

Department of Wildlife Resources
Hunting with Hounds - Stakeholder Advisory Committee
August 31, 2023

Virginia Department of Forestry-New Kent Forestry Center
11301 Pocahontas Trail, Providence Forge, VA

Executive Summary

Sixteen primary members and 2 alternate members attended the second meeting of the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), held at the New Kent Forestry Center in Providence Forge. Members worked in groups to identify areas where they would like more information, including the possibility of presentations by experts. Members also participated in small groups discussions about 4 topics identified as common themes in the Stakeholder Assessment Report and by the SAC at the first SAC meeting

The next meeting of the SAC will be on September 11th.

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*). The IEN team serves as facilitators for the SAC.

Ryan Brown (*Executive Director, Department of Wildlife Resources*) noted that he and other members of the DWR team were in attendance to learn from the SAC. He also emphasized how valuable the work of the committee is for the agency and thanked the members for their work.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) members were asked to introduce themselves by sharing their name and organization or seat represented on the committee. Members attending for the first time were also asked to share their connection to the issue.

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
- Joel Cathey, Citizen Representative
- Sean Clarkson, Virginia Chapter, American Bear Foundation
- Bill Collins, Citizen Representative

- 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)
- Rachel Jones, Louisa County
- Kevin Marshall, Spotsylvania County
- Nolan Nicely, Appalachian Habitat Association
- Steve Nicely, Virginia Bear Hunter's Association
- Debbie Oliver, Citizen Representative
- Chris Patton, Virginia Property Rights Alliance

Participants listed above are primary members unless otherwise noted. Alternate members participated in observer role only.

DWR team members attending to observe included:

- Jenn Allen, Assistant Chief of the Wildlife Division (DWR project manager for the SAC)
- Ryan Brown, Director
- Jon Cooper, Board of Wildlife Resources
- Aaron Proctor, Policy Manager
- Major Ryan Shuler, Deputy Chief of Law Enforcement

Stacey Brown, Boating Division Deputy Director attended the meeting to assist with small group facilitation.

Ground Rules, Meeting Summary, and Process Review

Mr. Foreman reminded the group of the ground rules developed at the first meeting. Ms. Altizer reviewed the Meeting Summary of the August 10th meeting, which members received as a handout. She noted that members had received some of the information that they had requested at the first meeting by email. For the complaint data request, she shared that DWR had provided that information to IEN and the IEN team was working with DWR to determine how to provide the raw data in a manner that helps readers understand it.

One member reiterated his requested bear-related comments from the survey, and Ms. Altizer shared that the IEN team was still working on it and would get it to the SAC as quickly as possible.

Ms. Altizer also provided an overview of the agenda for the day, noting that the small group work would begin by discussing the first four topics recognized as common themes in the Stakeholder Assessment Report and by the SAC and would continue this discussion into the next meeting with the additional common themes identified by the Stakeholder Assessment Report and SAC members. Future meetings will also include presentations from experts on

issues identified by the SAC. SAC members have indicated more information is needed to be able to make informed recommendations.

Topic Review and Information Gathering

Ms. Valentine reviewed the common theme topics addressed by the SAC at the first meeting and shared that the SAC would be breaking into three groups, where each group would review all topics and identify what additional information they needed to be prepared to make recommendations. Members were also asked to note experts who could speak to those topics.

Ms. Valentine listed the following topics, noting that they were offered as a starting point for the group discussion and that there was room for the addition of other topics and/or for topics to be combined in some way.

- Law Enforcement
- Use of Public Lands
- Use of Technology
- Community Engagement + Education
- Safety
- Continued Work on Ethical Hunting Practices
- Consideration of Other State's Approaches

A member offered the following additional topics:

- Property rights
- Lack of accountability
- Statutory and Regulatory Considerations

Some members expressed their view that “the problem” the group is trying to address should be defined before beginning group work, to focus the discussion, since the topics mean different things to each person, and vary depending in significance to each member. The IEN team shared that it is precisely because of these different views that the group work would be so important, because it would provide an opportunity for SAC members to learn from one another in the smaller group setting.

A SAC member stated his opinion that addressing the Right to Retrieve (RTR) law was a major reason for the conflicts and needed to be recognized as a goal of the SAC. IEN explained that although the RTR is not one of the topics covered separately in the current discussion, it is embedded within each of the other topics, and that future SAC discussions will focus on aspects of the RTR. IEN shared with the group that because each member of the SAC represents different perspectives throughout Virginia and those perspectives are based on different life experiences and knowledge, it is crucial to begin from the ground up to enable each member to understand each other's underlying interests and concerns and be able to address those

underlying interests and concerns when building consensus on recommendations to present to the Board of the DWR.

The SAC was divided into three groups, where each group considered the following questions for each of the initial topics listed above:

- What additional information do you need to make robust recommendations on this topic?
- What are the parts of this topic you need to learn more about?
- Are you aware of any experts on this topic whom you believe would advance our thinking?

Members expressed interest in learning more about existing laws and regulations, support for law enforcement and law enforcement efforts, applicable technology, approaches that have been taken in other states and if/how those have worked (with regard to managing the population, and the economic impact to the state), DWR's current education and outreach efforts, and the role of Counties in this issue.

Small Group Work: Beginning Development of Recommendations

After the identification of information needs, SAC members were divided into four groups and rotated through stations to begin an initial exploration of what components might need to be included in recommendations about each of the following topics:

Law Enforcement

- How would you like to improve law enforcement efforts? In your view, what changes are needed?

Use of Public Lands

- Consider expanding the use of public lands for hound hunting.

Use of Technology

- How can technology be used to improve relations between landowner and hound hunters?

Community Engagement + Education

- How can community engagement and education be used to improve relations and increase understanding between landowners and hound hunters?

Below please find the notes recorded on flip charts for each group listed (a reminder that these constitute initial ideas and points for exploration only):

Law Enforcement

- Increase the number of Conservation Police Officers (CPO's) within problem area counties.
- Increase the number of CPO's statewide.
- Address trespassing issues (Code 18.2-132.1).
 - Intent is difficult to show and prove – How can this concern be addressed?
- Increase CPO training.
 - Casework
 - Conflict resolution
 - Also improve relationships and knowledge shared with other law enforcement officers.
- Increase pay for officers at all levels.
- Increase support from Commonwealth Attorneys.
 - What is the best way to hold hunters who break hunting laws accountable?
 - How can more infractions be addressed by Commonwealth Attorneys?
 - Particularly youth offenses?
 - Perhaps utilize a model like DMV's model for addressing youth infractions
- Consider the "Three strikes, you're out law" in Maine.
- Increase nighttime patrols.
- Increase Law Enforcement's ability to detect and record fraudulent complaints and determine recourse.
- Improve analysis of complaint data and provide the data by location – geographically on a graph or map (visually).
- Develop an ombudsman program or crisis center for dispute resolution between landowners and hunters/hunt clubs.
 - Most important for areas with high complaints
 - How could this kind of program be funded?

Use of Public Lands

- On Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), there is too much local discretion on management and allowing hunting with hounds.
- On WMA's, some deed restrictions do not allow hunting.
- No one size fits all.
- In areas of conflict, open the WMA management plan and allow hunting .
- What is the number of WMA's open to hunting?
 - 46 total WMA
 - 15 closed

- 14 west of the “dog line”
 - Leaving 31 with the option if opening up more
 - Some WMA’s have some types of hunting but not others, etc.
- WMA’s could develop better scheduling and management allowing structured hunts for certain species at various times.
 - Some for veteran and handicapped hunts
- Federal Lands - Possible Options to Pursue
 - Military installations – installations such as Fort Barfoot, formerly Fort Pickett
 - 46K acres not available
 - US Fish and Wildlife Service - land such as the James River land, currently with no hunting permitted
- Form a state and federal agency group and form a coalition to develop a statewide plan for federal land and hunting.
- Road hunting as public land
 - Locality-based enforcement, no uniformity here either
 - Need state uniform rules!
- Some Counties allow hunting on their county-owned land
 - Not consistent either
 - Typically by permit
 - Liability issues of concern

Use of Technology

- DWR app to track complaints – building off of DWR’s electronic check-in infrastructure
- Telephone – property posted with landowner phone numbers and names.
- Tracking collars – setting boundaries
- Use of geofencing – What does it actually entail, and how is it implemented?
 - Limits in rural areas?
 - Absentee property owners not wanting to be contacted
- FCC licenses – purchase channels for each club (\$600/10 years/3 channels)
- Level of investment – many hound hunters have a lot of money already invested in their current technology
- Hound horn – tool with constraints
- What percentage of hounds have tracking collars? How can we reduce the cost to incentivize this?
- Tracking box as a means of communicating with landowners (Can ID exact location of the hound on their property.)
- Trail cameras communicate what has occurred and often act as surveillance.
- Citizens Band (CB) radio – Other hunt clubs can listen in. (possible negative impacts of other hunters knowing your location).
- Privacy issues
- Microchip requirement OR encouraged (for everybody, not just hound hunters).

- How to manage microchips for hounds changing hands
- Give game wardens the ability to scan for microchip.
- SPCA could more easily identify repeat offenders.
- Landowners to use electric fencing

Community Engagement & Education

- Notice to each Clerk of Court regarding right to retrieve
 - real estate discourse statement
 - property value?
- Hunting Education
 - include information about the hunting dog owner's code of ethics
- Problem areas
 - DWR hold public info meetings & discussion for community involvement
- Conflict resolution during this meeting
 - At local level/ county level or smaller
- Public info with conflict
- Education for landowners, how to properly mark their property
- Community-based law enforcement & public information vs. state-wide
- Provide many resources on county websites to inform the public about hound hunting.
 - Sussex County website & Farm Bureau
- Public Service announcements
- People engaging in dog hunting need to be educated on the laws & code of ethics
- Education for landowners & hunters on:
 - What are the laws regarding property rights
 - How to report dog hunting
 - Dog collar requirements & other related laws
- DWR Website
 - very specific information for landowners & dog hunters about laws
 - easy to use & find
- Hunt Clubs meet their neighbors
 - create a public relation committee inside club
- Recognition of Hunt Clubs who are practicing proper ethical dog hunting
- History of dog hunting - heritage – to understand where it come from & how it has evolved
- -DWR Hunter Education Course – additional course on Hunting with Dogs in Virginia to include taking care of dogs, ethics, seasons, tips/tactics, laws, mapping/planning a hunt

When small groups finished their work, facilitators for each station shared a brief recap of the notes on what each group had covered.

Next Steps

Ms. Altizer shared that the IEN team would begin working with DWR to make arrangements for the presentations needed for future meetings, and that the project team was hopeful that these could begin at the next meeting on September 11th. Before concluding, one member shared a request to see complaint data charted on a map of the state.

Ms. Altizer thanked everyone for attending, and the meeting adjourned.