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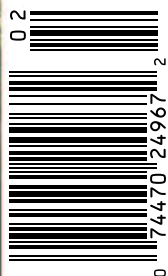
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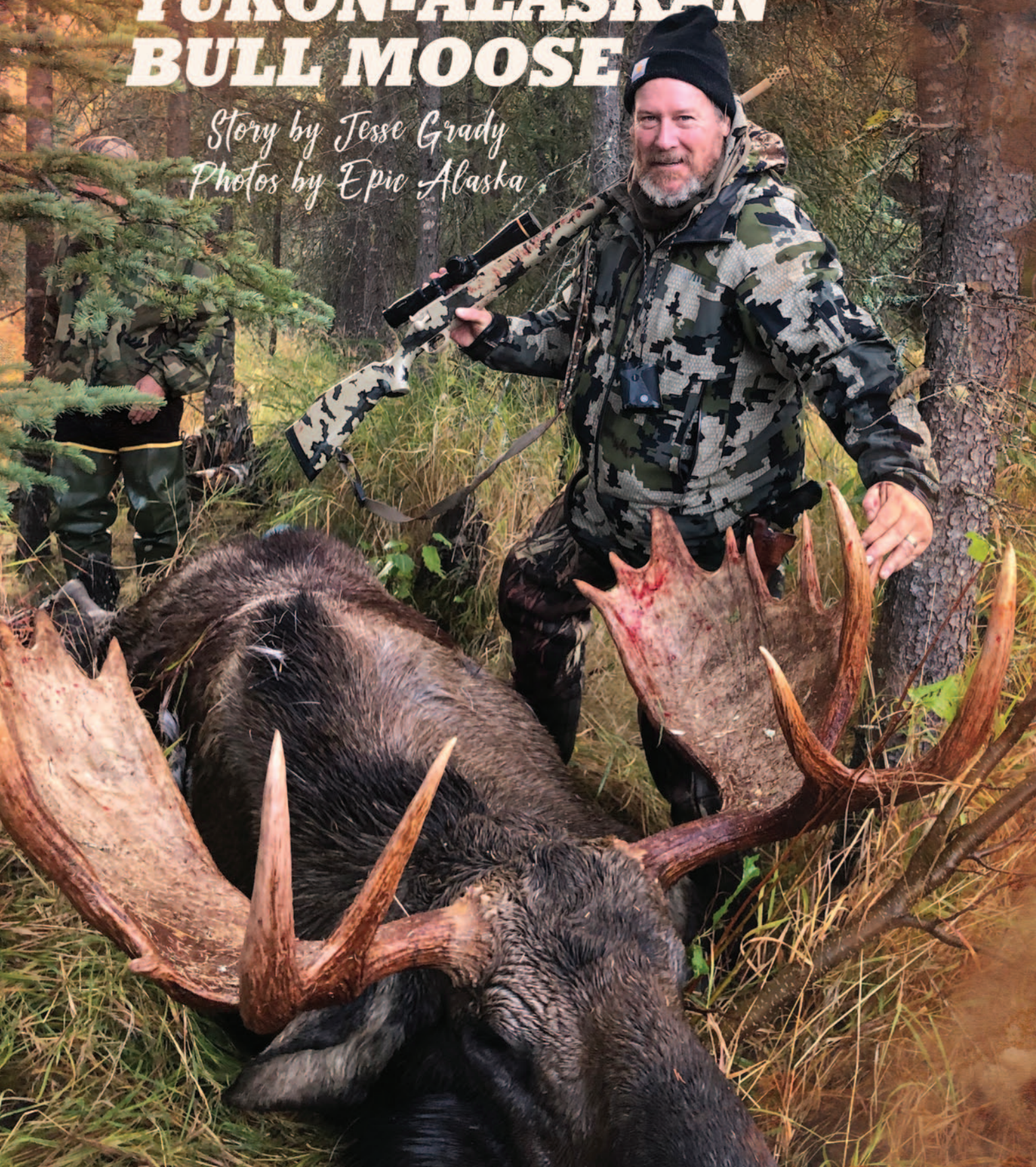


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# ADVANCED CALLING TECHNIQUES FOR YUKON-ALASKAN BULL MOOSE

*Story by Jesse Grady  
Photos by Epic Alaska*





*A young bull and old bull are sitting on top of a hill overlooking a large valley. All of a sudden, the young bull jumps up and yells: "Hey! I can see five cow moose down there...Let's run down and go screw that one by the lake!" The old bull casually looks up at the young bull and replies: "Naw...Let's just walk down there and screw 'em all."*

*-Dan Wiltyz*

I always think of this joke while I am hunting for trophy Yukon-Alaskan bull moose. The big bulls are never in a hurry. They are the dominant bulls and know they can have ALL the cows when they want them. Old war-veteran bulls have immense patience and will not run down the hill towards your calls.

There is nothing more exhilarating to me than choosing a place to call, getting a bull that is bedded down back in the forest to respond and drawing it out into the open. Even more exciting is when I am able to call the bull to within 25 yards, where I am able to smell his intense musk and see his eyes roll upwards as he gazes proudly at his antlers in full display. This is what I live for.

Over the years, I have spent many miserable days learning to call these large animals in remote interior Alaska. Being wet and freezing cold in a poorly chosen camp location; having inadequate gear; wasting time calling in bad locations and at the wrong time; and the worst feeling ever, scaring away very large, responding bulls because I was too excited, was all part of the journey. The misery was always self-inflicted due to my inexperience and a lack of patience. Fortunately, I was still able to call in and shoot a bull moose nearly every year since I was a teenager and have learned a lot.

It takes many years to be able to instinctively adapt to a non-ideal calling situation. Whether you can see the moose or if it is obscured from sight, there is not a single thing that you can do, or purchase, that will guarantee that you will be able to "call in" a moose to close distances.

When deep in the rut, it does not take much to call in a bull moose. Bulls lose most of their defensive instincts when trying to establish dominance in order to mate with

nearby cows in estrus. If you happen to start calling at a location hosting a large bull with a harem of cows he will immediately defend his harem. Or, if imitating a cow in estrus, a bull will not be able to control himself and will make his way towards you in the hopes of securing a prize. Chopping wood, pounding nails, hitting your axe against your boat and loud talking have all worked to call in trophy moose. I once called in a massive bull from over 800 yards away by shooting my .22 rifle at spruce grouse. No joke.

It is a challenge to call in old war-veteran bull moose during the early days of the rut. Early-rut bulls have recently shed their velvet and leave their summer range to begin searching for cows to breed. Once they find a cow, they will continue to follow her until she is in estrus or until he is driven away by a larger bull. Bulls travel long distances along ridges and feeding corridors (river valleys) and will respond to your calls during the early rut. These bulls are wary and even though they may respond to your calls, they may not move an inch for hours or even days. If moving, a pre-rut bull will always try to intercept your downwind scent or catch a glimpse of you. If they smell or see you and recognize that you are not another moose they will simply turn away and keep moving along. Listen for

Steve Faughn with a guided moose called in close to camp by the author using the moving call.

The author calling for Yukon-Alaskan bull moose.



the faint thump, thump, thump sound soon after they disappear... This is the sound of a spooked moose running away from you after causally turning into the woods as if nothing happened!

A lack of patience is one of the biggest flaws that I see time and time again with hunters of all ages while trying to call in a bull moose. I love to utilize "the sleeping call." Last hunting season I called in a 60" bull with this technique. Yes, the sleeping call works by making some long cow calls, then lay down and take a nap! It works. A lack of patience is a common theme I preach to clients and will do so always.

Knowing when to NOT shoot a bull can only be learned the hard way. I have spent numerous seasons tracking wounded animals; packing quarters hundreds of yards through the forest and swamps back to the boat until near exhaustion; and the worst, butchering massive bulls in waist-deep swamp water only 20 feet from dry land.

As my hunting experience grew over the years, I now focus on a single goal while calling moose: Call the bull in as close to my boat as possible and only shoot where I want to butcher him. This requires an immense amount of patience and the use of advanced calling techniques.

Although there are many techniques to discuss regarding how to call in Yukon-Alaskan bull moose, this article will only focus on the final call sequence—when a bull has been located and he is responding while moving in to engage you. Advanced calling techniques are important for drawing in early season, pre-rut bulls that may already have a harem of cows and for old, war-veteran bulls that take their time before walking down the hill to have their way with all of the cows.

## ADVANCED CALLING TECHNIQUES: THE FINAL CALL SEQUENCE

### Closing the Distance: The Flattering Art of Imitation

As a responding bull becomes visible you must take control of the calling, yet imitate the periodicity, sequence and tonality of how the bull is communicating with you. A big mistake at this moment is to call or scrape too much, too loudly or to go silent. All of which can spook an approaching bull.

Imitation is extremely convincing and will result in continued interest and movement of the bull. Imitate the number of times the bull grunts in a sequence, how he sounds and how long he is silent. If the bull only grunts two times in a sequence, do the same. If the bull barely grunts and then stares at your calling spot for 10 minutes, walks a few steps, grunts and stares again for 10 minutes, be patient. This is normal. Continue to mimic the bull.

It is at this time that you should avoid being impatient and to not shoot if the bull is  $\geq 300$  yards away. I have seen many bulls take well-placed shots, even at close range, then hop back up and disappear. Focus on patience and try to draw the moose in as close as possible to allow for more knock-down power and better shot placement with your rifle.

### Approaching Bull—Hidden Hunter: Back Calling & Flashing Antlers

At close ranges of  $\sim 100$  yards, an approaching bull's grunts and display sequence will change, and he will lower his head while walking towards you, swaying and displaying his antlers, grunting with each step. Sometimes a bull will grunt eight times in a row before stopping to display his antlers, tear at brush or try to get a look at you.

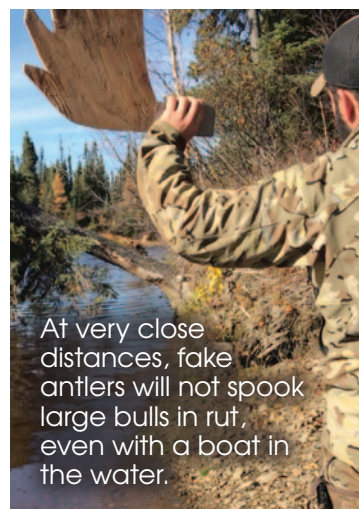
The tonality of his calls will



This 63" bull argued with the author for two hours, until just about dark. The water call drew the bull out onto the riverbank.



This very large bull was bedded down with a cow in the trees where I decided to take a nap in the sun after making a few cow calls. An hour later he was circling to get our scent. Using fake antlers and urine from a bull harvested earlier in the season, we kept him interested even with our boat in the open. Floating downriver we called him onto the bank and dropped him four feet from the riverbank.



At very close distances, fake antlers will not spook large bulls in rut, even with a boat in the water.

also change, becoming more insistent. The bull is basically excited and showing off. Bulls can pinpoint exactly where you are calling from at these distances. If you are well positioned for a shot and hidden in the trees, yet the bull is in an unfavorable kill location, this is when I perform "back calling" to try to draw him in closer.

By turning your back and quietly calling towards the ground, you are basically pretending that you are farther away than you truly are. At this point scraping is difficult because the bull may see your movement and can be spooked. Incorporate quiet, short, whiny cow calls followed by a few muffled bull grunts. This works wonders to draw them in even closer.

If you are out in the open, or behind minor brush and the bull can see you, the jig is up. This is when flashing fake antlers can help



convince the bull that you are a moose, and he will continue to approach. I once used two paper plates as fake antlers to complete the final call sequence because the bull locked his eyes on the calling spot while I was crouched behind a small willow out in the open. Be prepared to shoot if the bull gets spooked.

### Turning and Stopping Uninterested or Spooked Bulls

If you call a bull to within ~100 yards and for some reason he turns around and starts walking away, you have not convinced him that you are a moose, or he has realized that you are far enough away from his harem to not be a threat. Immediately let out a loud, long cow call and be prepared to shoot. He will turn around or turn broadside and look back at you. This may be the last chance for a neck/shoulder shot before all you see is rump.

If the bull gets spooked and starts running away, cow calls sometimes do nothing to stop him. As a last resort, try yelling as loud as possible: "Hey Bull!!!" Although this is out of the ordinary, most animals will stop and look at you with a "What the heck was that?" look on their face. I use this technique on fleeing black bears, but yell "Hey Bear!!!" Try it. It works. My clients and friends have seen me do it.

### The Power of Urine

At some point a moose will intercept your scent. Being cautious of your scent is important, but do not go overboard. If it is legal in your area, spray synthetic cow urine in the air when bulls are approaching, or make a fake wallow where you want to butcher a bull. I collect the urine of the first bull harvested in the season and spray this in the air if bulls are within 50 yards. If you happen upon a moose wallow while hunting do not be afraid to get your boots in it and rub the mud on your rain gear or fake antlers. My friend, Jeff Jenson, notoriously rolls around in elk urine in Utah. Although I am not that dedicated, doing so will be more useful than your camouflage pattern.

### Calling From the Water: The Fake River Crossing

If you are calling from your boat on the river or from a canoe on a lake and have a bull responding and thrashing in the brush yet he does not come out into the open, loudly splash the water with long, sweeping strokes while grunting. Do this by walking in the water with your waders or with a paddle and grunt with each stroke. This imitates a bull walking or swimming in the water. I have used this technique on all of the very large bulls that I have called in and have been able to draw them out into the open.



This 61" bull was called to within 120 yards using back calling and flashing fake antlers (paper plates). After he decided I was not a threat he turned and started to walk away. A long cow call turned him broadside one last time.

### The Moving Call

Moose do not stay in one place; they call, move, call and wait. Moving while calling is more realistic than stationary calling, again imitation is flattering. The use of all of the advanced calling techniques and the moving call has proven to be my most successful calling technique during the final calling sequence. The moving call works masterfully in most non-ideal calling situations:

**A responding bull is approaching from the forest where he may emerge into an unfavorable butchering or packing location.** Use the moving call to pull or push the bull

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Moose love to lounge in wet, stinky ponds and lakes. Be wary of the water depths as beaver will elevate the depths of these ponds to 4-12 feet deep, making for a “fun” butchering experience. Be patient and make sure the moose is on dry land before you pull the trigger.

to a better butchering location, preferably one that is dry and close to the boat.

**A wary, early-rut bull, or a bull with cows that will not come out of the woods.** Press the bull by closing the distance directly towards him from a downwind direction while calling. As you encroach upon his harem the bull will be forced to engage you.

**Trees/brush obstruct clear shooting lanes.** This happens all the time; you see antlers but no body. You cannot shoot through willows as your bullet will be deflected. Try to push or pull the bull into an opening to obtain clear shooting lanes.

**You have had no response while stationary calling.** The sounds you make while calling from a stationary spot may be drowned out by sweepers in the river, wind, stands of trees, or a bluff. Take a hike and call while moving. The sounds will reflect off of different objects along your hike and can potentially help in transmitting your calls. Remember to use your urine and spray it as you go.

### Successful Examples

The sequence of events that occurred during the hunt of “Old Stinky” is a great example



of how advanced calling techniques and the moving call worked to perfection (Figure 1).

After an exhausting 2½ hours of stationary calling back and forth with a bull that was headed straight for me and my hunting partners, it was clear that we were in a horrible location to get a decent shot if he continued towards us through the dense black-spruce forest. There was also a chance he could veer away from us and into a beaver pond where we would have to pack him 300 yards through a swamp.

I decided to use the moving call to turn the bull towards the river where we could get a better shot at him and draw him closer to the boat. We drifted the boat to the other side of the river while making loud strokes in the water with the push-poles (the fake river crossing) and back calling at each stroke. The bull followed my calls and crashed his way towards us through the tightly grown forest. Once we were in position on the opposite side of the river, I imitated his

grunt sequence, periodicity and tonality for the rest of the final-call sequence. It was too late for this monster bull as he emerged onto the riverbank 40 yards away.

Another example of the moving call occurred when my hunting group pressed downhill towards a responding bull sitting alone in a meadow on the opposite side of the creek, drainage ditch and an old beaver pond (Figure 2). By using the moving call and flashing fake antlers, we were able to pull the bull across the beaver pond and drainage ditch towards an old mining road where we shot him at 25 yards. If I had not told my group to not shoot upon first sight of this bull, it would have been a complete fiasco trying to pack that moose across the beaver pond and through the deep mining ditch. We ended up placing his quarters on the ATV and easily packed him out along the mining road.

### Summary

Calling Alaskan bull moose is a passion of mine. I always imagine that I am a large bull (or cow) when I am calling for myself, hunting buddies, or clients. As I became more knowledgeable of what an unpleasant experience post-kill butchering and packing could be, I developed advanced calling techniques including the moving call. These techniques are important for drawing in early season, pre-rut bulls, bulls with cows, and old war-veteran bulls. These techniques allow you to set up clear shooting lanes and draw the moose to a location for more favorable butchering and less packing distances.

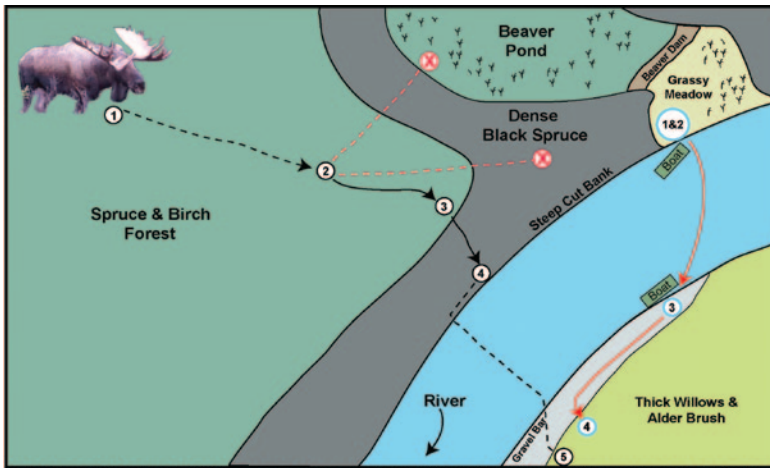


*Jesse Grady is a licensed Alaskan Big-Game Transporter and Class-A Guide that owns and operates Epic Alaska which offers self-guided big-game hunts and guided excursions. A lifelong Alaskan, Mr. Grady lives, hunts and has trapped in remote Interior Alaska and the Upper Innoko River area for over 30 years.*



The author's preferred butchering location. Always.



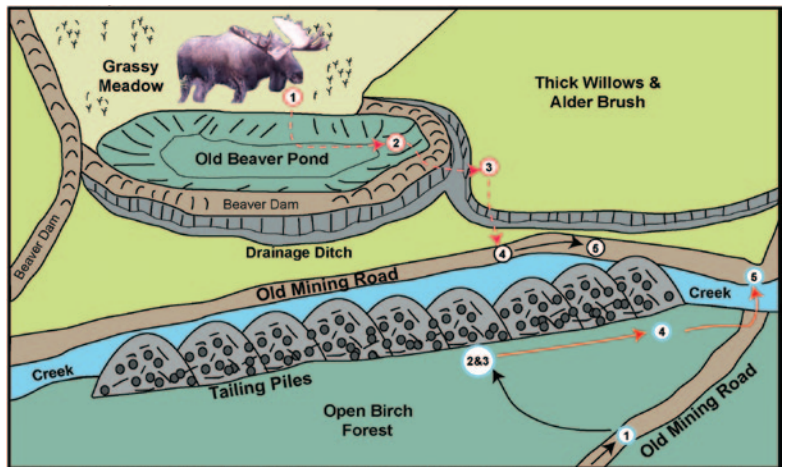


**Figure 1**

1 & 2) Stationary calling to draw a bull to within 300 yards yet he is still obscured from sight; 3) Utilizing the moving call, the boat is drifted downriver to the opposite bank which entices the moose to veer away from a nearby beaver pond and dense black-spruce forest, both of which are unfavorable kill locations; 4) Continued calling while moving farther away from the parked boat sets up clear shooting lanes and short packing distances as the bull emerges along the opposite river bank at 40 yards.

**Figure 2**

1) A large bull is spotted 300 yards away. While calling, the group stalks single file through the trees closer to the bull; 2 & 3) While positioned above the bull with great shooting lanes and stationary calling, the bull slowly traverses an old beaver pond and drainage ditch, becoming obscured from shooting in dense brush. At all times the bull was in unfavorable kill locations. 4) The hunters parallel the drainage ditch while utilizing the moving call and pull the bull towards the old mining road, a favorable kill location. 5) The bull is easily shot at 25 yards, butchered and packed out with ATV's.



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