

Hunter going for the record book

Getting ram tag took 48 years for Grant County man

By **RICHARD HANNERS**
EO Media Group

Walt Kight has been hunting since he was a child, and he's long had a special interest in sheep. He now can claim bagging three of the four sheep subspecies in the North American Wild Sheep Grand Slam and possibly a new state record for California bighorn sheep.

Kight moved to Grant County in 1972 after serving in the Marines. He typically hunts elk, deer, antelope and upland birds, but he's traveled to Alaska five times for hunts, four of them without guides. He's also worked for a British Columbia outfitter as a guide for elk hunters and hunted moose in British Columbia.

After leaving the Marines, Kight worked nine years for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife running a fish-screening crew. During that time, he talked his way onto a sheep-trapping crew, netting sheep on the ground or from a helicopter. He left ODFW and went to work for a private contractor helicopter-netting sheep across the Northern Rockies.

Grand slam

There are six subspecies of wild sheep in North America – Dall, stone, Fannin, Rocky Mountain, California and desert. Some hunting organizations only recognize four subspecies, so a hunter only needs to bag four to qualify for the grand slam. It's considered the most challenging grand slam for hunting.

Kight bagged a Dall sheep in Alaska and a stone sheep in British Columbia. He doesn't expect to bag a desert sheep, which are found in Mexico, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, because of the limited lottery chances, so he may never complete the grand slam recognized by the Wild Sheep Foundation.

Kight knew from his experience transplanting sheep around Oregon there were an abundant number of California sheep in Oregon. The current state record holder shot a California sheep in the Catlow Rim district near the Steen Mountains south of Grant County in 1997.

But getting a tag for a sheep in Oregon is not easy. Kight applied



Contributed photo

Walt Kight of John Day shot this bighorn sheep Nov. 10, opening day of the East John Day River hunt, after 48 years of applying for a tag. The ram is the pending state record with a green score of 185 1/8.

for a tag every year for 48 years. Unlike other hunts in Oregon, there are no preference points awarded to hunters who don't get a tag, so the years piled on.

Finally Kight got his tag. It was for the third hunting season on the east side of the John Day River canyon. The district extends from Spray north to McDonald Ferry. Kight estimated 600 sheep live in the canyon, and each season allowed three animals to be harvested.

River canyon

Much of the district is Bureau of Land Management land, but

Kight had permission to hunt on some private property, where he also camped. The 56,763-acre Stubblefield fire had burned in the area in August, so that limited some of the hunting area and raised the possibility sheep might move out of their normal habitat, Kight said.

The third hunting season kicked off on Nov. 10, but Kight wanted to begin scouting weeks in advance. Low streamflow prevented him from rafting the river until late October. He was joined by his wife Kathy on the float from Thirtymile Creek to the Cottonwood Bridge.

He spotted the ram he wanted 10 days ahead of the hunt. Not only did it have a large set of horns, but the ram stood out because its horns were chipped from fighting other rams. He nicknamed the ram Chiphorn.

Kight tracked the ram for the next 10 days, occasionally losing sight of the sheep and then finding him again on the talus slopes dotted with boulders in a side canyon. He said he never saw any other hunters during the whole time.

His hunting crew showed up the night before the hunt. They included his longtime hunting

friend Carl Stout, Kight's step-brother Chris Griffin, Griffin's son David Griffin, David's fiancée Nicole Sitton and David's friend Jimmy Hurley. Their job was to help out with the scouting and packing out the animal after the kill, but Kight had already done the necessary scouting.

The hunt

Opening day for the season began with a hiccup – Chiphorn couldn't be found. Then Kight located a group of sheep about 800 yards away and saw Chiphorn join them. Kight, David and Nicole moved within 600 yards of the group. They changed positions several times and then crawled to within about 320 yards to take the shot. All told, several hours passed between spotting Chiphorn and the kill, including half an hour of crawling, Kight said.

Kight used a custom-made 7 mm magnum rifle made by Benchmark Barrels of Arlington and Oregonsmithing of Pendleton with a Leopold VX-6 scope. The 162-grain Hornady ELD-X bullets were handloaded by Stout, Kight said. The setup provided a flat trajectory 3,000 feet per second capability.

Kight said he's mostly a bow-hunter these days, and so he doesn't see as much time at the target range as he used to, but all those years of hunting paid off. It was afternoon when he made the kill and dark when he hauled the 55-pound head and cape back to camp.

The hunting crew scored the ram at their camp, and Kight knew it was "knocking on the door for a new state record." Later at home in John Day, a local Boone and Crockett representative and an ODFW official scored the ram at 185 2/8 with 40-inch curl horns. That's a green score and is still pending – the horns must go through a 60-day drying period, Kight said.

Scoring by the Boone and Crockett Club includes tip to tip spread, length of horn, circumference at the base and circumference of the horns. Age can be determined by counting rings on the horns, starting from the tip. ODFW personnel estimated the ram's age at 11½ to 12 years old.

Kight said he plans to have the head and cape put on a pedestal mount by Merle Rempel in Vale, the same taxidermist who is remounting an antelope he shot in 1999. That was a No. 2 record holder, he said.



Ellen Morris Bishop/Chieftain

Montana Musher Brett Bruggeman starts of the 2017 Eagle Cap Extreme.

Eagle Cap Extreme joins Iditarod dog race series

EO Media Group

Wallowa County's Eagle Cap Extreme Sled Dog Race Jan. 23-26, 2019, is planning to join with two other Iditarod qualifying races in Idaho and Montana to offer the Rocky Mountain Challenge Cup.

"This means that we are recognized as a truly premier event," said race president Randy Greenshields. "It's really a feather in our cap."

The Rocky Mountain Challenge Cup will award mushers who place in races in each state. There are several Iditarod qualifiers. Exactly how the various races and distances will be ranked is still under discussion.

The Eagle Cap Extreme is the first race of the trio of races. The Eagle Cap Extreme 200-mile race is the Iditarod and Yukon Quest Qualifier. The Idaho Sled Dog Challenge, Jan. 29 to Feb. 2, includes both 150-mile and 300-mile Iditarod qualifiers. The race is held outside of McCall, Idaho.

Montana's Race to the Sky, Feb. 9-13, is the last of the three and is run east of Helena. The Montana Race includes 100-mile and 300-mile Iditarod qualifiers.

The Eagle Cap Extreme is still looking for volunteers to fill several important roles for the 2019 race. They include two cooks for the Ollokot checkpoint, several volunteers to staff the Salt Creek Summit checkpoint and a few people who are familiar with the race to help answer questions from the public and assist with educational programs at Race Central in the Joseph Community Center.

The race also needs one or two snow machines to transport dropped dogs (sore or tired dogs who are left at checkpoints) and carry supplies.

Those interested can sign up at eaglecapextreme.com, or contact Julian Pridmore-Brown at ecxops@eaglecapextreme.com or call 503-709-9109.

‘We can get our hands dirty’

Women who hunt on the rise

By **JENNA MILLER**
The Salisbury Daily Times

MARDELA SPRINGS, Md. — Butchering a deer isn't for the squeamish, but in the glancing light of an empty barn in Mardela Springs, 25-year-old Nettie Stewart tackles her first cut with quiet focus.

"You've got to keep the hair away from the meat," veteran hunter Maribeth Kulynycz advises. "It's a lot harder if you have to get it off later."

The two women carefully work their way around the buck that hangs suspended from the ceiling, slicing the skin off as they go.

Standing by with helpful tips is Kulynycz's brother, Luke, who they refer to as the expert butcher.

Though they tackle the task together, the meat belongs to Stewart. It's her first deer and she's beyond excited to recall the hunt.

"I can't even explain it," she said. "It was definitely one of the best days of my life."

Stewart is one of a growing number of women across the country who have taken up hunting.

In Maryland, hunting and who does it has changed rapidly over the past several years.

"We're seeing numbers of women hunters grow and grow," said Karina Stonesifer, associate director of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. "It



Jenna Miller/The Daily Times via AP

Nettie Stewart butchers her first deer in Mardela Springs, Maryland on Tuesday, Nov 6.

has really taken off."

In 2013, the total number of licensed female hunters was 5,421, according to numbers provided by the agency. In 2018, that number had jumped up to 7,251.

Women said while they once viewed hunting as a sport for "older men," representations of women from hunting shows to instructional programs have changed the landscape.

Stonesifer coordinates the Department of Natural Resources Outdoors-Woman, which provides guidance in skills like hunting, fishing and camping.

Demand for these types of workshops is sky high, Stonesifer said, and they fill up as quickly as the department can open more.

"It is a safe place where women can come and learn

and they love it," she said.

Stewart and Kulynycz met in one of these programs, a mentored deer hunt where the two bonded over their shared love of the outdoors.

Kulynycz, a Princess Anne native, has been exploring the woods since before she could walk and took her first deer at age 9.

"Ever since I was a kid they had to drag me indoors kicking and screaming at night," said the 32-year-old Kulynycz.

Still, it hasn't always been easy for her to fit into the male-dominated hunting community.

She remembers feeling boys were jealous of her experiences as a kid. When she got older, many men were welcoming but some were hesitant to take her hunting advice, despite two decades of experience.

"I definitely have felt the stigmas over the years," said Kulynycz. "I think we do have to work harder to earn our place and to earn the respect among other hunters."

An hour north in Millsboro, Delaware, physical therapy assistant Stacie Street has felt the same pressure.

She got hooked on the sport 10 years ago.

"I just fell in love with it," she said. "Your adrenaline is just rushing and that's a feeling you don't know it until you feel it."

At that time, there were less women in the hunting community. She said men were "shocked" to see her hunting and would question whether she could handle the physical demands of gutting and hauling her meat.

It wasn't just in the field. Street's been the president of Lower Delaware's National Wild Turkey Federation chapter for the past four years.

"When I first took over I could kind of see the hesitancy of some of the guys asking me questions regarding turkeys, regarding hunting, regarding even something as small as the banquet," she said.

Now, years later, she feels she has gained the respect of her male peers and believes men are becoming more accepting as increasing numbers of women get out into the woods.