



Women

WYOMING

Wyoming was the first state in the nation to allow women to vote, so it is only fitting that the Cowboy State also hosted the first women's-only antelope hunt in the nation last year.

The Wyoming Women's Foundation founded the hunt to promote camaraderie and mentorship through hunting, as well as to raise awareness about the economic self-sufficiency of women. The hunt, only open to women, was held over two days in October 2013 at the Ranch at Ucross in northeastern Wyoming. Hunters came from across Wyoming and the nation to participate, including prominent leaders like Wyoming Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kite, who helped found the hunt. Special guests included Julie Golob, captain of Smith & Wesson's highly successful shooting team, and outdoor writer Jim Zumbo.

First of its kind

Developing a women's-only hunt stemmed from a conversation between Kite of Jackson, Wyoming, and her sister-in-law Karey Stebner of Rawlins, Wyoming, while out hunting antelope together in the Red Desert. The two experienced hunters wanted to find a way to encourage more women to hunt.

Kite shared her idea with friends Lynne Boomgaarden, former director of Wyoming Office of State Lands and Investments, and Donna Wichers, senior vice president, Americas for Uranium One. They approached the Wyoming Women's Foundation, which supports efforts to help women become financially self-sufficient, to organize the event. The foundation agreed to host the hunt, recognizing that through hunting, women could feed their families and put free-range, organic meat on the table.

The idea further resonated with corporate sponsors and individuals across the nation. Strong support also came from the hunting industry and conservation groups, including Boone and Crockett Club, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Smith and Wesson, Remington, Safari Club International, Sportsman's Warehouse, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), and Wyoming Wildlife Federation. Because of the generous donations, the hunt was able to offer 11 scholarships, and recipients included several veterans.

The Wyoming GFD helped participants focus on hunting ethics and safety. On the first afternoon of the hunt, GFD employees reviewed hunting safety and regulations with the hunters, followed by a session with experts at the nearby range on how to properly sight-in their rifles.

In addition to its sponsorship, the Boone and Crockett Club stepped forward to help develop an awards structure to adhere to the core principles of conservation and hunting ethics. Awards included the Theodore Roosevelt award, which was sponsored by Boone and Crockett Club; the



On the first afternoon of the hunt, Wyoming Game and Fish Department employees reviewed hunting safety and regulations with the hunters, followed by a session with experts at the nearby range on how to properly sight-in their rifles.



Super Stalker award for taking an animal at the closest distance; Annie Oakley award for those hunters who take their antelope with one shot; the Diana award for all new successful hunters; and the Winning Team award for the corporate team with the closest average shot distance and all team members harvesting an animal.

Achieving the Super Stalker award, Danielle Sanville of South-ampton, Massachusetts, had the closest distance at 45.9 yards. The Annie Oakley award went to the 28 women who took their antelope with one shot. Seven women harvested an animal for the first time and received the Diana award.

The Smith & Wesson team received the winning team award. Team members that joined Sanville were Julie Golob of Glasgow, Montana, who shot at 165 yards; Laurel Smith of Broad Brook, Connecticut, who shot at 111 yards.

Persistence pays off

Kristy Scott of Corning, California, received the Theodore Roosevelt award for her fortitude to keep trying and maintaining a positive outlook regardless of the challenges. Named after the Club's founder and voted on by the guides, this award celebrates the type of personal character Roosevelt held in the highest regard—an adventurous spirit, determination, self-reliance, and the need to give back more than that taken. It represented all he believed that defined what was inside every true sportsman and sportswoman.

Although Scott never had won anything substantial beyond a movie ticket, she had a good feeling after submitting her essay for a scholarship to participate in the hunt last year. Her essay caught the attention of the hunt organizer, the Wyoming Women's Foundation. Scott, a single mother of three daughters, was new to hunting and wanted to teach her 7-year-old daughter how to hunt. Despite her old truck breaking down and having to replace the clutch en route to the hunt from California, Scott had the tenacity and determination to make her trip a success from the start. "I have hunted for two years but never shot an animal before this hunt," she said.

Ready at 5 a.m. on the first day of the hunt, Scott and the other 33 hunters opened their doors to a wet, fall blizzard, rare for even Wyoming at that time of the year. Heavy snow blanketed the ground, closing roads, snapping tree boughs and knocking out electricity.

"I was ready to go, whether there was snow or not. I wanted just



TOP INSET: Wyoming Supreme Court Chief Justice Marilyn Kite, who helped found the hunt after a

conversation between her and her sister-in-law Karey Stebner. **MIDDLE INSET:** To encourage mentorship, more experienced hunters were often paired with women less experienced. Kristy Scott was paired with Stebner, who shared hunting stories and advice while they tried to find antelope amidst the almost white-out conditions. **BOTTOM INSET:** Outfitter Eric Wilhelm and Kite coached Kristy Scott how to field dress the animal on the back of a ranch truck.



Blue sky and the sun welcomed the hunters on the second day when the remaining 21 hunters harvested their animals. The hunt raised more than \$70,000 for the Wyoming Women's Foundation to improve the economic self-sufficiency of women in the state.

to go," says Scott. But outfitter Eric Wilhelm delayed the hunt for a few hours for safety. The delay disappointed the hunters; some milled around in their camo at the ranch dining room swapping stories, while others trudged through the snow back to their rooms. The guides, all male except one, joked that men would be bellied up to the ranch bar by then, but not the women. With generators running, the call came at 9:30 a.m. that the hunt was a go, said Scott, who eagerly headed to her guide's truck.

To encourage mentorship, more experienced hunters were often paired with women less experienced. Scott was paired with Stebner, who shared hunting stories and advice while they tried to find antelope amidst the almost white-out conditions.

Spotting almost faint ghostlike outlines of antelope, Scott and her guide hiked up the hill. The hard wind blasted the falling snow, which felt like sand on their faces. "The wind [was] blowing so hard to the side that I couldn't keep my rifle still on the shooting stick," Scott said. "The rifle just kept swingin' back and forth on that stick. I didn't even want take a shot until I knew that I could have a kill."

The team moved farther down the road toward six antelope that had nestled down. The hunters drove up over a little hill, got out and sneaked back around to about 130 yards away from the animals. "We had the wind at our back at this time, so it was a lot nicer. Then my guide stood behind me, giving me some coaching lessons and blocking the wind, which helped quite a bit."

Scott took aim but missed with her first shot. The antelope stayed, not hearing the shot over the wind. The team waited as

Kristy Scott received the Theodore Roosevelt award for her fortitude to keep trying and maintaining a positive outlook regardless of the challenges. Scott, a single mother of three daughters, was new to hunting and wants to teach her 7-year-old daughter how to hunt.



Scott battled seeing through layers of snow speckles on her eye glasses and her scope. She remembers thinking, "I don't know if I [can] do this."

To top it off, she couldn't use her rifle, due to snow in the end of her barrel. Luckily, Kite, who was nearby, stepped in and lent her rifle.

"There are not a lot of people that would say, 'here take my gun and get your animal,'" Scott said, much less a Wyoming Supreme Court chief justice. More than that, Scott was impressed that the other hunters, all experienced, had agreed to wait and let Scott get the first shot. "They were willing for me to get prepared, get in there, and let me have that first kill."

Eventually, an antelope stood up. Scott settled down with her knees in the snow, and, seeing the antelope in her crosshairs, held her breath. "That's what sticks out in my mind the most is that breath in, pulling that trigger, and then seeing that antelope just fall," Scott recalled.

When the rest of the antelope did not move, Kite crept to 60 yards away to successfully take her shot. The rest of the antelope scattered. Socked in by the blizzard, the hunters decided to load the animals up and field dress them at the ranch. Wilhelm coached Scott how to field dress the animal herself on the back of his ranch truck. "It was not hard at all, so I did it," Scott explained.

A Success

Despite the blizzard conditions, 11 hunters were successful filling their tags that first day. Blue sky and the sun welcomed the hunters on the second day when the remaining 21 hunters harvested their animals.

The hunt raised more than \$70,000 for the Wyoming Women's Foundation's efforts to improve the economic self-sufficiency of women in the state, and the foundation has signed on to continue the event. Registration and sponsorship opportunities have opened for its 2014 hunt, which is set for Oct. 9-12 in northeastern Wyoming.

Glad that she came, Scott says she learned a lot. "I enjoy the sport—the hunting, the stalking, and the tracking. I just feel like I'm going to be a hunter for a long time. I think the conditions were some of the worst conditions I probably could ever hunt in, and being as that I made my first kill, that makes me pretty confident that I will do better in the future."

Scott also plans on passing the tradition to her daughters, especially her 7-year-old. "She wants to hunt and she's already showed interest, and I would like to be able to teach her." ■

