

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR



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In my struggle to whip up a topic for this space in *Fair Chase*, a duty further pressurized by a pending volunteer piece for the All-time records book, I've noticed that I've missed 80 percent of the elk-permit application deadlines

for the third or fourth year in a row. It seems I'm busily rushing past some of the best things in life.

Note to New Mexico and Arizona: I won't be loaning you \$1,500 for six months in 2005, which brings me to the admission that the current elk-licensing system for many "premier" tags just isn't working for me. Either I'm going to have to change my buying habits or the states must do a better job of accommodating me as an important member of their quickly aging customer base.

I do wish these states would get creative with tag allocations and design a program something like these private licensing services. For instance, what if I sent New Mexico \$1,500

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and the state just kept it and the interest on it for 15 or 20 years, until I died or drew a bow tag for 17A? If I don't outlast the draw process, then my son could either cash out of the New Mexico elk draw and stake himself to a couple of hands at an Internet poker room or take my place at the great, electronic roulette wheel of the public-land hunting lottery system.

The states could still figure out a way to bleed off an annual \$25 processing fee from me. I wouldn't care. I'd be happy enough to be consistently in the game.

The present system does seem to be working for some. During the past two or three decades, the states and the federal government have used our tag and general-fund monies to create a pile of elk, more elk than when President Roosevelt was galloping around in Yellowstone. So, certainly, the system is humming along beautifully for some. In Wyoming, we're calving elk almost as quickly as the wolves and grizzlies can slurp them up off the sweet

grasses of spring. We've got so many elk and elk-eating black bears in Colorado that bow-hunting licenses may soon come with liability releases: Warning. Black bears and cougars may respond to the mechanized sounds of herding elk and the use of manufactured elk urines by licking the skin off of your skull.

And just when we thought that the golden days of elk hunting were bad enough, we learn through this headline, "Audubon Group Advocates Deer Hunting" in the March 17, 2005, edition of *The New York Times*, that threatened song birds have it worse. It seems that a study by the New Jersey Audubon Society, which is not affiliated with the National Audubon Society except that both groups use Audubon Society in their names, found that: "... grazing [browsing] deer have so depleted the brush, flowers, and wild shrubs that they are threatening to wipe out the population of birds including Kentucky warblers, hooded warblers and ruffed grouse."

Eric Stiles, NJAS vice president for conservation, said, "This is an ecological disaster in the making. We have to do something now, before it's too late."

Nancy Bowman, director of the Mercer County Deer Coalition, countered with a glancing blow: "Killing more deer isn't the answer. In fact, when you kill deer, you simply increase their birth rates because they reproduce faster than you can kill them."

Obviously, Ms. Nancy has had very little contact with hunters from Louisiana.

Times writer David Kocieniewski also cited another study, a sort of doomsday scenario by professors at Rutgers University. It concluded that within 40 years, New Jersey may well become the first state to reach "build out," a point where it exhausts its supply of developable land. Wowzer!

Now, I'm no biologist. Further, the Mercer County Deer Coalition isn't going to vote me in as its director over Ms. Nancy. Nevertheless, loosely based on some of the stuff that I observe to be working out West, I opine that New Jersey should ratify a 20-fold increase in hunting license fees administered through a lottery draw; inundate the Garden State's forest and flood with hand-raised red-tailed hawks and bottle-fed pole cats; ban the use of birdfeeders; and allocate half of those hunting-fee increases to the re-introduction of 350 breeding pairs of timber wolves.

Send a car for the *Times* reporter, offer warbler-shaped cookies to the local media, and let those wolves skitter right out into hills from the parking lot at the big mall in Trenton. Desperate times require desperate measures. ■

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