

Trophies of the Mind

By Bruce Masterman

They are cherished mementoes of our hunts and fishing trips.

They hang on our walls, hold revered spots on our shelves and are stored forever in our hearts and in our minds.

Your favorite trophy might be a full mounted head, maybe just the antlers, of the first or largest whitetail buck you ever shot. Or a plaster reproduction of the last largemouth bass your father caught before he passed into eternal waters.

Perhaps it's a mallard drake, wings cupped and iridescent green head shining just like on that magical autumn morning when it suddenly appeared at the edge of your decoy spread.

Maybe it's a black bear rug spread out in front of a fireplace, its gleaming coat a favorite resting spot for your aging Lab.

People who don't understand believe mounting fish and game is a morbid exercise designed only to boost egos.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

A trophy is a lasting tribute to our fish and wildlife, their habitat and the management programs that benefit them. It's an affirmation of our skills, and luck. It's a celebration of the connection between us and wild things and places.

Whenever we look at our trophies, we relive many times over the hunting and experiences that provided them. The experience grows richer each time.

Trophies are reminders that we must be wise stewards of the land, and responsible managers of the fish and wildlife that live there. They reinforce the notion that hunting and fishing aren't sports like baseball or hockey, because hunters and anglers never win or lose.

Some trophies qualify for an official record book. Others rate preserving because of factors far less tangible, and much more personal.

Most trophies never make it to the taxidermist. No matter.

Trophies of the mind last forever. And they never need dusting.

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