

# ETHICS

## FAIR CHASE

### BIG GAME HUNTING

#### Ratings and Shares as defined by Nielsen are:

basic to the television industry. A rating is a percent of the universe that is being measured, most commonly discussed as a percent of all television households. As such, a rating is always quantifiable, assuming you know the size of the universe (TV households, persons, women 18 – 34, and so forth). A share is the percent of households or persons using television at the time the program is airing and who are watching a particular program. Shares can be useful as a gauge of competitive standing.

## At What Cost?

# RATINGS

I don't know about you, but I feel a certain vindication being able to watch hunting shows on television. When hunting programs appear alongside sports, sitcoms, news, documentaries, and even reality shows, it means the sport has made it to television's Big Time.

Not too long ago, hunting shows on television didn't exist. In fact, there was a dead zone between the occasional airing of Curt Gowdy's *American Sportsman* (syndicated in 1965) and the advent of private access cable, which became widely available in the 1980s. Today, we have not one, but five, outdoors networks airing a myriad of hunting and fishing shows. Some would say hunting has come of age, and they would be right. Nothing legitimizes an activity or pastime like being on television.

I'm of the generation who lived through the dead zone. All I had growing up was the aforementioned *American Sportsman*. Maybe it was my youth, or the lack of other outdoors programs to compare it to, but *Sportsman* episodes were great shows. Men of honor doing honorable things, and on TV! Big-game hunting, fly fishing, bird hunting, they did it all.

Then, *American Sportsman* was dropped. Not even reruns. All was lost. What was left for us hunters was huddling in some auditorium once a year when the *Wally Taber Show* passed through town. Taber produced a film once a year on hunting around the globe, along the lines of what Warren Miller does today with his skiing flicks. It was a big deal — the only game in town — but it wasn't on TV. Still, even these films fell by the wayside, and at the bottom of the dead zone, there was no hunting on television.

I can't remember if they even shot anything in those old *American Sportsman* shows. I'm sure they did, but that's not what stuck in my mind. The opening scenes of bounding mule deer and flushing roosters were all I needed to see. Today, they shoot things on TV. They shoot a lot, which is okay. But this column is about ethics, and what is intended to be a good thing is spawning a bad thing. Some of these shows are doing more harm to hunting than good.

Let's look at the effects these shows are creating, concentrating on the positives first.

#### Our Time

First, television generally legitimizes an activity. Do you think snowboarding, Texas hold 'em poker, and lumberjack competitions would be as popular today if they weren't on TV? The same thing is happening to hunting as a result of the sport's exposure.

Second, today's hunting shows are educational, exposing us to the pursuit of different species of game on every continent, using every hunting method out there. They show us techniques, strategies, and the latest equipment for success.

Third, they engage our next generation and give them role models to look up to. Hunter/hero personalities are born during these shows, and when the camera follows a "celebrity" into the woods, that's even bigger medicine.

It's a "feel good" to see Jack Nicklaus in a treestand or Jeff Foxworthy hamming it up in a deer camp, or Dale Earnhart talking about his favorite off-track pastime. It's also

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By Keith Balfourd

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an endorsement that says, "I hunt, and hunting is okay." At a time when many are saying hunting is a bad thing, celebrity participation on television hunting programs shuts these naysayers up for awhile.

Last, the depiction of hunting on television gives hunters our own specialized entertainment, which kindles the traditions and heritage of the hunt.

These are all positive points, but there are downsides to these programs as well.

#### **The Dark Side**

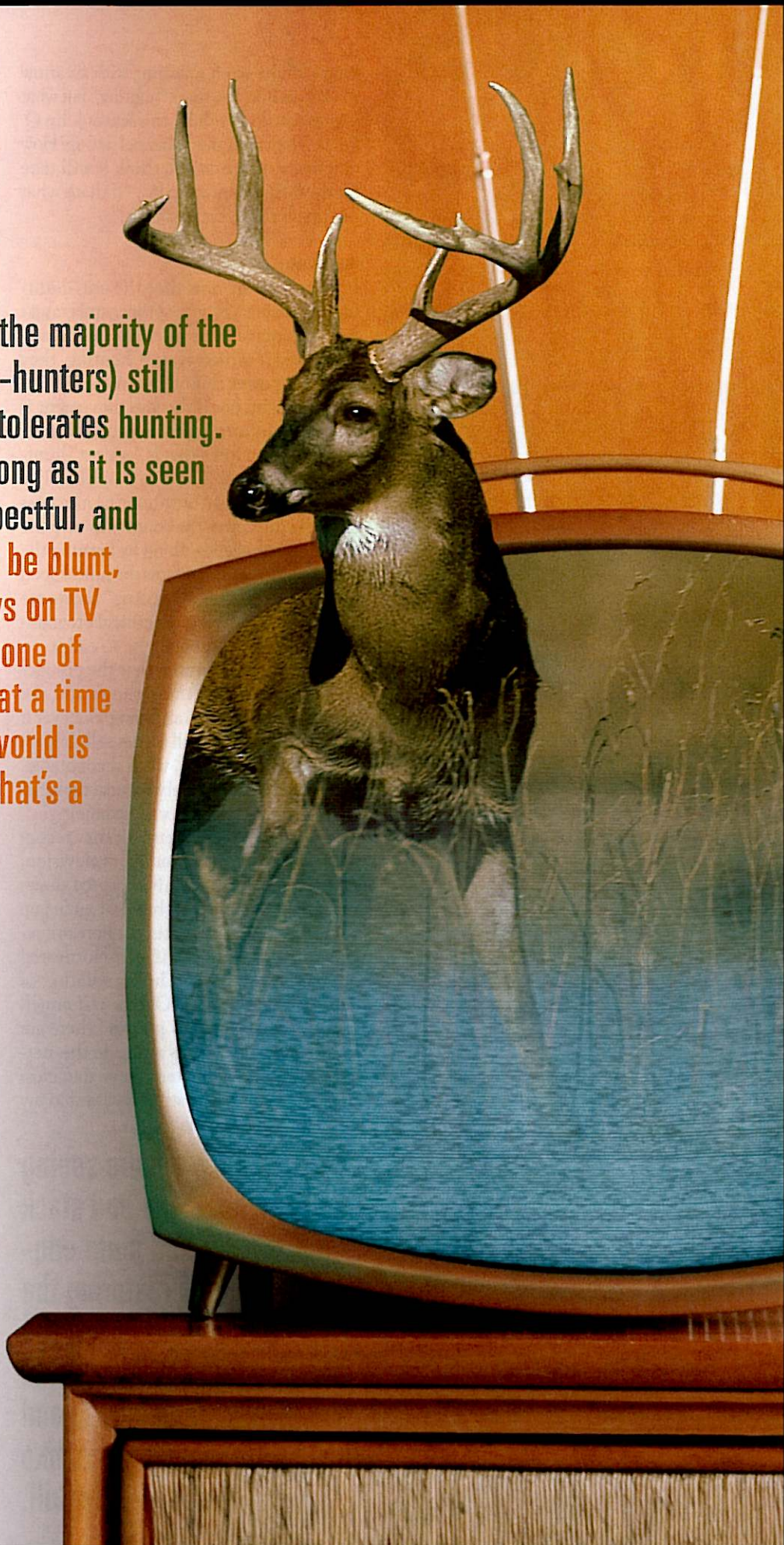
Television is public domain. What's on TV is on for everyone to see, non-hunters included. I understand hunting. I grew up with hunting. I know how important hunting is to our conservation system and the public stewardship of wildlife. I know sportsmen provide 80 percent of funding for wildlife initiatives, and we still have a strong say about how these resources are managed. I also know hunting is killing and can be bloody. That's part of it. But remember, we (hunters) are in the minority.

In general, the majority of the public (non-hunters) still accepts or tolerates hunting. This is as long as it is seen as fair, respectful, and humane. To be blunt, some shows on television today are none of these, and at a time when the world is watching, that's a bad thing.

I'm not sure how the 30-minute shows packed with graphic kill scenes got started. And I worry about the shows in which hunting is staged, or when the sport occurs in unrealistic settings where success is assured. Maybe these aspects are held over from the days when hunting videos burst onto the scene. The video boom came before the recent wave of hunting shows on television, and the marketing attitude of, "If you don't have 20 kills in a 60-minute tape, it won't sell," ruled the day.

Some (I stress some) shows today show deer hitting the deck with hair flying from too much gun, and the camera is rolling while the animal kicks its last kick, followed by slow-motion replays. I've seen elk shot with a bow while eating corn out of a road, and a hog run-

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#### ETHICS FEEDBACK

##### Where Do We Draw the Line?

The question of hunting ethics is a tough one and can only be answered by oneself. The author, George Bettas, freely states he "pour(ing) over topographic maps" preparing for a hunt. Are these self-made maps by him compiled from hiking the area on his own legs or are these computer-drawn and satellite-enhanced and GPS accurized maps?

When going on a hunting trip should we all start walking

from home with our gear and gun on our backs in order to comply with the law in most states: "pursuit of big game animals by motor vehicle is illegal." One cannot argue that if he packs his 4X4 with camping gear and hunting supplies and his gun and ammo to go hunting that the minute he leaves his driveway he is not actually in pursuit of his quarry.

Yours in Hunting,  
Jettsetter (via e-mail)

Re: SCOUTING

##### Fast and Loose

I do find it a bit unseemly as to the ethics that were used in taking two of the new World's Record animals. Specifically the new World's Record bighorn sheep and one of the new World's Record pronghorn. It just seems that those gentlemen were playing fast and loose with the ethics of Fair Chase rules.

Just My Thoughts, Don Moody,  
Lifetime Associate (via e-mail)

##### REQUESTING YOUR FEEDBACK

We would like to encourage you to send us your thoughts about the topic featured in our "Ethics" series this quarter. These articles are meant to make you think and certainly are not intended to make decisions for you.

Please send your comments to:  
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250 Station Dr., Missoula, MT 59801

or e-mail with subject: FC Ethics to  
bcclub@boone-crockett.org

ning into the brush squealing with an arrow stuck in its side. Yes, that's "hunting," but what impression do you think this leaves John Q. Public when he or she is channel surfing? How much of a nudge do you think it will take for these non-hunters to say, "If that's what hunting is today, I'm against it?"

##### At Stake

It's no secret by now that the anti-hunting movement's primary propaganda target is non-hunters. After all, they are the majority, and if turned against hunting, they have the power to say, "No more." It's a scary thought, but if the anti movement is successful in turning those who "accept" hunting into a force that is "against" hunting, we're in trouble, and so is wildlife. I've already seen enough anti-hunting measures on the ballot across the country to help the anti-hunting agenda along by fanning the flames with shows that cross the line of good taste. Some of these "hunting" shows are doing just that. Call it un-ethical programming? I don't know what else to call it.

I can only surmise that the producers and sponsors of these shows and the networks that air them are doing whatever it takes to get ratings. Kill scenes sell. Impact sells, and we watch. So, who's accountable? Who says what is acceptable or unacceptable? Is there a FCC of outdoor programming?

ESPN2 is one network that recognized the potential of outdoor television. At the outset ESPN2 only accepted shows that showed no impact, but that ended up being too restrictive. Later the network relaxed its position, but it still monitored content very closely. The grandfather of outdoor networks, The Outdoor Channel, has done a tremendous job, and there are some real quality shows airing on this network today. Unfortunately, shows that cross the line of good taste still exist, and in my opinion one is too many.

**Thankfully, we are seeing fewer "whack 'em and stack 'em" shows and more educational shows featuring the hunting experience. The dilemma for show producers is how to balance good taste with what hunters like to see — the kill.**

## IN THE NEWS

### Hats off to TOC and IHEA

I just recently returned for the SHOT Show in Las Vegas where the hunting and shooting sports industry gathers once a year. It was announced at this show that The Outdoor Channel and the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA) had just signed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to jointly develop a set of ethical guidelines for outdoor programming on The Outdoor Channel. "It is the goal of both parties to establish expectations and procedures that will contribute to improving the image of hunters and shooters among sportsmen and non-sportsmen, alike." My hat is off to both parties for this initiative.



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So, what do we do? Television is a business of ratings and advertising revenue. As with all businesses, the customer decides what stays and what goes. Now, I'm not saying you should stop watching, or that you should complain with letters and emails. But the reality is, such change often starts at the grassroots level.

Of course, there is always the advertiser. Profit from producing television shows comes from ad revenue. Show producers sell sponsorships and 30-second spots for advertisers to sell their wares. Advertisers have a lot of say. Advertisers pulling their ads off un-ethical shows will surely send a message.

The good news is that outdoor programming is maturing. The video quality and graphics have improved, as well as the content. Thankfully, we are seeing fewer "whack 'em and stack 'em" shows and more educational shows featuring the hunting experience. The dilemma for show producers is how to balance good taste with what hunters like to see — the kill.

What to do? Like the song my daughters sing when they are picking up their toys, "Clean up, clean up, everybody do their share." I believe it is up to us, the viewers, to tell networks, producers, and advertisers what we think. ■