

December 2016

\$2

# Wyoming Wildlife

[wgfd.wyo.gov](http://wgfd.wyo.gov)

MORE THAN MEAT  
Hunting with Heroes  
builds camaraderie

THE PORCH  
The elk were scarce,  
but the food plenty

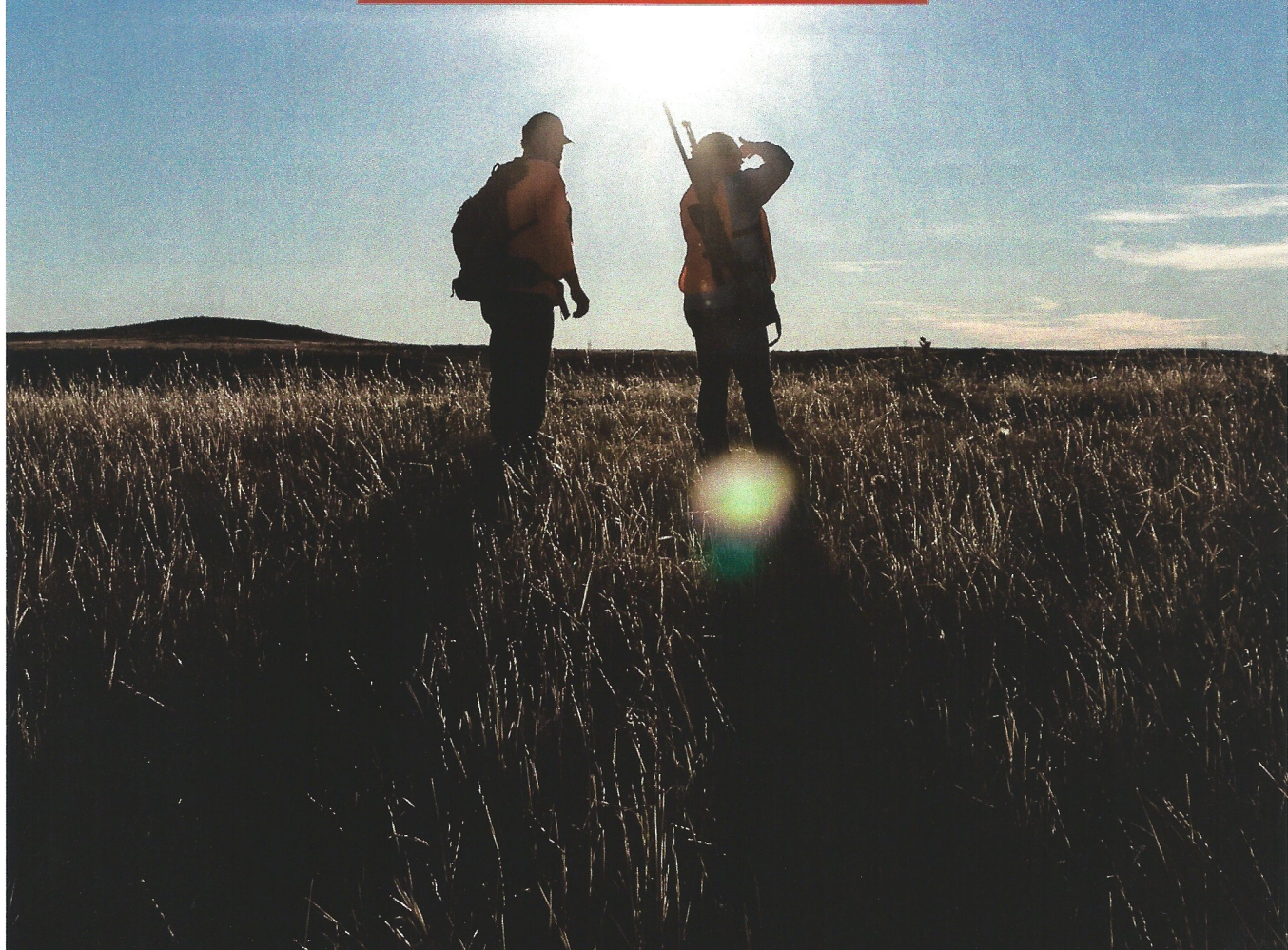
HONORING LANDOWNERS  
Game and Fish recognizes those  
who contribute to conservation



VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES  
FIND FRIENDSHIPS AFIELD

# MORE THAN MEAT

BY SARA DiRIENZO





**O**n this brisk fall morning, the breakfast tables at the Warren Livestock ranch outside of Cheyenne are scattered with maps, blaze-orange hats and the remains of biscuits and gravy. This pronghorn hunting homebase feels like many others rousing at daybreak — hunters and guides are buzzing, fidgeting with equipment, watching the skyline and their watches for the first sign of sunrise.

What makes this morning different is the hunters gathered around, waiting for daybreak. As veterans of various branches of the military, these hunters have served the country on missions across the world. Now, they gather on these rolling plains for a special big game hunt, one that can reap rewards far beyond a freezer full of meat.

“My boys and I have been hunting together for the last three years, and it has been enjoyable each time we go out. But this time it was different,” said Von Maul, an Army veteran staff sergeant from Cheyenne. This is the first time he’s been involved on a hunt specifically for veterans with disabilities, and he brought his two sons along for the event. By the time breakfast was over, he knew the day was worth it.

“My family always hears me talk about the bond the ‘brotherhood’ of service creates,” he said. “During breakfast both of my boys took the time to talk with other veterans to hear their stories and see that I’m not just telling wild tales. This turned out to be one of the proudest moments of my life.”

Maul and the other veterans on the hunt connected through Wyoming Hunting with Heroes, one of the nonprofit groups in the state that helps veterans with disabilities enjoy the outdoors, primarily through hunting. The program welcomes veterans with a 50 percent or more disability rating to participate in a big game hunt.

The camaraderie found during a hunt is one

**“Through these hunts, I’ve made lifelong friendships with people who understand my experiences.”**

Mandy Nelson, veteran



of the highlights of many of the veterans’ experiences. Mandy Nelson a retired staff sergeant with the Air Force and Wyoming Air National Guard traveled from Colorado to participate in her third Hunting with Heroes event because of the relationships she’s formed afield with the group in the past.

“Through these hunts I’ve made lifelong friendships with people who understand my experiences. It feels like I’m on an equal playing field again,” she said.

Dan Currah, co-founder of Wyoming Hunting with Heroes, didn’t realize at the

**Opposite page: Mandy Nelson, right, and her guide plan her route through the fields near Cheyenne.**

**Top: Von Maul, an Army veteran staff sergeant, center, said the time his sons spent with the veterans was fulfilling.**

**Above: Mandy Nelson gets a pronghorn in her sights.**

*Photos by Justin Joiner, except top photo by Sara DiRienzo*





## License Information

Game and Fish staff are available to answer questions about licenses for hunters with disabilities, the regulations behind them and the upcoming changes taking effect in January 2017. Call (307) 777-4600 to speak to a staff member, or look up Chapter 35 of Game and Fish regulations online at [wgfd.wyo.gov/regulations](http://wgfd.wyo.gov/regulations).

program's inception how impactful the experience would become.

"I think Colton [Sasser, co-founder] knew it would be a benefit to those who came to have the Wyoming hunting experience," he said. "But we didn't know how therapeutic it would be for some of the veterans. It is truly lifesaving. Some of those veterans who were near giving up have turned their lives around."

Hunting with Heroes works to diminish barriers that veterans with disabilities may experience when getting outside to go hunting. Through partnerships with landowners, the program brokers access to hunting locations, with a focus on finding places that are easy for hunters using wheelchairs or other assistive devices to get into. The organization also collaborates with businesses throughout the state for meat processing at reduced or no cost for participants.

Annually, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department helps get veterans out to hunt across the state. The department runs a license donation program through which any hunter may surrender his or her big game license (prior to the opening date of the license) and have it reissued to a veteran with a 50 percent or higher service-related disability rating, or it can be reissued to any person with a permanent disability who uses a wheelchair. To be eligible to get one of the donated licenses, these individuals must be sponsored by a nonprofit charitable organization

**"I think that we could do 200 hunts if we could get the funding for a number that large."**

**Dan Currah, Hunting with Heroes co-founder**

that provides hunting opportunities for them. Hunting with Heroes is one of these nonprofit groups. In some locations, Game and Fish employees also help organize events and volunteer as guides. Department personnel help explain the details of the new permits for hunters with disabilities, which take effect in January 2017.

This year, Hunting with Heroes took 183 veterans with disabilities on hunts in Wyoming.

Many of these hunts were on private land, guided one-on-one with volunteers. The program continues to grow each year from its origins in Casper in 2013. There are now more than 20 places that welcome veterans to hunt and Currah hopes to continue that growth by recruiting more women hunters and more ranches to hunt on in the future.

"I think that we could do 200 hunts if we could get the funding for a number that large. I know the locations could handle that number and we could find the veterans, it's just that matter of having the funds," Currah said.

Part of that expansion this year was on the Warren Livestock, Y Cross and Horse Creek Cattle Company ranches near Cheyenne. Maul and his sons stalked pronghorn after their hearty ranch breakfast. He took home two antelope, reserving the backstraps for a special Christmas dinner.

"We haven't stopped talking about the hunt," Maul later said. "My boys find every chance they can to tell their friends about the entire experience and how much fun they had watching me interact with other veterans. And they keep giving me a hard time about the three or four times I missed the doe."

—Sara DiRienzo is the public outreach specialist for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department.

**Top left: Mandy Nelson waits as a pronghorn moves into position.**

**Above: Warm weather and clear skies welcomed veterans who hunted the Warren Livestock property near Cheyenne in September.**

**Far right: Before venturing afield, the veterans plan their routes.**

**Right: The Warren Livestock ranch habitat and compelling terrain make it a great pronghorn hunting destination for veterans.**

*Photos by Justin Joiner, except top left photo by Sara DiRienzo*



