



# TITLE: FAIR CHASE

REVISED DATE: JUNE 21, 2016

## SITUATIONAL OVERVIEW:

As a means of separating the actions of commercial market hunters from those of sportsmen, an ethical code of hunter conduct was discussed at the first meeting of the Boone and Crockett Club in 1887. The name given to this code was fair chase, and it is defined by the Club as “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.”

Fair chase is part of an overall hunting ethic. It reflects an ideal to pursue game in the field in a manner that pays respect to the animals hunted and the traditions of hunting as a mechanism

for conservation. Fair chase is an approach that elevates the quality of the chase, the challenge, and experience above all else. By not overwhelming game species with human capabilities, fair chase helps define a hunter’s engagement in conservation. Fair chase has been embraced by hunters as the proper conduct of a sportsman in the field and taught to new hunters for over a century.

As with any guideline that falls within a legal framework, but is also grounded in personal ethics that cannot and should not be legislated, interpretations of fair chase can vary. Laws are largely set by society to protect, conserve and manage wildlife resources that are held in the public trust. Ethical decisions

in hunting, however, ultimately rest with the individual in what feels right or wrong, and what technologies or methods are acceptable or unacceptable for them to be successful.

As a leading conservation organization and promoter of fair chase in North America, it is important to the Boone and Crockett Club that the nuances and benefits of fair chase are clearly understood by hunters and non-hunters. The Club is concerned that hunting practices that were once deemed unacceptable are becoming more commonplace. This is not only eroding our overall hunting ethic, but the public’s widespread support for hunting.

## POSITION:

The Boone and Crockett Club supports the definition and practice of conservation as the sustainable use of natural resources, including wildlife. It supports ethical public hunting as the foundation of wildlife conservation and management. The Club also believes that hunting is a privilege that must be earned repeatedly. In modern, developed societies, there exists a general expectation that hunting be conducted under appropriate conditions; i.e., animals are taken for legitimate purposes such as food or to attain wildlife agency management goals. It is also assumed that the hunting will be done sustainably and legally, and that hunters conduct themselves ethically by showing respect for the land and animals they hunt. In the broadest sense, hunters are guided by a conservation ethic, and the most common term used to describe the actual ethical pursuit of a big game animal is fair chase.

Fair chase is what separates hunting from simply killing or shooting. It demands restraint and self-reliance, aligns with North American wildlife laws, and is in service to conservation. Fair chase allows for lasting memories

hunters can be proud of, provides young hunters with a proper path in hunting and in life, and meets the expectations of our modern societies. The Boone and Crockett Club believes ethical choices in hunting are more important today than at any previous time. Hunters’ values—their motivations and their conduct—shape society’s opinion of hunting. Hunters should be guided by principles whether applying to the activities of hunting in general, or for the qualification of trophies into the Club’s big game records book.

The Club will continue to take the steps it believes necessary to ensure that fair chase maintains its prominence among hunters while also reaching out to non-hunters about the relationship between hunting, fair chase, and a

conservation ethic. Sportsmen and sportswomen must also lead by example as primary proponents of fair chase hunting and, by doing so, safeguard the overall welfare of wildlife, especially big game animals and their habitats.

The Boone and Crockett Club encourages all hunters to be united behind the banner of a conservation ethic and fair chase and police themselves and others, but to do so in a way that is not divisive or unduly critical unless there is tangible justification. Just because a person may not follow the same customs or standards you have set for yourself, it does not necessarily make them unethical. Knowing the difference begins with a complete understanding of hunting ethics and fair chase.

**“Conservation means development as much as it does protection. I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us.”**

—Theodore Roosevelt, *The New Nationalism* speech, 1910

# BOONE AND CROCKETT: DEFINING FAIR CHASE IN THE PRESS

9/6/2016

During the summer of 2016, the Boone and Crockett Club, the oldest hunter-conservationist organization in North America, released a comprehensive essay on fair chase, the longest-standing honor code in hunting.

“Millions of hunters worldwide practice fair chase, many without even knowing this code has a name or that the Club originated it,” said Club President Morrie Stevens. “With public misperceptions about hunting on the rise and increasing questions about hunting practices and new technology, we feel it is time to revisit this fundamental part of the hunter’s conservation ethic.”

The concept of fair chase—the ethical pursuit of a game animal in the field—emerged over 125 years ago at a time of environmental crisis when many formerly abundant wildlife populations in North America were on the brink of extinction. Theodore Roosevelt, after witnessing the bleached bones of thousands of slaughtered bison, was determined to do something about this travesty.

The new code of conduct for hunters established by Roosevelt and the Boone and Crockett Club, not only transformed individual behavior and purposes for hunting, but also supported the new conservation principles the Club was promoting. The system of wildlife conservation we have today is still based on the Club’s principles of limiting harvest and wisely managing wildlife to ensure it will never be threatened again, as well as an ethical approach to hunting that meets with the expectations of sportsmen and society.

The Club’s essay on fair chase, introduced through the Club’s position statement explores the code’s historical roots and provides a framework for how modern fair chase hunters think about hunting practices and customs. It delves into how hunters evaluate new technological advancements, regional traditions, and why fair chase is more a matter of the “spirit of the hunt” than a set of written rules. The essay also addresses the opportunity for hunters to foster a positive public perception of hunting by conducting themselves in an ethical manner.

“Fair chase is rich with benefits,” said Stevens. “Not only to the game we hunt and the traditions of hunting, but to hunters personally. Fair chase is linked to such things as self-reliance, discipline and character development, and caring for something greater than ourselves. Understanding the value and transformative nature of a fair chase ethic is just as important for those who hunt as it is for non-hunters.”

## LEARN MORE ONLINE: WWW.BOONE-CROCKETT.ORG

More information can be found in the Club’s 8-page fair chase essay, available online. There are two videos directly related to fair chase on our website, or view our entire library of videos and past episodes of *Boone and Crockett Country* on our YouTube channel.



JOIN THE  
CONVERSATION.  
TELL US WHY YOU ARE  
A FAIR CHASE HUNTER!



“Hunting at its most fundamental level is defined by an intimate yet tenuous and unpredictable relationship between predator and prey. This is an intrinsic and irrefutable connection that cannot be compromised if the hunter is to maintain the sanctity of this bond and any credible claim that hunting is respectful of wild creatures and in service to wildlife conservation. This relationship is built upon many complex components that differentiate hunting from simply shooting or commercially harvesting wild game.”

—Dan Pedrotti, Jr., *Fair Chase Magazine* 2013