

The Hunter's Ethical Code

As Aldo Leopold, the “father of wildlife management,” once said, “Ethical behavior is doing the right thing when no one else is watching—even when doing the wrong thing is legal.” The ethical code hunters use today has been developed by sportsmen over time. Most hunting organizations agree that responsible hunters do the following:

RESPECT NATURAL RESOURCES

- Leave the land better than you found it
- Adhere to fair chase rules
- Know your capabilities and limitations as a marksman and stay within your effective range
- Strive for a quick, clean kill
- Ensure that meat and usable parts are not wasted
- Abide by game laws and regulations
- Cooperate with conservation officers
- Report game violations
- Treat both game and non-game animals ethically

RESPECT OTHER HUNTERS

- Follow safe firearm handling practices and insist your companions do the same
- Refrain from interfering with another's hunt
- Avoid consuming alcohol, which can impair you to the point of endangering others
- Share knowledge and skills with others

RESPECT LANDOWNERS

Responsible hunters...

- Ask landowners for permission to hunt
- Follow their restrictions on when and where you may hunt
- Treat livestock and crops as your own
- Offer to share a part of your harvest with the owner
- Leave all gates the way you found them
- If you notice something wrong or out of place, notify the landowner immediately
- Never enter private land that is cultivated or posted, unless you have first obtained permission

RESPONSIBLE HUNTERS STRIVE TO

Respect Non-Hunters

- Transport animals discreetly—don't display them
- Keep firearms out of sight
- Refrain from taking graphic photographs of the kill and from vividly describing the kill while within earshot of non-hunters
- Maintain a presentable appearance while on the street—no bloody or dirty clothing

PERSONAL CHOICE

As in every human endeavor, there are gray areas of ethical behavior that come down to a matter of personal choice. Examples of gray area ethical behavior are:

- Baiting deer with corn or protein pellets
- Shooting birds on the ground, on the water or in trees
- Shooting from a vehicle or boat within private boundaries or on private waters

HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES ON PUBLIC LANDS

All states have federal or state-owned public lands that are available for hunting. Public lands may have special regulations that regulate hunting on these properties and may require special permits. Be sure to check with your state's wildlife management agency and obtain maps before you go out.


Be aware that national parks are all closed to hunting. Public lands that may be open for hunting are:

- State parks and forests
- State-owned wildlife management areas
- National forests
- National Wildlife Refuge properties
- Bureau of Land Management properties
- Bureau of Reclamation properties

How to Behave If Confronted by Anti-Hunter Protesters

- *Remain calm and polite and do not engage in arguments. Never lose your temper.*
- *Never touch an anti-hunter or use any physical force and especially never threaten an anti-hunter with your firearm.*
- *Report hunter harassment to law enforcement authorities. If possible, record the vehicle license number of the harasser(s).*

Remember...

Hunting is a privilege. It can be taken away if hunters fail to act responsibly. 

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