

Testimonial – Stellane John

A few months ago, my husband received an email from the Wild Sheep Foundation about the Women Hunt™ Program. He immediately showed me and encouraged me to apply. I was hesitant at first but decided to give it a shot. So, I got started and applied the passion to learn about hunting and conservation in my application. After I submitted the application, I waited eagerly to see if I was accepted. I remember waking up that Friday morning and checking my email at 5am. Then again at 5:30am and every half hour until I received the news. I looked at my email and saw the sender was from Women Hunt™. At this point my heart was racing. I opened the email and as soon as I saw 'congratulations' I started cheering and jumping up and down. I immediately ran to my husband and told him I was accepted and going to Texas. After the little celebration I kept my eyes out for important emails leading up to the meet up. Before you know it, it was time to fly out. I stayed up late packing and could not sleep because I was so nervous and excited. It was flight day and before leaving to the airport I must've packed and unpacked 4-5 times and changed my suitcase/duffle bag at least 3 times before I was happy with how I packed and what I packed. I got to the airport and made my way to the gate. From our first zoom or teams meeting we were able to see each other's face and I was so grateful for that because when I got to the gate Catherine (also from Arizona) was already there. We started talking like we were just old friends catching up instead of two strangers meeting face to face for the first time. After arriving in San Antonio, Catherine and I shared a cab to the hotel continuing to get to know each other. After checking in we immediately went to the lobby for a meet and greet/cocktail hour. I was nervous to meet the other ladies and scared that I was not going to fit in. As soon as I walked over to the table where a few other ladies were I knew I had nothing to worry about. I was welcomed with open arms, we were already telling jokes, our laughter filled the hotel lobby, it was amazing! After a quick introduction we made our way to the restaurant where we were going to have dinner and the energy was astounding! I had nothing to worry about and getting to know each wonderful soul was the assurance I needed that I was right where I was supposed to be and that these ladies were going to be great friends. The next morning, we left in the vans and made our way to the ranch. It was such a scenic view between the landscape and the animals. When we arrived at the ranch, I think it was safe to say we all had mixed emotions. We were happy, nervous, excited, and curious as to what was to come. We took a couple of pictures and received our cabin assignments. Then we met in the lobby before our big surprise in the classroom. After we were invited to come in the classroom, we were gifted AMAZING gifts from our sponsors that none of us were ready for or expecting. Personally, I was shocked and speechless. I was not at all expecting a full Sitka set as well as Kenetrek boots and socks. We also received some cool gifts from the ranch and the Wild Sheep Foundation. Having received all of this at once was such a blessing that I began to tear up a bit thinking how blessed we all were as well as how generous all our sponsors were. After that we were able to see our rifles that were provided to us by Weatherby with Leica scopes. To see the engraved plate with the Wild Sheep Foundation logo and our name on a piece of tape was great! After a quick ranch tour and a very filling dinner we all went to bed and were ready to start our new hunter course. We started our first full day at the ranch with getting to know our new rifle and scope. Then we learned "A-Way" to clean our rifles. After that we got down to business and broke up into two groups and made our way to the range to ensure our rifles were zeroed in and gave us the opportunity to shoot a few groups at 100 yards. A few of us have shot a rifle but have not spent much time behind it or taught different shooting techniques while others have never shot a

rifle in their life. I had the pleasure of having Fredo as my instructor and he was so patient with April and I. Before actually shooting a group, he had us dry fire a few shots so we felt comfortable and get rid of any jitters we may have had and the anticipation of the recoil. It also gave me an idea of how much pressure I needed on the trigger, where my head needed to be on my cheek pad to ensure I had a clear view through my scope and that I was timing my breathing and not jerking the trigger but squeezing. Finally, it was go time! I felt confident that I loaded two bullets into the magazine and one bullet into the chamber, closed the bolt, found the target in my scope, and controlled my breathing. I moved the safety to fire and squeezed the trigger. To my surprise I did not feel any recoil! Fredo told me to reload and shoot the other two when I was ready. Before you knew it, I shot my first group with my new soon to be rifle. After some adjustments I was ready to shoot another group. I was getting closer to the center of the target. One last adjustment was made, and I was ready to shoot my final round. I loaded 3 more and to my surprise they were in the center of the target right where I wanted it to be. I had two bullets that went through the same hole and the third was just on the top left of it. I was so impressed and proud of myself. This was possible through the support and teachings provided by the instructors who were sooooo patient with us. We had some extra time and we wanted to make sure our rifles were set all the way out to 700 yards. Fredo slowly had me progress every 50 yards. I have gone out and shot a few times but never enough to call myself a great shot. Before the Women Hunt™ camp, the furthest I have ever shot was no more than 200 yards and I have only done that once or twice. At the ranch I dialed my scope in to 250 yards (thanks to the helpful range cards that were provided to us) and took a deep slow breath and squeezed... I looked through my scope and I hit the target! My confidence was already building so much that I knew I needed to keep my cool to continue. I eventually was able to make my way toward a 700-yard shot. I heard my bullet hit the gong and looked through my scope to confirm the hit. After seeing my hit on the gong, I unloaded and knelt behind my rifle and gave a high five to Fredo and April. That was the furthest shot I have ever taken, and I did it!! I was on cloud nine all the way back to the ranch. At lunch we all shared our first experiences as we all had firsts of our own. After lunch it was back to the range to work on a few fundamentals like keeping our head down on the scope after we had taken our shot to keeping our eye on the target and looking at our impacts. We also worked on keeping our head down and reloading. As we progressed on the range Fredo noticed that I was catching on fast to what was being taught to us, so he challenged me by shooting back-to-back targets at different ranges. For example, he would have me shoot a target at 200 yards then follow it up with a 300-yard shot. Then the pressure was on where we were given 10 seconds to shoot our first target, reload, and shoot our second target. It started off as the first and second target being the same distance but Fredo being the instructor he knew I was capable of more and had me do that same thing but again with two targets being at different distances. Instead of dialing in for different distances he would have me dial in at one distance then hold over for my last target. It took some adjusting but I caught on. The day went by so fast that it was time for dinner already! The next day was full of more range time and classes on shot placement and hunting management to prepare us for our hunt that evening. We had an early dinner, so we were able to get out for our hunts. Danny and I were partnered up with Fredo as our guide. Danny thought that I should go first as we drove out to our first spot. We grabbed our binoculars and started looking for deer. We looked and looked and with no luck decided to go to another spot. As we were driving to the second spot Danny noticed a whitetail doe and tapped my shoulder. I looked to my right and sure enough, there she was! I immediately tapped Fredo's shoulder and whispered deer, deer, to the right quartering by the tree. He looked over and drove forward enough to hide the jeep. I grabbed my rifle, and we made our way to a spot where we could get a better view.

Immediately I got set up on shooting sticks then Fredo told us "No shot" as the doe had a yellow ear tag. We looked around to see if there were any others with her and there were not. So, we continued to our next spot. When we arrived at the next spot, we immediately spotted a few does crossing a creek bed. I got set up prone, pulled out my rangefinder and got dialed in. We waited and waited but the deer never came out of the tree line on the other side of the creek. We continued to glass and saw that they had made their way uphill keeping themselves concealed within the tree line. At that time, it was too dark to try another spot, so we headed back to the ranch. The next evening, I had my chance as we were able to go out for another hunt. Right away Fredo found a few fallow does. I grabbed my rifle and quietly rushed over while Danny filmed behind me. I could see them feeding and tried to set up in the prone position, but the grass was too tall. We moved up hill to see if I had a better view and the grass was still too tall, so I had no choice but to shoot off shooting sticks. Since Fredo was my instructor all week he knew what I was capable of and reminded me of the confidence I had in my shots. Doing so the doe he had me on was in a small window. As soon as I got set up the doe decided to bed down. She was going to sleep and started tucking her head. Fredo coughed to get her attention, immediately she became more alert scanning her environment. What felt like a few minutes later, she finally stood up. I had my crosshairs right behind her shoulder where I wanted it, took a breath, and squeezed the trigger. I was expecting her to drop right then and there but due to the thick trees I was not able to see her. We waited to see if she would come out. I told Danny that I felt very confident in my shot, I squeezed the trigger, I didn't jerk, and I had the crosshairs right where I wanted it. I begged Fredo to let us go down there and look for her. Immediately the confidence I had was slowly fading. The other instructor AJ showed up with his dog. As we made our way down the hill, we spooked the two other does and they crossed our path to the right. I looked to the left and there she was under a tree. My confidence was restored as I walked over and saw the perfect shot I had made. She had just gone 5-10 yards from where I had shot her, and we just could not see her due to the thick tree line. I said a prayer for her and helped load her into the jeep. We got back to the ranch and was taught how to gut and butcher. The next day was just as amazing as we were able to debone not only my fallow, but a few other ladies' whitetail does. We learned what parts of the meat to use for various dishes and had a class with Chef Josh Schwencke on sausage making. We were eagerly waiting to go home with our new personalized aprons to try all the new recipes that were shared with us. This day led to the day none of us wanted. The last day at the ranch. Although it was graduation night full of celebration, a lot of tears were shed because we were so thankful for the bond that was created as well as the gifts received, and we didn't want it to end. I am extremely grateful I had the opportunity to attend the Women Hunt™ New Hunter Course through the Wild Sheep Foundation. After completing the program, I feel confident enough to further my hunting journey. I would like to bring this opportunity back to my reservation and teach other young women about hunting. Not only how to start but the before and after process. I want to teach them what it means to be an ethical hunter and the role they play in conservation and how important it is. The program provided me the knowledge and confidence I needed for my own public land mule deer hunt. I believe that this program helped me succeed in harvesting my first desert mule deer and I could not be grateful enough. We learned so much during the camp that I was not able to include it all, but I would like to say thank you to Renée Thornton, the Wild Sheep Foundation, the Women Hunt™ Program, the FTW Ranch, and all of our generous sponsors that without them, none of this would be possible.