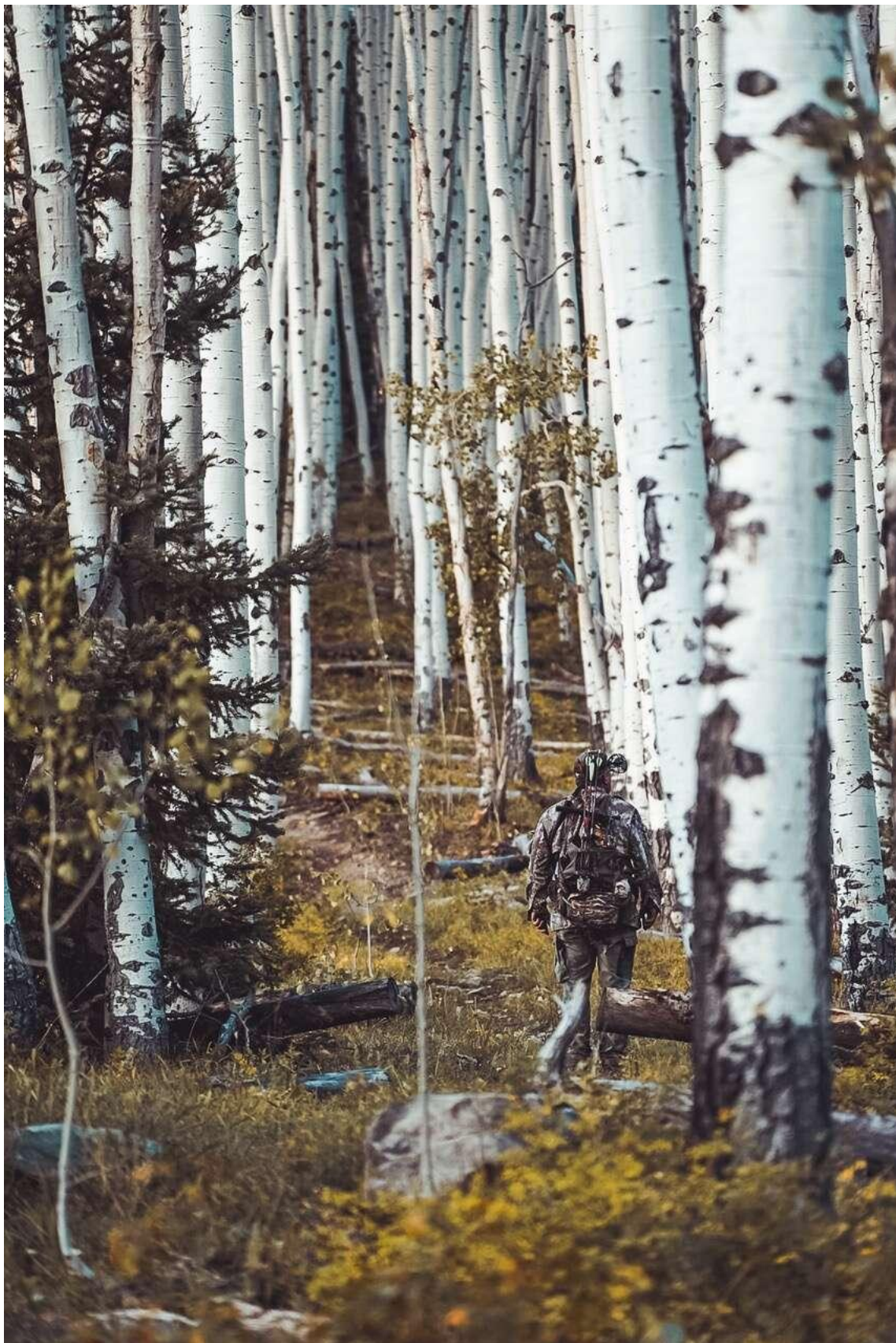


# Get Wild: Sharing the wilderness with hunters


Sports [FOLLOW SPORTS](#) | 22h ago

**Steve Elder**  
**Get Wild**





A hunter moves through the San Juan National Forest in September 2020.  
*Evan Moore/Courtesy photo*

Hunters are frequent users of the wilderness this time of year. I'm not a hunter, but I've found  that my friends and family who hunt are some of the most knowledgeable, capable and safe backcountry travelers I know.

But let's face it, during this time of year, the dynamic for nonhunting backcountry travelers changes as hunting seasons begin. This came to mind for me during a recent backpacking trip overnight in Eagles Nest Wilderness Area. As we set up camp near a meadow, my daughter said, "I just saw a guy over there in the trees walking around in camo."

"Oh! There are probably bow hunters camped over there," I explained. Sure enough, we found a camp of guys from Wisconsin who have been coming out to hunt the Gore Range Trail with their bows for 20 years. We had a delightful conversation, and they welcomed us to camp nearby.

Our encounter was motivation for writing this column: What would be useful for nonhunters traveling in the wilderness to know about the hunters they might meet?

I called an expert for some thoughts. My brother, Scot Elder, is a recently retired park manager from Colorado Parks and Wildlife with extensive experience as a hunter and as a manager of our state's backcountry hunting lands. The tips below are taken from that conversation.



## Participate in The Longevity Project

The Longevity Project is an annual campaign to help educate readers about what it takes to live a long, fulfilling life in our valley. This year Kevin shares his story of hope and celebration of life with his presentation *Cracked, Not Broken* as we explore the critical and relevant topic of mental health.

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While it's understandable for those not familiar with hunting to feel uncomfortable with the safety of it, hunting is actually a relatively safe activity when practiced responsibly. Parks and Wildlife reports that fatal and nonfatal incidents are at an all-time low. Incidents have dropped dramatically since the implementation of rigorous Colorado hunter safety education requirements, first passed into law in 1970.


That said, accidents do occur. Here are some tips for nonhunters to help keep everyone safe.

### Know your seasons

From Sept. 1 through Nov. 28, Colorado has six hunting seasons. In the Summit County area, the relevant seasons are archery and muzzleloader, which basically take place throughout September. Because both of these hunting methods are short range, these are the safest times to travel in the backcountry.

Four rifle seasons begin Oct. 1 and run through November.

### Stand out

Wear orange or another easily visible color, especially once muzzleloader and rifle seasons begin. Muzzleloader season is relatively safe, as the range of a muzzleloader is under 200 yards and accidental shootings are rare. Scot Elder still recommends wearing high-visibility colors, especially hunted  orange, throughout the rifle seasons.

### Learn from hunters



Just be generally aware and engage with hunters as you meet them. I learned so much by talking with the bow hunters about elk behavior, their hunting approach, the surrounding terrain and about them as people. You can learn a lot by talking with hunters, and they will be more aware of your presence as a result.

## Share the wilderness

Hunting is allowed in our local federal wilderness areas, as regulated by the state through Parks and Wildlife. Based on wildlife populations in a particular area, Parks and Wildlife issues a limited number of tags for different animals, including bighorn sheep, deer, elk and mountain goats. Hunters can only seek the type and gender of animal for which they have a tag.

Many hunters and anglers are avid advocates for wilderness and backcountry preservation. Hunters are also a primary income source – via license fees and other economic activity – for natural resource management. To learn more, the [Parks and Wildlife website](https://cpw.state.co.us) at CPW.state.co.us is a good resource, and you might also be interested in the [Backcountry Hunters and Anglers site](https://BackcountryHunters.org) at BackcountryHunters.org.



Steve Elder

“Get Wild” publishes on Fridays in the Summit Daily News. Steve Elder is a board member of Eagle Summit Wilderness Alliance, an all-volunteer nonprofit that helps the U.S. Forest Service protect and preserve the wilderness areas in Eagle and Summit counties. For more information, visit [EagleSummitWilderness.org](https://EagleSummitWilderness.org).

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