

The Bottom Line

THE MANY VIRTUES OF DEER HUNTING.

It's February. Y2K is already gone (if you can believe that) and so are most of the Y2K deer hunting seasons. Some may be still open as you first read this, but they're winding down and

will end soon. The end of another season means that perhaps as many as 2 million whitetails have been harvested during the last few months. That giant wailing sound you hear is from the Animals-Rights Freaks as they rush to their psychiatrists' couches for respite from that fact. (Anything that sends an ARF to a shrink is good for society.)

Despite their dramatic cries of despair, that number is not excessive. According to wildlife scientists, the whitetail population would not be harmed—and in some areas might be enhanced—by doubling that kill.

In the meantime, look at the benefits to America. Some 16 million to 18 million hunters participated in the hunt, an army almost three times the size of the United States' entire military forces in World War II. If each hunter was able to spend an average of just five days hunting this season, it adds up to 80 million man-days (or almost 220,000 man-years) of wholesome, active outdoors recreation—mostly in the company of friends and family. That's good for the health, both physical and mental, of the nation.

The harvest represents at least 40,000 tons of delicious, high-quality meat—and I mean only prime, boned-out, ready-to-cook meat. Venison, as most readers know, is higher in protein and lower in fat, cholesterol and calories than any farm-raised meat.

What the public mostly does not know is that America's deer hunters share this bounty with the less fortunate, donating tons of this excellent product to the poor and needy. Game processors throughout the land prepare

the venison, donating part of their labor, and hunters pay the remainder of the costs of butchering, grinding, wrapping, freezing and storage until the meat can be delivered to those who need it most.

If 1.3 million of those deer were bucks and only 10 percent of them justified the services of a taxidermist at an average cost of \$150, that bill alone amounts to almost \$20 million.

Then there are all the other contributions deer hunters make to the (mostly local) economy. They buy licenses, tags and stamps, gasoline, food, lodging, clothing, guns and ammunition, and more kinds of equipment than a nonhunter could believe. They put miles on their autos and, often, invest in special hunting vehicles for off-road use.

Many, these days, buy airline tickets. They pay trespass, lease or other hunting-access fees, hire guides, and rent or buy camping trailers. They subscribe to magazines like this one and buy how-to books and videos, and they keep some catalog retailers in business (boosting postal revenues).

There is hardly an industry or segment of the U.S. economy that doesn't profit from the cult of the whitetail deer, and very few states in which deer are not a major resource.

In my home state of Texas alone, I believe I read that hunters add more than \$1 billion annually to the economy. What does that translate to nationally? I don't know, but the multibillion-dollar total must be breathtaking.

Most of all, whitetail hunters honor and promulgate several unique and

important American traditions. One is public ownership of wild game instead of the European system of ownership by the aristocrat classes. Another is the democratic idea of hunting as a sport of the common man. A third presents conservation of wildlife resources as everybody's responsibility, rather than exclusively that of the government or the landowner.

Interwoven with these grand concepts are others, like the right to own and use firearms. These traditions took



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America's hunters are entitled to take as much pride in their skills and ethics afield as they do in their other endeavors.

root in America when the first settlers set foot on the land, and none can be more distinctively American.

Remind yourself of these things whenever the ARFs' propaganda begins to get to you. As a deer hunter, you're in the mainstream of American history, a contributor, a steward of the resource, on the cutting edge of wildlife management, an instrument of conservation, and a conduit of honorable tradition. Be proud. **[?]**