



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on March 21, 2010

## The Right to Hunt

Hunters across America are wary of the political intentions of groups like PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.) In particular, hunters are worried that PETA and other animal rights activists may be able to exert enough influence to get laws or local ordinances passed that make it difficult or impossible to continue hunting.



Although the Second Amendment guarantees the right to bear arms, as it has been interpreted, there is no right to hunt. Indeed, hunting itself is licensed almost everywhere in America and hunting seasons define what times of year hunters can harvest particular types of animals.

PETA is pretty straightforward about what it wants, as spokesman Ryan Huling says: “PETA exists to remind people that there is really no difference between abusing cats and dogs and abusing deer and fish. These animals feel pain in exactly the same way.” Wildlife and domestic pets, though, differ in fundamental ways. Deer are natural prey. Indeed, if deer are not culled by a predator, then the deer population will suffer a worse fate — slow starvation, with the youngest dying first. Game birds are also routinely killed in nature by predator birds, and when the predators are not active then the game birds die.

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Most state conservation agencies work scrupulously to have hunters operate much like other predators in the wild. The result is that hunters, in the estimation of most experts who study conservation seriously, are an important part of the natural balance in animal systems. Moreover, hunting licenses are dedicated to wildlife game generating revenue and support for their activities.

But there is a more fundamental issue than simply conservation. Hunting is one of the oldest ways for people to feed themselves. At the heart of all political rights is the right to exist and the right to engage in gainful employment. That is one reason why the state of Vermont has had a “right to hunt” recognized since 1777. Nine states in the last 15 years have also passed “right to hunt” provisions, including Alabama, Minnesota, North Dakota, Virginia, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Montana, Georgia, and Oklahoma. No state has banned hunting.

Fishing is even more fundamental to human existence. Nations like Iceland and Japan derive a significant part of their food supply from commercial fishing, and almost every nation with a coastline has some sort of fishing industries in which substantial numbers of people from fishermen to cannery workers to fish market operators rely. The recreational fishing enjoyed by so many Americans kills a much smaller number of fish than the commercial fishing operations which provide much of the food we eat.

Most Americans — and nearly all Americans who hunt or fish — also see the therapeutic effects of these



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activities, particular on young men and women. This is particularly true for children in cities who might otherwise turn to drugs or delinquency. Hunting and fishing programs, often run at no cost by organizations of sportsmen, allow these young men to enjoy the outdoors and engage in productive recreational activities. Hunters also run projects like “Hunters Against Hunger,” which provide free meat to homeless shelters, charitable activities without any state action. It seems likely that PETA and related organizations will push wherever they can, including challenging the right to hunt and to fish. But it is also true that this intrusion into traditional natural rights will run into tough opposition.



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