With plentiful deer and elk and impressive swaths of public land, Montana is heaven for big game hunters. But hunting comes with responsibility – to the land, animals, landowners and fellow hunters. Hunting, for livelihood and recreation, has a long tradition of ethics and etiquette that’s important to know and respect before heading out on a hunt.

As part of Bozeman’s Outside Kind program, we compiled best practices from partner One Montana on how to Hunt Kind in Montana. Here’s what you need to know to make your next hunting trip one that’s ethical, sustainable and kind.

1. Be prepared.
Hunting requires preparation that shouldn’t be taken lightly. First, make sure you have the correct license and tags for the animal you plan to hunt. You can find a list of license providers near you on the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) website or use the online licensing system. Make sure you understand state rules and regulations related to hunting, such as the seasons you’re allowed to hunt with a bow or rifle.

If you’re new to hunting, make sure to get some practice before the season starts. Head to the shooting range, get to know your gun and your ammo and understand your most effective shooting distance. This way, you’ll be able to take smart, clean shots when it comes time to hunt.

Plan ahead for how you’ll manage when you do kill an animal. Have a plan for how you’ll pack it out safely and securely. This includes accounting for weather, considering how incoming rain or snow might affect your process of hunting and packing out an animal.
2. Respect landowners.

Even if you’re hunting strictly on public land, you’re likely to come across private land in some place or other. Respect private land by staying off of it unless you’re granted access. Montana FWP has a [great hunt planning tool](#) that helps you understand the boundaries between public and private land. Or, you can use an app like onX Hunt, Basemap or goHUNT to monitor what land you’re on at all times. When you come upon a gate, make sure to leave it as you found it – whether open or closed – for grazing animals that may be nearby.

Communicate and develop positive relationships with those who own and manage the land. If you want to request access to private land, establish a relationship with the landowner well in advance and offer to help out with maintenance or chores in exchange for access. After accessing any land, write a thank you note to show your appreciation. These positive relationships will help ensure hunting access for generations to come.

3. Be kind to fellow hunters.

This one is simple: be friendly and kind to the people you meet in the outdoors! When you pass another hunting party, don’t hesitate to say howdy and ask how their hunt went. If they’re struggling to pack out an animal, offer a helping hand. A little kindness goes a long way to making it a better experience for everyone.

Remember that public land is public, and you may encounter other hunters, even at “your spot.” If your favorite hunting area is already occupied by another group, be prepared to take a new path and explore new ground.
4. Honor the animals.

Before you head out, understand your effective shooting range so you can take smart shots. While hunting, don’t take shots that are beyond your capabilities. Strive for a quick, clean kill to avoid leaving a wounded animal in the wild.

Use a highly ethical and fair chase approach to pursue all game. This means approaching any wild game animal in a manner that doesn’t give you an improper or unfair advantage over the game animals. For example, make sure you’re approaching an animal on foot, rather than shooting from a vehicle. Treat both game and non-game animals ethically, and report any game violations you see while hunting.
5. Protect the environment.

Hunters should protect the environment for the sake of it, but also because it allows the land and animals to thrive for seasons to come. Sustainable practices allow for sustainable hunting, year after year.

When driving, stay on roads and park only in designated parking areas. Practice Leave No Trace guidelines by leaving the land better than you found it. Pack out any trash, clothing, gear and as much of the animal as possible if you kill one. Go one step further and pick up any trash you see, even if it isn’t yours.

With the dry Montana climate we’re experiencing, fire safety is critical. Know how to safely light, maintain and extinguish a fire. Make sure any fire you make is completely out before you leave it. In addition, secure any vehicle chains so that they don’t drag on the ground while you’re driving, and don’t park over tall grass.

If you’re interested in diving deeper into hunting training, land stewardship and ethics, consider participating in One Montana’s Master Hunter Program or completing the Hunter-Landowner Stewardship program through Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

About Outside Kind
The Outside Kind Alliance, which consists of several local organizations and is facilitated by One Montana, joined forces to protect the people and places we love, and to explore ethical use issues that all recreational users need to know about. We want everyone to have a great experience, understand how to enjoy the outdoors while sharing it with others and treading lightly on the resource. To learn more, visit outsidekind.org.