

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.

From the MFHA Guidebook & Rules 2015

Unsanctioned Pack

The term "unsanctioned pack" (formerly "outlaw pack") is used to describe a pack of hounds that hunt in a recognized or registered member hunt's territory without its permission and its actions are considered detrimental to the sport of foxhunting. An unsanctioned pack shall not be so labeled unless the board of directors has determined it to be necessary and voted accordingly at the request of the offended member hunt. Member hunts shall not have joint meets with, draft hounds to or from, or participate in events with unsanctioned packs. Member hunts should strongly discourage their memberships from hunting with unsanctioned packs.

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.

Farmer Pack

The term "farmer pack" traditionally refers to farmers who hunt their hounds in territory registered to a member hunt with the permission of the latter. More recently, the term has been applied to packs that:

- (a) Do not meet MFHA standards, but do cooperate and are thought to comply generally with MFHA rules and guidelines, and who may wish to become members of the MFHA in the future.
- (b) Hunt in country not recorded to a member hunt.
- (c) Hunt in country of member hunts that have not voiced an objection.

There are no restrictions for member hunts concerning farmer packs.

No Status Hunt

The term "no status" refers to a hunt that the MFHA does not recognize in any manner or has no direct knowledge of.

Unsanctioned Person

The term "unsanctioned person" refers to an individual that the board, after careful consideration, believes to be acting in a manner detrimental to the sport of foxhunting. Such person would not be invited to, or allowed to participate in, any MFHA membership functions. The MFHA recommends that an unsanctioned person not be allowed to hunt with or join any member hunt. An unsanctioned person cannot judge or participate in any MFHA sanctioned hound show.

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.

COUNTRY

RECORDING OF COUNTRY

Territory should be hunted regularly before application to record is sent to the MFHA, 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 normally not 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 USGS 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 and "reserve" country 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.

LOAN OF COUNTRY

A Master may, with the written consent of his or her committee, lend a portion of his or her country to an adjoining member hunt. The loan agreement must be made on the MFHA *Loan Agreement Form*, which is available on the MFHA website.

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 shall sign a new

loan agreement if they wish to continue the arrangement. A signed copy of the loan agreement must be filed with the MFHA, voted on affirmatively by the board of directors and recorded before the agreement becomes effective.

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, at the sole discretion of the board, be considered that the country in question has not been fairly hunted and that it has been abandoned. The board of directors may or may not re-record the abandoned country to another member hunt. This does not apply to reserve country.

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.

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 board has the right, but not the obligation, to reassign it.

NEW HUNTS IN OR NEAR RECORDED COUNTRY

The MFHA 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 MFHA 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.

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 formed in an MFHA recognized or registered country without the consent of the Masters and/or the committee of that member hunt.

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 should ask their district representative to mediate the dispute. They may also contact the MFHA Executive Director to request help. The district representative and executive director will gather the facts and provide them to the president and the executive committee.

When a dispute cannot be solved 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 a hearing with the executive committee of the board of directors.

In that case, the executive committee will 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, the landowners in the hunting country and most importantly what is best for the image and future of foxhunting.

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, they may ask for the district representative's assistance. If an agreement cannot be reached, the board of directors shall make the decision.