

# ASSOCIATES PROGRAM UPDATE

## Private Ranches, Fair Chase and Ethical Hunting



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In this column in the last two issues of *Fair Chase* I have addressed some of the concerns raised by Raymond Sandoval in his letter to the editor. These issues are important enough that I will carry on this discussion to its conclusion in this issue.

### Private Ranches and Fair Chase

Sandoval charged that the Boone and Crockett Club has fueled a mega-marketing campaign for trophy size animals. He also noted that "he and thousands of other sportsman (sic) don't believe paying thousands of dollars on a private ranch, is fair chase." Sandoval believes that "Fair Chase should also be defined as chase in the public domain, not private reserves."

Although I have never hunted on a private ranch where I paid a fee for hunting, my view is that fee hunting on private land does not inherently give the hunter an unfair advantage. The question is whether

it is the fee or the private land that is the issue. It appears that the fee some individuals pay is the point of contention. The fact that a person pays a fee to hunt on private land does not violate fair chase standards. How that person conducts himself/herself as an individual while hunting, whether it is on private land where a fee is paid or anywhere else is what needs to be examined by fair chase standards.

This past fall a local hunter took a magnificent non-typical whitetail buck near Lewiston, Idaho. The hunter was hunting on private land where he had hunted for years...land owned by a neighbor

who allowed no one else to hunt the land. In this case could we say that because other hunters did not have a chance to hunt that piece of private property that the buck was not taken under the standards of fair chase? Is it the fee or is it access to private land which is the concern?

Currently hunters are paying significant fees for the privilege to hunt on public lands in those states where hunts are being sold at auction or raffled in order to raise money for big game management. Sheep hunts sold at auction bring hundreds of thousands of dollars and allow the hunter who buys the permit to hunt on public land with much more lati-



**FAR LEFT:** DUANE SIDLER WITH A TROPHY CLASS BULL ELK TAKEN WHILE HUNTING ON PRIVATE PROPERTY ENROLLED IN COLORADO'S RANCHING FOR WILDLIFE PROGRAM.

**TOP:** THE AUTHOR WITH A SIMILAR TROPHY CLASS BULL ELK TAKEN WHILE HUNTING ON A NATIONAL FOREST IN IDAHO.

**BELOW:** TROPHY CLASS BULL ELK TAKEN WHILE THE AUTHOR WAS HUNTING IN A SPECIAL DRAWING UNIT IN IDAHO.



tude to choose the area to hunt than hunters who draw sheep permits in the state in question. A friend of mine spent more than 30 days last summer scouting sheep for an outfitter who was guiding the person who purchased the Montana sheep permit at auction. He was charged with finding the biggest ram in Montana. As fall approached other individuals were afield looking for big sheep for the outfitter. When the hunting season arrived the hunter simply came to Montana and accompanied the guide to the area where the biggest ram had been sighted. The hunter took a ram that made "The Book" but not the one that had been spotted earlier. How does such a hunt relate to fair chase? As long as the hunter conducts himself/herself ethically, fair chase is not the problem.

If you plan to hunt Alaska brown bear on the Alaska Peninsula with a reputable guide you will likely be paying in the neighborhood of \$14,000 for the hunt. Such hunts are out of reach financially for many hunters. Sheep hunts in Alaska cost less but are still out of reach for many hunters. Does the cost of such hunts cause them to fall outside the bounds of Fair Chase?

Although private landowners may have good numbers of mature male big game species on their property due to limited access, good habitat, and good wildlife management practices, similar quality animals may be found on public land for the same reasons. Limited entry hunts are the most obvious examples. If you really want to harvest a bull elk that makes "The Book" you need to be applying for the elk permits available in states like Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, et. al. The bull elk available to hunters in the special hunt units in these states far surpass the bull elk available in open units in states that manage elk herds for yearling bulls. These elk are also superior to the elk found on most private ranches where fees are charged for hunting.

The neat thing about our American way of hunting is that people have choices. Some of us can afford to hire guides and outfitters to take us hunting. Others choose to hunt on their own. Most hunters can not afford to hire guides to take them hunting so they make hunts on their own using whatever equipment they can afford or are comfortable with. Still other hunters hunt on their own and on occasion hunt with outfitters on private land as well as public land.

My friend Duane Sidler, from Pennsylvania, is as serious about big game hunting as anyone I know. Duane loves to hunt deer and elk and has taken some fine bucks and bulls in the U.S. as well as Canada. Duane hunts often with me for mule deer and elk throughout the Western U.S., where we go unguided. The past several years Duane has hunted in Colorado on private ranches where a fee is charged for hunting. These ranches have been participating in Colorado's Ranching For Wildlife program. They are teeming with elk. Big elk. While hunting on these ranches Duane has taken some excellent bulls. However, he has hunted with me on public land where we have taken bulls of equal quality, sometimes in areas where any bull is legal and other times in special drawing areas. If you were to ask Duane which hunt he prefers he would tell you he prefers to go unguided simply because of the rewards inherent in planning his own hunt, packing his own horses, and doing it himself. Then again, there are other times when he chooses to go with a guide, especially when he has the opportunity to experience hunting in new and different habitat types where he can learn and experience new techniques of hunting whether it is on public land or private land. In the end it is not the fee paid to hunt on private land that determines Fair Chase. It is the hunter himself or herself who determines whether the hunt is fair chase or not.

## BOONE & CROCKETT CLUB BLAZING NEW TRAILS FOR CONSERVATION

**Competition for public resources is increasing at an alarming rate. The future facing wildlife is uncertain as private land is further developed and becomes less suitable for wildlife use.**

**The challenge is to conserve environmental quality, biological diversity, and productive wildlife populations in an oversubscribed system. Conservation must occur in the context of sustainable economic development, structured to keep environmental transformation within safe limits.**

**This challenge presents the Boone and Crockett Club with significant opportunities:**

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**Make the ethical case for sharing scarce resources and using them wisely to preserve options for present and future generations.**

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**Practice scientifically-based management to demonstrate sustainable natural resource uses and environmental renewability.**

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**Advocate high ethical standards for hunters to upgrade the perception and reality of hunting in the balance between humanity and nature.**