

SPORT ETHICS AND HUNTER RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract: The Pennsylvania Game Commission responded to a need by instigating a program of hunter participation in the enforcement of game laws. The program named **S P O R T** (stands for "Sportsmen Policing Our Ranks Together"), has encouraged clubs and individuals to report game law infractions. Some game protectors report that as much as 30% of their reported violations have resulted from their promotion of **S P O R T**.

Proc. Ann. Conf. S.E. Assoc. Fish & Wildl. Agencies 32:835-837

The idea of hunter responsibility and sportsmanship is not unique to this generation, but it's become perhaps more prominent than in the past because of the increase in numbers of hunters and the increasing frequency of attacks from opposing groups.

Executive Director Glenn Bowers at several meetings of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs stressed his belief that some form of self-policing by hunters was urgently needed.

Problems with hunters continued to grow during 1976. Prosecutions and penalties for violations of the Game Laws reached new highs. But a problem of equal or greater magnitude is that of hunter misconduct and disrespect which affects the public and especially cooperating landowners. Road hunting has become a way of life for too many of our hunters. This type activity was especially bad in 1976 because of the cold weather. Farmers and landowners are asking, "What's happening to our hunters? They don't want to leave the road!" On numerous occasions in the past, the need to "put the hunt back into hunting," has been emphasized. We need this now more than ever before.

We have heard a lot about the anti-hunting element in recent years. But this does not appear to be as serious as the anti-hunter. And there is a big difference. Many people who have no objection to hunting are being completely turned off by the actions of some hunters. We must eliminate the slobs and those others who are creating serious problems for sportsmen and the regulatory agencies.

At their 1976 spring convention, The Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs passed a resolution calling for an active statewide campaign to promote sportsmanship. The main motivation for this resolution was listed as the decrease of game due to poaching. However, the Game Commission, which had been asked to assist in developing such a program, foresaw more general application.

The Game Commission's Division of Information & Education came up with a list of suggested activities at the Federation, club and individual levels. All were designed to enhance the image of hunters both through internal cleanup and external public relations. These were expanded in various meetings and presented to the president of the Federation under the heading and program of "Hunter Responsibility."

There was little feedback. So the Game Commission ran with the ball themselves. Perhaps the program was too comprehensive and people were just awed by it. There were no gimmicks, just a lot of suggestions for hard work. The need was still there, and the Game Commission staff continued to think about a saleable attractive program to promote hunter responsibility.

In the fall of 1976 a new program aimed at eliminating "slob" hunters and policing the ranks of Pennsylvania hunters was launched by the Game Commission. Called **SPORT**, the program is designed to weed out undesirable hunters who are bringing disrespect to the hunting fraternity — slob hunters and poachers, defilers of landscapes, enemies of landowners, wanton killers, arrogant boors who make their own rules, gunners who alarm the common citizen and offend public decency.

For years the sportsman has had to put up with the anti-hunting moralist who, knowing little or nothing about game and hunting, feels morally qualified to condemn the person who does. But when the hunter over-reacts to this anti-hunting moralist, it may be because the hunter knows that the moralist is partly right. The ethical hunter feels anger and frustration at being forced to share the stigma of the slob. As the sport of hunting is dirtied by just a few persons, so is the sportsman, for all hunters are tarred with the same brush.

SPORT stands for "Sportsmen Policing Our Ranks Together." The Game Commission is hopeful that through the cooperation of sportsmen and pressure from within the hunting ranks will come a drive that will eliminate the slob from Pennsylvania before his disrespectful conduct can further damage the image of the hunter.

Endorsed by the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, the Game Commission's SPORT Program will be pursued and encouraged over the next several years. Soon after we kicked it off, we began to see and realize benefits from it. We have had violations reported that otherwise would have passed without our knowledge. We have sportsmen challenging those who misbehaved to correct their misdeeds. We are generating a better overall awareness to the necessity for respect and behavior above reproach while hunting.

Under the SPORT Program, sportsmen are urged to report Game Law violations. Evidence that the Game Commission's SPORT Program is paying dividends can be found in numerous prosecutions for Game Law violations resulting from their encouragement of SPORT participation. In fact, some game protectors report that 30% of their violations have resulted from their promotion of SPORT at meetings throughout their districts.

Eight Pittsburgh area men were arrested for poaching in Jefferson County resulting from the SPORT Program. In the Jefferson County case, a sportsman noticed 4 deer hanging in a wooded section near a camp. The sportsman tipped off the District Game Protector who, with the Land Manager and a Deputy Game Protector, kept the area under surveillance until the 8 Allegheny Countians came to pick up the whitetails.

The deer had been shot at night with .22 caliber rifles. The plans were to pretend that the deer had been taken with bows and arrows during the archery season.

In another SPORT related case a Pike County resident involved in the shooting of 6 deer was fined \$1000 for taking 5 deer more than the season limit. The offender was one of a group of individuals involved in a number of game violations. As the group's activities became known to other SPORT-minded hunters, word of some of the violations eventually reached the ears of game protectors, who launched investigations. Pike County District Game Protectors, with the assistance of Deputy Game Protectors, made the arrests. The offender was prosecuted after he killed a spike buck on November 30, an 8 point buck on December 1, another 8 point buck on December 5, and a 6 point buck on December 7. He also took an antlerless deer on December 16, and another antlerless deer on December 17. Several other members of the group were prosecuted on lesser charges by the officers.

Judging from the Field Notes we've received, many citizens are taking the program seriously. Not everyone who aids in an investigation identifies the SPORT Program as his motivation, but many field men think that the amount of citizen involvement has definitely risen since the inception of SPORT.

One strength of SPORT is that it focuses not on law enforcement by an already overtaxed staff of professionals, but on enforcement by peer pressure. That, in the final sense, is the single most effective element in the success of any kind of regulation. There can never be enough enforcement officers to witness every infraction or to prosecute each one if they did. But the psychological power of the opinions of those around you is tremendous. As the old saying goes, "you can't legislate morality" — but you sure can enforce it by peer pressure. That's how cultural values and attitudes are retained in a society, by and large. Legal enforcement works only if there is social approval of its basis. SPORT encourages social pressure against "slob hunters and gunners who alarm the common citizen and offend public decency."

SPORT has been the focus of a major exhibit and several of the smaller exhibits designed by I & E assistants. One exhibit was backed up with a black crushed velvet sheet outlined with 137 SPORT buttons. It was a real eyecatcher. Another I & E assistant has incorporated SPORT materials into the mobile display unit which travels to shows and exhibits in the Pennsylvania Game Commission's Southeast Division. He's tained in a society, by and large. Legal enforcement works only if there is social approval card about ten times for visibility and impact.

Hunter education programs have created the awareness for safer hunting. SPORT ethics which has been added to hunter education classes is also creating the awareness to improving hunter responsibility. Thousands of vehicles can be seen throughout Pennsylvania displaying SPORT bumper decals. Thousands of sportsmen wear SPORT

identification on hunting clothes telling others of their support in improving the image of hunting.

In reviewing our efforts for 1978, we are grateful to the many sportsmen who have joined in our SPORT Program but we need a lot more help. This will be a continuing effort and with the help of additional sportsmen we can progressively improve the image of the hunting fraternity. This is a year 'round project with added special emphasis during the critical periods. We must urge more of those who go afield to adopt and live by the SPORT Program. All sportsmen must become involved.

We have indicated in the past we must be responsible for the welfare of the various species in our consideration of harvest regulations. We are hopeful that more hunters will understand our obligations and that our first and primary responsibility is to the wildlife resources basic to our hunting enjoyment.

In the future we are certain to be called upon to do more in the way of surveys, inventories and data gathering preliminary to decisions affecting any and all wildlife resources. We will need to know more about the relation of decisions and actions to other resources and land uses. Already numerous states have prepared or are in the process of preparing Environmental Impact Statements or assessments on the management and harvest of various species.

We are concerned about the future. Many factors are working against hunting as we know it. Unfortunately, too many hunters take too much for granted. Perhaps one of the reasons is that the hunting recreation has come too cheaply. A more deserved appreciation must be afforded the privilege of hunting. Participants must be prepared to pay for the privilege. Further, we must work together to perpetuate hunting. Too often hunters and even organized sportsmen become chronic gripers and assume adversary positions when we should be working together.

We are encouraged that our SPORT effort is uniting our sportsmen for a better understanding of our wildlife problems. Every member of the Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs should carry a SPORT card and assist in enrolling others to work in this direction. Remember Sportsmen Policing Our Ranks Together can go far toward improving the image if sportsmen will become more involved.