

Field Dressing Big Game

How to field dress a big game animal using the gutless method



The Alaska Department of Fish and Game,
Division of Wildlife Conservation, 2017

In the field you'll need these basic field dressing tools...

- Sharp knife or two
- Bone saw and/or axe
- Knife sharpener
- Game bags (check the size and quality)
- Tarp (helps keep meat clean and dry)
- Rope and pulley (for tying off legs, lifting quarters, or moving carcass)
- Latex and/or cut resistant gloves
- Pack frame and/or sled (for transporting meat)

Watch a demonstration video first!

Before going into the field, watch the ADF&G field dressing instructional video "Field Care of Big Game meat" at www.adfg.alaska.gov > Hunting > General Information > Field-to-Freezer Meat Care.

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Learn to field dress and care for your meat

Proper field care of meat is an important step to putting tasty wild meals on your dinner table. After shooting an animal, the sooner you field dress it, the better. This helps the meat cool faster and prevents bloating, which can increase chances of puncturing the gut.

There are different ways to field dress a big game animal. The method described here is an efficient method that does not require removal of the guts. This technique is particularly useful for larger animals such as moose. However, it should not be used if you intend to leave the animal intact overnight before removing the meat. This will cause spoilage regardless of outside temperature. In this case you should gut the animal.

This brochure summarizes how to:

1) skin a moose, 2) remove the meat, and 3) care for moose and other big game meat in the field.



Before



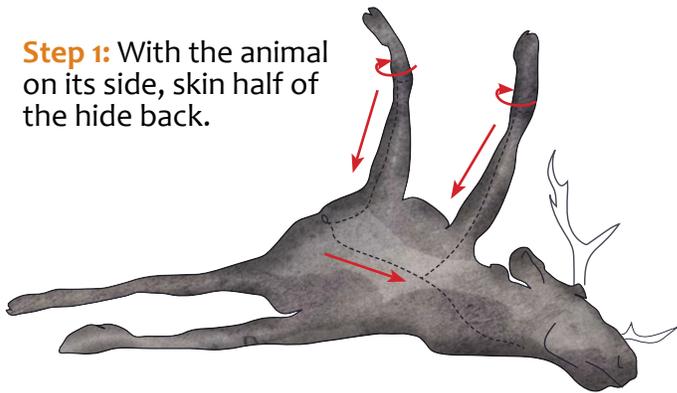
After

Skinning a moose

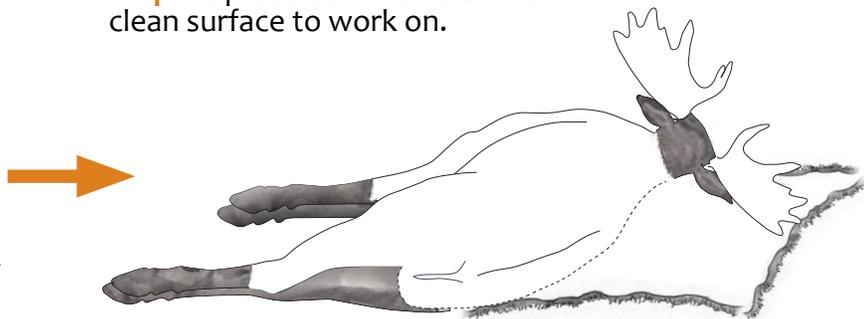
Remember, the first thing you should do after killing a moose is validate your harvest ticket or permit. To begin skinning, lift the top, hind leg. Start by cutting around the hock (heel/knee). Continue cutting down along the inside of the animal's leg toward the anus. Just before reaching the anus, turn your knife and cut along the side of the genitals, leaving them naturally attached to the meat. Continue up the belly along the mid-line toward the chin. Cut around the hock of the front leg, then down the inside of the leg to the existing cut at the mid-line. Skin the hide back to just beyond the backbone. Spread out the hide to make a clean surface for working. Make sure to keep hair away from the meat since moose hair often carries a pungent odor during the rut that can taint the meat's flavor.

Some hunters choose to skin their moose by making the main cut along the mid-line of the back instead of the mid-line of the stomach. This approach reduces the risk of puncturing the gut.

Step 1: With the animal on its side, skin half of the hide back.



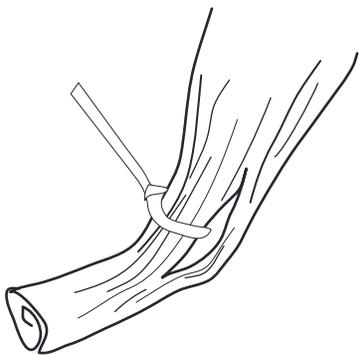
Step 2: Spread out the hide for a clean surface to work on.



Know the regulations! In a hunt restricted to a single sex, leave evidence of sex naturally attached to the meat. Moose antlers are not proof of sex.

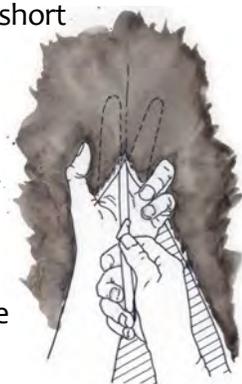
Helpful hints

Tying off the legs: If you remove the lower legs, use a bone saw, or knife, to cut them off just below the hock. Make sure to leave the Achilles tendon intact. You can thread a rope through the tendon to tie the legs up. Later this same technique can be used to hang the quarters.



Skinning techniques: When skinning, use short knife strokes. Always move blade from the inside of hide to the outside reducing contamination of meat with hair. Keep your knife at a shallow angle to avoid puncturing the abdomen or other organs.

It is also helpful to use the fingers of your other hand to guide the knife under the skin as you cut. Once you get started, you may be able to use your hands to separate the hide from the underlying muscle.



Cool, clean and dry!

Once you remove the meat from the animal, it should be placed in clean, dry game bags and hung in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place. Under these conditions meat can last for longer periods until it can be processed and frozen.

Cool: To reduce spoilage, keep meat cool. Field dress the animal as soon as it is killed and never leave the guts inside the animal overnight.

Clean: Clean meat ensures better tasting meat. Trim away blood clots and bloodshot meat. Dirt and hair should be wiped off meat immediately. If intestinal contents touch the meat, the area should be washed with clean water, and then dried immediately (normally you should not wash the carcass; water removes the glaze of blood that helps prevent bacterial growth).

Dry: Allow meat to develop a dry crust on the outside. This reduces spoilage and deters egg-laying insects. Some people also spray meat with citric acid to reduce bacterial growth.

Do not wrap meat in plastic garbage bags, or stack game bags on top of one another. Proper air circulation is essential to keeping meat from spoiling.

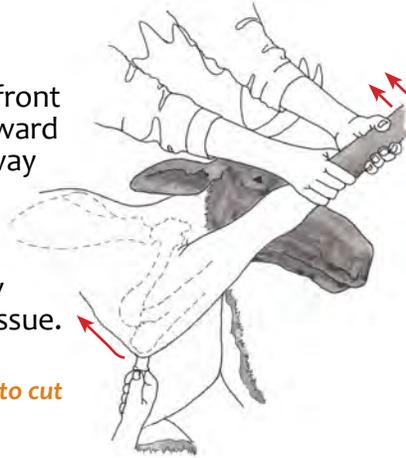
Removing the meat

Front quarter

Step 1:

After skinning, lift the front shoulder providing upward tension. Pull the leg away from the body and slice into the armpit. Cut through chest muscle into the loosely attached connective tissue.

Note: to remove the front shoulders you do not have to cut through bone.

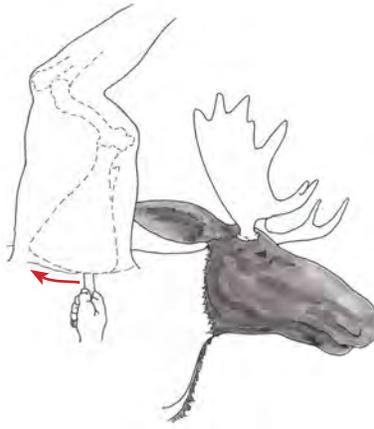


Step 2:

Once the leg is almost detached, locate the top of the shoulder blade. Cut until leg is free.

Cutting as close to the ribs as possible will result in more meat on the front quarter instead of on the ribs.

Place quarter in clean, dry game bag.

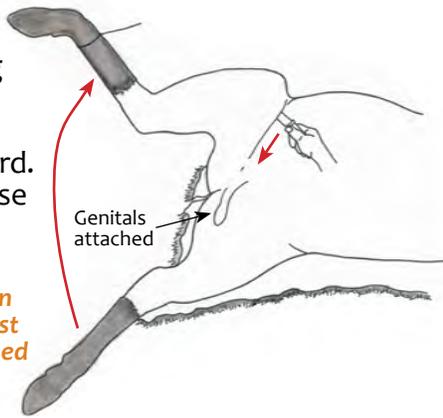


Hind quarter

Step 3:

Lift skinned hind leg providing upward tension. From inner thigh work downward. Cut through the loose tissues toward the genitalia.

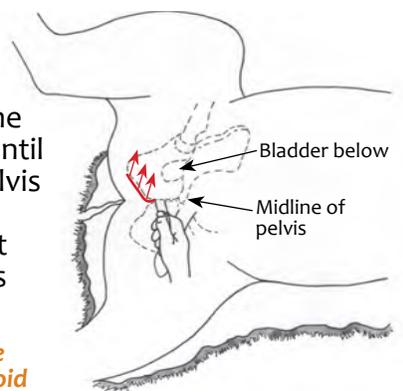
Check the regulations! In some areas genitals must remain naturally attached to the meat.



Step 4:

Follow the natural separation between the two leg muscles. Cut until reaching midline of pelvis bone. Turn knife to a shallow angle and fillet muscle off lower pelvis exposing the hip joint.

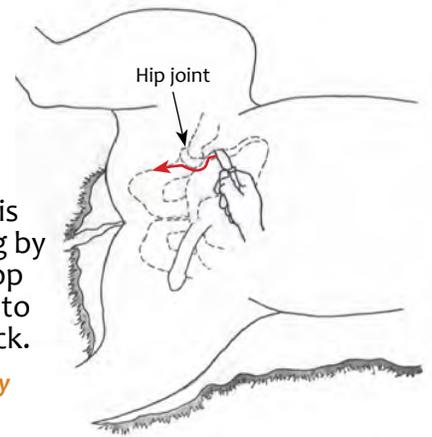
Keep your knife close to the bone and at an angle to avoid nicking the underlying bladder and intestines.



Step 5:

The hip is held together by a ball and socket joint. Cut through the tough ligaments holding this joint in place. Free leg by filleting muscle off top of pelvis following it to the center line of back.

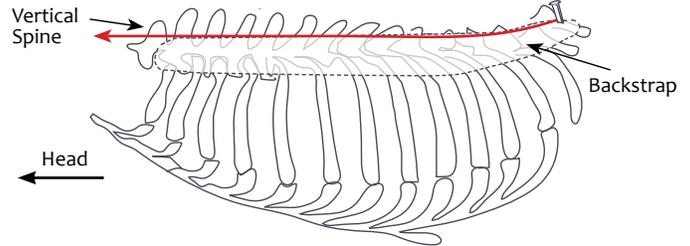
Place quarter in clean, dry game bag.



Hind quarter cont.

Step 6:

See step 10 illustration for location of backstrap. With knife against the vertical spine, cut from pelvis to neck. Keep knife as close to vertical spine of vertebrae as possible.

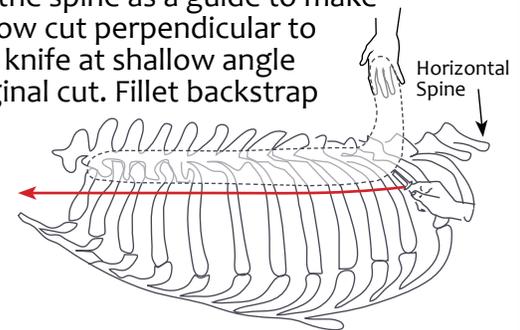


Backstrap

Step 7:

Where ribs end, find horizontal spine of vertebrae. Use the tip of the spine as a guide to make a second shallow cut perpendicular to the first. Keep knife at shallow angle facing the original cut. Fillet backstrap off ribs.

Place backstrap in clean, dry game bag.

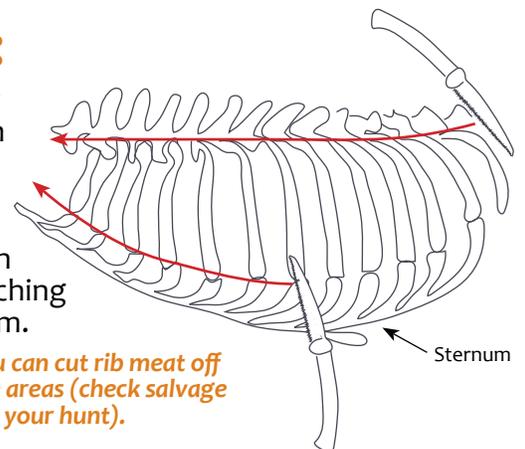


Ribs

Step 8:

Use a knife or saw to detach ribs from spine. Then use a saw to cut through cartilage attaching ribs to sternum.

Alternatively, you can cut rib meat off the bone in some areas (check salvage requirements for your hunt).



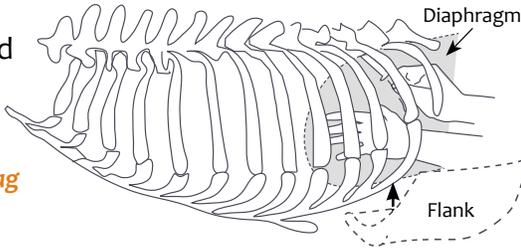
Removing the meat continued

Ribs cont.

Step 9:

The diaphragm muscle is attached to the last rib and separates the abdominal cavity (do not puncture) from the chest cavity. Cut through diaphragm to detach ribs from carcass. Then use knife to remove flank muscle which is found between ribs and rear legs.

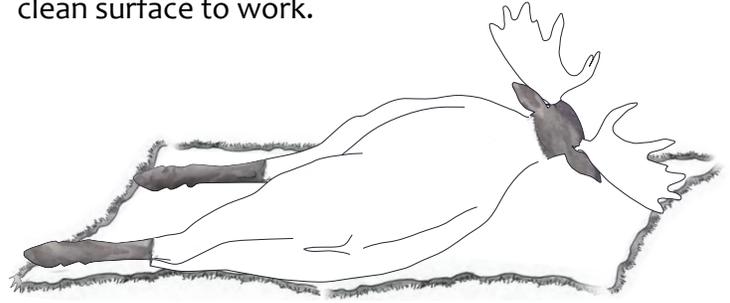
Place ribs and flank in game bag with backstrap.



Skin other side

Step 13:

Skin exposed side following same procedure as previously described. Spread hide out to provide a clean surface to work.

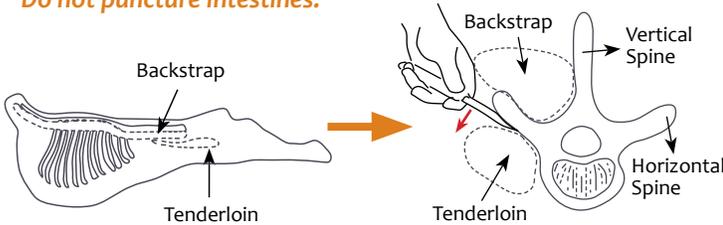


Tenderloin

Step 10:

The tenderloins run inside abdominal cavity along backbone down into the hip. Make a shallow cut just under horizontal spine of vertebrae.

Do not puncture intestines.



Step 14:

From the remaining side of animal, remove front and hind quarter, backstrap, tenderloin, and ribs following steps 1-11.

Look over the carcass and use a boning or fillet knife to remove any remaining meat from bones.

You must legally salvage all big game meat for human consumption. Some areas have additional salvage requirements such as leaving the meat on the bone or salvaging the antlers. Check current regulations to ensure that you have met all requirements.

Step 11:

Once tenderloin is exposed, reach into body cavity, use fingers to work it free from the connective tissue. Cut both ends and remove.

Place tenderloin in game bag with backstrap and ribs.

Although it is possible to leave the guts inside the moose cavity for the entire field dressing process, you may choose to remove the guts at this time. If you do so, prevent spillage of stomach contents and fecal material by tying off trachea, esophagus, and anus before making any cuts.

Neck

Step 15:

Expose neck by skinning hide to the skull just behind ears. Removing neck meat can be difficult, some people remove the entire neck with bone intact. Alternatively, cut along the natural separations between muscles and fillet along bones to remove as much meat as possible.

Place neck meat in clean, dry game bag.



Roll moose over

Step 12:

Use the two remaining legs to roll animal over onto the clean skinned hide exposing the unskinned hide of other side.

To help with maneuvering, leave lower legs attached until quarters are removed.

If moose has large antlers sever the neck first or lift antlers and turn them as moose is rolled over.



Antlers

Step 16:

Skin hide off head midway down snout. Starting at back of skull, use bone saw to cut through eye orbits. Remove antlers and skull plate from head.

