

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Sharing Our Hunting Heritage With Others

I recently attended a Hunting Think Tank sponsored by the Texas Agriculture Extension Service and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries on the subject of "What is the future of hunting?" The meeting was well attended by a diverse group of people interested in our hunting heritage. These included representatives from conservation organizations, agricultural interests, scientists, members of the print media, educators and members of the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Many statistics were presented relative to numbers of hunters, trends in license purchases, numbers of women hunters, age mix, economic status and annual expenditures on hunting activities. A review by David Scott, Texas A&M University, examined these criteria in a study titled, "Statewide Hunting Trends in Texas: 1991-1996." This study, based on National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife Associated Recreation, found that the number of hunters and the rates of hunting have gone down in the United States as a whole including Texas; participation in hunting is highly related to gender, race/ethnicity and place of residence; on average, hunters spend more annually than other recreationists; and despite decreases in rates of hunting, the number of days people spend hunting in Texas has actually increased.

The survey participants were then asked to comment on how they thought hunting might be characterized 10 years into the future. Based on a compilation of these comments, the panel thought that the public attitude toward hunters and hunting would be less supportive; hunters would seek longer outings and more comfort; rely on more managed/guided hunting opportunities; consist of proportionally more women and more children and that hunters

would make up a smaller proportion of total population.

Many other characteristics were examined and most responses were as expected. The panel believed that the quantity of game/habitat would be less; the quality of game/habitat would be improved; costs of hunting would go up; and opportunities to hunt on public lands would increase.

Throughout these brainstorming sessions I frequently heard the comment, "We have enough hunters, we don't need to increase hunter numbers." This really concerned me. Are we so jealous of our hunting heritage that we are unwilling to share it? If that is the case, we are doomed to lose. Sure, we would like to have the woods, forests, lakes and streams all to ourselves. It would be nice to never be disturbed in our stalks or bothered by an outboard cruising near our fishing hole, but do we really want to deny these inalienable rights to others?

I have experienced intrusions into my hunting area. In Alberta, in 1982, we had located a mature ram several days before the season opened. We watched him for hours so that on opening day we could ease up to the top and take this great trophy. Guess what? During the night, another outfitter moved into our area and without even knowing about our ram, managed to spook him into the next county. We hunted that ram for 10 more days and never even found a decent hoof print. I've had to quit fishing down here on the coast during the weekends because of the heavy boat traffic but isn't this what hunting and fishing is all about? All sports are competitive but if we play by the rules there should be room for everyone.

We must not be lured into the notion that hunters are an elitist group unwilling to share our great sport with others and

we certainly cannot allow that perception to become public. If we are to win the "undecideds" over to our cause, we must make such a compelling argument for our quests that everyone will want to join us. If we then tell them that there is not room the results will be devastating. Instead we must concentrate not only on selling our hunting heritage but figuring out a way to provide the opportunity for everyone who wishes to enjoy ethical hunting and to experience what we have mostly taken for granted.

If you agree with this last statement, come and join the Boone and Crockett Club's Campaign for Wildlife.

This fund drive is built around the concepts of education, demonstration and research. Education will change the conclusion that public attitude toward hunting and hunters will be less supportive. Demonstration of the value of wildlife will result in more opportunities to hunt and research will help us provide both better quality and larger quantities of game to pursue.

Awareness of a problem must come first. Meetings like our Hunting Think Tank have served to get our attention and make us see the picture and what is wrong with it. Our next meeting will focus on what we think the picture should look like and hopefully the next will give us the strategy to change it. ▲▲▲



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