

## **MFHA Territory Policy**

The MFHA's hunt territory policy is the most misunderstood and the most important policy within the Association. The very establishment of the MFHA in 1907 was prompted by a territorial conflict. The MFHA's territory policy remains the foundation of the Association, and it has been essential to organized foxhunting as we know it today. The policy was created to minimize disagreements between Hunts, to take pressure off of landowners and local fox populations, and to relieve stress on the land itself. It has worked since 1907 and is even more essential today.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, competition emerged between Hunt Clubs for the use of land. Landowners were caught in the middle (often between close neighbors and friends) as the conflicts escalated. Some of these conflicts were well publicized in local newspapers. Often communities were divided as people chose sides.

The problem was then, and is today, that many Hunts were created by members branching off and creating their own. Those new Hunts often removed financial support from their original Hunt and wreaked havoc with landowners. Hunts hunted anywhere they wanted, sometimes without landowner permission. Some landowners became tired of the situation and began to prohibit any Hunt from hunting on their land. The sport of foxhunting ended up the loser.

### **Formation of the MFHA**

With the intention of bringing order to the chaos, and to provide a means of settling disputes, a group of Masters came together to discuss the issues. Up to that point, the National Steeplechase Association had governed hunting. That Association, however, proved itself unable or unwilling to mediate the existing territorial conflicts. There was a need for an organization to focus exclusively on the unique problems of hunting. On February 14, 1907 Louis Baetjer, Westmoreland Davis, R. Penn Smith, Harry Worcester Smith, Henry G. Vaughan, and Major W. Austin Wadsworth met. The result was the formation of the Masters of Foxhounds Association.

Correspondence between the founders indicated their concern that Masters would be unlikely to cooperate and accept rules. Then, as now, Masters were independent people, self made, strongly opinionated and used to getting what they wanted. They didn't like to be told what they could and could not do. To the delight of all, however, the new policy began to work well.

Lack of territorial agreements doesn't just affect landowners. Too many Hunts hunting the same country also affect the fox population adversely. Foxes don't stay in a country that is hunted too often. Too many Hunts in the same area can result in too many horses using the same land, which may result in ecological damage. Too many Hunts in the same area result in a serious lack of accountability as each Hunt blames the other for hounds left out and damage to fences and crops. Time and again, the affected landowners have simply resorted to their ultimate defense, i.e. closing their land. The sport of foxhunting is the ultimate loser, and the shifting of the fox population and the potential ecological negatives become something more for the antis to exploit to their own purpose. All of this can be avoided by thoughtfully managing our sport.

Hunts that cooperate and rotate fixtures assure that they do not hunt too close to one another. They coordinate their meets so they don't hunt at the same time, or hunt any area too often. They are also accountable. If there is only one Hunt in a particular territory, responsibility is clear, and because of that, more care is taken and repair responsibilities are readily assumed. Pressure is removed from the fox population and the ecology of the area can be properly managed. As a result, the sport of mounted foxhunting and its public image are the winners.

### **Member Hunts**

The newly formed Masters of Foxhounds Association recognized all of this and came up with a solution. It adopted policies which required member Hunts to abide by Association rules, and it designed those rules with an eye to the preservation, encouragement and improvement of the sport of foxhunting. That was and continues to be the sole purpose of the Association.

Hunts were required to submit maps of areas they wished to hunt. A reasonable area for reserve was allowed to cover future loss of hunting territory, land development and Hunt expansion. The Hunt's request for territory had to be approved by the MFHA Board of Directors. If the requests were reasonable, the territory would be registered to the Hunt. Territories were fairly large, covering several square miles. It was not necessary that these territories be contiguous. The territory registered to the Hunt was theirs to develop for hunting. The key to understanding the policy is that, while the MFHA registered these territories to individual member Hunts, they by no means gave any form of permission to hunt on anyone's land. It was then, and remains today, the responsibility of individual Masters to obtain and keep permission from landowners in their assigned territories. Foxhunting depends on the willingness and generosity of landowners.

Once a Hunt had territory registered to them, no other member Hunt could hunt anywhere in that territory without special permission. This policy has worked wonderfully well for 92 years and conflicts between Hunts lessened considerably after the policy was adopted. It continues to work to this day. Conflicts between Hunts lessened after the policy was adopted. For almost 100 years, Hunts with disagreements over territory issues have taken them to the MFHA Board to resolve. This policy encourages foxhunts to cooperate. It is the same policy used in England and has stood the test of time there as well.

The territory policy is based on cooperation between member Hunts and a healthy sense of responsibility for land and wildlife management by individual Hunts. Adherence to MFHA rules is paramount. Hunts must not hunt in another Hunt's registered country without invitation. Newly formed Hunts cannot attempt to start a Hunt in a member Hunt's territory. That is the first commandment of new Hunt formation. Establishing exclusive territory benefits landowners because it encourages investment by member Hunts in conservation and maintenance of property in the areas they hunt. In addition, the Association encourages member Hunts to work out territorial loans and leases to other member Hunts when registered territory has been abandoned or is not being used. The continued presence of a Hunt in a territory encourages good public relations.

## **Farmer Packs**

“Farmer Packs” are Hunts that do not meet MFHA qualification standards or have not applied for membership in the Association. A Farmer Pack may or may not hunt in a member Hunt’s territory. In situations where they do hunt in a member Hunt’s territory, there must be a mutual agreement between the Farmer Pack and the member Hunt. In recent years the Board has been concerned about new member Hunts applying for country hunted by existing Farmer Packs. The MFHA customarily does not assign territories to member Hunts that are hunted by mounted Farmer Packs, unless there is no conflict between them.

## **Unsanctioned Packs**

A few packs of hounds that hunted without permission in member Hunts’ territories have been termed “Outlaw” packs. The term was developed because these packs were considered by member Hunts as extremely bad for the image of foxhunting, because they did what they wanted, when and where they wanted, with little regard for the good of the sport. Little effort to coordinate activities with the member Hunts was made. Today the MFHA considers these types of Hunts to be “Unsanctioned Packs” -- packs that hunt in a member Hunt’s territory without permission, and which create problems that affect foxhunting's public image and landowner relations.

Because “Unsanctioned Packs” do not contribute to the overall health of organized foxhunting, member Hunts are not allowed to give hounds to these packs or have joint meets with them. Historically, member Hunts have discouraged their membership from hunting with “Unsanctioned Packs,” believing their support only contributes to the problem. An “Unsanctioned Pack” can only be declared such by the MFHA Board of Directors. A member Hunt must formally request that the problem, non-member Hunt be placed on the unsanctioned list. It is not automatic. Only if the Board determines that the existence of a non-member Hunt is detrimental to organized, mounted foxhunting, will they declare the Hunt unsanctioned. This policy takes the decision out of the hands of the local member Hunt. An impartial Board of 33 members from all over the US and Canada makes that decision.

The Association believes that every attempt should be made to encourage member and non-member Hunts to coexist. Non-member Hunts that are not in territories already registered to member Hunts are encouraged to seek membership in the MFHA if and when they meet the standards of the Association. It is only by presenting a unified, strong front that we will meet the challenges of the twenty- first century effectively.

It is the firm belief of the MFHA that the territory policy is absolutely crucial to the survival and future of organized mounted foxhunting. Without it, anarchy would prevail. We believe the policy encourages cooperation between Hunts, and protects landowners, the land, the fox and the environment.

## **From the MFHA Guidebook (2008)**

### **COUNTRY**

#### **1. RECORDING OF COUNTRY**

Territory should be hunted regularly before application to record is sent to the Association, unless it is to be requested as reserved country. The proposed territory may then be set aside (for a limited time) until the Hunt meets registration requirements. No request for registration of initial or additional territory shall be considered until a Hunt has started to develop and hunt that country.

(a) **SIZE.** The area of a hunting country should be such that it can be reasonably paneled, maintained and hunted. The size of a recorded country should not normally exceed an area of approximately 250 square miles, plus a reserve for future expansion. It is not necessary to actively hunt reserve country. More than one area may be recorded to a Member Hunt, and these areas need not be contiguous. Drag hunts do not require as much territory as live hunts.

(b) **MAPS AND DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY.** All applications for recording Hunt country, whether new country or changes to an existing recorded country, must be accompanied by a detailed map, at a scale of one-quarter inch to the mile, clearly showing the boundaries of the territory. (A U.S.G.S. map on a 1:250,000 scale or a county map is suitable.) The boundaries should be roads, railway lines or rivers that can be recognized in the field. Political boundaries, such as counties or townships, or straight lines drawn between two points on the map are not acceptable. Cities and large towns should not be included in the recorded country. The Member Hunt's kennels must be noted on the map. A Member Hunt's "reserve" country must be shaded or outlined to distinguish it from the actual territory hunted.

The application also must be accompanied by a state map with the territory shaded to ascertain the Hunt's general location in relationship to other Hunts, if any.

(c) **SHARING A HUNT COUNTRY.** The Board of Directors will not normally record the same piece of country to two Member Hunts even though the current Masters wish to hunt it jointly.

#### **2. LOAN OF COUNTRY**

A Master may, with the written consent of his/her Committee, lend a portion of his/her country to an adjoining Member Hunt. The Loan Agreement must be made on the MFHA Loan Agreement Form, which is available from the Association office.

The term of the loan should be for a period of not less than one (1) year nor more than five (5) years. At the termination of the loan period, all of the Masters of both hunts should sign a new Loan Agreement if they wish to continue the arrangement. A signed copy of the Loan Agreement must be filed with the Association, voted on affirmatively by the Board of Directors and recorded before the Agreement becomes effective.

### 3. ABANDONED COUNTRY

If an entire hunt country, or a portion of hunt country, has not been hunted at least once each and every season, it may be considered that the country in question has not been fairly hunted and that it has been abandoned. If the Board of Directors determines that the country in question has been abandoned, it may re-record the abandoned country to another member hunt. This does not apply to reserve country.

### 4. HUNT FIXTURES

Upon request from the District Representative, Masters may be required to provide, on an annual basis, a map showing all locations of their meets. In addition, copies of all fixture cards must be sent to the District Representative. As a courtesy, it is appropriate to send a fixture card to Masters of neighboring hunts.

### 5. RESERVE COUNTRY

Reserve country is an accommodation to a hunt to allow future expansion. If a new hunt desires that country and the member hunt has never developed or specified in writing a plan to develop such country, the MFHA has the right to reassign it.

### 6. NEW HUNTS IN OR NEAR RECORDED COUNTRY

The Association will not Register or Recognize any new foxhunting establishment organized within the recorded boundaries of a Registered or Recognized Member Hunt unless those responsible for proposing the new Hunt have obtained the written consent of the Masters and/or the Committee of the existing Hunt.

Consent having been given, an agreement shall be signed by proper officials of the established Member Hunt and the new Hunt, to the effect that the new Hunt is permitted to hunt within certain specified boundaries only during the period of the agreement. A copy of this agreement must be lodged with the Executive Director of the Association and recorded only after affirmative vote of the Board.

It is the policy of the MFHA to protect the recorded country of Recognized and Registered Member Hunts, provided that the recorded country accurately represents the territory that is being fairly hunted, plus a reasonable reserve for future expansion.

It is also the policy of the MFHA to promote the sport of mounted foxhunting by encouraging the formation of new Hunts. This may involve the Registration or Recognition of a new Hunt near or adjacent to the boundaries of an established Member Hunt. Under these circumstances, the Board of Directors will protect the recorded country of the established Member Hunt unless the Member Hunt's recorded country is deemed to be abandoned or their reserve country is thought to be excessively large.

## 7. NON-FOXHUNTING PACKS

The National Beagle Club does not recognize any new Beagle or Basset pack organized within the boundaries of an already established Hunt (Beagles, Bassets, Harriers or Foxhounds) until those responsible for the proposed new Hunt have obtained the consent of the Master of the existing Hunt.

A pack of Harriers, Beagles or Basset Hounds should not be started in an MFHA Recognized or Registered country without the consent of the Master and/or the Committee of that Member Hunt.

## 8. TERRITORY DISPUTES

Disputes between Hunts tarnish the image of mounted foxhunting and are not in the best interests of the sport. Disputes, when they do arise, must be settled as quickly and quietly as possible and in a courteous manner. If the Masters involved believe they cannot settle the dispute themselves, they may ask their District Representative to mediate the dispute or they may contact the MFHA Executive Director to request help. The Executive Director will gather the facts and provide them to the President and the District Representative.

When a dispute cannot be solved at the local level or has reached the point that it could be detrimental to foxhunting's image, the President, in his discretion, may appoint a committee to try to mediate a decision. That committee normally will consist of three (3) knowledgeable, experienced foxhunters (they need not be on the Board of Directors) of neutral persuasion. They will travel to the area, investigate and interview both sides. If the committee cannot obtain a solution agreeable to both sides, the aggrieved parties may request to go before the Territory Committee of the Board of Directors.

In that case, the Territory Committee may hold a hearing and report its findings and conclusions to the Board, which will decide the matter according to the laws of common sense and the rules and traditions of mounted foxhunting. In arriving at its decision, the Board will consider the wishes of the hunts in dispute and the landowners in the hunting country.

## 9. HUNT-SPONSORED ACTIVITIES

No Registered or Recognized Hunt should schedule or conduct Hunt-Sponsored activities in another Hunt's territory without first receiving permission from that Hunt. All Hunts are encouraged to be reasonable about and receptive to such requests. If either Hunt feels that the other is being unreasonable about such a request, it may ask for the District Representative for assistance.