

Make sure the rig is ready



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Getting ready for a big game hunt, especially if you are going on a self-hunt, without an outfitter, can be a monumental task. Rifles need to be checked over and sighted in, clothes readied, tents, lanterns, and cook gear needs to be packed. Then there is the trip to the grocery store where you buy enough food to outfit a platoon of hungry Marines and worry that you did not bring enough. You probably spent a great amount of time studying maps, going over regulations, and purchasing the necessary licenses. Hopefully, you spent some time getting into shape for climbing the mountains. The one thing most often overlooked is the hunting rig, the four-wheel chariot to get you there and back, haul all your stuff, tow the ATV on a trailer, and sometimes serve as a hunting vehicle on the trip. The last thing you need is a vehicle breakdown on the road, or anytime on the trip for that matter. As old Murph, of Murphy's

Law Fame will gladly tell you, the breakdown is going to happen at the worst time, in the remotest place possible. Murph just loves unprepared hunting rigs. Our search and rescue team comes to the aid of people with a vehicle stuck or stranded about a dozen times a year. It is always the same thing, snow and the idea that maybe the road will get better the higher up we go. It won't. Most of the people we assist don't have the proper equipment. For instance, 4WD vehicle and tire chains for all four wheels. All-wheel drive in the fancy SUVs will not cut it. And remember, SAR will rescue and assist people, they will not pull vehicles out. The bill from an offroad tow company will be in the thousands of dollars, so it is a better idea to make sure you are prepared. Start with the obvious things, like your car battery. I purchase new batteries for my truck every two years, regardless of the length of the warranty. Batteries never die in town or in your garage, they fail when you



Some of our missions to rescue people stranded in the backcountry get pretty involved and time consuming. Make sure your rig is ready before you go, and remember, trails get pretty tough in the winter. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

park your truck up in the mountains, a 120 miles northwest of nowhere. All that warranty is good for up there is kindling for your survival fire. Buy new and get good quality batteries with lots of cold cranking amps. It does not hurt to bring along one of those portable jumper packs. The extra power will jump an ATV if needed, and it is good insurance for your rig battery. Many of these power packs also have to ability to charge cell phones, so it makes sense to have it along. Be sure to keep up on the regular maintenance of your vehicle. We don't do tune-ups with the frequency of cars from years gone by. This does not mean you should forget about checking plugs, fuel filters and wires. Winter is a good time

to put on some new wiper blades. Fill up your coolant reservoir and top off the windshield cleaning fluid with the winter formula that won't freeze in cold temps. Condition, inflation, and type of tires should be obvious, and don't forget to check the spare. I remember my grandfather always having to put on his snow tires in the fall. He was usually one snowstorm late. Highway tread or standard radials are fine for around town, but not when you head into the backcountry. Start out with good snow tread tires and be sure they are properly inflated. Bring along a tire inflator and a plug kit in case you get a nail on the way. It is not like there are many tire shops in the woods. As stated before, a good set of chains is a must, especially if you get off the beaten paths. Make sure the chains fit your tires. I carried a set around for two years that were too small for my tires. I got a larger set of tires and never thought to check the chains. Be sure yours are in good condition, have tighteners and spare links, and are the right size for your car. I carry several sets of tighteners to keep the chains snug and not rattling around. Colorado has a traction

law. When weather conditions warrant, Colorado Division of Transportation (CDOT) implements the Passenger Vehicle Traction and Chain Laws. CDOT can implement the law on any state highway. During a Traction Law, all motorists are required to have either:

1. 4WD or AWD vehicle and 3/16" tread depth
2. Tires with a mud and snow designation (M+S icon) and 3/16" tread depth
3. Winter tires (mountain-snowflake icon) and 3/16" tread depth
4. Tires with an all-weather rating by the manufacturer and 3/16" tread depth
5. Chains or an approved alternative traction device

I mention this for the folks who may plan on just using their vehicle to get them and their equipment to the hunting area because they plan on using an ATV or going on foot, figuring they don't need chains.

You will probably have plenty of extra warm clothes, boots, shovel, and lots of food, so having a pack in the rig with emergency supplies is probably not necessary. For those of you hunting with an outfitter and using the vehicle as transportation to and from the hunting camp, you should probably check through some emergency rations and snacks. Time to throw out those melted candy bars, expired snack bars, and a few other items I am no longer able to identify. I once found a sandwich that had evolved into an intelligent life form. The "hybrid sandwich" was grazing on an outdated power bar. I threw the whole pack away on that one. With the many big seasons Colorado has to offer, many folks will hunt multiple species and different seasons. So, if you will excuse me, I have to get back to my own preparations. Opening day is closing in. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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GMUG National Forests prescribed burns planned

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests are planning prescribed fires during the fall, winter and spring seasons. Forest Service officials estimate this work may continue through spring 2027 as conditions allow. Each prescribed fire start date will differ based on several factors, such as fuels moisture levels and weather.

Fire managers use these prescribed fires to remove excess vegetation, reduce wildfire risk, improve habitat, enhance watershed health and restore fire-adapted ecosystems.

Prescribed fires are planned for the following areas:

(List Format: Rx Fire Name – Closest City & State – Closest Location Description or Landmark – Size)

Ouray Ranger District

- 25 Mesa – Montrose County, Colo. – Northeast of Nucla, Colo., near National Forest System Road (NFSR) 503 – 1,300 acres
- Baldy Mountain – Ouray County, Colo. – Southeast of Ridgway, Colo., on County Road 12 – 862 acres

Norwood Ranger District

- Sanborn 8A – Montrose County, Colo. – Northeast of Norwood, Colo., near NFSR 530 – 171 acres
- Turkey Plot – Montrose County, Colo. – Northeast of Norwood, Colo., near NFSR 530 – 450 acres

Gunnison Ranger District

- Willow Rx – Gunnison County, Colo. – Northwest of Gunnison, Colo., near NFSR 609 – 1,188 acres
- West Elk Rx – Gunnison County, Colo. – Northwest of Gunnison, Colo., near NFSR 724 – 665 acres

Please do not report these fires, as firefighters will remain on scene throughout ignitions and patrol afterwards. Updates on these prescribed fires will be posted on our website's alerts page and InciWeb.

While smoke may be visible, the Forest Service works closely with air quality specialists and closely monitors smoke during prescribed fires. Prescribed fires are timed for best smoke management. Visit <https://fire.airnow.gov/> for current air quality information.

The Forest Service will evaluate conditions in the days and hours before ignition. If conditions are not favorable, planned prescribed fire activities may be postponed or canceled.