



Crossbow Myths Part 2

By Mike Brust, Chairman
North American Bowhunting Coalition

My last column illustrated that from a performance standpoint modern crossbows are vastly superior, on several levels, to all archery equipment.

One would think that with that type of information now becoming readily available, states would no longer be trying to lump crossbow hunting in with archery hunting, any more than they would be adding rifles to muzzleloader or archery seasons. And yet it continues.

Those that have a financial interest in forcing crossbows into archery seasons instead of their own or other seasons also understand that the charade that modern crossbows are “almost like” bows is just about over. They’ve pretty well abandoned this false pretense that got them into several states, and have adopted a new strategy. Their primary argument is now: by making bowhunting easier and success quicker, crossbows in archery seasons will increase hunter recruitment and retention. After all, who can oppose that?

However, this too is a myth.

Without crossbows, bowhunting has already been a bright spot of hunter recruitment and retention almost universally across the country. This has confounded those that don’t understand bowhunting. After all, it takes too much time, it’s more difficult than it has to be, and the success rate isn’t that good. But to us it makes perfect sense: It’s

a close range, high-intensity sport that requires a higher level of commitment; we challenge ourselves with restrictive rules, and our success is derived as much from the hunt as from the harvest. Unlike other forms of hunting, bowhunting is difficult on purpose. It’s a key reason why we buy bowhunting licenses in the first place.

So why are hunters buying fewer licenses for more efficient forms of hunting when some say we need to make hunting easier and quicker to attract new hunters and keep existing ones? It’s because the reasons we hunt are changing. Not long ago filling the freezer was the primary motivation, while these days it has become more of a chance to challenge ourselves and spend time outdoors. Sound familiar?

With bowhunting already providing the model for hunting’s successful future, why would any state want to change it? Especially to make it easier and more like other hunting methods that are declining.

Bowhunting is unique. There are plenty of other opportunities to harvest game as expediently as possible. But bowhunting has been amazingly successful for just the opposite reasons. Fundamentally changing it by adding mid-range, pre-loaded weapons like crossbows will affect whether hunters choose to continue participating.

Some states, like Georgia, learned this the hard way. In 2002 they were pressured to change their archery season into a crossbow *and* archery season, with the promise that the combined season would produce a lot more licensed hunter. It didn’t. In fact for most of the years since, the number of licenses sold for the combined season has been lower than it was for archery alone before the change.

Don’t let this happen in your state. Get involved with your state bowhunting association, game department and even state legislators to resist the onslaught from those that are more interested in marketing a product than the future of hunting, especially bowhunting.