

# GRANT IN AID UPDATES

## Hunting with Heroes Update. It's Been 5 Years.

By Nelda Currah

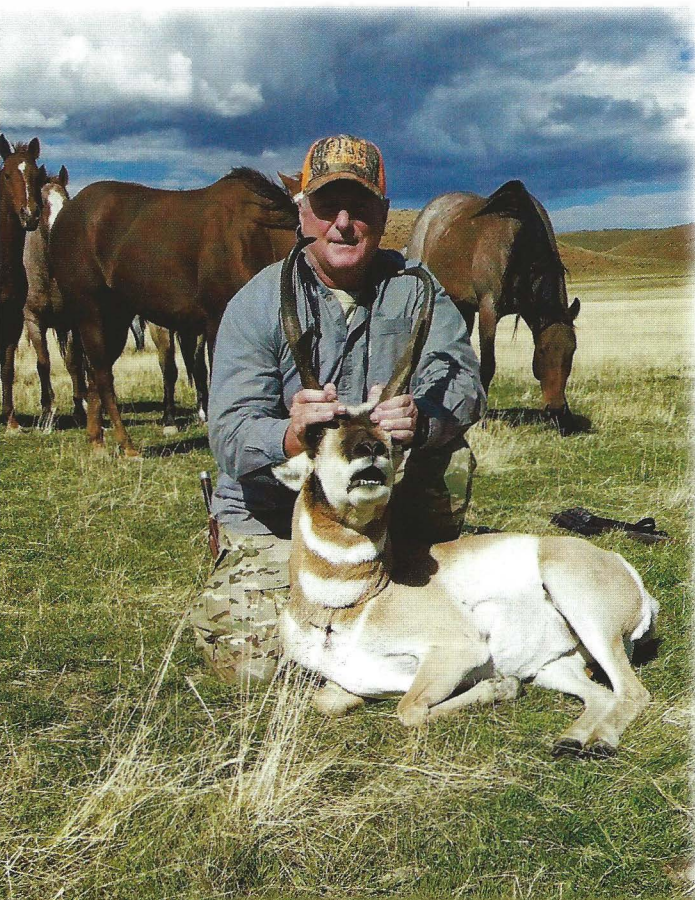
Five years. It's been five years since US Army veterans, Colton Sasser and Dan Currah, met for the first time at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. It's been five years since that first conversation took them both back to big game hunting in their beloved state of Wyoming. Five years since their first hunt together. Five years since they committed to give back to our nation's disabled veterans by doing everything they could to enable hunting experiences for the brave men and women who served in our armed forces and gave more than any of them should have given to protect us, our friends, our families, our children. 2017 marks Hunting with Heroes' fifth hunting season.

The program continues to grow substantially, and they couldn't be more pleased. Partnering with the Wyoming Game and Fish, dozens of other organizations including the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, and hundreds of volunteers, Hunting with Heroes has been able to change some lives, open some doors, have some fun, create lifelong friendships, facilitate some healing – and fill some freezers! Since their first hunt in 2013, Hunting with Heroes has hosted close to 400 hunts including elk, mule deer, white tail deer, antelope, turkey, big horn sheep, bear, mountain lion, and even one buffalo – impressive given they hosted nine hunts in 2013. They

welcomed their first WWII veteran in 2016. Hunting with Heroes continues to work with veterans from all conflicts – from WWII to Afghanistan. They've welcomed veterans from more than 30 states, veterans ages 21 to 91 – all with unique personal battles they continue to deal with long after they've returned home. During one of their post-hunt dinners this year, a veteran leaned over and quietly shared with one of the founders, "I was on the brink of suicide before I came here, but after

this weekend, I'm going home to my family to make it work. I hope I can come back to help, even if I can't hunt. I need this." He was very young. This isn't an isolated comment. Another veteran stood up and said, "You've given me something I thought I'd lost forever. You've given my dignity back. I didn't think anyone cared about this old man. I just have one question. May I come back?" He was in his 70's. Incredible people pitch in all over the state to help out. In 2013 the program operated out of Casper, but since then Chapters have started up in Riverton (North Portal), Lysite, Thermopolis, Cheyenne, Gillette, Big Piney and Black Hills, bringing their Chapter total to eight at the end of 2016. More communities are eager to get on board and form additional Chapters now. Jim Collins, Thermopolis resident, rancher, and Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation Board Member, was instrumental in getting the Thermopolis Chapter up and running this past year. He offered his personal thoughts about the 3-day event.

"On September 30, 2016 volunteers gathered at the Thermopolis Gun Club to assist with sighting in hunting rifles for the antelope hunt to start October 1st. The gathering was the accumulation of work done by the Hunting with Heroes Thermopolis Chapter, VFW Post #2281, local landowners and many volunteers – both businesses and individuals – to put licenses in the pockets of ten disabled veterans to



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hunt pronghorn in the Thermopolis area. Planning began early for the three-day event. Starting earlier in 2016, landowners purchased their antelope landowner licenses for donation back to Hunting with Heroes to transfer to these veterans. Many landowners granted permission for the veterans to hunt their ranches. We welcomed our guests to town and guides assigned to each hunter helped them sight in. Then the guides and their hunters headed to the Days Inn, who graciously donated three nights lodging for all of our veterans. Later that evening, all met at the VFW where the guides, hunters and other guests enjoyed a pre-hunt get together with a great meal. Early Saturday morning ten guides and hunters hit the field with great success. Several bucks green scored fractions from Boone & Crocket. After great comradery, backslapping and good-natured fun, the group sat down to dinner, once again put on by the VFW and the Ladies Auxiliary. This time a large part of the community, volunteers, landowners and many others joined our veteran guests. Sunday offered fishing on the river with the help of the Casper-based Project Healing Waters team. The Gun Club and Pheasants Forever sponsored trap shooting. (Note: Jim didn't

mention this here, but on Sunday evening the Collins' opened their home to the veterans, guides and other guests, served a delicious dinner, and gave all one last chance to visit and share stories about the weekend). A big thank you to Days Inn, Wind River Processing, Thermopolis Gun Club and Pheasant Forever, Project Healing Waters, all the guides who gave time to help, landowners, volunteers, the VFW and Auxiliary, Hunting with Heroes, and everyone who donated and gave their time. Let us not lose sight that the real thank you here is to our disabled veterans."

In addition to the programs hosted by Hunting with Heroes Chapters, many organizations have stepped up to help provide "hunts of a lifetime" for some of these disabled veterans. In 2016, the Wyoming Wild Sheep

Foundation partnered with Hunting with Heroes to get two lucky Heroes (one in-state veteran and one out-of-state veteran) in the field near Dubois to hunt bighorn sheep. (Note: See articles about Doug Bassford and Ron Nading in this issue, and again, many thanks to Fred Maguire and Chris Sandmark who donated the precious tags. Unbelievable generosity!). Young and "not so young" men and women with one common bond – they served their country with pride, and they came home disabled. We can't do enough to thank them. We can't give enough to help them heal, but Hunting with Heroes has figured out one way. It's been an incredibly rewarding five years for the Hunting with Heroes team. Please visit their Facebook page, [Hunting with Heroes Wyoming](#), or the website [huntingwithheroes.org](http://huntingwithheroes.org) to see how you can help give back to our nation's disabled veterans.



Hero Larry Baker and his wife, Adrian — 2016 Jackson Elk Hunt