

FROM THE EDITOR

Responses to High Fences and Fair Chase



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PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS to us at Boone and Crockett Club, 250 Station Drive, Missoula, MT 59801. You can also send your letters via email to jtripp@boone-crockett.org. We welcome the lively exchange of ideas and suggestions. Associates are encouraged to send their hunting stories along with photographs. We try to publish as many letters as possible. Letters are published as written but may be edited for brevity.

A TROPHY ANIMAL IS A TROPHY ANIMAL

Trophies taken from behind high fences should not be listed among those harvested in their natural habitat as our present definition of "Fair Chase" dictates. By the same token, I do not believe that trophies found dead, picked up, or harvested by an "unknown" hunter should be listed as you do now either.

In my judgement a trophy animal is a trophy animal, however! How, when, by whom harvested or where harvested matters little . . . He's still a trophy and should be recognized!

BERT METZGER

Our mailbox has been filled with feedback from our membership on the issue of high fences and the records program. As I noted in the last issue, the Boone and Crockett Club revisited the fair chase policies during its meeting in Chicago this March. The meeting was an opportunity to engage in thoughtful discussion on issues related to the concept of fair chase, to reaffirm the Club's position on its fair chase standard, and to discuss a variety of related issues. The Club's fair chase statement stands as:

"FAIR CHASE, as defined by the Boone and Crockett Club, is the ethical, sportsmanlike and lawful pursuit and taking of any free-ranging wild, native North American big game animal in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper advantage over such animals."

Hunter and outdoor ethics are critical elements of fair chase with this concept being articulated in the following statement: "The Boone and Crockett Club promotes outdoor ethics for all people, emphasizing shared use of natural resources to protect options for future generations. Protecting wildlife habitat on public and private lands, and associated outdoor recreational experiences, is a major focus of the program."

As our readers know, the Club is the oldest organization to champion fair chase in North America. The hunting and game laws recognized today are a direct result of the statement, philosophies, and efforts of the Club. The hunter ethics aspect of fair chase are also defined by the Club.

HUNTER ETHICS

Fundamental to all hunting is the concept of conservation of natural resources. Hunting in today's world involves the regulated harvest of individual animals in a manner that conserves, protects, and perpetuates the hunted population. The hunter engages in a one-to-one relationship with the quarry and his or her hunting should be guided by a hierarchy of ethics related to hunting, which includes the following tenets:

1. Obey all applicable laws and regulations.
2. Respect the customs of the locale where the hunting occurs.
3. Exercise a personal code of behavior that reflects favorably on your abilities and sensibilities as a hunter.
4. Attain and maintain the skills necessary to make the kill as certain and quickly as possible.
5. Behave in a way that will bring no dishonor to either the hunter, the hunted, or the environment.
6. Recognize that these tenets are intended to enhance the hunter's experience of the relationship between predator and prey, which is one of the most fundamental relationships of humans and their environment.

So what does all this have to do with high fences? It depends. Some hunters would argue that one can hunt ethically in a situation where big game is contained within a high fence and make a good case about hiding cover, escape cover, enclosure size, and ad infinitum. Some hunters and landowners would argue that they simply have high fences around their properties to keep "their" deer from being shot when they wander onto a neighbor's property. Others would argue that high fences in and of themselves create unethical situations, period.

Local hunting mores, individual beliefs, philosophies, and state laws have a great deal to do with one's perspective on high fences. Personally, I have never hunted behind a high fence. I have, however, watched a hunting video of whitetail bucks being shot behind a high fence. One of the bucks was eating out of a corn bin when shot. This mortally wounded buck literally jumped into the corn bin. I was repulsed. But for me to assume that this case illustrates all high fence situations would not be fair to situations where careful attention has been paid to create a hunting environment which is natural, wild, and as fair to the animal as possible.

The one thing most people agree on is that big game taken be-

hind high fences should not be compared to nor compete with big game taken in natural, wild situations for the purposes of record keeping. The Club's policy of excluding big game taken while confined by artificial barriers, including escape-proof fences, from its big game records program stands as it has since the records program was developed.

We are living in a culture that is changing at a very rapid pace. The shrinking American day, the connectedness craze, the maturation and diversity of our society, globalization, the information based economy, and the willingness of individuals to pay to save time are driving much of what most Americans do today. Think about how these factors are changing the face of hunting in North America and the world. My friend just returned this week from a brown bear hunt in Russia. He was appalled to have three hunters in his camp who wanted their guides to shoot their bears for them so they could get back home as soon as possible. This past fall, a friend who guides big game hunters in Alaska expressed concern about some of his hunters who wanted to "just shoot a bear and get back home." One of my friends is so tied to his cell phone that you can't go on a hunt anywhere with him that he is not getting phone calls and making calls.

All of this is impacting the ethics of hunting including "how" we hunt and "what" constitutes hunting. In the marketplace, consumers dictate style and product. As the hunters (read consumers) are impacted by changes in our society so will be the changes in what constitutes ethical hunting and fair chase. The Boone and Crockett Club and its members have always taken the high road when it comes to conservation, fair chase, and outdoor ethics. As our society changes we will be constantly challenged to reaffirm our position. This will require thoughtful discussion and similarly thoughtful decisions.

Following are a series of insightful comments by our fellow Boone and Crockett Associates:

TOTALLY UNFAIR

I think that the scope of fair chase is undoubtedly pointed in the right direction. This is where I would like to put my two cents worth in. I definitely feel that hunting animals behind any fence that is closed off to animals getting out is totally unfair. And I believe that no animal shot under these circumstances should be entered in the Book.

DAVE STUNZ

SKILL NOT MONEY

Regarding your comments about the Boone and Crockett Club's policy on high-fence trophies, I believe the policy should remain as it has been.

The company I work for has a high-fence operation, a "Whitetail University," in which folks with high-fence operations gather to discuss ways to create artificial deer habitats and grow trophy bucks. This is not a natural environment, and the only goal is to produce record-class racks no matter the cost. This is a zoo-like atmosphere and has nothing to do with "fair chase" by any definition.

I realize the scope of your discussions will take you far and wide within the realm of sport hunting, and I also realize that I am of the "old school." Young hunters today seem to think highly of the concept of shopping for whitetails (or any other trophy they desire). Technology has changed much in the world, but I am not certain that just because we can grow trophy bucks in high-fence areas that we should. If we get to the point where we can certify an animal just because its horns or antlers score high enough, what's to stop anyone from simply raising trophies like veal calves? It is not impossible for bears, sheep, caribou or moose to be force-fed and bred to trophy proportions, but the goals of Boone and Crockett have always been far more than that.

It is tough to find and take a true and honest trophy animal. It always has been. Leave the B&C requirements as they stand so it is skill, not money, that generates a trophy's rank.

STEPHEN D. CARPENTERI

MONEY SHOULD NOT BE A VEHICLE

I have a very strong dislike for any hunting that occurs in any type of game-proof fence. This is not hunting and it's certainly not fair chase. No trophy should be allowed entry into any record book if it came from a fenced area. It doesn't matter if it's a kudu from South Africa or a whitetail from "The Sanctuary" in Michigan. The simple expenditure of money should not be a vehicle into the record book. I have no problem with an individual hanging an impressive and expensive "trophy" on his wall to impress his friends. That's his business. I do have a problem when that "trophy" is held up against trophies harvested under true fair chase condition by hunters who have expended more than just money on their quest.

MARK ARTNER

DON'T LOWER YOUR STANDARDS

When I hear about people hunting behind a fence, I don't say anything, I just hang my head. Do you know why, because I hunt too and I am believer in "fair chase." Unfortunately, I'm thrown into the group known as sportsmen, because we all hunt. Don't ever lower your standards, it would be a real disservice to all hunters.

Now I know that there are circumstances where hunting like that is the only opportunity. But it also used to be said that the whitetail deer was the only animal money couldn't buy to put you "in the book!" That sure has been proven wrong, hasn't it? I guess we have to keep in mind the golden rule. "He who has the gold makes the rules!"

WERNER SCHMIESING

ARTIFICIAL TROPHIES

You indicated in your column that the B&C Club will be revisiting the concept of fair chase with regard to hunting behind high fences. I would urge the club to not change their position on this issue. I recently read an advertisement by a high fence, trophy deer sanctuary in Michigan, which virtually guarantees that the hunter, paying a high fee, will kill a trophy whitetail deer. And there are many pictures to prove it. The fact that there are this many trophy deer in a small confined area (approximately four square miles) and that many are killed has everything to do with the fence. The fence allows the manager to breed for trophy quality deer, it allows the deer to be fed to produce the best deer its genes are capable of producing, and the fence confines the deer, assuring the hunter success. In spite of the foregoing, I have read articles by notable outdoor writers praising the ranch and how truly difficult (fair chase?) it is to kill a large deer there. The figures argue otherwise. The deer killed behind this fence bears no resemblance to the trophy deer killed in the wild. The scenario is neither wild nor genuine. It is as artificial as the "trophies" it produces.

The non-hunting public has been shown to approve of hunting in general, but they do take exception to techniques and devices, etc. that appear to take unfair advantage of game animals. We can no longer take the position that it does not matter what they think. It does, because they vote and the anti-hunters are providing them with increasing opportunities to vote on these issues. A biologist and avid hunter with the Colorado Division of Wildlife was absolutely correct when he stated that the anti-hunters may be shining the spotlight on us, but we hunters control what we want them to see.

The Boone and Crockett Club should continue to concern itself with the concept of "fair chase" and should pause to look at this concept through the eyes of the animal rather than those of the hunter.

ROY G. JONES, M.D.

B&C HUNTING REPORT DEBUTS ON THE WEB

This week the Boone and Crockett Club's "Hunting Report" service for our Associates made its debut on our web site at www.boone-crockett.org. Colorado is the first state in a series of states that will be added to this new big game hunting resource for our Associates. The initial presentation of Colorado includes the state's big game records, trophy field photos, license information, state maps, and specific information on mule deer, American elk, black bear, cougar, whitetail deer, pronghorn, sheep, Rocky Mountain goat, and moose. Each big game category includes information on preference points, tips

on trophy areas, season dates, and a variety of other useful information. Links to related areas are provided, as are links to the Colorado Division of Wildlife's web site. This is our initial offering of this service and includes the basics. We will continue to add to the information provided and would like to incorporate your ideas. Check it out and give us your feedback at jtripp@boone-crockett.org

