

MASTERS OF FOXHOUNDS  
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

# PUBLIC RELATIONS & MEDIA GUIDE

2015





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# THE MISSION

An effective public relations and marketing program for MFHA member hunts involves planning and organization. This booklet is intended to offer suggestions and guidelines for working with traditional media such as newspapers, magazines and television, social media and other media outlets in a positive fashion. It also provides suggestions for counteracting “anti” media activity. The MFHA revises this document periodically with the input of the Communications Committee of the Board of Directors, established in 2014.

## OUR GOALS ARE:

- To promote, explain and educate the media about mounted hunting with hounds in North America.
- To overcome widespread misconceptions as to the nature of the sport of mounted foxhunting.
- To help member hunts develop good rapport with the public, the government and the media and to answer public concerns promptly and accurately.
- To suggest methods to promote mounted hunting through social media, newspapers, magazines, books, radio, television, motion pictures, advertising and community relations.

# GENERAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Media coverage, when carefully planned and well executed, is good for foxhunting. Preparation on the part of the Masters of each hunt, as well as educating hunt membership on appropriate and inappropriate use of social media, photographs and the press are key to effective, positive public relations.
2. Individuals have a constitutional right to free speech. Discussing personal philosophies or views is everyone’s right. It is only when individuals

are speaking for the hunt or about hunt activities that they must consult with their Masters before going public.

**3.** One appointed Master of the hunt shall be responsible for the supervision and release of all official public relations matters of the hunt.

**4.** Purely local publicity may be handled by the Master solely on the basis of his or her own judgement as to suitability, correctness and compliance with Association rules. Coordination with the MFHA office and/or the District Representative should be made when there are any questions regarding MFHA policy or when the media outlet is national in scope.

## **MEDIA RELATIONS RULES AND GUIDELINES**

Get to know local media representatives. Positive articles about foxhunting in local magazines, blogs and newspapers are good for the sport.

### **DEVELOP A MEDIA KIT FOR YOUR HUNT THAT INCLUDES:**

- Fact sheet in bullet point format about your history, the hounds, your land conservation efforts and your membership.
- “Stock” photographs/links that you can provide to media outlets. Those should depict the positive aspects of hunting, such as children with hounds and puppies, the hounds working, riders enjoying the chase, landscapes and happy faces.
- The fact sheet on the MFHA and the sport of mounted foxhunting in North America that is included in this document on page 5.
- Contact information and background on appointed local and national media spokespeople who can speak publicly about foxhunting. These individuals should be articulate and knowledgeable about all hunting matters.

## **IF A REPORTER, BLOGGER OR TV STATION CALLS:**

- Do an internet search to see what the reporter has written in the past, what outlet they work for and the general tone of that reporter's articles.
- Ask the reporter what their deadline is and ask for more time if necessary. If you are not sure you can answer an inquiry in a positive way, promise to get back to them in a timely fashion or refer them to the MFHA office.
- Provide reporters with your media kit and fact sheet. Refer them to your hunt's website (if you are certain there are no controversial photos or posts on it) and the MFHA website for national background. When speaking with a reporter that is not familiar with foxhunting, ask them to visit the MFHA website for background and then ask them to come back to you. Let them know it will give them a better understanding of the sport, help them ask better questions and give you both a better starting point.
- Most reporters know little to nothing about mounted foxhunting so begin with basic background. When being interviewed, make comments that enhance the story line and portray hunting in its best light.
- Invite reporters to see a hunt in action. Appoint a knowledgeable road whip or member who can serve as a spokesman, answer questions and respond appropriately to unforeseen events to accompany reporters. Make sure members and staff know they are coming. Discourage public drinking, emphasize safety and turnout and minimize use of whips and other hound control methods.
- Ask reporters if you can help ensure their story is factually correct when they have completed it. Ask them to read your quotes back to you before it goes to press.

By paying attention to these guidelines, you can minimize the chances for negative or inaccurate coverage. Most of the time the media does a good job.

Most bad stories result from the media's lack of understanding or inaccurate information. The responsibility lies squarely on your shoulders to do your homework and provide the media with positive, accurate information. Only then will we dispel the myths about mounted foxhunting and get the excellent coverage the sport deserves.

## INTERNET CONSIDERATIONS

Social media has incredible power to influence the public's perception of fox-hunting. At its best, social media encourages a sense of community, is a tool for attracting new members, publicizes the good that foxhunting does for conservation and wildlife and promotes overall community goodwill. At its worst, social media is capable of igniting a firestorm of anti-hunting sentiment. The MFHA publishes a separate "Guide to Social Media" that goes into depth about tools, usage and policies. The following are some basics on social media.

- Hunts should appoint a social media manager/administrator to monitor all social media the hunt uses, delete inappropriate posts and photos and keep track of posts about hunting.
- Hunts with Facebook pages are encouraged to restrict those pages to "members only" so that individuals must ask the administrator for permission to join the page.
- Hunts should familiarize their members with appropriate social media behavior. Please refer to the social media guide for more information.

## COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The importance of community relations cannot be over-estimated. The relationship that your hunt develops with landowners, residents of hunt countries, business people, media, charities, schools, state fish and game personnel, government officials, law enforcement and even passers-by can have an enormous influence on the perception of your hunt in the community.

- Good landowner relations are essential to the survival of a hunt. Take the time to meet local landowners and others who live in your hunt country. Hold events and invite landowners and local residents. Keep them informed about what you are doing to support the community.
- Know and comply with state, federal and local laws regarding hunting, livestock and firearms.
- Participate and join in local and state events as an MFH. Encourage your hunt members to do likewise. Patronize or donate to local events sponsored by the police, post office, hospital and community groups. Get involved with your local animal shelter and conservation organizations and serve on their boards if possible.
- Be proactive! Get to know local government, animal control, game wardens, department of natural resources officials and law enforcement. Introduce them to your hunt. Educate them about foxhunting and show them around your kennels.
- Encourage your members to do business with your landowners when possible. Provide a list of local business to patronize.
- Engage children by offering to speak at schools. Invite children to your kennels for a field trip and host local 4H events. Encourage Pony Club hunts and junior participation.
- Take every opportunity to speak to groups about mounted foxhunting.

Use members who are gifted speakers. Make sure they know their subject well and have considered their audience. Bring a slide show, puppies or hounds if possible.

- Get to know other hunting organizations in your community. Deer, raccoon, turkey and rabbit hunters, other foxhunters, fishermen and trappers have similar goals. Be prepared to support others regarding legislation affecting country issues.
- Similarly, get involved with local equine organizations that use public lands for trail riding and competition. Educate them about our sport and determine how best to work together. COMMUNICATE!
- Introduce as many people to your point of view. Invite friends, acquaintances and people of importance to ride, car follow, visit the kennel or come to a hunt function.

*\*The MFHA publishes a "Guide to Developing a Plan to Manage Anti-hunting Demonstrations". Please refer to that publication for detailed information about protecting your hunt from anti-hunting activities.*

## DELINEATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

One Master of each member hunt should be responsible for proper public relations and publicity in his or her hunt.

A hunt's board of directors, officers, members and subscribers must understand clearly that public relations matters are the responsibility of the Masters and must be cleared through them.

Masters should inform their district representative of local public relations issues. District representatives are responsible for keeping the Masters of hunts in their district informed on national issues that might affect their hunt.

Refer all national publications and media to the MFHA executive director for comment.

## MEDIA TALKING POINTS: FACTS ABOUT FOXHUNTING

Foxhunting has existed in North America since colonial days. The earliest record of the importation of hounds to this country was in 1650.

George Washington, first president of the United States, was an ardent foxhunter who owned his own pack of hounds. He hunted the area where Washington Dulles airport now sits. About 30% of foxhunters still hunt in the Mid-Atlantic region.

The MFHA was formed in 1907 and is the governing body of organized fox, coyote, other acceptable legal quarry and drag hunting in the United States and Canada whose main activities are to promote, preserve and protect the sport of mounted hunting with hounds and establish and maintain standards of conduct for foxhunting.

In the last 25 years the MFHA has had as many as 174 hunts and as few as 155 with around 20,000 foxhunters in the USA and Canada.

Foxhunting is mounted riders watching a group of hounds hunt the scent of a fox or coyote and following them as they trail the route the quarry has taken as it moves through its home territory. Hounds rarely make visual contact with the fox or coyote. The riders do not carry guns as the hounds are doing the hunting.

The hounds work like detectives, using their sense of smell to trail the quarry. They bark—called “giving cry”—when they find the scent and their crescendo of voices allows the riders to know where they are and how to follow them. The hounds are trained to stay in a group and respond to the sound of the huntsman’s horn.

The fox or coyote, also a hunting animal, most often eludes the hounds by cleverly taking a path that is difficult for the hounds to follow, or in the case of the fox, going into a secure hole. The hunt ends when the hounds can no longer find the scent or the huntsman and/or Masters are ready to call it a day. Sometimes the quarry, usually a hurt or unhealthy animal, is caught by

the hounds and quickly killed. Healthy quarry live to hunt another day.

Hounds, horses and riders love the thrill of the chase. Few breeds of dogs get to do what they were actually bred to do as the foxhound does. In hunting, horses get to move together in a herd as they do in a pasture so it's a natural activity for them. Families and friends enjoy riding together across natural terrain following the unscripted path of hounds and quarry.

Foxhunting appeals to people of all socio-economic backgrounds and to people of all ages, from children on lead-line ponies to people in their 80s and 90s. Foxhunting was the first sport that men and women could participate in together.

Foxhunters dress in a traditional manner. The elements of a foxhunter's outfit all have a practical use. For example, red coats are akin to hunters orange so that they can be easily seen, tall leather boots protect the legs and a stock-tie and pin can become a sling or a bandage for humans, horses or hounds if necessary. The woolen coat keeps hunters warm in bad weather.

The hunt is an integral part of the community. It helps farmers and landowners who worry about the increasing population of coyotes threatening new born calves, preying on house pets and becoming bold around humans. The chase keeps them away from houses, livestock and humans. Hunting with hounds is considered one of the most humane ways to hunt. In this sport, the quarry is either caught or gets away unscathed.

Foxhunting follows the ecological balance of the seasons, beginning in the fall after farmers have harvested their crops and finishing in the spring when farmers are planting and wild animals are having their young.

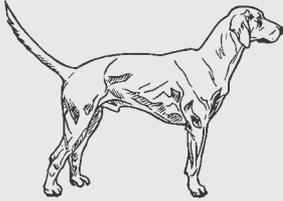
Foxhunters are avid conservationists and active in helping to impede urban sprawl. Many are involved in preserving land for riding and hunting. They take care of their hunting territories by clearing trails, maintaining healthy wildlife habitat and building strong conservation communities through easements. The hunts in North America alone have placed more than a million acres in conservation easements that all field sport participants can enjoy.





## AT A GLANCE

# FACTS ABOUT FOXHUNTING



### **THE HOUNDS USE THEIR SENSE OF SMELL**

to trail the quarry. They bark when they find the scent and their crescendo of voices allows the riders to know where they are and how to follow them.

Foxhunting has existed in North America since colonial days.

**THE EARLIEST RECORD OF THE IMPORTATION OF HOUNDS TO THIS COUNTRY WAS IN 1650.**



Foxhunters are avid **CONSERVATIONISTS** and active in land preservation.



**Foxhunters dress in a traditional manner for practical reason.**

FOR EXAMPLE: red coats are akin to hunters orange so that they can be easily seen, tall leather boots protect the legs and a stock-tie and pin can become a sling or a bandage.



### **FOXHUNTING APPEALS**

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**Foxhunters follow a pack of hounds on horseback,** although some follow in vehicles, as they trail the scent of the quarry.

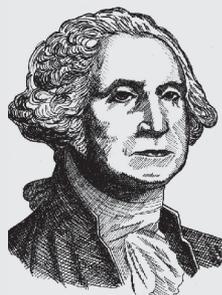
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Traditionally foxhunters form a club and their dues cover the expenses of the hunt.



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AT A GLANCE

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