Frequently Asked Questions
From Montana Hunters
Preface

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks staff answer thousands of questions every year from both new and experienced hunters. This FAQ document provides an introduction and quick reference on topics that FWP staff commonly address with hunters. It is not a comprehensive guide to understanding how to hunt in Montana. Hunters should thoroughly read and understand the current hunting regulations, which contain a more complete list of rules, restrictions, season structures, definitions and updates. It is the hunter’s responsibility to know and abide by all hunting regulations.
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome to Montana!</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is FWP?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who makes the rules?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are FWP offices?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Montana’s hunting license structure</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a hunting license?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a “game animal”?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the most common types of hunting licenses?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are Montana’s hunter- and bowhunter-education requirements?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are Montana’s residency requirements?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What documentation do I need to bring when I purchase a resident hunting license for the first time?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the difference between licenses, tags and permits?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the difference between preference points and bonus points?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I hunt with a deer or elk permit?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are hunting district boundaries different for each species?</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do license/permit type numbers mean?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are surplus licenses?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are shoulder seasons?</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hunter access</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where am I allowed to hunt?</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can I drive, park and camp?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the registration/validation requirements for off-highway vehicles?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the registration/validation requirements for snow machines?</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the registration/validation requirements for boats?</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does land ownership look like on a map?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I access public land by “corner crossing”?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What hunting activities are allowed under Montana’s Stream Access Law?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can I pursue wounded game onto private property?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What hunting access opportunities exist on federal public lands?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What hunting access opportunities exist on state public lands? .............................................. 19
What hunting access opportunities exist on private lands and adjacent public lands? ... 20
Does FWP provide hunters with a list of landowners who allow hunting? ................................ 22

Tools for planning your hunt ........................................................................................................ 23

Wildlife biology 101 ......................................................................................................................... 24
  What do game animals eat? ............................................................................................................ 25
  What are summer and winter ranges? .......................................................................................... 25
  When do game animals migrate? .................................................................................................. 25
  What is the rut? .............................................................................................................................. 26
  How do diet, habitat and the rut vary by species? ........................................................................ 26
  What should I know about chronic wasting disease? ................................................................. 30
  What hunting questions can an FWP biologist answer? ............................................................. 31
  What hunting questions can an FWP game warden answer? .................................................... 31
  What hunting questions can’t FWP staff answer? ....................................................................... 31

Bears in Montana ............................................................................................................................. 32
  Where are bears in Montana? ....................................................................................................... 32
  Who manages grizzly bears in Montana? ..................................................................................... 33
  How are black bears and grizzly bears identified? ...................................................................... 33
  How does bear activity change throughout the year? ............................................................... 34
  How can I avoid negative encounters with grizzly bears while hunting? ............................... 35
  How should I respond in a bear encounter? ................................................................................. 37
Welcome to Montana!

Who is FWP?
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is an executive-branch state government agency that administers hunting, fishing and trapping seasons in the state and works to conserve wildlife and habitat. FWP also manages state parks, fishing access sites and wildlife management areas. FWP is primarily funded through revenue generated from the sale of hunting, fishing and trapping licenses and federal excise taxes of hunting and fishing equipment.

Our mission: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, through its employees and citizen commission and board, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

Who makes the rules?
Proposals for specific hunting districts are initially offered by FWP wildlife biologists using scientific data. They collect public input and potentially modify the proposals before vetting them internally. These proposals are presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission, which is a citizen board appointed by the governor. The commission approves tentative regulations for more public comment. After that comment period, the commission makes a final decision on the proposals.

All hunting and fishing regulations are ultimately approved annually by the Fish and Wildlife Commission. Laws to regulate hunting are set by the Montana Legislature and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Where are FWP offices?
FWP is headquartered in Helena and divided into seven administrative regions, with regional offices in:
- Region 1: Kalispell
- Region 2: Missoula
- Region 3: Bozeman
- Region 4: Great Falls
- Region 5: Billings
- Region 6: Glasgow

Regions of FWP
• Region 7: Miles City

FWP also has smaller area-resource offices in:
• Helena
• Butte
• Lewistown
• Havre

Montana’s hunting license structure

Montana’s hunting license structure can be challenging to understand, especially for new hunters. However, FWP staff work diligently to simplify regulations to allow for better understanding, while still maintaining opportunities.

As the Fish and Wildlife Commission makes changes annually to hunting regulations and license quotas, it’s always a good practice to read the hunting regulations each year, especially as you prepare to purchase hunting licenses and go hunting. FWP staff are here to help as you navigate the process. A more comprehensive guide to Montana’s hunting license structure can be found at fwp.mt.gov/hunt/licensingbasics.

Here are some important topics to consider as you get started.

What is a hunting license?

A hunting license provides an opportunity for an eligible person to harvest a game animal. Once a hunting license is obtained, hunting regulations establish the conditions by which an animal may be legally hunted and harvested, such as:

• Species
• Sex
• Age or horn/antler class
• Who may harvest the animal
• Number of animals that may be harvested
• Dates when the animal may be hunted and harvested
• Where the animal may be hunted and harvested (known as hunting districts)
• Method of harvest

Hunting licenses are sold annually and are valid for only one person during one season. Montana’s license year runs from March 1 to the last day of February. Some hunting licenses are limited in quantity and are allocated through an application and lottery.
process known as the **drawing**. Other licenses are unlimited and can be purchased over the counter at certain times of the year.

A person’s Montana residency status (resident or nonresident) largely determines what licenses are available to them. Montana residents generally have more license opportunities at a lower cost than nonresidents.

**What is a “game animal”?**

A **game animal**, as defined by Montana’s hunting regulations and referred to in this FAQ document, includes deer, elk, moose, antelope (pronghorn), mountain sheep (bighorn sheep), mountain goat, mountain lion, bear and wild bison. **Upland game birds** are birds huntable with an upland game bird license, including mountain grouse, partridge, ring-necked pheasant, sage-grouse and sharp-tailed grouse. **Migratory game birds** are birds huntable with a migratory bird license (and Federal Migratory Bird Stamp for hunters over 15 years of age), including waterfowl: wild ducks, wild geese, brant, and swans; cranes: little brown and sandhill; rails: coots; Wilson’s snipes or jacksnipes; and mourning doves.

**Furbearers or fur-bearing animals** include marten or sable, otter, muskrat, fisher, mink, bobcat, lynx, wolverine, northern swift fox, and beaver.

**Nongame wildlife** are any wild mammal, bird, amphibian, reptile, fish, mollusk, crustacean, or other animal not otherwise lawfully classified by statute or rule.

**What are the most common types of hunting licenses?**

There are two prerequisite licenses that enable a person to purchase other hunting licenses. They are the **conservation license** and the **base hunting license**. These prerequisites provide funding for wildlife conservation and ensure the prospective hunter is eligible to hunt.

A **bow and arrow license**, plus the proper hunting license, is required during an archery-only season or to hunt in an area or hunting district where only archery equipment can be used.

The **general deer license** and **general elk license** provide opportunities to harvest those animals in many hunting districts. However, the conditions of that opportunity vary by district. For example, one district may allow a hunter with a general license to harvest an elk of either sex, while another district may only allow antlerless elk harvest with a general license. Check the current hunting regulations to learn the rules that apply to general license holders in each district.
Resident hunters can purchase a general license over the counter. Nonresidents must apply and be drawn to purchase a general license. A few exceptions apply that create additional opportunities for nonresident hunters (see FWP’s Licensing Basics web page at fwp.mt.gov/hunt/licensingbasics). Hunters may only purchase one general deer license and one general elk license within a license year, and each license is valid for only one animal harvest.

**B licenses** for deer and elk allow a hunter to harvest an antlerless animal of that species. Doe/fawn licenses for pronghorn (antelope) allow a hunter to harvest a doe or fawn of that species. Ewe licenses for bighorn sheep allow a hunter to harvest a ewe of that species. Each license under these categories has a number that identifies where it is valid. Some licenses are valid in only one hunting district, while others are valid in multiple hunting districts (see “What do license/permit type numbers mean?” on p. 12). In some cases, hunters may purchase more than one B license.

Deer, elk, upland game bird and fishing licenses are often sold in combinations, such as the **sportsman’s combination** for residents or the **big game combination license** for nonresidents.

An **upland game bird license** allows a hunter to harvest a limited number of upland game birds. This license is also a prerequisite for resident hunters before they can purchase a **turkey license**. Nonresidents can purchase a turkey license without an upland game bird license. A turkey license is valid for harvesting only one animal in most districts; however, some districts allow additional turkey licenses to be purchased.

A **Montana migratory bird license** allows a hunter to harvest a limited number of birds under this category, including ducks, geese and coots. A **federal migratory bird stamp** (also known as a duck stamp) is also required for hunters age 16 and older. Waterfowl hunting regulations, season structures and other rules vary by location.

To see a complete list of hunting license opportunities and application deadlines, see the current hunting regulations. To download these regulations online, visit fwp.mt.gov/hunt/regulations.
What are Montana’s hunter- and bowhunter-education requirements?

If you were born after January 1, 1985, you are required to show proof of completing a Montana hunter education course or a hunter education course from any other state or province prior to applying for or purchasing any Montana hunting license.

To purchase a Montana bow and arrow license, a hunter must show proof of completing a Montana bowhunter education course or a bowhunter education course from any other state or province. The hunter may also provide any prior year’s bowhunting or archery stamp, tag, permit or license from any state or province.


What are Montana’s residency requirements?

To be a lawful Montana resident and eligible to purchase any Montana resident hunting, fishing and trapping licenses, you must:

- Have been physically living in Montana for at least 180 consecutive days immediately prior to purchasing a resident license;
- Register your vehicle(s) in Montana;
- Be registered to vote in Montana if you’re registered to vote at all;
- Not possess (or have applied for any) current resident hunting, fishing or trapping privileges in another state or country;
- File Montana state income tax returns as a resident if you are required to file; and
- Have a valid Montana driver’s license or Montana identification card.

Once you have established your residency, you must continue to meet all these requirements and physically reside in Montana as your principal or primary residence for no fewer than 120 days per year (days need not be consecutive).

A person is not considered a resident for the purposes of this section if the person:

- Claims residence in any other state or country for any purpose, or
- Is an absentee property owner paying property tax on property in Montana.
What documentation do I need to bring when I purchase a resident hunting license for the first time?

To purchase an annual resident conservation license, you will be required to show a valid Montana driver’s license (MDL), a valid Montana identification card (MIC) or a valid Tribal identification card. An out-of-state driver’s license is not an acceptable form of identification for resident license purchases. If your MDL or MIC was issued less than six months ago, you will be required to show additional proof of residency. Acceptable documentation of residency includes lease agreements (not a mortgage), resident income tax forms, voter registration and pay stubs with your current address. If your MDL was issued more than six months ago, you can also purchase your resident hunting license for the first time online at fwp.mt.gov.

If you were born after Jan. 1, 1985, you will also be required to show proof of having completed a Montana hunter education course or hunter education course from another state or province. To purchase a Montana bow and arrow license, a hunter must provide a certificate of completing Montana’s bowhunter education course or provide any prior year’s bowhunting/archery stamp, tag, permit or license from any state or province.

What’s the difference between licenses, also known as carcass tags, and permits?

With many hunting licenses, the hunter is required to cut out the date of the kill from the appropriate license/carcass tag and attach the license/carcass tag to the animal before the carcass is removed from the harvest site, or before the hunter leaves the site. This process is called license validation or tagging, hence the portion of the license that is attached to the animal is often referred to as a carcass tag.

A hunting permit allows a person to use a general deer or general elk license to hunt in a specified area or time period where harvest restrictions exist. This combination of opportunities is otherwise unavailable to hunters without the permit. Most permits are allocated through the drawing, and each comes with unique restrictions.

What’s the difference between preference points and bonus points?

Preference points are used for drawing nonresident combination licenses. Preference points essentially move you ahead in line for the drawing. Hunters with the most preference points are drawn before hunters with fewer preference points. Any
accumulated preference points are lost when the hunter draws a nonresident combination license or if they do not apply for a nonresident combination license in consecutive years.

**Bonus points** are used in other drawings. They essentially offer you additional chances of being drawn for the license you applied for. Unlike preference points, bonus points do not guarantee a license/permit to the applicants with the most bonus points, and first-time applicants still have a chance to draw a license/permit. Bonus points are squared at the time of the drawing. For example, if you have six bonus points, you are entered into the drawing 36 times. A hunter’s bonus points cannot be transferred between species drawings or to other hunters. A hunter’s bonus points for a given species are lost when a hunter is successful in the drawing for that species.

**Where can I hunt with a deer or elk permit?**

Permits can either expand or limit hunting opportunity, and the rules are different for permits for each species.

Hunters who receive a deer permit valid for taking an antlered buck mule deer with their general deer license are restricted to taking an antlered buck mule deer only in the area specified on the permit. They may not use their general deer license to hunt antlered buck mule deer anywhere else in the state during that season.

Hunters with an elk permit are not restricted from hunting elk in another hunting district where their general license is valid, provided they still hold a general elk license that has not been used to harvest an elk in the permit area.

Consult the current hunting regulations for more information on rules that apply to deer and elk permits. Hunters should learn about the district they wish to hunt before applying for a permit. Some permit areas are difficult to access due to geography or private land.

**Are hunting district boundaries different for each species?**

While some similarities exist, hunting district boundaries for most game animals vary by species. Consult the respective hunting regulation book for each species or other mapping tools for hunting district maps. Hunters should be familiar with the legal boundaries of hunting districts where they wish to hunt. Hunting district legal descriptions are available in a separate publication from the regular hunting regulations.
What do license/permit type numbers mean?

Hunting permits and many hunting licenses (not general licenses) have an identifying number. Knowing the number of the license that is valid in the place you wish to hunt is important as you apply for and purchase licenses.

In many cases, the license number corresponds with a particular hunting district and FWP region. For example, deer B license 331-01 is valid only in hunting district 331, which is in Region 3. Elk B license 580-00 is valid only in hunting district 580, which is in Region 5.

Other license numbers do not match any particular hunting district, but they denote other opportunities. For example, elk permit 394-00 is valid in hunting districts 318 and 335 (there is no hunting district 394), which are in Region 3. Antelope license 900-20 is valid in many hunting districts across multiple FWP regions.

Laws and rules by hunting district and a list of licenses that are valid in multiple districts can be found in the hunting regulations.

When planning your hunt, it is usually easiest to decide first where you want to hunt. Then consult the appropriate hunting regulation book or other mapping tools (see “Tools for planning your hunt” on p. 23) to determine what hunting district covers your desired area and what license opportunities are available there.

What are surplus licenses?

Hunting licenses that are allocated through the drawing are usually limited in quantity. In many cases, FWP receives fewer applications than the number of available licenses. **Surplus licenses** are hunting licenses left over after the drawing. Hunters can begin signing up online for the Surplus List during the summer for these leftover licenses. The quantity of surplus licenses varies from year to year.

What are shoulder seasons?

Shoulder seasons are elk hunting seasons designed to reduce elk populations in areas that are over population objective as outlined in Montana’s Elk Management Plan or address problematic distribution of elk. Shoulder seasons typically occur outside the general archery and firearms seasons. Most shoulder seasons focus on antlerless elk harvest on private land.

Pay close attention to the dates and specific hunting district for which a shoulder season license is valid before purchasing one. Some may be valid only on private land in a small
portion of a hunting district or during winter months when access is difficult. Information for each shoulder season opportunity can be found in the hunting regulations.

**Hunter access**

Montanans are fortunate to enjoy millions of acres of public land. Yet access can still be challenging for many hunters, depending on the location, weather, time of year and species they’re hunting. Lands that offer easy public access or have dense concentrations of animals usually attract more hunters, while places where access is more difficult or where animals are more dispersed will usually attract fewer hunters.

Hunters should learn about the district where they wish to hunt before applying for a permit. Some permit areas are difficult to access due to geography or private land.

Whether you hunt on public or private land, respecting the rules of the landowner or land management agency and being an ethical hunter will help ensure continued access to the places you enjoy.

For a more detailed reference of Montana’s access laws, consult a copy of the *Montana Access Guide to Federal and State Lands*, a booklet published through the Montana Interagency Access Council that is available at various land management agency offices.

A more comprehensive list of hunter access opportunities in Montana can be found online at fwp.mt.gov/hunt/access.

**Where am I allowed to hunt?**

Once you have determined the hunting districts or portions of hunting districts where your license and/or permit are valid, you can begin a more detailed analysis of access opportunities. An early step in this process is determining who owns the land where you wish to hunt.

A lot of hunting in Montana happens on public land (U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, state, etc.), but not all public land is accessible or open to hunting. For example, hunting is not allowed in Glacier or Yellowstone national parks or, in most cases, on Indian Reservations. And some parcels of public land have weapons restrictions. If you’re unfamiliar with an area or aren’t sure whether hunting is allowed, contact the appropriate landowner or land management agency. For help in determining land ownership, see “*Tools for planning your hunt*” on p. 23. If you have questions about where your hunting license is valid, check the current hunting regulations.
FWP also works to facilitate public hunting access to private lands and other places where possible (see “Block Management” on p. 20). Hunting on private property requires permission from the landowner, lessee or agent, regardless of whether the land is posted. If you’re not driving on a public road, you must have permission from the landowner before crossing private land to access public land.

**Where can I drive, park and camp?**

Motorized travel on public roads, such as county, Bureau of Land Management or U.S. Forest Service roads, is generally allowed, but travel restrictions or seasonal closures may apply. Pay attention to gates, signs and maps that may indicate appropriate seasons and methods of travel in these areas. Do not block gates, roads or trails when parking. If you’re not driving on a public road, you must have permission from the landowner before crossing private land to access public land.

Similar principles apply for camping on public lands. Be aware of seasonal closures, site reservations, food storage orders, fire restrictions and other regulations that might determine where certain types of camping are allowed.

If you have questions about whether an area is open for motorized travel or camping, contact the appropriate landowner or land management agency (i.e. if you have a question about a U.S. Forest Service road, cabin or campground, contact the Forest Service). For help in determining land ownership, see “Tools for planning your hunt” on p. 23.

**What are the registration/validation requirements for off-highway vehicles?**

Off-highway vehicles (OHVs) include motorcycles, ATVs (four-wheelers), side-by-sides, dune buggies, amphibious vehicles and air-cushion vehicles. If you wish to ride your OHV on public land or trails (off-highway), it must be registered. You will be issued a decal for off-road use that must be displayed in a conspicuous location on your OHV. If you wish to ride your OHV on paved highways, it must be street legal and have a license plate attached to the rear of the vehicle. Title and registration work is performed at county treasurer’s offices throughout the state and online.

In 2019 the Montana Legislature created a resident trail pass for OHVs. Recreationists utilizing summer motorized recreation trails must purchase the resident trail pass (decal) at a cost of $20. This pass is valid for two years and expires on Dec. 31 of the second calendar year. All decals must be affixed in a conspicuous place on the OHV.
OHVs owned by a nonresident may not be operated by a person anywhere in Montana unless a nonresident temporary-use OHV permit is obtained. Permits are good for one calendar year, cost $35 and can be purchased from local vendors, at FWP offices or online at ols.fwp.mt.gov.

For more information about operating OHVs in Montana, visit fwp.mt.gov/activities/off-highway-vehicles.

What are the registration/validation requirements for snow machines?

Snowmobiles operating on public land must be registered and display decals in a conspicuous space on the left side of the cowling. Registration is different for Montana residents and nonresidents.

Montana residents must register their snowmobiles at the county treasurer’s office in the county where the owner resides. Residents must purchase a resident trail permit to legally ride on any of the groomed snowmobile trails in Montana. Trail permits are valid for two seasons and are $20. Trail permits apply to all “mechanized equipment,” including snowmobiles, motorized snow bikes and fat tire pedal bikes.

Nonresidents who plan to ride their snowmobiles and motorized snow bikes in Montana must purchase a snowmobile nonresident temporary use permit for $35 per machine. Nonresidents who plan to ride mechanized equipment that is exempt from registration in Montana, such as fat tire bikes or e-bikes, on groomed trails must purchase a nonresident groomed trail pass for $35 per bike. Passes are good for two seasons.
Trail passes are available seasonally from October to April. These passes can be purchased online at ols.fwp.mt.gov.

For more information about operating snow machines in Montana, visit fwp.mt.gov/activities/snowmobiling.

What are the registration/validation requirements for boats?

All watercraft with a motor attached as well as sailboats at least 12 feet long must be registered at the local county treasurer’s office. Resident boat owners must obtain a title and registration and pay all fees to the county treasurer’s office where the owner resides. The registration must be carried on board the boat and be available for inspection whenever the boat is in operation. The boat owner will receive one permanent registration decal that must be displayed on the left (port) bow behind the hull identification number (HIN).

Nonresidents who own boats that are properly registered in another state or country may operate them in Montana for up to 90 consecutive days.

Homemade boats or boats manufactured before 1972 that require registration must first have a HIN. Generally, the 12-digit HIN is on the exterior of the vessel’s transom in the upper-right corner. A boat owner may obtain an HIN from any FWP regional or area-resource office. The application fee is $5. The boat owner is responsible for permanently affixing the HIN on the boat and having the boat inspected by a peace officer.

All motorboats, sailboats and personal watercraft that are numbered must display two validation decals — one on each side of the boat’s bow behind the HIN. Validation decals may be obtained for free at any FWP regional or area-resource office.
What does land ownership look like on a map?

Maps often include a legend that explains what various features represent. However, most maps that display land ownership follow a similar pattern. Below is a land ownership color scheme you are likely to find on some maps:

**White**: private

**Yellow**: Bureau of Land Management

**Green**: National Forest (U.S. Forest Service)

**Blue**: State lands (may be purple on Forest Service maps)

These maps are divided into grids called townships and sections. Sections — the smallest squares on the grid — represent one square mile, or 640 acres. Land ownership boundaries can change on a small scale within a section. A township is comprised of 36 sections. Individual sections are identified by township, range and section — terms in the U.S. Public Land Survey System.

Knowing the township, range and section (TRS) where you harvested an animal can be important, especially for chronic wasting disease testing or if your harvest is subject to mandatory reporting requirements.

Land ownership changes over time. Ensure the maps you use are up to date. See “Tools for planning your hunt” on p. 23 for more information.

Can I access public land by “corner crossing”?

Corner crossing, such as at section corners, in checkerboard land patterns (mix of public and private land) is illegal without permission from the adjacent landowner(s).

What hunting activities are allowed under Montana’s Stream Access Law?
Montana’s Stream Access Law does not allow for hunting game animals (deer, elk, moose, pronghorn, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, mountain lion, bear and wild bison) between the ordinary high-water marks of streams and rivers without landowner permission. All other hunting, including upland game birds and migratory waterfowl, is allowed within the high-water mark. Retrieval of upland game birds and waterfowl above the ordinary high-water mark on private property requires the landowner’s permission.

Floating to a land-locked public-land parcel to hunt is allowed under Stream Access Law. Fishing on foot to a land-locked public-land parcel to hunt is not allowed. A hunter engaged in this activity would not be able to pack out a harvested game animal while conducting a water-based recreation activity on foot below the high-water mark.

**Can I pursue wounded game onto private property?**

Hunters must have permission from the landowner or the landowner’s agent to pursue wounded game on private property, regardless of posting.

**What hunting access opportunities exist on federal public lands?**

**National forest lands**

Most national forest lands that are legally accessible via a public road, navigable waterway, or adjacent state or federal land are open to hunting. Some exceptions are noted in FWP’s hunting regulations under “Restricted Area Descriptions.” Land-use restrictions apply in some areas, so it’s always a good idea to check in with the local ranger district office of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). For more information, visit [fs.usda.gov](http://fs.usda.gov).

**BLM lands**

Most Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands that are legally accessible via a public road, navigable waterway, or adjacent state or federal land are open to hunting. Land-use restrictions apply in some areas, so check in with the local BLM field office. For more information, visit [blm.gov](http://blm.gov).

**National refuges and waterfowl production areas**

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages 10 national wildlife refuges in Montana, most of which allow hunting during some portion of the season. The USFWS also oversees
hundreds of waterfowl production areas that provide waterfowl, upland bird and limited
big game hunting opportunities. Hunting opportunities on wildlife refuges are generally
quite restrictive and, in some cases, prohibited altogether. For general information on the
National Wildlife Refuge System in Montana, contact the Charles M. Russell National
Wildlife Refuge in Lewistown at 406-538-8706.

For more information, visit fws.gov.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation lands
The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) administers roughly 200,000 acres of land and
100,000 acres of surface water in Montana. Where there is legal public access, BOR-
managed land is open to hunting, fishing and other recreational activity. Motorized travel is
restricted to existing roads. For more information, visit usbrc.gov.

What hunting access opportunities exist on state public lands?

School Trust lands
These lands are owned by the State of Montana and managed by the Department of
Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Access to hunting, fishing and trapping
require the possession of a state lands hunting/fishing/trapping (H/F/T) license, which is
included with the purchase of a conservation license. Trapping on DNRC lands requires a
trapping license issued by DNRC. Other recreational activities, such as recreational
shooting, bird watching and others, that occur on state school trust lands require a state
recreational use license, which is available from all license agents where hunting and
fishing licenses are sold.

DNRC lands also have location-specific restrictions on firearms, camping and travel that
differ from those on federal lands. Revenue collected from the use of these lands is used to
support Montana schools. Some parcels are leased to farmers and ranchers for agricultural
use to provide a large part of this revenue. There may be location-specific use restrictions
based on the current lease status of a specific piece of DNRC land. Consult the DNRC and
any signage present for location-specific restrictions on DNRC lands.

For more information, visit dnrc.mt.gov.

State Wildlife Management areas
Montana Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are managed by FWP and provide free
public hunting opportunities in many places. All WMAs have limitations on the available
season of use. Some areas allow camping, and motorized use is restricted to designated routes. Hunting on WMAs is open to all resident and nonresident hunters with a valid hunting license, but weapons restrictions may apply on some WMAs.

Many WMAs have seasonal closures to all public access from Dec. 1 to May 15 to reduce stress on wintering wildlife, but these dates and closures may vary.

For more information on rules that apply to a specific WMA, visit fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management-areas or contact the respective regional FWP office.

**Fishing access sites**

FWP manages fishing access sites (FAS) statewide. Generally, these sites provide stream or lake access only, but some sites also allow hunting. Be aware that many fishing access sites have weapons restrictions. Be sure to check FWP’s printed FAS guide, available at regional offices, that lists what rules and opportunities apply to each site. For an online map of Montana’s fishing access sites, visit myfwp.mt.gov/fishMT/explore.

**State parks**

FWP manages Montana’s state parks. Some state parks are open to hunting, but site-specific restrictions may apply. To find out if a state park allows hunting, visit fwp.mt.gov/stateparks or contact the respective FWP regional office.

**What hunting access opportunities exist on private lands and adjacent public lands?**

**Block Management**

The Block Management program is a cooperative effort between FWP, private landowners and public land management agencies to help landowners manage hunting activities and to provide free public hunting access to private and isolated public lands.

Block Management area (BMA) cooperators receive benefits for providing free public hunting under certain terms. FWP publishes an annual BMA tabloid by Aug. 15 that explains current BMA opportunities, including BMA general locations, opportunities offered and
access information. Detailed maps and rules for each BMA can be obtained online at fwp.mt.gov or at regional FWP offices starting Aug. 15.

Each BMA is unique. They can range in size from 50 to more than 100,000 acres. Some BMAs offer a wide variety of hunting opportunities, while others offer limited hunting opportunities for specific game species. Some BMAs intensely manage hunting activities while others have few hunter management restrictions. Each BMA has unique rules, and hunters should know these rules, including how to acquire permission, prior to hunting.

For more information about FWP's Block Management program, visit fwp.mt.gov/hunt/access/blockmanagement.

**Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program**

The purpose of this program is to enhance upland game bird populations on lands open to free public hunting. FWP partners with private landowners and public land managers, groups, and organizations to improve habitat on private and public lands to benefit various upland game bird species.

Similar to the Block Management Program, a printed access guide for the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program is available in August every year at regional FWP offices. For more information on FWP’s Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, visit fwp.mt.gov/ugbep.

**Public Access Lands Agreements**

The Public Access Land Agreement Program is a creative way for private landowners to provide public access to public lands for hunting and/or fishing in exchange for a payment and other negotiated improvements to facilitate public access to public lands. For more information, visit fwp.mt.gov/pala.

**Unlocking Public Lands Program**

The objective of this program is to allow members of the public to cross parcels of enrolled private land to gain access to otherwise inaccessible parcels of state or federal land for the purpose of fishing, hunting, trapping, hiking, bird watching and other forms of outdoor recreation compatible with the use of public lands. For more information, visit fwp.mt.gov/aboutfwp/access/unlocking-public-lands.
Does FWP provide hunters with a list of landowners who allow hunting?

Outside of the Block Management and Upland Game Bird Enhancement programs and game damage hunts, FWP does not give out private landowners’ contact information. It is the hunter’s responsibility to seek and acquire permission to hunt on private land.

**Tips for acquiring permission to hunt on private land:**

- FWP offices provide free booklets containing “Montana Hunter/Landowner Access Courtesy Cards”.
- Show courtesy and respect to the landowner and make hunting arrangements by calling or visiting at times convenient to the landowner, well in advance of the hunting date.
- Explain what type of hunting you wish to do and be sure to ask any questions that can help clarify the conditions of access.
- Provide complete information about yourself and your hunting companions, including vehicle descriptions.
- Follow the landowner’s instructions and bring with you only the companions for whom you obtained permission.
- Ensure you have landowner permission if you plan to leave part of the animal carcass on the property.
- Ask landowners if there is anything they would like you to watch for while on their property.
- Offer to return to the property outside of the hunting season to help them with projects as needed. Follow through if help is requested.
- Only harvest game for which you were given permission to harvest.
- Be sure to thank the landowner after your hunt.

**Top reasons why landowners stop allowing public hunting access:**

- **Unethical and unsafe shooting behavior:** bullets hitting buildings, farm equipment, signs, livestock and other property; long shots; and wounded game
- **Inappropriate driving and parking:** blocking gates, leaving gates differently than how you found them, driving on roads that are muddy, driving off roads without permission, parking or driving vehicles in tall vegetation during high fire-risk periods
- **Inappropriately contacting landowners:** hunters calling late at night, early in the morning or on holidays, or asking landowners to help retrieve game carcasses
- **Disobeying property rules:** hunting among livestock, building campfires without permission, harvesting species for which permission was not given
- **Disrespect**: arguing with the landowner when they decline to give permission to hunt, using foul language, harassing livestock, using the property while under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- **Vandalism**: cutting fences, breaking fence posts, littering, inappropriate defecating, shooting property

## Tools for planning your hunt

There is a host of resources to help you as you plan your hunt and enter the field. A current copy of Montana's hunting regulations remains the most important tool in your toolbox, but numerous mapping and planning resources are also available online, many of them for free.

Please note that third-party applications, while helpful in many aspects, may not provide the most current information on hunting regulations, restricted areas, Block Management updates or other information critical to planning your hunt. Consult the current FWP regulations and the appropriate land management agency for the most current information.

Here's an introduction to several reliable tools available online for free.

**Montana FWP Hunt Planner** - [fwp.mt.gov/gis/maps/huntPlanner](http://fwp.mt.gov/gis/maps/huntPlanner) FWP’s Hunt Planner is a free interactive mapping website that allows you to research hunting opportunities in the state. This is the most reliable resource for up-to-date information on hunting district boundaries, Block Management updates and hunting regulations. The website can be used from a computer or mobile device. Important features include:

- Hunting district boundaries for each species, with links to applicable hunting licenses and harvest statistics
- Harvest opportunities by license and hunter type, including a lookup tool to view where your hunting license or permit is valid
- Rotating surveillance areas for chronic wasting disease (CWD), as well as CWD sampling stations and carcass disposal sites
- FWP hunting restricted areas (may not include USFS, BLM or other restricted areas)
- Species distribution
- Block Management areas (with printable maps) and other access opportunities
- Public and private land ownership
- Ability to find your location on the map, and coordinates of cursor location on the map
- Polygon and route drawing
• Links to printable geo-referenced PDF maps
• Ability to create a GPX file to upload to your GPS device
• Multiple base maps (topographic, satellite imagery, etc.)
• Help tools and links to other FWP resources

**Montana Cadastral Mapping Project** - svc.mt.gov/msl/mtcadastral

This free mapping website is maintained by the Montana State Library. It is a useful and reliable tool for confirming land ownership.

**ACME Mapper** - mapper.acme.com

If you prefer traditional topographic maps, this can be a useful resource. ACME Mapper is a free third-party, general-purpose mapping website. It does not contain layers for hunting districts in Montana, nor is it a tool for confirming land ownership. But it does provide satellite imagery and topographic map layers, with roads and county lines, for the lower 48 states.

**Weatherbase** - weatherbase.com

Many hunters ask what weather is typical for certain areas. While weather and its influence on wildlife movements can vary greatly from year to year, weatherbase.com is a resource for finding monthly averages for temperatures, precipitation and other data.

**Download Montana hunting regulations online** - fwp.mt.gov/hunt/regulations

**Wildlife biology 101**

Some of the most common questions from hunters pertain to animals and their behavior:
At what elevation do elk live? When is the rut? When do animals migrate? What do deer eat? When do bears hibernate?

Most of these questions have no single answer. But understanding some basic behavioral factors can help you decide where, when and how to hunt. Here are some important terms to know and considerations for several of Montana’s game animal species, as well as wolves. Also listed here are questions FWP staff may or may not be able to answer for you.
What do game animals eat?

Wildlife diets vary by species and time of year. Most of the diets referenced for the herbivore species below fall into these categories:

**Browse**: shrubs, deciduous trees, and woody vegetation. Examples include willows, aspen, sagebrush, currant, chokecherries, service berries, mahogany, bitter brush and rabbitbrush.

**Forbs**: non-woody flowering vegetation. Examples include dandelions, sagewort and clover.

**Grass**: non-woody herbaceous plants with leaves growing from the stem.

What are summer and winter ranges?

**Summer range** includes habitat areas used by migratory wildlife during the summer and early fall. These are usually at higher elevations where water and high-quality forage overlap.

**Winter range** includes habitat used by migratory animals during the late fall through early spring when most of the landscape is covered by snow. Winter ranges are where food resources are most accessible — usually at lower elevations or ridgelines that are exposed by the wind and sun.

When do game animals migrate?

Many game animals will travel between summer and winter ranges seasonally. Seasonal migrations are driven primarily by weather — as forage at higher elevations becomes difficult to access due to snow, animals migrate to winter ranges where forage is more accessible. The timing of wildlife migrations can be highly variable from year to year and difficult to predict because they are weather dependent.

Some game populations are non-migratory and spend their time in the same area year-round.

What is the rut?

The mating season for a game animal is often called the **rut**. Animals, especially males, are usually more active for longer periods each day during the rut. The rut is generally triggered by shorter periods of daylight in the fall.
How do diet, habitat and the rut vary by species?

Elk

Diet: Elk are generalists. They consume browse, forbs and grasses.

Habitat elements: In some areas of Montana, elk on public land utilize high-elevation sagebrush grasslands, grasslands, conifer forests, deciduous forests and low-elevation agricultural lands during the summer and early fall. During times of significant snow cover, elk migrate to lower winter ranges, which may include river bottoms and valleys, much of which are on private land. Some elk are non-migratory. Because elk are generalists, they can be found just about anywhere in Montana at almost any elevation.

Rut: The elk rut in Montana usually occurs from mid-September to mid-October, but this can vary by a couple of weeks in either direction.

Mule deer

Diet: Mule deer consume grasses, forbs and shrubs while vegetation is green and nutritional content is high. As grasses cure and the nutritional quality diminishes, mule deer diets transition to forbs and browses. Winter diets are often completely browse.

Habitat elements: In some areas of Montana, mule deer utilize high-elevation sagebrush grasslands, grasslands, conifer forests, deciduous forests and low-elevation agricultural lands during the summer and early fall. Winter snow accumulation triggers migrations to lower elevations during late fall or early winter. During the winter, mule deer concentrate within shrub-dominated habitats at low and mid elevations. Not all mule deer are migratory. Mule deer can be found anywhere in Montana.

Rut: The mule deer rut in Montana occurs throughout November.
**White-tailed deer**

**Diet**: White-tailed deer consume grasses, forbs and browse.

**Habitat elements**: In some areas of Montana, most white-tailed deer use low elevation valleys predominated by agriculture. These areas are mostly private lands. A small portion of whitetail populations migrate to high-elevation summer ranges.

**Rut**: The rut for white-tailed deer occurs throughout November.

---

**Pronghorn (antelope)**

**Diet**: Pronghorn consume grasses, forbs and shrubs while vegetation is green and nutritional content is high. As grasses cure and the nutritional quality diminishes, pronghorn diets transition to forbs and browse. Winter diets are often completely browse.

**Habitat elements**: In some areas of Montana, pronghorn use rangeland habitats at all elevations during the summer and fall. As snow accumulates, those pronghorn at high elevation migrate to rangelands at low elevation, where all pronghorn spend the late fall, winter and early spring. Some pronghorn are not migratory.

**Rut**: The rut for pronghorn in Montana occurs from mid-August through early October.
**Moose**

**Diet:** Moose consume grasses, forbs and shrubs while vegetation is green and nutritional content is high. As grasses and forbs cure and the nutritional quality diminishes, moose transition to a diversity of deciduous browses. By late winter, most moose diets are predominantly willow browse.

**Habitat elements:** In some areas of Montana, moose utilize deciduous-dominated riparian areas (places adjacent to water) and aspen-dominated forests year-round. During warm summer periods, moose often seek shaded environments within dense conifer forests. Moose use a diversity of shrub-dominated habitats during the fall. Some moose are migratory, and others are not. Migratory moose are distributed across high-elevation habitats during the summer and fall and migrate to lower elevations as snow accumulates.

**Rut:** In Montana, the moose rut occurs from mid-September through mid-October.

---

**Bighorn sheep**

**Diet:** Bighorn sheep consume grasses, forbs and shrubs year-round.

**Habitat elements:** In some areas of Montana, bighorn sheep prefer areas that are relatively steep and open. They also frequently use rocky terrain complemented with open, grassy benches that provide food. Seasonal migrations of bighorn sheep can vary — many have significant migrations across elevations, some migrate but stay at roughly the same elevation, and some do not migrate. Sheep will spend the winter wherever they can access food.

**Rut:** The rut for bighorn sheep usually begins in mid-November and can last as late as early January.

---
Mountain goat

**Diet:** Mountain goats consume forbs, grasses, shrubs, coniferous tree needles and lichen.

**Habitat elements:** Mountain goat habitat is at high elevations and includes escape cover and steep terrain, though this may include timbered areas. Some mountain goats migrate, and others do not. Most migrations are short, and goats may migrate up and down in elevation during the winter in search of forage.

**Rut:** In Montana, the rut for mountain goats occurs from early November through early December.

Black bear

**Diet:** Black bears are opportunists. As omnivores, they eat green grass, berries, leaves and other vegetation, as well as carrion and live prey.

**Habitat elements:** Because they have a diverse diet, black bears do well in a variety of habitat types. Most often they prefer forested habitat, but they can also venture into river bottoms and more open landscapes wherever food is easiest to obtain.

**Mating season:** Black bears mate between May and July and give birth in a den during winter.

**Hibernation:** Black bears can begin entering their dens as early as October, and most bears have left their dens by May.
Wolf

**Diet:** Wolves are primarily carnivores. They consume carrion and hunt live prey, including small and large mammals. On occasion, they have been known to consume berries.

**Habitat elements:** Wolves are highly mobile. While a single pack’s territory can be around 150 square miles, they only occupy a small area of their territory at one time. Wolves, which are native to Montana, are highly dispersed across the western half of the state. They prefer areas with high prey density and low human populations.

**Mating season:** Wolves mate once per year in mid-February.

What should I know about chronic wasting disease?

**Chronic wasting disease (CWD)** is a fatal neurological disease that infects members of the deer family. In Montana, these include mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk and moose. It is caused by infectious, misfolded proteins, called prions, that spread throughout the animal and result in organ damage and eventual death. CWD can spread from one animal to another through body fluids, either through direct contact or indirectly through environmental contamination.

CWD was first detected among wild cervids in Montana in 2017 and has since been detected in many parts of the state.

CWD is not known to result in illness or disease among humans. However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that hunters who harvest a deer, elk or moose from an area where CWD is known to be present have their animal tested for CWD prior to consuming the meat and not consume the meat if the animal tests positive.

CWD can be transmitted through carcasses of infected animals. For this reason, proper carcass disposal by hunters is critical to protecting Montana’s herds. All discarded carcass parts should be left at the kill site or bagged and disposed of in a landfill. Dumping carcasses is illegal and can spread disease.

Hunting is the primary tool for monitoring and managing the spread of CWD. Concerns over CWD shouldn’t stop you from enjoying hunting season. Hunters are critical to conservation efforts across the state and protecting our wildlife heritage.
For more information and updates about CWD in Montana, visit fwp.mt.gov/conservation/chronic-wasting-disease.

**What hunting questions can an FWP biologist answer?**

If you have questions about wildlife population trends, distribution, management objectives, or the rationale for season structures in a specific area, contact the area wildlife biologist. Regional FWP office staff can help connect you with the appropriate wildlife biologist for your area of interest. The more familiar you are with the focus area of your question before calling a biologist, the more they can help you find specific answers. A great deal of biological data including annual surveys and biological data can be found online at fwp.mt.gov/conservation.

Depending on the area, FWP wildlife biologists may be interested in observation reports for less common species, such as moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, wolves or grizzly bears.

**What hunting questions can an FWP game warden answer?**

If you have questions about a specific regulation and how it applies to a certain area or hunting situation, check the current hunting regulations first. If you are still unsure, contact the respective regional FWP office to reach a game warden or other staff member who can help you.

**What hunting questions can’t FWP staff answer?**

FWP staff cannot answer questions for which there is insufficient information available, or if the question is outside the purview of the staff member’s work, seeks private citizens’ personal information or asks FWP to advocate for or against private businesses. Examples include:

- What will the weather be like during my hunt?
- On what date will the elk migrate?
- At what elevation should I hunt?
- Will I encounter a grizzly bear at location X?
- Where is a productive hunting area with easy access and low hunting pressure?
- Can you provide landowners’ contact information?
- Which outfitter and guide service should I hire?
• Can I drive or camp along road X? (contact the applicable land management agency)
• Which hotel should I stay at?

**Bears in Montana**

Both resident and nonresident hunters often want to know where bears — especially grizzlies — are in relation to where they plan to hunt. Being prepared for a bear encounter is essential when hunting and recreating in bear country. As you plan for this in your hunt, remember these key points:

- Bears can be anywhere.
- Both black and grizzly bears pose potential safety risks, and bear behavior determines your response in an encounter.
- Avoiding a conflict is easier than dealing with one.

**Where are bears in Montana?**

Black bears are common in the western half of the state and less common as you move east. However, they could be seen anywhere in Montana.

Grizzly bear populations are expanding into places where they haven’t occupied in many years. Grizzly expansion in Montana emanates from several recovery ecosystems, including the Greater Yellowstone, Northern Continental Divide, Bitterroot and Cabinet-Yaak ecosystems. As a result, grizzly bears have the potential to be found anywhere in the western half of Montana.
Who manages grizzly bears in Montana?

Grizzly bears are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which works closely with FWP.

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) was formed in 1983 to help ensure recovery of viable grizzly bear populations and their habitat in the lower 48 states through interagency coordination of policy, planning, management and research. The IGBC consists of representatives from several federal, state and tribal agencies. For more information, visit igbconline.org.

How are black bears and grizzly bears identified?

Knowing how to identify black bears and grizzly bears is essential, especially if you’re hunting black bears. Here is a quick online tool to help you learn to identify different species: https://bit.ly/3nfeYV3.

When identifying a bear species, it’s important to look for a combination of characteristics rather than relying on one feature alone. A bear’s color and body size are not reliable indicators of species. Here are some traits to look for:

**Black bear**

- Color varies from blond to black
- No distinctive shoulder hump
- Rump is higher than shoulders
- Face profile is straight
- Ears are tall and pointed
- Front claws are less than 2 inches long

**Grizzly bear**

- Color varies from blond to black
- Distinctive shoulder hump
- Rump is lower than shoulder
- Face profile appears dished in
- Ears are short and rounded
- Front claws are 2 to 4 inches long
Tracks can sometimes help identify a bear’s species and give a basic indication of how recently a bear has been present. Black bears’ front feet have a more arched space between their toes and main foot pad. Grizzlies’ front feet have a straighter space between their toes and foot pad. Indentations left by claws may give an indication of claw length.

How does bear activity change throughout the year?

Spring

Bears emerge from hibernation when temperatures rise and food availability increases. Males emerge in early March. Females without newborn cubs emerge from late March to mid-April. Finally, females with newborn cubs will leave their dens from mid-April to early May. In springtime, bears often scavenge on carcasses of winter-killed animals.

Late spring/early summer

The mating season for bears occurs from May through early July. Males can be seen following females, and most fights between male bears happen during this time of year.
Summer

Bear distribution varies in response to seasonal and annual variability of food availability. Generally, bears often feed at lower southwest-facing elevations in the spring and move higher as the season progresses.

Fall

Bears become more active in the late summer and fall as they spend more hours each day searching for and consuming protein and calories in preparation for hibernation. This period is called hyperphagia. Bears can spend up to 20 hours each day eating. During this time, they may be less observant of their surroundings (creating conditions for surprise close encounters with humans). Bears will begin preparing a den in the late fall.

Winter

Bears may begin entering their dens as early as late October, though most bears enter their dens between mid-November and December. Some bears may remain active well into early winter months if food is readily available, such as ungulate remains left by hunters. Cubs are born during hibernation in late winter. Bears can awaken easily when disturbed during hibernation and may even wander from their dens periodically during winter. Carry bear spray and be prepared for a bear encounter at all times of the year.

How can I avoid negative encounters with grizzly bears while hunting?

Several aspects of hunting increase the risk of hunters encountering grizzly bears:

- Fall hunting seasons overlap with hyperphagia, when bears are most active.
- Hunters are often alone and tend to move quietly, against the wind, and during early-morning and late-afternoon hours when bears are most active.
- Elk bugling, game calls and cover scents can attract bears and lessen the bear’s ability to detect a person.
- Animal carcasses and gut piles can attract bears.

If you are hunting or recreating in the western half of Montana, be prepared to encounter a grizzly bear. This includes:
• Carry and know how to use bear spray. Keep it within reach and be prepared to use it immediately. In sudden grizzly encounters, bear spray has proven to be a simple and effective deterrent tool.
• Stay alert, especially when hearing or visibility is limited. Watch for environmental indicators of recent bear activity. If there is abundant fresh sign of grizzly bears in the area, consider hunting elsewhere. Let other hunters know when bears and/or fresh sign are observed.
• Travel and hunt in groups whenever possible. This can help you make casual noise to alert bears to your presence, and it may also increase your chances of survival in the event of a bear attack.
• Follow all food storage regulations. Contact the applicable land management agency to learn what food storage rules apply where you’re hunting.
• Avoid carcass sites and concentrations of ravens and other scavengers.
• Carry the equipment you need to process a carcass and get it out of the field as quickly as possible.
• If you harvest an animal, remove it from the field as quickly as possible.
  o If you plan on leaving the carcass for extended hours or overnight, it is recommended to quarter the carcass and hang the quarters away from the gut pile.
  o Leave the carcass or hanging quarters in a place where they can be observed from at least 200 yards away (bright-colored flagging can help with visibility).
  o When you return, scan the area from a distance for any movement or disturbance to the carcass. Then approach the carcass or quarters carefully. Yell or whistle repeatedly.
  o Do not attempt to frighten away or haze a grizzly that does not leave a carcass when it becomes aware of you.
• When possible, hang carcasses from designated food storage poles. This includes a pulley attached to a stout 15-foot-long “meat pole” that is at least 25 feet off the ground. The lowest portion of the carcass should be swinging from the center of the pole at least 10 feet above the ground.

Bears are opportunists and change their behavior in order to take advantage of new food sources. If you are hunting or living in grizzly country, always assume that grizzlies are in the area. Make sure your camps, cabins and homes are bear proof and that bear attractants (food, garbage, anything smelly) are unavailable or secured.

For more information on avoiding conflicts with bears, visit IGBConline.org.
How should I respond in a bear encounter?

Most bear attacks on people involve surprise close encounters and/or females with cubs. Both grizzly bears and black bears pose a risk. In any encounter, your behavior matters. Bears respond to your actions. The bear’s behavior should determine your response.

During an encounter with a bear, never run away. You cannot outrun a bear. Running may trigger a bear to chase. Never approach a bear.

Different situations call for different responses. If you see a bear at a distance, or if the bear appears unaware of you and you can move away undetected, do so quietly when the bear is not looking toward you. If you cannot avoid a bear that sees you, stand your ground and watch its behavior. Move away when it “disengages” or becomes uninterested in you.

1. If a bear is not actively engaged with you (looking away, ignoring you, running away, or retreating):
   - Give the bear space by backing away slowly from the bear and going in the opposite direction of the bear.

2. If a bear shows agitated/defensive behavior (huffing, jaws clacking, head swaying back and forth, bellowing, swatting the ground, hopping forward, and/or drooling):
   - Stand your ground, prepare your bear spray, or discharge your bear spray if the bear is within range, and speak in a calm manner until the bear moves off.

3. If a bear charges or appears ready to charge:
   - Stand your ground.
   - If it charges, use your bear spray.
   - If the defensive bear is going to make contact with you, go face down on the ground, cover your neck and head as much as possible, and deploy your bear spray in the bear’s face. If you are unsure of the species, but you recognize it is defensive, play dead. Never play dead in an encounter with a black bear.

4. If a bear shows predatory/curious behaviors (follows you, or slowly, purposefully or methodically approaches you):
   - Stand your ground.
   - Get aggressive: wave your arms and shout vigorously.
   - Get spray out and ready.
   - Fight back if it makes contact.

5. If a bear enters or reaches into your tent:
   - Use your bear spray.
   - Fight back.