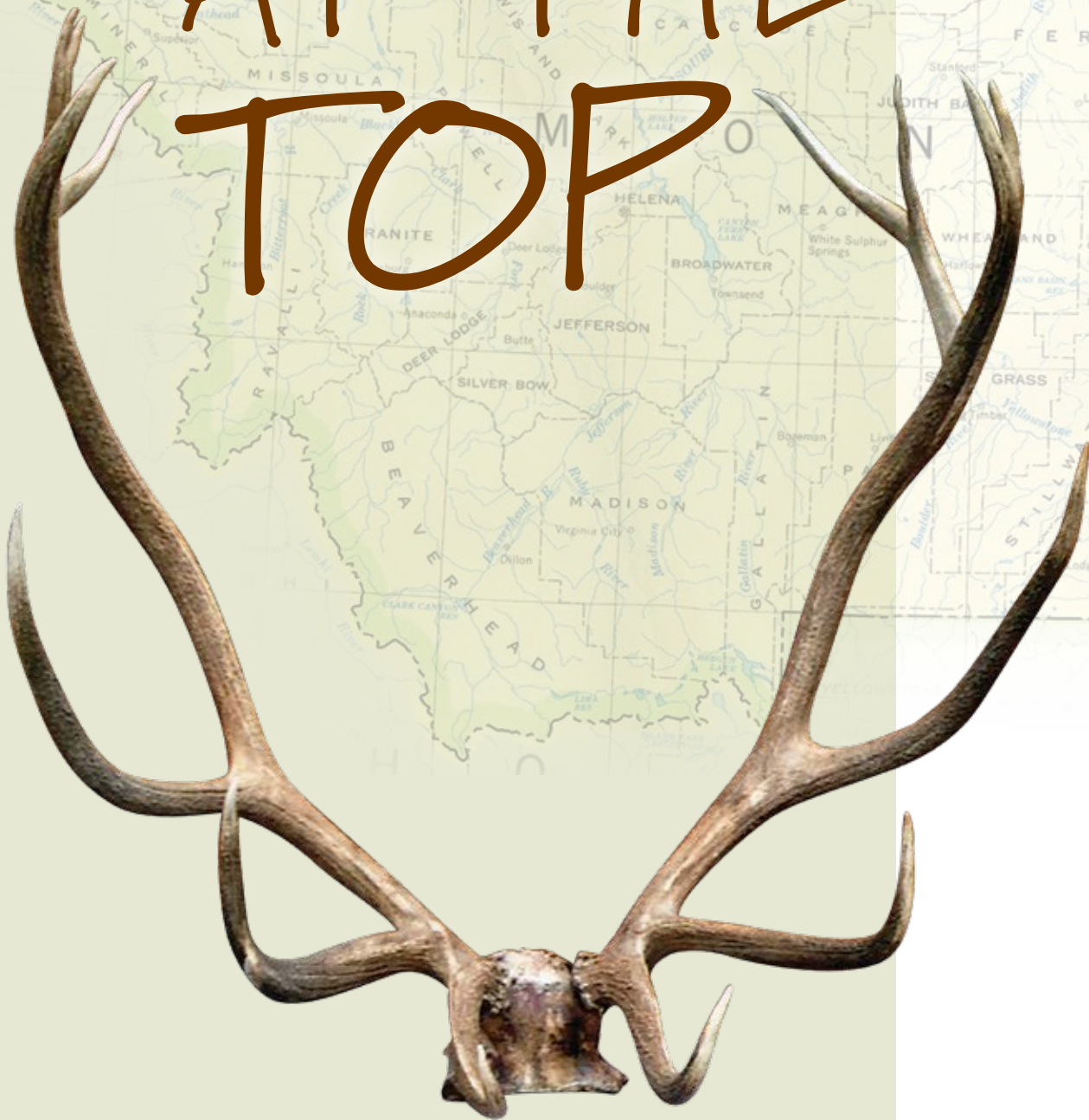


JUSTIN E. SPRING

B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER  
Director, Big Game Records

# ALONE AT THE TOP



Montana Public Land  
Typical American Elk  
Score: 430  
Montana State Record  
Fourth Largest B&C Bull  
Potential P&Y World's Record

As with probably 99 percent of the hunters in North America, Steve Felix is a hardworking 9-to-5 type of guy. He works hard both on the job and in the hills. For years he and his friends explored the state, found elk, and then faced the reality of hunting pressure on public land in terms of people and quality. Through all the days hunted and miles walked, they never wavered in their quest for the ultimate public-land elk hunting experience to which they could retreat from the realities of everyday life, if only for a few weeks each fall.

For Steve and his hunting partners, it served as their reinvigorating sanctuary to pull them through the rest of the year. It was high in the public lands of eastern Montana they found what they desired—relatively low pressure with big, open-country bulls. When the area burned a few years previous, the habitat and areas they knew became an elk magnet. Having held the tags previously, they knew right where they wanted to be when elk season rolled around.

When Steve found out he had to have shoulder-replacement surgery in May 2015 that he had been putting off, he was concerned his ability to hunt these mountains with a bow may be taken from him forever. Not willing to give up that easily and with no guarantees of a full recovery, as soon as the physical therapist told him he could start shooting again, he began the long, arduous process of rebuilding his shoulder strength. The 2015 season was a disappointment as he wasn't able to really shoot at all, let alone have the ability to make a lethal shot should a bull present an opportunity. His range and accuracy wasn't near the level of before the surgery, but slowly and surely it started to come back. When Montana's draw deadline approached in March of 2016, he still wasn't sure of his ability to archery hunt, so he and his hunting partner elected to put in for the rifle tags as a party (the state allows you to hunt the archery and rifle season if you draw the



permit in this particular unit).

When the results became available in the spring of 2016 and Steve saw that he was successful, his shooting regimen continued with even greater vigor. Hundreds of arrows refined his accuracy, but he knew that he could not take a shot over 60 yards. While the equipment had the ability, he simply did not have the muscle strength or stamina to ensure a precise shot beyond that.

As the season neared, Steve's anticipation grew. When the first weekend rolled around, his longtime hunting partner needed some help on his cabin, and the weather was just too hot to hunt. Opening weekend found the two hunters together, but not in the elk woods as they would have preferred. The next weekend Steve was able to hunt, but his partner was not, and he wasn't going to let two weeks slip by. In the midst of all this, the

relationship with his girlfriend hit a rough point and she left him the week preceding the season. So what does a hunter do at a major low point in his life? Loads up the truck and heads east to elk camp alone.

As Steve set up camp, he knew this would be a good year. The area had received above-normal rainfall and the normally brown to off-white grass of most Septembers greeted him with high green walls waving in the ever-present breezes of the mountains of eastern Montana. As with most hunters, the night prior was restless wondering where the elk would be, and he tossed with anticipation. Before daylight he was up and readying himself for the morning's solo hunt. It was well before the first rays of light illuminated the skies that Steve stood near his truck listening intently for a bull to reveal his location. He knew

of a good glassing point he intended to reach at first light and checked his watch knowing he needed to get a move on. Just as he headed out, the first bugle of the day broke the predawn silence.

As the sun warmed the eastern skies, Steve slowly worked his way along, glassing the broken timber and openings looking for elk. He could hear bulls bugling as he made his way to his desired outlook. Once there he sat down to grab a sandwich and a quick drink. Before he could take his first bite, bugles from just below him alerted him to the presence of some bulls. The morning snack quickly became an afterthought as he began cautiously working down the ridge. The bugles continued, and he didn't have to go far before he spotted a tremendous bull in some low brush raking a tree. Steve glassed the bull and instantly knew it was a shooter, but he really

didn't take the time to analyze the rack enough to realize this was what he was here for. He and his hunting partner had agreed that with the tags they had in their pocket, they would not settle for bulls any smaller than they had already taken, so the benchmark was set at a 350-class bull. This particular bull easily met the criteria—and then some—so the hunt was on.

Steve had a strong wind in his face and even though he had his elk call at the ready, the bull was in a good spot for a stalk, so alerting him to his presence with an attempt to emulate another elk did not seem the prudent choice. He dropped into some light cover and tried to close the distance to the bull. A small rise covered his approach while he crept to the concealing ridge-line and peeked over, not certain what to expect. When he found the spot the bull had been, it was vacant, so he just stayed put and waited to see what would happen. Soon the big bull and a smaller bull came into view. A small bench above them concealed from him a harem of cows that a bull of that caliber is known to have. The second, smaller bull let out a bugle, which prompted the big boy to come to full attention and he began working toward the sound of the intruder's challenge. Steve watched the posturing and body language of the big bull as he chased the intruder off to a comfortable distance but still within Steve's view. While he had no certainty that it would happen, a feeling told Steve the big bull would return to his tree, which he obviously had taken a strong inkling toward destroying.

Soon the bull began working back down towards the brush Steve had originally spotted him in. He ranged the bull 90...80...70... 64 yards, then 61. He was at Steve's threshold. He thought long



Not 100 yards from where the arrow struck the bull, the magnificent wapiti lay still. He knew it was big. Steve's emotions kicked in hard, but so did the reality of the fact that early archery season generally has higher-than-ideal temperatures. The thermometer already read over 70°F, and Steve knew this bull would take some time to process and pack out, especially by himself.

# MONTANA STATE RECORDS

## FRED C. MERCER'S 1958 MONTANA WAPITI - 419-4/8

Fred Mercer's bull elk, taken in Madison County, Montana, in 1958, still ranks No. 10 in the All-time records for typical American elk. The state of Montana lists more than 130 bulls netting over the 375 All-time minimum entry score, and Mercer's is one of only six Montana bulls scoring over 400 inches. The September-October 2012 issue of *Montana Outdoors* included the following comments about Mercer's elk.

In 1958, Fred Mercer was working on his uncle's dairy ranch just south of Twin Bridges, Montana. In late October, the two took a week off to hunt the upper Ruby River country, just as they had every year since 1946. In an article for *Outdoor Life* in 1960, Mercer wrote that he'd had a hunch he would find the bull of his dreams in the Gravelly Range, which he described as the 'rough and roadless country north of camp.' One morning at first light he took his .270-caliber rifle and headed out solo, walking through a few inches of sugar-soft snow. Soon he came across the biggest set of bull tracks he had ever seen. After following the tracks a while, Mercer figured the herd was an hour or so ahead of him. The bull, which may have sensed the hunter, circled his cows around Mercer. The herd caught his scent and took off running. Mercer wouldn't let up, however. After trailing the herd for another 12 miles or so, he changed tactics. He decided to cut the elk off when they reached a ridge at the head of an open canyon. Upon reaching the ridge top, he slowly peeked over. Not 50 yards away was the biggest bull he'd ever seen in his life, contentedly grazing broadside. Mercer's 150-grain soft-point hit the bull in the neck right below the ears. He fired once more and the hunt was over. After dressing the bull out to cool, Mercer made his way back to camp, arriving several hours after dark. For years the Mercer bull was the number two typical elk in the world.

Official Measurer's Note: The strengths of Mercer's bull's antlers include an impressive 53-inch inside spread. Main beams of 59-7/8 inches for the right antler, and 60-1/8 inches for the left, are tremendous and nearly perfectly symmetrical. Lastly, Mercer's trophy is the third largest "clean" (no non-typical points) 7x7-point frame bull in the B&C records.

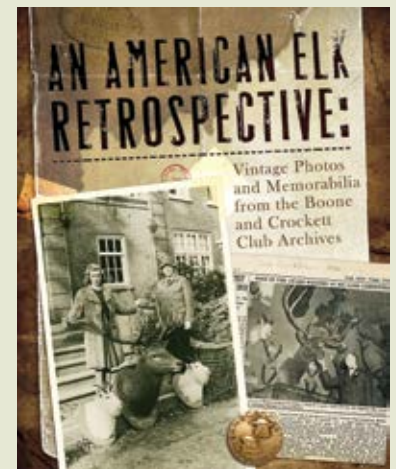
## More Elk from the Boone and Crockett Club

### AN AMERICAN ELK RETROSPECTIVE VINTAGE PHOTOS AND MEMORABILIA FROM THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

A fascinating, comprehensive look at the story of elk hunting in America from the nation's premiere big game hunting historians. After nearly a century of Records Keeping, the Boone and Crockett Club has dug deep into its records archive and produced the ultimate history book for elk hunting enthusiasts.

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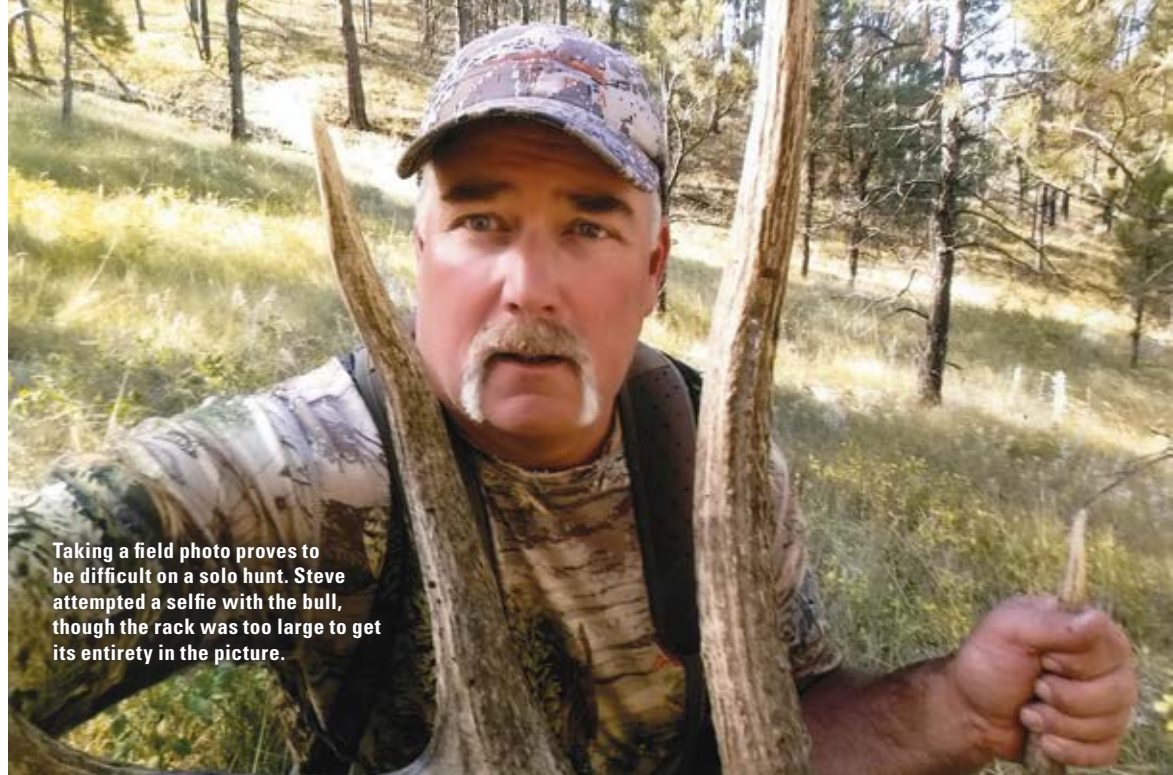


Steve remembers as a kid reading the story of the Mercer bull in an outdoor magazine. This bull held the top Montana spot since it was killed in 1958. Who would have dreamed that nearly 60 years later a hunter would still have the opportunity to take a bull in Montana exceeding that size?

and hard about his practice, his max range, all the previous weeks' emotions building, the fact he was alone in camp and miles from the truck. He drew. The bull's head was down and he was quartered away. The wind had dropped from a steady push to a light breeze. It had enough force to keep his scent at bay but not enough to affect arrow trajectory. It was now or never—10 more yards and the bull would be out of his shooting window. He drew in a deep breath, steadied his peep around his pin, found a spot on the bull and squeezed his release.

The sound of the arrow striking the bull reached Steve's ear just as the bull bolted away. It sounded hollow, and from Steve's experience, this sound meant the arrow had entered the chest cavity and pierced the lungs. His mind, on the other hand, questioned this initial assessment. Doubt started to enter that maybe the shot was a little high. After the shot, he had found the bull in his binoculars and could see the arrow penetration had been nearly complete with the majority of the arrow protruding out the other side of the bull, but it looked a bit high. The bull paused momentarily and looked back, as he turned to go Steve thought he might have stumbled, but he could not be sure. The bull disappeared, and he thought he heard a crash, but again wasn't positive. When the smaller bull bolted across the ridge right where Steve's bull had disappeared, doubt continued to seep in. Perhaps the crash was the other bull leaving his bed or just being startled by the bull Steve had arrowed.

He sat down and collected himself to wait a while before pursuing. It was now that everything started to become scrambled—the troubles at home, the surgery, the fact he had an arrow in a bull



Taking a field photo proves to be difficult on a solo hunt. Steve attempted a selfie with the bull, though the rack was too large to get its entirety in the picture.

but wasn't positive of the truthfulness of the shot. When he couldn't take it any longer, he started tracking. Fortunately, it was a short endeavor and not 100 yards from where the arrow struck the bull the magnificent wapiti lay still. Steve's emotions kicked in harder, but so did the reality of the fact that early archery season generally has higher-than-ideal temperatures. The thermometer already read over 70°F, and Steve knew this bull would take some time to process and pack out, especially by himself. He knew it was big, but with the current and oncoming heat, he tagged the bull, snapped a few photos—even attempting a selfie of himself and the bull, though the rack was too large to get its entirety in the picture. Panic began to set in about the meat spoilage in these hot temperatures, so he decided the quality photos would have to wait until the bull was processed and safely in a fridge or cooler.

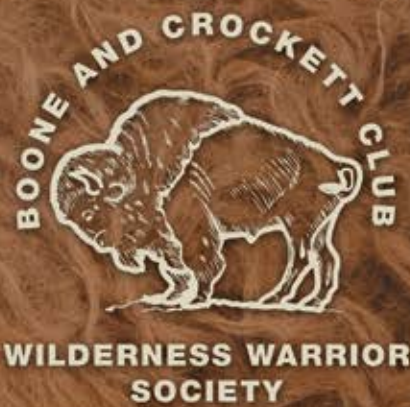
As he broke the bull down and handled the antlers, he told me he should have realized their size in relation to how high up he was holding

them as the skull lay on the ground, but still the worry of the meat spoiling kept him working quickly. He took most the day to skin, quarter and hang the bull in trees in a draw where he hoped the air circulation and cooler temperature would keep the meat from spoiling. He placed a quarter of the bull into his pack once this task was complete and headed for the truck. It was around 4 P.M. by the time he got back to his truck, and after loading the first quarter, he knew he needed ice and coolers. He jumped into his pickup and made a run to the nearest town where he bought additional coolers, ice and a few extra caping knives, just in case. He got back to camp around 7 that night, but by this point he was completely spent. He got a few hours of restless sleep and roused himself at 2:30 the next morning knowing he still had quite the task ahead of him. He got back to the bull by headlamp and was relieved that the temperature in the ravine hovered around 40 degrees. Knowing the meat was cooling well in nearly ideal temps, he caped

out the head from the skull and removed the antlers as it had become readily apparent the previous day he wasn't getting the head and hide out in one pack. Nearly the entire day was spent packing and boning out meat and getting it into the coolers.

The following day he got the bull to a taxidermist and the two finally got around to putting a rough score on the bull. As they tallied numbers, the taxidermist suggested to Steve that a local Boone and Crockett measurer be contacted as the totals he was getting were far higher than anything he had ever seen.

After the green score and official score were completed by the same measurer, the taxidermist had been correct. While the bull will be panel scored by the Pope and Young Club at their Judge's Panel in February 2017 to ascertain the potential World's Record score it will be entered at, it will most likely hold that No. 1 spot. The current Pope and Young archery World's Record falls about 17 inches below Steve's bull's entry score. The 430-point net score of this



## MEMBERS OF THE WILDERNESS WARRIOR SOCIETY

The Wilderness Warrior Society is the Club's premier major gifts society. It is named after Doug Brinkley's historic book about Theodore Roosevelt and his Crusade for America and was launched in 2011 to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Boone and Crockett Club.

With your gift of \$125,000 or more, you will be honored by being named a member of the Wilderness Warrior Society. You will be presented with your own numbered limited edition bronze of Theodore Roosevelt on horseback, a custom Hickey Freeman Blazer, as well as other gifts to recognize and honor you for your contribution. The \$125,000 donation can be paid with a \$25,000 current contribution and the balance payable over a maximum of 4 years.

Funds raised from Wilderness Warrior contributions are placed in the Boone and Crockett Club Foundation endowment where the principal remains intact, and the annual interest income generated provides permanent funding for vital conservation programs.

There are now twenty-five members of the Society. This translates to more than \$3 million for the endowment and has been a major portion of the growth of these funds. It has been a huge success by any measure.

Please join us in this grand effort. Contact the Boone and Crockett Club today to find out how you can become a member of the Wilderness Warrior Society.

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**Contact Terrell McCombs at  
210/818-8363 for more details.**

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**2016 Annual Meeting,  
Tucson, Arizona**

Steve Felix with Official Measurer Fred King, who confirmed the final score of the bull. The bull will be panel scored by the Pope and Young Club at their Judge's Panel in February 2017 to ascertain the potential World's Record score it will be entered at, it will most likely hold that No. 1 spot. Far Right: Steve and his state record bull made headlines in the B&C headquarters hometown of Missoula, Montana. Steve visited the headquarters to be interviewed by Justin Spring for this story.



bull currently places it No. 4 in Boone and Crockett's All-time records for typical elk. It is the largest typical bull we have seen that has been killed since 1968, and the largest typical or non-typical elk ever killed in the state on Montana.

While Steve's bull made the rounds and reached nearly 1.25 million people from B&C's Facebook post, he was adamant that we keep the location as secret as we could. Some speculated that was because something was suspicious, but in actuality there was still another tag to be filled. They had put in as a party and Steve's hunting companion still had the archery and rifle season to fill his tag. It was important to Steve that his longtime hunting partner had an opportunity as he did, before worrying about telling his story.

While this story and bull is of epic proportions and usually would be found on the front page of one of the more popular hunting magazines, Steve knows the conservation side of hunting just as much as, if not more than, the trophy hunting side. As he relayed this story to me, Steve told me of growing up in Minnesota and reading the story of the Mercer bull in an outdoor magazine. This bull held the top Montana spot since it was

killed in 1958. Who would have dreamed that nearly 60 years later a hunter would still have the opportunity to take a bull in Montana exceeding that size? The opportunity to see and hunt wildlife such as this still exists, thanks to the wildlife conservation efforts of such organizations as the Boone and Crockett Club, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Pope and Young Club. And because Steve had the opportunity to archery hunt such a tremendous bull, Steve decided all three organizations would get the rights to the story in hopes of spreading the message of the work done for wildlife on behalf of all hunters.

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation is planning a story to run in *Bugle* magazine's special archery issue in July/August 2017. Pope and Young will be featuring the bull and the story at their biennial convention in St. Louis, Missouri, April 5-8, 2017. And while most of us are hunters ourselves, I couldn't be happier that someone like Steve Felix got the opportunity to be the one smiling behind this bull at the conclusion of a hunt, even if it was only part of the rack in the picture as the bull was just too dang big to be in the selfie. ■

## POPE & YOUNG CLUB: ETHICS AND WILDLIFE STEWARDSHIP



**Founded in 1961, the Pope and Young Club was established as club with which bowhunters could identify themselves. The founder was a long time admirer of sportsman-conservationist Teddy Roosevelt, knew of the role played by the former President in founding the Boone and Crockett Club and the respected position that club held in the eyes of the hunting community. Today the Boone and Crockett Club and Pope and Young Club work together to conserve our wildlife and habitat, protect hunting's heritage, and create a better image for the sport through the use of high standards and a fair-chase hunting philosophy**

Few sporting traditions can match the challenge and reward found in bowhunting big game, especially for native deer and elk species. These elusive, wary ungulates provide high levels of adventure to the committed archer who appreciates their environment and honors their existence. True success comes to the hunter who not only harvests the animal cleanly, but pursues the trophy using the highest means of ethical, sportsmanlike conduct.

The Pope and Young Club (P&Y) is committed to such principles, as well as helping in the preservation of bowhunting and wildlife, so that every generation may experience a chance to enjoy this amazing privilege.

Every time a big buck or bull is harvested, it represents a milestone achievement for both the hunter and the sport. Recording this event is paramount.

This is where the Pope and Young Club's records book is vital. Records keeping does create excitement and friendly competition among hunters, but the real essence is found in honoring the animal's exceptional size and collecting data that assists in effective game management. Each listing becomes a part of bowhunting history by retaining trophy size, harvest date, time, animals sighted, and various other important data points that can be utilized to track certain health and hunting trends. This can later be used for research, comparison, and decision making.

Join every conservation-minded bowhunter out there who wants to make a difference and give back to the sport. Become a member and supporter of the Pope and Young Club today.

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