

GONE HUNTING! GONE FISHING!

Reflections on Wildlife and the 2nd Amendment

By Valerius Geist Ph.D.
B&C Professional Member
University of Calgary (Emeritus Professor
and Founding Program Director for
Environmental Science, Faculty of
Environmental Design)

Gone hunting! Gone fishing! That's something we North Americans take for granted. Those before us went hunting or fishing—as did those before them—and it was never in doubt or a big deal. Nor was it a big deal to get the necessary equipment in the local hardware or sporting goods stores, though almost all the equipment was in the house anyway. Hunting and fishing were part of the seasonal activities of family, neighbors, and friends; one grew up with it, accepting it as an inevitable and delightful part of life. It was a cherished time when duck or deer season rolled around, and your folks and friends got ready to go. The hunting clothing and boots came out, the dog got excited, food was prepared, the guns went into their cases. It was all part and parcel of getting out and coming back with a deer, a limit of ducks, pheasants or whatever.

It is all taken for granted.

Hunting and the right to bear arms has always been a part of North American heritage. Hunting stories were told by Theodore Roosevelt as far back as 1885, in *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman*. Illustration, drawn by A.B. Frost

Sportsmen like Jason W. Hellickson are helping uphold the North American Model by harvesting public wildlife like this typical whitetail deer.



POSITION OF THE BOONE AND CROCKETT CLUB

SECOND AMENDMENT RIGHTS

Lucky Americans! Fortunate people! In other lands, as little as an empty shotgun shell in the house would land you in jail—or worse! The gun—as an everyday tool for hunting, for work around the farm, as a companion of a rancher or of someone heading out for a bit of plinking, trap and skeet or target shooting, as a cherished object of a collector—is very much a North American phenomenon. The weapon at home, the right to bear arms has been historically the mark of free men. It was always the right of the truly free within any state or nation, democratic or otherwise. Consequently, the bearing of arms is a potent symbol of freedom.

However, the right to bear arms has much more than symbolic value. The North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, one of the great cultural gifts of North Americans to global culture, could never have developed without the right of citizens to bear arms. The most fundamental basis of this model is that every citizen in good standing has the privilege, nay, the right of participating in the annual harvest of public wildlife. And that implies an armed citizenry. The miracle of North American conservation is that wildlife is thriving despite every big game animal being outnumbered about ten to one by people, about eight to one by firearms in private hands, and about a dozen to one by livestock.

As a consequence, our model of wildlife conservation cannot be applied globally, because in most societies there is no tradition or right for citizens to bear arms. Quite the contrary. In most societies, wildlife is in the “de facto” ownership of the most privileged and powerful, making wildlife, at best, a national treasure akin to public art treasures in a museum. It’s then under a “look, but do not touch” policy, or it may be sold by the state to foreigners for hunting, for the purported goal of raising funds for conservation. Or, wildlife is considered the property of landowners to be disposed of as they see fit. Wildlife is of no concern to the common citizen, unless they have the wherewithal to buy wildlife in the national market. A few reserves do hold public wildlife, but such is also marketed akin to museum exhibits, aimed preferably at the more affluent of foreign visitors as part of that nation’s tourism. If the common man wants to eat wildlife, let him buy game meat at the local butcher shop or restaurant. Even as privileged hunters, this minority of the public has no say over how wildlife is conserved and managed. That is solely the business of the

Situational Overview

The Boone and Crockett Club is often asked to comment on gun control and Second Amendment rights, which are not directly addressed by the Mission and Visions of the Club.

The Club supports regulated, fair chase hunting that supports the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Because restricting access to firearms has the potential to directly impact this conservation paradigm, the Club takes the following position.

Position

The success of North American Model of Wildlife Conservation relies upon an armed citizenry able to participate in the regulated harvest of game species. The best guarantor of well-managed, well-funded and sustainable wildlife conservation programs is therefore the right to keep and bear arms as guaranteed by the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.

de facto or *de jure* owners of wildlife. It is he who instructs the hunter what to take as part of a sales agreement. The hunter's obligation is merely to kill the wildlife he paid for. The rest is handled for him. In publicly protected areas there exists either a laissez-faire system of management, or the wildlife is artificially kept in check by civil servants. Even in democratic societies in which wildlife is *de jure* public property, a legal interest by the citizen in how wildlife is conserved or managed is exceptional. However, where wildlife is *de facto* private property, it is very much in the interest of the owners of wildlife that the public be disarmed, and that weapons are strictly for those that have access to wildlife through wealth or social status or who need weapons to protect wildlife against illegal take by the public. Note that the ownership and use of weapons is linked to the ownership of wildlife; be it wildlife in private or public ownership. Consequently, the more wildlife under private control, the less justification for arms possession by the public at large, and, of course, vice versa. That is, the more abundant and accessible public wildlife, the greater the justification for an armed public, the greater the interest of the public in wildlife, and the greater the expectation by the public of having a say in wildlife conservation and management. There will always be lively differences of opinion whether private or public ownership of wildlife leads to superior wildlife conservation. Historically, there is little doubt that private ownership of land to which wildlife is attached can lead to superior abundance and diversity of wildlife. And what a pleasure to visit landholdings of owners keen on wildlife. I have seen such ranches, rich in wildlife and native flora, but I have also seen how such ranches became wildlife deserts after a change in ownership.

Without doubt, private lands rich in wildlife historically are targets for poaching and may generate severe problems in wildlife protection. England and central Europe have had this problem for centuries, and that has led to general bans on weapon ownership. Conversely, even in a communist dictatorship, where wildlife was an essential part of the public food or fur economy, weapon ownership remained widespread. Here weapons fulfilled an essential economic function, the harvest of wildlife. In short, he who harvests wildlife is very likely to own a gun. Wildlife can thus be a guarantor of weapon ownership.

However, European history also shows that when revolutions swept the land, when the elite lost their power, the public mercilessly slaughtered wildlife, in part because wildlife stood as a symbol of the hated elite. Post revolutionary societies then found ways to share power and wildlife. For instance, while in Spain hunting red-legged partridges, which were driven towards the guns by beaters, hunters were free to shoot only the partridges, but not the abundant hares. The former belonged to the landowner, and the latter belonged to the villagers. There are varied systems of wildlife conservation, but the ownership of weapons by the public is tied either to wildlife, or closely controlled, to target and competition shooting—or in some nations, to military service. The right to bear arms is thus justified by some strong traditions, but the constitutional right to bear arms is absent, except in the United States, where it is enshrined in the Constitution as the Second Amendment.

I thought that the North American system of wildlife conservation had an excellent chance of being adopted by post-communist Russia, and some Russian colleagues thought the same. After all, Russia has huge public landholdings, while the ownership of weapons was widespread in

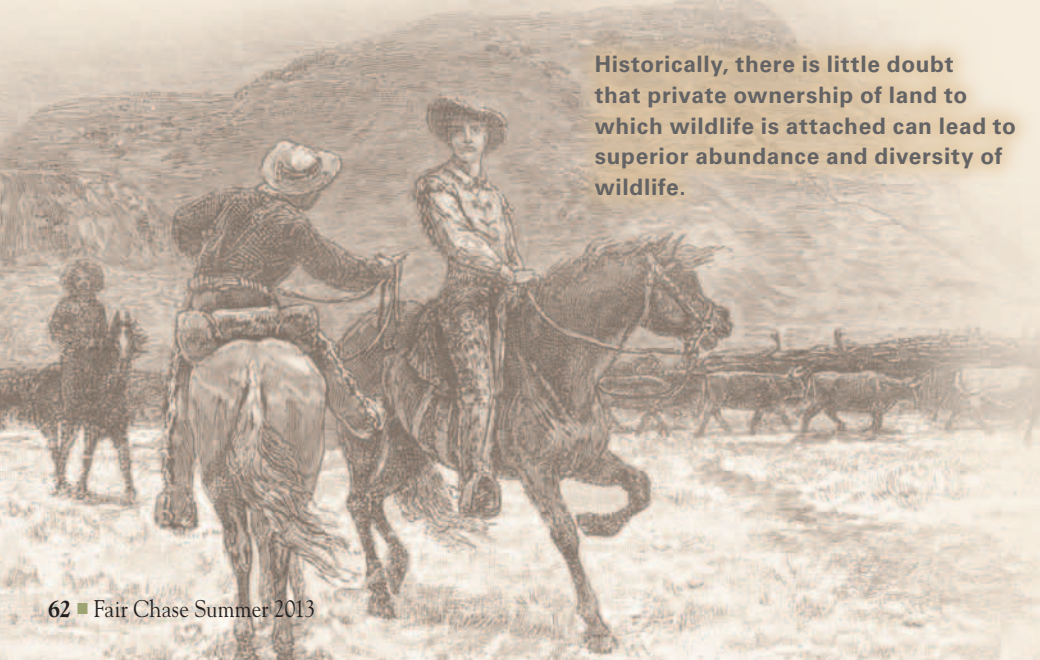
pre-revolutionary Russia, to the point that the wonderfully decorative ethnic costumes of men had showy cartridge holders as part of the decorations. Russia has a long history of excellence in firearm design and production, a long history of marksmanship and excellence in sniping, and a long history of subsistence hunting. However, under Communism the rulers also had a severe paranoia about arms in private hands. It went so far that the party not only censored news about wolves attacking villages and people, but also had “scientists” generate propaganda about the “harmlessness of wolves.” This was done to justify denying people to defend themselves and their livestock with guns. It all came to light after the fall of Communism. Russians were enamored by the way North Americans handled wildlife conservation and hunting. Some of my writings about our system was translated into Russian, and there were articles and splendid illustrations about hunting and wildlife in America. Nothing came of it, and there is now, unfortunately, an ominous silence.

The success of wildlife conservation is served by the Second Amendment. However, the heated debate about its nature does raise a warning flag. Too many Americans are, clearly, not convinced about the sanctity of this law and have bought into the argument that weapons belong only in the hands of soldiers and police. Too many are unaware that it was armed citizens that returned wildlife from the edge of extinction to its present abundance. And there are, frankly, too many that do not care. There are many good reasons for an armed populous, some beyond the Boone and Crockett Club's purview. However, the Club needs urgently to attend to those reasons that are of our concern. Above all, we need to strive towards policies that make wildlife abundant and accessible to the public. The better our efforts at increasing wildlife available to the common man for harvest, the better our chances to increase the number of hunters, and the stronger will be the political voices for hunting and the ownership of weapons. Subsequently, there will be many more ears willing to listen to the remarkable successes of wildlife conservation in North America, and the greater will be the public appreciation of wildlife.

Wildlife, by its very presence is an intrinsic good. However, the harvest of wildlife generates additional incalculable benefits.

- Our economy based on wildlife is exceptionally rich in the creation of wealth and employment, and is a sleeper that needs more attention.

Historically, there is little doubt that private ownership of land to which wildlife is attached can lead to superior abundance and diversity of wildlife.



- Game meats harvested from wild lands tend to be very healthy—very rich in essential nutrients. It's virtually “custom made” for human nutrition.
- The chemical composition of game meat could—and should—serve as quality standard for domestic meats.
- Hunting can encourage intensive physical activity, good fellowship and a bonding with wild places. These benefits are so significant that it should encourage us to find ways to pry young people loose from the virtual reality on their computer to the vibrant reality of real life. It would help make people, but above all the young, more fit and proud of our wildlife and our successes.
- The regular, extended presence of armed individuals in outdoor areas, in and out of hunting seasons, creates an unearned good for all of society. One can label it “the freedom of the woods.” We can all go hiking, camping, and picnicking without fear of encountering large predators day or night. The confident behavior of armed individuals is not lost on the sensitive large predators. In national parks, unfortunately, unarmed hikers, frightened of predators, teach predators that humans are fearful and can be confronted or attacked.

- A large contingent of hunters is an unearned gift to the security of society, long recognized by the military. It is not only that a nation maintains a large pool of individuals expert in handling weapons and marksmanship; there is more: hunters are normally well-versed in maintaining themselves out-of-doors in all seasons and kinds of weather. Their initiative at self-help is a boon to military units as they are able to quickly respond to contingencies and

instruct others to help themselves effectively out-of-doors. At the front hunters have superior “enemy vision” and are much more likely than others to spot and foil sneak or sniper attacks by the enemy. There are good reasons why nations formed elite regiments from hunters and foresters, such as the German Jäger, the French Chasseur, the British Rifle Regiments, and why the Russians lionized their Siberian snipers in WWII. And one suspects that it was not only a perceptive Japanese General who cautioned that an invasion of North America would be met by a gun behind every bush. Spot on! But then you must have known this ever since 1776!

We need to celebrate hunting! The Germans had the right idea of having hunter festivals with shooting, the “Schuetzenfest” (shooting festivals). Yes, we do a lot of organized shooting, but where is the festive mood, the celebration and the joy? We have lots to celebrate. Conventions, good as they are, are simply not enough, although, undoubtedly, a step in the right direction.

There are rich opportunities for our Club to engage the public in wildlife conservation, and never must we mute the role of hunting that got us here. The more we succeed in that, the greater the public's appreciation of the Second Amendment. ■

The more abundant and accessible public wildlife, the greater the justification for an armed public, the greater the interest of the public in wildlife, and the greater the expectation by the public of having a say in wildlife conservation and management.

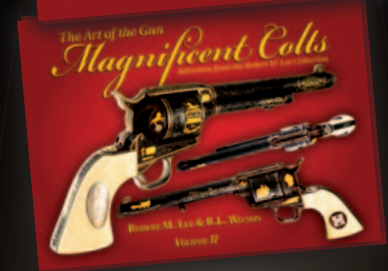
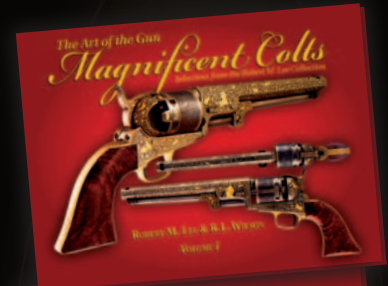


© ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/LUGO

B&C

ONLINE
 Read more B&C position statements

The Best Firearms Book Ever Made!



Classic Cloth Edition \$375
 Special First Edition Limited to 5000 Sets



Deluxe Leather-Bound Collector's Edition \$2900
 Signed & Numbered, Limited to 500 Sets

Featured on the Discovery Channel's "American Guns" and reviewed by American Rifleman & FEGA's The Engraver

For links to above articles go to www.YellowstonePress.com/FC713 and get details on upcoming shows and book signing events!

Order online, or call us today at **866-520-2001**



©2013 ROBERT M. LEE TRUST • ALL RIGHTS RESERVED • FC 7/13