# Arguments For and Against Hunting

[By Doris Lin](http://animalrights.about.com/bio/Doris-Lin-42302.htm)

The killing of wild animals for food used to be a part of everyday life. Today, hunting is a controversial issue because it is frequently regarded as a recreational activity, residents are concerned about safety issues, and society’s attitudes towards animals are changing. At the heart of the hunting debate in the United States is one species: white-tailed deer.

### Background

In many areas of the United States, white-tailed deer flourish because of the lack of natural predators and the abundance of deer-friendly habitat. As pockets of green space shrink and disappear in our suburbs, the species has become the center of the debate over hunting, and many who consider themselves neither hunters nor animal activists find themselves drawn into the debate. The debate centers on practical and ethical issues including deer management, human/deer conflicts, non-lethal solutions and safety.

### Arguments For

### Hunting proponents argue that hunting is safe, effective, necessary, and inexpensive to taxpayers.

* The injury rate for hunting is lower than that of some other forms of physical recreation, such as football and bicycling.
* Proponents argue that hunting is an effective form of deer management because it will remove a number of individual deer from a population and prevent those individuals from reproducing. Since natural deer predators have been eliminated in many areas, hunters argue that hunting is necessary to perform the function of wolves or cougars in keeping the deer population in check. Hunting proponents also argue that reducing the deer population will reduce human/deer conflicts, such as car/deer collisions, [Lyme disease](http://animalrights.about.com/od/wildlife/f/Does-Hunting-Reduce-Lyme-Disease.htm) and landscaping damage.
* Compared to sharpshooters and immunocontraception, hunting is inexpensive to taxpayers because hunters will kill the deer for free. Also, hunting permits are sold by state wildlife management agencies, which are partially or fully supported by the sales of permits.
* Hunters argue that killing the deer is better than letting them starve to death.
* Hunters argue that hunting is a tradition, a ritual or a bonding experience.

Regarding ethics, hunting proponents argue that killing a deer for food cannot be worse than killing a cow or a chicken. Furthermore, unlike the cow or the chicken, the deer lived a free and wild life before being killed and had a chance to escape. Hunters also argue that killing a number of deer benefits the ecosystem as a whole. Some hunters also oppose certain practices they consider unethical, such as baiting, canned hunting, trophy hunting, and hunting of stocked animals.

**Arguments Against**

Hunting opponents argue that hunting is unsafe, ineffective, unnecessary and unfair to taxpayers.

* Opponents point out that compared to other forms of recreation, hunting injuries are far more likely to be fatalities. Approximately 100 people die in hunting accidents in the United States every year, and unlike other forms of recreation, hunting endangers the entire community, and not just the willing participants.
* Opponents also argue that hunting is ineffective for solving human/deer conflicts. Studies show that car/deer collisions increase during hunting season because hunters frighten the deer out of the woods and onto roads. Contrary to popular belief, hunting [does not address Lyme disease](http://animalrights.about.com/od/wildlife/f/Does-Hunting-Reduce-Lyme-Disease.htm) because the ticks are usually spread to humans by mice, not deer. And as long as suburban landscaping includes deer-preferred plants such as tulips and rhododendrons, that landscaping will attract hungry deer, no matter how many deer there are. Opponents also argue that hunting does not reduce the deer population because removing some individuals from the population results in more food per deer, which leads to the births of more twins and triplets. This also means that hunting is unnecessary because the deer will self-regulate and give birth to fewer fawns when food is scarce. If the deer population needs to be further reduced, immunocontraception can be used.
* Hunting is ineffective because state wildlife management agencies [intentionally keep the deer population high](http://animalrights.about.com/od/wildlife/a/DeerManagement.htm), for hunters.
* Lands managed for hunting are sometimes purchased and maintained with tax dollars, even though 95% of Americans do not hunt.

Hunting opponents also find hunting unethical on a number of grounds. From a pure [animal rights](http://animalrights.about.com/od/animalrights101/a/BasicTenets.htm) standpoint, killing any animal for food is morally objectionable, whether that animal is a deer, a cow or a chicken. Many find hunting to be unethical because the killing is recreational. Also, many argue that human/deer conflicts are not the fault of the deer, but are the fault of humans who take habitat from the deer. Some hunting opponents also believe that modern technology has erased any chance of fairness in hunting. Certain practices are also considered especially objectionable, such as [canned hunting](http://animalrights.about.com/od/wildlife/g/CannedHunt.htm) , trophy hunting, baiting, and hunting of stocked animals.

**Resolution**

The hunting debate may never be resolved. The two sides will continue to debate safety, effectiveness and cost, but will probably never agree on the ethics of killing wild animals for food, trophies or recreation.

*[Doris Lin, Esq.](http://www.dorislin.com/" \t "_blank) is an animal rights attorney and Director of Legal Affairs for the Animal Protection League of NJ.*