liability, a company should disclose a free method that does not result in a standard-carrier fee.



may not be as effective as an ad in your state's Department of Natural Resources hunting guide. Your focus must be on the consumers you want to reach. Look at all your options.

With all the above done, it's time to announce your winner. The big finale should be exciting and fun and should involve as many people as possible, in-store and online. You can simply select the name and announce it, but why? Make it into an event for additional engagement, buzz, and promotion. Consider live streaming the winner selection and presentation. Engage a local celebrity to emcee. Set it up around a planned event. After selecting the winner, promote who won. Get some comments from the winner. Take pictures. Every bit of this is fodder for promoting your business now and down the road.

Last, but not least, evaluate the giveaway's results. Evaluation is all about return on investment (ROI). Did you meet your goals with the giveaway? If you did, you met your ROI expectations. However, further evaluation is helpful.

Focus on the important metrics such as the number of participants, comments, engagement levels, number of followers, traffic on the website, shop purchases and user feedback, to examine whether the giveaway was relevant to the audience you wanted to reach.

Beyond relevance is cost-effectiveness and/or return on investment (ROI). Measuring the ROI on promotional giveaways is not as simple as using the standard ROI equation of A (net profit) $- B$ (cost of investment) $\times 100 = \text{ROI} \%$

But there are ways you can get some decent metrics. Cost per engagement is an easy calculation of total costs divided by the number of engagements. Did the giveaway

Giveaway Ideas

There are numerous types of giveaways according to Nerdwallet.com. Here's a list of ideas to consider:

Sweepstakes

The sweepstakes premise is simple: Each customer has one chance to enter by taking some action with your business — such as giving an email address or following your social media accounts — and then you choose a winner at the end of a predetermined timeframe. The prize should be something related to your company, like a free product or service with your business. Your sweepstakes can be an in-person transaction, where people come into your physical storefront and drop their name into a bowl, or online through your social media accounts.

Raffle

An in-store raffle may give a customer an entry to win a prize each time they take a specific action during a certain period. The action could be making a purchase, bringing their reusable bag, opting for paperless receipts, following your social channels, subscribing to your email list, or referring a new customer. Allowing for multiple entries can encourage more transactions with your business.

Photo Contest

For this digital giveaway idea, ask your customers to take photos of or with your products and share them on social media. Then either choose

someone randomly or pick your favorite post as the winner. Make sure that when they share their pictures, they're tagging your business and following your business page so that you can keep track of the entries — and so your business gets a boost in engagement.

Surprise Coupon

Offer customers a surprise coupon, either in person when they come to your store or via email, to incentivize them to make a purchase. You can also provide customers with a coupon for a discount on their next purchase to encourage them to return.

Quiz

Emailing a quiz or questionnaire to your customers is a great way to find out what your patrons like or dislike about your business, what you could be doing better, as well as suggestions for future products or offerings. As a thank you for their participation, they are entered into the giveaway.

Contest

Need help coming up with a name for a new product, company mascot, or brand campaign? Have customers throw their ideas into the mix, either in person or on social media. You can get new ideas for your business, and in return, you can give them a chance to win the giveaway.

Free Product with Purchase

Offering a freebie when customers make a purchase can help drive more sales to your business. Branded company swag,

such as a tote bag or water bottle, is a great way to reward customers for shopping while also helping to spread the word about your business. As customers use the branded item, others will see it and they will be reminded of your generosity.

Spin-the-Wheel Offers

If you're feeling creative and want to encourage people to visit and interact with your business, consider creating a wheel with various rewards that customers can spin to reveal their prize. You can give away some of the goods or services your business offers or a gift card or coupon for them to use on a purchase. Small branded items are also an option. If you want to connect it to your main giveaway, you can put small prizes along with contest entries on the wheel.

Instant Win

Instant win involves participants entering a giveaway and finding out instantly if they've won. Scratch-off tickets, spinning a wheel, or pulling a ticket out of a bucket are all examples. The good news here is they need to come to the shop to participate.

Referral Programs

Incentivize your audience to become brand advocates, leverage word-of-mouth marketing, and help build a sense of community. Ask them to refer their friends and offer them a bonus for doing so. An extra entry into the sweepstakes is a great bonus.

generate any sales, how many engagements were first-time connections, what online platform produced the best results, and did advertising bring in people? All this information saves you time and money in the future, as you can use it to better gauge how

to optimize your next giveaway. You may even want to consider software or service providers who provide tracking options.

The sky's the limit with giveaways, and the benefits are undeniable. They let you build buzz, engage customers

and potential customers, promote your business to a wide audience, bolster name/brand recognition, foster customer loyalty, and introduce new products or services. Everyone loves free stuff. So, put that fact to work for you. **HR**





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Positive Reinforcement Is a Value Proposition

Making employees feel as if they really matter is critical to retention and engagement.





BY KEN WYSOCKY

Do your employees feel like they matter? In other words, do they feel valued by and connected to their managers and coworkers, and do they also feel like they advance the well-being of colleagues?

It's a tough question to answer, for sure. But the odds are that many employees feel insignificant at work, which creates a variety of problems, including high turnover, burnout, isolation and disengagement, says Gordon Flett, Ph.D., a professor in the psychology department at York University in Toronto.

"Generally speaking, there's a widespread mattering problem in the workplace," says Flett, who has studied the issue for years and is the author of *The Psychology of Mattering: Understanding the Human Need to Be Significant*. "It's an issue that has flown under the radar of industrial psychology. But it's an important issue because studies consistently show that feelings of not mattering are predictive of a host of issues related to self-esteem and a sense of belonging."

Organizations should be concerned about employees mattering because unhappiness and dissatisfaction in the workplace translates into employee turnover or, at the very least, so-called “quiet quitting” and diminished productivity, Flett says.

“There also are direct links to mental and physical health issues,” he adds. “So there’s a cost to an organization from a human resources perspective. We know from past research that if someone feels like they don’t matter, they’re more prone to stress, burnout and absenteeism.”

MORE NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Furthermore, dissatisfied employees also are likely to express their discontent to colleagues, which creates an ever-burgeoning negative climate. Moreover, what Flett calls “anti-mattering” is a strong predictor of anxiety, depression and substance abuse.

In addition, it can cause employees to disruptively act out to gain the attention they feel they don’t receive. In some cases, employees who feel like they’ve been unfairly isolated and



marginalized might even engage in organizational sabotage, he says.

On the flip side, employees who feel like they do matter are better at withstanding things such as workplace stressors, loneliness and adversity.

“It’s a double-edged sword,” Flett says. “Mattering is very protective when you feel it and very destructive when you don’t. A strong element of mattering is hope — a positive outlook about what employees can do and how things will turn out.

Hopefulness is very critical.”

GOOD MANAGERS ARE KEY

Managers often contribute to anti-mattering by purposely or inadvertently favoring certain employees. “Employees are acutely aware when someone dominates the attention of someone in a leadership position,” Flett says.

Furthermore, some managers mistakenly believe in motivating employees by ignoring them or being critical. “But they don’t understand how easily employees can take minor negative feedback or even neutral feedback and infer that they’re not important,” Flett says.

In fact, one study showed that it can take seven positive exchanges to make up for one negative interaction, he notes.

Given all this, is it possible that employees nowadays are just overly sensitive and need to toughen up? While Flett says he understands how some managers might feel that way, it’s generally not a constructive attitude.



“Some employees are capable of handling criticism and others fold up at the first sign of trouble and withdraw into themselves,” he says. “Some need criticism and some need a pat on the back. But to me, toughening up is finding healthier ways to make people more resilient and adaptable. The key is having criticism come from someone who employees believe has their best interests at heart. If they have a good relationship with their managers and know their managers believe in them, they’ll respond better — not internalize comments and automatically feel they’re inadequate and incompetent.”

MAKING IT HAPPEN

So what can managers do to make sure employees feel they matter? For starters, they can use a tool called an

Anti-Mattering Scale to determine just how many employees feel they’re not valued.

Developed a couple of years ago by Flett and other researchers at York University, the AMS poses five questions to determine employees’ level of anti-mattering feelings. Participants choose answers on a scale of one (not at all) to four (a lot).

Questions include, “How often have you been treated in a way that makes you feel like you are insignificant?” and “To what extent have you been made to feel like you are invisible?” Other such anti-mattering surveys also exist and can help employers determine if they’re meeting important mattering benchmarks, such as whether employees feel their work contributes to their company’s success, whether they receive public

praise for their efforts, whether the quality of their work positively impacts their organization and so forth.

“The key is to make such surveys anonymous, or employees might not tell the truth,” Flett says.

ASK CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Furthermore, managers should make a point to take their direct reports aside and ask them if they feel they matter at work and why they do or don’t feel that way.

“You need to really listen so people feel they’re truly being seen and heard,” he says. “This could open up valuable conversations.”

Managers also can strive to allow employees to provide input into decisions, which enhances their feeling of mattering; find opportunities to tell employees they matter; explain the

big-picture impact of their work; and allow them to mentor other employees.

“Knowing they’re influencing the next generation of workers can have an incredible impact,” Flett says.

Going even deeper, though, managers need to show personal interest in employees that transcends talking just about work-related issues.

“It’s not always easy and it takes time,” he says. “And the interest has to be genuine and authentic. But whatever resources you commit will pay off in terms of better engagement and productivity, as well as limiting the related costs of mental and physical health issues. The bottom line is people will feel better about themselves and subsequently will make a difference in the lives of other people. Everyone wants to know they’re making a positive difference.” **HR**

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12 Waterfowl Shotguns to Stock

There's a shotgun out there for every waterfowling niche and every budget. Consider these models to fill your customers' needs.

BY HILARY DYER

Waterfowling is an interesting subset of hunting. While you'll have some generalists who hunt deer and turkeys primarily but will hit the marsh a few times a year for ducks or geese, you'll also find your shop visited by a lot of specialists — die-hard waterfowling enthusiasts who live and breathe this stuff. The two groups often have different needs when it comes to their shotguns.

Because the generalists also chase turkeys in the spring and maybe small game and upland birds in the fall, they're often looking for a versatile, do-it-all shotgun, maybe even one with interchangeable barrels for deer hunting with slugs. They might not be interested in spending a lot and will probably turn

their nose up at a \$2,000 waterfowl-specific gun.

On the other hand, your hard-core enthusiasts have already dumped a small fortune into decoys, waders, blinds, leases, trailers, and their dogs — not to mention the amount they'll spend on ammo over the course of a season — and they demand the best of the best when it comes to guns. They have specific requirements, maybe even a favorite camo pattern, and the most dedicated among them might even want a species-specific gun like the dedicated snow goose gun from Beretta, highlighted in this article.

No matter what your customers' needs, there's a shotgun out there to fit their specific use and their budget. These 12 models are worth a spot on your shelves.





SAVAGE RENEGAUG WATERFOWL

This Renegaug has been a hit for Savage going on several years now, and the Waterfowl version comes with all the standard features, including the company's D.R.I.V. (dual regulating inline valve) gas system that vents excess gas for consistent ejection, less felt recoil and fast cycling. Savage says it will cycle even the mildest loads, and

length of pull, comb height and drop at heel can all be adjusted for a custom fit to the shooter. It's got a 3-inch chamber and comes with either 26- or 28-inch barrels, with oversized controls, three included choke tubes and a Mossy Oak Shadow Grass Blades camo finish. MSRP: \$1,349.



BROWNING A5

The semi-auto Browning A5 is a classic, featuring that distinctive humpback receiver profile, and waterfowlers will especially appreciate the custom touches on the Wicked Wing version: Burnt bronze Cerakote finish on the receiver, composite stock with shim adjustment for fit, fully chromed bore for corrosion resistance, and the fast-cycling, soft-shooting Kinematic Drive system (recoil operated). The gun is loaded with fea-

tures and comes with a 100,000-round/5-year guarantee. It's got lengthened forcing cones, back boring, 26- or 28-inch barrels, a 3 1/2-inch chamber, the Speed Load Plus system and a variety of camo finishes to choose from. You can even get it in a 16-gauge, and this year Browning introduced a 20-gauge version that only comes in the standard walnut and blue finish. MSRP on the Wicked Wing A5: \$2,279.99.



WEATHERBY ELEMENT

Weatherby's inertia-operated semi-automatic Element is designed to run smoothly with minimal maintenance. It's got a chrome-lined bore, interchangeable chokes, a checkered and vented top rib with a fiber optic front bead, and spacers and shims to adjust the fit for cast and drop. The bolt release is dual-purpose: It moves the bolt forward and into battery, of course, but it also allows a shooter to remove live shells

from the magazine tube without cycling them through the chamber. The Waterfowler version of the Element comes in 12- or 20-gauge (all 3-inch chambers) with a 26- or 28-inch barrel, and it's fully camo-ed out in the buyer's choice of three camo patterns. MSRP: \$799.





POINTER FIELD TEK 4

This no-frills gun, imported by Legacy Sports International, is a gas-operated workhorse of a semi-auto, with raised vent ribs, a fiber optic front sight, five included choke tubes, a tough black synthetic stock and forend, a ventilated buttpad and 28-inch chrome-lined barrels. It comes in 12-gauge and 20-gauge, with a youth-model

20-gauge and .410 also available. Buyers can get it in the standard black synthetic stock and blued barrel or a camo-stocked version with bronze Cerakote on the barrel and receiver, and they won't be able to resist the price. MSRP: Starts at \$279.



BENELLI SUPER BLACK EAGLE 3

This might be one of the most expensive guns on our list, but it's among the most in-demand by serious waterfowlers: The Benelli SBE3. It's designed for superior ergonomics, flawless functionality and modern waterfowling reliability. Driven by Benelli's legendary inertia system, the SBE3 comes in 12-gauge only and has a 3½-inch cham-

ber, 28- or 26-inch barrels, a Comfort Tech 3 stock, three camo options plus black synthetic and satin walnut, a Crio-treated barrel, shim kit, Benelli's Easy Loading system and Easy Locking bolt system, and Crio chokes (three flush-fit and two extended). Left-handed versions are also available. MSRP: Starts at \$2,199.



STOEGER M3500 WATERFOWL SPECIAL

Customers looking for an inertia-driven gun with waterfowl-specific features at a lower price than a Benelli would do well to look at Stoeger's M3500. The Waterfowl Special version of this gun boasts oversized controls, weather-resistant construction and five included choke tubes. It has a 3½-inch chamber, but Stoeger says it cycles

shorter shells equally well without adjustment. It comes with a fiber-optic front sight, a paracord sling, a recoil reducer, a shim kit, specially designed port for easy loading, a RealTree Max-7/FDE Cerakote finish and optional upgraded stocks. MSRP: \$899.

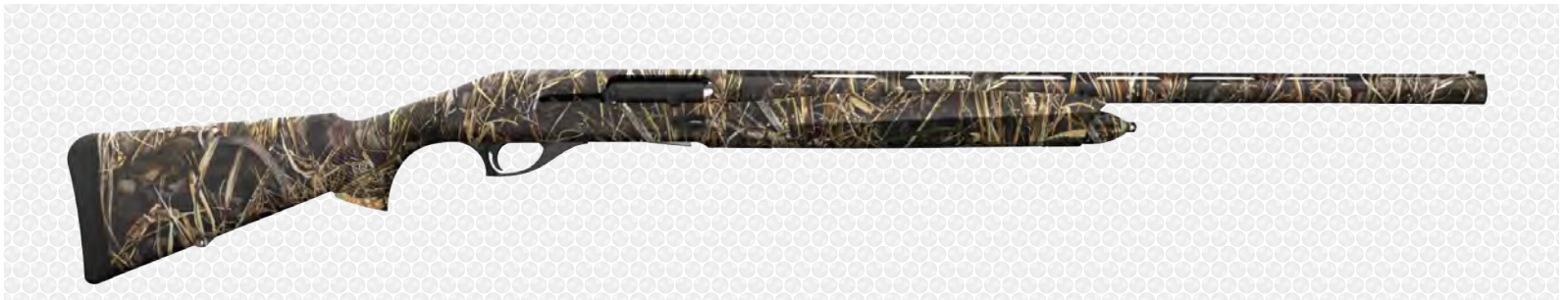




EAA GIRSAN MC312

Imported by EAA, this 12-gauge semi-auto falls into the do-it-all category, with a versatile 28-inch barrel, an inertia-driven action, a fiber optic front sight and your choice of black or camo finish. EAA says it ran a 5,000-round test without any cleaning or malfunctions, as well as a 10,000-round test without any parts replacement. It's

simple, clean, efficient and versatile, with a Picatinny rail in case your customer wants a shotgun that'll do double duty as a hunting gun and a home defense firearm. MSRP: \$449.



RETAY USA MASAI MARA

Customers who aren't familiar with Retay USA might be pleasantly surprised by the Masai Mara, particularly the RealTree Max-7 version ideal for waterfowling. It's an inertia-driven semi-auto that comes in 12- or 20-gauge with 28- or 26-inch barrels, and the 12-gauge has a 3 ½-inch chamber. Features include a chrome-lined barrel, op-

timized lengthened forcing cone, adjustable fit plate and shim system, push-button removeable trigger system, Inertia Plus rotating bolt, TruGlo fiber optic front sight, a recoil pad and five included choke tubes. MSRP: \$1,399.



BERETTA A300 ULTIMA SNOW GOOSE ARCTIC FOX

Snow goose hunting is a niche within a niche, and this gun is built expressly for them. It uses Beretta's AGS gas system to reliably cycle 2 ¾- and 3-inch shells, and has a 28-inch barrel with a stepped rib — and it's suppressor-ready. Magazine capacity is an impressive 10+1 (2 ¾-inch shells) for those unlimited conservation-season hunts, and it's optics-ready if your customer wants to add a red-dot optic. It's got a thin-

ner forend for better control, and an integrated M-LOK system on the forend and extended magazine clamp allows hunters to easily mount a camera. Of course, the whole thing is decked out in Arctic Fox camouflage, or get it in plain black synthetic if you prefer. MSRP: Starts at \$1,459.





REMINGTON 870 SPS SUPER MAGNUM TURKEY/WATERFOWL

Of course, not every hunter wants a semi-auto, and pump guns don't get any more iconic than Big Green's 870. The SPS Super Magnum Turkey/Waterfowl version is a versatile gun for hunters who chase turkeys when waterfowl season is over. It's a 12-gauge with a 3 1/2-inch chamber and a 26-inch barrel, drilled and tapped for optics

for turkey season (HiViz fiber optic sights are optional). Covered in Kryptek Obskura Transitional camo and brown Cerakote, it'll blend in in the marsh and the woods. MSRP: Not available.



WINCHESTER SPX WATERFOWL

Another popular pump, the Winchester SXP is made to take the punishment the waterfowling world is known for, with a chrome-plated bore and chamber and a matte black chrome bolt. Winchester says, "It will always cycle smooth and go 'bang' when you're counting on it most," and what else do you need? You can get the 12-gauge with a 3 1/2-inch or 3-inch chamber, and a 3-inch 20-gauge is also available. All come

with a lightning-fast, inertia-assisted pump action, four lug rotary bolt for secure lockup, aluminum alloy receiver, drop-out trigger group, durable e-coating on the magazine tube, TruGlow fiber optic sight, an Inflex Technology recoil pad and three choke tubes. Six camo finishes are available depending on the configuration. MSRP: \$429.99.



MOSSBERG SILVER RESERVE EVENTIDE WATERFOWL

And now for something different: Over-and-unders are having a bit of a resurgence lately, driven by their classic feel but also by the versatility afforded by two different choke tubes. Mossberg is jumping on the o/u trend with the Silver Reserve Eventide Waterfowl, featuring extractors, a corrosion-resistant chrome-lined chamber and barrels, tang-mounted safety, dual locking lugs, and a five-tube choke set. It comes

in a 12-gauge only right now (although other versions of the Eventide are available in 20-gauge), with a 3 1/2-inch chamber, with a camo and brown Cerakote finish and a fiber optic front bead. This is a real conversation starter on your shelves, and it might just be ideal for that customer who is looking for something a little outside the norm. MSRP: \$956. **HR**



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Layering Up

By carefully selecting the right material types and clothing types, hunters can stave off the elements without adding too much bulk.

BY DAVID REARICK

When it comes to staying comfortable in all conditions, cotton long johns, polypropylene, and heavy jackets that are bulky and cumbersome should not be the focus. Instead, hunters should focus on building a quality layering system that starts at the next-to-skin base layer and ends with a waterproof exterior. A properly designed layering system will not only allow for nearly infinite combinations to match the weather conditions, it will also outperform simply wearing a "heavier" jacket when it gets cold outside.



When looking for a clothing line to stock the shelves, retailers should look beyond hunting-specific clothing brands when considering products. While many hunting-specific clothing lines are excellent, there are also many good mountaineering and skiing clothing companies, like Helly Hansen or Outdoor Research, that sell through retailers and make exceptional products that can augment a layering system. These companies generally use high-tech materials designed to minimize bulk but maximize heat retention, allowing maximum flexibility. Sure, they are generally only offered in solid colors rather than camouflage, but as a base or mid-layer, camouflage patterns are not important, and even on outer layers, for many hunting situations, camouflage is not a necessity.

NEXT-TO-SKIN BASE LAYER

Hands down, wearing the appropriate next-to-skin base layer is the most important piece of a layering system, and there isn't a close second. Base layers are important because they help to wick or pull away moisture from the skin. They are specifically helpful in situations where a hunter must hike or travel to a hunting spot that induces the body to sweat. If the



moisture from sweat is not removed or controlled, once the hunter becomes idle, this moisture will rapidly cool, leaving the hunter damp and uncomfortable.

The first place to start with a base layering system is likely not where one thinks. Instead of thinking about bottoms and tops, hunters should in-

stead look at undergarments and liner socks, as these regions both generate significant moisture and are the key starting point to retaining body heat. Like other pieces in a base layering system, undergarments and thin liner socks should be made from synthetic or natural materials, like merino wool, and never cotton. In fact, cotton should be avoided throughout the layering system entirely, as unlike other materials, cotton provides no insulation value when it gets wet.

While there are synthetic materials that outperform cotton, nothing truly beats merino wool. While the thought of wool in, umm, sensitive regions sound less than appealing, merino wool boxer briefs, like those made by Smartwool, are extremely comfortable without any itch. In fact, starting with a Smartwool base layer consisting of their boxer briefs and liner socks is a great first step. While many companies have their own version of

synthetic wicking material, for the money, nothing beats natural merino wool for performance. For instance, a downfall to many synthetics is they really stink after a day in the field. On the other hand, merino wool, even after multiple days between showers, is far less ripe, as it does an excellent job at wicking away moisture and staving off the formation of odor-causing bacteria. I don't want to discourage anyone from selling synthetics, as they are also proven performers, but understanding the benefits of wool and being able to articulate those benefits to a customer is the first step in providing an alternative product for their specific system.

In addition to undergarments and liner socks, a base layer system should include tops and bottoms made from similar synthetic materials or merino wool. Companies including Smartwool, Banded Hunting Gear, Sitka Gear, and others all make synthetic

"The first place to start with a base layering system is likely not where one thinks. Instead of thinking about bottoms and tops, hunters should instead look at undergarments and socks, as these regions both generate significant moisture..."



and merino offerings in various weights. Lighter-weight base layers are good for mid-season hunts, while heavier weight materials are ideal to layer on top of lightweight options when it gets colder.

This next-to-skin system, despite being sleek and lightweight, will keep hunters far warmer than wearing a four-inch-thick puffy jacket that inhibits motion. No one wants to be dressed like Randy in *A Christmas Story*, and the good news is, you don't have to if you do it right!

MID-LAYER

Unlike a base layer that is thin and body-contouring, mid-layers are thicker to provide insulation. Mid-layers consist of things like fleece sweatpants/bottoms and a wool, down, fleece, or other synthetic material top. Good mid-layers can have a hood, be a simple thin down jacket, include a wind-proof liner, or be made from a solid fleece material.

Examples of good mid-layers include Sitka Gear's Fanatic Hoody and Smartwool's Fleece Tech Pants. Thin "puff" jackets with down or synthetic down are also a great choice to add insulation while being lightweight, as the air voids are great at trapping heat inside and keeping the cold out.

Once a top and bottom mid-layer is selected, don't forget about socks. Technically a mid-layer, high-quality wool socks over a liner sock are a must-have. Merino or alpaca wool socks are available from a plethora of suppliers and generally come in different weights/thicknesses. It is a good idea for every layering system to consist of a base liner sock to control moisture and get it away from the skin and two different thicknesses of wool socks to place over top of the liner. This allows hunters to select the appropriate sock the day of the hunt, basing their decision on the tempera-

Great Layering Options

BASE LAYER OPTION

Smartwool Classic Thermal Merino Base Layer Hoodie

I can't stress enough how body temperature control starts with the base layer, and Smartwool's Classic Thermal Merino Base Hoody is a great place to start. The heaviest-weight base layer Smartwool makes, this hoodie is perfect to wear as part of a full layering system or just as a base layer underneath and outer layer. It is made from 100% Merino wool, to assist with moisture and odor control, and excels at keeping body temperature in, even when damp or wet.

MID-LAYER OPTION

Sitka Gear Fanatic Hoody

Featuring fleece insulation and Polygiene Odor Control, Sitka Gear's Fanatic hoody is a great mid-layer option. Featuring a built-in hand muff and flip-over hand mitts, the Fanatic can also be worn as an outer layer in warmer temperatures. It includes a hood with built-in breathable face mask and other functional designs that make it very versatile. As part of a complete layering system, the Fanatic has many uses and is a great multi-purpose addition to any system.

OUTER LAYER OPTION

Banded Utility 2.0 Jacket

Banded's Utility 2.0 Jacket can be worn as a traditional outer layer over a mid and base layer combination or simply over a base layer on warmer days. It features a wind-blocking, midweight soft-shell exterior that is lined with a tec-fleece warmth grid and water-resistant DWR-treated exterior. Flexible and soft, the Utility 2.0 doesn't restrict movement, allowing users to hike, climb, or shoot without feeling constrained.

RAIN LAYER OPTION

Browning Kanawha Rain Gear

Having a good, lightweight rain layer is a key and often overlooked component of a layering system. Browning's Kanawha Rain Gear features a reliable waterproof/breathable membrane and fully taped seams to ensure that your layering system is sealed off against the elements. Unlike other thin and flimsy rain jackets, Browning's outer shell fabric is tough enough to shrug off brush while remaining light enough to stuff away inside your pack.



ture, hunting style, and boot choice. And advise your shoppers to avoid cotton socks at all costs.

OUTER LAYERS

For all intents and purposes, there are two types of outer layers: waterproof and non-waterproof. While outer layers can be purchased with waterproof membranes, the most effective layering system consists of a base, mid, and outer layer PLUS a thin, packable rain layer. This combination allows hunters to pick the best combination of layering pieces without focusing on an outer layer that is simply waterproof. Additionally, having a separate rain layer allows the layering system to function like it should, by allowing hunters to remove the outer layer or even the mid layer on hot

days while still having peace of mind that they can add their rain layer as needed, regardless of the temperature.

Like mid-layers, there are many different types of outer layers. As mentioned above, water resistance is less important when planning to have a separate rain layer, but one place not to skimp is to make sure it is windproof. One of the quickest ways to get cold, even with a great layering system, is to stand in 50 mph winds without any wind buffer. Having a windproof liner in an outer layer goes a long way into making sure the layering system does what is supposed to. Without one, the rain layer can serve as this layer, but it is more effective to have it built in to the outer layer for maximum efficiency.

In addition to a windproof

material, outer layers should add some insulation value to the layering system. Good outer layers include a fleece jacket or an outer layer made of another, similar, synthetic material. Softshell jackets/pants with fleece linings are very popular outer layers, as they provide the wind-stopping layer while remaining flexible enough to allow for typical movements.

RAIN LAYER

The main criteria for a rain layer should be that the rain layer is waterproof (not water resistant), packs down small, and has reasonable durability. Companies like Frogg Toggs and Browning make great, lightweight, and packable options. The rain layer is not designed to add insulation value per say, and should

not be thick or heavy. Instead, it should be small and serve its only purpose: to keep you dry.

Personal preference often decides the brand and camouflage pattern a buyer chooses due to their lack of understanding of other manufacturer's products or previous experiences. Vendors armed with critical information about how a layering system is supposed to work go a long way to selling products that make a difference. With today's vast market of layering system options, the days of picking a big bulky jacket that looks warm should be a thing of the past. Instead, hunters should focus on designing a custom layering system that is lightweight and made from quality materials for maximum performance. **HR**



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Survival Kits and Navigation Tools

Keep customers coming back and prepared for the worst.

BY ACE LUCIANO

In today's world of extreme politics, numerous wars, pandemics and sometimes local violent acts, survival kits and navigation tools have become a practical necessity for everyone, not just extreme adventurers or doomsday preppers. Whether you're camping, hiking, traveling, or preparing for natural disasters, these tools provide safety and peace of mind to your customers. By offering top-quality survival kits, navigation tools, and related supplies, you can create a loyal customer base that keeps coming back for more. Let's dive into how you can do just that by focusing on pre-made inclusive survival kits, supplies for custom kits, handheld GPS units, GPS-enabled watches, and topographical maps and compasses.





PRE-MADE SURVIVAL KITS

People love convenience in all things. Pre-made survival kits are the “easy button” for survival. They come with everything one might need in an emergency, from first-aid supplies and food to fire-starting tools and shelter materials. By offering these all-in-one solutions, you’re saving your customers the hassle of figuring out what they need on their own.

Make sure that when you choose what to stock on your shelves you choose vetted, quality products, because when your customers buy a pre-made kit, they’re trusting that it’s been put together by experts who know what’s essential for survival in many scenarios.

Want to stand out from the competition? Offer some specialized kits. Create/stock ones for specific activities like hiking, hunting, or prepping/natural disasters.

INDIVIDUAL SUPPLIES: LET THEM BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME!

While pre-made kits are super convenient, some folks prefer to put together their own kit by choosing activity-specific supplies. By offering a wide range of individual supplies, you allow them to create a kit that’s just right for them. This can include anything from specific types of first-aid items like tourniquets to multi-purpose items like paracord, fishing line, or even a multitool.

One of the fastest-growing areas in the outdoor retail

→ Some customers will prefer to assemble their own survival and navigation kit. Are you stocking the individual components they’ll need?



space is supplements and specialized foods. Those fit into this category as well. Selling individual supplies is also a great opportunity to engage with your customers on which supplies they might need, they probably need, and the ones that are absolutely essential. Offer advice and recommendations to help them choose the best items for their unique needs. This personalized service not only enhances their shopping experience but also fosters trust and loyalty — two things that are essential for repeat purchases and customer retention.

A comprehensive backcountry survival kit for two people should include essential items to ensure three things: safety, sustenance and shelter. First and foremost, the kit should contain a well-stocked first-aid kit with bandages, antiseptic wipes, pain relievers, tweezers, and any necessary prescription

medications. For sustenance, include high-calorie, non-perishable food items such as energy bars, dehydrated, high-calorie foods, and water purification tablets or a portable water filter. Shelter supplies should include a lightweight, durable tent or emergency bivvy sacks, emergency/thermal blankets, and/or a compact, multi-use tarp. Fire-starting tools, such as waterproof matches, a



↑ Prepackaged first aid kits are a smart thing to stock. Everyone who goes afield needs one, and they’re an easy upsell to hunters and hikers.

lighter, and fire starters, are crucial for warmth, water purification and cooking.

For navigation and signaling, the kit should include a detailed topographical map of the area, a reliable compass, and a GPS unit with extra batteries. A multi-tool with knife, pliers, and screwdriver functions will be invaluable for various tasks, while sturdy, weather-resistant flashlights or headlamps with extra batteries ensure visibility in low-light conditions. Include personal hygiene items like biodegradable soap, a compact shovel for sanitation purposes, and insect repellent to maintain comfort. Finally, rope or paracord, duct tape, and a sewing kit provide the





means for repairs and improvisations. This well-rounded kit ensures that two people can handle a range of challenges they might face in their backcountry adventures.

Having these supplies in stock will ensure that your customers will have a safe return to you and their families.

NAVIGATION TOOLS

Handheld GPS units are a must-have for anyone exploring unfamiliar or remote areas, regardless of activity. They offer accurate and reliable navigation and can be a godsend when in unfamiliar terrain or even “familiar” terrain after dark. Tech-savvy customers love the latest and often more complex devices. A non-technical

hunter going on their first pack-in trip may need something simpler. Offer a variety of GPS units, from basic models to high-tech versions with features like weather updates, mapping, track-back capability, and, as some of the newest, most advanced devices offer, the ability to communicate with your party and even someone back at home 1,000 miles or more away. Keeping up with the latest technology can also keep your customers interested and coming back to see what’s new after they see the newest devices advertised in any of the multitude of places we are marketed to today.

Excellent after-sales service is also a key to developing a one time purchase into a long term relationship.

Provide tutorials, software updates, and troubleshooting help to ensure your customers get the most out of their GPS units. Bring in speakers for special training sessions and offer it to the general public. Remember: Every time a customer comes in is an opportunity to give them excellent service, even if they have a problem or complaint.

RECOMMENDED GPS UNITS GARMIN INREACH

The Garmin InReach series, particularly the InReach Mini 2, is a top choice for adventurers who need reliable, two-way satellite communication in remote areas. This compact device weighs just 3.5 ounces and fits easily into your pocket or backpack.



↑ Garmin InReach Mini 2



One of its standout features is the ability to send and receive text messages anywhere in the world via the Iridium satellite network, even when out of cell phone range. The InReach Mini 2 also includes interactive SOS capabilities, which connect users to a 24/7 global emergency response coordination center, providing an extra layer of safety for solo travelers or those in extreme environments. In addition to its communication capabilities, the Garmin InReach Mini 2 offers navigation features such as basic GPS tracking and the ability to share your location with loved ones. The device pairs seamlessly with smartphones via the Garmin Earthmate app, allowing users to access maps, aerial imagery, and U.S. NOAA charts. The battery life is impressive, lasting up to 14 days in 10-minute tracking mode, and up to 30 days in 30-minute tracking mode. The Garmin InReach Mini 2 retails at an average price of \$399.99.

For an “all-in-one” unit, one of Garmin’s InReach GPS Map units (\$499.99-\$599.99) are an excellent choice. Either are a worthwhile investment for peace of mind and reliable communication during any adventure, but all Garmin communication systems also require a subscription to Garmin’s InReach subscription system, which offers both a “freedom” and a month-to-month plan. The only downside is that, due to reconnection fees, etc., going month-to-month doesn’t save you much money if you use it more than a few months — but after all, what is your customer’s safety and peace of mind worth?

SPOT PLB

The SPOT Gen4 Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is a robust, user-friendly device designed for



↑ SPOT Gen4 Personal Locator Beacon

outdoor enthusiasts who need a reliable means of emergency communication, but may already have another means of navigation like a handheld GPS. One of its primary features is the ability to send SOS messages to GEOS International Emergency Response Coordination Center, ensuring that help is on the way even in the most remote locations. It also allows users to check in with predefined messages and share their GPS coordinates with family and friends, providing real-time updates on their location and safety. In addition to emergency communication, the SPOT Gen4 offers customizable tracking features that can be set to transmit the user’s GPS coordinates at various intervals, from every 2.5 minutes to every 60 minutes. This helps keep a detailed record of the journey and ensures that the user’s progress can be monitored. The device is rugged and water-resistant, making it suitable for harsh outdoor conditions. The SPOT Gen4 PLB is powered by four AAA lithium batteries, providing long battery life to

last throughout extended trips. The average retail price of the SPOT Gen4 is approximately \$149.99, making it an affordable and reliable tool for safety and communication in the backcountry.

GARMIN RINO

The Garmin Rino 755t is a versatile handheld navigation device that combines GPS navigation with two-way radio communication, making it ideal for situations with multiple people coordinating activities in remote areas. The Rino 755t features a 5-watt, two-way radio that can communicate with any FRS/GMRS radios, providing both voice communication and text messaging capabilities. This is especially useful for coordinating with group members during



↑ Garmin Rino 755t

“By offering top-quality supplies, you can create a loyal customer base that keeps coming back for more.”

hunting, hiking, or other outdoor activities where communication over long range can come in handy. Additionally, the device supports position reporting, which allows users to send their exact location to other Rino users. The Rino 755t is equipped with several other advanced navigation features, including a high-sensitivity GPS and GLONASS receiver for better performance in challenging environments like heavy tree cover and cloud cover. It comes preloaded with TOPO U.S. 100K maps and a 1-year BirdsEye Satellite Imagery subscription, offering detailed views of whatever terrain you are in. Also included is a built-in 8-megapixel camera, a barometric altimeter, and a 3-axis electronic compass. The 3-inch touchscreen display is sunlight-readable and can be operated with gloves on, enhancing its usability. The Garmin Rino 755t typically retails for around \$649.99, more than a simple handheld GPS, but its extensive features and reliable performance more than justify the price.

BUSHNELL BACKTRACK

The Bushnell BackTrack Mini GPS is a compact, user-friendly navigation device designed for those who





↑ Bushnell BackTrack Mini GPS

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK: GPS-ENABLED WATCHES

The best of both worlds, GPS-enabled watches are popular because they're convenient and are always with you. They not only help with navigation but also track fitness, can provide weather updates, and even send emergency alerts. This multi-functionality also makes them appealing to a wide range

a long way in the convenience factor as well. These watches aren't just functional — they're fashionable, too. Be sure to offer a variety of styles and designs to suit different preferences. When customers can find a watch that matches their personal style and meets their practical needs, they'll be more likely to buy.

High-quality GPS-enabled watches aren't cheap, though. By partnering with reputable brands maintaining high standards for your in-house

from several manufacturers for them to choose from.

OLD-SCHOOL RELIABILITY

Even with all the tech available in the marketplace, traditional maps and compasses are still essential for anyone traveling in the backcountry. They don't require batteries or a satellite signal, and the only way for a compass to stop working is to physically damage it such that it would likely no longer be recognizable as a

need simple and reliable guidance without the complexity of more advanced GPS units. The BackTrack Mini allows users to mark up to five locations, making it easy to find their way back to specific points such as a campsite, car or trailhead. The device provides both distance and direction back to the marked locations, ensuring users can navigate confidently even in unfamiliar areas. The BackTrack Mini is quite easy to carry in a small pack, weighing just 1.6 ounces and featuring a durable, water-resistant design. The straightforward interface is very easy to use, making it accessible and easy for individuals of any experience level. It is powered by a rechargeable battery that offers up to 16 hours of use on a single charge, suitable for day trips and short excursions, but maybe a little less that you need for significant backcountry adventure unless you're confident in a spare battery pack and/or solar panel. Additionally, it includes a digital compass and time display. The Bushnell BackTrack Mini GPS retails for \$79.99, offering a budget-friendly option for reliable navigation support during outdoor activities.



↑ GPS is an incredible advancement in navigation, but encourage hunters who go deep into the back country to carry an old-school backup.

of customers, from the jogger to the wilderness athlete to the serious hunter. Advances like solar recharging and ultra-long battery life have come

products, you can also tap into existing brand loyalty. Apple people tend to remain Apple people. Android people tend to stay Android, but there are also always reasons to “cross the fence.” Customers who trust these brands are more likely to trust you and your business for carrying them.

As watches tend to be very personal, you'll want to have an assortment

compass. Offering high-quality maps and compasses shows your customers that you and they are prepared for any situation. Educational topographical maps and compasses aren't just for use — they're for learning too. Offer workshops or tutorials on how to use them and, if you open them to the public, you'll likely find some new customers in the mix. **HR**



Saddle Up for Whitetail Season

Deer hunters haven't given up on ladder stands, climbers and blinds, but the saddle craze is one that can't be ignored.

BY ALAN CLEMONS

If you're not selling saddle hunting kits and accessories to whitetail deer hunters this year, you're missing out. That's about as plainly as it gets. Hunters haven't given up on climbing stands, ladder stands, lock-ons and sticks or ground blinds. Sales ebb and flow with those. But for the last few years with saddle kits, the acute spike in interest has been akin to a sherpa scaling Mt. Everest.





Saddle hunting is the hottest thing in the whitetail world at the moment. It's been around for years, like other methods of hunting from trees. But in the last few years, it has become more refined, thanks to better saddle designs and gear. Location doesn't matter; if a lopsided, crooked or limb-covered tree can be climbed, saddle hunters can climb it. Age doesn't matter; younger and older hunters are using them. Bowhunters make up the majority of saddle hunters, but they can be used with crossbows and firearms, too.

"We started selling the Tethrd models last year and absolutely blew it out of the water. They sold like gangbusters," said Mark Smith, archery manager at Mark's Outdoors in Vestavia Hills, Alabama. "We sell a ton of the big \$3,000 shooting houses, compared to a lot of places, and always have. We also sell some of the portable ground blinds, the pop-up models, but honestly not a ton of those. And we sell lock-ons and ladder stands.

"But the saddles have just gone crazy for us. We're selling Tethrd, Latitude ... Cruzr may start doing retail, and there are all the other mom-n-pop companies with saddles or gear. It's amazing how it's taken off."

Jody Smith is seeing the same interest at Mack's Prairie Wings in Stuttgart, Arkansas. He's the archery department manager and buyer for Mack's, as it's known by millions of duck hunters. Mack's began about 90 years ago in a hardware store after duck hunting took off on flooded greentree reservoirs. Local hunters and visiting sports needed gear; Mack's sold it and eventually became a standalone outdoors store. Waterfowl hunting was its lynchpin, but deer hunters, small-game hunters and trappers also found a home there.

Today, Smith's archery department



caters to whitetail deer hunters seeking a Natural State buck. Hardwood forests dot the landscape around Stuttgart, about an hour east of Little Rock. Saddle hunting has been the big hit.

"It's pretty clear that although tree-stands haven't gone away, everything right now seems to be going toward saddles," Smith said. "I spent more on saddles this year than on climbers and lock-ons. It's been dominant and rising. I don't know how long it's going to last, but we're going to ride it as long as it's going."

Smith said the appeal for saddle hunting is easy to understand.

"There's about no tree you can't climb," he said. "You can climb just about any tree and get set up. You can get into just about any area with them, take less weight (than a climber), and customize them a million different ways. I think a lot of people really appreciate that. The comfort, to me, isn't as good as a lock-on or ladder, but the upside is they're lightweight and mobile. There's always a trade-off, right?"

WHAT ARE YOU SELLING?

Yes, you're selling a physical product: ladder stands, hard-shell or pop-up hub blinds, climbing stands, lock-ons and sticks, or saddle kits. Safety

Blinds and Stands to Consider

Rutted-Up Gladiator Blind – This blind is 7 feet wide by 7 feet long and has a ceiling height of 7 feet, as well, giving hunters more than enough room to move around comfortably. Eleven windows have locks and are smoked but still offer clear views in various lighting conditions. It has an airtight roof, several inches of insulation throughout, and sound-deadening carpet. rutted-up.com

Summit Dual Threat Pro SD – The new Dual Threat adjustable front bar offers multiple possibilities for bow or gun hunters. It can be positioned straight down for a sit-stand climbing method, down and under the seat for bowhunting, up as a gun rest, or removed for hand-climbing and open-front bowhunting. The seat is more adjustable, and the stand has a higher weight rating (to 350 pounds). summitstands.com

Millennium L-224 Pro-Lite – The new L-224 Pro-Lite two-man ladder stand has a roomy platform, ComfortMax seat and platform size of 39.75 inches wide and 22 inches long, with a height of 18 feet. It weighs 78 pounds and is built with powder-coated, rigid oval steel. Weight capacity is 500 pounds. For two hunters, or one seeking more space, this is a roomy stand. millenniumstands.com

Redneck Hunting Cabin – This new blind is built for hunters interested in the long haul. The fully sealed, 7x8-foot Hunting Cabin comes with 110-volt outlets and other accessories such as a bed frame, lights and storage spots. It has closed-cell foam insulation in the walls, ceiling and floor, insulated metal doors, magnetic window curtains, and a door awning. redneckblinds.com

Primos Double Bull Surroundview Double Wide – Along with the very cool 180-degree see-through capability, the spacious blind has zipper and bungee closures for the door and a full front window with silent slide closures. It has a height of 67 inches and floor space of 56x56 inches. primos.com



harnesses, too, of course. If you're selling anything that helps hunters get off the ground, you're doing a disservice to them by not selling safety harnesses.

But the main thing you're selling to hunters is access and concealment. Most deer hunters want to get to a spot and then get up in a tree. This helps them see further, scan, decide, get ready and shoot. Being on the ground limits that. Ground blinds are great hunting tools and one of my favorite ways to hunt. They're safe, quiet and comfortable, although not a fortress of solitude protecting a hunter from being seen, smelled or heard. Blinds can be tossed up quickly or planned ahead before the season.



↑ Ground blinds offer advantages for older hunters who don't want to climb trees anymore — and they're great for kids.

Several years ago, in Kansas, we were riding around our hunting area at midday, enjoying the scenery and killing time. A monstrous rub on a fencepost got my attention. Then another, and another, and then one on a power line pole. That got our attention. We stopped and checked the small block of woods on the boundary of our hunting land. The trees were torn apart, so we threw

up a ground blind and added cover. A small deer came in that evening. The next day, a wary buck came close enough that its tarsal musk could be easily detected, and then it vanished. Bummer. But the ground blind experience was, and is, quite cool.

Being elevated, though — in a ladder stand, climber, lock-on or saddle — is vastly different. For hunters who prefer to climb, it puts them

above the deer or other game. Scent is, or can be, mitigated. Sightlines are vastly improved. Shot lanes are, often, much better. Twitchy Toms who can't stay still may get busted easier, but that's part of it. These hunters want access to 15 or 20 feet off the ground. That's what you're selling: access to get up the trees.

"We're seeing different age groups, but yeah, a lot of them are younger who are buying the saddle kits," said Smith at Mark's Outdoors. "A lot of younger guys just getting started don't have \$2,000 to join a hunting club, so they're hunting on public land. If you're walking a mile or more with a 25-pound climber on your back and your bow, crossbow or gun, that just sucks. It does. We've done it for years and still do it, but it's not enjoyable, right? You're also not likely to get back into the woods as far as

↑ Saddles aren't for everyone. Stock an assortment of saddles, blinds and different types of treestands.

you probably want.

"But with a saddle on your butt and a few sticks, you can get further back into the woods with less hassle and all your gear is not as cumbersome. I think that's one thing that's pushed it, along with saddles being so doggone customizable. You can add different pockets and the MOLLE stuff. With a climber or lock-on or ladder stand, it is what it is."

DON'T IGNORE OTHER STANDS

Saddles are hot, yes, but don't overlook or forget about the other stands hunters want. Ladder stands, climbers and lock-ons still have their place



and always will. Many hunters will, rightly or wrongly, see these traditional methods of getting up into to trees as safer or better. Opinions vary, of course, and so you'll have to know your customer base to make the right decisions.

Smith, at Mack's in Arkansas, said hunters there often seek ground blinds but don't necessarily want the expensive ones. Winters can be tough in Arkansas. A ground blind left in the woods or on the edge of a cut agriculture field will battle not only cold temperatures and possibly freezing rains, but also usually several strong windstorms. It's easier for many hunters to go with the less expensive blinds, Smith said.

"The ground blind (sales) have kind of leveled off," he said. "We're selling some but not as many. The three-man hub-style blinds still have some interest. Hard-core blind hunters seem to like the see-through ones and are planning to leave it there for as long as it will last. Others are interested in whatever is \$99 or so and might buy several.

"The saddles have hurt the climbers (sales). Lock-ons, we still sell the Millennium M-7 MicroLite pretty well. But the bigger lock-ons and climbing stands, those have started to go downhill, and I think that's because of the saddle hunters. We still sell a few ladder stands, of course, but I've seen a few older hunters switch-

Cushions and Chairs That Work

Tripod chairs are not comfortable. One of the three legs is going to be poking in a tender area. They're usually small in design, meaning your hips are lower than your knees. That means blood circulation is impacted, resulting in cold and/or numb feet and legs. Tripod chairs cost maybe \$30 or so, and there's a reason for that: they're cheap.

Instead of selling cheap stuff, sell premium products hunters will enjoy using.

Double Bull Swivel Hunting Blind Chair – This chair allows for a 360-degree range of motion and has an adjustable height. This allows users to get set to see and shoot through window openings. The chair is comfortable for long sits.

primos.com

Redneck Blinds Portable Hunting Chair – I've used one of these for years. They're comfortable and portable. They're great for ground blinds or setting up in quick brush blinds for a long sit. It has a padded back and seat that swivels a bit. Add a cushion for added comfort. The chair folds easily for portability. Add the Platinum 360° Chair that rotates 360 degrees for hunters who want to spend a little more. *redneckblinds.com*

Millennium Chairs G100 – The G100 has adjustable tripod legs, a folding design and full-back ComfortMax seat. The seat swivels to 360 degrees. The height adjustment can be made from 13 to 18 inches. It's also pre-drilled to hold the optional G101 shooting stick, and can match up with the optional M600 bow holder. *millenniumstands.com*

Therma Seat D-Wedge – For customers who want more cushioning, or have blind seats and need something durable, offer the D-Wedge. This double-wedge design puts the thick part behind the lower back and under the thighs. Once settled in and everything's copacetic, it's the best ergonomic position for long sits. Easily portable and made with military-grade hardware. *thermaseat.com*



ing from ladders to ground blinds."

Over in Alabama, Smith at Mark's Outdoors said their sales of ladder stands and blinds also have taken a pinch from saddles.

"Let's say that I'm in a club and have invested in that for a year or more, or I have leased my own few thousand acres," he said. "Now, think about the blinds and ladder stands you might want to put up and the cost of all those. Think about the anchoring or safety systems for those. And the time involved getting them put together, to the location on the property

and then properly secured or set up.

"Then, depending on your situation, you might have to move them if you lose the lease or the timber company calls. We had that happen to a guy who works with us, at Christmas. The timber company called, and he had to scramble to go get a stand out of that block of woods. He ended up in the hospital for a week. Or, you can buy some saddles and sticks, and be mobile enough to hunt pretty much anywhere on the property. That's one of the great things about them." **HR**





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ADAPT 2

AXLE TO AXLE: 31"
BRACE HEIGHT: 6.5"
PEAK DRAW WEIGHT: 45-60 LBS.
55-70 LBS.
DRAW LENGTH RANGE: 24"-31"
SPEED: 320 FPS
LET-OFF: 80%

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All About Dog Gear

Hunters spend a fortune on gear for their four-legged hunting partners. Are you cashing in?

BY JARROD SPILGER

Outfitting human hunters is only part of the equation outdoor retailers should consider. Almost as important is catering to their canine counterparts. After all, hunters love to spoil their bird dogs just as much or more than other pet owners. It's not just about rewarding Fido for a great retrieve or point, either. Many of these items will help train hounds to be better hunters or keep them safe while they're on the job. The end result is happier hunters of both the two- and four-legged variety.





GARMIN PRO 550 PLUS W/ TT15 COLLAR

RUFFLAND KENNELS

A good kennel that keeps pooch confined, comfortable and safe is essential when traveling with a dog. RuffLand Kennels do all of that. These lightweight crates feature one-piece roto-molded construction that's strong but has enough flex for protection in an accident. Features include two-way doors, generously vented sides, and dual grab handles. Best of all, they're stackable for storage so they won't take up excessive garage space when not in use.

There are seven sizes: X-Large, Large, Intermediate, Backseat Rider, Medium, Mid-Size, and Small. The Large, Intermediate, and Backseat Rider (which is just slightly shorter than the Intermediate to better fit inside vehicles) will probably be the best models for most hunting breeds. Depending on kennel size, options include dual doors, front and back or front and side, as well as SUV slant back to fit inside SUVs. Several different colors are available. I have a pair of Intermediates in Millstone, the most popular color, that fit perfectly side-by-side in the back of my Jeep, allowing both of my dogs to join me on hunts and trips. MSRP ranges from \$207.99 to \$474.99 depending on size.

RuffLand also offers numerous kennel accessories. My favorite is the Easy Rider Top Tray that fits on top of the kennel and provides a place to hold shotgun shells, bagged birds, leashes, e-collars, and other assorted gear. MSRP is \$35.99 to \$38.99 depending on size. www.rufflandkennels.com

GARMIN

Used properly, an e-collar is a dog handler's best friend. Look past the negative connotations and consider the safety element that an e-collar provides for correcting unwanted or dangerous behavior remotely. In my experience, Garmin makes the best e-collars out there. The most popular models include the PRO 550 and Sport PRO.

The PRO 550 has a range of up to one mile, the ability to train up to three dogs at a time (with the purchase of additional collars), 21 levels of continuous and momentary stimulation, plus tone and vibration settings, a built-in BarkLimiter, and a beacon light. I have an older Garmin model that is very similar to the PRO 550, and it's my general purpose, workhorse e-collar. MSRP is \$399.99.



Hunters who have a runner, like my Komet, may want to upgrade to the PRO 550 Plus. It has 18 stimulation levels, over two mile range, and — most importantly — GPS tracking that is displayed on the handheld. I bought this collar after Komet pulled one too many disappearing acts, and it's been around his neck every time we hunt ever since. MSRP is \$749.98. The peace of mind it provides is invaluable.

The Sport PRO is a no-nonsense, easy-to-operate collar that can train up to three dogs. It has 10 stimulation levels, BarkLimiter, tone, and beacon. Best of all, the handheld is compact, so it fits easily in a vest or coat pocket. Range is about ¾-mile. MSRP is \$249.99. www.garmin.com

YETI BOOMER 8 DOG BOWL



YETI

YETI coolers are all the rage, but this company also offers a pair of nearly indestructible dog dishes. The folks at YETI say the Boomer 8 Dog Bowl is a great size for most dogs. This stainless steel bowl is puncture- and rust-resistant and dishwasher safe, and it will hold up to eight cups of dog food or water, while the non-slip BearFoot ring keeps the bowl from sliding around. There's also a smaller four-cup Boomer 4. Both come in a variety of colors. MSRP is \$50 Boomer 8, \$40 Boomer 4. www.yeti.com

RUFFLAND INTERMEDIATE KENNEL



RUFFLAND EASY RIDER TOP TRAY





BROWNING

Besides making some of the world's finest firearms, Browning also offers gear for dogs. These include Vinyl Training Dummies in both small (blaze or white, MSRP \$10.99) and large (black/white, MSRP \$14.99) sizes, and Canvas Training Dummies in small (black/white, MSRP \$7.99) and large (blaze, MSRP \$9.99), all of which prominently display Browning's popular Buckmark logo. Blaze Safety (MSRP \$24.99), Full Coverage Safety (MSRP \$34.99), and Chest Protection (MSRP \$24.99) vests offer varying degrees of protection and visibility, while camo Neoprene (MSRP \$44.99) waterfowling vests in Realtree or Mossy Oak provide concealment and warmth. Browning's Classic Webbing Dog Collars come in a variety of colors and camo patterns, in sizes small, medium, or large (MSRP \$12.99-\$14.99). There's even a Duck Rope Toy (MSRP \$16.99) for fun, informal training sessions. www.browning.com

EVERY SPORTING DOG

Avery Sporting Dog (ASD), a division of Banded, offers a host of hunting dog gear. Topping the list are the EZ Bird bumpers, available in various bird species. The Green Winged Teal was the first bird bumper I bought my Phantom when she was a puppy, since it was small enough to fit in her mouth. Other options include Mal-

BROWNING DUCK ROPE TOY



BROWNING TRAINING DUMMY

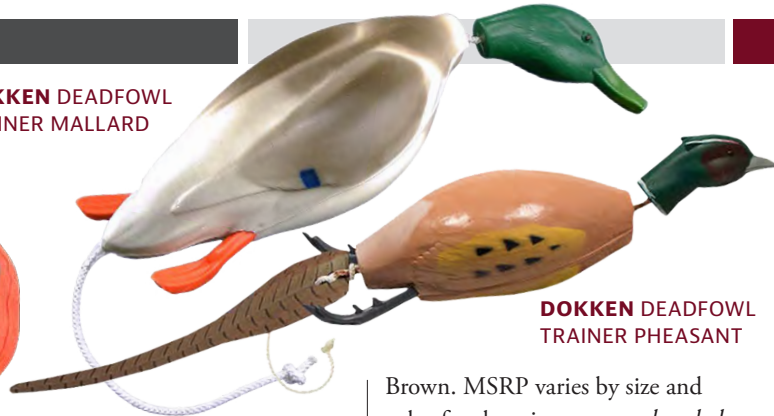


ADS EZ BIRD GREEN WINGED TEAL



ADS HEXABUMPER

DOKKEN DEADFOWL TRAINER MALLARD



DOKKEN DEADFOWL TRAINER PHEASANT

lard, Pintail, Wood Duck, Wigeon, Mourning Dove, and Pheasant, as well as Mallard and Teal black/white flashers. MSRP is \$19.99 to \$29.99 depending on species.

ASD's HexaBumper is a great all-around bumper. Its six flat sides and raised Vgrips make it easy for dogs to pick up and retrieve. The 2-inch size in orange, white, or black/white flasher is the most popular. MSRP is just \$8.99. Stock plenty, because serious dog trainers will buy several. The PerfectHold HexaBumper is similar, but its larger dumbbell-shaped ends encourage dogs to grab it in the middle. Same colors are available. MSRP is \$10.99.

The Boater's Dog Park provides concealment and warmth, with grab handles for lifting retrievers into boats. It comes in several sizes and colors. ASD's Kennel Coat surrounds crates to provide warmth, which is essential if crates ride in the back of an open pickup. Colors are Marsh Brown or camo. The collapsible Quick-Set Travel Kennel should be used for containing dogs inside vehicles or hotel rooms. Color is Marsh

Brown. MSRP varies by size and color for these items. www.banded.com/collections/asd-brands

DOKKEN

When it comes to canine training aids, none are more popular than Dokken DeadFowl Trainers. Each DeadFowl Trainer features a soft, durable body with lifelike weight, while hard feet and a hard, free-swinging head teach dogs to properly carry dead birds by the body.

Just about every game bird imaginable is represented, including dove, pheasant, quail, several grouse and partridge species, and nearly every duck species, as well as snow, blue, whitefront, and Canada goose. I own a bunch of DeadFowl Trainers and rotate them throughout the year based on the season or to keep my dogs from getting bored. Top sellers are the dove, pheasant, and mallard models, but you might also want to stock some larger goose trainers or other species depending on what's popular locally. MSRP varies by species, but retail prices are around \$30 for pheasant and mallard, \$50 for goose, and \$25 for the smaller birds. www.deadfowltrainer.com



ASD KENNEL COAT



ASD QUICK SET TRAVEL KENNEL



ELIMITICK

If ticks are a serious problem in your area, consider stocking the Elim-Tick Dog Vest. It features the same Insect Shield treatment as Elim-Tick human clothing that bonds to the fabric and lasts through 70 washings. It repels ticks, chiggers, mosquitoes and other insects. Colors are blaze or tan. The blaze vest would be ideal for the thick ruffed grouse woods of the Northeast and Great Lakes states where Lyme disease is a real issue. Medium through 2X sizes are available. MSRP is \$44.99. www.gamehide.com

PURINA

Dog food is a category you'll have to feel out — if your customers are used to buying it from local pet stores or feed stores, it might not be worth the shelf space. But if you decide to delve into it, I can tell you I've tried a lot of dog foods over the last 28 years of running bird dogs, but always return to Purina. Specifically, Purina Pro



ELIMITICK DOG VEST

Plan Sport 30/20, which is formulated with 30% protein and 20% fat to fuel canine athletes, and that's exactly what hard-charging hunting dogs are. There are several varieties, including Beef & Bison and Salmon & Rice, but my dogs seem to prefer the Chicken & Rice formula, so that's what I feed them most of the time. In the off-season, though, portions must be cut to avoid weight gain when feeding this high-calorie performance food. MSRP varies by variety and bag size, but Chicken & Rice commonly retails for around \$70 for a 37.5 pound bag. www.purina.com

MUST-STOCK PRODUCTS

Raising a high-energy bird dog can be a lot of work. If you're at it long enough, though, you'll eventually learn what works and what doesn't. Here are some products that I've found make training and owning hunting dogs just a little bit easier.

Drake Waterfowl makes two of my favorite training aids. The small Stage 1 Retrieve-Rite Puppy Bumper easily fits in a young dog's mouth, while the soft mid-section and hard end caps encourage a proper carry. All my pups start on this bumper. Available in white or black/white with green end caps. MSRP is \$6.99. As pup grows, I switch to the Stage



DRAKE RETRIEVE RIGHT FORCE FETCH BUMPER



DRAKE RETRIEVE RIGHT PUPPY BUMPER



Cowboy Magic Detangler & Shine may have been created for horses, but it works equally well on dogs and is even safe for use on humans. My vet suggested this product when I complained about having to constantly remove burrs from the fur of my long-haired dogs. It works. The Concentrate formula is available in 4-, 16-, and 32-ounce tubes. MSRP varies by size, but a 4-ounce tube, which should be more than enough to last a season, retails for around \$15. www.cowboymagic.com

Sawyer Permethrin for Dogs is similar to Sawyer's other Permethrin-based insect repellent treatments for human clothing. Simply spray on the dog starting at the tail, fluffing hair as you go so the treatment reaches the skin. Each application should provide about five weeks of tick and flea prevention. MSRP is \$18.49 for a 24-ounce bottle. www.sawyer.com

Kent ProTrial Field Blanks are a much safer way to introduce puppies to gunfire than using live rounds. I've used them to successfully and safely introduce several pups to gunfire. They're available in 12-gauge only, and shell length is just 2½-inches long, which is why I prefer to fire these blanks out of a single-shot or double-barrel shotgun, since they may jam an autoloader. A couple shots per training session are usually all that's needed anyhow. MSRP is \$22.95 per box of 25. www.kentcartridge.com **HR**



2 Retrieve-Rite Force Fetch Bumper. While I don't force-fetch my dogs, the soft body and extra-large, hard end caps help reinforce a proper retrieve. Available in brown with green end caps. MSRP is \$14.99. www.drakewaterfowl.com



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State Fish & Game Departments Are Changing and That Should Concern You

Two anti-hunters recently confirmed to Colorado's Parks and Wildlife Commission are just the tip of the iceberg.



BY LARRY KEANE

Today's state wildlife agencies are changing. Some critics might call it metastasizing, and it could spell trouble ahead for the hunting traditions Americans have enjoyed for centuries.

Colorado's Parks and Wildlife Commission (CPW) recently confirmed two new appointees to the state agency that oversees and administers hunting and wildlife regulations. The concern is that these new commissioners have anti-hunting activist backgrounds. Both were confirmed by Colorado's Senate after

being nominated by Gov. Jared Polis. A third nominee was held over until May 9, after the state's legislature ends the legislative session.

The two appointees confirmed to their positions are Jessica Beaulieu and John (Jack) Murphy. They will serve terms until July 1, 2027. The concern is that both aren't hunters at all. In fact, they're the polar opposite. Both have previously held positions with anti-hunting organizations. Now, they're two of the 11 voting members of CPW that will administer wildlife, hunting and conservation

policies in Colorado.

ANTI-HUNTING ACTIVIST

Murphy's background advocating for hunting conservation is non-existent. He co-founded Urban Wildlife Rescue, which provides "humane solutions" to wildlife conflicts, wildlife education and wildlife rehabilitation, according to MeatEater. He has also served on the Colorado Nongame Conservation and Wildlife Restoration board and the board of Colorado Animal Protectors.

Beaulieu will serve as representa-

tive for Colorado's outdoor recreation and parks utilization. That's not exactly her background, though. She manages the Animal Law Program at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law. She was also a fellow at the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD). If that sounds familiar, it's because CBD is the anti-hunting group infamous for the "sue and settle" scheme with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In 2021, CBD sued the Trump administration over the 2.3 million acre expansion for hunting and fishing on National





“They’re notorious for getting the taxpayer to pay their legal fees when they settle their frivolous lawsuits.”

Wildlife Refuges (NWRs). They alleged that expanding hunting and fishing would harm endangered species that live on or around the refuges.

MeatEater reported that Beaulieu told Colorado’s Senate that she’s not anti-hunting but admittedly lacks the statutory qualifications to be a wildlife commissioner, with the exception that she’s a “park user.” She couldn’t say how many annual park passes she’s purchased.

Beaulieu’s history with CBD is concerning for hunting and conservation. The CBD is a nonprofit membership organization known for its anti-hunting efforts and work protecting endangered species through legal action, scientific petitions, creative media and grassroots activism.

The American Council on Science and Health says that the CBD aren’t wildlife conservationists at all. “In reality, it’s largely a group of lawsuit-happy lawyers.” The Council added, “CBD’s website lists about 170 staff members, with more than 50 having ‘attorney’ or ‘counsel’ in their job titles. So, that’s a law firm, not a scientific organization.”

Inversely, the group has only 10 individuals with “scientist” in their job title.

This organization is known for suing the federal government to force through policy initiatives that are devoid of science. They’re also notorious for then getting the taxpayer to pay

their legal fees when they settle their frivolous lawsuits.

In February 2022, the Biden administration, represented by Interior Sec. Deb Haaland and USFWS Director Martha Williams, filed a joint request for the Court to stay proceedings while both parties engaged in settlement agreements even before they filed with the court an answer to the complaint. NSSF denounced the cozy agreement. NSSF intervened in the case early on to stop this dangerous legal theory at its inception, however an appeals court later dismissed the effort.

This is the same organization that sued USFWS for allowing traditional ammunition to be used in the Kaibab National Forest. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed a lower court’s dismissal of that case in September 2023. CBD, citing the Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA), alleged the USFWS was allowing the industrial dumping of lead in the national forest because it didn’t ban traditional ammunition. The case had a long and tortured procedural history and was the third time being heard in the Ninth Circuit.

EMOTION, NOT SCIENCE

Colorado is facing serious wildlife concerns. The state began reintroducing wolves from Canada, an initiative that was approved through a ballot measure instead of sound science and



input from stakeholders, like most other wildlife policy decisions. Those wolves have ranged far since their reintroduction and some residents are concerned as there were previous reports of wolves migrating into Colorado and preying on ranchers' stocks. Two of the recently-introduced wolves came from Oregon, where they had a history of preying on livestock, even though Colorado Parks and Wildlife Director Jeff Davis and his staff testified before the House Agriculture Committee on Sept. 12, 2023, that they would do everything possible not to bring "problem" wolves to Colorado.

Those wolves are a concern for hunting in Colorado. Colorado estimates that \$3.25 billion is generated into their economy annually from hunting and fishing, impacting all 64 counties and supporting over 25,000 full-time jobs. A large part of that is Colorado's elk population, which numbers over 300,000. Harsh winters and habitat impacts cause some biologists to be concerned for the near-term herd sustainability. CPW already warned that big game licenses would be reduced for the coming year. Introducing wolves to the mix has Colorado guides worried.

"It would devastate rural Colo-

rado, absolutely devastate us," said Colorado hunting guide Jim Johnson to KRDO in December. "So we need to have animals to hunt. And if there's no animals to hunt, there's no hunting."

Those wildlife policy decisions should be based on scientific evidence, not anti-hunting or preservationist sentiment. Adding anti-hunting activists to CPW's commission threatens that.

IT'S NOT JUST COLORADO

Vermont's Senate considered adding nonhunters to the state's Fish and Wildlife Board. That proposal

received considerable pushback and a veto threat from the governor. A revised version of S. 258 would still include members to "provide balanced viewpoints," which replaced requirements to include wildlife watchers, photographers and birders. That's not much of an improvement to give hunters reassurance. The new bill would also transform the Wildlife Board from a decision-making body to one that advises and oversees Vermont's Fish and Wildlife Department, which would assume decision-making authority for wildlife policies.

Hunting in Colorado, and in the



United States, could be drastically impacted by decision makers who don't understand, or don't want to understand, the critical role hunting fulfills in wildlife conservation. Dr. Kim Thornburn was once a Washington state wildlife commissioner. She's admittedly a non-hunter but understood the need for hunting and sound scientific-data to drive conservation decisions. She spoke with Outdoor Life about her opposition to the state's conservation policy that de-emphasized the role of hunters and is critical of commissioners who ignore science to pursue an anti-hunting agenda.

DC DIRECTIVES

Those problems aren't just in the Western states. They're showing up at the USFWS. For the past couple

"Hunting conservation is under threat from anti-hunting activists who appear to be conservatives in hunters' clothing. Really, they're activists in lawyers' suits..."

years, USFWS has played a "bait-and-switch" game with hunters across America. Director Williams has opened more National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) to hunting and fishing but at the expense of a phased plan to ban the use of traditional lead ammunition. That decision was made without sound site-specific scientific

data. USFWS officials claimed that traditional ammunition is harmful to California condors and the American bald eagle. Yet, some of those NWRs that are slated to ban the use of traditional ammunition are on the East Coast, where condors have never flown. Bald eagles are fully recovered and have been delisted from both the

Endangered and Threatened Species Lists. Bald eagle populations are soaring all across the United States.

Demands to ban traditional ammunition were also made by the Center for Biological Diversity when they filed a petition to the USFWS to create a national rule banning the use of traditional ammunition on NWRs. USFWS rejected that petition after considerable pressure from the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP), a coalition of 41 conservationist groups, of which NSSF is one.

Hunting conservation is under threat from anti-hunting activists who appear to be conservationists in hunters' clothing. Really, they're activists in lawyers' suits who are threatening the gains made for true conservation. **HR**

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NSSF
The Firearm Industry
Trade Association



BY GORDY KRAHN

HUNTING RETAILER NEW PRODUCTS

ZEISS 3-12X44MM CONQUEST V4 RIFLESCOPE

One of two additions to the Conquest V4 riflescope family, the Zeiss 3-12x44mm with a Z-Plex reticle introduces a Ballistic Stop feature for an absolute confirmation of zero, multi-turn turrets and zero stop. It also includes enhanced engravings for fast and accurate adjustments, .25 MOA per-click settings and capped windage. Conquest V4 riflescopes feature Zeiss T* coating that guarantees brilliant, high-contrast images even in adverse light conditions and LotuTec coating that ensures a clear view in all weather conditions. The higher definition glass produces 90 percent light transmission, delivering great low-light performance and excellent target resolution. Also new is the 3-12x56mm model with a Plex-Style illuminated center-dot reticle. MSRP: \$849.99/3-12x44mm; \$1,149.99/3-12x56mm www.zeiss.com



BURRIS SIGNATURE HD 15X56MM BINOCULAR

Experience clarity and precision with the Burriss Signature HD 15x56mm Binocular. Trusted by hunters around the world, Signature HD series binoculars deliver exceptional clarity, durability and maximum light transmission for low-light conditions when game is most active. Signature HD binoculars are built to withstand the toughest environments with a shockproof body and durable rubber armor. They are nitrogen-filled for reliability in all conditions and equipped with a tripod adapter mount for steady glassing. Other key features include no-slip texturing, a cushy neoprene neck strap and metal eyecups for eye relief adjustment. Bak-4 glass with Phase Correct, employs a dielectric coating for precise resolution and true-to-life colors. MSRP: \$960 www.burrisoptics.com

OZONICS HR600 OZONE GENERATOR

The Ozonics HR600 Ozone Generator takes active scent control to an entirely new level. Reimagined, reengineered and redesigned from the ground up, it literally breaks the mold of all previous HR units — designed to elevate the whitetail hunting experience to unprecedented levels. The most powerful Ozonics unit to date, the HR600 is able to produce up to 20 percent more ozone, and its new body style has been redesigned with an overhead air intake and new bulletproof fan to minimize noise and ensure reliability and durability in even the toughest conditions. Other key features include extended battery life, removable coil and integrated LED lighting. The HR600 is app and remote control enabled. MSRP: \$699.99 ozonichunting.com



ZONE REALTREE INSECT REPELLENT WITH PICARIDIN

Picaridin based personal insect repellent with proven 12-hour protection against ticks, mosquitoes, chiggers and gnats from Zone Realtree is completely odor-free. It has been used and tested by hunters and outdoorsmen all over the world with 100 percent success in keeping them free from ticks, mosquitoes and more. Zone Realtree with picaridin is non-oily, non-greasy and safe for adults, children, pregnant/nursing women and even pets, and the continuous spray (non-aerosol) bottle is refillable to save money. Also available is Zone Realtree Outfitter's Spray Insecticide with Permethrin. MSRP: \$24.95/Twin 4-ounce mist spray and refill; \$12.95/8-ounce field spray; \$18.95/10-ounce continuous spray; \$10.95/Refill www.zoneprotects.com



BIG HORN ARMORY RIFLE BUTT CUFF

Big Horn Armory, makers of big-bore firearms, has announced the launch of its latest innovation — the Premium Cape Buffalo Hide Butt Cuff. Crafted from robust and resilient Cape buffalo hide, this premium butt cuff is easy to attach and is designed to keep five rounds of extra ammunition close at hand, ensuring the hunter is always prepared when it matters. The Cape buffalo leather used in this butt cuff offers an unparalleled combination of thickness and strength, surpassing traditional cowhide in durability and longevity, and is built to withstand extensive wear and tear. This significant upgrade enhances both comfort and endurance, making it an ideal accessory for any serious shooter. Tailored exclusively for the right-handed .500 S&W lever gun. MSRP: \$275 www.bighornarmory.com



VICTORY ARCHERY TKX CROSSBOW BOLT

Victory Archery provides crossbow shooters with revolutionary technology with its new TKX Bolt. Constructed with advanced 3K carbon weave technology and a stiffer spine, this bolt boasts faster arrow recovery, penetration and momentum while reducing torsional deflection for reliable performance on game. TKX bolts are available in 20- and

22-inch lengths in Elite, Gamer and Sport models with straightness tolerances of $\pm .001$, $\pm .003$ and $\pm .006$ inches, respectively. They come custom hand-fletched with 100 percent brass inserts, finished with either standard or lighted nocks, with an inside diameter of 0.300 inches and an outside diameter of 0.328 inches. MSRP: \$34.99-\$61.99/Three pack www.victoryarchery.com





SAVAGE ARMS 110 TRAIL HUNTER LITE BOLT-ACTION RIFLE

Savage Arms' 110 Trail Hunter Lite Bolt-Action Rifle stands up to the elements, no matter the conditions — a partnership with Hogue Stocks that includes the toughness of the original 110 Trail Hunter, with decreased weight to ensure it's easier to carry afield. Hogue overmolded rifle stocks provide outstanding performance and grip. The full-coverage rubber overmold on the stock provides the user with a superior hold in the worst weather conditions and a Cerakote ceramic coating on the barreled action helps to seal out the worst Mother Nature can dish out. Other key features include two sling swivel studs, button rifled threaded heavy sporter barrel, two-piece Weaver-style bases, 2.5- to 6-pound user-adjustable AccuTrigger, detachable box magazine and three-position tag safety. MSRP: \$699 www.savagearms.com

FIREFIELD AGILITY II RIFLESCOPE

The Firefield Agility II 4-12x40 DX Riflescope was designed for medium-range precision shooting. With a durable, shockproof body and nitrogen-filled tube, this riflescope is capable of withstanding even the most rugged conditions. Featuring a straightforward wire duplex reticle and ¼-MOA adjustment clicks, it ensures precise targeting at practical hunting ranges. Capped turrets offer protection, while aggressive textures facilitate easy adjustments, even in harsh weather. It has a maximum windage and elevation adjustment of 60 MOA and is suitable for up to .300 Win. Mag. recoil. Resistant to water and fog, with enhanced low-light capabilities and multi-coated lenses for bright, high-contrast imaging, the Agility II is the ideal companion for rugged hunts and mid-range outdoor shooting. MSRP: \$79.97 www.firefield.com

VORTEX VIPER HD 5-25X50MM FFP RIFLESCOPE

When success rides on making the perfect shot, hunters can rely on the exceptional versatility and optical performance of the Vortex 5-25x50mm Viper HD FFP Riflescope. When hunting everything from big game to predators, this first focal plane scope delivers outstanding image clarity, resolution and sharpness to ensure quick and accurate target acquisition in sharp detail. The Viper HD also boasts enhanced features for unmatched accuracy at extended ranges while also excelling in the low light of dawn and dusk when game is most active. Built on a sturdy 30mm tube, key features include the VMR-4 (MOA) reticle, exposed elevation and capped windage turrets, .25 MOA adjustments and 3.4 inches of eye relief. MSRP: \$1,399.99 www.vortexoptics.com



SWAROVSKI NL PURE 10X52MM BINOCULAR

Swarovski Optik North America has announced the addition of a 10x52mm option to its NL Pure family of binoculars. Low-light conditions are no longer a challenge with the larger 52mm objective lenses — critical during early morning and late evening hours when game is most active. NL Pure binoculars feature Swarovski's largest field of view to date, and the compact design and optional tripod adapter make them an excellent choice for hunters on the go. Maximum color fidelity and uncompromising edge-to-edge image definition are provided by Swarovision technology. The NL Pure 10x52mm bino comes with an FSB side bag and a UCS universal comfort strap that can be quickly and intuitively adjusted to the length desired via a quick-lock clasp on each side. Retail: \$3,449 www.swarovskioptik.com



BIG & J HEADRUSH DEER ATTRACTANT

The secret to Big & J's Headrush lies in its irresistible aroma, capable of enticing deer from long distances. By strategically placing it across their hunting grounds, hunters can draw deer from neighboring properties and guide them closer to their preferred hunting areas — ensuring a higher concentration of deer on their property. Big & J has enhanced Headrush with the powerful, long-range aroma of its popular BB2, combined with the salt that deer love. This product promotes antler growth and captivates deer with its unique scent and flavor. By strategically placing the attractant and monitoring with game cameras, hunters can draw deer from challenging spots such as thick bedding areas or rough terrain. MSRP: \$24.99/20-pound bucket www.bigandj.com



STEINER PREDATOR 10X42MM BINOCULAR

The High-Definition Predator 10x42mm Binocular features the Predator Diamond Coating developed by Steiner Optics. Predator Diamond Coating revolutionizes high-definition optics by leveraging proprietary technology to achieve exceptional light transmission, contrast and high-definition imaging capabilities. All this in a compact, lightweight design that provides military ruggedness and durability. The 10X magnification reveals greater detail at long-distance, making it ideal for hunting open country and field edges. The Predator 10x42mm bino is equipped with a Fast Close focus wheel for quick, absolute sharpness from close up to infinity and laser texture grip that ensures a secure hold on this compact and lightweight model. MSRP: \$747.99 www.steiner-optics.com



HUNTING RETAILER GEAR ROUNDUP

Treestands and Ground Blinds

Be sure to have your bases covered when patrons visit your store or click on your website on the hunt for a new treestand and ground blind.

BY GORDY KRAHN

There are two schools of thought when it comes to setting up an ambush for that buck or bull that dreams are made of: hunt high or hunt low. Both have their advocates, based on personal preferences and application. Sometimes the choice is obvious. Sometimes, not so much. As an example, public-land hunters have some important decisions to make about the use of treestands or ground blinds. Most states require the

removal of portable stands and blinds when exiting the field each day, and that often means setting them up or packing them out in the dark. For those hunters who decide to go with a treestand, advanced scouting and selecting specific stand locations and even specific trees is extremely important. That way they can get in and get their stands set up without causing a lot of disturbance to their hunting area. A better option might be to use a portable ground blind.

They're quiet and easy to transport, set up in minutes and are very effective for concealing movement. But one of the disadvantages of using portable ground blinds is that unless they're expertly concealed, whitetails might regard them with suspicion. One of the reasons treestands are so effective is that hunters are able to gain elevation, which gives them a better vantage point for spotting game while helping to conceal movement. But if the terrain permits, this

strategy can be applied to portable ground blinds, by finding a ridge or other high point in the terrain that overlooks a game trail and setting up the blind much in the same way as a treestand, being careful not to skyline the blind. Whether it's hunting from a state-of-the-art treestand or the comfort of a ground blind, your ambush artist patrons will want to check out these latest and greatest models. Then, it's up to you to help them make the right choice.

Ameristep Pro Series Thermal Blind

The quilted-fabric Ameristep Pro Series Thermal Blind (\$499.99) will help hunters stay protected from the worst weather, and its five-hub, pentagon design creates an asymmetrical shape that offers plenty of room for bulky clothing and lots of gear and helps it blend into its surroundings. It has a huge 59x59x70-inch footprint and a maximum height of 70 inches. Twelve silent slide windows — eight triangular and four vertical — offer ample room to maneuver, while black ShadowGuard interior coating eliminates shadows and silhouettes within the blind. The easy-access walk-through 30-inch door is quiet to operate and large enough for smooth, silent entrees and departures. The blind comes with a carry bag with backpack straps, ground stakes and carabiner. www.ameristep.com



Browning Envy Hunting Blind

The Envy Hunting Blind from Browning Camping & Hunting Blinds (\$399.99) features a roomy 82-inch center height and 74-inch shooting width and silent-operation features such as a Silent-Trac window system and QuickConnect silent-entry/exit door system that utilizes magnets along the door seam. A durable 600D polyester fabric makes up the Envy's wall and window curtain construction, while shoot-through mesh is used across the 180-degree window openings. Support comes from strong and flexible fiberglass poles connected to aluminum hubs featuring engineered tips and pins. The Envy also incorporates a 360-degree ground skirt to deliver maximum concealment, minimize light intrusion and to help keep scent in. Available in Realtree Escape and Mossy Oak Country DNA. www.browningcamping.com



Cooper Hunting Chameleon Treestand Blind

Add amazing coverage to existing treestands with Cooper Hunting's Chameleon+ Hunting Blind (\$219.99) in Mossy Oak Breakup or NWTF Obsession camo. The Chameleon+ is an innovative way to get that shooting house effect without all the expense and hassle — engineered to be lightweight and collapsible, making it transportable to virtually anywhere. By utilizing the weighted drawcord system and new double hexagon rod system, hunters can reduce 95% of wind movement. These blinds are made from high-quality materials and are designed to hold up to the harshest environmental conditions for years. The average customer gets eight to 10 years of service from a Chameleon+ Blind when cared for properly. www.cooperhunting.com



Dixie Deer Blinds Hex Bow Blind

The 7-foot Hex Bow Blind (Starts at \$3,337) from Dixie Deer Blinds is a seamless, one-piece, 100% marine-grade fiberglass enclosure, coated in Polyurea (similar to a spray-on truck bedliner) with a welded steel base — made for comfort, durability and longevity. It comes with an insulated aluminum door with a security lock, carpeted floors and optional carpeted walls to enhance soundproofing, .25-inch thick smoked plexiglass windows and composite interior shelving for storage. Dixie Deer Blinds offers many different sizes and customizable accessories. Optional Hybrid and Steel Riser/Lift kits, a camo upgrade and a 36-inch wheelchair accessible door with a window are also available. www.dixiedeerblinds.com

Down & Out Scout Blind — Chaos

Built tough to withstand the elements, the Scout Blind — Chaos from Down & Out (\$399.99) is made from durable 600D wet print PolyOxford for longevity in the field. It has a DarkOut all-black interior for maximum concealment and an ultra sturdy, powder coated all-aluminum, all-season panel frame. Key features include six windows for full 360-degree viewing, blackout fabric curtains with silent hook/bungee attachment, see-through mesh curtains with silent magnetic adjustment, and accordion-style design for easy setup/takedown and storage. It is equipped with a silent magnetized door for quiet entry/exit and comes with a shoulder strap for field carry. Six heavy-duty all-steel stakes integrate with the steel frame to hold it in place. www.hawkhunting.com



Family Tradition Treestands LD14 Ladder Stand

The LD14 Ladder Stand from Family Tradition Treestands (\$399.99) is built tough with galvanized tubular steel for structural integrity and rust resistance — with baked-on textured powder coating to provide seasons of worry-free use. It features the company's ergonomic support system with 2-inch-wide nylon strapping webbed onto a fully welded seat frame to take the load off the spinal column, back, hips and legs. It has a fully welded upper platform frame for added strength and ease of assembly, and a full body fall restraint system is provided for added safety. The LD14 ladder stand seat height is 12 feet, 3 inches off the ground, and an additional 41-inch ladder extension is available. www.familytraditiontreestands.com



Hawk Rival Micro Hang-on Stand

Hawk developed the Rival Micro Hang-on Stand (\$199.99) to be exceptionally lightweight, highly compact and easy to secure to a backpack for trouble-free transport to remote hunting locations. It is based on a minimalized 20.5-x17.5-inch platform and features a nylon web flip-up seat. The assembly folds flat for easy, unobtrusive transport, and its simple and lightweight design makes it easy to attach to a tree with the two included ratchet tree straps. The Rival Micro weighs 10.1 pounds and has a weight rating of 300 pounds. For added safety, it comes with a full-body safety harness. www.hawkhunting.com



Keen Outdoors Alpha HD Blind Platform

Bowhunters can hunt from high places faster and easier with the new-for-2024 Alpha HD Blind Platform from Keen Outdoors (\$2,799) — designed to maximize mobility with fast and easy setup. This versatile, completely collapsible, fully portable hunting stand platform provides rock solid stability from a heavy-duty steel frame. With a floor height of 8 feet, the Alpha HD can be set up or taken down in less than 10 minutes using a loader or tractor and accommodates blinds from most manufacturers. www.keenoutdoors.com

Millennium Pro-Lite Ladder Stand

Millennium Treestands' Pro-Lite L124-SL Ladder Stand (\$249.99) was designed for dependability and versatility in the field. Built with the solo hunter in mind, it is constructed from powder-coated rigid oval steel, ensuring unparalleled strength and longevity. Weighing 64 pounds, this ladder stand is robust enough to withstand the rigors of the hunt, providing a spacious platform and treebrace stability. It features Millennium's exclusive ComfortMAX seat for superior comfort for all-day hunts. Accessory hooks are conveniently located to help make sure essential gear is easily accessible, and an integrated shooting rail provides a rock-solid rest for crossbow hunters. The L124-SL has a weight capacity of 300 pounds, and a Safelink 35-foot rope, prusik knot and carabiner system are included. www.millenniumstands.com



Muddy Boss XL Hang-On

The ergonomic and durable Boss XL Hang-On Treestand from Muddy (\$129) features a flip-back 20-inch wide by 15-inch deep Flex-Tek flip-back seat designed for all-day comfort, a large 25-x34-inch steel platform, fixed footrest and a four-point full-body harness. The Boss XL weighs 19 pounds and is rated for 300 pounds, is constructed from steel and is packable with compatible Muddy climbing systems (not included). It features silent slide buckle straps and can be mounted on trees with a minimum 9-inch diameter. www.gomuddy.com



Orion Modular Box Blind

Swamp, ridges or valleys originally thought to be inaccessible to box blinds are now accessible with the Orion Modular Box Blind (Starting at \$2,999) — composed of a set of lightweight 2-inch aluminum structural insulated panels, easily assembled with the Orion quick latch system. In its disassembled form, the Orion blind can be placed into the back of a full-size pickup truck or UTV and hauled to the nearest access point to the hunting location. Then, thanks to the lightweight panels — ranging from 15 to 40 pounds — the blind can be carried to the desired location and assembled in 5 to 10 minutes. The Orion is resistant to weather and water ingress with the use of EPDM seals on every seam. www.huntorion.com



Primos Double Bull Raised Hunting Ground Blind

The Primos Hunting Double Bull Raised Hunting Ground Blind (\$599.99), a collaboration between Double Bull Hunting Blinds and the Raised Hunting team, is constructed with the original SurroundView one-way see-through design that allows hunters full vision in all directions while effectively concealing them from game animals. The blind is equipped with windows specially optimized for both filming and bowhunting but work well for any hunting application. It also offers a double-wide door with wired window system plus horizontal window openings for vertical windows. For effective setup and transport into the field, the blind comes with an easy-to-fill blind bag to transport the blind and upgraded brush straps and anchor stakes. www.primos.com

Shadow Hunter GhostBlind Predator Ground Blind Bundle

For on-the-go hunters who want to blend into their surroundings, the GhostBlind Predator Ground Blind Ultimate Bundle Kit (\$389.99) includes everything they need for a stealthy hunt — the GhostBlind Predator ground blind, Predator carry pack, two sets of extenders (four extenders), Predator chair, tie-downs, stakes, shoulder strap and bungees. Weighing just 12 pounds, the GhostBlind is 102 inches wide and 46 inches high, making it a portable solution for hunters who want to be able to move often and set up quickly. www.shadowhunterblinds.com



Summit Treestands Dual Threat Pro SD Treestand

The Dual Threat Pro SD Treestand from Summit Treestands (\$449.99) features the adjustable Dual Threat front bar, which allows hunters to tailor the climber to their preferred hunting method. Bowhunters can move the bar all the way down and under the seat to achieve the optimal open-front bowhunting position. And with its new Dual Position seat, they will have full control over their sitting height, ensuring an optimal vantage point for spotting game and taking the shot. The Dual Threat Pro SD is also equipped with the FasTrack accessory system for keeping gear close at hand. Other features include the Quick Draw cable retention system, Dead Metal Sound-Deadening (SD) technology, SummitLokt structural enhancement and RapidClimb stirrups. www.summitstands.com



Will Thermal Imaging Change Hunting?

BY BOB ROBB

In 1987, the movie “Predator” introduced the masses to thermal imaging devices. Back then, this was otherworldly sci-fi-like stuff, reserved for the military and, later, law enforcement and firefighting agencies. Only a few crazy folks (like me) thought that a thermal imaging device could really help a hunter kill more game, or help find downed game in thick and challenging terrain. Of course, back then they were illegal for hunting use, and their extreme cost and lack of availability made it a moot point anyway.

As is the case with all technology, as time marches on, the equipment gets better, manufacturing processes evolve, and prices come down. For the past couple of decades, hunters in Texas, where after-dark hunting for predators and wild hogs is quite popular, as well as over in Europe, where nighttime hunting restrictions are not nearly as prevalent as in the U.S., are where the use of thermal imaging optics has been popular. Today, thermal riflescope and monocular manufacturers have been aggressively promoting their products, and with prices coming down and availability widening, more and more sportsmen have had their interest piqued. This is particularly true of the younger generations that grew up in a technology-driven world. They are the epitome of what Aldo Leopold, in his classic 1949 book *A Sand County Almanac*, described as “gadgeteers.”

Thermal imaging devices aren't limited to riflescopes and stand-alone monoculars. For example, the Xinfra T2 Pro converts a smartphone

into a thermal imaging monocular. IRayUSA, who distributes InfiRay products in America, has a laser rangefinder monocular and the P2 Pro Thermal Camera for iPhone, while Seek Thermal has a compact thermal camera for smartphones and tablets. For a \$7,000 MSRP there is the InfiRay M6T 25mm Thermal Vehicle Mounted PTZ with LRF 640x512 12 Micron 25mm, which the company describes as designed to “enhance scanning capabilities while on-board a vehicle.” It includes video recording, gyro stabilization, and mobile app connectivity with wireless streaming. Companies like Sightmark, Teledyne FLIR, Sionyx, ATN, Armasight, Holosun, Zeiss, Leica, Sig Sauer, Burris, AGM Global Vision, Bering Optics, Trijicon, and Pulsar, among others, offer consumer-focused thermal imaging products. And while prices remain high, options and availability are growing rapidly.

All this thermal imaging equipment is fueling a groundswell movement by the public to find more ways to be able to use them legally. In March 2023, the Sightmark website posted a state-by-state listing of their legality. It shows it's legal to use thermal devices under specifically-defined circumstances in 40 states, primarily limited to the hunting of predators like coyotes and foxes, hogs, and critters like raccoons, possums, skunks, and in some cases, other furbearers. Hunting big game with thermals after dark remains verboten.

Here's the rub. Ethically, most hunters agree that spotlighting big game, even if you're just scouting,

is no good. Could you not argue that using thermal imaging optics to locate game in the dark is not an extension of that? Do big-game animals not deserve the respite from hunters that the night provides?

There's no way to impede technological advancements. We've seen that in everything from ultra-accurate and relatively inexpensive rifles topped with turret scopes loaded with precision ammunition that make accurate shooting at a half-mile possible, to 500 fps-plus crossbows topped with rangefinding scopes that are now legal during some state archery-only seasons, to smartphone mapping apps, to trail cameras (that have been banned in states like Arizona and Utah for hunting), to high-tech, lightweight clothing and related gear, all that make hunters more efficient with less time spent preparing for, then executing, the hunt itself. In the thermal imaging world, in the next five years, look for the incorporation of mapping and GPS features, high-resolution video capability, and the use of artificial intelligence that will make target identification more certain. And get ready for thermal-equipped scouting cameras.

Here's what many gearhead hunters don't understand about the high-tech revolution. By becoming increasingly efficient, success rates increase exponentially. That means game managers have to control the harvest by limiting the number of hunters afield by reducing the number of tags issued and/or reducing season lengths, especially when it comes to hunting bulls and bucks.

We're already seeing the effects of this out West, where a combination of increased hunter success coupled with a growing population of apex predators like wolves, grizzlies and cougars, as well as black bears and coyotes, are taking a toll on elk and mule deer herds. Throw in the occasional big winter kill like we saw in 2023, and the number of tags issued drops. When tag numbers drop but demand remains high, you'll find that nonresident license and tag costs increase to the point where the average guy is being priced out of the game. If more and more Joe Lunchbucket hunters give it up, that means their kids don't grow up hunting. If it becomes primarily a rich man's game, that does not bode well for the future of the sport. It's a version of the law of unintended consequences.

There's no doubt that thermal imaging devices are here to stay. The question is what, if any, restrictions will be placed on their use? It's easy for a game warden to catch a spot-lighter whose lights he can easily see, but he can't see a thermal imaging monocular in use. Will the answer be to make it illegal to possess any thermal imaging device in the field during big-game hunting seasons? Or will some states go full metal Europe, where hunting at night for big game with thermal scopes is permitted in many instances?

Which brings to mind a question I've asked for decades: Just because it's legal, is it ethical?

What's your take? Drop me a note at editor@grandviewoutdoors.com. I'd love to hear your thoughts. **HR**



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