

TRAPPERS AND HOUNDSMEN: UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL

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Abstract: The conflict between trappers and houndsmen in many areas of the southeast, over the same resource, the raccoon, has nationwide implications. Animal rights organizations have publicly attacked trapping, and indications are that these anti-organizations are encouraging the conflict between trappers and houndsmen to help their goal to abolish trapping, then coursing and other forms of hunting with dogs. Trappers and houndsmen must unite and form an alliance to collectively fight this threat to both sports. The following is the script of a slide show that has been developed for use by all states in the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

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Just as a nation divided cannot stand alone, when sportsmen groups begin fighting amongst themselves, the end of all outdoor sporting interests is near. If anti-hunting, anti-trapping, anti-fishing influences are successful in turning sportsmen against one another, the resulting division will spell doom for America's wildlife consumers.

Anti-organizations believe that all sportsmen are sadistic killers of wildlife. There are many major anti organizations, and hundreds of smaller ones. By building up a fanatic hatred for hunters, trappers and houndsmen, these organizations collect an estimated \$30 million a year to further their grand strategy of making animal rights a legally accepted principle.

They pursue this goal by political action in the United States Congress, in the 50 state legislatures, in voter campaigns, and in the state and federal courts. They believe that animals have a right to be represented in court, supported by a human being to do their talking for them. The human being, of course, would be a representative of one of the anti organizations. The plaintiff might be a dog facing euthanasia, but it's more likely to be a deer confronted with a hunting season or a fox protesting the start of trapping and chasing season or a coyote programmed to be eliminated in a predator control campaign. The animal rights' umbrella has been extended to include domestic as well as wild animals. The goal is to declare all animals as entitled to a natural life . . . with the right to go to court with a human guardian. They are not only opposed to trapping and hunting of furbearers, but also to commercially raised furbearers.

An article in the prestigious Smithsonian magazine is critical of modern methods of raising poultry. It was written by the head of the Humane Society's institute for the study of animal problems, who also sent a lengthy questionnaire to veterinarians and others asking for their reactions to modern methods of raising livestock. If some questions strike you as being very kooky, remember that this movement is taken very seriously by the anti organizations and their millions of contributors.

Their main targets, however, are sportsmen, particularly hunters, and the wildlife agency professionals who they portray as being tools of sportsmen's interests.

Nearly every animal rights group has come out in opposition to trapping, especially trapping with the leghold trap.

And most of the major anti-sportsman organizations have also declared their intent to abolish hunting, as well. The head of the Humane Society of the United States has called for the end of sport hunting. The Fund for Animals outspoken leader, Cleveland Amory, has suggested the formation of a "Hunt the Hunters Club." Both Greenpeace International and The Friends of Animals have mounted hunt sabotage campaigns within their memberships. All are critical of both hunting and trapping.

In fact, The Wildlife Legislative Fund of America, which is familiar with nearly every animal rights organization is hard pressed to cite any of these organizations which are not opposed to *both* trapping and hunting. Hundreds of these groups exist and they wield a massive funding base. To date only 1 state — Arizona — has declared any of the anti-hunting activities of these groups illegal, no matter how unethical.

The *antis* have many methods that they use to eliminate all hunting and fishing. But their most effective, and permanent technique is to "divide and conquer." And in the southeast, they are just sitting back and laughing as 2 sportsmen's groups fight amongst themselves, doing the anti's work for them. These 2 groups are the houndsmen and trappers, who are fighting over the same resource, the raccoon and fox.

The roots of both sporting interests date back to the earliest days of the history of the southeast. When the southeast was first being opened, wildlife was abundant and people were scarce. Even though it was then one of the most populous parts of the new nation, human density was not at the same level it is today.

It was in this environment that 3 sports developed around the raccoon and fox. Breeds of hounds were developed for chasing both animals. Walkers, blueticks, redbones and mountain curs became famous as trail and tree dogs. Raccoon hunters pursued raccoons as they saw fit, and since there were few raccoon hunters and many raccoons, no harm was done. The 2nd sport is fox hunting which split into 2 factions. One used large packs of dogs to cover the countryside chasing the fox as the hunters followed closely on horseback. Other fox hunters followed the lines of the raccoon hunter. Their aim was not the capture of the fox, but rather to hear the sound of hound music. The 3rd sport that developed was trapping. Although trapping has ceased to play a vital role in the economics of the southeast, it did and still does provide additional income for many people. As rural America lost ground to the metropolitan areas, hunters, trappers and houndsmen became confined into smaller and smaller areas, and conflicts among these 3 groups began.

At the same time, the animal rights groups began to form, for the sole purpose of outlawing all hunting, trapping and fishing. These large, heavily funded and professionally staffed organizations have been successful in attracting phenomenal support from a wide spectrum of the American public. In the name of "saving the animals," these organizations have mounted costly, effective campaigns against hunters and trappers.

To date, blatant attacks on houndsmen by anti-hunting groups have been rare, due to the fact that houndsmen are doing a good job of eliminating themselves. Even though the primary focus of the anti-groups now is to outlaw trapping, they

haven't forgotten the houndsman. Cleveland Amory of the Defenders of Wildlife makes it clear in his book "Man Kind" that raccoon hunters are definitely targets for the anti-hunter. He states that "of all the hunting cruelty, cooning may well be the worst, one which comes closest to an erotic sadistic motivation." On NBC's Today show, he announced his "Hunt the hunters club." One example heard by millions of viewers threatens the time honored sport of fox chasing. The Humane Society of the United States, another powerful, well funded anti-organization, also makes it clear that raccoon hunting is one of their favorite targets. In their publication "Game Animals: Animated Targets for Hunters," they cite examples of raccoon treeing and water races as some of the most pathetic sports.

The antis have taken their battle to outlaw chasing and trapping to federal, state and local legislatures. Thirty-two states had legislative and voter campaigns designed to interfere with sportsmen's rights during 1 recent period. In recent years, the most blatant example of an attempt to curtail hunting with dogs has been a bill repeatedly introduced in Congress by Representative Glenn Anderson, a notorious California anti-hunter. This bill would have specifically banned dog coursing nationwide. In New York, a bill introduced in the state legislature closely paralleled this congressional bill. For a number of years it failed to clear the committee to which it was assigned. But rumblings are now coming from New York regarding the introduction of a bill to ban bear hunting with dogs.

Trappers, on the other hand, are continually confronted by anti-sportsman groups throughout the country. Many states — most notably Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon and Maine — each year produce bills that would severely restrict trapping or stop the sport altogether. The anti threat is not new to trappers; they have been facing it for years.

While attacks on houndsmen have been rare, more generalized attacks on hunters have occurred repeatedly. One recent example of an attack on hunters was the fight to close Florida's Tosahatchee Park Preserve to deer hunters. Several anti-hunting groups tried to stop the hunt through a series of legal maneuvers, and were temporarily successful. However, the Governor's cabinet issued a unanimous decision in favor of once again opening the preserve to deer hunting in May, 1981. But the anti-hunters are not finished. Subsequent to the cabinet decision, 2 bills have been introduced in the Florida legislature that would, if passed, again prohibit deer hunting at Tosahatchee. It is interesting to note that Florida is one of the few states that has enacted severe restrictions on trapping at the request of houndsmen.

One of the animal rights organization's most important tacts is to first outlaw trapping and then move on to attack hunting. Florida provides stark evidence of the methodical plot the anti-sportsman groups have adopted. In some states where trapping has been restricted or threatened, the impetus has come from houndsmen, not anti-hunting forces. The anti-hunters and anti-trappers have had no reason to move into these states to attack trapping — the houndsmen have been doing that job for them.

Many houndsmen are under the misconception that the animal rightists respect their activities. After all, coon and fox hunting are part of the heritage of the South. Since men and dogs have hunted together in the southern states all these years, houndsmen must be in the right. The houndsmen are deluding themselves if they believe this to be true! The reason the anti-hunters have not attacked houndsmen is that the houndsmen are providing a valuable service. As it stands now, if

trapping is ever abolished in the South, it will be the houndsmen taking credit, not the anti-trapping animal rights fanatics. Once trapping has been eliminated, the anti-hunters may then begin working to abolish hunting (which will include hunting with dogs), and finally fishing.

But why would the anti-trappers want to outlaw the time honored sport of the houndsmen? Quite simply, for the same reason they want to outlaw trapping; because it results in the death of an animal. Houndsmen must be vigilant because their sport is harder to defend than trapping. Hunting with hounds does not attract the defense support of the mammoth fur industry, which wields considerable financial and political power. Nor does it attract the support of other politically active segments of the outdoor industry since houndsmen are relatively few in number and contribute relatively little in terms of commerce.

On the other hand, many states have enacted codes protecting trappers from theft of traps and theft of game caught in traps. It stands to reason, then, that houndsmen — although they have not come under attack in the vehement manner in which trappers have been attacked — are actually less protected under the law in many states. They need the support of trappers who have learned the ways of the anti-sportsmen and have, in many instances, mastered lobbying techniques and other skills necessary for protecting themselves.

Dave Jones, president of the California Houndsmen for Conservation, has seen the effectiveness of a trapper/houndsman coalition. "My groups have maintained an alliance with the trappers," he said. "We realize what would happen if infighting began to take place and know that sportsmen cannot afford to fight one another in this day and time — especially in California."

Seth Galt, editor of the nation's largest houndsman publication, "Full Cry," reports houndsmen in other parts of the country also feel houndsmen must unite with trappers in the name of protecting the rights of all sportsmen. The houndsman can do a great deal for the trapper in terms of offering support when trapping comes under attack. However, in the future, when hunting with dogs is attacked by anti-hunting groups, the trapper's political help is going to pay off for houndsmen, that is, as long as houndsmen are willing to work with trappers for a common goal, said Galt. A model trapper/houndsman coalition has worked to the advantage of both groups in Galt's home state of Illinois. There, trappers and houndsmen have joined forces to set up a Furbearer Alliance. The goal of the Alliance is to take positive action on mutual problems and it has been quite effective in that regard. For instance, a lack of knowledge by novice and amateur trappers in Illinois was identified as the cause of a great deal of trapper/houndsman conflict. It was determined that the state trappers association could work to solve problems resulting from a lack of training by setting up trapper education programs.

Trappers and hunters in the South can learn from the examples of their counterparts in other states on how effective a trapper/houndsman coalition can be. In Connecticut, for instance, where anti-hunting, anti-trapping groups have given sportsmen fits for years, the Connecticut Trappers Association was successful in enlisting the support of houndsman groups in the state sportsman's coalition. This coalition operates under the pretext that if 1 member group is attacked, the entire community of sportsmen is being attacked and action is taken to defend the rights of all sportsmen. In spite of heavy anti-sportsman activity in Connecticut, the anti-hunters, anti-trappers have been unsuccessful in passing detrimental legislation in recent years.

Ohio's 1977 proposed leghold trap ban, which appeared on a statewide ballot, was soundly defeated thanks to the work of a similar coalition. Houndsmen were among that coalition and today take pride in their accomplishment which helped beat back the anti-sportsman effort to abolish trapping. Shortly after the Ohio sportsmen's victory, houndsmen joined trappers, representatives of labor, farmers, wildlife managers and veterinarians to prevent the introduction of an anti-trapping proposal in California. As a result, trappers continue to harvest the state's furbearer resources and houndsmen continue to hunt raccoon and fox.

In South Dakota, it was the trappers who came to the aid of the hunters when a dove hunting issue appeared on the general referendum in November, 1980. In fact, trappers from outside South Dakota joined South Dakota trappers in providing funds and other support to hunters in the state who wished to hunt mourning doves.

What has worked for trappers and houndsmen in other parts of the country will work for the 2 groups in the southeastern United States. Patience and tact will be required to draw the 2 groups together and both groups will have to give. However, when brought together, houndsmen and trappers will be able to work together to their mutual benefit. If not, the end of both sporting interests is imminent.