

THE ETHICS OF FAIR CHASE

A Look Ahead—Ethical Activities and How They Affect Hunting



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This new column likely needs no conceptual introduction; however, a more detailed look ahead will provide readers with an expectation and working understanding of what the Hunter Ethics Committee considers most current and important. This

committee intends to evoke thoughtful consideration of the topics and a measure of introspection that we believe will make each of us a more productive member of our grand community of hunters. Much has been written about situational ethics, and at some level, every time we go afield we are faced with personal choices that must be made. This aspect of ethical behavior is frequently discussed—as it should be—but it is not where we intend to take the reader. This column will be devoted to more global issues of ethical activities in North America, particularly those that affect our hunting craft, culture and heritage.

Fundamentally, our heritage as hunters is based on a dignified, respectful relationship with the land and the creatures that roam. This dignity and respect is the foundation upon which we build our culture and defend our rights as Fair Chase hunters. It is strong and solid, but it is not invincible. Our actions, as viewed by others, are what determine the long-term sustainability, viability and ultimately defensibility of our craft, culture and heritage. This is particularly

relevant as it pertains to our ability to maintain membership in the hunting community and as we go about recruiting and nurturing new participants, especially our youth.

Like the shifting of the continental plates, there are threats to our very foundation which must be recognized and addressed on a dynamic and constant basis. To those who are watching us, the most common threats often look like our misdeeds, when in fact they are not ours at all.

An example of this is the business of breeding “trophy” whitetail bucks. While this is clearly a legal business in many states, with increasing demand for the product, there is a transformation of the animal from wild

long-range shooting of game animals. This is an increasingly popular activity and is very prevalent on television. Somehow it is seen as hunting when the shooter is completely detached and not expected or required to actually pursue the animal at all. Shots from distances well beyond 700 yards are lauded as a successful “hunt.” This diminishment of the aesthetic of the pursuit and all its nuances is removed from the scenario, and the dignified, wild game animal is reduced to the status of an interesting target.

Another area of hunt culture degeneration is the overuse of technology as a crutch to lessen the importance of hunting skills. In our discussions, we have conceived the “fair chase continuum,” a concept that began with prehistoric man and the primitive tools available and ends with a fully integrated weapons guidance system that locates, targets and kills. While either end of the continuum is beyond reasonable debate, there is a place along the scale where we recognize the limits of fair chase and ethical pursuit.

This is but a glimpse into some of the issues we intend to bring forward for your consideration. Ultimately, this is an intensely personal thought process, and your decisions have bearing on our entire culture. We will not dictate credo, per se. We do not intend to provide the be-all and end-all answers, and we will attempt to avoid mindless debate about degrees of right or wrong. We will present issues and our thoughts about them so that we all think and weigh in. In doing so, we will provide and explain our position on the topic as each column is presented.

We look forward to the journey with you. ■

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game to livestock and what follows is a pseudo-hunt scenario that many perceive as the “real” thing. The pseudo-hunt involving these animals as portrayed on television or by other means looks like Hunting but it clearly is not. Our Club neither recognizes the farm-raised animal as a game animal, nor does it condone the contrived circumstance. One additional note: There can be and often is a distinction between legal and ethical. This will be fleshed out as we go forward with this column.

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