



Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance

Powhatan, Virginia

August 5, 2008

Stakeholder Advisory Committee Publishes Draft Recommendations

The SAC has published its draft recommendations and DGIF/VT will hold a series of public meetings in August and September to explain them to hunters. These meetings are very important to all Sportsmen. Hound hunters should note that the DGIF Board is under no obligation to follow these recommendations. Everyone who hunts with a dog, whether or not you own dogs, needs to attend these meetings! The recommendations not only address deer hunting with dogs, they involve law enforcement, increase funding, code of ethics and education pertaining to dog hunting.

Only one recommendation is an immediate threat to your sport. However, others are cause for concern and demonstrate a serious lack of understanding of hound hunting and a lack of respect for our heritage. The SAC's recommendation that a Code of Ethics be developed for hound hunters is of great concern. We agree that this would be helpful but do not support a Government developed and mandated set of "ethics" from folks who have demonstrated a willingness to harm our rights. Bob Duncan said in a July 27, 2008 article in the Richmond Times Dispatch "it is clear that any recommendation coming from the SAC will have an education component." We believe that there is room to learn and grow for all concerned and that education coupled with the willingness to live and let live will benefit all Virginians no matter where they come from.

We will address several of the "Strategies" here Please take time to become familiar with these proposals and express your opinion. We will give you the latest list of public hearings on these proposals and hope that each of you will take ten friends with you to one or more meetings.

The Proposed Strategy: **Hunting From or Near Roads** would "establish a minimum setback distance from public roads in which hunting would be prohibited. This **no-hunting zone** should be defined so that hound-hunters who have permission to can initiate a hunt after pulling off the road, but prevent the release of hounds onto private property without permission." This recommendation passed the SAC by 17 For, 0 Against. The Proposal says, "There are few weaknesses with this strategy." We wonder if they considered that in the words of the Powhatan County Commonwealth Attorney, Robert Beasley, "it's a whole lot safer to be standing along a road shooting into the woods than to have someone fifty yards in the woods shooting at the road!"

The purpose of stopping on the road is often to prevent dogs from being hit by cars that will not slow down for a dog or a person. Every hunter understands that the law requires that all four wheels must be off of the pavement, except in an emergency. Blocking the road is also against the law as is trespassing, which has been greatly exaggerated by DGIF. A weakness that was noted by DGIF Biologists was the loss of acreage to hunting, which depending on the size of the no-hunt zone could be hundreds or thousands of square miles.

DGIF is unable to enforce existing laws, but is all for increasing the burden on one of the most law abiding segments of our society.

DGIF has not disclosed how the individual SAC members voted, however, one or more members of the SAC opposed four of the Proposed Strategies. They are:

- ❑ **Repeal/Modify Virginia's Right-To Retrieve Law**
Not Recommended: 7 For, 10 Against, 0 Abstained
- ❑ **Change Hunting/Training Seasons**
Not Recommended: 10 For, 5 Against, 2 Abstained
- ❑ **ID System for Hound Hunters/Hounds**
Recommended: 14 For, 1 Against, 2 Abstained
- ❑ **Hold Violators Accountable**
Recommended: 16 For, 1 Against, 0 Abstained

Repeal/Modify Virginia's Right-To Retrieve Law

This Strategy was expected to be a major point of dispute and it was. Since the SAC established a rule requiring a supermajority of two thirds for a proposal to pass this "strategy" failed. There are nine members carefully hand-picked by DGIF to represent the interests of hound hunters. This Proposal, strongly favored by the technical advisory committee (DGIF Law Enforcement and Biologists), modified the existing law to require:

1. Permission to retrieve hounds from posted private property.
2. Landowners to thoroughly post property with contact information, and
3. Private property that is not properly posted is presumed open to retrieval.

The "Strengths" and "Weaknesses" reflect an incredible lack of understanding of Virginia law and tradition and a "Pollyanna" approach of understating its limitations. They state "Interpretation and enforcement of trespass/retrieval laws are often poorly understood and complicated for landowners, hunters, law enforcement agents and the judicial system." We find it amazing that one "hound hunter", even if DGIF handpicked, would support this proposal. If law enforcement were properly trained to even-handedly enforce the laws that currently exist, we believe that difficulties would be greatly diminished. **Remember that there is no Property Right in Virginia that allows landowners to prevent animals (including dogs) from crossing their property, except by fencing.**

We appreciate those non-hound hunters who stood with us.

Change Hunting/Training Seasons

Not Recommended: 10 For, 5 Against, 2 Abstained

This is simply a way to reduce existing seasons at the expense of other hunters, by creating a “deer hound training season”, and shorting all other seasons to conform to the new “training season”. This is nothing more than a divide and conquers strategy to pit deerhound hunters against still hunters, bow and black powder alike. Remember that before there were “primitive weapons seasons” you had deer hunting with dogs “East of the Blue Ridge” (Rt. 29) line and still hunting west. Promises were made at that time that the bow hunters wouldn’t interfere with hunting dogs. Now in spite of the fact that this recommendation was voted down once several SAC members are continuing to clamor for this at the expense of their fellow hunters. **No mention was made of the need for a bear hound training season and a kill season in the east due to the bear population explosion!** This is despite the fact that their much-touted “Black Bear Study” called for opening a season in thirteen “traditional hound counties” in Southside. Remember that study was the model for this one!

ID System for Hound Hunters/Hounds

Recommended: 14 For, 1 Against, 2 Abstained

“It is recommended that some type of hound identification be established that links hunters, hunt clubs, and dogs. External identification (vs. micro-chip) is favorable because it would allow dog-owner contact information to be obtained by landowners, animal control, or law enforcement officials without the use of special equipment.”

The weaknesses are stated as follows: “Although putting identification on dog collars is commonly practiced by hound-hunters and is recommend here, collars are occasionally removed and discarded by hound-hunters and is recommended here, *collars are occasionally removed and discarded or put onto other dogs by ill-intentioned individuals. This type of activity would effectively thwart any benefits potentially obtained from a system aimed at linking hounds to hunters and/or hunt clubs and stiffer penalties for removing the collar off a hunting dog may be needed as a deterrent*”. (Emphasis added)

This statement was made as if they did not know that it is already a Class 1 misdemeanor (§ 18.2-97.1 Code of Virginia) to remove a tracking collar! More will be said on this subject below.

“Finally, although this strategy could indirectly address issues associated with “hound trespass” (intentional and unintentional of hounds on private property where they are not wanted), these activities are not in violation of any laws and there are no disincentives to engaging in them.” (Emphasis added)

We do not condone trespass or any intentional law violation by hound hunters or any other hunters, but if it is not against the law it is not trespassing!

At first glance this appears reasonable, but is actually laughable! DGIF Conservation Police Officers (CPO) in several cases have REFUSED to investigate or prosecute criminal removal of tracking collars despite it being the highest level of misdemeanor and is a part of the Code that they are specifically responsible for enforcing. A Game Warden (CPO) in the City of Chesapeake refused to even assist the hunter in retrieving a collar from private property after his collar was thrown in a pond! City Police were needed to make it right... but no charges were filed

against the perpetrator! A VHDA Board member had to get involved to resolve the case!

In Southampton County a P.E.T.A. employee picked-up a dog and threw the collar in the brush and took the dog off only to be stopped by the owner, a Southampton Deputy Sheriff. Charges were filed but dismissed by a judge.

As this is written, a Richmond County Humane Society leader is charged with two felonies for discarding a tracking collar and stealing hunting dogs. This will be described in more detail later in this Newsletter.

A criminal investigator from another state has advised us that there are “animal rescue folks” who are actually stealing dogs and destroying collars. If DGIF wants to begin earning the confidence and trust of Virginia Sportsmen, here is an excellent place to begin. Note that their crime-reporting database does not have a code for discarding a tracking collar – the highest-level of misdemeanor offense – Class 1!

We are not issuing a blanket condemnation of all Game Wardens because we know of a case where efforts were made to recover tracking collars in Shenandoah County a number of years back. Although there are many fine DGIF employees, increasingly few of them support our Heritage, but instead see us as the enemy.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries does not have a good reputation or record of enforcing the game laws among local officials. This is one area that hurts their ability to speak with any creditably about new laws and problems of “rouge hunters”. VHDA members have reported a great deal of criticism of DGIF efforts by local government representatives. **Statewide DGIF has averaged 179 trespassing convictions (not just hound trespassing) per year for the last three years! That is all convictions! An average of less than 2 per county!**

THIS HOUND STUDY WAS CONTRIVED FROM THE START – DON'T EXPECT IT TO CHANGE NOW! Twenty-one County governing bodies have adopted resolutions declaring they were supportive of current dog hunting practices and saw no need for any change except better law enforcement of existing laws. County Boards of Supervisors are much better able to judge the best interest of their citizens than VT academics and DGIF's West Broad Street staff.

Hold Violators Accountable

Recommended: 16 For, 1 Against, 0 Abstained

“It is recommended that members of the hound hunting, nonhound-hunting, and landowner community hold accountable those who violate game law and regulations or act in unsportsmanlike, unethical ways...”

We are not going to mince words **WE SUPPORT PROSECUTING VIOLATORS!** We do not support harassment of law abiding Sportsmen or any citizens, whether you agree with the law or not it is the duty of every citizen to uphold the law until it is changed!

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries needs to re-train their officers. We are not the enemy. They need to promptly respond to complaints especially those of interfering with Hunting. If they want the number of hunters to increase, then support hunting. The actions of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, its employees and Board alike, are seen as detrimental to the very Heritage they are entrusted to defend.

VHDA is prepared to prove to the Virginia General Assembly that this study has been a profligate waste of hard earned Sportsmen's money!

Richmond County Humane Society Leader Charged with Two Felonies

A seventy-six year old director of the Richmond County Humane Society and another women have been charged with two felonies each in connection with the theft of a hound and the removal and disposal of the tracking collar. The Richmond County Animal Control Officer and a Deputy Sheriff brought the charges. The accused appeared at a hearing in District Court in Warsaw last Friday where they asked that the case be continued. There will be a preliminary hearing to determine whether or not to certify the charges to a Grand Jury. If Animal Rights Activists picket the Court, it will be necessary for hunters to turn out and show strong support for law and order!

We applaud Keith Herbert, Richmond County Animal Control Officer and the Commonwealth's Attorney Wayne Emory for their diligence in this matter.

This case is one of several that have signaled a disturbing trend. Animal Rights activist in Virginia are increasingly being accused of stealing hunting dogs. If this is the case, all hunters must increase their vigilance and report missing dogs to the authorities. If you are unable to get action from Game Wardens or local authorities, contact VHDA and let us try to help you.

Public Meetings To Be Held on SAC Draft Recommendations

The Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) Draft Recommendations are available and have been mailed to many people. The DGIF/VT staff will hold a series of public hearings to allow for public comment. Once again they are going to open this up on the Internet. **The Humane Society and P.E.T.A. have already alerted their supporters about the need to comment!** Once these meetings have concluded the SAC will vote on its final recommendations, which will go to the DGIF Board of Directors for any action they wish to take. Remember that DGIF has started a new regulatory cycle that could "fast track" any of these proposals or anything else they wish to propose.

You need to be at as many of these meeting as early as possible and be prepared to tell them that this study was not needed and is a waste of money. Note that the distance to many of these meetings is simply too far. There are no meetings in the Northern Neck/Middle Peninsula for example.

YOUR COMMENTS ARE VITALLY IMPORTANT TO THE FUTURE OF HOUND HUNTING IN VIRGINIA, DON'T SIT BACK AND WAIT FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO SPEAK UP!

HUNTING WITH HOUNDS IN VIRGINIA: A WAY FORWARD

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

All comments, whether written, spoken, or sent via email, shall be considered part of the public record. The comment period closes on Friday, September 12, 2008. <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/hunting/hounds/>

FAR SOUTHWEST

August 26, 7:00-9:00PM: Wytheville Meeting Center

- 1-81/77 Exit 73 or 1-77 Exit 41, 333 Community Boulevard Wytheville, Virginia 24382

SHENANDOAH RIVER VALLEY, HARRISONBURG

August 27, 7:00-9:00PM: Spotswood High School

- 368 Blazer Drive, Penn Laird, VA 22846

NORTHEAST, CAROLINE COUNTY

August 28, 7:00-9:00PM: Caroline Community Center

- 17202 Richmond Turnpike Bowling Green, VA 22427

NOVA

September 2, 7:00-9:00PM: Fauquier High School

- 705 Waterloo Drive, Warrenton, VA 20186

MID-PIEDMONT

September 3, 7:00-9:00PM: Appomattox High School

- 198 Evergreen Ave, Appomattox, VA

SOUTHEAST

September 4, 7:00-9:00PM: King's Fork High School

- 351 Kings Fork Rd, Suffolk, VA

SOUTHSIDE

September 9, 7:00-9:00PM: Gretna High School

- 100 Gretna Hawk Circle, Gretna, VA 24577

MEETING GROUND RULES <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/hunting/hounds/>

- Anyone wishing to make an oral comment will have an opportunity to do so.
- Each individual will have 3 minutes to make an oral comment. Please limit your comment to the time allowed.
- Unused time may not be deferred to another commenter.
- If time remains before the published meeting end time AND each individual who has signed up to comment has had the opportunity to speak, individuals who have already spoken may provide additional comments and groups wishing to speak collectively may do so after that.
- If you have a written comment, please consider summarizing it during your oral comments, and also providing the written document for the record.
- Address comments to the facilitator, recorder, and VDGIF/Virginia Tech/SAC representatives in the front of the room, not to those in attendance.
- You are expected to be respectful of others, even if you don't agree with their comments. Cat-calls, booing, cheering, shouting, etc. from those in attendance will not be tolerated.

Written comments can be emailed to HoundHuntingSAC@M.edu or sent to: Hound Hunting SAC c/o Sarah Kozlowski, 111 Cheatham Hall, Department of Fisheries & Wildlife, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24060-0321.

GET IN THE FIGHT OR LOSE YOUR RIGHTS!

SAC Draft Recommendations To Have Final Vote

After the public meetings to receive public input on the SAC Draft Recommendations there will be one last meeting of the SAC to vote on its final recommendations to the DGIF Board. It is very important for you to make comments about these recommendations.

Wildlife Regulations Under Review Again

As mentioned elsewhere in this Newsletter, the review of the Wildlife regulations has begun again. There will be a series of local meetings around the state to receive input concerning changes that the Sportsmen want. These meetings are not part of the Hound Study but can certainly be used to tell the DGIF staff of your displeasure with their Hound Study Technical Committee (<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/hunting/hounds/technical-report.pdf>) proposals!

WILDLIFE REGULATION TOWN HALL MEETINGS

6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

September 3, 2008

Region 3 – Cedar Bluff

Southwest Virginia Community College, King Community Center,
295 Community College Road

September 4, 2008

Region 3 – Wise

University of Virginia's College at Wise, Alumni Association Building,
One College Avenue

September 8, 2008

Region 3 – Christiansburg

Montgomery County Government Center, 755 Roanoke Street

September 9, 2009

Region 1 – Chesapeake

Chesapeake Sheriffs Office,
Chesapeake Correction Center,
401 Albemarle Drive

Region 4 – Lexington –

Rockbridge County High School,
143 Greenhouse Road

Region 5 – Centerville

Arlington/Fairfax Chapter Izaak Walton League, 14708 Mount Olive Road

September 10, 2008

Region 1 – Wakefield

Airfield 4-H Center, 15189 Airfield Road Region 4 –

Middletown

Middletown Elementary School
190 Mustang Lane,

September 11, 2008.

Region 1 - Gloucester Point -

VA Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), Route 1208, Create Road

Region 2 - Burkeville -
Burkeville Fire Department
503 Namozine Street

Region 5 - Madison -
War Memorial Building
4 Main Street

September 15, 2008

Region 4 - Covington -
Alleghany County Governmental Complex, 9212 Winterberry Avenue

September 16, 2008

Region 1 - Warsaw -
Rappahannock Community College
52 Campus Drive

Region 2 - Danville -
Danville Community College
Regional Center for Advanced Technology & Training 121 Slayton Avenue

Region 4 - Harrisonburg -
Rockingham County Fairgrounds
4808 South Valley Pike

Region 5 - Richmond -
VDGIF Board Meeting Room
Broad Street

September 17, 2008

Region 1 - Charles City -
DGIF Region I Office, Rice Center 3801 John Tyler Memorial Highway

September 18, 2008

Region 2 - Lynchburg -
Central Virginia Community College Merritt Hall, Room 5122
3506 Wards Road

Region 5 - Fredericksburg -
Gander Mountain Store Meeting Room, 3708 Plank Road

Make sure that you and all members of your family 18 or older are registered to vote!

Get in the fight or lose your rights!

<http://www.vahda.org>

All VHDA Board members are real hunters who own dogs. The VHDA has no paid staff. We pay our own expenses because "We HAVE a dog in this fight!" If we sometimes sound angry, it is because we are! We would prefer to be hunting, teaching our children about the wonders that God has given us and training our dogs. We know that we must have a strong voice or we will lose to people, who not only disagree with you... but hate and revile you because you hunt.

We pray for loving and forgiving hearts and that we will be ever mindful of the needs of others.

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