

A Report on Deer and Bear Hound Training Seasons

*Prepared by DWR staff for the
Wildlife and Boat and Law Enforcement Committees*

Among the non-regulatory hound hunting proposals passed by the Board of Wildlife Resources on March 20, 2024, was a proposal to prioritize enforcement of the prohibition against hunting outside of the open seasons. In addition to elements related to law enforcement strategies and training, the proposal directed the Executive Director to prepare a written report for the Board's Wildlife and Boat and Law Enforcement Committees that evaluates whether the creation of a deer hound training season or adjustments to the current bear hound training season would provide opportunity for hunters to better train their dogs and ensure that running of game occurs during appropriate designated seasons. The report was also to evaluate what conditions and actions would need to occur in order to ensure that any season adjustments do not present biological concerns or cause increases in hunter/landowner conflicts. Lastly, representatives from both the hunting and landowning communities were to be consulted in the report's development.

I. Current Status on Deer and Bear Hound Training Seasons in Virginia

Deer

Of the nine (9) southeastern states that allow deer hunting with dogs, four (4) states (AL, GA, SC, and VA) do not have any provisions allowing for the training of dogs used to hunt deer outside of the deer hunting season. Five (5) states (AR, FL, LA, MS, and NC) have either a designated deer hound training season or allow deer hounds to train during general hunting dog training periods. Arkansas allows deer dog training October-December in "dog areas," but it is not allowed during certain still-hunting portions of deer season (i.e., 9 days in October, 2 days in November, and 6 days in December). Florida has a 20-day deer dog training season in certain counties during the archery/crossbow season. Staff with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission noted that "dog zones" are typically marginal deer habitat with dense vegetation that still hunters typically avoid, and there have not been significant conflicts between the user groups. Louisiana allows dog training for deer during the closed season on private lands. Mississippi has no regulation prohibiting dog training for deer or other game except during still-hunting deer seasons or turkey season. North Carolina allows dog training for deer, where deer hunting with dogs is allowed, during the closed season when dogs are under the control of the owner.

Bear

To provide hound hunters additional recreation and the opportunity to train and condition dogs before bear harvest seasons, a September bear dog training season was initiated in 1992 for 24 counties/cities in Virginia. Neither carrying weapons nor harvesting bears are permitted during the bear dog training season. Depending on the calendar year (i.e., the number of Saturdays in September), this season was generally four weeks long; but in some years, it was a 5-week season (e.g., 1995, 2000, and 2001). Beginning in 1995, Sunday hunting during the dog training season was permitted because weapons were not allowed. Although the season length was not

changed, the entire dog-training season was shifted 1-week earlier (i.e., the last Saturday in August through the last Saturday in September) in 1997 to avoid a 1-day overlap with the opening of deer archery season. The localities open for dog training were expanded to 27 and 31 counties/cities in 1997 and 1999, respectively.

The training season was changed in 2003, adding eight additional southwestern counties. Then, in 2006, an earlier opening date (second Saturday of August) provided additional recreational time by increasing the bear dog training season length from the usual 4-week season to generally a 7-week season. Then as a precursor to firearms hunting with hounds in the region, a 2-week training season (Sundays excluded) was opened in the southside counties of Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Brunswick, and Greensville during 2006. In 2009, the second week of this training season was incorporated into the new 1-week firearms season established for these counties. Legislative amendments to dog training hours were made in 2008, when hunting hours for dog training were extended to 4½ hours after sunset (instead of a half hour after sunset). In 2012, hunting hours were legislatively amended to be from 4:00am to 10:00 pm.

Over the past decade four additional changes have been made to the bear hound training season in Virginia. In 2013, a two-week November training season was established in 33 counties and portions of two more counties in the southeastern part of Virginia. In addition, a two-week training season was established in September in four more counties in southcentral Virginia, which was expanded by one week in 2014, and then again in 2015. In 2015 a six-week training season was established in portions of five counties and three full counties in the southwestern Blue Ridge and Piedmont. In 2017 for all counties with an established training season in August and/or September (counties along the Blue Ridge and west and some counties in southcentral and southeastern portion of the state) the training season was expanded to eight weeks starting on August 1st.

Most other eastern states do not have a special training season for bear hounds, but for those that do, the following is a brief synopsis of general dates and/or restrictions:

- *Georgia's* training season for bear dogs occurs during August and September and January-March, during legal daylight hours. Participants must sign in online at georgiawildlife.com once per season.
- *Kentucky* allows bear dog training during daylight hours only in certain areas (excluding a number of public lands) during June-September. Participants must possess either a bear chase or bear hunt permit.
- *Maine's* bear dog training season is from July 1 almost until the bear hunting season. Participants must have a Dog Training and Hunting Permit and can train up to six dogs at a time.
- *New Hampshire's* bear dog training season is during July and August. Participants must have a training permit.
- *North Carolina* has a continuous, year-round bear hound training season in the eastern part of the state; in the western part of the state, bear hound training is allowed on state lands from August 1 until the beginning of bear hunting season. In addition, dogs cannot be trained or allowed to run unleashed in designated bear management areas between March and mid-October.

- *Tennessee* allows bear dog training in certain bear hunt zones during daylight hours only. Dates vary but are generally in August and September, with a couple of zones allowing additional bear hound training opportunities during May and June.
- *Vermont's* bear dog training season is June-September during daylight hours. A permit is required and all dogs must be registered. No more than six dogs can be used.
- *West Virginia* has a continuous, year-round bear hound training season, established by legislative code. West Virginia Division of Natural Resources staff have indicated that they would likely seek to establish a shorter bear hound training season if it was not in code.

II. Perspectives of Hunters and Landowners in Virginia

During deliberations of the 2023-24 Ad Hoc Hound Hunter and Private Landowners Stakeholders Advisory Committee (SAC), some members suggested that running out of season occurs in some cases because hunters lack opportunity during designated hunting and training seasons to train dogs on their chosen species. Other SAC members felt that any additional opportunity should occur only with adequate landowner protections in place.

The Department has received frequent requests over the years for a deer hound training season, as well as for expansion of the bear hound training season; at the same time, the Department has received significant input from landowners and still hunters concerning potential impacts on their interests. For example, during the scoping period for the 2022-2023 wildlife regulation review and amendment process, the use of hounds for hunting deer and bear and training (bear primarily) were the predominant comment types within both species' groups. Of all deer comments received (1,101 total comments on deer), 22% were related to the use of hounds. Of these, 68% opposed increasing opportunity or recommended restrictions or limitations for the use of hounds for deer hunting. Calls for additional opportunities for deer hunting with hounds (e.g., hounds on youth weekend, Sundays, additional WMAs) represented 4.1% of all hound comments. A small percentage of comments related to hounds in the context of a deer hound training season (1.3% of total deer comments, 5.4% of deer hound comments). From this subset, 6 comments asked for a deer hound training season.

Bear hound hunting comments during the 2022-23 regulation scoping period (477 total bear comments) were primarily seeking increased opportunity through longer hound seasons and additional counties where the use of hounds is allowed (16% of all bear comments). A subset also related to the legislative issue of allowing hounds for hunting bear on Sundays, which is currently prohibited. Most comments related to bears during the 2023 process were in relation to bear hound training (52% of bear comments). These comments were primarily seeking to increase opportunities for bear hound training by extending the current training season, creating a year-round training season, and/or extending bear hound training opportunities during the current bear firearms seasons.

Scoping summaries for the current wildlife regulation review and amendment cycle (2024-25) are being provided separately to the Board during January 2025.

Deer hound training season

Proposals were put forward for the establishment of a deer hound training season by stakeholder advisory committees during both the 2007-2008 Hunting with Hounds in Virginia: A Way Forward process and the 2023-24 Ad Hoc Hound Hunter and Private Landowners process. The 2008 proposal was to provide a training season for deer hounds on private land with permission, at a time where it avoids conflict with other hunting seasons; provide for overlap of hunting and training for all types of hound-hunting to the greatest extent possible; and, provide for a period where there would be no hound-hunting or training, with few exceptions (e.g., raccoon hound-hunting and/or mounted and non-mounted fox hunts, provided that the latter could be distinguished from deer hound training under the guise of non-mounted fox hunting). According to this proposal, specific dates should be determined during a formal DWR regulation review and amendment process but should avoid allowing hound-training or hunting during times when wildlife are breeding and/or rearing young. Specific objectives to be addressed by this proposal included the needs to exercise and train deer dogs, differentiate between types of dogs (to address the “fox hunting loophole”), protect existing training seasons, separate hound and still hunting, and protect breeding and rearing periods for wildlife.

During the 2023-24 process, a member of the SAC offered a proposal (Appendix 1; summarized as Proposal 5.5 in the 2024 final report) to create a deer hound training season, with requirements that electronic tracking collars be affixed to the dogs and for dog owners to stay in the accompaniment of the dogs being trained. This proposal was offered as a possible conflict reduction measure by providing an opportunity for hunters to better train their hounds prior to hound hunting season. It was argued that this training season opportunity could result in hounds less likely to break off a track and more likely to return on command, ideally reducing the likelihood that they wind up on property where they are not wanted. The member proposing this approach believed it would only be successful if the training season timeframe was sufficient and specific (see next paragraph). It was argued that it could also reduce misuse of other hound seasons, such as fox and coyote. The electronic tracking collar requirement and accompaniment of the dogs could help to ensure that the training season does not introduce new complaints. The member did not specify whether “accompaniment of the dogs” means that the hunter must be within sight, within sound, on the same property being hunted, etc. Some other SAC members shared that they are not opposed to this idea, but that other enforceable measures like changes to laws or regulations should be a greater priority for reducing conflict, and other members were concerned that a deer hound training season could introduce more opportunity for conflict. Some members indicated they would be open to this measure if it included the expectation that dogs were to remain on property where their owners had permission to hunt.

Specific dates for the deer hound training season proposed by the SAC member during 2024 were as follows: August 15 through September 30, 7 days a week; October 1-31, from Sunday at 1:00 PM through Wednesday (to reduce conflicts with archers and church), and from the conclusion of the general firearm deer season through early March (to avoid deer fawning and spring gobbler season).

Potential conflicts with other users would inform any discussion of dates. For example, the proposed October dates are likely to raise concerns from archery hunters. It is also anticipated

that concerns will be raised by archers regarding potential disturbance immediately prior to the opening of archery season and by participants during the deer youth and apprentice weekend. It is for these reasons that the current bear hound training season ends the last Saturday in September. Extending deer hound training season later into January and beyond might be seen as a loss of opportunity for small game hunters. A number of quail, woodcock, and rabbit hunters prefer to wait until deer hunters are out of the woods before they go afield with their dogs so there are fewer potential conflicts. Many trappers also prefer to begin trapping after the close of the deer hunting season in early January to avoid potential conflicts (e.g., risk of dogs being captured).

To gain additional insights and perspectives from hunters and landowners regarding the creation of a deer hound training season, DWR staff interviewed representatives of deer hound hunter and property rights groups prior to submission of this report. These organizations included the Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance, Sporting Dogs Coalition, Virginia Property Rights Alliance, and the Property Rights Coalition of Virginia.

Perspectives expressed by hound hunting representatives included:

- Better trained hounds will lead to fewer complaints during the general hunting seasons, which is the goal of everyone.
- The lack of a current training season prevents the benefits of proper hound training from being realized and forces deer hound handlers to either forego training opportunities, or to misuse fox/coyote seasons to train their dogs.
- Some representatives expressed a belief that bear hound training and deer hound training were distinct topics, while others believed that all hound hunters (including deer and bear hunters, and also hound hunters of other species) would benefit from opportunities to better train their hounds, and an all-inclusive hound training season ought to be considered.
- Alternative date possibilities were offered (e.g., July 1-last Saturday in September; January/February following the close of general firearms deer and bear seasons).
- Conditioning and training of dogs takes significant effort and time and tracking/toning collars, though beneficial, are only of use where a hound is trained to them.
- There are unlikely to be large masses of hunters participating because many do not own dogs and will not be able to harvest a deer during this time. The experienced handlers with the dogs will be the only ones out, not the large number that you see during hunting season.
- Training season would give hunters a better chance to learn about their dogs in a hunting situation (e.g., if a dog won't respond during training season, it won't be released during a real hunt).
- Potential benefits of this additional training in reducing complaints during the hunting season will far exceed any additional complaints received from landowners.
- Establishment of the season could be used as an incentive to encourage use of technology, and perhaps also to address funding for enforcement and education/outreach through establishment of a separate training license (e.g., in order to utilize the training season, a hunter could be required to use electronic tracking and correction, and/or purchase a separate license), or to require additional hunter education.
- Representatives also offered a requirement that the hunter accompany his hounds in the field as a means of preventing free hunting hounds.

Perspectives expressed by landowner representatives included:

- While there is no objection to the concept of training hounds on lands where permission has been granted, establishment of training seasons should only be pursued after adequate safeguards are put in place to prevent or address trespassing hounds generally; in the absence of that, it will only lead to increased trespass by hunting hounds and thus conflict situations with no recourse for landowners.
- Creation of a deer hound training season would need to ensure that hounds are not afforded the opportunity to access private property where permission to hunt/train is not provided; this could be done by requiring geofencing through use of GPS collars (i.e., hound owner should be responsible to the location and actions of their hounds).
- A concern was expressed that hound handlers are only concerned about running their hounds and not in preventing the hound from entering or crossing lands where they don't have permission to hunt/train. A perspective was shared that a sense of entitlement exists to "hunt where the game goes" whether or not permission to hunt/train has been granted, and current law and regulations does nothing to provide protection to landowners.
- Springtime (when wildlife are having and raising young) should not be a time when hounds should be in the woods or trained to pursue to ensure survival of young and protect wildlife populations.
- The coyote/foxhound loophole needs to be closed to ensure there is no running of other species out of season.
- Landowners should have the ability to use photographs/videos from game cameras to verify complaints and secure law enforcement action against hound owners who allow hounds to enter properties where they don't have permission to hunt.

Bear hound training season

A member of the 2023-24 SAC offered a proposal (Appendix 2; summarized as Proposal 5.6 in the 2024 final report) to expand the bear hound training season statewide to begin June 1 and run through the first Friday in October, to end before archery season. (The proposal also called for training bear dogs 24 hours a day during this period; however, this provision would need to be addressed via amending Code of Virginia § 29.1-520). This proposal reflects the view that the current approach to the bear hound training season causes hunters to hunt in pocketed concentrations in time and space and expanding opportunities would allow hunters to disperse and thereby reduce opportunities for conflict. According to proponents of this proposal, expanding the bear hound training season could also reduce agricultural damage by bears, which is of significant interest to producers. Some members were resistant to the idea of expanding opportunities for bear hound hunting (as mentioned above for deer) without any commitment that the hounds be contained to land where their hunters had permission to hunt and felt that these proposals could result in an increase, rather than a decrease, in conflicts.

With regards to the specific SAC proposal, it is anticipated that concerns could be raised by archers regarding potential disturbance immediately prior to the opening of archery season. It is for this reason that the current bear hound training season ends the last Saturday in September. Not included in the final SAC proposal but included in the version submitted by the individual SAC member was a provision to reopen the bear hound training season, during legal hunting hours only, starting with the opening fall firearms bear season and running through January 31,

in counties with a firearms bear season. Concerns could be expressed by western Virginia deer hunters regarding the training of bear hunting dogs during that portion of the firearms bear season which overlaps the standard 2-week western deer firearms season. As noted above for deer, small game hunters and trappers may have concerns with the January extension.

To gain additional insights and perspectives from hunters and landowners regarding adjustments to the bear hound training season, DWR staff interviewed representatives of bear hound hunter and property rights groups prior to submission of this report. These organizations included the Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance, Virginia Bear Hunters Association, Massanutten Hunt Club, American Bear Foundation-Virginia Chapter, Virginia Property Rights Alliance, and Property Rights Coalition of Virginia.

Perspectives expressed by hound hunting representatives included:

- Current training seasons are not of sufficient length to allow proper training of a hound; this prevents the true benefit of the season from being realized. Better trained hounds will lead to fewer complaints during the general hunting seasons, which is the goal of everyone.
- Complaint data suggests that hunter/landowner conflict levels are low for bear hunting and thus it would be unlikely to be an issue in an expanded season.
- Other states have much more expansive training opportunities available to bear hunters.
- Alternative dates and areas were offered: July 1-last Saturday in September, with this expansion only East of the Blue Ridge; in many areas, hunters aren't seeing as many bears in December, so extend into first several weeks of October to compensate for lost opportunity.
- Training is a nonconsumptive season that helps train the dogs and helps keep the bears wild, which assists with agricultural damage and residential conflicts with bears.
- Hunters who have established relationships with landowners have few conflicts. Education of both hunters and landowners is key to reducing conflicts.
- An opinion was expressed that bear hunting with dogs and deer hunting with dogs should be regarded as distinct: bear hunters use public lands in many cases, employ different methods, and do not experience as much landowner/hunter conflict.

Perspectives expressed by landowner representatives included:

- Modifications to the bear hound training season should ensure that bear hounds are not afforded opportunities to access private property, this could be achieved in two ways:
 - Reduced training seasons.
 - Regulation or legislation preventing the presence of hounds on private property where hounds are not wanted.
- Extended training seasons without protection from trespassing hounds are not of interest to private landowners as they increase the amount of time throughout the year when private landowners must live with repeated issues associated with hound hunting.
- Bear hound hunters should not be able to use public roads to add more hounds into a chase when there is no public land on either side of the road or the hunt is progressing from public land onto private lands; rather, hound hunters should be required to pick up their hounds to prevent the chase from continuing onto or through private property.
- Continuing to allow hound hunters to utilize public roads and public access to continue the chase onto and through private lands encourages conflict.

- Law enforcement presence needs to be increased, particularly in remote areas where public roads/public access runs through private property.

Mitigating crop damage was not the original intent of the bear hound training season; however, there have been instances in Virginia where hunters have assisted farmers by chasing bears out of agricultural areas. DWR does not currently have a means of tracking how frequently this occurs or how effective the technique is for mitigating damage from bears. An ongoing pilot project being conducted by DWR in the southwestern Piedmont may provide more data on the effectiveness of deploying smaller, non-hound breeds in deterring bears from corn fields. Research has shown that dogs, in certain circumstances, can be effective in chasing bears out of agricultural or recreational areas (e.g., campgrounds); however, dogs used in these documented trials have generally been trained for livestock protection rather than hunting .

Finally, the Department's Law Enforcement data was consulted regarding complaints filed during the 2024 bear hound training season. From the period of August 1-September 28, a total of 11 Calls for Service (CFS) involving hunting with hounds were received statewide. Seven of these calls related to alleged violations involving hound hunting , while four calls involved complaints where no violation of law was alleged. Note that these are complaints made directly to DWR Law Enforcement; complaints made to other law enforcement agencies or non-LE staff would not be included in this total unless they were ultimately referred to DWR's Law Division.

III. Biological Considerations

Additional recreational opportunities for constituents to pursue game with hounds must be weighed against biological considerations for both the target (bear and deer) and non-target species potentially impacted by these seasons. Empirical evidence for many biological considerations mentioned below are difficult to gain outside of a controlled captive wildlife facility. Thus, these biological considerations are based on inferences from best available science and professional opinions of bear and deer managers in Virginia and other eastern states.

Some level of short-term (acute) stress is likely during any chase. Acute stress is a normal physiological response to predation or danger and does not result in long-term problems for the animal. The more biologically meaningful issue is whether chronic stress occurs. Chronic stress will occur when animals cannot escape from the stressor or undergo repeated stressful events over a prolonged period. Chronic stress is more likely to result in health (e.g., suppressed immunity) and reproductive issues.

Training season timing

The time of year for any proposed deer hound training season or adjustments to the current bear hound training season is an important consideration for potential biological impacts both to target and non-target species.

Late winter (January-March)

Deer: Many deer are nutritionally stressed during winter, particularly in areas with low quality habitat or following increased exertions related to disturbance during hunting season. Does are in their gestation cycle during winter, thus adequate food sources and limited stressors are critical to maintaining body condition. Although literature on disturbance during this period is limited, research in Virginia during the 1970s on captive deer chased during pregnancy did not find definitive evidence that dog chases affected reproduction.

Bear: Female bears give birth to cubs in their dens in Virginia during January and February. Den site selection varies across the Commonwealth, but an increasing number of ground dens (nests) are being used by bears, making females more susceptible to disturbances from hounds during the denning period. Following birth, female bears remain in the den with their cubs through March or April and disturbances during this time reduce the likelihood of cub survival. Non-bred females and male bears may remain active during the winter, but with limited food sources, movements are often restricted. These bears may den simply to conserve limited resources, especially during cold or wet weather.

Spring (April-June)

Deer: The spring is a critical period for pregnant does to gain additional nutrition following the lean winter months prior to the birth of fawns in the late spring and early summer. As much as 75-80% of fetal growth occurs during the last trimester. During winter and spring, until fawning season begins (April through July with peak fawning occurring in June), family groups are often together. These social networks provide both protection from predators and behavioral learning for younger deer. Increasing disturbance during this time could add stress to does during late gestation and impact family group dynamics. See the section about summer below for potential direct impacts to young fawns.

Bear: Den emergence by females with cubs takes place from mid-March through April, depending on weather conditions. During this time, cubs of the year are highly vulnerable to any separation from the sow.

Non-target species: This timeframe would overlap with the spring breeding and nesting season for wild turkey, ruffed grouse, and other ground-nesting birds. Increased disturbance during this time could not only impact breeding activity, but nesting and brooding as the spring progresses. Young of the year for many bird and small to mid-sized mammal species (e.g., rabbits, fox) are vulnerable throughout this timeframe. Some Southside Virginia counties have dog confinement ordinances during this timeframe for the specific purpose of protecting turkey poults and fawns.

Summer (July-August)

Deer: The primary consideration during this time frame is the rearing of fawns. Increased use of hounds during the summer while young fawns are still dependent on their mother could lead to separation, myopathy due to prolonged stress from a chase, or even capture by a hound (particularly during the 1st month of a fawn's life, generally during late-May to early July).

Lactating does are also under additional nutritional demands due to care of fawns, thus increasing stress by chase during this timeframe could be detrimental.

Bear: Cubs of the year are still highly dependent on the female throughout the summer but are more mobile and more likely to survive if separated. Heat stress is an important consideration for all age/sex classes during this time frame. The breeding season peaks in VA for bears in mid-July through mid-August. Use of hounds across the landscape during this time could have some impact on breeding behaviors in some circumstances.

Non-target species: Many young of the year for a variety of species are vulnerable to disturbance or separation from their parent during this time. Turkey poults, for example, are flightless during the first few weeks of life and are highly susceptible to predation or death if separated from the hen.

Fall (September-November)

Deer: Most fawns of the year are weaned by September 1, which is why the earliest deer seasons in Virginia begin around that date. Due to deer (and other) hunting seasons already occurring in the fall, biological concerns associated with adding training seasons during this time frame are limited.

Bear: Cubs of the year can be weaned by July but will stay with the sow through their first winter; thus, separation can still occur but is of less concern during this time frame. Because bear (and other) hunting seasons already occur in the fall, biological concerns associated with adding training seasons during this time frame are limited.

Wildlife disease impacts

There is a lack of clear evidence whether chasing diseased deer or bears with dogs is detrimental. Both deer and bear may move long distances during hound chase events but have been documented to return to their home range soon after the chase concludes. In areas where chronic wasting disease and sarcoptic mange occur, it is unknown if potential disease transmission would be any higher during expanded training seasons vs. during the current bear hound training season or during hunting seasons when and where hounds are allowed for either species.

It is reasonable to conclude that intense chasing by hounds over extended time periods could lead to added physiological stress on deer or bear that are already in a state of compromised immunity, nutritional stress, or vigor. Relevant to timing, during the summer and early fall, deer with hemorrhagic disease are often weak due to a high fever and lack of foraging. They will often try to conserve energy by laying in cool shady areas and/or near or in water to relieve their high fever. Bears with sarcoptic mange are mostly reported each year in the spring and early summer, and again in late winter.

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Sporting Dog Coalition Proposal

Deer Hound Training Season

A deer hound training season would run from August 15 until September 30 - 7 days a week (Sunday thru Saturday.) *Other than the youth hunt day, there are no other seasons that would conflict with deer hound training and the use of hounds on YHD should be legalized to get the youth involved in the sport. The use of dogs on youth days should have been legalized years ago.*

Starting on October 1 and ending on Oct 31, the training season would start after 1:00 PM Sunday and include Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. *The rationale is to present a compromise with the bow hunters. Even though bow hunters would not be receptive to legalizing a deer hound training season during October, the present practice can have dogs training at anytime. This would give more assurance that the days with the highest bow hunter participation would be the days with the greatest chance of not being disturbed by deer hounds. This is not to say that bow hunters can't hunt seven days a week but it does give them an assurance of having 3 days that there should be no chance of interruption.*

It should be noted that this would have no effect on the existing year around fox season nor effect the open coyote hunting but, these are practices that are practiced in minimal numbers. An established deer hound training season would encourage participants to focus on the designated days and restrain from Thursday-Friday-Saturday.

This proposal also avoids conflicts or interruptions with most all rural church services.

Establishing a training season allows the hound owner to train the hounds to break off a track and return on command. This should help in reducing land owner complaints by preventing dogs from getting onto properties where they are not wanted.

The seven weeks of the general firearm season doesn't allow the time to focus on training.

In counties where muzzle loading season is legalized, the deer hound training season would be closed during the muzzle loading season.

The rationale would be that with the muzzle loading season comes an increased number of hunters. The increase of hunters are more likely to cause conflict with hound training. Plus, most hound hunters are hunting with muzzle loaders so, taking a two week break prior to the General Firearm season isn't a bad idea.

Once the general firearm season starts, any issue with training is irrelevant.

At the conclusion of the General Firearm season, the deer hound training season would be open until March 7.

Ending the training on March 7 would prevent any conflicts with fawn birthing. It also removes the hounds from the woods prior to spring gobbler season.

Deer hound training would be closed from the March 7 until August 15.

This resolves any conflicts with the spring gobbler hunter and protects newborn fawns as well as the bucks in velvet in June and July..

#1 – In order to participate in a deer hound training season, all dogs must be equipped with either GPS or telemetrix collars so the dogs can be monitored, tracked and retrieved in short order.

Free casting dogs to hunt and run on their own is not training.

#2 – It shall be a requirement for dog owners to stay in the accompaniment of the dogs being trained. Owners shall exhaust all reasonable efforts in attempting to retrieve the dogs prior to abandoning the dogs in the field and leaving them behind.

Dumping dogs and going home will be viewed as an unlawful practice. I realize that this will be near impossible to enforce but the idea is to identify what the expectation is. Across the board, there will be some that will abuse this privilege (but we have that already) The majority of the dog owners will appreciate the new established season enough to obey the law. The idea here is to make it an understanding that training dogs has its commitments.



AMERICAN BEAR FOUNDATION VIRGINIA CHAPTER

Virginia Chapter of the American Bear Foundation Requested Changes to the Virginia Bear Chase Season

The American Bear Foundation is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to the protection & development of bears, bear habitat, & bear hunting in the United States. The Virginia Chapter of the American Bear Foundation is the Commonwealth's own chapter founded by bear hunters to represent all bear hunters in the state, regardless of how we pursue bears, by legal means of harvest or season, and to ensure a future for bears and bear hunting in Virginia. The Chapter submits to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources the following request to modify the Bear Chase Season in the following ways, with justification to follow below.

The Virginia Chapter of the American Bear Foundation respectfully requests that the Bear Chase Season be expanded statewide to begin June 1 and run through to and include the first Friday in October, and during such time to be permitted 24-hours-per-day, then reopen beginning on the day of the opening of the Fall Firearms Bear Season in each county in the state with such a Fall Firearms Bear Season and run through to and including January 31st in all counties within the Commonwealth that have a Fall Firearms Bear Season, and during such times to be permitted during legal hunting hours.

Our request is made based upon several factors. These include: the Department's own Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2021, specifically Goal 4 (Recreational Opportunities), Goal 5 (Ethics of Bear-Related Recreation), and Goal 6 (Human-Bear Problems); the Department's Objectives to: Identify and Utilize Non-Lethal Options for Managing Bear Complaints, Reduce Negative Human-Bear Interactions, Identify and Implement Site-Specific Management Options to reduce Human-Bear Conflicts, and to Reduce Out-of-Season Agricultural Kill Permits; and the Department's own commitment to being open and responsive to public input from user constituent groups and to improving conditions around Recreational Opportunities involving bears, improving the Ethical Hunting of bears, and to reducing Human-Bear Problems. An expanded chase season will assist in accomplishing each and all those goals.

The overwhelming sentiment expressed by bear hound hunters, in online forums and social media posts, in Chapter conversations, and in Departmental public meetings, is to have an increased Bear Chase Season in the Commonwealth (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs.29, 97-98). The current Chase Seasons in Virginia are limited in both time and in geographic scope, with little continuity and create difficulty for hound hunters to properly train their dogs. Dogs that are more properly and well trained are less likely to be injured themselves or to unintentionally injure bear or other wildlife while engaged in bear hunting (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pg. 31). Adding the months of June and July, and the last weeks of January, to the chase season as well as expanding the chase season

statewide will assist in better training of dogs used for the hunting of bears in Virginia. As such, the proposed expansion of the chase season should be considered and adopted.

The expansion of the chase season as proposed will assist in the use of dogs as a means of mitigating Human-Bear Problems, such as bear-related agricultural damage and bear-related human conflict around residential, suburban, and urban communities, all goals of the Department (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 31-32, 72, 85-86). The use of dogs as a means of mitigating human-bear conflicts and agricultural damage fits within the reviewed and adopted scope of Adverse Conditioning and Repellents (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 47-48). As such, the proposed expansion of the chase season should be considered and adopted.

The current chase season does not begin until after the peak of the growing seasons for many agricultural crops, specifically bees, corn, wheat, grapes, and orchard crops (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pg. 32). Currently, agricultural producers may only work with dogs and their handlers under the auspices of an Agricultural Damage Kill Permit, and not strictly as a non-lethal intervention effort. The Department's Objective to Identify and Utilize Non-Lethal Options for Managing Bear Complaints is not assisted by the current chase season (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 83-84) The Department's Objective to Reduce Agricultural Kill Permits is not assisted by the current chase season (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 87-88) The proposed expansion would open the chase season during those peak growing seasons, specifically the months of June and July, and to do so statewide allowing agricultural producers to work with dogs and their handlers to mitigate bear-related crop damage via non-lethal management option while reducing reliance on kill permits. As such, the proposed expansion of the chase season should be considered and adopted.

The current chase season only allows for the pursuit of bears until 10:00 p.m. each day, mandating that bears, dogs, and humans are subjected to the intense heat of Virginia Augusts and Septembers, leading to increased potential for heat-related stress on all involved. The expansion of the chase season hours during the early portion of the season – as recommended and requested June through October – to include all 24 hours in the day allows for the use of dogs to mitigate crop damage to the greatest degree possible and for the chase to be conducted at night when temperatures are lower, mitigating potential heat-related stress on bears, dogs, and humans. The expansion to include all hours of the day, especially the cooler night-time hours, is a humane consideration for bears, dogs, and humans. As such, the proposed and requested expansion of the chase season should be considered and adopted.

The current chase season does not begin until after the mating and dispersal period for bears, and it is not open during the late winter feeding and foraging period primarily for young male bears (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 6, 31-32). The Department's Objective to Identify and Utilize Non-Lethal Options for Managing Bear Complaints is not assisted by the current chase season (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 83-84). The Department's Objective to Encourage and Support Bear Management Option to Reduce Negative Human Bear Interactions is not assisted by the current chase season (Black Bear Management Plan 2012-2022, pgs. 84-85). The proposed expansion would open the chase season statewide during the mating and dispersal period for bears allowing residential, suburban, and urban communities to work with dogs and their handlers to pursue bears in a variety of methods to mitigate human-bear conflicts during this period via non-lethal management option, moving bears unharmed from undesirable areas. The proposed expansion would open the chase season as well during the late feeding and foraging period for younger male bears, again allowing residential, suburban, and urban communities to work dogs and their handlers via non-lethal management option to mitigate human-bear conflicts around human refuse sites, bird feeding sites, and other areas of late bear concentration, moving bears unharmed from undesirable areas. As such, the proposed expansion of the chase season should be considered and adopted.