

Editorial

The Seven M's of Hunting

My good friend, Dr. Bill Eikenhorst, who is an intellectual giant, began postulating some basic tenets of hunting some years ago, that he initially referred to as the Four M's of Hunting. Later he added two additional tenets, and I added the final piece; an assembly that we refer to as *The Seven M's of Hunting*. Bill and I have discussed these principles on many occasions over the years and I began crafting some language about a year ago as an attempt to breathe life into this framework of principles.

From my perspective, the collective merit of this model should be to effectively serve as both a litmus and a compass for hunting. One can ponder what hunting "is" and what hunting "is not," which can lead to complex discussions, and can also create spirited debate. Hunting is partially made up of properties that are hard to put your finger on, hence the difficulty that most people find in answering the question, "Why do you hunt?" But in a world where our societal norms and expectations are critical of environmental responsibility and animal welfare, our ability to understand the complex nature of hunting, while also being able to explain and defend it, is growing more critical. Equally important, our ability to best understand how to steward the sustainable nature of hunting should be inextricably part of this model.

Self-introspection is not an easy process. For starters, people being people, we tend to inebriate ourselves through our own predisposed kool-aid, which circumvents an honest deep dive into matters at hand. Further, special interest groups from within, can create chaos when disparity creeps into the introspective process. Also, the distractions that are inherent to group introspection make it difficult to establish the vision that charts a path forward in reconciling possible reforms that allow for progress. With this notion in mind, I suggest that our hunting community has an urgent need to develop more bandwidth in learning how to remain, or shall we say regain, relevancy within the sideboards of mainstream USA. Thus, *The Seven M's of Hunting* offer a conversation platform for such needed introspection.

1. **Mystery**- When there becomes too much certainty of various details in the hunt, an integral property of hunting is lost - it's no longer hunting. Rather, it's something else. When certainty of the harvest is assured, much of the Mystery is no longer. Among other things, this begs the question of, "Can we know too much about an individual animal that is being hunted?", which may be a prime example of TMI – too much information. Case in point is what we now see with remote cameras that are integrated into hunting, which can sometimes allow us to become extremely familiar with the traits and habits of our quarry. Small enclosures that allow little or no chance

for escape, and domesticated game that lose much of their fear for man, represent a few other scenarios that could be used to illustrate possible erosion of "Mystery" in the hunt.

2. **Magic-** There are soft, special features of wildlife that connect with the minds of humans in ways beyond description. Kids and adults, alike, have forever held fascination with wild creatures. This biophilic relationship that we have with these wild others, and that hunters have with their quarry, is Magical. When hunters become too narrowly focused on what they are looking for through the exercise of hunting, the "Magic" is diminished. I can point to examples of hunters whose sole focus is collecting an animal for the wall, as falling into this bucket. Hunters must not lose sight of the broad features that hunting offers, some measurable and some not so much – it's the collective sum of these features that create Magic for hunting.
3. **Majesty-** With God's natural creations, there exists is an absolute character of dignity, beauty, grandness, and resplendence. Man's ability and urge to rely on too many man-made devices in "artificially" producing such natural beings only tarnish the Majesty of these amazing natural creations. When game management practices look more like livestock practices, the unique values that are tied to wildlife are potentially usurped by the traditional values that are tied to livestock, effectively altering the unique Majesty of wildlife – the music of wildlife is lost.
4. **Meat-** The genesis of hunting dates to a time when humans hunted for the purpose of collecting food. When our departure from the core values that originally defined hunting is so great that food is no longer a motive of the hunt, then such departure effectively creates pressure on our ability to defend the need to hunt. Human decency has its boundaries; taking animals' lives for no legitimate or justifiable reason arguably breaches certain lines of decency in the eyes of a civilized society. Hunters must be resourceful with the reasonable use of our harvest. Further, from a proverbial and more intangible standpoint, when the hunt lacks substance, it lacks the "meat" that provides the legitimate platform to support hunting.
5. **Maturity-** "Maturity" does not simply relate to a basis for growing big deer. In the grand scheme of things, Maturity is a virtue that our hunting community must assume if we are going to be relevant. When I reflect on the razor-sharp tools, technologies, and techniques that we use to produce and harvest game animals, I'm reminded of Bill Eikenhorst's theory that the edge of intensity cuts both ways, often resulting in unintended consequences. In a Mature hunting community, introspection of our tools and techniques de jour should be considered as we move along. Focusing more equity on making decisions based on what's in the best interest for the greater good of hunting and wildlife, with less emphasis on narrow, short-term gains, is an example of Mature reasoning that will serve hunting and wildlife well. With social media providing a looking glass into our hunting world, we are well-served to reflect on Leopold's philosophy that it's not always the tools that we use to manage wildlife that matters the most, but it's how those tools are applied that often determines the outcome; responsible use of social media is a good starting point.

It's this type of self-governance and discipline that led to an amazing recovery of North America's wildlife, spearheaded by Theodore Roosevelt and others, some 125 years ago.

6. **Money-** For hunting to remain relevant, there must be basic financial economies that justify its importance. The impact of these economies is demonstrated at various levels, including community-based conservation where local citizenry reap the benefits of hunting-related expenditures, ultimately creating a sense of importance for hunting in the eyes of that public. Money derived through excise tax, license and tag sales, and other hunting-related areas, support conservation efforts at the state and federal wildlife agency levels. Also, free-enterprise markets allow private landowners to benefit from fee-based hunting programs, incentivizing private lands stewardship. Further, robust industries these days often rely on a public perception that those industries meet certain ESG (Environment, Social, and Governance) standards, and if we are going to ensure sustainability of the conservation Money that is tied to hunting, we must reflect on the importance of the previous five M's in demonstrating acceptable ESG standards within our hunting world.
7. **Maternal-** To bear and to protect its own future, our hunting community must assume a Maternal mindset. One could plausibly make an argument that hunting is one of the strongest innate desires that shaped the historical success of humans over millennia. One could also surmise that there is no greater innate quality than the Maternal sense to protect. For hunting to survive the future tests of time, we must serve as a great protector, no different than that of a mother protecting her own, often placing her own interests at risk in the name of protecting her offspring. Patience, selflessness, understanding, nurturing, tenacity and an unwavering sense of love and compassion, are all virtues that make up the Maternal drive.

An entire book could be dedicated to this postulate of *The Seven M's of Hunting* and perhaps someday that will happen? The above information is a very quick look at these principles which should serve a litmus for hunting, and these tenets should serve as the pressure points that shape an undefined list of best practice standards – the same practices that allow hunting to pass the test of public scrutiny, the same practices that keeps wildlife wild, and the same practices that protect the integrity of the hunting experience. When hunting cannot check-off each of these seven boxes, we are then presented with a failing grade. One thing is for sure, regardless of the conceptual framework that might be employed, our hunting community needs to introspect more proactively if we are going to maintain pace with a rapidly changing world – a world that has grown more distant from hunting.

I hope this WSI ENews finds each of you doing well. As they say, "Life's better outside," so carve out plenty of time in the Back-40, wherever that may be.

Cheers,

Greg Simons

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