

Hunting Ethics



Introduction

People are judged by their actions. How we behave and how we follow the rules affects other people. As a hunter, you must be aware of how your personal behavior and activities, as well as the actions of your companions, will affect others.

When driving a car, we are expected to drive carefully following the rules of the road. When we play any sport we are expected to follow the rules of the game. Hunters, too, are expected to behave responsibly while hunting...to hunt according to the rules.



Can you imagine what it would be like if every person driving a car made up his own rules? Can you picture any sport if each player did whatever he pleased? Few people would enjoy living together under such circumstances.

If we are to live, play and work together in harmony then we must conform to the standards of behavior that are expected of us. These standards of conduct or "ethics" are important guidelines for living in peace and friendship with other people.

Definition of Ethics and Laws

Ethics are standards of behavior or conduct which are considered to be morally right. Ethics begin with the standard of behavior of an individual person. Each individual must make a personal judgement about whether certain behavior is right or wrong. If a person truly believes that a specific action is morally right, then it is ethical for him to act this way.

For example, if a hunter truly believes that it is right to shoot a duck with a shotgun while it is sitting on the water, then it is ethical for that particular hunter to do so. His behavior is consistent with his personal code of ethics. If, however, a hunter believes it is wrong to shoot a sitting duck, then it would be wrong for him to do so. Such action would not be ethical for him.

Very often, groups of people share the same ethical beliefs. When a group of hunters have similar ideas concerning ethical hunting behavior, they often form a hunting party, club or association which expects its members to act according to the group code ethics. In this situation, ethics are similar to laws. The ethics are written down and each member of the group agrees to abide by this code. Any member who violates the ethics agreed upon may be asked to resign from membership in the group or be penalized in some manner.

Sometimes ethics are made laws by state or federal legislatures. When a majority of the people believe a certain ethic or standard of behavior is right for all and they expect everyone to act according to that belief, then that ethic may become law. For an ethic to become a law legislative procedures which are basically the same for creating all laws must be followed. Most hunters have a personal code of ethics which is similar to the laws which are associated with hunting. Usually, hunters agree that the hunting laws are fair and just, and find these laws easy to obey. But occasionally, a hunter's personal code of ethics may differ from one of the hunting laws. For example, while hunting on the prairie, a hunter may come upon a doe antelope with a broken leg. According to his personal code of ethics, he believes it is morally right to kill a seriously injured animal in order to end its suffering. However, according to law, it

may be illegal to hunt or kill doe antelope except during an open hunting season for antelope and the hunter has a valid permit to hunt doe antelope in the area.

What should he do? One ethical course of action is to advise the nearest Fish and Wildlife Division office or conservation officer as quickly as possible that there is an injured animal and describe its exact location. The officers will then attend to the problem quickly.

A hunter's personal code of ethics, the ethics of others and ethics which are laws sometimes differ widely. These differences of opinion can make some decisions very difficult for a hunter.

Personal Code of Ethics

Personal ethics are "unwritten laws" which govern your behavior at all times when you are with others, and when you are alone. They are YOUR personal standard of conduct. Your personal code of ethics is based upon your respect for other people and their property, for all living things and their environment, and your own image of your self.

Aldo Leopold, a pioneer in the field of wildlife management and a respected hunter said, "The hunter ordinarily has no gallery to applaud or disapprove his conduct. Whatever his acts, they are dictated by his own conscience rather than by a mob of onlookers."

The basis of a personal code of ethics is a "sense of decency." You must ask yourself repeatedly, "What if someone else behaved the way I am-would I respect him?"

Chances are you will have developed a personal code of ethics long before you became a hunter. Because you want the respect of your parents and family, your friends and neighbors, you developed a certain standard of acceptable behavior. If you have been on hunting trips, even before you were old enough to hunt game yourself, you gained important insights into how you are expected to act while hunting and learned some hunting ethics. These, and other experiences, will guide your behavior in the future and can help you earn self-respect and the respect of other hunters.

Your personal code of ethics and your hunting behavior may change through the years. It is usual for a hunter to go through five behavior stages.

- 1) First is the "shooter stage"-a time when shooting firearms is of primary interest.
- 2) Next is the "limiting-out stage"-when the hunter wants, above all, to bag the legal limit of game he is hunting.
- 3) The third stage is the "trophy stage"-the hunter is selective, primarily seeking out trophy animals of a particular species.
- 4) Then the "technique stage"-the emphasis is on HOW rather than WHAT he hunts.
- 5) The last stage is called the "mellowing-out stage"-this is the time of enjoyment derived from the total hunting experience-the hunt, the companionship of other hunters and an appreciation of the outdoors.

When a hunter has reached the mellowing-out stage of his development, bagging game will be more symbolic than essential for his satisfaction. The hunter's personal code of ethics will change as he passes through each of these five stages, often becoming stricter and imposing more constraints on his behavior and actions when hunting.

These self-imposed restrictions, however, will add to the enjoyment of the hunting experience, for the ethical hunter is the hunter who can most appreciate the sport of hunting. Only he understands the new sense of freedom and independence that comes from hunting legally and ethically.

Ethics for Consideration

Various people have proposed ethical standards which they feel should be adopted by all hunters. These are presented for your consideration in the remaining sections of this chapter. Consider each ethic carefully. Decide whether it is right or wrong in your view. If it is right, incorporate it into your personal code of hunting ethics and practice it when afield. In the final analysis, your standards of conduct while hunting will be the true indicator of your personal code of ethics.

Hunter-Landowner Relations

The ethical hunter realizes he is a guest of the landowner while hunting on private land. He makes sure he is welcome by asking the landowner host for permission before he hunts. On the rare occasions when permission is denied, he accepts the situation gracefully.

To avoid disturbing the landowner early in the morning, an ethical hunter plans ahead and obtains permission to hunt on private land before the season opens. He understands that the landowner usually does not mind if he brings a friend or two along but he will destroy his welcome if he arrives with a carload of companions.



While hunting, the ethical hunter takes extra care to avoid disturbing livestock. If he is hunting with a dog, special precautions are taken to ensure it does not harass cattle, chickens, or other farm animals. He understands that, if disturbed by loud noises or other activity, dairy cows may fail to produce milk and poultry may crowd together in the chicken coop and suffocate. Beef cattle when frightened and forced to run may suffer a weight loss costly to the rancher.

He leaves all gates as he finds them, and if closed, he ensures they are securely latched. He crosses all fences so as to avoid loosening the wires and posts. He only goes on those portions of private land the owner has granted permission to hunt. He never assumes he is welcome on private property simply because other hunters have already been granted permission to hunt there.

An ethical hunter is careful to avoid littering the land with empty shell boxes, sandwich wrappings, pop cans, cigarette packages or other garbage, including empty shotgun shells. He never drives or walks through standing crops nor does he send his dog through them when crop damage might result. When driving across pastures or plowed fields, he keeps his vehicle on the trail or road at all times. He understands that the ruts left by vehicles on hillsides can cause serious soil erosion when water runs down these tire tracks. He hunts as much private property on foot as possible rather than by driving over it in his vehicle. When parking his vehicle, he is careful not to block the landowner's access to buildings, equipment and roadways.

If he notices anything wrong on the property such as open gates, broken fences or injured livestock, he reports it to the landowner as soon as possible.

An ethical hunter limits the amount of game he and his friends take on a landowner's property to less than the bag limit. He realizes the landowner may accept one man taking his bag limit on a given day but two or three taking their limit is being greedy.

Unless he is a close personal friend of the landowner, an ethical hunter does not hunt on a specific farm or ranch more than two or three times each season. He does not want to wear out his welcome.

Before leaving, he thanks the landowner or a member of his family for the privilege of hunting the property and he offers a share of his bag if he has been successful. In appreciation of his hospitality, a thoughtful and considerate hunter offers to spend a half hour helping the landowner with his chores. If the offer is accepted, he cheerfully pitches bales, mends fences, forks manure or does what ever else is required. He may even use his special skills if he is a plumber, mechanic, painter or carpenter.

If he owns property elsewhere such as a farm, ranch or lake cottage, an ethical hunter will invite his host to use them. He notes the name and address of his host and sometime later, perhaps around Christmas, he sends a thank you card expressing his appreciation for the landowner's hospitality.



Remember, a landowner has no respect for those who trespass. For the time it takes to ask, why not feel welcome and know you may come back again.

Regard for Other People's Feelings

When hunting on public lands, an ethical hunter shows the same respect for other users of the land and their property as he shows for landowners on private land.

He hunts in areas where his activities will not conflict with other people's enjoyment of the outdoors. And he treats the land with respect-being careful not to litter the back country or seriously damage its vegetation. He limits his use of vehicles to travel to and from his hunting area, always remaining on trails or developed roadways.

He knows that alcoholic beverages can seriously impair his judgement while hunting. He restricts his enjoyment to such drinks to the evening hours after the firearms have been stored away and he can relax with his companions and recollect the enjoyment of his day afield. Even then he limits his drinking to ensure that his actions do not offend others-either his companions or other people who may be sharing the campground with him.

An ethical hunter recognizes that many people are offended by the sight of a bloody deer carcass tied over the hood of a car or a gut pile lying in full view of the road. He knows some people may be offended at the sight of such things. Their senses may be shocked by a vehicle full of hunters with a gun rack full of firearms parading through a campground or the streets of a community. Realizing these things and having respect for the feelings and beliefs of others, the ethical hunter makes a special effort to avoid offending non-hunters. He is constantly aware that many of these people are his friends, neighbors, relatives and even members of his immediate family.

He appreciates the fact that, for a variety of reasons, many people do not hunt nor do they want to hunt in the future. Likewise, he understands some people are opposed to hunting for one reason or another. He does not regard these people as kooks and Bambi lovers or anything else other than normal human beings whose likes and dislikes differ from his own. He accepts the fact that non-hunters and anti-hunters are just as sincere in their beliefs as he is about hunting.

He appreciates that many trappers abide by their own code of ethics. They commonly leave their cabins unlocked in back country areas so someone who is in trouble may use them in a time of need. However, anyone doing so is expected to replace anything they use as soon as possible and advise the owner of their actions. An ethical hunter will never abuse this privilege nor will he tamper with equipment along a trap line.

Relationship With Other Hunters

An ethical hunter shows consideration for his companions. When leaving for a hunt, he ensures he is ready to go at the appointed time and he does not invite others to join the group unexpectedly.

Once in a field, his consideration extends to other hunters as well. He realizes the true satisfaction in hunting does not depend on competing with others for game.

An ethical hunter avoids doing anything that will interfere with another one's hunt or his enjoyment of it. He does not shoot along fence lines adjacent to fields where others are hunting nor does he try to intercept the game they are hunting.

If disputes arise with other hunters, he tries to work out a compromise-perhaps a cooperative hunt-whereby every one can enjoy themselves.

An ethical hunter does not hog an unfair number of shots he does just the opposite. He gives friends the advantage of getting a good shot whenever possible. He shows special consideration for the inexperienced or handicapped hunters allowing them to hunt from the most advantageous position.

Each hunting season, an ethical hunter invites a novice hunter to accompany him in the field. He takes the time to share his hunting knowledge with his companion and introduces him to the enjoyment of hunting ethically. He realizes that a man learns something very important about his own ethics when he teaches others to hunt.

He does not shoot over his limit to fill the bag limit of others nor does he take his own limit unless he plans to use all he has taken.

He observes the rules of safe gun handling at all times and firmly insists that his companions do the same. He politely lets others know when he thinks their behavior is out of line.

Self-Respect

An ethical hunter realizes it is his responsibility to know how to take care of himself in the outdoors. And he respects his limitations.

He never places his life or that of others in jeopardy by failing to notify someone where he intends to hunt and how long he expects to be gone. If his plans change once he is afield, he leaves a note on his vehicle designating his destination, time of departure and expected time of return. He respects the limitations of his health and physical fitness.

He consults with his family doctor regularly to ensure he is physically capable of coping with the rigor of strenuous hunting activity. If unfit, he builds up his fitness before he goes hunting. He ensures his vision is adequate and, if necessary, wears glasses or contact lenses to correct any visual impairments.

To cope with unexpected outdoor emergencies, an ethical hunter learns and practices the basic skills of first aid and survival and he understands how to recognize and deal with hypothermia.



Respect of Wildlife

An ethical hunter is not just a sportsman, he is also a naturalist. His interest in wildlife extends beyond game animals to the variety of other living things that inhabit the outdoor world. He is just as thrilled by the sight of a bald eagle as a bighorn sheep. He knows and studies nature's ways and realizes that wildlife can be enjoyed year round not only during hunting season.

When hunting, his pursuit of game is always governed by the "fair chase" principle. Simply stated, this principle or ethic demands that a hunter shall always give his quarry a "fair" chance to escape being shot.

When hunting big game, an ethical hunter will always attempt to get close enough to his quarry to ensure a quick, clean kill. He realizes that in doing so, his quarry may discover him and escape before he has a chance for a shot.

But he always gives his quarry this sporting chance.

Never under any circumstances will an ethical hunter shoot indiscriminately at a flock of game birds or a herd of big game in the hope of hitting one. He will always attempt to kill his quarry quickly and humanely.

Through considerable practice before a hunt, he will learn the distance at which he can be most confident of killing game cleanly. He will ensure his rifle is accurately sighted in and determine the most effective shot size for his shot gun.

Once afield, he will expend extraordinary effort to retrieve and dispatch wounded game-even if it means interrupting his hunting to help another hunter locate a wounded animal. When possible, he will use a trained hunting dog to retrieve wounded game birds.



If it appears he has missed his shot, an ethical hunter will always carefully inspect the spot where his quarry stood to ensure the animal was not hit.

An ethical hunter shows as much respect for his game after it is taken as before he shoots it. He never allows the meat or other usable parts of the animal to be wasted. Even though he may not want the antlers or hide of the animal, he recovers them to give to other people who will use them. The fur and feathers of many game birds and animals are useful, for example, in making flies used by fishermen.

Respect for Laws and Enforcement Officers

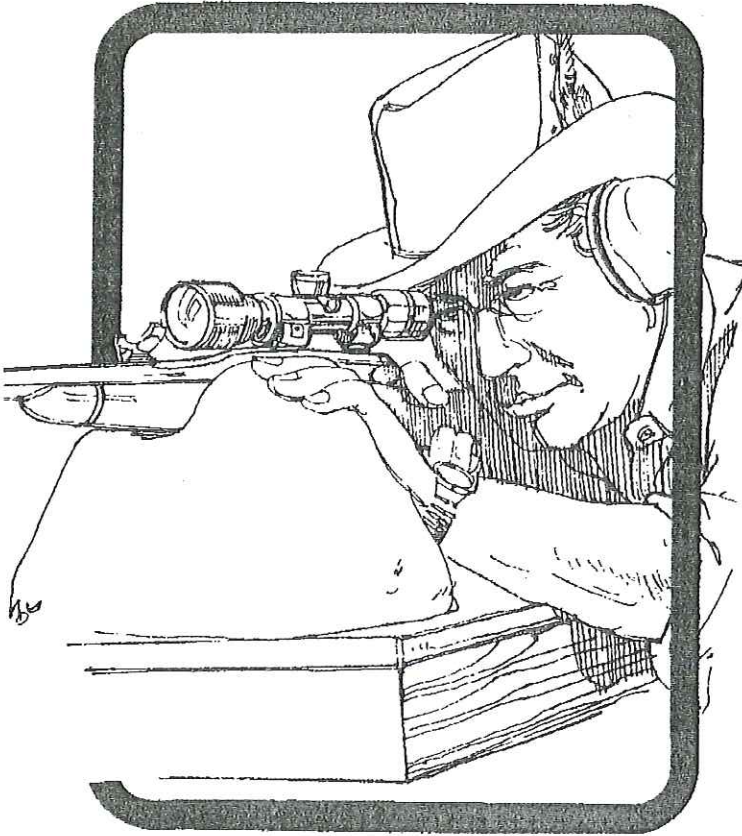
An ethical hunter obeys all laws which govern his hunting activities. Although he may occasionally disagree with a

specific law, he will not deliberately disobey it. Instead, he will work through his elected representative to change laws he feels are unjustified.

An ethical hunter will not condone law breaking by others by ignoring illegal acts he observes when afield. He right fully insists that all members of his hunting party obey the law and he reports law breaking by other people to the appropriate law enforcement agency. If asked to serve as a witness, he accepts his responsibility as a citizen and sportsman to do so.

Importance of Ethics

Future opportunities to enjoy sport hunting in North America will depend upon the hunter's public image. If hunters are viewed as "slobs" who shoot up the country side, vandalize property, and disregard the rights of landowners and citizens, they will lose the privilege to hunt on private land and public land as well. However, if an increasing number of hunters follow the honorable traditions of their sport and practice a personal code of hunting ethics which meets public expectations, the future of sport hunting will be assured.



When he meets a state or federal wildlife officer, wildlife biologist or technician checking hunters in the field, he is cooperative and provides the information they request concerning his hunting activities. If he does not understand the reason for providing certain information he asks for an explanation.

Notes

