

# THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE

By Daniel A. Pedrotti Jr.  
B&C REGULAR MEMBER



CHAIR  
Hunter Ethics  
Sub-Committee

## Be True to Your School

I remember going on a road trip with my pals back in college for a bit of revelry in a rival school's town. As for a plan, we were up for whatever came along. Somewhere during the night we ran across some other fellows from our school who we knew well enough to know we didn't much care for them. In fact, on our campus, it was well known that there was bad blood between us. Anyway, we sort of acknowledged one another with a grimace and stayed on opposite sides of the bar so we could keep an eye on each other. After all, we were on a road trip, and all we wanted was to have some fun.

Next thing you know, there's some shouting going on and we see they are mixing it up with a group of guys from our rival school. Without even a thought, we joined our buddies and backed those SOB's right out of the bar just before all hell broke completely loose. After everybody calmed down a bit, we spent the rest of the evening with our buddies taking turns buying the next round as we laughed and carried on until the wee hours of the morning.

I told this story to one of my boys a while back, and near the end of a much-longer version of the tale, he stopped me and asked, "Who are the SOB's and who are the buddies?" I said, "Son, you gotta pay better attention; the buddies may be our rivals back home, but the SOB's are our rivals everywhere else".

As hunters, we have our fair share of this going on all the time, but we can and must rise above our differences when we deal with those that would put an end to what we do. There is much, much more that we all agree upon than what we do not. The tricky part is discussing the things we disagree on without alienating different groups or elements of our culture. And, we need to do this continuously, not just when we are challenged. We need to create a central doctrine or agenda that includes all that we can agree upon and recognize this as our core belief structure and give voice to it for all to see, hunter and non-hunter alike. Then we can break down our differences as nuances derived from the core belief.

As a starting point, let's agree that we are all hunter-conservationists. We are not takers per se, as we contribute in whatever capacity we possess, to the viability and sustainability of the wild places and wild animals

that live there. We know our place as stewards in the great circle of life. We enjoy an intimate and complex relationship with our wards, and we benefit as much from them as they do from us.

Second, we respect the animals we hunt and the places where they roam. This respect requires us to treat our prey with honor and dignity and compels us to leave the places where they live unspoiled by our visit.

Third, we are hunters not collectors. While we may be opportunistic, we willingly accept and relish challenge and uncertainty. Hunting skills and preparation versus natural adaptation and instinct comprises a dynamic and exciting formula that defines the hunt equation in simple and elegant terms. It is from here that we begin to explain the compulsion that drives us.

Fourth, we abide by the law of the land. While this changes from region to region and reflects the variability in cultural values, it defines, in legal terms, what is acceptable and what is not. The caveat here is that all that is legal is not necessarily right. Beyond strict adherence to the law, we have a responsibility to conduct ourselves as though our sons and daughters are watching, and we must not bring dishonor to our hunting community.

Fifth, we need to be recruiters and role models. There is great opportunity to bring others into our community, and the beneficiary of success in this effort will be the wild animals and wild places. Women, children, and locavores are all increasingly interested in joining us. They each represent new perspective and enthusiasm, and we should embrace and support them as they make their way afield. We have to do our part to maintain access to hunting opportunities in both legal and economic terms or we will dissuade participation and interest from those currently outside community.

These ideas should be in our fight song and our battle cry of our beloved alma mater. We can agree to this point. Beyond these, we have to find a way to openly and honestly discuss our differences in techniques, approaches and ultimately values and ethics. Diversity, in and of itself, can be a tremendous strength once we recognize our commonality.

I, for one, would prefer that you hunt than that you didn't. We can talk about the details over a whiskey...I'm buying. ■

