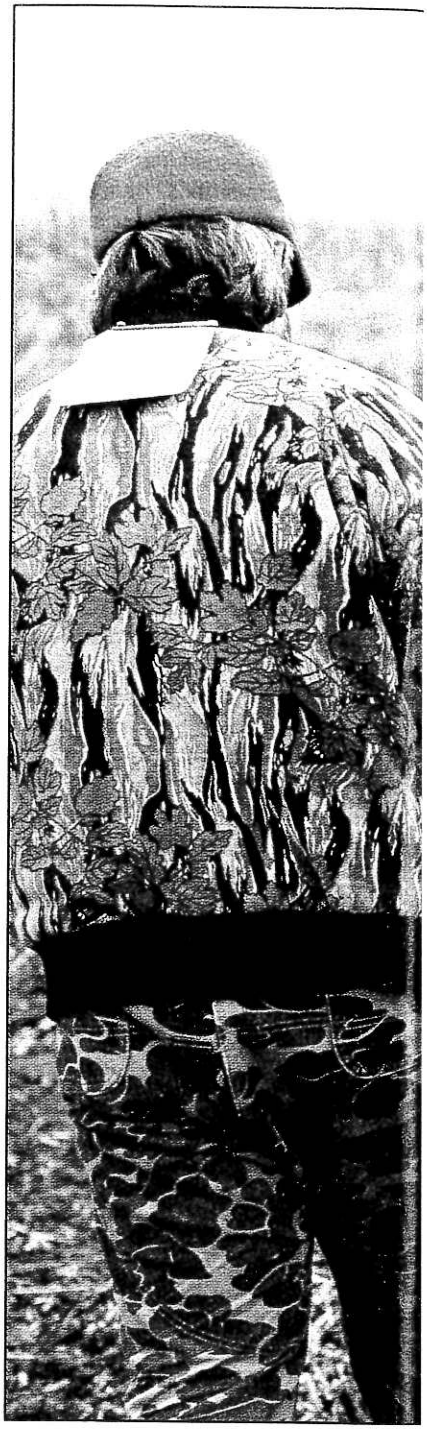
Part 3

Fair Chase Whitetails

Tactics that utilize forced movement of deer are loved by some hunters, loathed by others. Here's how readers voted on the ethics of using these and a number of other aggressive methods for pursuing North America's No. 1 big-game species.

by Gordon Whittington



For many hunters, joining family and friends to push deer is a tradition, one as ethical as it is effective and enjoyable. Others detest forced movement of deer, preferring instead to hunt with no help — or interference — from anyone else. One guy lives to hear his hounds on a buck's trail, while the next considers this to be anything but sporting. And while some see high-tech scouting aids as reasonable ways to enhance success, others contend that such advances are really setbacks in the war against poaching and hunting's shaky public image.

Where do ***WHITETAIL*** readers stand on these questions? Which hunting methods and types of gear can legitimately be used in fair chase? Which can't? And why? That's what we asked you in our survey in the January 2001 issue, the first ever on fair chase in whitetail hunting.

In our September issue, we looked at the ethics of methods commonly used to lure deer. Those who responded to our survey gave overwhelming approval to most such tactics, though baiting with feed (illegal in many areas) was a notable exception. Many of you told us you support these methods because deer have a choice of whether or not to respond to "lures" — food plots, water, sounds, scents, even other deer — during legal hunting hours.

But what if instead of waiting for a deer to come to him, a hunter decides to go to the deer? In such cases, the animal can find itself confronted by a hunter even though it had no intention of exposing itself in daylight. How far can a hunter push it before overly hampering a deer's odds of escape?

In this category are several classic hunting methods, including human drives, dogging and tracking, plus such state-of-the-art tactics as aerial surveillance and the use of infrared-triggered cameras. And what about using a guide? Here's how you voted:

DRIVING DEER WITH PEOPLE

Fair Chase: 79 Percent

Unfair: 20 Percent

The human drive is among the most traditional of hunting methods, and a strong majority of voters told us that this practice can have a legitimate place in the deer woods.

Among states and provinces from which we got at least 20 responses to this question, highest approval was in Pennsylvania (90 percent), closely followed by Florida, Indiana, Minnesota and Virginia (88); North Carolina (87); and Wisconsin (85).

The only places in which respondents gave human drives less than 70 percent approval were Maine (52) and Texas (68). Maine likely lagged so far behind everywhere else because it's illegal to drive deer in that state.

Readers who most approved of drives tended to be in regions with heavy hunting pressure, thick cover and/or late gun seasons. "Forced movement is often the only way to get deer to move later in the season," noted Wisconsin's David Zielke.

But even where drives are common, survey respondents didn't give this method blanket approval. Many readers said they want a limit on the



When deer hunker down in standing corn or other heavy cover, drives can get them moving. But many readers told us they think there should be a limit on the number of participants in a push. Photo by Gordon Whittington.

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size of drive parties, with most suggesting six or fewer hunters.

To South Dakota's Bryan Gasper, the key isn't hunter numbers, but balancing the party's to the habitat. "There must be many escape routes or few standers," he wrote. And many other readers expressed approval for drives only on land not surrounded by a high fence.

A few of you told us that you think drives should be taboo on public land. One who expressed that viewpoint was Wisconsin's Charles Warner.

"This is my pet peeve," he noted. "There's nothing worse than sitting in a stand for several hours on a 40- to 120-acre piece of public land and having 10 to 20 guys walk through on one of their many drives of the day, pushing everything out. They drive every piece of public land within a 5-square-mile area and leave nothing undisturbed for people who like to sit or still-hunt."

Among respondents who voted against drives, the prevailing view was that they just aren't fair to deer. New York's Tyler Smith pulled no punches in expressing that view.

"Deer drives are just organized killing," he claimed. "Hunting deer one on one is the only fair way."

DRIVING DEER WITH DOGS

Fair Chase: 27 Percent

Unfair: 71 Percent

In most of North America, it's been a very long time since the law

allowed the use of dogs in hunting deer. Most dogging now is limited to coastal/swampy areas from Virginia down through the lower Mississippi River Valley. Even in some of these traditional strongholds it now struggles to hang on in the face of increasing restrictions.

Florida readers gave the highest approval to dogging (67 percent), followed by a number of other states that still allow the practice in some areas: South Carolina (65); North Carolina (60); Virginia (59); and Mississippi and Arkansas (56 each). Lowest approval of dogging as fair chase came from readers in Minnesota (13 percent), followed by those in New Jersey (15), Maine (16), Kansas (17), Oklahoma (18), Maryland (19) and Indiana (20).

"I personally don't care about hunting with dogs, because I'd rather locate the deer myself," wrote Florida's Lee Jackson. "But I'm not against it. It's more of a social hunt."

Dogging deer "is not nearly as easy as you think," stated Virginia's Edward Gardner.

Alabama's Sidney Bright also favors dogging, if it's done "without CB radios or riding all around in a 4-wheel-drive. For years my hunting buddy and I had some of the finest deer dogs in the state," he noted, "but we gave up dog-hunting because people not in our group shot deer in front of our dogs."

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North Carolina's Chris Jarman is another dogging fan. "I realize that many people felt this type of hunting is unethical and unfair," he wrote. "Hunting with dogs has taken a beating over the years because many people do not understand what is involved in it. This sport is very challenging and does not guarantee the hunter of taking a deer."

Kentucky's Ricky McKinney, who voted against dogging, called the practice "undue harassment of all deer." He and many other readers noted that because dogs have so much more stamina and better overall senses than do people, they can unduly stress a deer herd. And a number of hunters in states where dogging is legal pointed out that problems often arise because deer dogs have difficulty reading "Posted" signs.

SHOOTING DEER FROM A MOTOR VEHICLE
Fair Chase: 10 Percent
Unfair: 90 Percent

Discharging a firearm from a public road is illegal across North America. But in some states — Texas, South Carolina, Florida and Arkansas among them — you can shoot deer from a motor vehicle on at least some private lands, provided the vehicle isn't used to pursue the animal.

The highest acceptance of shooting deer from a vehicle came from readers in the above states. Among Texas respondents, 38 percent classified it as fair chase. That support almost was matched in South Carolina (35), with Florida (24) and Arkansas (23) also coming in well above the overall approval of 10 percent.

While all of these states lie south of the Mason-Dixon Line, survey responses didn't divide along regional lines. Kentucky actually had the lowest approval of vehicle hunting, at 3 percent, and Alabama (5) was close behind. In between those states were Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri, each with 4 percent approval.

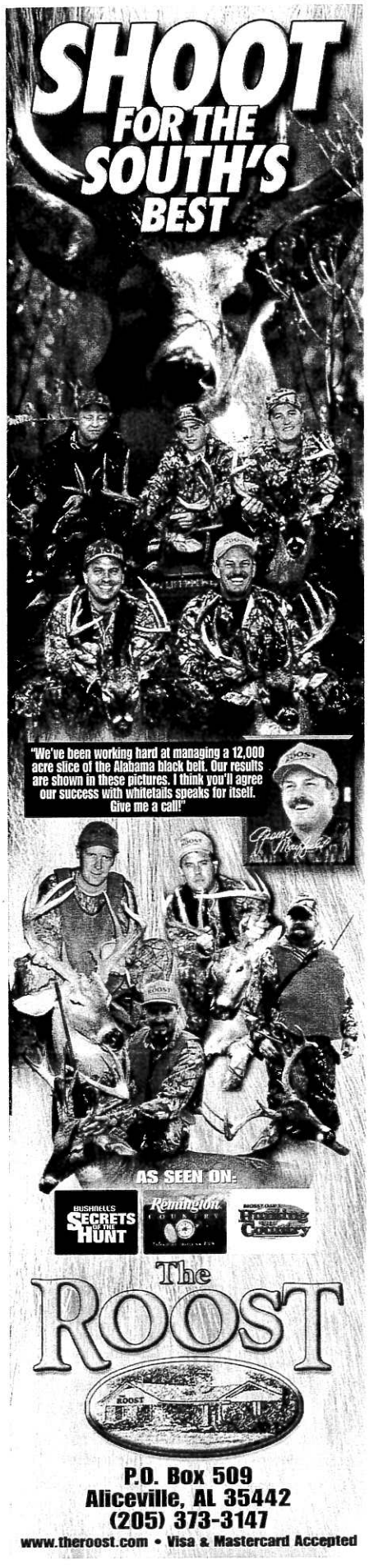
Some readers noted that while they didn't think shooting from a vehicle was fair chase in most situations, they would approve of allowing it for disabled hunters. Among those who disapproved of it in *any situation*, the No. 1 concern was human safety.

TRACKING DEER IN SNOW
Fair Chase: 99 Percent
Unfair: 1 Percent

In no major Northern state or Canadian province did more than 2 percent of respondents vote against snow tracking as fair chase. However, there was some indication that the less snow a person has hunted in, the more likely he or she was to question that tracking is fair chase. Although readers in the South still overwhelmingly supported tracking, fully 12 percent of Mississippi respondents voted against it, as did 5 percent of those in Alabama.

Many readers told us that snow tracking is one of the most challeng-





ing and "pure" ways to hunt. However, Nebraska's Matthew Jochum did note that the direct use of a vehicle while tracking could eliminate fair chase, and a few other readers, including New Jersey's Robert Magda, opined that tracking is ethical only on land not surrounded by a high fence.

AIRCRAFT SCOUTING
Fair Chase: 46 Percent
Unfair: 53 Percent

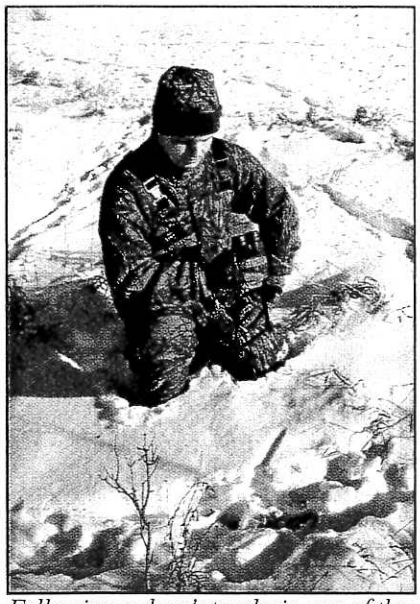
It's universally illegal to shoot or herd deer from the air. Nor can a hunter use aircraft to find deer and then initiate an immediate pursuit, either by dropping off a hunter or by means of establishing radio contact with one already on the ground.

By nature and by habitat choice, most whitetails wouldn't be too vulnerable to such tactics anyway. But what about scouting from the air? Is that fair chase? Many sportsmen use aerial photographs to analyze hunting areas. Most such photos are acquired from government agencies, but some hunters take their own.

No one who sent in a survey argued against this as fair chase. For many respondents, however, aerial scouting is more debatable in places where lack of a heavy tree canopy makes it feasible to spot deer from the air. One such place is South Texas, where it's now common practice to use aircraft to survey the herd. While the purpose of such surveys ostensibly is to assess deer densities, buck:doe ratios, and other key information to aid in herd management, some hunters use aerial sightings in deciding where to set up stands and/or feeders.

South Carolina readers expressed the highest support for aerial scouting, at 68 percent. Right behind were those in Oklahoma (66) and Tennessee (65). In Indiana, support was 61 percent, while in Michigan it was 56. (In Texas, where aerial surveying largely was developed, the votes were split 50-50.)

The closeness of the overall vote on aerial scouting suggests that opinions vary widely. South Carolina's Allen Shumpert said he thinks it's legitimate, provided knowledge gained from flying is used "only for management records." However, Tennessee's David Kiser claimed that aerial scouting is "lazy." And many



Following a deer's tracks is one of the fairest ways to hunt, voters said. A whopping 99 percent called this fair chase. Photo by Gordon Whittington.

readers noted that they disapprove of this practice if the hunt occurs on the same day as the scouting flight. Some even wanted it limited to when the season is closed.

SPOTLIGHT SCOUTING
Fair Chase: 50 Percent
Unfair: 49 Percent

Only the tiniest margin separated the "yeas" from the "nays" on this one. However, from place to place, opinions varied widely. But this was to be expected; spotlight scouting is taboo in some places, legal in others.

Among states from which we received at least 20 votes on this question, the highest approval was in Pennsylvania, with 83 percent. Next came Indiana (78) and South Carolina (64). Conversely, only 24 percent of voters from Vermont approved of spotlight scouting, as did only 31 percent of those in Louisiana.

Wisconsin's Bill White, who favors this practice, explained his support by commenting, "Deer are becoming more nocturnal, and you have to find out where they are."

Massachusetts reader Ted Godfrey wrote that he opposes spotlighting because "it disturbs feeding deer." That opinion was voiced by a number of other readers as well.

Even among respondents who told us they regard spotlight scouting as

ethical, there was widespread support for limiting it to the closed season. Otherwise, many readers claimed, it could lead to increased poaching.

CAMERA SCOUTING
Fair Chase: 90 Percent
Unfair: 10 Percent

Unmanned cameras now are widely used. As Dr. James C. Kroll and Ben Koerth of the Institute for White-tailed Deer Management and Research point out in their feature on Page 46, these devices can help a hunter manage land. However, hunters more often use them for scouting and wildlife viewing.

A strong majority of respondents from every state and province favored using cameras for scouting, with no regional trends apparent. The highest approval was in Iowa, with 95 percent, followed closely by Alabama (93); lowest approval came from Illinois and Texas (81 each).

Indiana's John Schnarr voted against camera scouting being fair chase, noting, "I think it's important to get out and scout on foot." And Gregory Eaglin of Wyoming said he'd favor this type of scouting "only if the camera is handheld." However, most voters claimed to have no problem with using automatic cameras to capture images of whitetails at any time of day or night.

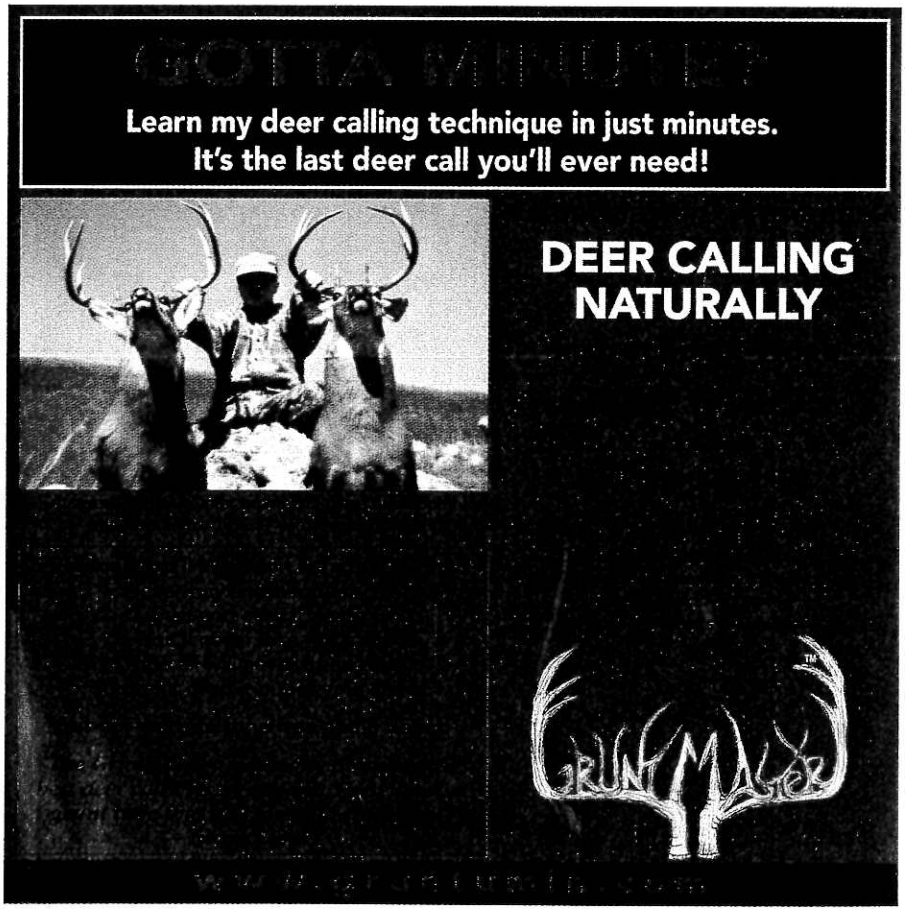
"It's OK," wrote Ken Keegan Jr. of Illinois. "You're just taking pictures." And Missouri's Tom Head, "It's fun and lets you find out about deer in the area, especially the nocturnal ones."

GPS TECHNOLOGY
Fair Chase: 83 Percent
Unfair: 20 Percent

The Global Position System (GPS), which provides for satellite navigation, is widely used by hunters. Many use it just to avoid getting lost; others use it to plot the location of deer sign.

Approval was highest in Tennessee, at 97 percent. Maine and Oklahoma were next, at 96. Iowa had the least approval, at 72 percent, followed by West Virginia at 75. No regional trends in viewpoint were apparent.

Many voters in favor of GPS noted that they don't think it limits a deer's escape options. The most common complaint from "no" voters was that such devices are unnecessary gadgets.



HUNTING WITH A GUIDE
Fair Chase: 91 Percent
Unfair: 8 Percent

One other obvious way to scout for whitetails is to pay someone to do at least part of the work for you. In fact, by law, a U.S. resident hunting deer in Canada must use a guide/outfitter. Does this type of arrangement necessarily eliminate fair chase?

No, said more than 9 of every 10 readers who sent in surveys. In fact, readers in Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, South Carolina, Delaware, Connecticut, Colorado, Idaho, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Rhode Island and Saskatchewan voted unanimously that a guided hunt can be fair chase.

Some respondents did qualify their support of guided hunts. Ray Czarnik of Michigan voiced support for them "as long as the guide shares my fair-chase values." Wisconsin's Russell Bonde wrote that if a record-class deer is tagged on a guided hunt, he has no problem with the animal being entered "as long as it's noted that a guide was used." But New York's Bill Lahue wrote that he'd like to see the record books go even farther than that, by "giving the guide credit for the kill."

The least support of guided hunts came from Nebraska (62 percent), with Kentucky (83), Alabama (84) and Georgia (87) also having under 90 percent approval.

Guided hunting is "fair chase for the guide, shooting for you," wrote Nebraska's Terry Whitmer. Another Nebraskan, Doug Kapke, claimed that ethical lines are crossed when money changes hands on a hunt. "A guide who does not get any form of payment is acceptable," he wrote.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Next month, we'll see how you voted on the ethics of some gear used in making the shot: rangefinders; ultra-long-range rifles; in-line muzzleloaders; scopes on muzzleloaders; bows with higher than 65 percent let-off; and crossbows. Then, in the December issue, we'll report reader views on a range of management practices, including genetic manipulation and supplemental feeding.