



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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Final Position Statement

Shooting Preserves for Game Birds

A shooting preserve is an area of land, sometimes enclosed by fence, where artificially propagated native and non-native wildlife are released and harvested under liberalized regulations. These areas are often privately-owned and hunting opportunities are available based on a fee schedule, in addition to any state licensing requirements. This position statement refers specifically to shooting preserves for bird hunting. The confinement of ungulates behind high fences is addressed in a [separate TWS position statement](#).

Hunting opportunities, especially near metropolitan centers, are diminishing due to increasing human populations, declining wildlife habitat, and decreasing amounts of private land available to the public for hunting. Reduced opportunity to pursue wild game has stimulated increased interest in shooting preserves. Properly managed shooting preserves offer recreation opportunities to the hunting public, provide an opportunity for those who have never hunted to be introduced to hunting, are highly valuable for training bird dogs, and have potential to provide demonstration sites for desirable wildlife management practices.

However, shooting preserves also raise a number of issues, including (1) the possibility of released animals establishing free-ranging populations and their subsequent impacts on native wildlife, (2) the genetic and behavioral competence of captive-reared game birds for survival in the wild, (3) disease transmission to native wildlife, (4) the ecological implications and ethical considerations of native predator density control to boost game bird survival from release through the hunting season, (5) the ecological impacts of often high non-shooting game bird mortality post-release and through the hunting season, (7) compliance with fair-chase hunting ethics and the [Public Trust Doctrine](#), (8) the development of negative attitudes towards hunting by the public due to the artificial and highly managed situations often created by shooting preserves, and (9) mistaken assumptions that shooting preserves compensate for habitat loss and/or loss or reduction of local wildlife populations.

The hunting experience for any wildlife taken on a shooting preserve should always qualify as “fair chase.” Hunted areas should be of sufficient size and habitat quality to allow the hunted animals a reasonable chance to elude hunter efforts. Stocking birds too soon before a hunt reduces the time they have to acclimate to available cover and stocking too far in advance could result in them leaving the property before a hunt.

Fair-chase may lead to escaped animals that may compromise local wildlife populations and habitat quality outside of preserves. This risk, and the risk of disease transmission, is heightened when non-native game birds are stocked in shooting preserves. Therefore, precautions should be taken to ensure that introduced game birds are inspected for disease prior to release and are

retained on preserve premises. The policy of The Wildlife Society regarding shooting preserves is to:

1. Recognize the value of high quality shooting preserves, especially the part they play in the recruitment and retention of hunters.
2. Recognize that shooting preserves are not a substitute for healthy, native, game bird populations or a surrogate for natural habitats.
3. Recommend that state and provincial wildlife agencies develop science-based policies for management of shooting preserves. Personnel in these agencies should have knowledge of game species within their jurisdictions, including sufficient data on native and non-native populations of species potentially impacted by escaped animals.
4. Recommend that shooting preserves use native or naturalized game species.
5. Support state and provincial wildlife agencies as the primary regulatory authority over shooting preserves, whether they involve stocking of native or non-native game birds. State and provincial wildlife agencies should work cooperatively with other state, provincial, and federal agriculture and health agencies, hunting groups, conservation organizations, and private landowners to reduce the potential for problems, such as disease transmission and genetic exchange among and between released non-native game birds and native wildlife.
6. Encourage states to require all birds for release to be certified per the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP).
7. Recommend that the physical operation of shooting preserves remains in the realm of private enterprise, and discourage their establishment by public agencies on public land or the leasing of public land for such purposes. Recognize that stocking of game birds by public agencies on public lands open to hunting is a legitimate wildlife management practice that provides a quality recreational opportunity when managed correctly.
8. Encourage state and provincial wildlife agencies to license shooting preserves, to establish and enforce high standards of operations to ensure a quality hunting experience, to require shooting preserves to develop management plans that specifically address habitat quality, fair chase, disease prevention, and the management of escaped animals to minimize risks to off-site wildlife and wildlife habitats and to provide education that links hunting to the Public Trust Doctrine.

Approved by Council July 2011. Expires July 2016.