



INSTITUTE *for* ENGAGEMENT & NEGOTIATION
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**Addressing Hunter-Landowner Conflicts in
Deer and Bear Hound Hunting:
Stakeholder Assessment Report**

**Institute for Engagement & Negotiation at the
University of Virginia**

**Report to:
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources**

September 8, 2023

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
Survey Results	7
Interview Results	29
Summary Results and Recommendations.....	42
DWR Web Results	43
Stakeholder Advisory Committee: Next Steps.....	44
Appendices	45

Addressing Conflicts in Hunting with Hounds Survey and Interview Stakeholder Assessment Report September 2023

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We trust this report summarizes the current interests, issues, concerns, suggestions, and hopes shared with IEN and serves as the foundation for the SAC beginning its deliberations and creating mutually agreed upon options for possible solutions to resolve issues pertaining to hunting with hounds in the Commonwealth. Consensus-building work is difficult, and we appreciate the dedication of our Stakeholder Advisory Committee in working toward a resolution of these issues following the distribution of this report. We also appreciate the Board of Wildlife Resources' commitment to bringing these stakeholders with diverse interests together to resolve the issues in a collaborative manner for the purpose of determining long-term, practical, and effective solutions for their recommendations to the Board.

Please note below those individuals who have contributed to this survey and interview report:

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Executive Summary

The University of Virginia's Institute for Engagement & Negotiation (IEN) was asked to assist the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) in opening a dialogue among Virginia's key stakeholder groups to address certain conflicts pertaining to hunting deer and bear with hounds. IEN is providing an impartial, facilitative role in helping stakeholders and DWR staff develop well-informed solutions to the longstanding conflicts between hound-hunters who hunt deer and bear and individuals interested in or affected by deer and bear hound-hunting, particularly private landowners¹.

In this report, IEN synthesized and analysed the current interests, issues, concerns, suggestions, and goals of the nearly 9,000 stakeholders who participated in IEN's electronic survey and interviews. This information will be used to inform a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), selected in consultation with DWR, to develop recommendations to resolve the issues. IEN will facilitate a series of meetings for these deliberations using a stakeholder consensus-building approach. IEN will then present the SAC's recommendations in a final report for DWR and the Board's consideration.

Three categories of survey responders were utilized to develop the following survey summary narrative: hunters, landowners, and a category in which the responder was neither a hunter nor landowner but had an interest and connection to the issue. The questions posed to survey responders for each category were similar but not identical. There also was overlap in the three categories; for example, some hunters are also landowners, and responded to questions posed to both of those groups.

For the hunters with hounds' community, the following important, consistent, and frequent elements and themes were present in the survey and interview results:

- Hunting with hounds has an important, historical legacy in Virginia involving generations of families and has significant community involvement.
- Hunting with hounds is critical to overall game management.
- Hunting with hounds provides considerable positive secondary economic impact² for rural areas.
- In some areas law enforcement efforts are considered incomplete, and more enforcement personnel are needed.
- Bear hunting utilizes public lands more commonly than deer hunting, although they sometimes encounter issues with landowners who own property adjacent to public land.
- The "right to retrieve" law is viewed as an important element to those who hunt with hounds.
- Most hunt clubs and other hunting with hounds' groups practice respectful interaction with landowners.
- It is acknowledged that there has been and continues to be conflict with landowners and those interactions have had negative consequences.

¹ Legal or beneficial owner of land of any size, including those holding the right to purchase or lease the land

² Gains in employment or revenue among firms that receive the primary benefits

- New landowners who move to rural areas sometimes do not understand or appreciate the historical significance of hunting with hounds and are not aware of the legal framework in which hound hunters operate. In addition to pressure from new land development, this has contributed to a decrease in hunting opportunities.

For the landowner community, the following important elements and themes constitute their perspective on the hunting with hound's issue:

- Hunters with hounds often cross properties without permission.
- Law enforcement personnel do not act in a consistent manner on incidents when reported.
- In some areas law enforcement efforts are considered incomplete, and more enforcement personnel are needed.
- Hunters often lack communication with and respect for landowners when it comes to accessing properties, retrieving hunting hounds, or interacting with property owners.
- At times uncontrolled hunting hounds run freely, do not respond to commands, and cause disruptions to their properties, including harassing livestock, domestic animals, and wildlife.
- Landowners highlighted safety risks associated with hunting hounds and hunters on their properties, including confrontations, dropping and waiting for hounds in and around public roadways, hunters carrying firearms, and potential accidents involving firearms.
- Hunters let loose their hounds on property they do not have permission for in hopes of them running across larger tracts.
- The presence of hunting hounds and hunters on their properties affected their overall quality of life, including disturbances to their peace, concerns for the safety of their children and animals, ability to use and enjoy their property, and the general inconvenience caused by these issues.
- Some hound hunters violate hunting regulations, such as hunting at night, using spotlights, and hunting in areas where it is prohibited.
- Many landowners support stricter enforcement, revisions to the "right to retrieve" law, and better protection of landowners' rights in relation to hunting activities.

Regarding the resolution of these issues, there was considerable common ground on a set of improvements. These recommendations do not consider resources necessary for implementation, political viability, or present legal or regulatory authority. Many of the themes identified by this survey and interview process match previous work identified during the 2007-2008 effort and later processes implemented by DWR. The survey and interview results indicated areas of agreement, including:

- Law enforcement staffing gaps need to be filled.
- Communication between the groups needs to be consistent and transparent.
- Respect and trust are paramount to successful interaction and reduce potential for conflict.
- Educational efforts for both groups, including new landowners, need upgrading.
- Hunt clubs could enhance communication efforts using a landowner ombudsman³ approach.
- Hound identification mechanisms could be improved.
- Electronic tracking collars should be considered statewide.

³ A designated neutral or impartial conflict resolution practitioner

Introduction

The University of Virginia's Institute for Engagement & Negotiation (IEN) was asked to assist the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) in opening a dialogue among Virginia's stakeholder groups to address certain conflicts pertaining to hunting deer and bear with hounds. IEN is providing an impartial, facilitative role in helping stakeholders and DWR staff develop well-informed solutions to a longstanding conflict between hound-hunters who hunt deer and bear and private landowners.

In this report, IEN synthesized and analysed the current interests, issues, concerns, suggestions, and goals of the nearly 9,000 stakeholders who voluntarily participated in IEN's electronic survey and interviews. This information will be used to inform a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), selected in consultation with DWR, to develop recommendations to resolve the issues. The recommendations will be submitted to the Board of Wildlife Resources.

IEN conducted its stakeholder assessment in the form of a robust digital survey via the Qualtrics platform, as well as 18 interviews to surface stakeholder concerns, hopes, and suggestions for what might be done to alleviate conflicts between hound-hunters and private landowners as well as others interested in how the issues are resolved. The survey link was distributed via email and DWR social media channels to broadly advertise the survey. It was not a statistically representative, randomized study, but instead, it was intended to generate the current interests, issues, concerns, hopes and goals of the volunteer participants -- as a starting place for comparisons with prior reports, to help IEN create the best process for collaborative work, and to share with SAC members, along with additional information when beginning their deliberations. There were 8,868 responses via the survey. In addition, around a thousand people submitted comments on this issue via DWR's website.

In addition to the survey responses, IEN conducted 18 interviews with key stakeholders to allow for in-depth discussion on interests, issues, concerns, opportunities, and suggestions. In selecting individuals to interview, the Agency considered the results of the survey, individuals recommended to DWR staff, individuals who expressed interest in participating, and DWR's goal of hearing from individuals who represent Virginians' diverse perspectives on the issues. IEN interviewed these individuals by Zoom or phone. Interviewees are listed in Appendix 2.

The following information summarizes IEN's synthesis and analysis of its findings and lays the foundation for the SAC's mutual gain approach to resolving the issues.

Survey Process and Questions

Key Findings by Question

Responses to the survey are divided into three groups: hunters (those who hunt with and without hounds), landowners impacted by hunting with hounds, and those who are neither but who have an interest in this issue. The questions posed to survey responders for each category were similar but not identical. There also was overlap in the three categories; for example, some hunters are also landowners, and responded to questions posed to both of those groups.

Do you live, hunt, or own property in Virginia?

98.5% of respondents live, hunt or own property in Virginia. This yes/no response enables readers of this report to understand and acknowledge that the survey results are largely reflective of Virginians who are interested in this topic, rather than individuals from other states.

I am... (check all that apply):

There were a total of 8868 responses to the survey. The following is a breakdown of the types of responses (with overlap due to many people fitting multiple categories):

- 5842 respondents identified as hunts with hounds
- 2338 respondents identified as hunts without hounds
- 4336 respondents identified as landowners
- 155 respondents were neither hunters nor landowners but interested in the subject matter
- 166 respondents were governmental representatives (law enforcement, elected officials, etc.)
- 241 respondents fit into the “other” category. Respondents were asked to describe their connection to the issue and most who selected this box fit one of the categories listed above. Other responses include those who are proximate to this issue, e.g. retired hunters, conservationists, landowners who don’t interact with hound hunters, etc.

Responses ran the gamut across hunting types and species and DWR geographic division. By these comments, it is clear that hunting with hounds is considered a historical legacy sport in Virginia, and individuals involved are concerned that the sport is being threatened. Landowner comments were equally as passionate on the conflict that arises when hound hunters engage on private property through trespass and other law-breaking activities such as carrying weapons on property while retrieving hounds (while not in pursuit of a fox).

Respondents noted additional concerns, including:

- Farmers that depend on hunting and hunting with hounds to curb crop damage but then are in conflict due to trespass and other behavioral issues such as livestock disturbance.
- Damage to livestock through outright hound aggression or more subtle stressors that affect reproductive potential.
- Variations in law enforcement attempts/efforts to engage and diminish the issue.
- The abandonment of hounds after the hunt is over or after the entire season is over. The complexity of hound care and ownership.

- Business interests affected hunting, hunting with hounds, and the decrease of hunting generally in Virginia.

Hunters Survey Results

Questions and Responses Pertaining to Hunters with Hounds

Where do you hunt? (Please state the County/City or Counties/Cities)

The survey responses accounted for nearly every county in the Commonwealth, and rural areas of the state were more highly represented. Viewpoints from a wide variety of geographical areas are represented. The range is from very rural counties, such as Southampton, Bath, and Halifax, to moderately rural counties such as Louisa and Franklin, to more urbanized locales such as Chesterfield and Virginia Beach, and Counties of Northern Virginia including Clarke, Loudoun, and Fauquier.

Are you a member of a hunt club?

Of the 6915 responses to this question, 4893 (71%) answered affirmatively to being a member of a hunt club with 2022 answering “no.” Hunt clubs provide support for organizing hunts and offer training in the ethics and laws around hunting with hounds. In addition, hunt club members can be still hunters without any hound involvement.

Does your hunt club provide its members with information about ethical hunting and obeying laws and regulations?

An overwhelming majority of respondents (97%) say their hunt clubs provide information to members on ethics and laws and regulations.

Please explain how this information is shared.

A large number of responses indicated that the primary method for sharing laws and ethics information occurred at the hunt club meetings and at their morning meetings prior to the actual hunt each day. A number of responses cited the use of guest speakers during the evening meetings and participation in charity events and fundraisers. Furthermore, many responses stated the use of social media such as a private Facebook group to share information. The use of “word of mouth” across the members was frequently stated as a common communication vehicle. The following quotes addresses the theme:

“We hold hunt club meetings and go over new laws and regulations for the upcoming season if any come about. Also to new members and guests, we always ask questions pertaining to the laws and regulations just to see if they are up to date and know the laws, and if not, we let them know what you can and cannot do!...”

“Up to date information and annual regulations are typically provided to members from our club secretary prior to the season and post season. We also have 2 annual club meetings...”

Hunt clubs utilize different methods to distribute information. Some clubs print their own hunter handbooks and/or laminate the DWR rule book and/or have member agreements that each hunter signs to indicate they have been told of the rules around hunting and hunting with hounds. In addition, many responses indicated each member must have passed the hunter education safety course required by DWR and that their club participates in the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP). Respondents stated that members who have broken these rules and their signed agreements have been removed from club membership. This action, however, was not universal across the list of responses.

A number of responses cited the use of a “field team leader” or “hunt master” during hunts that directs the use of the hounds and watches over member actions.

The Hunter-Landowner Relationship (From the Hunter's Perspective)

If you hunt with hounds, before the hunting season, how do you coordinate with the landowners adjoining the property you plan to hunt?

A common theme for this question was the intent for clear communication and good relationships between the hunter and the landowner. Cited in the responses was the idea that hunt club leadership had a responsibility to conduct this relationship-building and permission-seeking effort. This quote states this idea:

“The Hunt Staff manage this. Members are usually not involved...”

Many responses stated the relationships are good and long-term with little conflict occurring. Many responses also showed the idea of a “day of” hunting contact to ensure the landowners are notified of the hunt with hounds in a timely manner. This enables landowners to minimize disruption to their daily routine and protect livestock.

The following quotes from the survey shows this idea of a continuing good relationship with landowners:

“We are a member of the community and keep open communication with all neighboring landowners. We communicate with landowners year-round and have a good relationship. We share contact information with them so they can escalate any issues or concerns so they can be addressed immediately...”

“Club members are friends and family of adjoining landowners. Our club has no conflict because of the open dialogue and respect we have for our community...”

Many hunting with hounds’ clubs have established a year-round approach involving landowner visitation, information-sharing, clarification of boundaries, and signed written agreements. In several instances, public land hunting or public land as an adjacent landowner did not warrant contact before or during a hunt.

“We talk to the surrounding clubs and property owners that (they?) will talk to our club about how to work together so that there are not any problems. Some landowners and clubs refuse to participate in discussions or work out a schedule to eliminate conflict. We are willing to not hunt certain tracts some of the time to allow others to hunt peacefully, but we lease the land to hunt so it is unreasonable to not hunt these tracts the entire season to completely keep the peace...”

While the idea of a good landowner relationship was prevalent throughout the survey comments, also common was the idea of a “shrug one’s shoulders” around the idea if the landowner was uncooperative, then hunters could run the hounds anyway due to the hounds not knowing property lines and other boundaries. The following quotes show this particular hunter perspective:

“No, because you can’t coordinate where a deer runs and where the dogs follow. Deer and dogs cannot know nor will they ever know where property lines are...”

Some hunters who are also landowners discussed the “Right to Retrieve” law enabling hunters with hounds to access property at any time. This idea is difficult for property rights advocates to understand. Many of the hunters who are also landowners wrote that this right is unacceptable and contrary to basic decent behavior. The following quotes show this hunter/landowner perspective:

“Right to retrieve has been a great law for so many years for us, 90% of the time. The landowners are very respectful and us as well, never had any problems retrieving my dogs, the landowner most the time around us are completely fine with it. I think it’s a small group of folks that abuse the right to retrieve, and that’s where the problem comes into play. Which then makes it a problem for us, that have no problem with obeying the good laws we have, to go retrieve our hounds”

“I think that to retrieve dogs from private land, the hunter must have permission to enter private land regardless. The land belongs to the owner not the hunter thus the hunter must have permission, or if the hunter enters land without permission be charged with trespassing. Virginia is one of only two states I believe that allow hunters to enter land without permission. It’s time to stop this. The hunting dogs have bitten landowners [and] killed their livestock. It needs to stop. The hunters drive on land tear up roads, fields and leave gates open. Why should landowners be subject to this harassment? The dog hunters are bringing this on themselves. Some of the hunters are arrogant and very disrespectful to landowners...”

A portion of the conflict also arises as developmental pressures break up larger tracts that hunters with hounds had permission to hunt and creates more adjacent smaller tracts where new landowners are either unaware of the right to retrieve or have no desire for this activity to occur on their land.

If your hound(s) have run onto property that you did not have permission to hunt, did you contact or talk to the landowner or representative?

Out of a total of 4748 responses, 4127 were affirmative and 621 negative that they go and talk to the landowner following hounds running across property they did not have permission to hunt.

Did law enforcement get involved with your situation?

Out of the total of 4127 survey responses, 3937 responses (95%) stated that law enforcement was not contacted nor involved with the situation.

Was the situation resolved to your satisfaction?

With a total of 4127 responses from hunters who use hounds to hunt, 4011 reported that the situation was resolved to their satisfaction, a 97% satisfaction rate.

To help us better understand your experiences, please use this space to share details or information about your responses above.

As noted above, basic trust-building and relationship work is critical to avoiding and resolving conflict. The following quotes summarize this intent:

“Establishing and maintaining good relationships with landowners is crucial to both show and receive respect over a controversial topic such as hound hunting in Virginia. It is beneficial to both parties and goes a long way without having to get law enforcement involved..”

“We don’t have a lot of people around our property where I hunt. So it’s not common to run into someone’s property but I like to make sure they know I’m there and make sure it’s okay to get my dogs and let them know I have no weapons on me and all I’m gonna do is get my dogs...”

An issue that has become apparent through these survey responses is that the hunting with hounds’ community may not know or be aware of all the adjacent or nearby landowners whose property their hounds may cross. From the responses, some hunters with hounds conduct extensive landowner contact during both the off season and during hunting season. We could determine that although landowner contact is a routine function of hound hunting, not all landowners are either aware of this activity, are not living on the adjacent land, or have not been contacted. This quote reflects this theme:

“Once one time my dogs got in some property that I didn’t have permission to and I found out who owned it and contacted them asap. They gave me permission to and get my dogs...”

“I have never spoke to landowners before hunting season, however if a situation comes along and my hounds have made their way onto a piece of private property I do my very best to get in contact with the landowner and explain to them what is happening, how my dogs have made it onto the property, and treat them (and their land if they give permission to retrieve) with the most respect I possibly can”

The basic conflict can be characterized by the action of whether the hunter, if their hounds have crossed over private property with which they do not have permission, has contacted the landowner as a courtesy or whether the hunter is using the right to retrieve law to just go get the hounds. In some cases for the landowner, there is a lack of understanding of exactly what the hunter is doing. Some of the landowner questions are as follows:

- Are they currently hunting on my property?
- Are they trespassing and checking out my land for future hunting opportunities?
- Have the hounds been placed just off my property to allow them to run on my property in hopes of running a deer?
- Or just getting their hounds?

Many respondents indicated that they do not go onto the property, despite their legal right to do so, unless they have contacted the landowner and gained permission to do so. In essence, they avoid conflict. In addition, GPS collars are utilized to track location and assist with retrieving the hound, although respondents also indicated that this does not work all of the time and occasionally they need to go get the hound themselves.

Several respondents identified the land development trend as not aiding the hunting with hounds/landowner conflict. Concurrent with the increasing number of conflicts within the hunting with hounds’ issue is the rate of land fragmentation, increasing numbers of landowners, and

resulting development in rural Virginia. New landowners are often not aware of the right to retrieve law nor the cultural heritage of the communities they have purchased land in. The following quotes offers this perspective:

“Like I’ve stated, it’s called common sense, USUALLY most landowners are ok with you getting your hounds if you call them. The biggest problem is, someone moving from the city and buys 5 acres surrounded but thousands of acres of public land and they think they own it also!! Those are the ones that give the most trouble. The ones that don’t have any issues are the landowners that have lived in the area their whole life. They understand that nor the dog or the animals in pursuit can’t not read a trespassing sign nor a survey map!!”

“A new landowner moved into the community. Some of our dogs got inside an electric fence and the landowner did not want us to retrieve them. She threatened us and the dogs. We called the local VDGIF officer and he came to the situation and explained to the landowner the laws and rights of landowners and hound hunters. We have not had any issues since”

Survey respondents identified the importance of posted signs with landowner contact information on them in the event they did not have prior permission to get their hounds or did not know the landowner.

Please describe the relationship between hunters who hunt with hounds and landowners in your area:

Respondents offered a wide-ranging set of answers to this question. Many responses indicated a “normal” or congenial relationship between hunters and landowners. It is clear that many hunt clubs work hard to maintain a good working relationship with their landowners. Hunt clubs routinely communicate during the off-hunting season, with some hosting dinners and appreciation events. Often, landowners themselves are members of the nearby hunt clubs so the interests of both hunters and landowners are integrated.

Poor relationships were cited by respondents as well with seemingly deteriorating conditions through the years. The following reasons were given for the poor relationships cited by respondents:

- Bullying tactics by the hound hunters during the retrieval process.
- The belief that they have the full rights or entitlement to landowner’s property and can abuse the retrieval law.
- The use of alcohol during the hunt was cited as a negative part of the experience and relationship.
- The release of hounds on smaller adjacent properties where they do not have permission.
- The disruption of landowner still hunting by the running of hounds.
- The violation of normal safety protocols during hunts such as transportation issues like road blockages, speeding and shooting from their trucks.
- Increased number of landowners who buy smaller parcels and move into an area where hunting with hounds is prevalent and they are unfamiliar with it.

The following quotes convey the ideas around the poor relationships:

“Strained. Hound hunters let dogs out and have no control over them. In the past they probably knew and had some sort of permission on land between the drop off and pick up points in 90% of the cases. Nowadays I don’t think that is necessarily the case most of the time. Dogs and actual hunter trespass (whether actively hunting or not) is the problem”

“Those who hunt with hounds think they have the right to go ANYWHERE. They release hounds on property line or on property that is adjacent. They claim they can’t help that the hounds went on your property. They also try claim game that they did not shoot. People get into confrontation. It is very sad to hear about this. They shoot any deer that moves regardless of what you are supposed to shoot. Another very sad situation. See hound hunters with trucks going through farmland fields that posted no trespassing and have livestock in the fields. Seen some hunters set in car with gun. Some walking along road with gun. Our personal experience our shed got shot. We also find beer cans during the hound hunting season at the end of the road. Very scary considering all of them have loaded guns. Seeing all this the relationship is very bad for that don’t allow dog hunting or even drinking while hunting on their property”

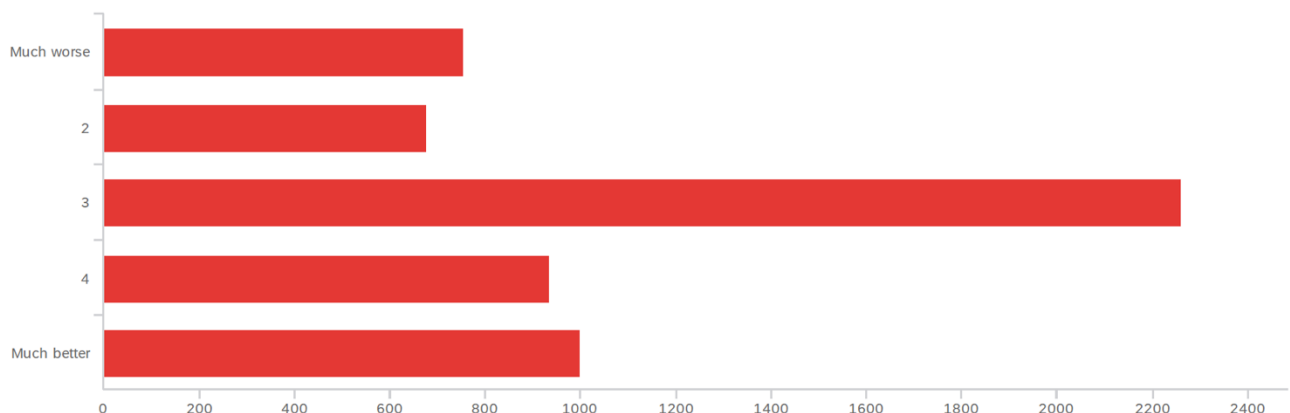
Becoming very hostile. The hunters are damaging property. Stealing game cameras. The dog hunters think they have the right to hunt your land. They will use a lead dog to find a track and once found will drop rest of dogs out of truck. The hunters will then tell landowner dogs can not read posted or trespassing signs and do not have GPS. The landowner has no recourse the hunters will lie and say the dogs were dropped elsewhere. It’s time if dog hunters enter property without permission they are charged with trespassing. If this issue is not addressed as has almost all other states except 2 one is Virginia. The landowners do not want to stop dog hunting only want to protect our livestock, roads, fields and our families without intrusion. Let dog hunters use government land and this could be avoided.

Clearly, relationships are better between hunters and landowners when communication is constant throughout the year, respect is apparent from both sides, expectations are clear, and laws are obeyed. The following survey responses show this concept:

“Just like in everything, there are good and bad folks on either side of the debate. There are hound hunters who do it "right" by reaching out to surrounding landowners before during and after the hunting seasons and create a solid relationship. But there are also hound hunters who use RTR as a crutch and an excuse to access private land 24/7. There are also landowners on both sides of the spectrum as well. There are some who simply just want to be left alone and don't want their property accessed. Then there are some who think the sight of dog boxes driving down the road is a clear sign of someone doing something wrong - which isn't always the case”

*“Overall the relationship is good for several reasons: * We maintain regular communications with our landowners * A great many landowners value the hunting traditions of our area that have endured for hundreds of years. In fact, many non-hunters move to Western Loudoun because of these traditions * Many landowners understand that the preservation of hunting is directly linked to efforts to preserve open spaces and land conservation”*

How does the current relationship between hunters who hunt with hounds and landowners in your area compared to how it has been in the past?



Over 5600 hundred individuals responded to this question, with 25% of respondents indicating the relationship is “worse” or “much worse” than in the past, 40% indicating that the relationship is “about the same”, and 35% indicating it is “better” or “much better” than in the past.

In your view, how should the issue of hounds going onto property where they are not wanted be addressed?

There was a wide range of responses to this question. Some feel that nothing should or can be done to alleviate the conflict and that hounds cannot read trespassing or boundary markers and live for the hunt. Others believed hound hunting should be made illegal. There is clear widespread agreement that hunter/landowner communication and agreement is critical to a good relationship. Without this relationship as a foundation than any other conflict that arises will be exacerbated by the lack of relationship. Requesting permission to hunt and/or retrieve hounds when necessary is important in this relationship/agreement framework. Elevated communication was also aligned with better education efforts for new landowners. It is apparent that new landowners purchasing rural property are not wholly aware of the history, legacy, and current hunting culture in rural Virginia.

The following survey quotes identify this concept:

“Education - Perhaps the biggest impact would be each hunter, with or without hounds, take initiative to understand surrounding lands and the hunting impact to those lands. This would include each hunter reaching out to land-owners of adjacent areas, to inform them of their intent and establishing an arrangement and understand of the impact that hound hunting may have. This should not be a legislative or regulatory requirement but should be encouraged as a courtesy between land owners and hunters. Enforcing Trespass - In cases where there is disregard or disrespect for the privacy of other hunters and land owners, trespass enforcement should be strictly enforced. This could prove challenging as accidental trespass can occur with animals, which are not intentional nor result in harm to other hunters or land-owners. This is where landowner/hunter communication is very critical”

“Education from the State DNR on the use of hounds should be given to all landowners and placed on the web for ready access. Handouts should be provided and required to be given to prospective land purchasers from real estate agents who sell property in dog hunting locales. Hunt Clubs need to take the initiative to meet and create positive relationships with the landowners of the properties they hunt, and do not hunt, that border their lands to alleviate in advance any issue that could arise. At a minimum a clear understanding of the feelings and stance the landowner will have about hunting dogs coming onto their property will be gained.”

One of the more common approaches discussed in the responses was the idea of no hunting at all where one does not have permission. Additional ideas expressed in the survey responses speak to an increasing law enforcement presence, heightened penalties for continuous violators and better identifying the hounds through a licensing/ permitting approach. The following quotes speak to this issue:

“I feel like the hunter should ask permission to run their dogs on other people’s properties and if the landowners do not give them permission I feel like the dog should not be on their land”

“In my opinion the current right to retrieve is equitable for hunters and landowners. Hunters that disregard the property rights of others and are in constant conflict should face penalties for their actions. Enforcement and stiffer penalties are needed”

“License # attached to each dog. Warning issued for first occurrence. Penalties/fines for second offense. Loss of hunting privileges for third offense. Clubs should be held accountable as a group and not accountable for just the individual. Clubs should have a minimum of continuous leased acreage”

“Private property rights should be protected. Hunting with hounds is a regulated privilege and should not be allowed to trump personal property boundaries. If they are not wanted, then they are trespassing and should be addressed accordingly. Only property where permission has been granted beforehand should be hunted and properly trained and monitored dogs should be controlled by trained handlers at all times. If need arise, permission to enter private property should be mandatory”

“This has to stop. It’s time to change the law and start to giving tickets or summons. If not, what good are no trespassing signs. It’s time to change the law. No entering private property without permission if not charged with trespassing!”

Many respondents suggested the use of electronic collars has improved this conflict situation and that they should be made mandatory for all hound hunters. The use of these reduces the hounds trespassing on property for which the hunters do not have permission to hunt. In addition, survey respondents stated there could be minimum acreage requirements and more hunting on public land during certain times for hunting with hounds. This minimum acreage/public land use reduces the risk of conflict. These three quotes summarize these ideas:

“I think people should use the GPS system so that they know where they are on the map. I have 3 GPS handhelds that I keep up with my dogs. I keep one on me when I am in the woods and my son that is not old enough to carry a firearm yet has as well and knows how to operate it. I also keep one in my truck hooked up to the long-range antenna. This allows me to keep up with my dogs so I know if they are heading towards somewhere that they are not wanted. I also keep a look at them to make sure they are not near a high traffic road. If they are headed to either one of these places I go get them”

“Individuals can go on to the property to retrieve hounds A) without permission- as long as they are not armed, must be on foot, and as long as they have made a documented attempt to obtain permission of the landowner for retrieval. B) with permission- unarmed and at any other reasonable requests of the land owner. If request seem unreasonable to hunters, contact local resource officer. If landowner is contacted by hunter they must legally let hunters retrieve the hound unless there are extenuating circumstances in this case hunter may not enter property until local resource officer has given them permission. Limit deer and bear hounds to parcels of continuous land 100 acres in size or larger. Exception being smaller parcels that are connected totaling over 100 acres that the hunter has written permission for hound hunting”

“Hunting hounds should not be allowed on any property without permission. Landowners and those who lease land need legal recourse to keep dogs off. Other states have enacted rules / laws to diminish the amount of landowner / hound hunter conflict such as: Require a minimum amount of acres to hunt deer & bear with dogs. How about 250. Require deer and bear dogs to be registered with the registration number attached to the collar of the dog. or Require permits for the property where dogs will be used to hunt deer and or bear. Have the permit number on the collar of each dog. Have a large visible permit number visible on the front or rear windshield of any motor vehicle involved in the permitted hunt. Numbers not less than 2" tall. Require those to hunt deer / bear with dogs purchase a deer/bear - dog hunting license. Give deer dog hunters their own week at the very end of the season so they're not in conflict with any other deer hunter. Repeal the right to retrieve”

Finally, a true sense of frustration is seen by many of the comments as exemplified by the comment below:

“The right to retrieve law is a blessing for hound hunters and while i cannot speak for all I would like to think i am speaking for the majority. Hound hunters try to do the right thing and always make an effort to get in touch with the landowner if we must get the dogs. Most hunt clubs lease 1000's of acres of land

and don't want to trespass/get on anyone's land they don't have permission to hunt. We love our dogs, we love the tradition, we love the people, and we love the comradery. My son has enjoyed growing up around dogs and helps his papa every weekend with the dogs. If we were to lose the right to retrieve this will be a devastating blow to hound hunters and will probably be a pretty big loss of revenue for the state. I don't think any kind of continuous acreage law would do any good and I believe would probably make things worse. I think the best thing to do is continue to support and promote interaction between local landowners and hound hunters”

Questions Pertaining to Landowners

In what County/Counties, City/Cities do you own property upon which you have interacted with hunters using hounds?

As with hunters, landowner respondents were numerous and widespread across Virginia. This widespread geographic response brings a high degree of confidence to the subsequent responses for the landowner-based questions.

Do you hunt on your property?

Of the 3680 responses, 3033 responses or 82% indicated they do hunt on their own property.

Do you hunt with hounds on your property or allow others to hunt with hounds?

2052 (56%) of landowners allow hunting with hounds on their property, and 1628 (44%) indicate they do not allow hunters with hounds.

Do you actively manage your land for wildlife?

Survey respondents indicated that a large majority (76%) manage their land for wildlife. This shows an active stewardship philosophy and conservation ethic. Furthermore, this suggests that landowners care about the time, money and energy they have put into land and wildlife management and do not want their land or property mismanaged or abused by other individuals.

Hunter-Landowner Relationship (Landowner Perspective)

Has any hunter and/or club ever asked permission to hunt on your property with hounds?

Two-thirds (66%) of the respondents from the landowner perspective reported that a hunter and/or club has previously asked for permission to hunt on their property.

Prior to hunting season, has a hunter or club talked to you about their intentions to hunt a nearby property?

Fifty-six percent (56%) of the landowner respondents reported that a hunter or club have discussed their intentions with landowners about hunting nearby properties.

Have you ever experienced hunters or hunting hounds on your property whom you did not want to be there?

Just over half of the landowner responses (52%) have experienced hunters and hunters with hounds on their property who they did not want to be there. The relatively even split may indicate that in some communities, there are good relationships between hunters with hounds and landowners, while in other areas there may be gaps in communication and poorer relationships.

Please tell us about your experience and any issues or concerns you encountered.

Out of the 1727 comments for this survey question, the following bulleted points summarize the bulk of the comments received:

- **Trespassing:** Landowners expressed frustration with hunters and hunting hounds trespassing on their properties without permission, disregarding posted signs, and crossing property boundaries. Although the right to retrieve law allows hunters to get their hounds, many landowners have had less than ideal experiences as shown below in the following quote:

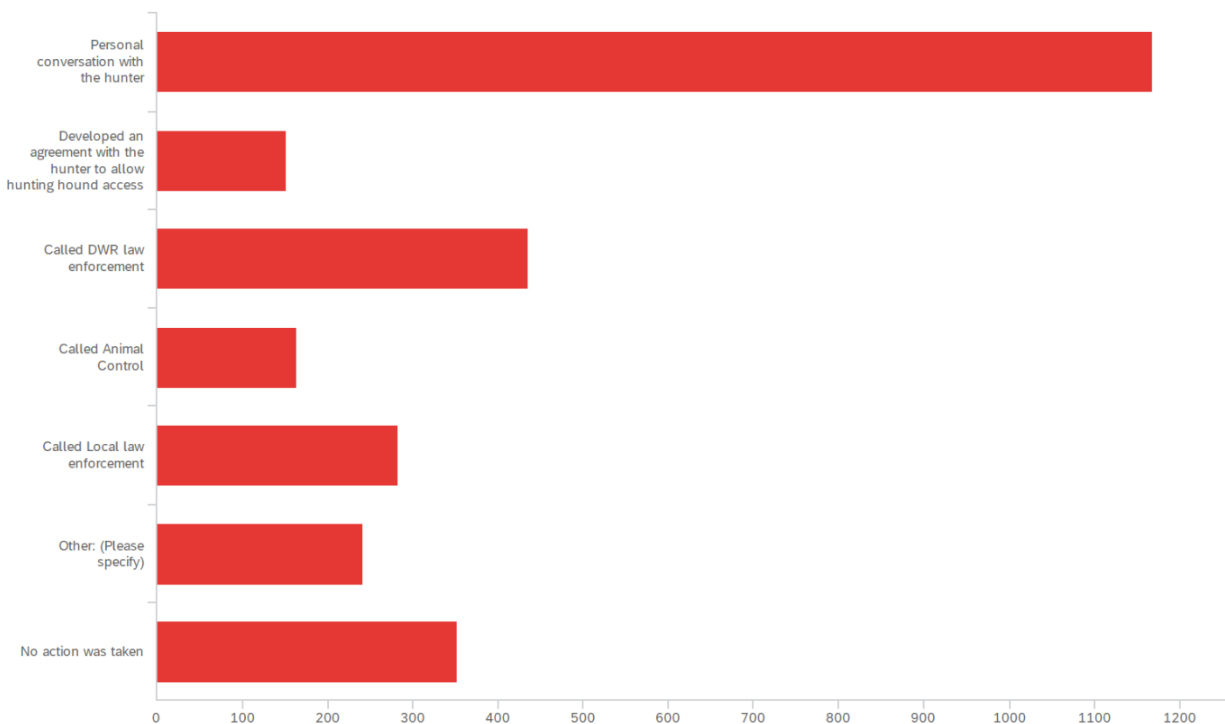
“In the past I have developed an agreement with a local hunt club with restrictions on times and notification so that they could drive into our long access roads after hours. Within one week of the agreement, they were found to be releasing hounds onto my property with the intent of running through to adjacent pieces. I quickly withdrew the permission and have since heard from others that have made similar agreements that were also abused”

“Hound hunters need to adapt to changing land use patterns and societal trends. The days of letting packs of hounds run roughshod over the landscape are over. If the hound hunters maintain a hard line against any change, their sport will go away. It is incompatible with modern society. Discourteous, unethical behavior by some hound hunters tarnishes the reputation of all hunters and promotes conflict with landowners. As a landowner, I should not be required to allow people on my property without my permission. That issue rests at the very core of private property rights. I encourage hound hunters to look for collaborative solutions. This is an opportunity to preserve the future of their sport. If they miss this opportunity to shape their own destiny, the future of their sport will not be dictated by DWR or legislators. It will be decided in the courts and the outcome will not be in the dog hunter’s favor. 86% of states prohibit deer hunting with hounds. Wake up and acknowledge reality”

- **Uncontrolled hunting hounds:** Landowners reported instances of hunting hounds running freely, not responding to commands, and causing disruptions on their properties, including harassing livestock, domestic animals, and wildlife.
- **Safety concerns:** Landowners highlighted safety risks associated with hunting hounds and hunters on their properties, including confrontations, hunters carrying firearms, and potential accidents involving firearms.

- **Violations of property rights:** Landowners felt that their property rights were being infringed upon, with hunters ignoring no trespassing signs, entering their properties without permission, and disregarding their objections.
- **Property and infrastructure damage:** Landowners mentioned incidents of hunting hounds damaging property infrastructure such as fences, trellises, and downspouts. They also expressed concerns about the safety of their livestock and the loss of animals due to interactions with hunting hounds.
- **Impact on quality of life:** Landowners conveyed how the presence of hunting hounds and hunters on their properties affected their overall quality of life, including disturbances to their peace, concerns for the safety of their children and animals, and the general inconvenience caused by these issues.
- **Lack of hound control:** Landowners expressed frustration with hunters' inability to control their hounds effectively, with instances of hounds entering their properties, chasing wildlife, and causing disturbances.
- **Disregard for regulations:** Landowners mentioned instances of hunters violating hunting regulations, such as hunting at night, using spotlights, and hunting in areas where it is prohibited.
- **Lack of communication and respect:** Landowners felt that hunters often lacked communication and respect when it came to accessing their properties, retrieving hunting hounds, or interacting with landowners.
- **Need for policy changes:** Several landowners expressed a desire for changes in legislation and regulations, advocating for stricter enforcement, revisions to the "right to retrieve" law, and better protection of landowners' rights in relation to hunting activities.

What action did you take, if any? Please check all that apply.



There were a number of “action” options offered to the survey respondents ranging from having a personal conversation with the hunter to calling some type of law enforcement. From a total of 2794 responses, please see below the following breakdown.

- Personal conversation with the hunter - 1168 respondents
- Developed an agreement with the hunter to allow hunting hound access - 151 respondents
- Called DWR law enforcement - 435 respondents
- Called Animal Control - 164 respondents
- Called Local law enforcement - 283 respondents
- Other: (Please specify) - 241 respondents
- No action was taken - 352 respondents

Just under one-third of the respondents did call some form of law enforcement following the incident. Of the respondents who contacted law enforcement, about half called DWR and the rest contacted local law enforcement. Some comments expressed they did not know who exactly to call. This shows some lack of awareness of the existence of the DWR enforcement effort and their particular expertise in hunting enforcement issues and actions.

Within the small “Other” category of actions, most comments indicated they let the action go and just waited for the hounds to be retrieved, hence a “no action” alternative.

In your view, how would you rate the resolution of the issue?

66% of the landowner respondents stated that the issue resolution was not satisfactory.

Please tell us about any challenges you faced in reaching a resolution.

Out of the 805 responses to this question, the following major points were expressed:

The landowners express a desire for changes in the law to protect their property rights and address the issues caused by hunting with hounds. They emphasize the need for stricter enforcement, accountability for violators, and elimination of loopholes that allow hunters to trespass or engage in unethical hunting practices under the guise of hound retrieval or hunting other species.

One of the main concerns expressed by landowners is trespassing. They describe instances where hunters enter their properties without permission, often ignoring posted signs or claiming the right to retrieve their hounds as justification for their presence. Landowners feel that their property rights are being violated, and they express a strong desire for legal measures that can effectively prevent hunters from trespassing and hunting on their land without consent.

Additionally, landowners report property damage caused by hunters and their hounds. They describe instances of hunters driving off-road vehicles through their land, damaging fences, and causing disruptions to their daily lives. Landowners expressed frustration with the lack of accountability for such damages and a sense that the current legal framework does not adequately protect their property.

The landowners also highlight instances of threats, intimidation, and hostile behavior from hunters. Some have received explicit threats or experienced aggressive behavior when confronting hunters about their actions. This creates an atmosphere of fear and discomfort for landowners, who feel vulnerable and unsafe on their own properties.

Enforcement-related issues are another major concern raised by landowners. They express disappointment with the response and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, particularly DWR and local law enforcement. Landowners report instances where violations were reported but no action was taken, citing a lack of resources, loopholes in existing laws, or personal relationships between law enforcement and hunting clubs as contributing factors.

Please tell us what worked well about the action that you took?

Out of 654 total question responses, the following major themes were apparent in the comments:

- **Communication:** Effective communication between landowners and hunters proved to be a crucial factor in resolving conflicts. Landowners appreciated hunters who approached them before accessing their property and sought permission or informed them about the situation. Clear and open dialogue helped establish mutual understanding and allowed landowners to express their concerns while hunters could explain their intentions and address any misunderstandings.
- **Respectful Approach:** Landowners found that maintaining a respectful and polite demeanor when engaging with hunters yielded positive outcomes. Treating each other with respect, listening attentively, and being willing to understand each other's perspectives helped build rapport and foster cooperative relationships. Landowners acknowledged that most hunters were reasonable individuals and approaching them in a respectful manner resulted in a better understanding of each other's needs.
- **Awareness and Education:** Some landowners emphasized the importance of hunters being knowledgeable about hunting regulations and respecting landowners' rights. Educating hunters about relevant laws and regulations regarding hunting with hounds, property boundaries, and the landowners' preferences contributed to a smoother coexistence. By raising awareness and providing information, landowners aimed to prevent accidental trespassing or other violations.
- **Problem Resolution without Involving Law Enforcement:** Landowners preferred resolving issues directly with hunters whenever possible, without resorting to involving law enforcement. Many landowners mentioned that after explaining the laws and regulations to hunters, most understood and rectified the situation. This approach emphasized personal responsibility and encouraged hunters to correct their behavior willingly, thereby avoiding legal consequences.
- **Collaboration with Hunting Clubs:** Some landowners maintained positive relationships with nearby hunting clubs by establishing clear communication channels and agreements. They coordinated with the clubs to ensure that hunters respected property boundaries and sought permission when accessing their land. Establishing relationships and mutual understanding with hunting clubs facilitated effective management of hunting activities and minimized conflicts.
- **Hound Retrieval Protocols:** Landowners appreciated hunters who had well-defined protocols for retrieving their hounds that may have strayed onto private property. Hunters who contacted landowners promptly, respected their property boundaries, and retrieved their hounds without causing further disturbance or damage were viewed

positively. This responsible approach to hound retrieval helped maintain good relationships between landowners and hunters.

If you did not take action, please share more about why you did not.

Out of the over 600 responses to this question, the following major themes emerged:

- **Fear of Backlash or Retaliation:** Landowners express concerns about potential retribution or negative consequences if they were to confront or report hound hunters. They worry that acting may lead to strained relationships with neighbors or hunt clubs, or even result in damage to their property in their absence. Fear of confrontations with armed individuals and uncertainty about how hunters might react further deter landowners from pursuing action
- **Limited Support from Authorities:** Some landowners indicate that they believe local authorities, such as the police or game wardens, are not inclined to get involved or follow up on their complaints. Past experiences of not receiving any response or feedback when contacting law enforcement agencies contribute to a perception that reporting incidents may be futile. This lack of support from authorities can make landowners feel helpless and dissuade them from taking any action.
- **Uncertainty about Applicable Laws and Rights:** Landowners mention being unfamiliar with hunting regulations and property rights related to hound hunting. They express doubts about whether their rights as landowners are protected, or if there are any legal provisions they can rely on to address the issue. This lack of knowledge about the relevant laws and regulations contributes to a sense of powerlessness and discourages landowners from acting.
- **Perceived Ineffectiveness of Actions:** Landowners often mention previous attempts to address the issue that yielded no changes or improvements. They may have reported incidents to authorities, contacted game wardens, or engaged in conversations with hunters or hunt clubs, but experienced a lack of response or saw no resolution. These past experiences lead to a belief that acting will not yield any meaningful results, reinforcing a sense of helplessness and resignation.
- **Desire to Avoid Conflict or Start a Dispute:** Some landowners express a desire to maintain positive relationships with their neighbors or the local community. They choose not to take action to avoid confrontations, arguments, or the potential escalation of conflicts. They may prioritize harmony and understanding over asserting their rights or addressing the issue directly.
- **Time and Resource Constraints:** Landowners mention being busy or lacking the time and resources to address the issue effectively. Chasing down hound hunters, monitoring their property, or engaging in legal processes may be perceived as time-consuming and burdensome. These practical constraints, combined with the belief that little will change even if they take action, contribute to a decision to not invest further effort.

When have these experiences most commonly occurred? (check all that apply)?

Many of the experiences occur during the traditional fall/winter hunting season. Combining fall and winter accounts for 2578 of the total 3138 responses (82%). For fall alone, 1469 responses (47%) of the experiences occurred. However, there were also responses around year-round issues such as when hounds are being trained, etc.

How would you describe the relationship between hunters who hunt with hounds and landowners in your area?

There were 3370 responses to this question. The following themes were drawn from the responses:

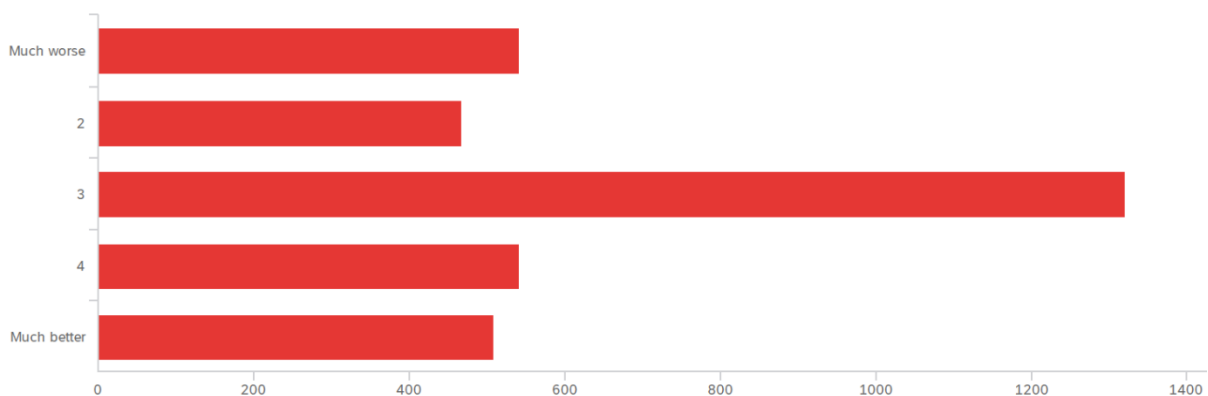
Overall, the relationships between landowners and hunters seem to vary widely depending on the specific region, individual circumstances, and the behavior of the hunters. Nearly 1/3 responded the relationship as “good” in their area.

Some landowners express positive experiences and good relationships with hunters, emphasizing mutual respect, trust, and understanding. They appreciate the tradition and cultural significance of hunting with hounds in their area. Other landowners have reported strained or poor relationships, citing issues such as trespassing, lack of permission, disrespectful behavior, damage to property or livestock, and concerns about safety.

There are landowners who feel threatened, ignored, or disrespected by hunters who use their land without permission. Some mention instances of hunters disregarding property boundaries and exhibiting confrontational or entitled attitudes. On the other hand, there are landowners who have developed long-standing relationships with hunters, particularly those who have a history in the community. These relationships are generally described as positive and amicable.

The attitudes towards hound hunting and the behavior of hunters also vary. While some landowners have no problems with hound hunting and view it as a way of life or tradition, others have negative perceptions, especially regarding deer hunters with hounds. Concerns are raised about the impact on wildlife, excessive chase seasons, and the need for hunters to ask permission before using private property.

How does the current relationship between hunters who hunt with hounds and landowners in your area compare to how it has been in the past?



As the data above indicates, 30% feel the relationship is “worse” or “much worse” than it has been in the past, 39% feel it is about the same, and 31% feel it is “better” or “much better” now.

In your view, how should the issue of hounds going onto property where they are not wanted be addressed?

As with many of the questions in the survey, responses to this question were wide-ranging. Again, hunter/landowner communication is key to reducing conflict. The following two quotes display this perspective:

“Hunt clubs should make a strong effort to personally meet all the landowners in their surrounding hunting territory. They should be respectful of landowners wishes at all times and promptly remove hounds from unwanted areas. Hunt clubs should have a community service component that benefits the area, such as roadside trash cleanup”

“Meet with the property owner and discuss the process hunting with hounds. Help educate and do not try to bully about the right to retrieval”

As expressed before, there remains a considerable thematic presence of modifying the right to retrieve law to enable landowner relief for property boundary, trespass, and hound-related issues. Going even further, there were also numerous comments around ending hunting with hounds in the Commonwealth.

The following quote offers this perspective:

“Change the RTR law to hold hound hunters responsible for their dogs!! All my life living in Virginia and being an avid outdoorsman, I never thought I would EVER advocate against hunting but the hound hunters are using RTR to violate the property rights of those who have a little bit of land. As someone who has served their country my entire adult life, I never thought I would ever have to deal with something like this where there is such blatant disregard for the law and year after year it is never changed or amended to hold these hound hunters responsible for their dogs. The days of “dogs can’t read signs” and being told to put a fence up if we don’t like dogs on our property are coming to an end. People who pay taxes and contribute to society in a positive way are tired of being violated with no recourse due to a law that allows for legal trespass and hunting”

In many instances, landowners offered possible solutions to these conflict issues. This willingness to acknowledge the history and legacy of hound hunting while crafting possible solutions is positive. The following quote offers an example of solutions for this landowner:

“I am not sure there is anything you can do to stop dogs from entering a property where they are not wanted. I think there are 2 potential solutions. 1) extend general firearms season another week or so prior to dog hunting being allowed. Example: first week of general firearms may not allow hound hunting, or extend black powder an additional week prior to hound hunting during general firearms. This may shorten hound hunting by a week, but I think this allows some sort of compromise between still hunters and hound hunters. 2) require a minimum amount of acreage required for hound hunting. Many clubs have leases and/or land ownership on a large scale. In order to hound hunt a particular area(s) you would need a minimum of “x” acres before turning dogs loose on a piece of property. This would prevent a club from turning dogs loose on a piece of property that is relatively small and is surrounded by larger pieces that may not desire hound hunting”

Landowners also advocated for increased enforcement actions including penalties, automatic trespass violations, better hound identification and licensing actions. Landowner safety was expressed routinely throughout the comments. Safety of landowner’s family, pets, and livestock. This quote shows the concern:

“The hound owner should be held legally accountable for trespassing when his hounds are on my land without my permission. In Virginia, we NEED A LAW that states that hound hunters are NOT ALLOWED to let their dogs run on private land without the owner's permission. I don't borrow my neighbor's tractor without his permission, he shouldn't be allowed to borrow my property without my permission! I want SAFETY on my land. I want property rights of a land owner to include the right to privacy and safety from unwelcome hounds. Hounds should not be allowed to run year around and threaten the safety of private property owner's pets and family. PLEASE help private property owners by making a law that prohibits hounds from running on non-permitted land. If the law is broken, PLEASE make a clear fine system or legal charge that escalates with each infraction so hound hunters will respect the law and not willfully continue to violate it. VA property owners are counting on you to do what's right”

In addition, the same themes for hunters came up for landowners regarding law enforcement. Both groups see a strong need for increased numbers of DWR enforcement personnel and the subsequent enforcement actions for violations. Also, acreage minimum requirements were cited often as a way to minimize the release of hounds on small parcels outside of their permitted hunting areas. This quote offers a minimum acreage perspective:

“I believe there should be acreage requirements for running dogs. Either leased or written permission of continuous land. It is simply not possible to run dogs on a piece of property for deer and expect them to stay on the property. In some cases, hunt clubs lease 100 acres and then the dogs run all over the county. unacceptable. Ultimately there has got to be protection of landowners' rights. The American dream is to own your own land. Right now, there is no enforcement or consequences for repeat offenders and their dogs on private property. Maybe a permit to run dogs? And if a violation is confirmed after warnings the permit can be revoked. Whatever it is there must be more rights given to landowners and more consequences for hound hunters that allow their dogs to run onto private property”

Responses from those who are “Neither a hunter nor landowner who interacts with hunters using hounds but interested in these issues, or local government representative (including local law enforcement staff)”

The purpose of this third category of respondent was to capture individuals who are neither hunters with hounds nor landowners but have an interest in this issue.

What interests connect you to this issue?

There were a number of respondents who stated they were retired law enforcement or retired hunters. Also included were working animal control officers and a number of respondents who identified as animal welfare advocates.

To which locality/localities does your interest pertain?

As with this previous question for the other categories of respondents, there were widespread geographic representation in Virginia again giving credence to the following responses.

What do you believe are the top issues regarding the relationships between those hunting with hounds and landowners?

Question respondents offered little difference on the issues versus hunters or landowners. The establishment of trust and good relations remains paramount in the comments received by this group. These two quotes show this perspective:

“I honestly feel that the bad apples are spoiling the entire bunch of good apples. I also feel there could be good conversation between hunters and landowners and there is much good that can happen if both come together and both will see that there is a common goal between the two”

“Misunderstandings on both sides, most of it due to anti-hunting propaganda. Better understanding of ethical hunting and the long tradition of dog use in hunting is needed”

As with the hunter and landowner categories of survey responses, this group also had experiences and witnessed negative interactions. It appears relevant for this group that a certain lack of respect, trust and good relationships in certain geographic areas has accounted for some of the conflict. Here is an example of a response:

“I think the biggest issue is the lack of respect those hunting with hounds have for landowner’s private property and the lack of laws protecting the landowner. I have seen many hunters with hounds purposefully and accidentally allow their dogs to go onto landowners’ private property and destroy things or present challenges for the landowners. For example, when I am visiting my parents who are landowners, I am unable to let my dog out without a leash, even though we have an extensive (over 100 acres) of land during hunting season for fear another dog will come onto our property without permission and have a negative interaction with my dog. In addition, hunters come onto private property to retrieve their dogs that have sometimes purposefully come onto private property land. Landowners should not be forced to allow unknown individuals onto their land without permission for safety concerns among others”

In your view, what would be most helpful in preventing and addressing conflicts between hunters using hounds and landowners?

There were no significant differences versus the two previous response categories (hunter and landowner) in suggestions for addressing the hunter/landowner conflicts. Issues of respect, trust and relationship-building remain the most discussed strategies for reducing conflict. More law enforcement personnel, increased hound identification and the use of GPS collars for everyone were cited. Enhanced communication and landowner education were mentioned many times in these comments.

What else is on your mind with regard to this issue?

The following quotes offer additional ideas and perspectives to hunting with hounds and landowner conflict issue.

"It seems there is an easy, fair, and sensible compromise on the table: continue to allow dog hunting but with regulations in place to uphold VA property rights. It's frustrating that (as far as I can tell) the dog hunters refuse to agree to this. Landowners do not want to take away the dog hunter's right to hunt with dogs. They just want to protect their own rights. But dog hunters want to protect their right to hunt with dogs (we're all for that!) while also demanding to be allowed to infringe upon landowners' rights to do so (this is where they lose me). The side to be on seems pretty clear to me"

"There are inconveniences associated with hounds coming across my land, however, I feel the benefits far out way the cost. A large majority of the community responsible for preserving rural and open space are involved in hunting with hounds. There is a strong and direct correlation between open space and hound hunting in Loudoun County. Overall, it is a good thing for the countryside."

"I believe that every hunter must protect the right to hunt and respect the rights of the private property land owner. No hunter should have the right to go on someone else's private property without permission. When you hunt with dogs those dogs are an extension of the hunter thus the hunter's responsibility. The DDH needs to be accountable for their dogs' actions. I recommend that the Virginia DWR relook at the current laws and ensure that the DDH does not cross into private property. Bottom line, private property is just that, private not open to everyone and the hunting dog is an extension of the hunter. In order to hunt with dogs the dogs must remain in the area designated for hunting with dogs. If the hunter cannot ensure that the dog will remain in the designated area, then hunting with dogs should not be allowed. I believe there are a few dog hunters that are unethical and give those of us who respect them landowners a bad name. I hope that our age-old tradition will be preserved for us and cuter e hounds men to come. The majority of us are ethical respectful hunters and do it because we love it. Hound hunters can go a long way to stopping this problem by not releasing dogs onto posted land. It happens, every hound hunter knows it happens, and those people are causing great problems for the rest of us. Going onto posted land with firearm or vehicle should be punished severely if the hunter uses the excuse of retrieval. We lose rural hunting territory every year and the hound hunters have to realize their sport is extremely threatened by any bad behavior. Perhaps penalties should be greatly increased for convictions involving trespass with hounds to dissuade the act. I realize this is beyond the scope of VADWR and becomes a legal issue. Landowners have to realize dogs cannot read and hound hunters need to realize not everyone appreciates a pack of dogs outside their residence or chasing game through their property. The only time a landowner tried to stop me from retrieving dogs and threatened to call a CPO, I found the reason why. He had 5 corn feeders on his property adjoining NF land with a tree stand near each. The hound hunters aren't always the bad guys! I did retrieve my dogs and he did not call a CPO"

Survey Summary

In this report, IEN synthesized and analysed the current interests, issues, concerns, suggestions, and goals of the nearly 9000 stakeholders who participated in IEN's electronic survey and interviews. This information will be used to inform DWR and a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), selected in consultation with DWR, to develop recommendations to resolve the issues. IEN will facilitate a series of meetings for these deliberations using a stakeholder consensus-building approach. IEN will then present the SAC's recommendations in a final report for DWR and the Board's consideration.

Three categories of survey responders were utilized to develop the following survey summary narrative. The categories were hunters, landowners, and a category in which the responder was neither a hunter nor landowner but had an interest and connection to the issue. The questions posed to each category were similar but not identical. There was overlap in the three categories, as some respondents were both hunters and landowners.

For the hunters with hounds' community, the following important, consistent, and frequent elements were present:

- Hunting with hounds has an important, historical legacy in Virginia involving generations of families and has significant community involvement.
- Hunting with hounds is critical to overall game management.
- Hunting with hounds provides considerable positive secondary economic impact for rural areas.
- In some areas law enforcement efforts are considered incomplete, and more enforcement personnel are needed.
- Bear hunting utilizes public lands more commonly than deer hunting, although they sometimes encounter issues with landowners who own property adjacent to public land.
- The "right to retrieve" law is viewed as an important element to those who hunt with hounds.
- Most hunt clubs and other hunting with hounds' groups practice respectful interaction with landowners.
- It is acknowledged that there has been and continues to be conflict with landowners and those interactions have had negative consequences.
- New landowners who move to rural areas sometimes do not understand or appreciate the historical significance of hunting with hounds and are not aware of the legal framework in which hound hunters operate. In addition to pressure from new land development, this has contributed to a decrease in hunting opportunities.

For the landowner community, the following important elements and themes constitute their perspective on the hunting with hound's issue:

- Hunters with hounds often cross properties without permission.
- Law enforcement personnel do not act in a consistent manner on incidents when reported.
- In some areas law enforcement efforts are considered incomplete, and more enforcement personnel are needed.
- Hunters often lack communication with and respect for landowners when it comes to accessing properties, retrieving hunting hounds, or interacting with property owners.

- At times uncontrolled hunting hounds run freely, do not respond to commands, and cause disruptions to their properties, including harassing livestock, domestic animals, and wildlife.
- Landowners highlighted safety risks associated with hunting hounds and hunters on their properties, including confrontations, dropping and waiting for hounds in and around public roadways, hunters carrying firearms, and potential accidents involving firearms.
- Hunters let loose their hounds on property they do not have permission for in hopes of them running across larger tracts.
- The presence of hunting hounds and hunters on their properties affected their overall quality of life, including disturbances to their peace, concerns for the safety of their children and animals, ability to use and enjoy their property, and the general inconvenience caused by these issues.
- Some hound hunters violate hunting regulations, such as hunting at night, using spotlights, and hunting in areas where it is prohibited.
- Many landowners support stricter enforcement, revisions to the "right to retrieve" law, and better protection of landowners' rights in relation to hunting activities.

Regarding the resolution of these issues, there was considerable common ground on a set of improvements. These recommendations do not consider resources necessary for implementation, political viability, or legal/regulatory authority. Many of the themes identified by this survey and interview process match previous work identified during the 2007-2008 effort and later processes implemented by DWR. The survey results indicated areas of agreement, including:

- Law enforcement staffing gaps need to be filled.
- Communication between the groups needs to be consistent and transparent.
- Respect and trust are paramount to successful interaction and reduce potential for conflict.
- Educational efforts for both groups, including new landowners, need upgrading.
- Hunt clubs could enhance communication efforts using a landowner ombudsmen approach program.
- Hound identification mechanisms could be improved.
- Electronic tracking collars should be considered statewide.

Stakeholder Interviews

Eighteen interviews were conducted with key stakeholders representing a wide diversity of perspectives in the hunting with hound's issue. The intent was to capture a broad array of responses, themes, and ideas that were representative of views statewide. The interview pool was developed by the DWR and IEN project teams, with consideration given to interviewee's knowledge and interest in the issue, geographic area, gender, diversity, and species hunted. Interviews were conducted via phone or virtually in June and July 2023. The interview questions are shared below, along with the summarized responses and select quotes from interviewees, which are presented without attribution to maintain anonymity.

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me briefly about you, your work, and your role in the community? What is your current role and how are you involved with this issue?
2. Is there any specific history relating to this issue in your community that you would like to share and is important for us to understand?
3. What are your concerns – and your hopes – for the future of hunting with hounds?
4. Is there information or resources that you would like to share that could help the SAC create solutions to reduce conflict between hunters and landowners? Are there opportunities or alternatives that you think should be considered?
5. What would success look like to you? In terms of the hunters? For the landowners? To make sure we have included and heard from everyone who needs a voice?
6. What else might be important for us to know so we can help resolve some or most of this issue(s)
7. Who else would you suggest we talk to? And why?

Interviewee Responses

1. Can you tell me briefly about you, your work, and your role in the community? What is your current role and how are you involved with this issue?

Information shared in response to this question isn't being summarized to maintain anonymity. The list of those interviewed can be found in Appendix 2.

2. Is there any specific history relating to this issue in your community that you would like to share and is important for us to understand?

Responses to this question could be categorized as touching on elements of culture, relationships and communication, the impact to still hunters, and the role of law enforcement.

Culture

Culture around this issue was noted by many respondents, in different contexts. For the hound hunters, the passion and camaraderie fostered by hunting with hounds distinguish it from other types of still hunting. Because it is by nature a group endeavor, the depth of relationships of those involved and the connection they feel to the hounds and to one another is significant and characterizes their experience of the sport. Many noted a longtime family connection to the experience of hound hunting, and/or the desire to teach their children and share that experience with them.

Some hound hunters expressed the obligation they feel to pass their knowledge to the next generation of hunters, because of a sense of responsibility to both the people and to the land. Ensuring children are taught to respect nature, the animals, and to understand the elements of conservation inherent in the sport were components important to several of the hound hunters interviewed.

“Hunting season never ends for me. I bow hunt, muzzle load, squirrel hunt, quail hunt. But hunting with dogs in a hunt club is a different type of camaraderie and a different hunting experience. It’s a different atmosphere. I love all types of hunting, but this one is a different passion for me.”

“We still do dinners once a month at our Hunt Club and all of our neighbors are invited. We built a bigger Hunt Club and we think of it as a community center and that’s how it gets used by the community.”

Culture was also mentioned by many of the landowners interviewed, though for them the context was negative. Interviewees described experiencing threats and extreme behaviors from local hound hunters in a way that they felt reflected a culture of intimidation, entitlement, and disrespect. These included verbal and physical harassment, threats made with and without firearms, erratic driving on public roads, and dropping of hounds in illegal places and outside of the appropriate season, among others. These experiences have had a significant impact on the quality of life for these landowners and have made many of those interviewed feel that they aren’t safe on their own properties. Landowners described not feeling like remedy had been achieved through contacting law enforcement, or in some situations like they shouldn’t contact law enforcement because they feared retaliation. This perception that law enforcement cannot or will not assist in addressing these circumstances contributes to landowners’ feeling that hunters exhibiting these extreme behaviors can do so without consequence.

“My family is afraid to be on our property. My wife is always armed on our property because she feels she has to be to be safe. It shouldn’t have to be like that”

“They drop their dogs wherever they want on public lands. They drive like mad on public roads to try to intercept deer and shoot the deer as they cross the road. Or they come right up to the property line and drop the dog 6 inches from the gate and stand at the road. It’s maddening and unsafe. They absolutely shoot on the wrong property and loose the dogs on our property. It’s the ‘culture of take.’”

“In the community they have a reputation for being the orange hat militia.”

Relationships and Communication

Several hound hunters expressed the obligation they feel to making a positive contribution to their communities. Some noted the benefits of hound hunting to wildlife management especially, and how many communities might experience population issues in its absence.

Hound hunters who have largely positive relationships with their neighbors and community members described the tremendous efforts that have gone into their relationship building and establishing lines of communication with those nearby to head off potential issues and to address them when they arise. Examples included visits to introduce themselves to new neighbors, calls, and texts to nearby landowners to let them know what days they would be hunting or when a hound is being retrieved, and efforts to communicate outside of hunting season to maintain those connections. Those who have this type of relationship with local landowners indicated that creating and maintaining these relationships was also an important part of the culture of their sport. This often includes an element of education for new neighbors

who aren't familiar with hound hunting and can include addressing fellow hunters who aren't following the law and meeting the expectations of the hunt club. This could also include an ombudsman role for the hunt clubs to connect with private property owners and facilitate communication between parties.

"I've got a lot of feeling that a lot of issues that people are having are really due to lack of respect and communication. I have yet to knock on somebody's door and have them keep me from getting my dog. If you treat people with respect and communicate it will really slim down your issues"

"If we run a coyote, I will text my neighbors and let them know what's going on the next morning so they put up their pet dogs, so they don't take off too"

"The issue in our community is communication – a lot of hunt clubs are used to how they've always done things and could do so much better if they would communicate with new and existing landowner."

"We [a fox hunting organization] go a long way to work with landowners. My hunt spends a lot of time with those where they have permission to hunt, and new landowners to explain what will happen if they do cross property lines. We do spend a lot of effort to engage the people who welcome us and those who don't and those who don't know about this. If we can get to a place where the people who are upset about deer and bear hunting understand that most hunters don't want their dogs to go on other people's property - it's a matter of education on both sides and will be hard to accomplish but it would be the perfect world if everyone understood the need for that."

Impact to Still Hunters

Outside of the landowner experience described above, interviewees also shared substantial impacts to still hunters that occur as result of hound hunting. Several mentioned major investments in habitat management on their property that they perceive to be practically useless because of the frequency with which hounds run through their land. One person described how they intentionally avoid visiting parts of their property to encourage deer to feel comfortable there (with the goal of facilitating a better hunting experience), but that their efforts are nullified by hounds running through or hunters coming to retrieve them.

Two separate interviewees mentioned a desire to host people with disabilities for hunting on their property (one person working with children, one person with adults) but that they are unable to do so because of the conditions created by local hound hunting. A few interviewees clarified that their issue is not with dogs used for bird hunting because they're typically well-controlled, with the implication that there is an incentive to a deer hound hunter to not have their hounds well-controlled because they might push deer from other property to a space accessible to the hunters.

"I spent a fortune on my land and food plots. There have been times I've had to leave my stand and come back or just don't go because I can hear the dogs."

"We would like to do programming for disabled kids but can't risk it right now with the dogs."

"They are intentionally dropping their dogs at the edge of their property and the dogs are just naturally going to come east across our property. During the dog season it's almost every day there is a group of dogs from that same hunt club."

"It's infuriating that the state makes us share our property. They ruin our hunt and our ability to enjoy our property. Even during bow season, they say they're running foxes. I invited disabled hunters to come out and it's stressful for them. The habitat work that we do is pretty much all for naught. We hired a company...to help us develop plans for habitat, but it doesn't matter if the hounds are running all the time."

“You don’t have this issue with bird hunting dogs. They know how to control their dogs. Control is an issue with deer hunting because they want to run the deer off of other people’s property.”

Role of law enforcement

Many interviewees mentioned the role of Conservation Police Officer (CPOs) in their responses, with those views being expressed primarily in two ways: that an increased law enforcement presence would be helpful to address the issues arising between hound hunters and landowners, and that in some areas law enforcement is not as responsive as interviewees would like. In the latter case, interviewees felt that this was because in some areas law enforcement officers are part of the hound hunting community, and in some places, CPOs feel that there is nothing that they can do in certain situations.

“There are rules on the books for not dropping dogs where they’re not supposed to be. You’ve got to have the enforcement to do it”

“At a DWR Board meeting, others from across my county spoke and had they had the same opinion about the chaos and the inability to get support from law enforcement -- throughout the county”

“I got checked for fishing yesterday, but game warden’s hardly ever check these days. Just their presence will head off these situations”

“Conservation police officer doesn’t show up because they say there’s nothing they can do. That ‘culture of take’ is a thing”

3. What are your concerns – and your hopes – for the future of hunting with hounds?

A common response from interviewees reflected the concern or hope that action will or will not be taken on this issue, or the concern that compromise will not be reached. Hound hunters do not want to lose their sport as some states have, or see it curtailed by regulation and legislation when many see the problems as arising from only “a few bad actors.” Many hound hunters described a strong code of ethics within their clubs, and expectations that all members will abide by the law. Landowners who have been impacted by the sport hope for changes that would resolve these ongoing issues and express concern that not enough will be done to make a difference in their experience.

“The law abiding [hound hunters] do not want to protect those doing wrong. Some have been used to hunting when land was not broken up, and dogs could run more freely. But we also need to protect property rights”

“As a landowner and still hunter, I would like my privacy to be respected. I would like to do land management as I like with my money and time. I would like to create a sanctuary for deer. I do not want deer hunters who hunt with hounds to lose their right to hunt with hounds. They simply need to have more control of their dogs. If they do not have to have control of their dogs, they are not going to do it”

“I definitely don’t want to see it go away, especially for Southside for VA. The hound community we get hit with studies or something every 3-4 years that something else is being looked at. When I look at it from our area, at how good the relationships are and how few the issues are, my worry is that not just that it goes away at some point but also that if it’s overregulated.... We have about 38 clubs in Mecklenburg

County. Any types of regulations that restrict plot size, there would be no way that smaller clubs could survive”

“I want them to do away with hound hunting. There aren’t that many states that do that anymore. But to me, they should limit it to the last couple weeks of gun season. It’s not fair to the landowners and still hunters to deal with the inconvenience. There are places on my property where I haven’t walked because I know that’s where my big bucks are, so why does someone else have that right to do that”

“I don’t want to see these things poached away by the inappropriate actions of a few individuals. I think that most hunters are law abiding and want to do the right thing. We have to identify those people and have the resources to solve them rather than addressing the whole group”

“I don’t know of any other sort of American way that impinges on a property owner the way this does. They have developed a culture of taking what they want. They wouldn’t be allowed to come on and use our tractor without our permission. How is it ok that they can just use our land without permission? I think it’s a big problem and it should be illegal. There shouldn’t be shades of grey with trespassing”

“The current law structure and regs are lopsidedly in favor of hound hunting to landowner/still hunters. This interferes with the protection of livestock and the private enjoyment of one’s own property. I have little or no recourse for the things I want to do to manage my property – with hound hunters being able to cross my property at will. The right to retrieve law allows bad hunters to do what they like. I am hopeful about coming to a resolution amicable to both sides. I am more concerned about hunting long term. Only 9 states allow hound hunting. The amount of conflict we have now will also affect future hunting. More hunters take a different approach – there are more still hunters. Neighbors have thrown in the towel – not seeing recourse for harm done. A resolution is needed”

Concerns

Safety

Safety is a significant concern for landowners impacted by hound hunting. These concerns are divided into those that stem from the effects of unwanted hound hunting on their property, and those that stem from retaliation for contacting law enforcement or otherwise speaking up about it. Interviewees describe fearing for themselves, family members, and their pets and livestock when hounds are running through their property. Some have experienced harassment and intimidation in their communities and to varying degrees feel that law enforcement cannot be counted on to address violations.

“Our local law enforcement are a joke because they are all related...If you call them, they will laugh at you. These women do not feel comfortable in own homes. One’s house got buckshot”

“It’s not safe for hunters to be on private land. To come up on someone who has a gun or is pointing a gun towards my land. Our dogs are black and I’m worried they will be mistaken for deer. It’s a huge safety issue”

“In last year or so I have over \$5000 in bills [because of this issue]. I have pictures and videos of the endless supply of livestock being chased by hounds. I have electric fence and set it up so deer can get over and dogs will run through it, the dogs panic and then cannot get out of the fence. Hunters have tried to take apart my fence to get their dogs out. There has been chasing of ducks. Buckshot rained in trees over my and my children’s heads. A lot of damage over the years”

“There are people going to get seriously hurt. They don’t respect the landowners that they’re trampling on their land. Altercations will get more than just verbal. Just like the man on our property who threatened us with us a gun. That’s not ok.... We called the Sheriff a few days later, I don’t have a signal all the time right there so couldn’t call him when it happened. And landowners are going to stand their ground. That is my greatest concern, what’s going to happen because landowners are done with this and they’re going to start defending themselves”

Development, Demographics, and Population Shift

Several interviewees noted concern regarding the way development has impacted the hunting experience and also the way neighbors interact with one another. In some places, new housing and the division of land parcels has resulted in less space for hunting in general. In some communities, new residents not understanding hound hunting has led to an increase in contentious situations. In these instances, a few interviewees noted the need for improved relationship-building and education to decrease the tension.

“With landowners and hunters – when they go in where they are not known, they may not act as well as they would in their home area. Other landowners, hear a gunshot and think it is a mass shooting. Some landowners get five or ten acres, and they want nobody on it. For small landowners, I tell them to put a fence around their small property. They might laugh, but I have to maintain miles of fencing to keep cattle in. When people change from one lifestyle to another. And now there is so much moving around”

“I am concerned the non-hound hunting people do not understand hound hunting for bear. They do not understand why so many people are parked along the road. Our sport is not one-on-one as with non-hound hunting. In bear hunting, one animal provides recreation for a number of people. Many who are not capable of getting into woods can still track the dogs and can appreciate the race and sound of the dogs. Having a number of people allows us to stop dogs from going into places they ought not to be. Today, highway traffic has more than double.”

“Nonhunters have no clue about what dog hunting is about.”

“A lot of landowners who have given us permission to use their land to access the national forest, to bring a bear out, we buy a fruit basket at Christmas and to take it to them. And others when [it is time for] chopping corn, volunteer to drive some of the silage trucks. Hound hunters stay connected with landowners. But [Virginia] is getting so populated. We used to know everybody. In past, most went to church, then you had gatherings. So it would be a big help if landowners and hunters really got to know each other”

Law enforcement

Several interviewees expressed the concern that the amount of law enforcement officers is insufficient for meeting the current need, and they believe that an increase in law enforcement (in numbers and presence) would be helpful for addressing violations and other contentious situations. One person mentioned that there are also instances in which landowners don't follow through with pressing charges, and they felt that doing so would make a difference to how these situations are addressed.

“We have 134 authorized law enforcement officer positions filled at this time. 20 recruits in line to graduate. This is an insufficient number of law enforcers in the field”

“The amount of game wardens that we have seen has dwindled down to maybe once per year. Just like the state trooper who sits in the median, it keeps you honest. I think their presence really helps keep the bad actors honest”

“Most issues would be resolved by having 225 filled positions – what we had in mid- 1990s”

“Mathews county does not actually have a game warden. We share one with Mathews/Gloucester, Middlesex and King and Queen and sometimes your County if we are short-handed. I have a great relationship with that game warden. At any time, he is an hour and half away and three counties over. So

you are left to handle things on their own... I try not to call unless we really have to, because of the shortage. Those who break the law know we don't have a game warden"

"At the Board this spring, landowners were being abused by a dog club. They called the police, but the warden seldom came. Nothing done. A board member investigated and found out the individual simply would not file charges. Three times they asked if he would. He was blaming everyone but himself. We need people to participate saying this is a violation that needs to be corrected or [if not, that] it is not a problem, and we need to understand and get to be better neighbors"

4. Is there information or resources that you would like to share that could help the SAC create solutions to reduce conflict between hunters and landowners? Are there opportunities or alternatives that you think should be considered?

Resources

Very few specific resources were mentioned in response to this question. A couple of interviewees noted the 2008 stakeholder engagement process and report completed by Virginia Tech in 2008, but the context for that was more around their perspective that not enough from that work had produced results. One interviewee mentioned the 2016 Technical Report produced by DWR. The complaint data from DWR was also mentioned, with the implication that the number of complaints on this issue is increasing. A few experts were also recommended in response to the final question of the interviews (see **"Who else would you suggest we talk to? And why?"**).

More interviewees were interested in what could be learned from other states, and those views are reflected below.

Opportunities and Alternatives

Other States

Many interviewees mentioned the approaches taken by other states as possibilities for Virginia to consider. Specific options noted by the interviewees include additional licensing and hound identification, minimum acreage requirements and/or limits on the number of hounds that can be released, shortening the season, and requirements for GPS collars and geofencing. Other options mentioned include the idea of registrations for hunt clubs or a separate license for hunting with hounds, registering hunting leases with DWR (to make it clear to game wardens who has to permission to hunt where), and elimination of hunting from roads. The idea of requiring landowners to post their name and phone number on posted property signs (mentioned in the section above) was also reiterated.

"We now have other models that work – Georgia and Florida – with licensing and penalties for a level of accountability for the bad actors. Now there is no recourse, so there is no accountability. It is impossible to catch bad actors red-handed"

"The minimum acreage requirement is helpful. If you drop off dogs on a 3-acre parcel, the dogs will go on 500-acre parcel next door"

"Limit the number of hounds that can be released per acre. A controlled hunt is a safe hunt. If sixty dogs are out with ten hunters, – you cannot manage that safely and effectively"

"I suggest a minimum acreage requirement. I suggest a registration of hunting clubs, dogs, and a dog ID. I should not be forced to catch dogs to identify them. I like the idea of having the hunt club's initials painted on the dog"

“...We may not be able to compare the states because many states permit baiting, and Virginia does not. Keep the science in mind for this state. Hunters could go beyond. An example is requiring GPS collars on their hounds. You can have a posted sign with a phone number a hunter can call, and the hunter can have software so the hunter knows exactly where the dog is and can share that with the landowner when asking permission. The GPS reveals the property lines and the dog’s location. Most hunters do use GPS collars, but the collars are not a requirement”

“Tie the hunt to the land being hunted. It is difficult for a game warden to know where a hunt club has permission to hunt, so it is hard to enforce where they have permission to hunt. Getting permission in writing from the landowner and registering that permission with DWR would be helpful. Currently, most hunt clubs pay to lease property unless the hunting area is family property. Most go to a property owner every year or two and get permission for a fixed price. Basically, submitting a signed copy of the lease”

“X” hunt club has permission to hunt my 100 acres. This is better than the game warden having to figure it out. And a lot is already documented. Most hunt clubs need insurance to cover any liability – a lot of landowners require that”

“A geofencing requirement seems like a no brainer. All the hunter does is plug in the property boundaries and that prohibits dogs from going on to other private property where they are not wanted”

Enforcement

As noted in the preceding section above, several interviewees expressed the concern that the amount of law enforcement officers is insufficient for meeting the current need. Those views were reiterated by interviewees in response to this question. Some mentioned enforcement in relation to the “opportunities and alternatives” posed by this question to share their view that the laws as they are currently written are not strong enough to stop the problematic behaviors and that the “fox loophole” (a reference to the law that allows fox hunters to enter property while carrying a weapon) is used by hound deer hunters to evade citations.

Others noted the opportunities to foster relationships with game wardens, and to develop a “community policing” approach that would encourage more responsibility within hunt clubs and other groups. Like the “cop on the beat” in cities, DWR law enforcement should consider a more hands-on approach, working with hunt clubs to foster ethical hunting practices, particularly where hunter/landowner conflicts are more prevalent.

“Dog hunters like to say, ‘This is an enforcement issue, if we just had more CPOs, it would address it.’ There are no laws that the CPOs can use to enforce what goes on. Trespass by hunters using dogs”

“The right to retrieve lets them come onto land with guns to continue their chase if someone says they’re fox hunting. This is what scares me. ‘I’m just running foxes’ is their get out of jail free card. My CPO likes to say that they get lied to every day by dog hunters. CPO morale is low”

“There are poor relations between state police and DWR on a systemwide field level...We did a sheriff survey to get info you need from us and got a response from 40. 75% said we need more game wardens. A number of laws can be enforced by any law enforcement officer. Many game wardens and sheriffs and deputy's hunt”

“We often call animal control instead of game wardens because there are not enough wardens. When you call the 800 number, all you hear is ‘crickets”

DWR needs to do better-they are reticent to develop community policing. Hotbeds of problems. Group indictment. See a focus on community policing. Spotlighting issue as an example. Allow game wardens to use their clubhouse. Have a relationship. Workable team effort. Same approach to build community.

Conflict resolution. Ombudsman solution. Against the law to set the dogs loose on property you do not have permission. Drummed in. Very few violations. Educational piece”

Other Perspectives

Other responses to this question focused less on resources, alternatives, or opportunities, and more on the reasons behind why changes are or are not needed.

For hound hunters, these responses included emphasis on the positive relationships with local landowners and the steps that are taken to maintain those relationships in and out of hunting season, the role of hound hunting in the management of deer and bear populations, the care that hunters have for their hounds, the impact of absentee landowners or new landowners who are unfamiliar with Virginia’s laws, and “bad apple” landowners who take hounds, remove collars, or put the hounds in basements where the GPS signal can’t be tracked.

“We don’t have this problem. There is an occasional issue that may come up with a landowner that isn’t involved with us that would be quickly handled. I realize in the entire state that not everything is done the right way. We contact all of our landowners that are not members of our club every year. And we don’t just talk to them right before hunting season because a lot of them are friends and relatives. When we start the preparation for the upcoming hunting season, we have conversations with them. Do you have any places that you don’t want us to go? Any new paths that you’ve worked on? We have great friends of our hunt clubs that are not members that are landowners, and you have to respect what their issues are”

“With GPS tracking, it’s rare that we can’t get our dogs back. People having to use the right to retrieve is very rare. I’m a firm believer that you try to make contact with the landowner before you get your dog, and most hunters I know are like that”

“It’s just a handful of complaints that have gotten to the point where law enforcement has gotten involved. There is nothing you can do to make some landowners happy, other than no dogs touching their property ever again”

“Some landowners do not want to be called when the hound has crossed the property line at 5 AM. They culturally welcome the bear hunting. Some landowners are no local and appreciate hunters looking after their property”

“I’ve met people who have never harvested a bear though they have hunted for years. I talk about what it means to hunt with dogs, the fun part of it, and how you can manage the population... It’s about the hounds, the chase, and the comradery. Harvesting the bear is actually less important than the other parts”

“Hunters are smart at navigating the woods. Hunters may have invested one thousand dollars in [GPS] collars while their trucks are held together with chewing gum. Sometimes the hunters have two [GPS] collars. Hunters care deeply about their dogs”

For landowners experiencing conflicts with hound hunters, responses focused on the safety concerns, harassment, and quality of life impacts involved in encounters with hound hunters, the way that hound hunting effects the experience of “still” hunting, and the view that hound hunting is not necessary to manage the deer population. A few interviewees drew the comparison to the right to retrieve being similar to using someone else’s kitchen to make a sandwich – in that circumstance, you would have to negotiate the terms of entry, discuss a contract, etc. You wouldn’t just be able to enter without permission.

“They shouldn’t have the right to retrieve. They should have to sit on the public road and call. They shouldn’t be able to walk all over personal property, they chose to release the dog and they can deal with the inconvenience”

“If dogs come through your land, your hunt is over. You might wait around another hour or two, but it is pretty well-ruined by then. If they have tracking numbers, guys know where the dogs are, and they are honking horns, riding up and down the road and [it is] perfectly legal. Even if not hunting, you just would like peace and quiet. And we have no rights to keep these dogs away. The hunting dogs are penned up [before they are let loose to roam]. It is really frustrating”

“The myth of population control is not true. Maryland has a similar deer population and terrain, and they don’t allow dog hunting. The western Counties of Virginia control theirs without dogs”

Hound Training and Field Trials

The legacy of hound hunting in Virginia and elsewhere includes the training of the hounds and the use of field trials, which is an important part of the sport and recreation involved in hunting with hounds. Field trials are defined as non-competitive evaluations of a hound’s hunting ability and are usually sponsored events and are used by hunt clubs as a basis for attracting membership and interest in the sport. Field trials typically happen in the spring and summer months.

Both the survey and interview results contained comments regarding the importance of hound training and field trials. Comments noted many of the same issues previously discussed occurred during training as they do during the actual hunting season. Issues such as crossing property boundaries without permission and landowner disturbance were cited.

For the hound hunters, comments were noted about the lack of training area options such as more public land to train on and lack of general support from DWR. Recommendations listed by survey respondents and interviewees were opening more public land for training and field trials as well as designating certain times of the year for training hounds.

5. What would success look like to you? In terms of the hunters? For the landowners? To make sure we have included and heard from everyone who needs a voice?

A common theme in responses to this question reflected the desire to reduce conflict so that all parties involved could pursue their preferred activities in more peaceful or amicable and safe circumstances.

For landowners, success would be largely viewed as hounds and hound hunters not coming on to property where they aren’t welcome, and changes to approaches like hunting from public roads, which a number of our interviewees identified as problematic. That would enable other components of success that were mentioned by interviewees in this group, including the enjoyment of property without disruption (including still hunting), and safety for landowners and their families and visitors.

“Having landowners and farmers have peace. I want my children to ride their bikes in driveway and not get shot and to keep people from riding down my driveway because they can. I want to sit in my tree stand and not have dogs run under me.”

“Success...for the landowner it is greater restrictions and accountability for the hunters. For example, not having our choices for still hunting taken from us because their dogs are running all over the place.”

“Hound hunters need to be held accountable for their dogs since the dogs can go anywhere they like. If they are accountable for their dogs, there will be fewer problems. (A recommendation) the first time an offense occurs, there can be a warning. The second offense more. If they keep their dogs on their property, it would eliminate 90% of the problems. They have no incentive to keep their dogs on their own property, and they do have an incentive to let dogs follow the deer. Why would they want to keep their dogs off my property?”

“For landowners success is being able to say who comes on their land and who does not and to have a legal remedy to enforce that.”

“A lot of farmers lose livestock when dogs get into pens. They need to hire an attorney to recover losses, and a lot of cases so not get followed up on. Some have tried to follow through in court; the cases are thrown out. The judges have been lenient because it may be the first offense – The judge gives you a warning. A lot of what landowners are feeling is frustration and a lot is intimidation. People are fearful. Landowners fear them coming after themselves, their dog, or their wife. They have either tried without success or they are intimidated. They have thrown in the towel.”

“I don’t see a lot of room for negotiation on this. It’s either trespassing or it’s not. Right now, there are no laws that protect landowners. Protect property rights. I’m not against dog hunting but if they kept to areas where they had permission, it would be fine. Quiet enjoyment of private property. Road hunting inherently requires trespassing and is problematic. You can’t do one without the other. We have to get the trespassing and road hunting other control otherwise the whole thing needs to away like it has been in 42 other states.”

For hound hunters, success was largely described as being able to continue practicing the sport, ideally without new restrictions in place. In the view of those interviewed in this group, some proposals would have negative impacts to the sport, for example, minimum acreage requirements could hamper the ability of smaller clubs to participate, and breed restrictions could alter what can be accomplished in hunting within National Forests. Some hound hunters mentioned that in their communities, they feel that they have very good relationships with local landowners, so success to them would look like all areas having those types of conditions.

“Success would be common ground. I’ve run through it in my head about alternatives – lengthening season for still hunters so it’s not such a burden on them to give them more activities. Success would be not taking away rights of smaller hunt clubs. I’m very concerned that we would go to what you see down south with acreage requirements and permits. Our sport is expensive in general and I think you would lose a lot of passionate hunters, maybe not right away but as the generation ahead of me dwindles, I think the numbers would decrease.”

“For the hunter: being able to continue this tradition and the ability to cooperate with landowners and being able to say this is where my dog is and having the conversation not hostile. Each side understands they have to coexist. They know both sides have to be respected.”

“Tracking infractions to the land where the infraction occurs is helpful for imposing restrictions on permits/licenses. [The Florida model.] The outliers make it bad for the sport. No hunter wants to protect those who harm the reputation of all the law-abiding hunters. You also have to have the details of whether or not those other states bait when comparing laws and thinking about adopting the laws of other states.”

“Also need to have flexibility with different pack sizes and different breeds. A law that would regulate the kind of breed and the size of the pack is overregulation that would harm the sport. This kind of law would not solve the issues of landowners. An example is when hunting a small piece of land versus the National Forest. You need hounds that can run longer in the National Forest. Some are hot nosed, some are cold nosed, and some track. They have different roles in the pack.”

Regulations and Enforcement

Several interviewees mentioned the role of regulations and law enforcement in working towards successful outcomes. Some emphasized again the need to increase the number of law enforcement officers and reduce the area CPOs are expected to cover. Others shared their sense that increasing the number of officers won't address the issue if the regulations make it difficult to have charges stick. A few mentioned that an approach used in another state ties violations to the piece of property being hunted, and too many violations results in the permit for that property being rescinded. The idea of being able to know who has permission to hunt where was also mentioned.

"The laws need to change with the times. I fox hunted in Maine. The control we can have from horseback, and lack of control even with collars saying where they are – there is no excuse for not keeping them on their land. Timberland is being sold off. Someday someone will be killed. We need to let dog hunters do their thing in a more controlled and safer process."

"Conservation officers cannot prove intent. If the statute is so vague you come back to the same issue. They need something they can enforce with consequences. They know the clubs that abuse. Give an actionable remedy. You have to have something to people honest."

"Increasing law enforcement will not be helpful until we change the regulations. There are something like 124 game wardens for a population of 300,000 Virginia hunters. The current regs won't help unless you catch a person in the act of breaking the law since there is no accountability in current regulations – since we do not know where the dog was let out."

"Law Enforcement roles: County police – if we could get a change to road hunting – county police would be good at patrolling that."

"Role of agency law enforcement – they need more help. Game wardens are covering more than one county."

"Hunters need to self-police because game wardens can only do so much. For example, when somebody turns dogs on posted property – tell the game warden."

6. What else might be important for us to know so we can help resolve some or most of this issue(s)?

Most responses to this question reiterated positions stated earlier in the interview regarding their views that hunting with hounds either is or isn't problematic. For hound hunters, this was largely about the belief that most participants have good relationships with local landowners and that problems stem only from a few "bad apples", and that the hound hunting demographic is significant in Virginia and plays an important role in managing the population of deer and bear. Several also noted the positive economic impact of the sport, particularly in smaller rural communities (see "Economic Impact" section below).

"Hunters who are harassing or abusing landowners deserve citations. In our hunt club, if people were to do something that they weren't supposed to, it's zero tolerance policy within our group. We've got to be good stewards of our community, it wouldn't take but one private landowner to be upset with us to threaten our opportunities."

For landowners experiencing conflict with hound hunters, responses to this question reflected earlier responses, noting how many feel unsafe on their property because of the impact of local hound hunting. In some cases, that stems from harassment and intimidation experienced by landowners, and in some cases, from the byproduct of hound hunters practicing the sport

nearby (meaning packs of hounds might cross their property, hunters might be shooting from the nearby road in the direction of their property, etc.) Several respondents see opportunity in approaches taken by other states, and the use of technology to address these issues.

"It's an abomination that you can stand an inch outside of a yellow line on a public roadway and shoot at deer."

"We can bring this up to a 2023 standard and not a 1938 standard."

"In terms of solutions, the dogs have to be considered an extension of the hunter. When you release a hunting hound, that dog is hunting and knows nothing else other than the hunt, regardless of the calendar. The way that we treat it now, the laws are directed to the human, but not the dogs, connecting the two together would make sense. They should have to contain their dogs to the land they have permission to hunt."

"They do have the ability to call the landowner and talk to them before they trespass. Geofencing is a real capability that they could use to contain their dogs. Most of their GPS collars already have it engrained but they don't want to use it because you want them to run across properties that you don't have permission to hunt. Plenty of people use it to keep their dogs on their property."

"Separating the seasons would go a long way towards reducing conflict. No wonder that [still] hunting numbers are on the decrease, because it's no fun to deal with dogs running through."

Economic Impact

A few hound hunters noted the economic impact of their sport and the difference it makes, particularly in smaller rural communities. They mentioned how it affected the country stores and gas stations that previously served as game checking stations before electronic game checking was implemented, and how a change to hound hunting could have a similarly negative impact. Some clubs lease land from farmers who rely on hound hunting to help keep the deer population under control, thereby minimizing the damage to crops.

"The money we spend is important - the economic impact. We buy one 50 pound bag of dog food every day. We have a \$20,000 budget and we're a small operation.... It will make a difference in the small places, country stores. There are a lot more groups like ours than larger groups. If we do this [make changes to hound hunting], how many folks does this effect?"

Other Responses

Other observations made in response to this question include the differences in hound hunting for deer and bear, and the view of some hound hunters that more issues stem from the pursuit of deer, namely because hounds hunting for bear are pausing when the bear is treed, and also that deer hunting is typically occurring in areas that are more populated.

One interviewee posed the idea of turning this issue over to localities and allowing each area to determine themselves what changes, if any, are needed. They felt that the reliance on local expertise made more sense for crafting solutions appropriate to each area.

7. Who else would you suggest we talk to? And why?

Interviewees recommended a total of over 30 people in response to this question, based on those people having a shared experience and/or expertise that interviewees thought would be

helpful. These names and the information shared will be provided to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee for their reference.

Interview Summary Results

Recommended Options for Improvement

While responding to this question, several interviewees noted possible changes, tools, and approaches that could help to alleviate contention, very similar to those that were noted in the survey results. These include adding landowner contact information to signs for posted property to facilitate communication when hounds enter another property, more proactive use of the GPS collars to intervene before hounds enter property where they are not wanted, a requirement to call notify a landowner before entering their property, possible use of geofencing to manage a hound's whereabouts more tightly, an increase in law enforcement, and the creation of a database or something similar to enable law enforcement to know who has permission to hunt which areas. Approaches used by other states, including minimum acreage requirements, hunting from roadways, and connecting violations to property (as opposed to the specific hunters) were also recommended by a number of interviewees.

Summary of General Comments Received through the Department of Wildlife Resources Website

On May 25th, 2023, VDWR provided a comment submittal form on its webpage for the Hound-Hunters and Private Landowners Stakeholder Advisory Committee, to enable citizens to contact DWR with any comments or questions regarding the SAC. . Between May 25th - July 13th, 2023, 1,009 comments were received. While this comment submittal form was accessible to any citizen of the public, there are records of large stakeholder groups, for example the Virginia Hunting Dog Alliance (VAHDA), that actively advertised the webpage to their members and requested that members send DWR a comment. A large number of the responses may have come from individuals responding to those advertisements.

The summary below is meant to highlight the intent, concern, and future recommendations given by those who provided general comments through the responded to the comment submittal form and to augment the more robust survey and interviews.

Summary of Feedback

The common theme that was thoroughly expressed by many commenters was the view that hound hunting has been a deep-rooted tradition within the Commonwealth of Virginia and should remain that way. While over half of the commenters recommended making no changes to the current regulations and laws, many of those commenters also noted that they anticipate change coming to these regulations and at the bare minimum would rather see the practice of hound-hunting remain in some form in the future than be eliminated completely in the Commonwealth.

Both commenters who identify solely as hound hunters or solely landowners agree that a major issue is the lack of law enforcement with the current regulations in place and that increasing staffing would be a viable solution to the disparity between the stakeholder groups. Another common theme that was found throughout was the notion that voluntary measures between private landowners and hound-hunters would help eliminate many of the negative occurrences by being transparent with all parties involved before going out and conducting a hound hunt.

Respectful communication and recognition of relationships between private landowners and those looking to hunt their land with hounds stood out as the solution most important to those involved as it commonly led to those involved being able to solve their disputes and move on without "ill-will" between one another. Most scenarios described where a landowner or a hound-hunter were frustrated with one another and appeared to be associated with a lack of communication and/or when property was damaged.

Stakeholder Advisory Committee: Next Steps

Regarding the resolution of these issues, there was considerable common ground on a set of improvements, many of which were discussed in prior stakeholder contributions as well as the current survey and interview process.

Considering the comments IEN received in the surveys and interviews, DWR's commitment to hunters who hunt deer and bear with hounds and to private property owners, as well as the changing demographics, increasing population, and social and recreational trends, the SAC will begin with the following topics as a starting place for SAC deliberations. These do not consider resources necessary for implementation, political viability, or legal/regulatory authority:

- Law enforcement
- Safety
- Use of public lands
- Use of technology
- Community engagement framework
- Continued work on ethical hunting practices
- Consideration of other state's laws

Appendix One

Links to Hunting with Hounds Resources & Previous Reports

- **Department of Wildlife Resources: Hunting with Hounds project website**
<https://dwr.virginia.gov/hunters-landowners-sac/>

- **The 2008 Hunting with Hounds in Virginia: A Way Forward Project**
<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/HLSAC-Hunting-with-Hounds-in-Virginia-Content-Analysis-Report-2008.pdf>

- **2016 Report on Hunting Deer with Dogs**
<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/deer-hunting-with-dogs.pdf>

Appendix Two Interviewee List

- Kirby Burch
- Abram Charlton
- Sean Clarkson
- Will Frank
- Keta Fetters
- Mike Hayes
- John Morse
- Jason Mull
- Steve Nicely
- Debbie Oliver
- Chris Patton
- John Payne
- Mike Pearson
- Denny Quaiff
- John Rawls Jr.
- Amanda Savignano
- David Steger
- Keith Tharrington