

BEYOND THE SCORE

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For those of you trying to chase as many different recognized species as possible in North America I am following up my last column and continue to break down state-by-state species and opportunities available to the hunter. I will concentrate on hunts that don't require the assistance of an outfitter or guide or purchasing a high-dollar tag.

CALIFORNIA

California, in my opinion, has horrible non-resident odds in its general draw. The state only allows one non-resident tag each for elk, antelope, and sheep. If you could predict which hunt would be drawn first, that would be the one to apply for since as soon as one non-resident is drawn, it's over for all other non-residents for that species. This doesn't necessarily mean that a non-resident will pull on that first hunt, but you can see how miniscule your chances are of drawing as a non-resident, especially if you happen to pick a tag that is further down the list. The computer sorts everyone by points, then the draw is executed for that species. You could have more points than all other resident applicants but will not be drawn if one non-resident has more points than you

once that tag quota has been met. Let's assume that hunt 300 (the lowest hunt number for elk and with very little public access, according to the regulations) is the first assigned, the Siskiyou bull hunt. Last year there were 20 tags, meaning 75 percent, or 15, go to point-holders first. That means that if a non-resident hunter has max points (maybe the applicant was a California resident with max points and then moved out of state), and is drawn, no other non-resident hunter can draw anywhere in the state. If you have max points, pick the tag you think will be drawn first and cross your fingers. If you don't have max points, you can apply for a fundraising tag where no points are considered. Figure out what you want to hunt, and put all your extra money into those chances which are just under 6 bucks a chance—or buy a landowner tag.

Now that I have told you why you will likely never draw, consider that California is the only state with tule elk, it is the No. 2 location for Roosevelt's elk entries, and while it doesn't have a ton of American elk, the ones there can get very large. The state's antelope do occasionally hit book; there are 62 in the records, though the state has never produced a 90-inch goat. California desert sheep are great as well, coming in as the No. 4 location behind Arizona, Nevada, and Old Mexico. Species to concentrate on with the draw odds in mind are bear and blacktail, whose tags are generally over the counter. California leads in blacktail entries with 753, nearly 300 ahead of the No. 2 location. The northwestern part of the

state is where the blacktails are, and there is plenty of both public and timber company lands that can be hunted. Many private ranches offer excellent quality hunts as well. In terms of bears, we have 155 entries with the No. 5 black bear of all time being from California with a score of 23-3/16. California recently banned dogs for bear hunts, so if spot-and-stalk is your thing, a few years from now California could become a top spot-and-stalk state for big bruins.

ARIZONA

You should be applying for Arizona, especially since you no longer float the tag fee if applying online. You must put up the full tag price, which is refunded if not drawn. There are only three other states in the Lower 48 (Utah, Montana, Wyoming) with a free-range bison herd, though the tag fee of over \$5,000 prevents my name from being in on that. Arizona's elk are legendary; in fact it has over twice as many 400-plus bulls in the book than the next closest state. With 57 bulls exceeding 400, if big elk are your thing... the \$160 required license to apply and the \$650 tag fee might be justified. The antelope will run you \$565; the deer tag \$315. If you don't apply online you still have to float the fee. Arizona's draw is on a unique schedule; there are spring hunts, fall hunts, and two separate deadlines for pronghorn,



Tule Elk

Location: Colusa County, CA
Hunter: Todd A. Robillard
Year: 2005
Score: 331

WORLD'S RECORD Pronghorn

Location: Coconino County, AZ
Hunter: Dylan M. Woods
Year: 2000
Score: 95





This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.

elk, and deer. The pronghorn and elk applications must be in by February, mark your calendars for next year; for deer you have until June. Arizona has a 10 percent non-resident cap on tags but only 20 percent of tags go specifically to top point-holders, meaning you have a chance for any tag your first year of applying. Arizona deer are world-class whether you want a Coues' deer or mule deer. The Kaibab Plateau is arguably the most famous big buck area in the United States, though a look at the records reveals only seven typicals and another seven non-typical from Arizona listed in the top-100 mule deer. Coues' deer is a different story. Coues' deer are only found in two U.S. states and Mexico, and Arizona is by far the highest producing. Arizona is listed as the kill location for 324 of our 556 typical Coues' entries, while New Mexico only has 34. Certain units do excel, but for the most part, apply for a later December tag and hunt the grey ghosts in the rut. On the first day of our first trip down to the southwest, my wife took an excellent buck which stretched the tape to the mid-80s. Not wanting to be outdone, I enjoyed a tag sandwich, though learned more about hunting in those five days than I did in the last 10 years. This is unique country where optics and patience is king. Hours behind high-powered optics would result in deer being spotted. We hunted public land where there were other hunters, but there were deer as well, and I would recommend everyone try this out—you may get hooked.

Arizona antelope are worth a shot as well—seven of the top-10 ranked antelope have come from Arizona, including the two current World's Records (tie).

fees, it can be a deal-breaker. The deadline this year is March 19.

If you draw an antelope tag, you are guaranteed a ranch to hunt, but the quality of the ranch is not guaranteed. Landowner tags are an option, but for deer and pronghorn you must stay on the deeded land according to the regulations, even though the landowner may lease public land for grazing. The regulations also say the landowner controls the hunting rights on this public ground.

Elk tags are a little different. In New Mexico's program, if a landowner allows access to his land, your tag may also be valid on public lands. Information can be found on the website. Don't forget that some of the tribal lands in New Mexico offer tags and don't necessarily require a guide.

New Mexico recently opened some sheep units that had been closed, so be prepared to see the sheep ranking changing over the next few years. Don't overlook New Mexico as a bear hunting location, either. While the state doesn't have any top entries, book trophies are taken, with the best being 21-15/16, taken in Rio Arriba County in 2007. If I really wanted to hunt New Mexico, I would research outfitters. They need their clients to draw so they will help with your application. I have had friends draw New Mexico elk and kill bulls unguided so it is a possibility, but in terms of draw odds and lack of points, New Mexico is toward the bottom of my priority list in application season.



Typical Coues' Whitetail
Location: Hidalgo County, NM
Hunter: Roger A. Roan
Year: 2007
Score: 114

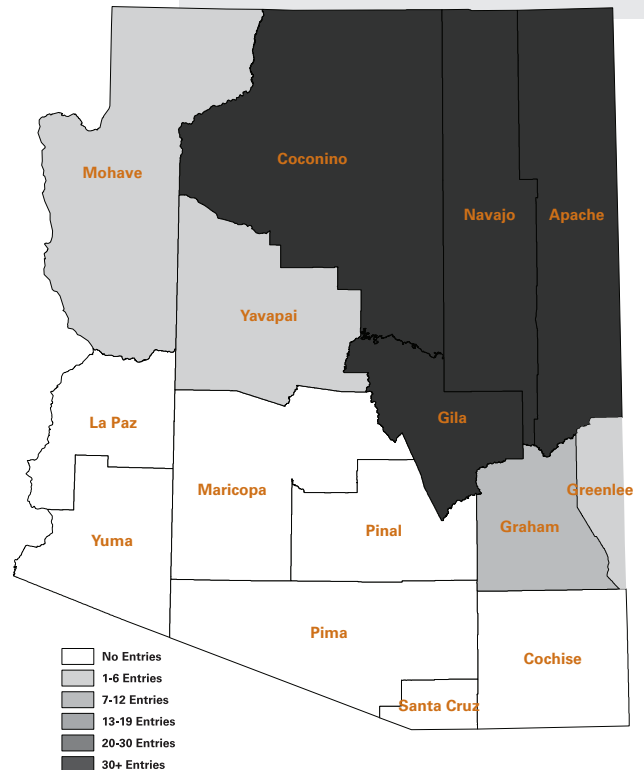
NEW MEXICO

Go guided or go home! Not really, but in terms of odds this isn't that far off. New Mexico has some great elk, antelope, and mule deer, but with the tag allocation for non-residents totaling 16 percent and only 6 percent going to unguided non-residents, your chances are slim. The state also requires you to float the tag fee at the time of application. With no point system in place, it is not impossible, but check your budget—you must buy a license, so with the state sitting on the

ARIZONA AMERICAN ELK

COUNTY	ENTRIES
Coconino	70
Apache	64
Navajo	38
Gila	37
Graham	10
Yavapai	6
Mohave	5
Greenlee	4

Note: Arizona has 15 additional entries with unknown or incomplete location data





Columbia Blacktail Deer

Location: Jackson County, OR
Hunter: Dusty S. McGorty
Year: 2011
Score: 164-1/8



Shiras' Moose

Location: Stevens County, WA
Hunter: Marc W. Babiar
Year: 2005
Score: 183-6/8

Cougar

Location: Idaho County, ID
Hunter: Daniel R. Helterline
Year: 2001
Score: 15-7/16

VERMONT, MAINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

If you want to chase all categories, Canada moose is a must and truthfully one of the easiest and cheapest draws you can apply for. The three states that offer non-resident Canada moose tags are Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire. It is under \$50 to apply for each state, unless you want to purchase numerous chances—which you can do in Maine, and you actually stand a very good chance. I have only been applying for a few years and was selected as an alternate in 2011, though the tag offered was not feasible to hunt as it was the same year as my wedding and buying our first home. In Maine you want a northern unit where harvest success is very high—90 percent for some areas. All these states have produced book bulls with Maine in the lead at 120. Maine allows residents to purchase numerous opportunities, and while the non-resident quota is in place, you can buy your way into the classification for 10 years of applications for less than most western states charge you for a license. The tags aren't cheap but far more affordable than many western elk or even some deer licenses coming in at the \$500-range.

Canada Moose

Location: Aroostook County, ME
Hunter: David Such
Year: 2011
Score: 207-1/8

For value and quality, this is the best trophy hunt you can apply for.

OREGON

I always apply for Oregon, but it is not for trophy quality. That is where I grew up, my family is still there, and I love hunting blacktails. While the trophy quality of Oregon's big game is not equal to its many neighbors, there are over-the-counter Roosevelt's and blacktail tags. And the fact that I buy a license and can apply for bighorn sheep, antelope, deer, elk, and bear for a small application fee per species is a plus. An Oregon antelope tag will take you a long time to draw, but don't be enticed by the archery tag that is guaranteed; that could be the hardest archery antelope hunt in the country. You may kill a book goat in some of the units, but for the 15-plus years it will take to build up the points for the top units, I would not recommend Oregon as a trophy antelope state. Oregon had both California and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep tags available to non-residents, but this year's regulations show that non-resident tags are only offered for California bighorns. It is a once in a lifetime tag, along with its mountain goats, which

historically have not been open to non-residents, but this year one tag will be available to an out-of-stater. Oregon has very large goats, and it was where I took my book-qualifying billy in 2008 before moving to Montana. For the extra few dollars, this is worth throwing in for. Oregon offers plenty of mule deer opportunities, though usually a 160s is a shooter on opening day in many units. The majority of the state is open to over-the-counter archery opportunities for both elk and deer. It has a deer unit that is one of the hardest tags to draw with a rifle, but a guaranteed archery tag if you put in. The catch is you have to use traditional equipment.

In terms of elk, Oregon has both American and Roosevelt's. While the occasional bull is entered from the eastern part of the state where American elk are found, low 300s is a wall hanger in most locations. Roosevelt's elk can be hunted every year in Oregon with a rifle or a bow, but there are draw and general units, so check the regulations. As logging has been greatly reduced on federal and state land because of endangered species issues, many of the historic, big-producing elk units are seeing

major declines. Your biggest concern for a west side Roosevelt's hunt with an over-the-counter archery tag is fire danger. A dry year means all the private timber companies will have their lands closed to access. Be sure to check harvest statistics; though Oregon has lots of bulls and lots of deer, it also has lots of hunters. One other interesting offering is Oregon is the only state





Bighorn Sheep

Location: Fergus County, MT

Hunter: Toni L. Sannon

Year: 2008

Score: 204-2/8

IDAHO

Idaho is a must-apply state. In terms of trophy production, it doesn't show as impressively as Colorado for mule deer. Though there are huge mule deer killed, and recent changes classifying certain units as trophy and limiting tags is starting to produce. On a fairly easy draw with only three days to hunt we saw a handful of bucks on public land without any cooperation of the weather. I didn't kill the biggest buck in the unit but still took a fine 3x4 muley with a trident front fork the last day of the hunt. A good friend drew a late rut hunt and killed a mule deer which nearly hit the 200-inch mark.

Idaho has no point system, but a unique draw system allows you to apply for moose or goat or sheep or deer, elk, and antelope (group). No shotgun approach here; pick what you want and go for it. This structure results in the highest odds of any state for a trophy species draw. While Idaho does produce the occasional book mountain goat—24 to date—and has decent sheep—52 accepted to date—it is not a “bomber” state. Though if just hunting a goat or sheep is your goal, there is no doubt this is where you should be looking.

Shiras' moose is a different story. With an impressive 209 Shiras' moose accepted, this is a top destination with great draw odds.

where a Columbia whitetail is available. The Club does not have a category as their numbers and range do not warrant one, but they can be hunted.

Oregon is not a major producer of book bears, but in some areas three bears a year is attainable with a spring and two fall opportunities available with an over-the-counter tags. Cougar tags are over-the-counter as well; the season is open year-round in most units, and it will cost you less than \$15 as a non-resident. I wouldn't plan a hunt for them but if you go for deer or elk, have a tag in your pocket. For blacktails, the tag is “western deer rifle” and if you get nasty weather at the end of the season you may get some rutting activity, and big bucks will show themselves. Your other option is late season muzzleloader or archery, which allow you to hunt in November where, if it's raining and nasty, blacktails will be out chasing does.

WASHINGTON

Washington's draw deadline is May 22. There are many similarities to Oregon in terms of general tags, late rut hunts, and plenty of opportunities, though not a ton of trophy quality in most areas for deer and elk. There are Roosevelt's and blacktails that are killed and submitted every year. I am not saying there aren't eastern units that have potential either; the state put out a 436-4/8 non-typical elk in 2008. The other things to keep an eye on: moose and sheep. While I have heard the big rams have all been killed in the state's best units, the southeastern area shows some very impressive score-at-age numbers for bighorns. While Washington only has 28 accepted sheep entries, seven of them exceed 190 inches.

We have received score charts on 69 Shiras' moose from Washington. Oddly, it is the only western state that has no huntable pronghorns. Regarding mountain goats, the state has produced 82 submissions—which, for the number of tags available, is quite impressive. The drawback is the non-refundable charge of \$110-per-species for the trophy species of moose, sheep, and goat, though you don't have to purchase the actual \$1,600 license until you are drawn. Washington does have a point system, and for me, this is a trophy-only application state. I feel the deer and elk tags are overpriced for quality, unless you want a whitetail in the northeast part of the state which is generally over-the-counter.

If I were to place a bet on the next location for a 200-inch typical whitetail to show up, it would be the area of northwestern Montana, northern Idaho, or northeastern Washington—all over-the-counter tags for the last few years.

COMBINED TYPICAL AND NON-TYPICAL MULE DEER ENTRIES IN B&C'S RECORDS PROGRAM

	1987-1992	1993-1998	1999-2004	2005-2010
Colorado	47	66	141	163
New Mexico	10	37	37	38
Wyoming	27	22	59	39
Utah	24	28	27	38
Nevada	10	16	14	30
Arizona	21	23	16	28
Idaho	49	33	44	18
Montana	11	7	13	16
Oregon	11	30	19	11
Washington	1	2	9	4
California	1	1	4	4



Desert Sheep

Location: Nye County, NV
Hunter: Joseph L. Maslach
Year: 2008
Score: 182-2/8

Big bulls are still being taken, and with a little research this could be the best Shiras' hunt out there, though again there is a drawback. For the trophy species, Idaho makes you float the fee, and it is over \$2,000. If you do the deer, elk, and antelope group, you buy a license (\$154) and pay a small application fee. You need to make sure you purchase your tag by the deadline in August if you're drawn, or they will redraw. The tags vary in cost but are comparable to most western states.

Idaho is a great elk state as well. The southeast area has some huge bulls in the desert but long odds. I have friends who have quality archery elk hunting in general units year-in and year-out. There are areas where historic populations are down, though Idaho has a tremendous hunt drawing information page that gives you harvest statistics and everything you need to cater a trip to your desire. I live fairly close to the Idaho line and apply every year, so if I don't draw I can always buy a general license for elk, whitetail, or mule deer, depending on what my friends over there have planned. Luckily I can take advantage of my license and generally can put some meat in the freezer and antlers on the wall.

MONTANA (TROPHY SPECIES)

If you apply for sheep anywhere you should apply in Montana. The state boasts

728 bighorn rams that exceed 175. If you want an opportunity at 200 inches, there is no better place right now than the Missouri River Breaks—though there is not a unit in Montana where 170 inches is not attainable. You have to float the tag fee (\$755) for this trophy species, but if a book ram is what you are after, there is no doubt this is the place to be.

Mountain goats are available, and with the Crazy Mountains unit allowing 50-plus tags each year, this state can produce some goats but trophy quality is not always the greatest. Montana has had 86 goats find their way into the records book.

Shiras' moose is tough, as only a few units are open to non-resident hunters, but at 203 entries from the Big Sky country, the potential for a trophy Shiras' is there. May 1 is your cutoff for the trophy species. Montana also has antelope available, though the deadline does not come until June. The units with higher tag numbers generally don't support much trophy quality, though 80-plus inch goats do occur, and with bonus points instead of a preference point system, this can be a good option for a decent antelope.

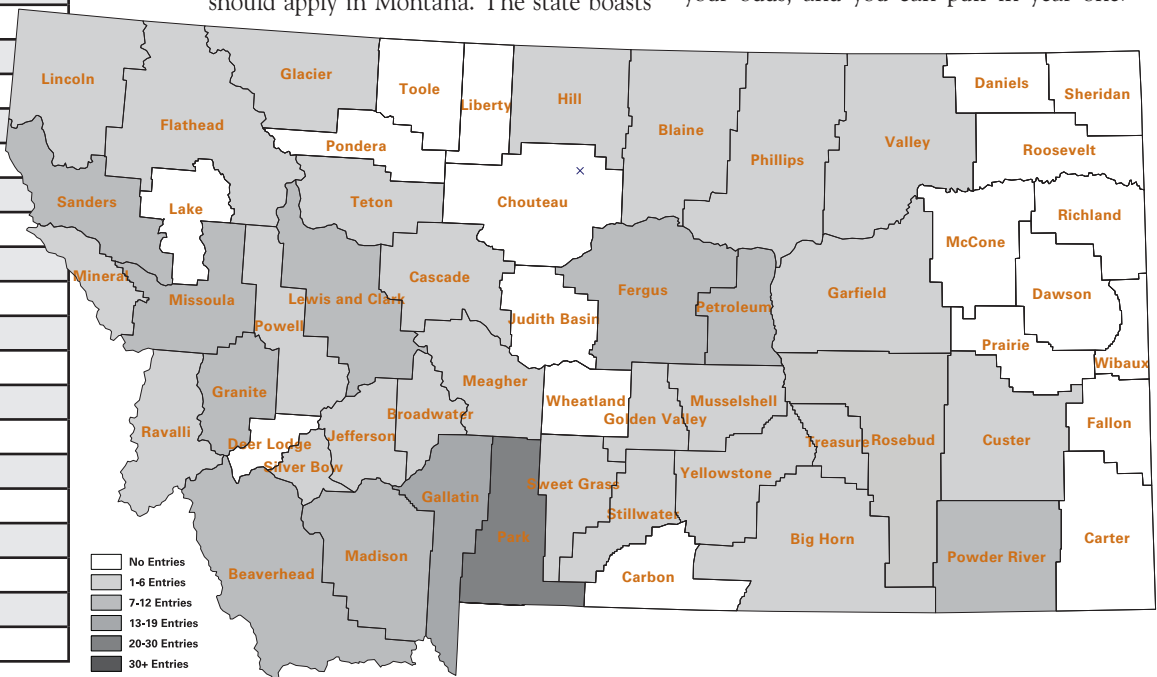
While I covered Montana's deer and elk in the last issue and the draw deadline was March 15, over the counter tags have been available all the way through the season for a Nonresident Combo License the last few years and as you can see, nearly all of Montana has put out book caliber bulls.

NEVADA

For non-residents, Nevada is the best state to apply for big game. The way this state's system works is that your bonus points square, so the more you apply, the greater your odds, and you can pull in year one.

MONTANA AMERICAN ELK

COUNTY	ENTRIES
Park	25
Gallatin	19
Beaverhead	12
Lewis and Clark	9
Madison	9
Sanders	9
Fergus	8
Granite	8
Petroleum	7
Powder River	7
Big Horn	6
Powell	6
Flathead	5
Jefferson	5
Missoula	5
Yellowstone	5
Cascade	4
Garfield	4
Teton	4
Broadwater	3
Lincoln	3
Meagher	3
Ravalli	3
Rosebud	3
Sweet Grass	3
Blaine	2
Custer	2
Glacier	2
Golden Valley	2
Hill	2
Mineral	2
Musselshell	2
Stillwater	2
Phillips	1
Silver Bow	1
Treasure	1
Valley	1



With 90 accepted elk, 122 accepted mule deer, 283 pronghorns, 20 bighorns, and 245 desert bighorns in the books, to me, it's a no brainer. If you want to hunt as many species as you can in a lifetime, especially if a budget is of concern, this is where you will chase your desert bighorn. Nevada charges you \$142 for a license plus a small application fee for each species. Don't be alarmed when it says "traditional," as most all current archery equipment is referred to in Nevada as traditional archery. The Nevada Department of Wildlife has great info about each unit, including access, on its website. Some research is needed but there is a great value-to-quality for anyone that decides to apply here. There are units of varying degrees of difficulty to draw as well as trophy quality tags, but there is a little of something for everyone. This year the deadline is in mid April.

UTAH

This is a tough one; it has very long odds, but great trophy potential. You have the potential of drawing the most challenging free-ranging bison hunt. It is Utah where the current World's Record non-typical elk was taken. The state has desert and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, Rocky Mountain goats, some of the best trophy mule deer hunting in the world, decent numbers of pronghorns, and an impressive growing population of Shiras' moose, along with lions and bears available. Give this state a long, hard look. That said, there are other options as well if the general draw scares you off. Every year at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo, the state offers up to 200 tags at \$5 each. Many of these are bear, turkey, and lion tags that really don't warrant a trip to Utah for me, but some of them are reserved for non-residents only, though you must attend the Expo to apply. This is a point state, so set your sights on a

hunt and start the process—\$80 a year plus an application fee per species doesn't sting too badly. Unfortunately, Utah offers a very high number of permits through auctions. While these funds do go to conservation, they pull from the available quota for those trying to draw. Utah's deadline is an early one—March.

COLORADO

Colorado is a straight preference-point state; if you don't have the points, you are out of luck. If you are looking for one of the top units for muleys and don't already have a handful of points, you missed the party. The state dominates the mule deer category with 706 typical entries accepted and 273 non-typical entries. These numbers are beyond impressive, and they all didn't come from top units. Colorado is on my list of places to try, but it also requires the most legwork of any location with as many units as there are, a preference-point system, and me not having much experience in the state, I am fairly blind.

If you want an elk, go to Colorado. I was looking through statistics recently, and a unit with a 63 percent chance of drawing put out an impressive success rate of nearly 30 percent with archery equipment. This is unheard of for a fairly easy-to-draw unit. Colorado also has goats, moose, and sheep in addition to some great antelope and whitetail hunting out in the flats. From what I have heard though, the eastern part of the state is a little more difficult than the mountains for access unless you are guided. Shiras' hunting is coming on strong, and the state also has desert bighorns. Colorado by

all accounts is an opportunity state with the potential of harvesting a jaw-dropper mule deer or elk—but far from guaranteed. With numerous rifle seasons, muzzleloader seasons, archery seasons, and a menu of species that rivals any other state, this is another one you should probably be in on. Start early with your legwork, though—the deadline is April 1. I intended to apply last year but pushed it too close. I didn't have time to look into what I wanted to do and didn't want to end up with a mediocre unit too early by applying before I was fully educated. You do have to float the fees though, so an elk is nearly \$600, a non-resident deer comes in the same as a pronghorn around \$365. A moose will set you back around \$2,000, which is the same as mountain goat and bighorn sheep. For some reason the desert sheep application is only \$1,300. Colorado does not accept electronic applications from non-residents for moose, sheep, or mountain goat, so all the expensive applications must be submitted by paper. The state has produced 67 book bighorns, 4 deserts, 77 Shiras' moose, and 16 book mountain goats. ■

WORLD'S RECORD

Non-Typical American Elk

Location: Piute County, UT

Hunter: Denny Austad

Year: 2008

Score: 478-5/8

Typical Mule Deer

Location: Eagle County, CO

Hunter: Mike Duplan

Year: 2006

Score: 208-1/8

