

Fair Chase Whitetails

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But in striving to reach our hunting goals, can we go too far? Might we risk losing some of the mystique that drew us to deer hunting in the first place? In short, in trying to use management to make the hunting experience better, might we instead end up making it worse?

That question was the impetus for our feature "Managing Whitetail Management," in the January 2001 issue. There, David Morris — who has over 20 years of professional deer-management experience — voiced concern that misusing some intensive management practices could take too much of the challenge out of harvesting deer. Were that to happen, David argued, we would risk the sanctity of what the hunting community knows as "fair chase."

David's look at the ethics of various management practices was necessarily based on his own experiences, as well as those of many readers he knows across North America. But how do the rest of you feel about such matters? To find out, along with David's feature we ran a survey asking for your input. We wanted to know which practices *you* think have a place in today's deer woods.

In the past three issues, we revealed how readers voted on the fair-chase aspects of many hunting tactics, including everything from baiting and deer drives to snow tracking and the use of high-let-off bows. Now, it's time to reveal how you voted on some management practices now being used in the deer woods.

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That said, here's how you voted on many of the management questions we asked in our survey:

HUNTING DEER THAT HAVE BEEN HANDLED BY MAN

Fair Chase: 14 Percent

Unfair: 84 Percent

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management programs.)

Seven of every eight voters agreed with the author, saying they were against hunting "handled" deer. Only 3 percent of Iowa voters approved of the practice, followed by 5 percent in Illinois and 7 percent in Missouri.

Highest support came from New Jersey, with 35 percent of voters approving of the practice as being consistent with fair chase. However, every other area with above-average support was below the Mason-Dixon Line: South Carolina (28 percent), Louisiana (24), Texas (23), Georgia (23) and North Carolina (21).

HUNTING DEER IN HEAVILY OVERBROWSED HABITAT

Fair Chase: 77 Percent

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To have fair chase, "the habitat must be 'natural,'" David wrote. "By this, I mean there must be at least a certain minimum vegetative quality level, with the habitat in good condition and not too damaged or denuded by gross overbrowsing. . . . This is primarily related to deer density and calls for a herd to be in balance with its food supply."

David argues that if a deer is desperate for food it will sacrifice some security to find food, making it overly vulnerable to hunters. But based on the voting, not many of you agree that this is reason enough to avoid hunting nutritionally stressed animals. Indeed, some of you claimed that such herds *need* to be hunted, to get deer numbers in line with the food supply.

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NON-NATIVE GENETICS

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The majority of readers who took our survey on fair chase expressed support for most efforts to grow bigger deer. Photo by Mike Searles.



products

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Few of us hunt native whitetails in the purest sense. Most states and provinces at least dabbled in restocking during the 20th century, moving deer within their own borders when possible but going elsewhere for brood stock when it wasn't.

What's done is done, and we've come to accept the descendants of those deer as "native," whether they are or not. But what about further infusions of new genetics, via restocking and/or artificial insemination? Do these threaten fair chase?

Votes largely divided along regional lines. Among states and provinces from which we got at least 20 votes, highest support was found in North and South Carolina, where 70 percent of voters in each state approved. In Tennessee, approval was 68 percent, and Florida came in at 62. Meanwhile, only 28 percent of Iowa respondents approved, with Vermont next at 29 and Wisconsin at 34.

FOOD PLOTS

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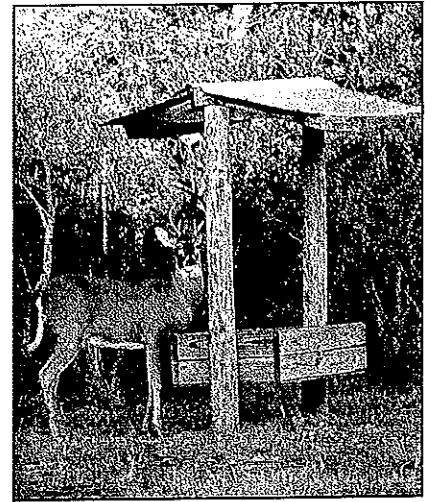
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David argued that using food plots to improve herd nutrition is consistent with fair chase. "All things being equal," he wrote, "a deer's wildness is directly related to the quality and availability of food, provided it's always available and the deer don't associate it with man, both of which are the case with food plots."

Traditionally a means of luring deer to specific areas for hunting purposes, food plots now are being used more and more to improve herd health. And more than four of every five readers who expressed an opinion on using food plots to boost deer number and/or size supported it.

In areas from which we received at least 20 votes on this question, approval was highest in South Carolina and Texas (92 percent); followed closely by North Carolina, Arkansas and Florida (91); Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky and Oklahoma (90); and Mississippi (88).

By an overwhelming margin, readers in Maine expressed the lowest



By a 10-to-1 margin, readers who took our survey agreed that supplemental feeding is consistent with fair chase. Photo by Tom Evans.

support; only 36 percent of respondents there gave it a thumbs-up. Then came voters in Minnesota, Wisconsin and New York, with 74 percent from each state advocating the use of food plots as fair chase.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

Fair Chase: 90 Percent


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Feeding got unanimous approval in Oklahoma, South Carolina, Rhode Island, Wyoming, Washington, New Brunswick, Colorado, Arizona, Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba. Nearly as supportive were voters in Kentucky (98 percent); Tennessee, West Virginia, Florida and Kansas (97); Michigan and Missouri (96); and Indiana (95).

On the other end of the spectrum, just 68 percent of voters in Maine and 83 percent of those in Wisconsin agreed that supplemental feeding is consistent with fair chase.

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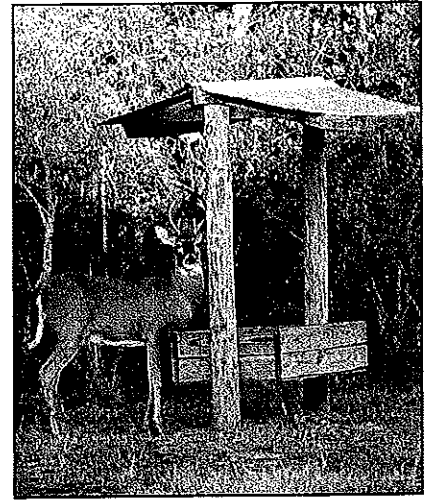
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