

2024

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OUTDOOR RECREATION *Guide*



 PENNYSAVER


Seeking permission to hunt on private property

*Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis*

One of the changes that was made to the Hunter Education program in New York because of the pandemic was the ability to complete the course online. In-person courses have returned but people still have the option to take the course online. So, for anyone who took the online course, or anyone that needs a refresher, this article will discuss interacting with landowners and other hunters.

One of the more difficult obstacles to navigate can be asking for permission to hunt on a piece of property. Hunting private property instead of public land can drastically increase your success rate as less human activity will keep the deer from becoming nocturnal or from leaving the area altogether. The first thing you want to do is know who owns the property you want to hunt on. There are apps for your phone that have the tax map with owner information, or you can use the county tax department's mapping software. This can also help you know the property boundaries if you get permission to hunt there. Another way is to stop at a nearby house and ask if they are the owner and if not if they know where the owner lives. Be careful as some people can lie and say they own it and say you cannot hunt or say go ahead and hunt it without being the actual owner. When asking permission, dress appropriately. This does not mean suit and tie but avoid muddy clothes or beer-brand tee shirts. Remember you want the owner to feel like you can be trusted to be on their property. If they give you permission, have some follow-up questions ready that can save you later. Some examples would be, does anyone else have permission to

hunt there, is it alright to put treestands up, is it alright to harvest does (if you have the appropriate tags), can I have someone hunt with me?

There is always a chance of running into another hunter while you are hunting. The question always seems to be what do you do? The first thing to do is to make sure they know you are there. DO NOT wave or make motions with your arms.

Talk in a loud, clear voice to let them know you are there. Once you know they have seen you, you can approach them to talk. Make sure you both handle your firearms safely during your interaction. If you are new to the property, you may not feel comfortable asking them questions regarding them having permission to be there but if you want to ask their name and how they know the owner. See how long they have been hunting that property and if they have any tips. If they stammer or seem suspicious, stop and talk to the landowner about the interaction. If you think they have permission to be there, it may be worth asking them where they usually hunt so you can avoid running into them all the time. Or consider exchanging contact information so you can coordinate who is hunting where.

When you are afield, make sure you are on the lookout for garbage and pick up after yourself and others. This is important for any lands, whether public or private. If you seem to find garbage all in the same area, it may be worth telling the landowner for private property (or an Environmental Conservation Officer or Forest Ranger for public land). The thing to keep in the back of your mind is that it only takes one person to ruin it for everybody else. Whether it is through littering, bringing a bunch of buddies with them, or driving their vehicle where they should not.

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Making the right arrow selection for your hunt

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

The progression of hunting arrow materials went from wood to aluminum to carbon shafts. Wood arrows can be difficult to make as density can be slightly off making them weigh different amounts. Getting a perfectly straight wood arrow can also be a tall task. Aluminum came into play as it was something that could be replicated using machines.

The ability to make arrow shafts that were nearly identical meant more consistency between arrows. This means that arrows with the same flex, or spine, could be batched together easier. This consistency translated into better results when shooting. Aluminum is heavier than wood, so the arrows would have better penetration due to their increased kinetic energy. However, added weight comes with a price, speed. Lighter objects take less to move so they can go faster. Aluminum arrows have one big negative and that is that if they hit something wrong,

the shaft will bend. Once bent, the arrow is ruined because it will not fly straight off the bow again. Carbon shafts replaced aluminum shafts as the top material. Carbon fibers are rolled into tube to make the arrow shaft. Carbon is much lighter than aluminum, so the arrows are lighter. This decrease in weight leads to faster arrow speeds and carbon shafts do not bend like aluminum shafts. Carbon arrows also have smaller diameters than aluminum, so they have increased penetration. Think of a nail versus a railroad spike. While carbon shafts are pretty rugged, the linear nature of the rolled carbon makes them crack or split if hit by another arrow or another dense object in flight. Due to this, it is important to inspect each arrow

before using them each time. A cracked shaft can lead to the entire arrow shattering when the bowstring is released. Some arrow companies make arrows using a woven carbon shaft instead of a rolled tube, which makes them more resistant to splitting or cracking. One of the more popular arrows is a "best of both world" approach. A small diameter carbon shaft is covered by an aluminum shaft. This allows for added weight to help get kinetic energy and smaller diameter for added penetration. The aluminum outer shaft is still prone to bending like the all-aluminum arrows are. Another company has an arrow with stainless steel fibers woven in with the carbon of one model. Other factors to consider when looking for arrows



include your draw length, draw weight, the broadhead you plan to shoot, and your target species. Knowing your draw length and weight will allow you to decide what spine strength your arrows will need to have to give you the best performance. If you choose an arrow spine that is too weak, your arrow will bend excessively during flight and give you poor results. Some mechanical broadheads require a lot of energy to open when they impact the target so shooting some arrows may not

be best suited for this (or the broadhead may not be suited for your setup). Knowing what game species that you want to hunt can change what arrow you want. Small, thin-skinned game can be harvested with almost any arrow because penetration is easy to achieve. However large game species with thick hides can slow arrows down quick and result in

mere flesh wounds instead of harvests. These are things to remember and consider when shopping for arrows. Do not be afraid to ask questions at a bow shop to get better insight on what your options are before making your choice. Arrows can cost upwards of \$20 a piece, so do your homework and make an educated decision so ensure you get the best possible results.

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Quit bugging me mosquitoes and flies

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango Columnist Eric Davis

Nothing is quite as annoying as the constant buzzing of mosquitoes around your ears while sitting in the stand during bow season.

In the spring you deal with mosquitoes and blackflies while trying to listen for gobbling turkeys and then while trying to stay still while waiting for a tom to come into your calling.

On top of flying insects, you also must be on the lookout for crawling pests, like ticks. To make your time outdoors more enjoyable, finding a way to keep these literal bloodsuckers at bay should be a high priority. The first option to help alleviate the issue is to pre-treat your clothing and equipment. This is my preferred way to combat ticks. Spray your clothing with a 0.5% permethrin treatment and let it dry for 24 hours before wearing it. This treatment even lasts for a few trips through the laundry before needing to be reapplied. This treatment also repels mosquitoes.

There is even a company that you can send your clothing to and they treat it with permethrin and it is supposed to last up to six months of regular wear and washing.

The next option for treatment would be a repellent actively applied while afield. This can be a chemical treatment such as DEET or a natural treatment such as essential oils. This treatment option can work in some situations but might not be ideal in others.

These treatments, especially natural ones, can be greasy. A greasy feeling on your hands can make handling equipment difficult especially fishing rods and reels. It also can transfer onto your lures and/or bait, which could be detected by fish making them not bite. Additionally, these treatments do

wear off and need to be re-applied every so often.

When working in the Adirondacks in 2013, I endured the black fly swarms that are famous up there. The main problem that I had was keeping them from biting my hands as I was trying to write notes into my field journal. After trying out a handful of products, I found a product that worked at a gas station. It was a thick gel that had citronella in it. A second option for in the field treatment would come in the form of heated chemicals, such as candles and torches. This can be a good option when fishing from a boat that is not moving fast, as the chemical that is heated makes a zone of chemical around the heat source. Another popular form of this is the Thermacell. This is a small butane powered device that heats up a chemically treated pad to make a zone of repellent. It gets great reviews for repelling black flies from spring bear hunters in Canada. I have used one for a couple of years and am happy with it. The only thing to remember with these treatments is that it takes time for the zone of repellent to become established and heavy winds can make the repellent useless.

A third option that my wife and I are trying after talking with a few people that use them are magnetic repellents. These little cards get placed in a sock or on a necklace with the magnetic strip facing your skin. The card creates a repellent zone after 24 to 36 hours that lasts for 3 months. After spending time afield, particularly if you went through tall grass or low brush, you should check yourself for ticks. They will head towards pockets on the body.

Look at armpits, the groin, behind your knees, and along your hairline. If you do find a tick that is attached, it is recommended that you remove it by grabbing it as far forward on the body with tweezers and pulling it straight up. DO NOT smother the tick with oils or Vaseline. This will cause the tick to regurgitate as it tries to detach, which is when it can pass the bacteria that causes Lyme disease.

If you are not able to fully keep the other biting insects at bay, you may find yourself itching and scratching irritated bites. Excessive scratching at bites can lead to infection. To battle this, you can use antihistamine creams applied directly to the bite area or antihistamine pills. Black fly bites can swell so ice can be useful to combat this.

Whether going afield to hunt, fish, shoot, or just to go for a hike, hopefully this article can help you be able to stay in out longer by dealing with the biting insects that can cause you to stop early.

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How to use deer hunting scents

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

Some deer hunters go to extreme lengths to try to avoid having a deer detect their scent. From special laundry soap and keeping their camouflage clothes in air-tight containers to odor eliminating hair and body wash, the process of getting ready to deer hunt can seem like a ritual. However, there is a short window in the fall where hunters can use the deer's sense of smell to their advantage. Late October to mid-November tends to be the time to try using scents. Once the rut begins, bucks spend their time focused on finding does that are ready to breed and trying to breed them. This consumes everything they do for a couple of weeks because they know there is a limited amount of time before all the does will be bred. To find those does, bucks cruise around the areas

where they know does go and use the wind to try to get the scent of pheromones that mean a doe is ready to breed. Due to this reliance on their nose to detect does in heat, bucks can be fooled into thinking a doe is nearby by using scents. Any sporting goods store you walk into now will have a wide selection of deer scents to choose from. Most of the options are bottled urine that is collected from captive deer on farms. Recently, multiple brands have started to offer synthetic options in response to natural urine bans in some states. The urine generally is offered in two forms, regular and estrous. Regular urine would be urine that was collected from does that are not in heat. Some hunters like to use regular urine as a cover scent to help mask any

human scent they might have on them. Estrous urine is collected from does that are in heat and contains the pheromones that bucks are trying to detect. Estrous urine is what most hunters use in hopes of luring in a buck.

A common method to deploy the estrous urine is to do a scent drag. As the name implies, the hunter drags a wick or piece of cotton soaked in urine behind them as they walk to their stand. Then if a buck crosses the path the hunter took, they get the scent and follow it right to the hunter. While the application of this is simple there are a couple things to plan. First, as you get close to your stand, think about where you want the deer to be for

the best shot. This is where the scent drag will end and you put the wick up on a limb. Once you know where you want the deer to end, think about how you want it to approach that spot. I try to make a loop around some brush or behind a conifer so that the buck will walk someplace where I will be able to draw my bow without being seen. With a scent drag, you are literally picking the path you want the deer to take. Hunters can also try using buck urine in a scent drag to imitate a buck intruding into the area to look for does. In addition to the scent drag, hunters can hang scent wicks that have been soaked in scent in the area around their stand. Try to locate these all where you can shoot in case a deer follows the scent all the way to the source. Putting doe urine on some wicks and buck urine in others can increase the drawing power by suggesting a buck has already found the doe that is ready to breed. The last thing to think about is what to do when you are done

hunting with the wicks. I want the deer to come to the scent while I am there, so I take my wicks down at the end of every hunt I use them. If I plan on using the same scent again on another hunt, I will bring a few sandwich bags. This lets me double bag a used wick to prevent accidental leaks in my pack or pockets. When using scents to try to attract deer,

sometimes the deer react like they read the script while other times they act just the opposite. I have seen both reactions. The first deer I ever shot with a bow was a doe that followed my doe-in-heat scent drag to my stand. Then a few days later, I had a doe come to my scent trail and turn around and walk away. No matter what you do, you never know how the deer will react.

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Layered for success with the right clothing

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

There are a few things that I wish I would have learned or realized sooner than I did in my early years of hunting. Unfortunately, it took some time and experimenting before I came to realize that my clothing choices were hurting my hunting instead of helping. I would get cold feet one day hunting, so I wore two pairs of socks the next time

out. Yet my feet would still get cold. Knowing what I know now, I had overdone the socks, making my feet sweat in my boots. Then the sweat would evaporate, which would make my feet cold. Understanding footwear insulation can help you avoid getting wet feet that end up getting cold. You would be surprised at how thin a sock you might need if your boots are heavily insulated. If

you wear rubber boots, think about getting wool socks. The boots do not allow for moisture wicking that well so having socks that stay insulative after getting wet is important. Lace-up boots allow for more moisture to escape but they still hold a lot of moisture in, especially boots with waterproof membranes. I suggest wearing a pair of socks that are one “thickness” less than what you usually wear if your feet end up cold after a few hours. You may also be interested in trying the rechargeable heated insoles you can purchase. All you need to do is hit a button on the remote control and the insoles



heat up. Be advised that these can really make your feet sweat if you’re not careful.

The key is to focus on the material the clothing is made of. Cotton is a nice, soft material but it loses all its insulative properties when it gets wet. Avoid using cotton as a layer that contacts the skin, as it will soak up any sweat off the skin and start making you feel colder. Polyester clothing helps wick moisture away from the skin so you stay drier and warmer. Clothing made with merino wool is excellent as a base

layer because the wool retains its insulative properties when it gets wet. It also is supposed to inhibit some microbial growth which results in less odor that deer can smell. I bought a set of merino wool base layers last year and have nothing but good things to say about them. The only downside, is that merino wool clothing has special washing instructions that you need to follow. Dressing in layers helps you regulate temperature easily. If you feel too warm, you can remove one layer or more. If you are too cold, add layers. Compared to wearing one heavy jacket or bibs, where you can’t take them off without being down to bare skin. Another tactic I have started using the past few years is not to wear all my clothes to the stand. I walk uphill for a few hundred yards where I do most of my

hunting, which gets my blood flowing. If I have too many layers on, I will be sweating before I climb the tree and will be cold within a couple hours. By carrying my jacket, I can let my base layer or layers breathe on the walk in so some of the moisture is lost before putting my jacket on at the stand. While a lot of attention is given to the extremities in terms of staying warm, you should also focus on keeping your core warm. If you let your vital organs start to get cold, the blood that is sent to your hands and feet will start to get cooler. Therefore, some hunters like to have a vest as a middle layer because it retains heat in your core without making moving your arms hard with bulky sleeves. Placing the disposable hand-warmers in inside pockets helps keep the core warm and can extend your time in the stand.

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How to prep game meat following a harvest

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

No matter what type of wild game you pursue, proper handling following your harvest can make the difference between excellent table fare and a not-so-great dinner experience.

Get it cool. Just like the meat at the grocery store, you want your wild meat to stay cool until you are cooking it. This prevents bacteria from growing on the meat and spoiling it. The quickest way to cool down a deer carcass is to remove the entrails and then the hide. I have transported a deer over 2 hours before hanging it to skin it and the meat on the carcass was still warm when I was skinning it.

Another option is to put bags of ice into the body cavity after field dressing the deer if you are planning on not getting to skinning it in a relatively quick amount of time. Skinning is easier when the animal is still warm. If the outside temperature allows it, you can let the carcass hang outside to cool. If it is too warm out, you will want to cut the meat from the carcass and get it into a refrigerator as soon as you can to start cooling it down. Some people like to age their deer by letting it hang for a few days (up to a week or more) before butchering it. This can also be accomplished in the fridge once the meat is removed from the carcass.

Wild birds have high core body temperatures so either plucking the feathers or removing the meat from the carcass is critical to getting it cooled down quickly.

Keep it clean. When field dressing your harvest, be

careful not to open the stomach or intestines with errant knife strokes. Exposing the meat to the digestive enzymes can cause it to taste bad or to spoil altogether. If you hit the stomach either during field dressing, rinse the body cavity

out with water to remove those enzymes. Follow along this line of thought with game birds, especially if you are planning to pluck it and remove the entrails. Avoid cutting into the meat when skinning as well. Any opening in the meat is a possible avenue for bacteria to get it. If you bring you deer to a processor, they will greatly appreciate a deer that has been properly field dressed.

Quality preservation. Once the meat is

removed from the carcass, take the time to trim away excess fat, silver skin, or tendons from the cut you are working on. I plan on not having to touch the cut of meat when I remove it from the freezer later to cook it other than to maybe break it into smaller pieces (i.e. turning a roast into spiedies). My thought is that you can always make the pieces smaller later but you can't make them bigger once they're cut. When freezing meat,

air is the enemy. If you plan on doing a lot of venison yourself, I highly recommend investing in a vacuum sealer. This device removes all the air from the package so that the meat lasts longer without getting freezer burn. I have had venison stay good for over a year in the freezer. Some people like using freezer paper to wrap their venison. The key is to remove as much air as possible before putting it in the freezer.



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Tracking and blood trailing on a hunt

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

The moments that follow releasing an arrow or shooting your firearm at a deer can greatly increase, or decrease, your chances of recovering your harvest. It is easy to get caught up in the moment with adrenaline making your heart pump like crazy. Pay attention to how the deer reacts when you shoot. Deer that are shot in the heart and/or lungs will often jump and kick their rear legs back. Deer shot in the liver will walk or run off without jumping. Gut shot deer will jump and tuck

their rear legs into their stomach area. Use your binoculars to watch as the deer runs off. If you lose sight of it, pick out a nearby landmark to know that where you last saw it. If hunting from an elevated stand, try to triangulate where that spot is with two other markers because once you climb down, your line of sight changes and you may have a difficult time finding it. Do the same thing for where the deer was standing when you shot. If you watch the deer go down, keep an eye on it for a few minutes to make sure it doesn't get back up. Wait at least 30 minutes before

going to start blood trailing a deer shot with archery equipment. You can look for deer shot with a firearm sooner but waiting 30 minutes doesn't hurt anything. Climb down and slowly walk to where the deer was when you shot. Look around for any hair or blood. Try to mark the spot with either flagging tape or a shred of toilet paper. If using archery equipment, also keep an eye out for your arrow or bolt. Using lighted nocks helps you see where on the deer your arrow impacts and helps you find the arrow. Pay attention to the color of the hair and/or blood



when you find it. The vital area of a deer is covered in both brown and white hair so seeing only white hair at the point of impact can mean your shot was too low if hunting from a treestand. If you find pinkish-red blood and it has bubbles in it, the deer is likely shot through the lungs. Heart shot deer will have bright red blood in their blood trail. If the blood trail looks very dark red almost a maroon or burgundy, the deer may be shot through the liver. This shot is a lethal shot but it takes longer for the deer to expire. Mark where the blood is and back out. Come back at least 6 hours later. Liver shot deer will go 100 to 200 yards and then bed down. If you leave them alone, they will often expire there. If you rush in and jump the deer, their adrenaline can take over causing them to travel close to a mile without stopping. If you find green or brown debris in the

blood or on your arrow, the deer is shot in the gut. Gut shots are not always lethal so you need to take extreme caution when tracking because you may need to shoot the deer again. Wait at least 12 hours, if not closer to 24 hours, before trying to track a gut shot deer. Like a liver shot deer, a gut shot deer will bed down after a short distance. If tracking a liver or gut shot deer, move slowly along the blood trail and keep scanning ahead in the direction the trail is heading. Once you start tracking, DO NOT walk on the blood trail itself. You will get blood on the bottom of your boots and then smear it everywhere making it hard to decipher what direction the trail goes. Periodically you may want to put up either more flagging tape or shreds of toilet paper. This can help in case the blood trail gets harder to follow. You

can step back and see the general direction the deer was going because they seldom take hard turns when mortally wounded. If you find the blood trail stops, you can start making circles around the last blood, slowly making the circles bigger each time. You also can call for a certified tracking dog that are trained to track deer based on the scent the deer leaves as it walks/runs, not the scent of the blood. If you do call for a tracking dog, make sure you have permission to go onto the property where the deer was headed because the dog handler cannot go onto property without the property owner's permission. Tracking dog handlers are not allowed to charge for their services unless they are a fully licensed guide in New York, however many hunters will tip the handler to help cover fuel costs and license fees.


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Is it Karma or is it Luck?

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

Last fall I went into the season as unprepared as I can remember since the summer I was in North Dakota until the end of September. I only really planned to hunt on one property during bow season so the excitement of putting out trail cameras was lackluster. No matter what I got on camera, that was the only place I was going to hunt. Plus, I still get depressed at times when I think about deer hunting since one of my best friends that I made through hunting passed away in a car accident a couple years ago. What did help me was finding a couple of teenage boys who wanted to learn to turkey hunt in the spring of 2023. One day I mentioned the Youth Deer Weekend to them, and they were very excited with the idea of going deer hunting. So, I had them shoot my .243 rifle to make sure they were comfortable with it before the hunt. Being teenage boys, they refused to hunt together with me, luckily a friend of their family offered to take one of the boys while I took the other. Unfortunately, their family friend had a medical emergency right before the Youth Weekend so only one boy got to hunt with me. We saw 6 deer in the afternoon, which included my hunter having a brief opportunity to harvest one of them. However, my youth hunter couldn't get the deer in his scope in time before it was out of the shooting lane. It took a minute to figure out why, but he had been exhaling right onto the eyepiece of the scope while we waited for it to

come out from behind some brush. Hopefully that is a lesson he will remember for the rest of his hunting career. As gun season got closer, the boys' mother texted me asking about season dates and taking the boys out during regular season. She shared with me that they had been asking multiple family friends (who hunt) to take the boys hunting and they all were suddenly busy after saying they would throughout the summer. I have written it before, but I got into hunting after my dad passed away when I was thirteen and had to rely on other hunters to take me, so I knew how the boys felt because I had been in their shoes twenty years ago. I had already planned on going to Watkins Glen on opening day, but I committed to taking one of the boys on the second day of gun season and Black Friday. We didn't see any deer on the second day, and I had to postpone Black Friday to that Sunday as my wife got sick on Thanksgiving. I spent more time in the woods without a rifle trying to get one of the boys their first deer this season than I spent hunting by/for myself. Things changed last week for me the last week of the season though. On the last Wednesday of gun season, I had to take my wife to an eye doctor appointment in Syracuse and we had gotten some fresh snow Tuesday night. I told my wife if we got back in time, I'd like to hunt in the afternoon since I hadn't hunted much by myself. We got back just after lunchtime. I grabbed some food, changed into my hunting clothes, and headed to the woods. Just

after 4:00, I shot a doe with my rifle. I have hunted that property for a couple years and was happy to report my harvest to the landowner. Then on the last Saturday of regular season, I went to Watkins Glen to do some deer drives. I was chosen to be a sitter on the first drive and as I sat there, I heard a loud crunch to my left. I saw a

deer coming through the brush and could tell it had some antlers but couldn't tell how big it was. When it got into a clearing, I got my binoculars on it to see it had one good antler and was missing the second antler. As it broke into the hardwoods from the brush, I stopped it and shot. The buck dropped in its tracks. When the drivers came out of the brush lot, I got down from the stand and we went over to check out the buck. When we got to

it, we realized its second antler had very recently been shed because there was blood on the pedicle (part of the skull the antler grows from). We continued with the drives after I put my tag on the remaining antler. Once we finished the drives, we headed back to the buck so I could field dress it. As I worked on gutting it, the other hunters headed into the brush where the buck had been bedded to see if they could find his other antler. Right as I finished

up, the others emerged from the brush and asked me, "So what is the other antler worth to you?" as one of them displayed the antler to me. Then to top off the weekend, on Sunday I got a text message that one of the teenage boys had shot their first deer on the last day of the season! So, I am not sure whether to call it karma, luck, or anything really. It was a fantastic way to finish up the season.

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Not your dad's muzzleloader

Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

If you are looking for a way to add some days in the woods while also being able to harvest another deer, or if your regular season is a bust and you need a way to try to put some meat in the freezer, hunting during the muzzleloader season may be an appealing option.

Here in the Southern Zone of New York, the "late" muzzleloader season runs for 8 days immediately following regular gun season. And a few years ago, the Holiday Hunt was implemented, which is from December 26 through January 1. Muzzleloaders are legal to use during the Holiday Hunt.

If you haven't looked at muzzleloaders lately, you probably think of the old percussion cap or flintlock style muzzleloader like those used on the frontier. While some hunters still use this style muzzleloader, the most popular type of muzzleloader is the in-line style. In this style, everything is, as the name suggests, in line with the barrel. This means the breech plug sits directly behind the barrel and centers the primer behind the charge of powder in the barrel. With everything in-line, the maintenance and cleaning of the muzzleloader is very easy.

The main thing to consider when looking at an inline muzzleloader is how far you plan on shooting it. If you don't plan on shooting it more than 50 yards or so, you could probably get by with a muzzleloader with just open style rifle sights. If you plan on shooting farther than 50 yards, buying a muzzleloader with a scope is a good idea. Almost every muzzleloader produced today is drilled and tapped so that a scope base can be installed.

When it comes time to shoot a muzzleloader there are three components that make the shot work; powder, primer, and bullet. There are multiple options for each of these components.

You can purchase either loose powder or powder that is pre-formed into pellets or sticks. Loose powder requires that you measure the powder to get the charge you want before putting it into the barrel. Loose powder allows for more precise powder charges and can lead to better performance if a shooter is able to test different charges to see what shoots the best in their muzzleloader. Pelletized powder comes in standard charge sizes that allow for quick loading without using a measure or funnel. The drawback to pelletized powder is that the pellets can be slightly different in weight that can result in less consistent accuracy. For the most part though, the difference is not great enough to affect the accuracy of a muzzleloader out to 100 yards. Another consideration when deciding what powder to use is the ease of cleaning. All powder is corrosive once it has been fired, but some powders take longer to dirty up a barrel. Do some research either online or by talking to other hunters to see what they recommend.

Most current in-line muzzleloaders use a 209 primer. The 209 primer was originally used in shotgun shells but has been found to provide the optimal spark for ignition in modern muzzleloaders. Some companies even market 209 primers that are specific for use in muzzleloaders and with certain muzzleloading powders.

As the component that does the flying and impacting on the game, the bullet you choose can be important. There are two main styles of muzzleloading bullet (or projectile) available. The first is the sabot. This uses a conical bullet that slips into a plastic sleeve with four petals that is then loaded into the barrel. The plastic sleeve engages the rifling on the inside of the barrel and causes the bullet inside to spin. When fired, once the sabot leaves the barrel, the petals on the sleeve open and the bullet keeps flying independent of the sleeve. The sabot provides excellent accuracy but takes longer to load into the barrel.

The second bullet option is a conical bullet with a gas seal around the base. The seal on the bullet engages the rifling when the muzzleloader is fired to create spin. This style of bullet can be less accurate than a sabot but is easier and faster to load because there is no sleeve to put the bullet in before putting in the barrel to load it.

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Winter hunt predator calling

Evening Sun
Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis

Once the New Year comes around, things can get slow and uneventful for the deer hunter as they must wait until the spring to look for shed antlers or start their food plots. Something that they could do to help make the winter go by quicker is to try their hand at predator calling.

While some people go all-out and spend over a thousand dollars on gear, you can get into predator calling for a relatively low cost. The bare minimum gear required includes full camouflage, calls, and a firearm. For most deer hunters, the only purchase they would need to make was for calls.

As predators use their eyesight to find prey and to avoid other predators, complete camouflage is needed, even when hunting at night. Remember that these animals actively hunt during the night. If there is snow on the ground, snow camouflage helps you blend in better as regular camouflage can make you look

like a giant blob on the white background. The go-to predator call is the rabbit-in-distress call. This call mimics the noises made by a rabbit that is hurt or being attacked. To predators this is like someone ringing the dinner bell and they come in to investigate. The call basically sounds like a baby crying but at a higher pitch. Another popular call is a mouse squeaker. This sounds just like the squeaker in a dog's toy and is used when a predator is outside of shooting range to coax it into coming closer. Coyote breeding season is in the winter and some hunters can use a coyote call to mimic the sounds of females-in-heat or males defending their territory. An upgrade that some hunters use is an electronic caller. This lets the hunter set a playlist so they aren't moving around using a mouth call. Some calls even have the option to plug a motion decoy into the caller, which adds eye-appeal to keep the predator distracted as they approach. For your hunting

implement, you can get by with either a shotgun loaded with buckshot or your deer rifle. Smaller caliber rifles, such as the .223 and .22-250, are popular among predator hunters because they leave smaller holes in the animal's pelt so the hide is easier to sew and sell to fur buyers. If using a larger rifle, consider using a full metal jacket bullet so that the bullet doesn't fully expand and make a huge hole in the pelt. Shotgun users like to use number-4 buckshot as it allows for a good number of pellets while still allowing for good penetration. Predator hunting success often requires covering a lot of ground by making multiple setups. When



getting ready to make a calling setup, approach from downwind and pick a location where predators have a hard time swinging around downwind of you without you being able to see them. Coyotes will almost always try to circle downwind before coming in close so you want to be ready to have a shot before they get your wind and take off. If you have a wireless caller, you can put the speaker out about 100 yards upwind from you. This will put you in position to see predators that are trying to swing downwind from the caller.

As most predators are

more active at night, hunting them at night increases the odds of seeing something. To hunt at night, you need to invest in a spotlight so that you can see incoming predators and stand a chance at getting a shot at them. You can get either a handheld spotlight or one that mounts to your firearm. Get a light that has a red filter lens on it. Predators will see white light coming

from spotlights and spook, however the red lens doesn't spook them just like the red lightbulbs on trail cameras. Or you can splurge and go for thermal imaging optics that detect heat instead of projecting a light beam. If you are tired of waiting until the spring to get out of the house and into the woods, predator calling can be just the ticket.

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Time to prepare for ice fishing season



*Evening Sun Outdoor Chenango
Columnist Eric Davis*

Now is the time to get ahead of the game and to start preparing your ice fishing equipment. All it takes is one or two harsh cold fronts to turn open water into solid black ice this time of year. Some years, there is fishable ice before New Year's Day.

If you are done deer hunting and need something to do that makes you think about the outdoors, grab your jigging rods and tipups to get them ready.

At the beginning of every ice fishing season, I like to put fresh line on all of my jigging rods. When I fished in a lot of bass tournaments in high school, I put fresh line on every week. I didn't want to have a fish break off because the line was old and weak. While every week is a tad extreme for the casual ice fisherman, once a year should be plenty.

Remember not to overfill the spool the reel. I stop at about 2/3 capacity of the spool. This helps control the line as it wants to unravel off the spool. It has the memory from being stored on the larger spool that you buy it on at the store.

If you don't use spring bobbers on your jigging rods to watch for strikes, give bright colored lines a try. I like the Suffix line that comes in fluorescent orange. This makes it easier to watch the line for any movement as it contrasts with dark black ice and with white snow, once snow accumulates on the ice. Yellow line works well also.

For tipup maintenance, I like to unspool 10 yards or so and inspect the tipup line and swivel for any noticeable damage. I will replace the leader material every year. For "small fish" tipups, I like to use 6 pound fluorocarbon and for the "big fish" tipups I go with either 10 or 12 pound fluorocarbon.

I typically will make the leader 6-8 feet long. If I plan on going after big

toothy fish, such as northern pike, I will use steel leaders to avoid the fish cutting the line. Inspect the spool on the tiptop to make sure it is smoothly spinning.

You may need to put a small dab of grease on the shaft of the spool to get it operating smoothly. Set the tipup like you would while fishing and make sure that the flag is tripped when line is taken from the spool.

Once I have gone through the rods and tipups, I will go through my tackle boxes to make sure everything is organized the way I like it. I use a small box for my jigs that has foam in it so you can stick the hook into the foam to hold the jig in place. I keep my vertical jigs on one side and my horizontal jigs on the other side. They are organized by size and color so I can quickly find a jig if I need to swap to what the fish are biting.

I have started experimenting with using plastic jig trailers as opposed to live bait, such as spikes or mousies, and have a small box where I keep the plastics. I don't catch as many fish but they tend to all be bigger fish when using the plastics.

I release 99% of the fish I catch usually with only a few outings a year devoted to helping someone else fill the freezer (I'm allergic to eating fish) so I don't mind catching fewer fish. All of the supplies I use for tipup fishing I keep in their own tackle box. I have the hooks organized by size, color, and whether they are single or treble hooks. The sinkers and swivels are organized by size also.

If you use a fish finder or power auger, dig them out and give them a good once-over. Throw any batteries on the charger to get them ready. If you use a gas auger, give the motor some attention. If your hand auger seemed like it wasn't working as great last season, consider looking for replacement blades. You can even find places that will swap blades with you and they will sharpen your old blades then swap them with another fisherman who wants fresh blades. Get your shanty out and set it up. You can see if any rodents have chewed on the fabric or if the rope to pull it needs to be replaced before it breaks when your out on the middle of the lake.

As I have come to realize, it is often easier and less expensive to take a few minutes to inspect your gear and catch something that needs to be fixed instead of having to replace things after they break.

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