

TIME TO REFLECT OR LOOK IN THE MIRROR

By Dr. Vince Crichton

As a member of Manitoba's Wildlife Branch for 40 years I had the privilege to participate in and lead many discussions relative to hunting seasons and a plethora of other topics. Some of the decisions reached were controversial and did not always have universal support but the process was democratic. During the 70s there was opportunity for hunters to party hunt, the process was quite simple and to do so legally one only had to sign their partner's licence. As we gathered more knowledge relative to party hunting the data clearly showed that as party size increased so did success. Party size was subsequently reduced to 4 for deer and 2 for moose.

Today, namely 2014 and I suspect for the foreseeable future the party size for licensed hunters is and will be 2 for all big game species. Hunters can hunt as a party as long as each possesses the identical licence. One additional change for 2014 which is a reflection of the dramatic decline of Manitoba's deer population is that party size has been reduced from 4 to 2 for licensed hunters and the bag is bucks only. Residents and non-residents can party hunt but foreign residents can only party hunt with foreign residents.

One law that always was an irritant involved those who purchased "Conservation Moose Licences" (2 licences but one tag) and who fly in for a moose hunt at significant cost to enjoy a remote hunt. When a group of 4 harvested an animal, 2 of the hunters were then required to abstain from hunting yet, if 4 individuals purchased non conservation licences, all could continue to hunt by signing another colleagues' licence yet the more conservation minded individuals were penalized. Something was wrong! I initiated discussions to have the legislation changed – now, when 4 individuals fly in for moose hunting (or drive to a hunting area) but have conservation licences, once an animal is taken all 4 can continue to party hunt until a second animal is taken or, it is time to go home! Of course, to do so legally requires signing of the appropriate licences.

The aforementioned sets the background for what is to follow. But first, one must be on a different planet if they are not aware of the serious state of Manitoba's moose population and familiar with the conservation closures that have taken place in Game Hunting Areas in Western Manitoba and a small proportion of one in Eastern Manitoba where "no one" is allowed to legally hunt moose. Much more must be done if this deplorable state is to be reversed.

Over the years I have had moose hunters contact me on many occasions expressing concern about the lack of moose in the area where they hunt and stating "doc, there are no more big bulls where we hunt". Further, concern was always expressed that they now only get 1 or 2 bulls annually whereas they used to get 4. Hello! Time to look in the mirror my fellow moose hunters. You cannot harvest excessively in small isolated areas and expect the same success rate every year. Further, to continue along this line, if it is being done by many groups you collectively are hurting the opportunity for those of us with different ethics to hunt moose in the future – you must look in the mirror and realize that you are part of the problem.



Now, this past fall I have firsthand information where 4 hunters took 3 moose from a small area and before and after they left this area other hunters also harvested a moose. The actions of the initial 4 is an abuse of privilege in these troubled times and no argument can justify their actions – legally they did nothing wrong but morally it was wrong. It is even more upsetting when a number of us are working to bring "conservation" to the forefront for all harvesting not just for those who purchase licences.

Now, to contrast this 4 friends did the precise opposite while on their fly in moose hunt. Early on in the hunt they saw a small bull, harvested it and were quite satisfied and essentially their hunt was over (except for fishing) as the agreement was one moose. The following day they did see a much larger bull but were content to simply watch and marvel at the behaviour being displayed. Hats off to you folks and you know who you are. My rule is at most 2 moose for 4 hunters.

Government cannot legislate ethics. And, there are 2 kinds of laws – one is legislated and enforceable whereas the other is an ethical code or code of honour that the true sportsperson places on him or herself.

Most Manitoba licensed hunters obey the game laws (previously I have examined compliance rates and found that 95% of hunters are compliant) but that is not enough. Without ethics, a hunter can be law abiding but still be a poor sportsperson who does not do justice to the hunting fraternity. In other words it is time to reflect and be a good will ambassador for the sport and for all hunters. The ethical hunter will never take more than the legal limit of game but more importantly will never take more than they can use – shooting 3 or 4 moose so they can feed other family members, friends and neighbours is poor ethics. There are givers and takers in this world. The ethical hunter is a giver. The unethical is the poacher, one who breaks game laws and sets no standards for their conduct – he/she is the taker.

As public awareness of the hunters' role in conservation increases and with more focus on the good that we as hunters do for conservation, I am optimistic that the anti-hunting sentiment will recede. While hunters will never enjoy full approval of the non-hunting public let us conduct ourselves in such a fashion that will increase that approval.

So, for those greedy moose hunters, look in the mirror and reflect on what you are doing or have done. It is not too late to change and you will be respected for it.