PRESERVING THE PRIVILEGE TO HUNT

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PRESIDENT

It is no secret that hunters represent a relatively small percentage of the population and that the future of hunting will be determined by a large voting population that doesn't hunt.

Boone and Crockett Club member and former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Jack Ward Thomas said it best: "In the United States, while the right to keep and bear arms is constitutionally assured, hunting is a privilege to be repeatedly earned, year after year, by those who hunt. It is well for hunters to remember that in a democracy, privileges, which include hunting, are maintained through the approval of the public at large."

The crusade to conserve wildlife began by the Club when hunters realized the need to set limits to protect species. This led to what we now refer to as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Two important principles of the model are relevant to this discussion: 1) wildlife belong to all North American citizens (held in trust), and 2) these resources are to be managed so that populations will be sustained indefinitely.

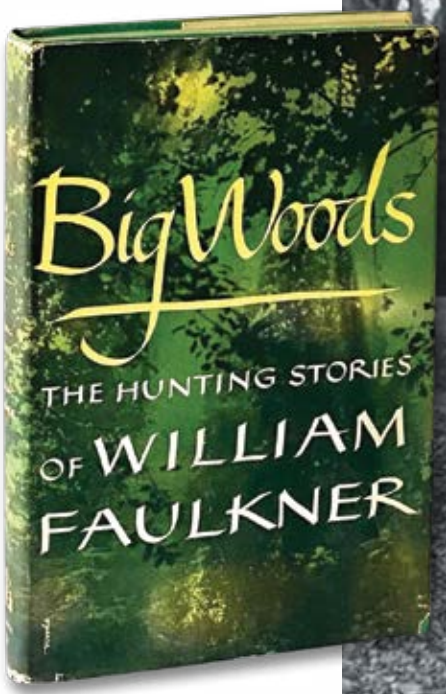
Why the talk of all this? Basically, there are a few million hunters, a few million anti-hunters, and several hundred million "independents" who are neither for nor against hunting. Collectively, these people will play a role in how wildlife resources are utilized in the future. Most hunters project an image of dignity and self-respect. On the other hand, the way others act and look serves only to alienate non-hunters. If the "independents" are alienated by game hogs, poachers, and people who project a poor image of hunters—and this is the image we allow to be portrayed—true sportsmen and women will bear the consequences. As each instance of these violations or unethical behavior becomes known, the future of hunting becomes a little more endangered.

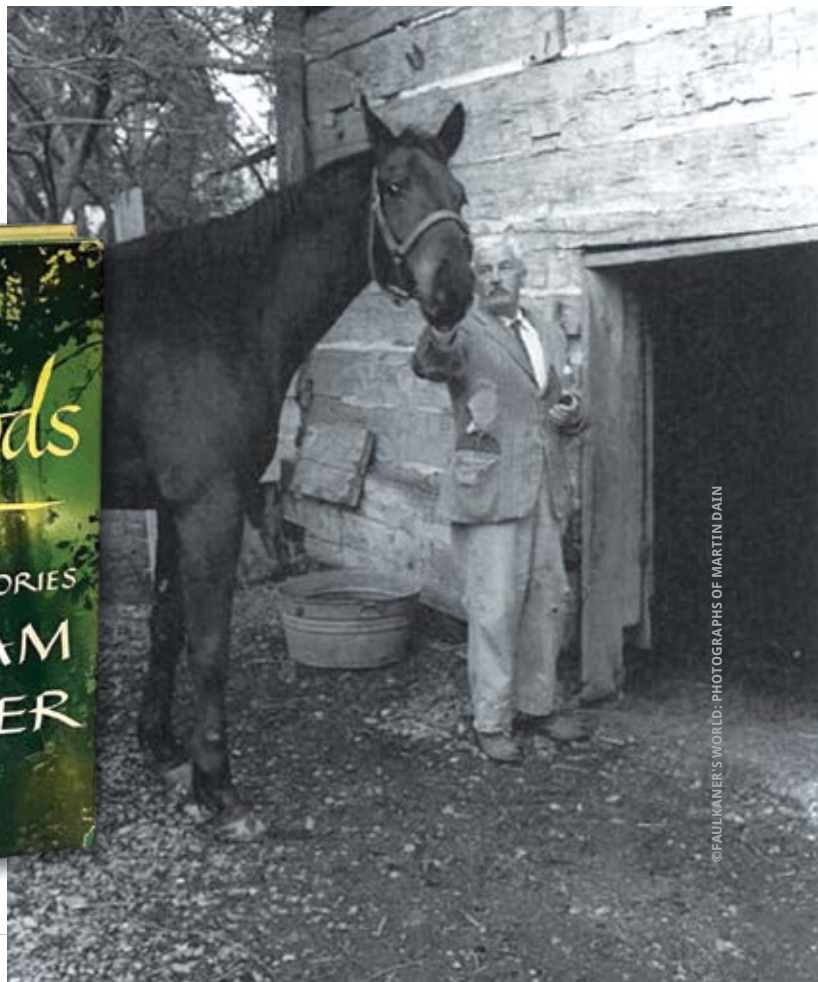
One of my favorite hunters is one of the most celebrated writers of American literature. His image as a hunter was impeccable. His name is William Faulkner. Faulkner drew upon his vast experiences in Mississippi for his story material. For example, Sam Fathers, a character in his 1955 collection of hunting stories, *Big Woods*, is thought to have been based on Holt Collier, Theodore Roosevelt's guide on the famous 1902 bear hunt.

In November 1909, in the Mississippi Delta, 12-year-old Faulkner became a true deer hunter. Having killed a whitetail buck on the last day of a hunt, Faulkner recalled not the shot, nor the "kick" of the double-barrel shotgun, but rather the realization that he had joined the ranks of deer hunters.

"The Old People" was the first story Faulkner told in first person prose. It later morphed into the story of Ike McCaslin, a character that Faulkner followed as he grew from boy to man. At one point Faulkner describes the scene in which Ike takes his position as he waits for the legendary buck: "Then, as if it had waited for them to find their positions and become still, the wilderness breathed again. It seemed to lean inward above them, above himself and Sam and Walter and Boon in their separate lurking-places, tremendous, attentive, impartial, and omniscient, the buck moving in it somewhere."

The buck proved elusive on that day of hunting. However, in *Big Woods*, the buck reveals itself and allows the boy to glimpse its greatness. Faulkner writes: "Then the boy saw the buck. It was coming down the ridge, as if it were walking out of the very sound of the horn which related its death. It was not running, it was walking, tremendous, unhurried, slanting and tilting its head to pass the antlers through the undergrowth...





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Faulkner was once asked why he hunted. His response was "...always to learn something, to learn something of—not only to pursue but to overtake and then to have compassion not to destroy, to catch, to touch and then let go because then tomorrow you can pursue it again. If you destroy it, what you caught, then it's gone, it's finished. And that to me is sometimes the greater part of valor but always it's the greater part of pleasure, not to destroy what you have pursued. The pursuit is the thing, not the reward, not the gain."

Then it saw them. And still it did not begin to run. It just stopped for an instant, taller than any man, looking at them; then its muscles suppled, gathered. It did not even alter its course, not fleeing, not even running, just moving with that winged and effortless ease with which deer move, passing within twenty feet of them, its head high and the eyes not proud and not haughty but just full and wild and unafraid."

This time, the buck did not get away and the thrill of the hunt was more alive in the boy than ever. Not the thrill of the kill, mind you—the thrill of the hunt. Like me, deer hunting became a way of life for Faulkner, not just a hobby. Hunting taught Faulkner how to live the simple life and how to hunt with certainty, respect, and understand the game he was pursuing.

When Faulkner killed his first buck, he better understood the internal struggle of the hunter: How can man kill the object he so loves? The quest to understand this became the underlying theme in Faulkner's hunting stories.

Faulkner would return annually to his deer camp where he was joined by lawyers, bankers, farmers, and blue-collar workers. They would share in the duties of cleaning and cooking wild game and enjoyed drinks and telling stories late into the evening. Faulkner cherished his time in the "Big Woods" of the Delta and would render some of his best writing from camp. It was, as always, his sanctuary. Here, Faulkner was no longer a world-renowned author, but another hunter. Later in life, Faulkner became captain of the camp; to Faulkner, this may have been his greatest accomplishment of all.

In 1950, Faulkner received a call from a Swedish journalist informing him that he had won the 1949 Nobel Prize for literature—the most prestigious award for a writer. When the journalist asked him if he would come to Sweden to receive the award, Faulkner responded, "I can't get away. I am going deer hunting." After deer season ended, he went to Sweden to accept the award.

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If more hunters could project the image of Faulkner—someone who cares deeply about the hunt, the habitat, and has great understanding and respect for the animal they are pursuing before and after the harvest—then hunting would have more support from the non-hunting public. We must communicate to the public why hunting and conservation benefit the common good. For example, why is managing a forest utilizing science good for elk, elk hunting, elk habitat, carbon sequestration, and clean drinking water? This type of argument makes the hunter-conservation community relevant to society. And in doing so, we have a seat at the table when decisions about resource utilization are made. And as sometimes said: "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu."

Faulkner once said, "Never be afraid to raise your

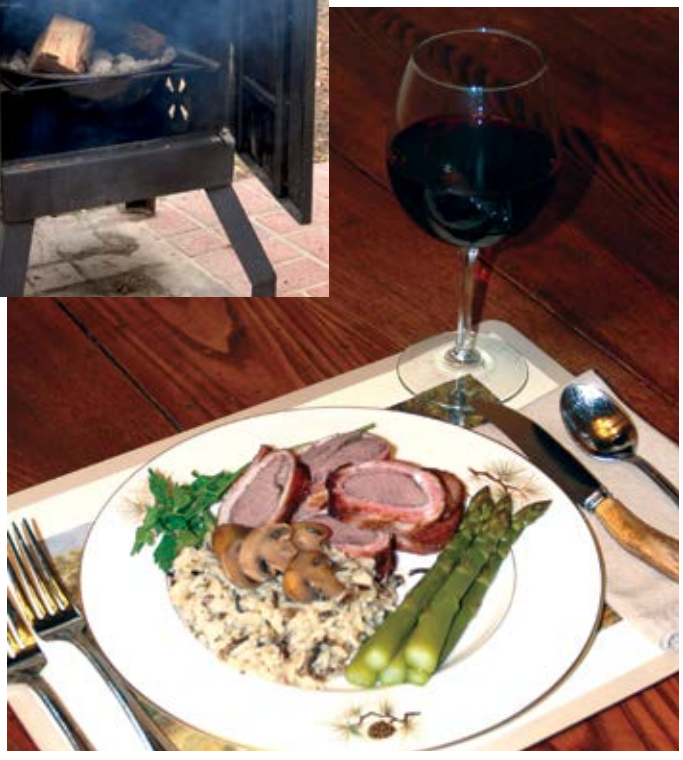
voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the earth." As I see hunting, hunters, and science-based wildlife management being constantly distorted, I do believe Faulkner would want us to stand up and make our voices heard. Not doing so is committing a slow suicide.

The National Rifle Association's book, *How to Talk About Hunting* by Mark Duda, states that the percentage of Americans who approve of hunting for food is above 80 percent, yet that number drops to 29 percent if only for trophy hunting.

The Club's mission is to promote the conservation and management of wildlife, especially big game, and its habitat, to preserve and encourage hunting and to maintain the highest ethical standards of fair chase and sportsmanship in North America. Yet, when I tell most people about the Club, they think we are only a big game trophy hunting organization. We are so much more than that. We are to hunting and conservation like Faulkner was to literature.

Unfortunately, hunters are usually painted in a very unfavorable light by people who do not understand what being a true sportsman or woman really means. Hunters are projected to be cold-hearted killers who kill for the fun of it. While there are some that are, most are true hunters and conservationists.

Throughout history, hunting has been a means of feeding ourselves and our families. It has also been a means of controlling wild game populations. However, thanks to a revival of recognizing where food comes from and concerns for human health, many people who were once completely against hunting are now rethinking their position. In addition, "locavores" who have decided to eat food from local or regional providers are more invested in where their food comes from and how it is produced. Procuring your own meat through hunting fits into the locavore and health-conscious movements, particularly when considering the health benefits of wild game. More on this in the pages to come of this issue of *Fair Chase*.



With 80 percent of Americans now living in urban areas (and farther from natural spaces), our challenge is to help society maintain enough of a connection to the land and the natural world to care about it and see the importance of taking care of it—whether they like to hunt or not. Most Americans value outdoor experiences and are more concerned about the environment than ever before. People want to do what is best, yet they may not necessarily know what that is. We need to help them see that hunting and conservation helps our economy, retains jobs, preserves property values, and promotes a healthy lifestyle, all while increasing the sustainability of natural resources. The future of hunting and conservation depend upon helping others see how what we do benefits them. The writer Shelby Foote once penned a letter to Walker Percy describing the writer's craft: to teach others how to see.

My term as president of this great Club is about over. It has been a privilege to lead it. You—as members, supporters, and partners—should know you have great officers, directors, committee chairs, members, and staff. It has been an honor to work with such fine people who care so deeply about hunting and conservation. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I hope I left the Club in better shape than when I started this position. I think I did.

Being my last column, I want to leave you with this. My wife's family has had a summer home in Monteagle, Tennessee, since 1873—a wonderful place to get out of the hot, humid summers of Mississippi. Their next-door neighbor was Frank C. Waldrop. He was executive editor of the *Washington Times-Herald* (which later merged with the *Washington Post*), of which Eleanor "Cissy" Patterson was its legendary owner-publisher. Ms. Patterson was a hunter in her own right; she shot a Mannlicher rifle, was excellent on a horse, and like TR, loved the chase. Upon her death, she left the paper, including part of the *Chicago Tribune*, to several people, of which Mr. Waldrop was one. As I was rambling through some of my father-in-law, Arch Dalrymple III's, papers not long ago, I found a letter Mr. Waldrop sent to him and four other close friends. The letter was about the land between the rivers, then and now. That land encompassed Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown, Virginia—the same land my ancestors settled in the 1600s.

I never met Frank Waldrop, but from the many front porch conversations I had with my father-in-law, I felt like I knew him well. So, I leave you with some thoughts he conveyed to his five friends in his March 30, 1982, letter: "It is simply this: there is no free lunch. You never get something for nothing. In the end, all bills are paid. The American nation started as certainly on that finger of land between the rivers as it started anywhere. It started in danger and in fear. Peace, sunshine, beauty, do not come on the cheap, and they are fragile as all imagining. Remember this: it cost something to achieve America. You are inheritors. What will you do?" ■