

Department of Wildlife Resources
Hunting with Hounds - Stakeholder Advisory Committee
August 10, 2023

Virginia State University – Randolph Farm & Pavilion
4415 River Road, South Chesterfield

Executive Summary

Sixteen primary members and 2 alternate members attended the first meeting of the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), held at the Randolph Farm Pavilion in South Chesterfield. Members heard from the Institute for Engagement & Negotiation facilitation team, and Department of Wildlife Resources project lead Jenn Allen about the work to date, and the expectations moving forward. The IEN team shared an overview of the Draft Stakeholder Assessment Report, which captures the information learned from a survey conducted by IEN with almost 9000 responses, as well as the 18 qualitative interviews. SAC members identified various pieces of information they would like to request from DWR that would be helpful for their understanding as the group moves forward.

The next meeting of the SAC will be on August 31st.

Welcome and Introductions

Kelly Altizer (*Associate Director of Operations, Institute for Engagement & Negotiation*) opened the meeting along with colleagues Mike Foreman (*Special Projects Manager, Institute for Engagement & Negotiation*), and Chamie Valentine (*Project Consultant, Institute for Engagement & Negotiation*). IEN is a public service organization of the University of Virginia with a 40+ year history of supporting groups to navigate contentious issues, and they will be facilitating the stakeholder engagement process.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) members were asked to introduce themselves by sharing their name, organization (if applicable), connection to this issue, and a brief description of why this issue is important to them. Meeting attendance was as follows:

- Chief Frank Adams, Upper Mattaponi Tribe
- Greg Austin, Virginia Bear Hunter's Association (alternate)
- Kirby Burch, Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance
- Daryl Butler, Virginia Farm Bureau

- Sean Clarkson, Virginia Chapter, American Bear Foundation
- Sherry Crumley, Citizen Representative
- William Gillette, Virginia Hound Heritage
- Dave Griffith, Virginia Deer Hunters Association
- Jim Hackett, Sporting Dog Coalition of Virginia
- Michael Hayes, Virginia Property Rights Alliance (alternate)
- Kristi Martel, Citizen Representative
- Nolan Nicely, Appalachian Habitat Association
- Steve Nicely, Virginia Bear Hunter's Association
- Debbie Oliver, Citizen Representative
- Chris Patton, Virginia Property Rights Alliance
- Donald Parham, B&W Hunt Club
- Andrew Pullen, Citizen Representative
- Darryl Toomer, Virginia Association of Responsible Sportsmen

Participants listed above are primary members unless otherwise noted. Alternate members participate in observer role only, though were included in the introduction portion of the meeting.

Many common threads were noted amongst members, even those who shared different perspectives. Most notable was the belief that it was time to find common ground on these issues and decrease the conflict with hunting with hounds and landowners.

Project Overview and Questions

Following introductions, Jenn Allen (*Assistant Chief - Wildlife Division, Department of Wildlife Resources*) shared an overview of this project. She emphasized DWR's appreciation for participants and gratitude for the time they are dedicating towards this effort and noted that the Board of Wildlife Resources is open to all recommendations that the SAC might be interested in making, not just those that are specific to regulations. She also described the difference in the authority of the Board (regulations) and that of the General Assembly (statutory law). Ms. Allen shared that DWR staff are available to support the SAC with information and technical expertise and that any requests for information from them can be channeled through IEN. She provided an overview of the timeline for the project, which is an anticipated five in person meetings to be held August – October, with the goal of submitting recommendations to the Board by the end of the year, though she also noted that if feedback from the Committee indicates a different timeline is needed, DWR would take that into consideration.

A SAC member observed that the Board doesn't currently have a meeting scheduled for December and wondered if that was going to change or if other plans were in place for the timing of delivery recommendations to the Board. Ms. Allen confirmed that no meeting was

currently planned. The same member noted that the Board meeting date in January falls after the deadline for submitting new legislation for consideration to the General Assembly.

Another committee member expressed the desire to see the committee avoid statutory-based recommendations, so as not to avoid “opening” up the law resulting in changes out of line with the coming SAC recommendations.

One committee member inquired about the possibility of virtual participation in the meetings in the event they can’t attend. Ms. Altizer answered this question to share that that isn’t something that IEN is able to offer to the nature of how the group will be doing its work moving forward, but that IEN will circulate a meeting summary following each meeting to help members stay up to speed, all members will receive all handouts, and IEN is willing to have a phone conversation with any members who missed meetings if they have questions once they’ve been able to review the materials.

Following her remarks, Ms. Allen departed the meeting to bring focus to the SAC itself and its important work.

Ground Rules

After a short break, Mr. Foreman facilitated a discussion with SAC members on the development of “ground rules” for how they want to work together this year. Members clearly acknowledged the potential for disagreement within the group and the need for civility and respect in their discussions.

Ground rules identified by the group include:

- Cell phones on “stun.”
- Keep communication open.
- There are no enemies – respect everybody.
- Explore diverse opinions.
- Start/end on time.
- Speak to the larger issue.
- Use courtesy when speaking.
- Anyone can call a “timeout” when needed.
- Bring a willingness to give/take.

Consensus

Ms. Altizer gave an overview of decision-making by consensus, which is how the SAC will develop their recommendations to the Board of Wildlife Resources. She explained that while many people are familiar with voting and a “major rules” approach, consensus is different, and is used to learn about interests and concerns in addition to where people land on a proposal.

Testing for consensus involves asking members to evaluate a proposal and to respond with a 3, 2, or 1 to reflect their corresponding level of support:

- 3 = full support for the proposal
- 2 = I have some questions or concerns, but I can live with it
- 1 = I do not support the proposal

If any members of the group are a 1, the proposal does not move forward. Instead, anyone indicating a 1 would be asked to share what changes it would take to move them to a 2 or a 3, which allows for greater understanding within the group about what is important to each member. The proposal would be gradually adjusted to incorporate changes as feedback is gathered, and another test for consensus would be conducted to determine if concerns had been addressed. If all members indicate that they are a 2 or 3, consensus has been achieved. If most members are 2s, consensus has been achieved but it is weak. If one member indicated a 1, consensus has not been achieved and the proposal as it is written would not advance as a final recommendation from the group.

The consensus-based approach for decision making gives all members an influence on the final recommendations and ultimately results in stronger recommendations that meet the needs of more members.

Presentation of Stakeholder Assessment Report + Q&A

In June and July 2023, IEN conducted a “situational assessment” which included extensive engagement on this issue in the form of an electronic survey, which received almost 9,000 responses, and 18 qualitative interviews. The results of that engagement are captured in a Draft Stakeholder Assessment Report, which SAC members received on Tuesday prior to the first meeting.

In this segment, Mr. Foreman and Ms. Altizer presented the content of the Draft Stakeholder Assessment Report, including common themes and key takeaways from the surveys and interviews. Their slides were provided to SAC members as a handout, along with the Executive Summary of the draft report. IEN is receiving feedback on any areas where clarification might be needed in the report, and it will be finalized and distributed to members prior to the next SAC meeting. In addition, the DWR Board members received the draft report, and their comments will be included in any revision.

Ms. Valentine facilitated group questions about the presentation, and a member was interested in what bear-specific information might be able to be pulled from the survey results. Ms. Altizer shared that no species-specific question was asked in the survey, so any direct results are not offered in that way, but that IEN can pull bear-related comments from throughout the survey results to share with the group.

Ms. Valentine shared the areas of focus that IEN sees as a place for the SAC to begin their work at the next meeting. These areas were drawn from the common themes of the survey and interviews, and are as follows:

1. Law Enforcement
2. Safety
3. Use of Public Lands
4. Use of Technology
5. Education and Community Engagement
6. Increase Ethical Hunting Practices
7. Consideration of Other State Approaches
8. Anything else?

Members expressed an interest in considering how local laws and ordinances might be integrated into the list above. "Education" was also mentioned and was grouped with "Community Engagement" on the list.

During this segment members also noted the information they would like to request from DWR to help them gain a greater understanding of this issue. This list included:

- Complaint data by species and region (locations of infractions - interest is in where most infractions occur), and timing (in season or out of season)
- Law enforcement
 - Conservation Police Officer (CPO) vacancy rate and steps being taken to fill empty slots
 - The number of CPO positions that DWR has currently authorized/filled/# graduating (or expected to join the ranks soon).
 - Peak number of wardens and what year was that peak?
 - What is the expectation for game wardens in terms of area coverage?
 - Turnover rate
 - Rate of pay
 - Type and amount of conflict resolution/in-service training received in the academy
 - CPO assignments - this was specifically about the expectations for CPOs to cover lake/water assignments, and how that might impact CPO coverage and availability for hunter/landowner conflicts

Next steps

Ms. Altizer shared that a meeting summary will be developed by IEN and distributed to group members following each meeting. She will also be following up with the group to inquire about their availability for future meeting dates. The next meeting of the group will be on August 31st.

She thanked everyone for their participation, and the meeting adjourned.