CUSTOM MEAT GUIDE · STEP 3: FOR HUNTERS

Bringing Your Deer or Elk to the Processor

Updated October 31, 2026



THE SHORT ANSWER

Cool it fast, keep it clean, and bring it in **skinned and cleaned** with your tag. In WDFW's Region 1, which includes Lincoln County, you must turn in a **CWD sample within five days** for every deer, elk, and moose, and evidence of sex has to stay attached until the animal is processed. Call ahead, since fall is our busiest season.

Cool It Fast

Heat is what ruins game meat. Washington's wildlife department says to get the carcass below 40°F as quickly as possible, and extension guidance aims for 40°F or lower within 24 hours. That takes more effort than it sounds: in a University of Wyoming study, elk delivered to a meat locker on cool fall days were still averaging 88.5°F deep in the hind leg, almost six hours after the kill.

- **Get the hide off.** WDFW advises skinning larger animals like elk and moose when it's above freezing. In the Wyoming study, skinned elk sides cooled to 38°F in about a day, while sides with the hide on were still around 45°F.
- **Skip the plastic.** Don't put meat in plastic bags or under tarps before it's thoroughly chilled; plastic holds the heat in. Use breathable game bags, and bags of ice in the body cavity if you need them.
- **Watch the weather.** If it's 65°F or warmer when you harvest, the meat should be cut right away rather than aged. Tell us when you call.

Keep It Clean and Dry

Wipe out excess blood with clean towels and clean water, then dry the meat as completely as you can. Dirt, hair, and fly-blown spots all get trimmed off, and that's meat you lose. It's one of the main reasons a locker plant's yield ran lower than the lab's in the Wyoming elk study (more in how much meat from a

deer or elk).

Bring It Skinned and Cleaned

Our game processing is cutting and wrapping only, so your animal needs to arrive skinned and cleaned. Call us at (509) 900-7145 before you come so we can fit you in.

Washington Rules to Know

These are the rules as of the 2026 season. They change, so check WDFW's pages before you hunt.

CWD testing in Region 1

Chronic wasting disease has been found in Eastern Washington. If you harvest a deer, elk, or moose in WDFW's Region 1, you must turn in a sample within five days and before you leave the region: the whole head with at least 3 inches of neck, or the lymph nodes. Results take 4 to 6 weeks, and a sample doesn't count as your harvest report. Drop sites and hours change each season, so see WDFW's testing page.

Evidence of sex

Evidence of the animal's sex has to stay naturally attached to at least one quarter or the largest piece of meat until it's processed. For deer and elk there's an exception: if you surrendered the head at a WDFW collection site, have the signed ID card, and take the carcass straight to processing.

Your tag

The tag stays with the carcass, the largest piece of meat, or the game bag while it's transported, and with the meat for as long as you keep it. With an electronic tag, write the confirmation number and harvest date on something weatherproof, like flagging or duct tape.

Information processors must record

Since September 2026, Washington requires wildlife meat cutters to record each hunter's name, address, phone number, WILD ID, and signature, plus the species, the county and date of harvest, and the tag number. Have your license and tag information with you when you drop off.

Taking meat out of Eastern Washington

Whole carcasses can't leave Region 1 for the rest of the state. You can move boned-out meat, skulls and antlers cleaned of all tissue, hides without the head, and finished mounts. If you're headed home to another part of Washington, ask for **boneless cuts**. Animals taken in another state can only come into Washington as boned-out meat.

Disposing of the rest

Don't put bones, hides, or trimmings in curbside yard-waste or compost bins. WDFW prefers leaving them at the kill site, then a landfill, then double-bagged household trash, and state health rules call for disposal within 72 hours.

Avoiding a "Gamey" Taste

Most strong-tasting venison comes down to handling: meat that cooled slowly or got dirty. Deer fat also tends to taste strong, so trimming it helps, and meat from a stressed animal can sour if it's aged. Quick cooling and clean handling make the biggest difference.

After Drop-Off

Tell us how you want it cut: steaks, roasts, ground, and any jerky, snack sticks, or sausage. We'll call when it's ready. Orders must be paid for and picked up within 5 business days. See game processing for what we make.

Questions? Call Howard & Mia.

(509) 900-7145
H&M Custom Meat LLC · 34274 Redwine Canyon Road, Creston, WA 99117

Read it online, with calculators:
handmcustommeat.com/guide/taking-game-to-the-processor/

Sources

Food safety for hunters, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/food-safety

Testing for chronic wasting disease (CWD), Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/chronic-wasting/cwd-testing

CWD information for hunters, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/diseases/chronic-wasting/info-for-hunters

WAC 220-413-100, mandatory reporting and CWD sampling, Washington Administrative Code
https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=220-413-100

WAC 220-413-090, evidence of sex, Washington Administrative Code
https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=220-413-090

WAC 220-413-020, tagging requirements, Washington Administrative Code
https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=220-413-020

WAC 220-413-030, transporting dead wildlife, Washington Administrative Code
https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=220-413-030

WAC 220-400-060, wildlife meat cutting records, Washington Administrative Code
https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=220-400-060

Big Game from Hunt to Home (PNW 517), Oregon State, Washington State, and University of Idaho Extension
https://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pnw-517-big-game-hunt-home

Bulletin B-594R: elk carcass care and meat yield, University of Wyoming Extension
https://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B-594R.pdf

Bulletin B-513R: aging big game, University of Wyoming Extension
https://www.wyoextension.org/agpubs/pubs/B-513R.pdf

Figures are typical ranges from these sources; every animal is different. Prices are subject to change.