

High Fence, Low Fence, No Fence

What is the issue? Many people believe that hunting inside a fenced in area is unfair to the animal as they have no chance to elude the hunter. In talking with people, our estimation is that many hunters' opinions are based on second-hand and incomplete information rather than first-hand experience. From someone who has been on both sides of the fence, I would like to submit to you a few thoughts for your consideration. Hopefully this will encourage you to explore the topic a little deeper.

Whether you are for or against high fence hunting, most of us realize that the long term public acceptance and survival of the sport of hunting is tied to the concept of "fair chase." Many hunters conclude that "fair chase" and "high fence" are mutually exclusive terms, being on opposite ends of the spectrum, regardless of any other facts or circumstances. So the first step would be to come up with an idea of fair chase. Think on the following scenarios for a few moments...

1. Before sun up, a hunter with a high powered rifle and spotting scope slides into a rock crevice on the side of a mountain overlooking thousands of non-fenced acres. He shoots a bull elk at 500 yards, the bullet travels three times the speed of sound and hits home before the animal hears the shot. He radios the recovery team to pick it up.
2. A hunter, armed with his new high tech muzzleloader is on his first Canadian black bear hunt. He is in a vast wilderness and has been in his blind for 30 minutes on the first night of the hunt. He is perched just 40 yards downwind of the biggest pile of donuts you have ever seen. Here comes Yogi. You know what happens next.
3. A 15 year old hunter is 20 feet up in a tree in his new Summit climber on a 500 acre high fenced hunting preserve. It's his fifth bow hunt and he has never had an opportunity at a deer. A group of does is moving quickly from their afternoon bedding area toward an alfalfa field. Shaking almost uncontrollably, he nocks an arrow and comes to full draw. The lead doe ventures a little too close and stops just 20 yards away. He releases and makes a good shot.

So the question is, which scenario is fair chase? Some would argue all three are and others would argue none are. Fair chase cannot be so easily defined as high fence, low fence or no fence. Many hunters form their opinions based on their favorite TV celebrity hunters. Many of these celebrities claim "we will never hunt high fence" and then hunt certain intensely managed private ranches - though not high fenced - that have extremely high deer populations. Have you ever seen a hunting show where the host did not get an opportunity to harvest an animal? It is sad to see so many people regurgitate the statements made by these celebrities without thinking them through for themselves or experiencing them through their own CONSCIENCE.

Fair chase comes down to conscience. The conscience refers to a God-given moral sense or awareness of right and wrong within every person that defends them when they make the right choice and accuses them when they make the wrong choice (see Romans 2:14-16). Conscience is where you will find the answer to the fair chase question.

To achieve our management goals one of the many things we would do is not shoot a 2 or 3 year old buck; let him mature. Yet this deer walks off my property and a gun goes off only moments later. I can't expect my neighbor to have the same convictions that I do and I won't fault my neighbor for acting within the law and their conscience. Hence, our decision to put up a fence to control our herd and allow us to achieve our goals. I would love to be able to operate without having to make such an investment in fencing, but that is simply not feasible.

Are all high fence operations fair chase? No, probably not. Are all kills on non-fenced properties fair chase? No, probably not. Many factors play a role in the fair chase equation on both high fence and non fence land; including acres, amount of cover, physical land characters, deer population, weapon, etc.

Our land consists of several hundred acres of field, woodland, high ridges, deep ravines, thick swamp, cattail marsh and river bottom. We have a high fence to allow proper management of our herd to achieve our goals. Here is our fair chase pledge: We will have areas of the property that are sanctuaries for the deer where there will be no hunting. We will only allow a limited number of hunts each season. We will not hunt over a feeder or bait. We will not drive or push the deer. The herd numbers will be appropriate for the carrying capacity of the land. We also pledge to abide by the existing industry code of ethics. I can, in good conscience, say that hunting in our facility will be fair chase. We will not fault you if you don't want to hunt within a preserve, please don't fault us if our convictions allow for it.

