

ASSOCIATES PROGRAM UPDATE

Fee Hunting...the Changing Fabric of Hunting on Private Lands in the West



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THE AUTHOR TOOK THIS MAGNIFICENT MULE DEER BUCK MEASURING MORE THAN 35" WIDE ON PUBLIC LAND IN MONTANA'S SCAPE GOAT WILDERNESS. ARE THE DAYS NUMBERED WHEN SUCH QUALITY ANIMALS MAY BE FOUND ON PUBLIC LAND?

IN THE WINTER 1996 FAIR CHASE I MENTIONED THE CONCERNS OF RAYMOND SANDOVAL REGARDING THE ACCEPTANCE OF TROPHIES TAKEN ON PRIVATE RANCHES WHERE FEES ARE CHARGED TO HUNT. ASSOCIATE BILL FRANKENBERGER OF GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA, RESPONDED TO MY INTRODUCTION OF THE SUBJECT. IN HIS LETTER BILL NOTED: "HUNTING, PARTICULARLY BIG GAME TROPHY HUNTING, IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A PASTIME FOR AN ELITE MADE UP OF ONLY THOSE PEOPLE WITH THE FUNDS AND OTHER RESOURCES NECESSARY TO PURSUE THAT PASTIME ON PRIVATE LANDS. I KNOW THAT I WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO GAIN ACCESS TO SUCH PLACES AND MY HUNTING COLLEAGUES HAVE RELEGATED THEMSELVES TO THE SAME FATE. THE PUBLIC DOMAIN WILL CONTINUE TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF HUNTING PRESSURE THEREFORE IT WILL PROVIDE LITTLE IN THE WAY OF TROPHY ANIMAL PRODUCTION." BILL WENT ON TO NOTE, "WHETHER OR

NOT A TROPHY TAKEN ON PRIVATE LANDS (SIC) UNDER A FEE SYSTEM IS CONSIDERED "FAIR CHASE" IS A MATTER THAT NEEDS THOUGHTFUL DISCUSSION." WITH BILL'S COMMENTS IN MIND LET'S CONSIDER SOME OF THE ISSUES.

The idea of a rancher or farmer leasing hunting rights on his/her land is relatively new to those of us who have hunted the western United States over the years. In fact, there are many of us who may even resent the fact that hunting on private lands now often requires more than a simple "thank you" or perhaps a small gift or token of our appreciation. In more and more cases it requires cash, sometimes significant sums of cash. Each year more and more landowners are leasing their lands to outfitters who, in turn, sell hunts for everything from ground squirrels to upland birds and big game. Why is this so?

Although one could probably come up with any number of reasons for this change, there are essentially two basic reasons; economics and demand.

Livestock ranching has been a traditional means of livelihood in the Western U.S. since the pioneer days. Over the years sheep ranching has declined in many areas and as cattle prices have had their ups and downs more and more cattle ranches have gone the way of the developer with cabins and condos taking the place of the cows on the land. Many of the hardy souls who have stuck it out with ranching in the West have done so mostly because of their love of the land and the unique relationship that exists between man and animal among ranchers. Many of those who have survived have done so because they are hard working, strong willed individuals who keep costs down by being



frugal, taking care of their equipment and making machinery, vehicles and other equipment last as long as possible.

The ranchers of the West have traditionally shared their land with the wildlife and the hunters who seek the wildlife during the hunting season. The idea that wildlife could be an income source to the farmer/rancher has arrived at the time when many landowners need to diversify their income from the ranch in order to survive. Thus, when an outfitter proposes a lease on the hunting rights on the ranch more and more of our ranchers out here in the West are making the switch from thank you's to cold hard cash. It is simply a matter of economics. Many of them need the income to survive.

I used to hunt mule deer and elk on several thousand acres of private land in Idaho's Hell's Canyon until about five years ago when an outfitter leased the hunting rights and began selling elk hunts for more than \$5,000 and mule deer hunts for more than \$2,000. Since I had been hunting the area for nearly twenty years I knew the rancher well. I understood why he leased the hunting rights. The rancher could not afford not to lease the hunting rights and the outfitter had the demand among hunters willing to pay the price to hunt the area.

Another trend which has influenced the fee hunting situation is the fact that large tracts of land are being purchased in the west by individuals who see fee hunting as a source of income from the "get go." The Flying D Ranch in Montana is a good example of this. This ranch produces probably more income for the owner from deer and elk hunting than it does from its cattle operation. In fact, cattle are being replaced with bison for the purpose of hunting rather

than ranching. The hunts are booked full year after year and the demand for such hunts continues to be strong.

The areas of the U.S. traditionally owned by ranchers and farmers are not the only places in the U.S. where fees are being charged to hunt private land. In 1982, my brother was teaching school in King Cove, Alaska. That year he and I hunted Alaska brown bear near King Cove on lands owned by the King Cove Native Corporation. That year and again in 1986 I took record book brown bears while hunting with my brother. When I took my bear in 1982 very few people were hunting brown bear in the area. By 1986 several new outfitters had moved into the area. When I returned to Alaska for another brown bear hunt in 1990 the King Cove Native Corporation was leasing their lands to several different outfitters and charging \$1,000 per bear hunter, resident and nonresident alike. Again, it was a matter of economics as well demand that influenced the King Cove Native Corporation in its decision to charge a fee to hunters.

It is apparent that the way private lands are being managed for hunting is a changing scene in America. As with all such changes questions arise which need to be answered. Is it considered to be a "fair chase" hunt when a hunter pays a fee to hunt private land? What is the difference between being drawn to hunt public land managed for "trophy quality" elk and hunting on private land where the landowner practices good habitat and wildlife management and produces mature, trophy quality elk which are free-ranging and hunted for a fee. Next issue we will examine some of these issues as well as the importance of private landowners practicing good wildlife management practices.

B&C ANNUAL FUND

Response to the Annual Fund appeal serves as proof that hunters are the strongest supporters of wildlife and wildlife habitat. Thank you to those of you who have responded to the challenge sent out in March! Additionally, the message you seem to be sending is that Boone and Crockett Associates, are willing to "walk the talk" when it comes to conservation and education. As of our Fair Chase printing deadline, Associate participation in the Annual Fund is approaching the \$10,000 mark. If you haven't yet sent in your contribution, please consider doing so at your earliest convenience. We hope to surpass the \$10,000 mark before we finish. We will report the results in the next issue of Fair Chase and want you to be included!

FALL ASSOCIATE DRIVE

OFFERING EXCITING OPPORTUNITIES TO ASSOCIATES

Fall will mark the first annual Boone and Crockett Associate Drive. This autumn counterpart to the Annual Fund looks to offer some spectacular opportunities to Associates.

The Boone and Crockett Club will be shipping new firearms (make and model to be determined) to Associates reaching a pre-determined participation rate in our Associate Drive. As we work on the details of this exciting program, you might want to start thinking of friends and hunting buddies you can sign up to become Associates. Although we are in the final stages of planning, I can tell you the Associate Drive will be very straight forward — An Associate signs up a certain number of new Associates and he or she will automatically receive a new firearm. In addition, we hope to offer other items for participation in the drive.

Look for more detailed information in the next issue of Fair Chase and in your mailbox come September.