



# East Idaho Activity

## Caught On Camera

*Watching the wild with trail cams*

by Kris Millgate

PHOTO CREDIT: Tight Line Media

*A* As an outdoor journalist, I work with five different cameras when I'm in the field. The biggest and most valuable is my main video camera. Next, my still photo camera followed by a waterproof camera for under-river shots. The fourth camera is my phone. I use it on the fly for social media. My fifth lens is attached to a drone. I launch it when I want overhead angles.

I thought five would be my max. Then I decided to follow grizzlies for a summer and I didn't want to be in their way. They're deadly, especially when surprised, so I added three more cameras to my covey that don't need me right next to them to keep rolling.

My trail cameras are in the woods when I am not. For field production of *On Grizzly Ground*, I wanted to capture what the wild does when we're not in the way. I spent several weeks learning how to use trail cams then spent several more weeks researching the best places to put them.

By summer's end, I had footage of cows, horses, dogs, people, elk, moose, wolves, porcupine, skunks and squirrels. A lot of squirrels. Most of

those clips won't be in the film, but the many grizzlies I spied will be.

Now that I know what works in the

woods, I want to help you with the learning curve so you don't stumble around like I did. Here are four trail cam tips.



### FACT BOX:

EIO editor Kris Millgate is working on final edits for her newest film, *On Grizzly Ground*. The half-hour documentary includes exclusive trail camera footage discussed in this story. *On Grizzly Ground* premieres August 2023 in Idaho Falls with Millgate's third book *My Place Among Beasts* debuting at the same time. Both the film and the book highlight grizzly recovery in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, which includes Eastern Idaho.



### Survey:

My cameras are not strapped to trees randomly. Each one is placed with purpose. Animals will be where food and water is. Survey waterholes or berry patches. Cams on those spots capture animals eating, playing, napping, even swimming. Consider game trails too. Cams on game trails show animals on the move, where they go, who is with them and how they're holding up as the seasons change.

### Secure:

Movement triggers trail cams so use them where vehicles are not allowed. You don't want your trail cam triggered every single time a car passes. Wind is going to trigger the cam regardless so avoid adding traffic to the pile of files you have to sort through.

Make sure it's firmly strapped to a tree with no wiggle and secure it with a locking cable. Mine are in places where animals are active, but people are in there too. No one has touched my trail cameras so far, but once the devices start collecting rare footage, I don't want anyone walking off with them. At that point, the files are worth more than the device.

### Supply:

Check your trail camera every few days. You don't want a malfunction making your efforts fruitless for a whole month or even a week. If something is wrong, you want to know it before you miss too many opportunities.

I change batteries and memory cards every time I check a camera. I take a card reader too. It attaches to my phone so I can quickly check files and be sure the camera is working properly before I leave.

### Speed:

I don't hang around my trail cameras. I'm speedy when I'm way in there. This habit, along with carrying bear spray, is unwavering. I'm strategic and cautious because once I start seeing bears on my cams, I know it isn't smart to linger despite the lethargic heat of a hot summer day.

I also prefer to disrupt the wild as little as possible. The best shots happen when you're not in the wild's way, so get in, get the files and get out. 📷

