

HUNTING WITH HOUNDS IN VIRGINIA: A WAY FORWARD

STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT



SARAH G. LUPIS KOZLOWSKI, STEVE L. McMULLIN, JAMES A. PARKHURST
DEPARTMENT OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE SCIENCES, VIRGINIA TECH



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INTRODUCTION

In July 2007, the Board of Game and Inland Fisheries (Board) in Virginia approved the initiation of a comprehensive public involvement process with the goal of “providing diverse opportunities for hunting with hounds in Virginia in a manner that is fair, sportsmanlike, and consistent with the rights of property owners and other citizens.” Facilitated by human dimensions faculty from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences at Virginia Tech, this process provided opportunities for participation by more than 6,000 individual citizens. A key component of this process was the formation of an 18-member Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) the members of which were charged with identifying issues related to hunting with hounds, evaluating potential solutions, and making recommendations to the Board about how to achieve the project’s stated goal. This report summarized the process the SAC engaged in and presents their final recommendations.

In an initial phase of the public input process, 157 people participated in 13 focus group meetings conducted across the Commonwealth (McMullin et al. 2008). Focus group participants were selected because they represented a broad spectrum of stakeholder interests, and were invited to attend a session by VDGIF and Virginia Tech personnel. Many of these participants previously had contacted the VDGIF and expressed an interest in participating. Others were selected for invitation because of their past involvement in hound hunting issues, either as a hunter, hunt club member, landowner, or other related capacity. Many of the participants are recognized leaders in their communities, whereas others represented the views of local hunt clubs, sportsmen's groups, and kennel clubs.

Individuals invited to sit on the 18-member SAC (Table 1) came largely from the larger pool of focus group participants. The SAC was carefully structured to ensure a balance between stakeholders representing those who hunt with hounds and stakeholders who represent citizens who do not hunt with hounds. Nine members of the committee represented the various hound-hunting stakeholder groups (i.e., mounted fox hunters, non-mounted fox hunters, bear hound-hunters, deer hound-hunters, raccoon hound-hunters, and rabbit hound-hunters) and nine represented private landowners, non-hound hunters, federal land management/law enforcement agency (U.S. Forest Service), corporate land owners (Mead Westvaco), and animal control.

After several months of information gathering, issue identification, and engaged deliberations, the SAC has produced a series of recommended strategies to address issues and concerns related to hunting with hounds in Virginia. These recommended strategies have taken into account the input gathered through the focus group meetings, letters and e-mails sent directly to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (Lupis Kozlowski et al. 2008), results from a web-based and a paper informal survey (McMullin et al. 2008), e-mailed and written comments solicited on draft recommendations, and the personal experiences of each SAC member. As part of this deliberative process, SAC members identified and prioritized issues, developed and prioritized potential strategies, and developed and voted on recommended strategies that sought to address the identified issues and concerns related to hunting with hounds in the Commonwealth. Summary notes from SAC meetings are available on-line at:

<http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/hunting/hounds/stakeholder-advisory-committee.asp> .

Table 1. Members of the Hunting with Hounds Stakeholder Advisory Committee (in alphabetical order by last name) and the stakeholder group they represent.

Committee Member	Stakeholder Group
Carroll Dickenson	Non-hound Hunter
William Easter	Non-mounted Fox Hunter
Emmett Edmonds	Animal Control
Joyce Fendley	Mounted Fox Hound Hunter
Lt. Col. Dennis J. Foster	Mounted Fox Hound Hunter
Buddy Fowler	Rabbit Hound Hunter
Ben Fulton	Private Landowner
Jim Hackett	Deer Hound Hunter
L. Nick Hall	Non-hound Hunter
Woody Lipps	Law Enforcement, U.S. Forest Service
John Payne	Deer Hound Hunter
Lyndell Price	Raccoon Hound Hunter
John Rawls, Jr.	Deer Hound Hunter
Greg Scheere	Corporate Land Manager, Mead Westvaco
David Shelor	Bear Hound Hunter
David Steger	Private Landowner
Wilmer Stoneman	Private Landowner and Virginia Federation of Farm Bureaus
Robin Weinhold	Private Landowner, Non-consumptive Recreationist

To achieve the status of “Recommended Strategy,” a two-thirds vote of support was necessary from the SAC; other recommendations that failed to attain the necessary two-thirds vote of support after group deliberations were not considered further and are not reported on here. An explanation of the reasons that underlie some individual SAC members’ positions on these final recommendations is provided in Appendix A.

It is important to note that the final recommendations of the SAC presented here will not be adopted automatically. All of the recommendations must be further considered by the VDGIF, the Board or the Virginia General Assembly (and perhaps other governmental bodies). As a result, none of the strategies will be adopted without additional opportunities for public review through normal VDGIF and Board regulatory processes or the Commonwealth’s legislative processes.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

On the following pages, the final recommendations of the SAC are presented, exactly as they were finalized and voted on by the SAC. In some cases, a recommendation may be a single statement or concise paragraph; in others, the recommendation may consist of a series of statements or multiple paragraphs that attempt to encompass the complexity of the base issue being addressed or objectives being sought. Therefore, readers should recognize that the recommendation being offered by the SAC includes all of the language appearing under each strategy heading.

IMPROVE LAW ENFORCEMENT

Approved by the SAC: 18 votes for, 0 against, 0 abstentions

Improve enforcement of all laws and regulations by increasing the number of conservation police officers (CPOs) employed by the VDGIF, increasing coordination between VDGIF CPOs and other enforcement agencies, and providing better training to all enforcement agency personnel.

While the specific increase in staffing needed is not known, the Hunting with Hounds Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) recommends that additional staffing include officers in the field, dispatchers, and support personnel (e.g., database managers). In addition, the SAC recommends that additional field staff be concentrated in problem areas during specific times of the year.

Although VDGIF CPOs and other law enforcement agencies currently engage in some coordinated efforts, additional coordination is needed especially related to officer dispatch resulting from calls to 911 or local law enforcement, specific problem areas, and training on laws and regulations as they apply to situations related to hunting with hounds (i.e., right to retrieve, trespass). Increased coordination also is needed to better track complaints and violations related to hunting with hounds (see Strategy on Better Record Keeping).

The SAC recommends that training for all wildlife professionals VDGIF CPOs, biologists, managers, etc. include specific modules on the culture, tradition, and practices of the various disciplines of hound-hunting. In addition, training for VDGIF and local/911 dispatchers should include content specific to hunting with hounds to enable prioritization of calls and increased efficiency in the delivery of information to the appropriate responding agency.

IMPROVE RECORD KEEPING

Approved by the SAC: 18 votes for, 0 against, 0 abstentions

Improve record keeping on violations and complaints received by VDGIF CPOs, VDGIF staff, dispatchers, local law enforcement agencies, and local animal control. The SAC recommends that more comprehensive, consistent, and standardized records be kept for example:

- Disposition of violations (e.g., were tickets issued, convictions made, charges dropped, etc.)
- Geographic location
- Victim/complainant
- Violators

Of issues related to hunting with hounds, better record keeping for those related to traffic violations/complaints, trespass violations/complaints, lost/abandoned dogs, and hunting from the road is especially needed. Data collection should be incorporated into existing database frameworks (i.e., CAD, STARS) where possible. Finally, data should be easily retrievable by law enforcement agencies and the VDGIF.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Approved by the SAC: 17 votes for, 1 vote against, 0 abstentions

Seek permanent, new funding for VDGIF law enforcement to support the implementation of strategies related to increased law enforcement and better record keeping. Implementation of these strategies being recommended by the SAC will require additional resources; existing funding sources are likely insufficient and many of the agency's existing sources of funding prevent significant reallocation of funding within the agency. The burden of funding law enforcement should be born equitably by all users of wildlife resources; the hunting and fishing public should not be solely responsible for providing additional monies.

INCREASE PENALTIES AND FINES

Approved by the SAC: 18 votes for, 0 against, 0 abstentions

Increase penalties and fines for game law and regulation violations to increase compliance with existing laws and regulations, especially those related to high priority issues like trespassing, violations of Virginia's right-to-retrieve law, road hunting, traffic violations, and hunting out of season. Repeat offenders should be dealt with harshly. Minimum, mandatory penalties should be established for violations, especially those associated with high priority issues, as listed above. Additional mandatory education for violators is also recommended. Finally, public information campaigns should be developed that inform stakeholders about increased penalties in order to encourage compliance with existing laws and regulations and deter unlawful behavior.

TRAINING SEASONS

Approved by the SAC: 14 votes for, 4 votes against, 0 abstentions

Establish training seasons that:

- 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

- Provide for a period where there would be no hound-hunting or training, with few exceptions

Possible exceptions to synchronized training seasons and the period without hound-hunting or training should include raccoon hound-hunting and/or mounted and non-mounted fox hunts, provided that the latter could be differentiated from deer-hound training/hunting under false pretenses.

Specific dates should be determined during a formal VDGIF rule-making process, but should avoid allowing hound-training or hunting during times when wildlife are breeding and/or rearing young. Specific objectives to be addressed:

- Need to exercise deer dogs
- Need to train deer dogs
- Need to differentiate between types of dogs (fox hunting loophole)
- Need to protect existing training seasons
- Separate hound and still hunting
- Protect birthing periods for wildlife

HUNTING FROM OR NEAR ROADS

Approved by the SAC: 15 votes for, 3 votes against, 0 abstentions

The SAC recommends that the VDGIF Board address road hunting so that:

- Hunting of property where permission has not been granted would be curtailed;
- “LINING THE ROADS” (i.e., vehicles along roads) would be reduced or curtailed;
- This does not affect the existing right of hunters to retrieve their hounds

Specific changes to rules or laws should be established through the existing regulation development and/or General Assembly protocol.

MODIFY VIRGINIA'S RIGHT-TO-RETRIEVE LAW

Approved by the SAC: 13 votes for, 5 votes against, 0 abstentions

Modify Virginia's right-to-retrieve law such that:

- Hunters would be required to make a reasonable attempt to contact landowner prior to retrieval of hounds from posted private property,
- Landowners would be required to thoroughly post their property with contact information, and
- Private property that is not properly posted would be presumed open to retrieval.

It may be necessary to make exceptions to these modifications for treeing hounds (i.e., raccoon, bear, and fox hounds) that are trained not to leave quarry unless called off by hunters.

IDENTIFICATION FOR HUNTING DOGS

Approved by the SAC: 17 votes for, 0 against, 1 abstention

It is recommended that some type of hound identification be established that links dogs with hunters or the hunt clubs that own them. It is recommended that owner contact information be displayed on a plate or tag affixed to a collar. External identification is recommended 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.

It is also recommended that the penalty for removal of an identification collar or tracking collar be increased to discourage removal and/or destruction of collars and/or equipment.

EDUCATION/TRAINING PROGRAM

Approved by the SAC: 17 votes for, 1 vote against, 0 abstentions

The VDGIF, in cooperation with hunting organizations, individual hunt clubs, and other relevant stakeholders, should develop and promote educational materials regarding hunting with hounds. These materials should be made available in multiple formats (e.g., web-based, paper, brochures, established/new training programs) and should target the needs of hound-hunters, non-hound hunters, and landowners.

Educational materials developed for hunters should emphasize how changes in society dictate the need for changes in behavior, promote respect for landowners, outline best practices, and clearly define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

For landowners and non-hound hunters, educational materials should help to increase understanding of hunting with hounds. Potential topics include what a hunting hound in good condition looks like and how tools like telemetry collars, fox hunting training facilities, and two-way radios help to resolve conflicts between hound-hunters and others. The goal of these materials would be to develop a greater awareness and acceptance of hound-hunting culture and practices.

ESTABLISH CODES OF ETHICS

Approved by the SAC: 16 votes for, 0 against, 2 abstentions

Develop a code of ethics for hound-hunters that outline expectations for ethical behavior and best practices. The code could be drawn from existing codes of ethics used by hound hunting organizations and should address:

- Ethics and practices for developing positive relationships with landowners
- Following game laws and regulations
- Practices that promote proper treatment of hounds and quarry
- Practices that reduce traffic/road-related conflicts
- Hold violators of established codes of ethics accountable

Codes of ethics should be voluntarily adopted, endorsed, and/or promoted at many levels (i.e., statewide organizations, local hunt clubs, individuals) to help increase awareness and compliance. Items included in any code should be specific to the type of hunting engaged in and important issues in a particular locality.

HOLD VIOLATORS ACCOUNTABLE

Approved by the SAC: 17 votes for, 0 against, 1 abstention

It is recommended that members of the hound-hunting, non-hound hunting, and landowner community hold accountable those who violate game laws and regulations or act in unsportsmanlike, unethical ways by:

- Participating in the investigation and/or prosecution of complaints
- Establishing and enforcing penalties and/or taking away privileges for engaging in bad behavior
- Establishing accreditation for members of associations, organizations, or clubs
- Creating an easy avenue for complaints to be filed
- Mandating additional education for egregious or repeat violations of game laws and/or regulations

- Hold violators accountable for violations of codes of ethics

The SAC intends that this strategy be implemented by Virginia's citizens, and its implementation be endorsed and promoted by the VDGIF, local governments, hound-hunting organizations, sportsman's groups, and individual hunt clubs.

LITERATURE CITED

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McMullin, S., S. G. Lupis Kozlowski, and B. Wright. 2008. Summary of responses to web-based and paper informal surveys regarding hunting with hounds in Virginia. Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, USA.

VDGIF. 2008. Hunting with Hounds in Virginia: A Way Forward Technical Report. Hound-Hunting Technical Committee, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Richmond, Virginia, USA.

APPENDIX A.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee
Final Recommendation Rational

This Appendix contains a compilation of the reasons individual members of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) offered for their support or non-support of the final recommendations. These comments were voluntarily submitted and, as a result, comments may not be available for all members of the SAC. Comments are presented in alphabetical order by SAC member last name.

Ben Fulton, Private Landowner

Improve Law Enforcement, Improve Record Keeping, and Increased Penalties and Fines. These recommendations all received unanimous votes. These recommendations will do little or nothing to relieve the current problems between property owners, general public, and hound hunters.

Increased Funding for Law Enforcement. I voted for this recommendation but had seriously considered not supporting it. CPOs are leaving the department at an alarming rate. Unless they are better compensated this trend will continue. At the same time, I know there is little chance that Virginia can afford to provide additional funding. I am also very leery of funding coming to the department from sources other than hunting, boating and fishing.

Training Seasons. I supported this recommendation because it states that the deer hounds must be on property that they have permission to train on, and it also states that it should not interfere with other hunting seasons. The most important recommendation in this proposal is the differentiation between types of hunting dogs. This will close “fox hunting loophole”, the act of calling a deer hound a fox hound so they can train any time of year. I would not have supported this proposal without these qualifiers. The only way to close this loophole is to register all hunt clubs and their hounds. This registration will also improve accountability of hound-hunters. It is important that this training season not interfere with bow or muzzleloader seasons. Hound owners should be held responsible if their deer hounds do not stay on property that they have permission to train on.

Hunting From/Near Roads. I supported this strategy because it is important to stop the act of deer dog hunters releasing hounds from the road onto property where they do not have permission. This will also help to improve the image of the hound-hunter to the general public by getting them off the public roads. It is my hope that the board will also make it unlawful to have a loaded weapon on a state road. This will give the CPOs the needed tools to fight road hunting.

Modify Virginia’s Right-to-Retrieve Law. I voted against this strategy. Virginia’s right-to-retrieve law is being abused by deer hound-hunters who use the law to gain access to property

where they do not have permission. This is accomplished by the dogs being released onto a property where they do not have permission and a driver will guide the dogs through the posted land. The driver does not carry a weapon and is on foot. If the land owner catches the driver he claims he is just trying to catch his dogs, when in fact he is hunting the posted land without permission. The goal of the driver is to jump the game on the posted land so that it can be driven to the next road or property that the club members can cut it off. The right-to-retrieve law is giving these hound-hunters the means to hunt anyone's land they please without breaking any laws. This proposal does nothing to address the real problems with the right-to-retrieve law. It is unfortunate that other forms of hound-hunting have been drug into this debate, but deer hound-hunters have no need to gain access to posted lands. Their hounds will leave the posted property when the chase is over or the quarry leaves. It should not be required of land owners to place their private phone numbers on posted signs, and it is naïve to believe that hunters won't claim that they tried to call the land owner but got no answer, when caught on posted lands.

Identification for Hunting Dogs. I supported this recommendation. This will help in reuniting hounds with the owners and also help with accountability of hound owners.

Education/Training Program. I voted against this proposal. I do not believe that this will be effective in solving any problems. The VDGIF should not waste money on this type of program in these tight budget times. I do not believe that Virginia's private property owners and non-hunters need to be educated about hound-hunting. They are not the ones that are causing the conflicts.

Establish Codes of Ethics. I supported this proposal but I feel that it will have little, if any, success in solving any existing problems.

Hold Violators Accountable. I supported this proposal but I do not believe this contains anything that will correct hound-hunting's problems.

Jim Hackett, Deer Hound-Hunter

Improve Law Enforcement. I supported this recommendation because:

- Information obtained during the study revealed that over 800 complaints for game law infractions were never investigated.
- Statistics show that there are only 1.2 Conservation Police Officers (CPOs) per county in the state of Virginia.
- Over 1000 letters and emails were received by the SAC from the public. In these letters it was observed that there are areas that have more problems than others.

It seems clear that more law enforcement is needed, especially in certain hot spots around the state. Though hiring extra CPO's would help greatly, pending budget cuts of 15% make that an unlikely outcome. To help with the problem, county and state police need to be trained on the enforcement of game laws. This will help provide the needed support that over-taxed CPO's could use.

Improve Record Keeping. I supported this recommendation. From the start, there were questions and doubts about the validity of numbers and statistics used to justify the hound study. Information received from several outside sources gave evidence that many numbers given by VDGIF were misquoted or incorrect. Further research into the record keeping process revealed that the data provided to the SAC was a result of a poorly organized system and not a purposeful intent on part of the VDGIF. The SAC recognized that it is important for the future of hound hunting that accurate data be collected during investigations—regardless of whether CPO's, county police, or state police investigate a complaint. The questions asked and the data recorded must be consistent to assure that all issues are measured “apples-to-apples”. In a few years, the information that is collected will help provide statistical data that can be used to measure improving or degrading trends.

Increased Funding For Law Enforcement. I supported this recommendation. The lack of CPO's in the field, the initiation of a new record keeping process, training of other law enforcement officers, and an attempt to reduce the enormous turnover rate of CPO's will only be resolved with money.

Increased Penalties and Fines. I supported this recommendation. The conviction rate for game law infractions is very low. This seems to be caused by local courts not taking game law crimes seriously. When violators get a slap on the wrist or charges totally dropped, little has been achieved in deterring these incidents from reoccurring. In the end, the public starts to stereotype all hound-hunters as law breaking criminals. The law alone must be the muscle that keeps hound- hunters practicing their sport in a lawful manner. For those that choose to practice the sport unlawfully let them fall under the yoke of justice. When the penalty is clear and unbending, and the fines are increased, it actually becomes a deterrent to criminal activity. For those who are repeat offenders, the penalties need to be even more severe.

Training Seasons. I supported this recommendation. Complaints from the public were identified and prioritized. Conflicts between still hunters (i.e., bow, black powder, and spring gobbler seasons) and running hounds that are being trained was one of the top three issues. The study revealed that it was most often the training of deer hounds that was causing the conflict. It was also identified that there is no legal training season for deer hounds. All other hounds that give chase have an established training season. Because deer hounds do not, they are most often run under the guise of the 365-day-24/7 fox hound training season. Researching the other nine states

that have deer hound hunting, it was identified that six of them had a training season of some type; only Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia do not. I felt that if a reasonable period for a deer hound training season could be established, this would provide the means to allow training of the hounds and, at the same time, provide the time of solitude for the still hunters. The key to this success of this recommendation will be the period designated in October. Still hunters and hound-hunters alike want the woods at that time and both have equal rights to it. With compromising attitudes they will both come out winners. One item I was concerned about the proposal was the bullet for “need to differentiate between types of dogs”. I was in opposition to this inclusion but was assured by representatives from the VDGIF Technical Committee that this did not necessarily mean the issuance of permits. At this time I am not in favor of a permit/registration system because an overwhelming majority of recorded results from the SAC, Technical Committee, and public are not in support of it at this time.

Hunting From or Near Roads. I supported this recommendation. In discussions, the SAC identified that the purpose of this recommendation was to stop hound-hunters from releasing hounds from the road onto properties that were posted. The discussion became complicated when the legalities of road easements came into it. The discussion on this subject became pressed for time so it was decided to pass it up to the VDGIF Board to address. I voted for this proposal but, having more time to rethink this, I regret that decision because I don't believe that the intent of the strategy was clear enough. I think it needed to be made perfectly clear that the purpose of the strategy is to prevent the release of hounds from public roads onto property where there is no permission to hunt. Time should not have been allowed to be factor in any decision.

Right-To-Retrieve. I supported this recommendation. Obviously, this was the most controversial issue of all. The SAC struggled with this throughout the sixth meeting. In the end, no agreement was reached on what to do with this. So when the proposals went to the public, this was one item that was left open ended.

Input from the public was strong on both sides. One side did not want to touch the law while the other side wanted it totally abolished. In the public forums, the right-to-retrieve law was defended by just about everyone. There were only a few spoke out against it. The email responses we received included many opposed to the right-to-retrieve law but, if numbers were the only deciding factor, then those in favor of the right-to-retrieve law would have clearly won out. In my opinion, the decision on what to do with this law is not about numbers. The most in favor don't necessarily win in this case; this is about what is right. Is it right for a hound owner to access another's property showing total disregard and disrespect to the owner? Is it right for hunters to use the right-to-retrieve law as their ticket to access another's property for the purpose of driving off game? On the other hand, is it right for a landowner to deny hound-hunters the right to retrieve hounds for no reason, just because he can, even when they can prove that the hound is there? Is it right that hound-hunters can be denied access to hounds when not retrieving

puts the hound in danger? There were many more tough questions surrounding this issue. I listened to all sides. I read and felt sympathy for some landowners. Being a hound owner, I have felt the equal pains when I have found my hounds deliberately killed, stolen, or run over because I couldn't get to them quick enough. I was committed to protect the right-to-retrieve law. The future of where this would go was my biggest concern. If the right-to-retrieve law was to go to the courts, no one could guess the outcome.

I had earlier discussed the right-to-retrieve law with other members of the SAC and we shared feelings on the importance of finding middle ground with the landowners in order to save our beloved sport. At the conclusion of the sixth meeting, several landowners dug in with their opinion of total abolishment of RTR and nothing else. With that opinion, I did the same and dug in with NO CHANGE. I went into the seventh meeting willing to listen but not planning on doing anything different. I was shocked to hear that a strong advocate for the right-to-retrieve law had changed their mind and was willing to surrender it. With that knowledge, could I be guaranteed that those who had stood steadfast before would continue to hold the line for the defense of the law? There was too much at stake to make that gamble.

During open discussion, the proposal that failed to receive a 2 /3 majority in the sixth meeting was brought back for consideration. This same proposal is one that I had received much positive feedback on from other hound-hunters. I felt that if this suggestion could pass, then this would prevent a proposal of total elimination of the right-to-retrieve law from coming to the floor for a vote. With all evils measured together, it was my feeling that the requirement of giving the landowner a call of respect was a far better option than taking a chance of totally losing the right-to-retrieve law. This is why I supported this proposal.

Identification for Hunting Dogs. I supported this recommendation. I viewed this as a two-part proposal. First, making it a requirement for hound owners to place an identification tag on a hound so it can be traced to the owner, is just plain common sense. I discovered that most states that have hound-hunting have the same requirement already in place. Connecting the hound with the owner is on the same level of thinking as the right-to-retrieve. The idea is to reunite hound and hunter as quickly as possible. Secondly, in alignment with my support of "Increased Penalties and Fines", I felt that it was only fair and justified to increase the penalties for those who remove any type collar from a hound that does not belong to them. The practice of removing collars from hounds is a big contribution to the high numbers of hounds found running loose at the end of a season. Many of these hounds were previously stolen from other counties and turned loose in areas far from home.

Education /Training Program. I supported this recommendation. It is no secret that the 21st century has brought many challenges to hound-hunting in Virginia. The influx of suburbanites into country settings has led to many conflicts. Newcomers' misunderstandings of the sport

along with the concerns of public perception have become major problems for the hound-hunter. Along with that, the increased interest of bow and black powder hunting has led to conflicts with hounds.

Many hound-hunting practices that have been with the sport from the beginning are now being challenged. What used to be common practice is now looked at negatively by the public. If hound-hunters continue on the same course as they are now. They will be the ones responsible for the increased public opposition to the sport we love so much.

The information I have seen has convinced me that there are many things that hound-hunters can do to help themselves. The first thing we need is an education process that will teach everyone how to hound-hunt in today's world. I call this "Hound Hunting in the 21st Century -101". Most hound-hunters are unaware of the many things we do that cause negative perceptions by the public. Most all of the issues have simple fixes, but until everyone knows what they are, we will never fix the problem.

In addition to the training of hound-hunters, I believe that training needs to be made available for the general public. This will allow them an opportunity to see the other side, including the importance of hound-hunting in Virginia, the history, public misconceptions, and the reasons for conflicts.

Establish Codes of Ethics. I supported this recommendation. The great majority of the complaints received by the SAC had to do with unethical behavior. The Mounted Fox Hunting Association is an organization that has, and abides by, a rigid code of ethics. Because of this, their reputation is impeccable. Not one valid complaint was received by the SAC against the MFHA. An honorable reputation goes a long way when you are in the public's eye. In order for other disciplines of hound-hunting to withstand public scrutiny and continue into the future, it is going to be necessary for hound-hunters to practice our sport in a manner that is honorable. "It is never wrong to do right".

I think that the hound organizations within the commonwealth should come together and establish a code of ethics for all hound-hunters. This code should be taken seriously by all the organizations and those violating the code should be held accountable. Rules without enforcement are worthless.

Hold Violators Responsible. I supported this recommendation. I can't count the number of times I have heard or read: "It's just a few bad apples, making all hound hunters look bad". I agree with that statement. Those few "bad apples" have brought hound-hunting into the lime light. These people have caused the things that mean so much to us to be challenged. Yet, throughout

this study, these offenders were nowhere to be found. The rest of us were left to fight this battle all summer long without them.

If we are truthful in what we said, then it's time we alienate ourselves from them. Those that have caused us this trouble need to be held responsible. As respectable hunters, we need to expose these "bad apples". The individual items identified in the proposal will provide a means to penalize those who chose to do wrong. I support all efforts of coaching and advising but, when these fail, they need to be held accountable.

Nick Hall, Non-Hound Hunter

I voted yes on everything that passed. The reason was because it was in the best interest of the hunting community.

John Payne, Deer Hound-Hunter

Improve Law Enforcement. I voted in favor of this. Self explanatory.

Improve Record Keeping. I voted in favor of this. Would go a long way in identifying who, where, what, etc. the actual violations are coming from. Accurate, factual data is critical to the solution.

Increase Funding for Law Enforcement. I voted in favor of this. More people in enforcement equals more cost. Where the monies for this will be found in these tough economic times, I'm not sure. Look at how and where funding is coming from, restructure if necessary. Also, can we afford to continue the free ride for so much of the hunting & fishing community that currently exist?

Increase Penalties and Fines. I voted in favor of this. Nothing gets attention much faster than when one gets hit in the pocket book.

Training Seasons. I voted in favor of this. Deer hound-hunters need a time to train/exercise their hounds just as all others do. Keeping deer hounds penned for 45 weeks a year simply because they don't have a "legal" training/exercise season is probably what should be illegal.

Hunting From/Near Roads. I voted against this. The folks I heard from in the hunting community were very concerned about the uncertainties and lack of definition surrounding this issue. The use of terms like "no hunting zone", without definition, was very unsettling.

Modify Virginia's Right-to-Retrieve Law. I voted in favor of this. I spoke with fellow SAC members and numerous folks in the deer hound-hunting community, in leadership positions, about this issue at length. The general consensus was that the right-to-retrieve did not have nearly the same effect on deer hound-hunting as is the case for bear, 'coon, and fox hunters whose hounds are trained to stay at the tree, fox hole, etc. Their need and ability to go to their hounds is crucial. The deer hound on the other hand, even at harvest, typically does not stay with the game for any length of time once the chase is over. A sniff or two and then they're off to try and find another one. Let me be clear. My vote to modify the right-to-retrieve law was solely directed towards the deer hound-hunter. In fact, at the final SAC meeting I made a proposal, to make it an additional requirement for deer hound-hunters, and only deer hound-hunters, to be required to have telemetry equipment in hand when on prohibited lands in search of a dog if the dog was not in sight of the road. This would be a good faith effort on our part as we have been told repeatedly, from day one, that by in large the most frequent abuser's of the right-to-retrieve law is the deer hound-hunting community. The reasonable attempt to contact landowner recommendation that we voted on and passed hopefully will be effective. However if said modification is going to be at the expense of the other disciplines mentioned, I would reconsider my position.

Identification for Hunting Dogs. I voted in favor of this. Self explanatory. Frankly, I've never seen anyone that hound-hunts turn out a dog without a identification collar on it. Maybe some do.

Education/Training Program. I voted in favor of this. I think it would be beneficial to all.

Establish Code of Ethics. I voted in favor of this. Good idea. I think awareness/education is good for all.

Hold Violators Accountable. I voted for this. Self explanatory

Lyndell Price, Raccoon-Hound Hunter

Improve Law Enforcement. I voted for this recommendation. Law enforcement is spread thin with all of the boat traffic on the lakes, so I feel that more Law Enforcement officers are needed.

Better Record Keeping. I voted for this recommendation. I feel that poor record keeping was one of the reasons for this study. With a better system it will be easier to get some real numbers.

Increased Funding for Law Enforcement. I voted for this recommendation. Like other state agencies, the VDGIF is usually underfunded. They need the extra funding for good record keeping, more wildlife studies, and increased Law Enforcement.

Increased Penalties and Fines. I voted for this recommendation. One way to get people that are unlawful to start abiding by the law.

Hunting/Training Seasons. I voted against this recommendation. During the study there was a lot of talk and discussions about taking the hounds out of the woods for 3-4 months a year. It took the raccoon hound-hunter's and bear hound-hunters too long to get the training seasons they have now to vote for something that might change that. Also, this change might affect nighttime hunts held by AKC, UKC, and PKC in the state. We have had our 'coon hound-hunting training seasons for years and the populations of deer and turkey have continued to grow.

Modify Virginia's Right-to-Retrieve Law. I voted against this recommendation. I feel this is a necessary law and it needs to be left as it is. As a hound-hunter, the existing law gives me the right to be able to get my hounds out of harm's way if they should get out of pocket and into an area that I didn't want them to go. Over the past months, I talked with many 'coon hound-hunters and bear hound-hunters. Everyone that I talked with wanted to make sure that I voted to leave the right-to-retrieve law just the way it is and that is the way I voted.

Hunting From/Near Roads. I voted against this recommendation. I did not agree with the "lining of the roads" part for the following reason: I know a lot of elderly and disabled hunters that go out on a bear hound-hunt who cannot get into the woods, so they sit along the roads to listen to the hounds run. If parking along the roads is stopped, elderly and disabled would not be able to have this experience.

Hound Identification. I voted for this recommendation. After changes or clarification was made to explain that "identification" would consist of a name plate on a collar.

Education/Training. I feel that education and training is one way for hunters and non-hunters to be able to understand each other better.

Code of Ethics. I abstained from this vote. There were a couple things that were left up to interpretation and a lot of people look at things many different ways. What one person might think something is one way another person may think is exactly the other way.

Hold Violators Accountable. I voted for this recommendation. If someone is caught doing something wrong then they should be held accountable.

John Rawls Jr., Deer Hound-Hunter

Improve Law Enforcement. I voted for this recommendation because there is a need for more Conservation Police Officers (CPOs) to help enforce our current laws. When called, they sometimes have to come from another county, and this makes it hard to fix the problem quickly.

Improve Record Keeping. I voted for this recommendation because we need to know when a CPO is called out if there was really a problem when he arrived, or if the person who called it in was not correct. That way, when the number of complaints is discussed or referenced, you know you have a correct number.

Increase Funding for Law Enforcement. I voted for this recommendation because it is necessary for the first two recommendations (i.e., Improve Law Enforcement, Improve Record Keeping) on this list to work.

Increase Penalties and Fines. I voted for this recommendation because the people who do break the law get a warning or a slap on the wrist. If it stings a little, maybe it will help the repeat violators.

Training Seasons. I voted for this recommendation because without it, you are asking deer hound-hunters to keep their dogs in a pen (except for during hunting season) and not allow them to train their dogs at all. I find this to be unfair.

Hunting From or Near Roads. The only reason I voted for this recommendation is to stop people from hunting property where they should not be. Counties already have laws as to how far you have to be from the road; that does not need to change.

Modify Virginia's Right-To-Retrieve. I voted for this recommendation because I felt that the hound-hunters needed to meet the landowners in the middle. Landowners are very important to hunting and need to be treated with respect.

Identification for Hunting Dogs. I voted for this recommendation because I believe that if you are going to turn your dogs out, you needed to have your name on the collar.

Education/Training Program. I voted for this recommendation because people need to be educated about hunting with hounds so they will better understand how it works. Sometimes people are misled because they just don't know how it works.

Establish Code of Ethics. I voted for this recommendation because something needs to be outlined as to what types of behavior is ethical.

Hold Violators Accountable. I voted for this recommendation because I believe that peer pressure can really influence people. If fellow hunters will make people stay in line then that would make other hunters do the right thing more often.

Greg Scheerer, Corporate Landowner (Mead Westvaco)

I voted for all of the Recommendations passed by the Hunting with Hounds Stakeholder Advisory Committee, except for the recommendation to Modify Virginia's Right-to-Retrieve Law.

I believe that the conflict between a landowner's right to control access on the property they own and pay taxes on and a hound hunter's right to retrieve their animal is the primary issue that sparked the Hunting with Hounds study. I did not vote for the recommendation to Modify Virginia's Right-to-Retrieve because I do not think that it addresses this controversial issue in any substantive way. The recommendation as written is unenforceable, and, therefore, advocates increased responsibilities for both hound-hunters and landowners with no real resolution to the current situation.

Another primary conflict identified in the Hunting with Hounds study involves user conflicts arising from hound "trespass". I believe that the Training Seasons Strategy Recommendation offers a tenable solution to this issue for all stakeholders. I voted for this recommendation because: 1) I believe deer hound hunters should have a legal training season; it is inhumane to expect deerhounds to stay penned up all but 6 or 7 weeks a year; they need to be exercised and trained periodically just like other hounds; 2) I also believe that private landowners should be able to enjoy their property without hounds running at large during some period of the year and that wildlife would benefit if hounds were not in the woods during the birthing and rearing seasons of most wildlife; and, 3) I believe that archery, muzzleloader, and spring turkey hunters should be able to pursue their sports during those specific seasons without hound interruption. The VDGIF should be able to modify existing hound training seasons and enact a deer hound training season that accommodates all of these interests.

David Shelor, Private Landowner

Concerning Virginia's right-to-retrieve law, I think it should be repealed, but in the spirit of cooperation I think that we can start by asking permission in hopes that it will lead to a condition of respect of the landowner by the hound-hunter.

Concerning deer chase seasons, I supported this recommendation in hopes that a legitimate chase season will lead most of the deer hound-hunters to stop cheating as "fox hunters".

The only other contentious recommendation was identification for hounds. This is the only way for a hound-hunter to be fair to the hound and the person who finds the hound. Why wouldn't you ID your dog unless you had something to hide? The other recommendations stand on their own merits and were virtually unanimous.

David Steger, Bear Hound-Hunter

Improve Law Enforcement. From the beginning of the study, it was apparent from the emails and letters sent to the SAC that most actions that generated complaints from landowners, non-hound hunters, and the non-hunting public were already violations of existing laws and hunting regulations. We heard many complaints that law enforcement personnel, when called, either came too late to observe the behaviors or refused to take appropriate action because they did not think they could get a conviction. If existing laws and regulations cannot be enforced, it would be fruitless to recommend additional restrictions on hound-hunting.

Improve Record Keeping. I supported this recommendation. In order to improve law enforcement, it would be prudent to ascertain the types of complaints and the locations of complaints so that the limited number of CPO's could be concentrated in problem areas during hound-hunting seasons. I feel that the record keeping of complaints and violations on Smith Mountain Lake was much more accurate than hunting regulations, and the availability of those numbers obviously justified increased enforcement there, leading to fewer complaints and accidents. Simply increasing presence and visibility of VDGIF law enforcement in problem areas would, most likely, deter some unlawful behaviors.

Increase Funding for Law Enforcement. I voted for this strategy because again, in order to improve law enforcement, there needs to be additional funding for VDGIF law enforcement. The VDGIF should seek permanent, new funding for law enforcement, either through the General Assembly or by reviewing and reallocating the department's current budget. How much of the budget is used to enforce the regulations that support the VDGIF's mission? It is unfair that hunters and fishermen are the only users of the resource who fund the Department.

Increase Penalties and Fines. I supported this recommendation. Especially when enforcement is lax, penalties and fines must be severe enough to deter unlawful behavior. Information campaigns would be needed to inform the judicial branches of government of the problems that

escalate when unlawful hunting behavior is not adequately punished. The SAC intended the increased penalties and fines apply to all hunters – not just hound-hunters.

Training Seasons. I voted against this strategy. The negative public input received by the SAC was primarily against deer hound-hunters in the eastern part of the state. Apparently, deer hound-hunters have been taking advantage of the “fox hunting loophole” to exercise and train their dogs. I don’t think this recommendation would change that practice since it contains an exception for fox hunters. Also, it is not practical, or even desirable, for hound-hunters to differentiate between types of dogs. One dog can be a multi-purpose dog, used for hunting more than one quarry. I was also concerned that a training season for deer hound-hunters might be established at the expense of coon, bear, or fox hunters.

Hunting From or Near Roads. I voted against this recommendation primarily because of the words, “lining the roads,” and the impact that curtailing this would have on bear hound-hunters. Bear hound-hunters often find it necessary to park along roadways to stop a chase before it enters private property or before dogs are endangered by traffic. Also, many older and disabled hunters are now able to listen to a race or see a bear cross the road by parking along roadways. From the public feedback the SAC received, the 24 resolutions we received from county governments, and knowing the vast diversity of Virginia’s counties, I don’t think a blanket regulation could effectively work in all counties. I think these road restrictions should be left to the localities to mandate.

Modify Virginia’s Right-to-Retrieve Law. I voted against this strategy. As was evident from the hundreds of comments received during the open public comment period, Virginians think the right-to-retrieve law is a good law—good for hunters, landowners, and especially for hounds. The feedback from the stakeholders I represented on the SAC (and from others) was overwhelmingly against any modifications. Landowners seemed to be against posting their personal contact information, as is understandable. The recommended modifications are hollow and could even lead to greater animosity between landowners and hound-hunters. What is a “reasonable attempt”? What if the landowner denies permission and I retrieve my dog anyway? Sometimes time is critical in retrieving a hound, and the time spent trying to locate a landowner could often put the dog’s welfare in danger. If the law is being abused by a minority of hound hunters, then those hunters should be prosecuted. This is a good law as currently written!

Identification for Hunting Dogs. I voted for this recommendation since all hound-hunters that I know would not consider releasing a dog without owner contact information. More important to bear hound-hunters is the included recommendation that penalties for removal of identification or tracking collars be increased. I am aware of several instances just during the recent bear hound training season where owners were not able to locate and retrieve valuable dogs because collars had been removed. In some of those cases, the dogs were also taken far away from the area in which they were released.

Education/Training Program. I voted for this recommendation. I read every comment submitted to the SAC during this study, and it was apparent that many, many Virginians do not understand hounds, hound-hunting, and the equipment used today to track dogs. Many hunters and landowners are not aware of the specifics of the right-to-retrieve law. The non-hound hunting public does not realize that hound-hunters are some of the best stewards of the game animals they pursue, that unlike still hunters, they are generally selective in the game taken, and that hounds are the ultimate dog-athletes. An educational campaign would be one of the most effective ways to reduce conflict and promote awareness and acceptance. A couple of pages in the game regulations booklet, brochures made available to hound-hunters to disseminate in their communities, public meetings at the beginning of hunting season—all would be cost-efficient ways the VDGIF could support hound-hunters.

Establish Codes of Ethics. I abstained from this vote because I'm not certain that a universal code of ethics would help. The Virginia Bear Hunters' Association already has a code of ethics, as do many other hunt clubs. I don't think a code developed by outside groups would be endorsed by hunt clubs. But most importantly, I believe that ethical hunters are not the problem, and unethical hunters would not be swayed by a voluntary code of behavior.

Hold Violators Accountable. I voted for this recommendation because I think violators of any laws or regulations should be held accountable for their actions.

Wilmer Stoneman, Private Landowner/Virginia Federation of Farm Bureaus

Through "Hunting with Hounds in Virginia: A Way Forward" the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries provided hunters, landowners, and a variety of other stakeholders an opportunity to surface any issues and concerns associated with the use of dogs for hunting, and seek solutions that we can live with. If we as hunters, landowners, and stakeholders squander this opportunity we have placed the "tradition" and the sport we cherish in jeopardy. To that end, I was guided by the following statement developed by the people I represent: ***"We support the use of dogs for hunting, where permitted by law, by hunters observing the rights of landowners and other hunters"***.

Prior to and throughout the study, everyone that provided comments stated very clearly that current laws addressed a significant number of, if not all of the concerns associated with the use of hounds or any other hunting issue. Even though many are budget-dependent the following address utilization and enforcement of current law:

- Improve Record Keeping
- Improve Law Enforcement
- Improve Funding for Law Enforcement
- Hold Violators Accountable.
- Increase Penalties and Fines

Each of these received high or unanimous votes from the committee.

This study and its associated dialog provide the opportunity to improve the image of hunting and especially hunting with dogs. It has been clearly stated in the study, and like in every part of society, a few bad actors damage everyone's credibility and the perception of the sport. All stakeholder organizations should join together to establish ethical practices that are expected by all hunters regardless of the law. Additionally while many have stated that there are few problems with hunting from a road it should go without saying that some hunters and nearly all non-hunters cannot comprehend the practice. With the exception of picking up lost dogs or releasing dogs on property with permission, hunters and vehicles should be off the road, hopefully out of sight and out of mind of the general public.

I therefore supported the following recommendations:

- Establish Codes of Ethics
- Education /Training Programs
- Hunting From or Near Roads

Another broad issue category was the welfare of the dogs. Simply put, if kept year round, the dogs need exercise and training in order to remain healthy and perform as expected. Currently, loopholes in existing laws are used to accomplish exercise and training. Development of a training season will mean more dogs running more often. However, if the department can develop a training season that is specific to a dogs use (i.e., deer hunting, fox hunting, etc.) along with a means to identify that use, then a training season can be potentially beneficial to everyone. The benefits of a training season could include healthier, better trained dogs. In addition, perhaps more predictable laws can be more clearly implemented and enforced. The recommendations that address these issues include:

- Training Seasons
- Identification for Hunting Dogs

I supported, on the condition that the use of dogs could be identified and that specific seasons could be established, with few exceptions (i.e., fox and coon hound-hunting) a period of time during the year with no dog training or hunting.

Throughout the study hunters clearly supported preserving their ability to retrieve their dogs from property of others. It is also clear that landowners want control of the property. The code of Virginia is clear about what trespassing is or is not. It is also clear that, under the conditions of no firearms or archery equipment and no vehicles, a hunter may retrieve his dog. The final recommendation preserves a hunter's ability to retrieve their dog and the basic conditions of the current retrieval law. However, if a landowner desires more involvement in the process of retrieval, they can post their property with detailed contact information. The hunter would then be required to **attempt to contact** the landowner prior to retrieval. This change establishes dialog and exchange of information and extending common courtesy to the landowner. The final recommendation is reasonable middle ground that I supported.

Robin Weinhold, Private Landowner

Increase Funding for Law Enforcement. I did not support this strategy because:

1. Increased funding from state coffers is unlikely in today's economic climate.
2. Throughout the process, CPOs repeatedly stated that current laws and regulations were not enforceable. Since these laws and regulations are the source of a majority of complaints received, there needs to be significant changes made in current regulations and Virginia Code to make offending hound-hunting activities chargeable. If significant changes are made, the number of complaints should decrease. This would negate the need for additional law enforcement. Data received from states imposing restrictions on hound-hunting (e.g., Alabama, Georgia and Florida) indicates a significant decrease in calls after regulations were put in place.
3. Local law enforcement can provide invaluable assistance if properly trained. During a meeting with my local Sheriff's Department in the last month, I was informed that they had responded to 397 game related calls/complaints since their automated system was put in place, sometime in 2005. This figure does not include the calls forwarded to VDGIF dispatch or directly to the local CPO. It makes sense to promote coordination between CPOs, Sheriff's Departments, Animal Control Officers, Commonwealth's Attorneys and State Police.

Modify Virginia's Right-to-Retrieve Law. I did not support this strategy because:

1. Virginia's Right to Retrieve Law violates private landowner's rights and it is under scrutiny because of the resulting escalation of landowner/hunter conflict. The proposed modification does nothing to mitigate this face-to-face conflict. Private landowners want control over who is allowed to enter their property legally. This situation will only get more confrontational as previously rural counties become more suburbanized.
2. The confrontational situation fostered by this law needs to be completely defused by repeal of the law. The premise behind the proposed modification is to foster communication between parties where there has been none previously. Unfortunately, the level of animosity that currently exists between some hound-hunters and private landowners as a result of years of confrontation and nuisance situations is beyond this stage. During the past two months, I've had conversations with three individuals who indicated they carry a sidearm 24/7 for the entire general firearms season because of confrontations they've experienced with hound-hunters. Another individual confided that he stopped carrying his sidearm because confrontation he personally experienced with hound-hunters had escalated to the point he was afraid he might use it. A single female purchased a sidearm because she is uncomfortable with strange individuals claiming to be retrieving dogs prowling around her home. She requested assistance with target practice so she would feel comfortable using the weapon.

3. A few years ago, an attorney in Caroline County shot and killed his neighbor. The confrontation started over an old law on the books that allowed the attorney to bill his neighbors for half the cost of the fence he erected on the property line. To aggravate the already tense situation, the neighbor's bull was repeatedly found visiting the attorney's registered Black Angus herd. Trespass charges and counter charges ensued over several years. After the attorney was found innocent of criminal charges in the shooting incident the Virginia legislature deemed it prudent to get rid of the law that spawned the situation. Do we want to wait until a hound-hunter trespass ends in a similar way?
4. The wording of the modification only introduces another loophole to escape a chargeable offense.
5. The proposed modification continues to promote a safety hazard by encouraging individuals to enter property of another without giving satisfactory notification and receiving acknowledgement of the landowner. Do we need a still hunter accidentally shooting a hound-hunter retrieving his dogs before we take action to repeal this law?

Training Seasons. I did not support this strategy because:

1. The current language of the strategy does not institute any restrictions that will minimize the current impact on private landowners and other citizens.
2. The strategy does not adequately address current loopholes that allow hound-hunters to run their dogs under the guise of hunting/chasing a different type of quarry.
3. Rewarding bad behavior seems counter intuitive.