



The Future of Hunting *in B.C.*

by Bob Morris

Unlike many of you, I did not start hunting at an early age. There is no hunting history in my family and, as a result, I didn't take up the activity until the early 1970's, by which time, according to some of my hunting companions much longer in the tooth than I, the glory days of hunting are now only a memory.

I use the word activity and not sport when referring to hunting because, I believe hunting to be a total outdoor experience and to refer to it as a sport just demeans the activity.

Since I was a kid, I've enjoyed hiking and backpacking in the bush, but until I began to hunt I never really understood or appreciated the interrelationships of wildlife species to each other and to their habitat. Through my hunting activity, I also began to comprehend how man can have a devastating impact on natural ecosystems. And that comprehension has led me to become involved in activities to maintain at least some of those natural ecosystems in their pristine state, and to participate in projects which attempt to enhance the ecosystems damaged by man and to restore them to historic levels of productivity as much as possible.

That sounds pretty idealistic and is, of course, not the reason I hunt. My reasons for hunting are the same as most of yours. I enjoy the outdoor experience and the companionship of those who share my attitudes and personal code of environmental ethics. I also prefer game meat to domestic livestock because it's lower in fat, higher in protein and contains no antibiotics, dyes and God knows what other chemicals. Besides, damn it, to my palate, wild game just tastes better! Moreover, there is a certain pride or satisfaction in bringing home food obtained by your own skills and strength. Fortunately, that aspect of genetic diversity has not yet been bred out of the human population.

My hunting trips are also my way of recharging my psychological batteries. Out there, trudging across the muskeg, packing out a caribou, or slipping silently through a coastal forest, looking for that perfect black-tail buck, I can relax mentally. The problems of our complex society are far away and when I return home, I'm able to once again cope with the stress of modern life, not only because I've just had a rest, but also because I know I can get away again next year.

For me, the wilderness hunting experience gives me the kind of relaxation I can't get by flying to Hawaii or Mexico and frankly, that worries the hell out of me. Because, given the present political climate, I'm not sure how many next years we have left.

In the first place, we're rapidly running out of wilderness; from industrial activity such as logging, mining, or dams, and from increasing access into remote areas.

Secondly, I foresee additional limited entry hunting, both for the more desirable species and for those areas which consistently produce quality animals. I don't like the idea, but it could happen. We already restrict vehicle access to provide a quality hunt for guides and those residents with horses in some watersheds. Not satisfied, the guides are now pushing for exclusive commercial access to their territories. I've heard rumours that mountain bikes may also be banned. Our Federation takes the position that no single group should control access to Crown land but if we resident hunters are to have the same access opportunities as the horse set, perhaps it's time to decide that an A.T.V. is an A.T.V., whether it burns gas or hay.

Pressure from misinformed segments of society will continue to threaten our hunting activity and some hunting opportunities; particularly migratory birds and coast black-tail deer, will be lost due solely to human population increases and associated safety factors. However, if we conduct ourselves in an exemplary fashion and continue to carry out and promote programs designed to eliminate poaching and weed out the slobs among us, I believe that the public at large will appreciate the value of maintaining hunting opportunities wherever possible.

While all of these scenarios may result in a decrease in hunting opportunities for resident hunters, by far the most serious, in my opinion, is the continuing loss of wilderness because, once lost it can never be regained; at least not in our lifetime. Any regulations or restrictions can be deleted as quickly as they are imposed.

The decisions taken in the 1990's with respect to the designation of the few undisturbed watersheds we have left, will determine the quality of our outdoor experiences for the next century at least. The land use policy of our Federation is to support the principle of multiple use with a few site-specific exceptions (eg. Adams River and the Junction Range). I believe it is no longer reasonable and certainly not desirable to expose the philosophy of multiple use in every B.C. watershed. However, there are several watersheds in this province, whose most probable use is simply to be left alone. Some better known examples for are: the Stein, Khutzeymateen, and Carmanah. While we support conservation of the first one, we (the B.C.W.F.) have not formally made its position known on Carmanah or Khutzeymateen, Watersheds such as the Megin and Ahnuhati are equally worthy of consideration.

Since our land use policy also provides for changes or additions, I believe that we should immediately compile a comprehensive list of areas where single use or limited multiple use designations become Federation policy. Many of the more desirable areas have already been identified by other outdoor conservation organizations and these could serve as a basis for our consideration.

Right about now some of you are probably asking yourselves, "What has all this got to do with the future of hunting?" In part, the answer is obvious. If we don't maintain wilderness areas, we will have no opportunity for a wilderness hunting experience. That's the selfish reason. We all know that attitudes stem from experience, and the ideals I've mentioned reflect my attitude towards the natural environment which has developed over time as a direct result of my hunting activities. I suspect that's one underlying reason why we are participating in this discussion. We may be expressing our concern for the future of hunting, but are really concerned for the future of wildlife and their habitat.

We hunters have developed an intimacy with wildlife through our hunting activity that enables us to be among the first to observe the impact of man on the natural environment, and for a variety of

reasons (some selfish), we are among the first to express concern about that impact. We know, that if hunting were eliminated, it would mean approximately 150,000 fewer people in this province would become concerned about a quality environment.

To you hunters, we should not be reluctant to support other environmental groups, despite any basic philosophical differences we may have when we believe such support is warranted. If we do, and do so publicly, even the most stringent anti-hunters must at least grudgingly respect our point of view.

All of us in the environmental movement have a common cause; to maintain wildlife habitat and wilderness areas for the enjoyment of present and future generations. It really doesn't matter if that enjoyment is hunting or hugging trees. The point is: if we don't work together, we all lose.