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*by Gordon Whittington*

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Yet the idea of confining whitetails is hardly new. In fact, the town of Deerfield, Wisconsin, drew its name from a deer-holding structure built there in the late 1800s. A clever fellow used long logs to erect a fort-like pen, then built up a large mound of dirt just outside the tall fence. Some wild deer that went onto the mound would end up hopping over the log fence into the "deer field," from which they then couldn't escape.

The idea has evolved considerably since then. For starters, logs have given way to metal posts and wire. For another, many fence advocates say their goal isn't so much to keep deer in as to keep them out.

This is a common refrain in Texas, the traditional epicenter of high fence-

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Of course, for many landowners and hunters who build high fences around hunting land, neither lower whitetail numbers nor exotic wildlife is the main motivation. They build high fences because they think doing so will help them kill more big bucks. Part of the rationale is that the bucks can't get out and be shot by neighbors; the rest of the rationale is that with a high fence, poachers will have a harder time accessing the herd.

But what do you readers have to say on the matter? Do you think high fences have a place in fair chase — and if so, under what conditions? Here's how you voted. (Keep in mind that not all readers answered all questions, so the responses don't always total 100 percent.)

#### **IS FAIR CHASE POSSIBLE INSIDE A HIGH FENCE?**

**Yes: 40 Percent**

**No: 58 Percent**

We wanted to know if you think fair chase is *possible* inside a high fence, regardless of the size, cover, hunter density, weapon type, etc. When the votes were totaled, almost three of every five voters had rejected high-fence deer hunting outright.

On our survey, the highest support for hunting inside enclosures came from Louisiana, where 73 percent of

voters told us the practice doesn't necessarily violate fair chase. Next came Florida (69 percent), followed by New Jersey (62), Texas (61), Virginia (55), Mississippi (51) and Tennessee (50).

Overall, these results suggest that approval of high-fence hunting is lower north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Maine voters were the least supportive of fences, with just 17 percent in favor, while those in Kansas and Iowa gave 26 percent approval.

We expected to see great regional variation in views on high fence, given that fencing hasn't come to all regions at the same pace. Some states and provinces have hundreds of such enclosures, while others have only a handful. Some wildlife agencies have taken a hands-off approach to such fences, while others regulate them closely. And whitetail habitat can vary immensely from place to place, as can average home-range sizes.

"To me, fair chase cannot involve a (high) fence," wrote Saskatchewan's Murray Wild. "The deer can only go so far. I've picked up matched sheds five miles apart. I know of bucks that have moved 20 miles."

#### **HAVE YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW EVER HUNTED IN A HIGH-FENCED AREA?**

**Yes: 23 Percent**

**No: 77 Percent**

While less than 1 percent of North America's whitetail habitat is surrounded by high fence, nearly one-fourth of survey respondents reported having hunted on such land or knowing someone who had.

Texas readers had the highest positive response to this question; 72 percent answered in the affirmative. Louisiana was No. 2 on the list, at 46 percent, with South Carolina (42), Florida (39) and Michigan (33) also above 30 percent.

Meanwhile, just 5 percent of Vermont voters answered "yes" to this question. Kansas was next (7 percent), then Minnesota (9), Iowa (10) and Illinois (12).

#### **IF YOU COULD, WOULD YOU HIGH FENCE YOUR LAND?**

**Yes: 24 Percent**

**No: 73 Percent**

In his January 2001 issue feature, "Managing Whitetail Management," David Morris expressed his view that

most deer hunters would enclose their hunting areas with high fences if they could. However, among readers who participated in our survey, the overall vote was 3-to-1 against doing so.

Lowest support (8 percent) came from readers in Maine, followed by Kansas (13), Kentucky (15), Iowa (16) and Arkansas (20). Meanwhile, 63 percent of Louisiana voters told us they would fence deer land if given a chance to do so, and 56 percent of Florida voters came to the same conclusion. Among Texas readers, the voting was split exactly 50-50.

#### **MINIMUM HIGH-FENCED ACREAGE FOR FAIR CHASE?**

**Average: 1,458 Acres**

David offered that a high-fenced tract be of at least 1,000 acres (just over 1.5 square miles) in order to provide fair chase. As a group, voters expressing support for high fences came up with a minimum of 1,458 acres, or nearly 2.3 square miles.

The average varied widely. Votes in Kentucky came up with the highest acreage requirement: 3,275. Next were Maine (3,125), Iowa (2,895), New Jersey (2,326), Minnesota (2,100) and Wisconsin (2,031). The lowest average was in Vermont (855),

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On average, the highest minimum cover requirement was in Kentucky: 1,751 acres. Minnesota was next (1,400), followed by Texas (1,407), Florida (1,359), Louisiana (1,292), Georgia (1,241), Mississippi (1,159)

and Iowa (1,155).

The lowest average cover requirement was in Maryland, at 475 acres, with Illinois (530), Missouri (554), Maine (585), Kansas (586), Arkansas (598), New York (602) and Michigan (634) also well below the average for all of North America.

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In only eight states or provinces did a majority of pro-fence readers tell us that fair chase could be experienced with a hunter density heavier than 1 per 200 acres inside a high fence. The lowest minimum acreage per hunter was in Vermont (134), with Missouri (147), Maryland (150), Arkansas (153), West Virginia (155), Pennsylvania (172), Virginia (185) and New York rounding out the list.

Meanwhile, in only five places did the average come out above 300 acres per hunter: Texas (648), South Carolina (637), Georgia (562), Iowa (484) and Florida (476).

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The lowest average was in Kentucky (47 acres per hunter), with several other locations also at 80 acres or less: Virginia (49), Missouri (52), Michigan (53), Minnesota (62), Ohio and South Carolina (69), Illinois and West Virginia (70), New York (73), Pennsylvania (78) and Arkansas (80).

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In no state or province did a majority of voters reject island hunting. In fact, the lowest support, from readers in Alabama, still was a strong 68 percent in favor.


North Dakota voter Ryan Wollan apparently summed up the sentiments of many of his fellow island hunters when he noted, "The deer got on . . . they can get off." And T. Scott Forbes of Maryland pointed out that "water's no boundary (to a deer)."

But even among many supporters of island deer hunting, there was a view that details factor into the equation. For instance, Alan Reekie of British Columbia opined that island hunting is fair chase only if you hunt "by yourself, no drives." Florida's Bob Adey claimed that island hunting is only ethical if there's at least 100 acres of land per person.

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