

What Is Fair Chase?

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Since its beginning, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish has promoted the practice of *fair chase*, a philosophy shared by hunters that encourages respect for wildlife, the land and the law. The department realizes fair chase is a personal and ethical preference among sportsmen and sportswomen—and that in some cases, what sometimes is legal may not be considered ethical or moral.

Today's many technological advances in equipment can make hunters' choices about "fair chase" difficult. Is it fair chase to attempt to shoot game beyond your personal effective range? Is it acceptable to monitor game on real-time trail cameras, wait for a trophy and then move in and harvest the animal? Is it fair chase to use high-tech devices such as rifle scopes that digitally track distant animals and even pull the trigger at the precise moment?

Traditionally, fair chase has been defined as the ethical and lawful pursuit and taking of a free-ranging game species in a manner that does not give the hunter an improper advantage over the animal. Hunter–conservationists always have embraced this concept and taught the ethics of hunting to new hunters for decades. It is a fairness code of mostly unwritten rules that is defined and practiced by each individual hunter.

Today, as technology continues to test the limits of fairness, the New Mexico State Game Commission counts on hunters, rather than the establishment of new regulations, to decide conduct in the field and whether use of advanced equipment represents "fair chase," even if it is legal.

The department, as it evaluates future hunting rules, plans to continue public discussion about evolving technologies, fair chase and hunting practices. Sportsmen, sportswomen and everyone concerned with wildlife conservation are encouraged to engage in those conversations.