

MIKE FOSS

## PREPARATION FOR THE HUNT

### *Beating the post-hibernation blues*



**SUZUKI**  
Way of Life!



Spring marks the end of hibernation for bears and humans alike. The author's estimate of "Snaggle Tooth's" fall weight was approximately 700 pounds. Will he show this year?

The Wisconsin bear season looms on the horizon. You've found your guide, or plan to select bait sites, maintain the stations yourself and hopefully be rewarded on a cool September morning or evening by fastening a tag to a Wisconsin black bear. But now what?

During the winter months, just like those bears we pursue, we seem to slow down and gain weight. It's nature's way of preparing us for winter. But it's exactly the opposite of how we should be preparing for the hunt. It's time that we wake up from our sedentary winter state and get in shape.

Personally, I feel your pain. Despite living the active and often strenuous life of a professional guide, my couch almost swallowed me whole during the long, cold winter months. I didn't exercise and put on weight, but the true wake-up call came when I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes.

Just like a big bear coming out of hibernation, I've shed some pounds, eaten healthy, exercise weekly and finally have my diabetes under control. I've not felt this good in 10 years. I'm ready for the bears, and ready to properly fulfill my client responsibilities as a guide.

The physical part is easy to diagnose: We relate to terms such as "spare tire," "couch potato," "beer belly," "junk-food junky," ... and the list goes on. Although not as easy, we know what we must do to address the problem; get out and walk, scout, take the wife and kids on a hiking excursion, bike or run.

Your local fitness center is the real priority. On doctor's orders, I work the elliptical machine for the best cardio-vascular workout that's also easy on the joints. Don't laugh too hard, but for me, each session on the elliptical becomes an imaginary journey in the woods, shed hunting, climbing steep ravines, running or jumping over logs like I did when I was young. It makes the workout go faster and I guarantee this: two or three times a week on the elliptical and you will have more energy and feel better. And feeling better means that you will better withstand longer hours in that tree stand or ground blind, waiting for that trophy to appear.

Mental preparation is just as important. Most often, a Wisconsin bear hunt isn't like the bear hunts shown on the outdoor channels in which a 5-minute wait on stand culminates with a big bear strolling in and a well placed shot ensues. More than likely, you'll spend days on stand, sleep deprived, bug bitten, and sometimes frustrated. Like any worthwhile endeavor, dues are paid in the form of preparation and diligence, and when all is said and done, you'll likely have your bear.

Some of you will get lucky, and your hunt will be done in a short time. Fourteen of our 15 hunters in my camps in 2008 tagged bears—with 100 percent shot opportunity—and several hunters had their feet up in camp by day No. 2. But what if you're one of those hunters who, despite doing everything right, doesn't score early?

Mentally, you must prepare for just that scenario. If you're on an outfitter-guided trip, trust your guide. He knows the area and stand sites. Believe in him. Prior to the hunt, call your guide. There's no such thing as dumb questions. I invite my clients to Bayfield County during the summer months to help bait for a few days. It's a perfect way to alleviate some anxiety and learn exactly what to expect.

Gain all the information you possibly can. Purchase bear hunting videos and read. But ask yourself ...are you physically and mentally prepared for the hunt?

#### SPRING IS IN THE AIR

This is an exciting time of year for me. The snow in the North

Country is gone, and the bears are out of hibernation and looking for food. My trail cameras will be out spying, and I will be looking at each photo with great anticipation, wondering if the most special among Wisconsin black bears has been "captured" again.

In the next issue we'll find out if the massive bear, "Snaggle Tooth," has survived the long, cold winter. For more than a year in On Wisconsin Outdoors, we've followed this largest bear I have ever encountered in the northern Wilderness of Bayfield County, Wisconsin, capturing him several times on motion cameras on our baits.

Last year, my estimate of his weight at 500 pounds-plus was conservative. After viewing other pictures of him, I know that Snaggle Tooth was 600 pounds coming out of his den this past spring and more than 700 going in late last fall.

Last year, when I left a bowhunter over bait station No. 01, I thought Snaggle Tooth had an excellent chance of showing. He didn't, but the hunter did tag a 412-pound black bear that scored 19-7/16 Pope and Young club points—we had also captured this bear on camera from the same stand.

Snaggle Tooth makes the tagged 412-pound bruin look like a cub. Hopefully, this September, one of our hunters will help us write a final ending to the ongoing saga of the monster of Bayfield County. *W*

*Northern Wisconsin Outfitters is now booking for the 2009 bear season. Go to [www.northernwisconsinoutfitters.com](http://www.northernwisconsinoutfitters.com) or call them at 715.373.0344.*

