

WISCONSIN HUNTING HOUND INCIDENT SURVEY

Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter | Protecting Native Forests and Wildlife Subcommittee

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Introduction

Beginning October, 2015, the Protecting Native Forests and Wildlife subcommittee of the Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter conducted a survey of self-selected respondents who reported adverse incidents with hunting hounds. The survey format was designed to elicit data concerning such incidents while preserving the anonymity of the respondents. The survey was posted on the Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter website and remained available through 2019. The survey as it appeared at <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/protecting-native-forests-wildlife>, is included in the Appendix.

Background

As part of the National Sierra Club Protecting Wildlife and Wild Places initiative, the John Muir Chapter's subcommittee, Protecting Native Forests and Wildlife, discussed the problem of first-hand reports members had received of citizens and land owners experiencing adverse encounters with hunting hounds and their handlers. At the time, news reports in other states described injuries to people by hunting hounds, as well as wildlife crimes involving illegal use of hunting hounds. The committee decided to make an anonymous report form available which would allow tabulation of the kinds of incidents taking place in Wisconsin. The committee reached out to local law enforcement in the counties from which reports were received, as well as the Wisconsin Department of Resources for incident report data. We were informed by both agencies that "no such data is recorded." During the period of our survey, a rash of wildlife and pet poisonings broke out in areas of public lands favored by bear baiters who use hounds. According to WDNR, these poisonings remain "under investigation."

Method

An online report form was available on the John Muir Chapter's website, and printed hard copies of the form were also available. The survey was announced on the Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter's website and distributed via hard copy at wolf and wildlife related meetings and conferences in Wisconsin in 2015 and 2016. Committee members also invited citizens who described adverse hounding encounters to file a report. About 80% of respondents used the online form to report anonymously, and 20% chose to report directly to committee members via mail, phone, email, or in person while being assured of anonymity. While the responses were not limited to Wisconsin residents, 105 respondents report adverse incidents with hunting hounds from 51 Wisconsin counties, as well as 4 Michigan counties, 5 counties from other states, and several who declined to specify location. Reported incidents include trespass, threatening behavior by hound handlers, and damage to property and livestock. These reports did not indicate multiple reports of the same incident, identifying factors such as location and date having been taken into account. The sample was edited



to eliminate responses which identified no adverse incident involving hunting hounds, as these respondents generally used the report format to express an opinion about the practice of hunting with hounds, which was outside the purview of this survey. These comments are recorded but excluded from this sample.

Overview

The 25 question survey is organized in four sections: **Observations; Trespass; Property Damage, Personal Injury or Threats; and Interactions with Law Enforcement.** 22 questions are yes/no with 3 questions devoted to explanations of “yes” answers. An open comment section concludes the survey.

Location

Respondents were asked to identify county of residence, as well as county of incidents observed. The highest number of reports in Wisconsin came from Bayfield and Iron Counties, while the greatest number of hounds involved in reported incidents were identified in Burnett, Green and Sawyer Counties. The greatest number of incidents, averaged between multiple respondents, occurred in Iron, Langlade and Forest Counties.

| Most Reports | Most Hounds | Most Incidents* |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Bayfield (6) | Burnett (8) | Iron (6) |
| Iron (6) | Green (8) | Langlade (6) |
| Sawyer (6) | Sawyer (8) | Forest (5) |

**Multiple incidents averaged per location. Respondents from Nash Co., NC and Burnett Co., MI also reported 4 or more incidents.*

| County | Reports | No. Hounds | Incidents | County | Reports | No. Hounds | Incidents |
|----------------|---------|------------|-----------|---------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Ashland | 1 | 2 | 1 | Manitowoc | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| Barron | 1 | 6 | 4 | Marathon | 3 | 6 | 3 |
| Bayfield | 6 | 4 | 3 | Marin, CA | 1 | | 1 |
| Brown | 1 | | 1 | Marinette | 1 | | 1 |
| Burnett | 1 | 8 | 4 | Milwaukee | 1 | | 1 |
| Calumet | 1 | | 1 | Nash, NC | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Cheboygan MI | 1 | 2 | 1 | Oconto | 2 | 6 | 4 |
| Chippewa | 3 | 2 | 3 | Oneida | 1 | 6 | 3 |
| Columbia | 1 | | 1 | Ontonagon, MI | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Cuyahoga OH | 1 | | 1 | Outagamie | 1 | | 1 |
| Dane | 3 | 2 | 2 | Ozaukee | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Dodge | 2 | 2 | 2 | Polk | 3 | 6 | 3 |
| Door | 1 | 2 | 2 | Price | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Douglas | 2 | 6 | 2 | Rock | 1 | | 1 |
| Dunn | 2 | | 2 | Rusk | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Eau Claire | 1 | | 1 | St. Croix | 1 | | 1 |
| Florence | 2 | 2 | 3 | Sawyer | 6 | 8 | 6 |
| Fond du Lac | 1 | | 1 | Shawano | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Forest | 5 | 6 | 5 | Sheboygan | 1 | | 1 |
| Gogebic, MI | 1 | 2 | 2 | Taylor | 1 | | 1 |
| Green | 1 | 8 | 2 | Trempealeau | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Houghton, MI | 1 | 2 | 1 | Vernon | 1 | | 1 |
| Iron | 6 | | 6 | Vilas | 1 | | 1 |
| Jackson | 1 | | 1 | Walworth | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Kenosha | 1 | | 1 | Washburn | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| Kewaunee | 1 | 2 | 2 | Washington | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Langlade | 4 | 6 | 4 | Waukesha | 1 | | 1 |
| Lincoln | 2 | 2 | 2 | Winnebago | 1 | | 1 |
| Macon, GA | 1 | 6 | 2 | Wood | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| | | | | Withheld | 7 | 6 | 2 |
| Total | | | | | 105 | | 119 |
| Average | | | | | | 4 | 2.02 |

Not all respondents identified the number of hounds seen, or a number of incidents. Multiple reports of hounds sighted and multiple incidents were averaged by location.

Findings

Observations

48% of respondents were able to identify the species being pursued by hounds. 42% state the hounds observed were not accompanied by a handler. 11% report injury to pets or livestock by hounds, while 24% report direct knowledge of hounds attacking others' pets or livestock. 41% report finding abandoned or lost hounds on their property and their recourse varied from contacting local animal shelters or law enforcement to contacting handlers via phone numbers on collars.

Trespass

63% of respondents describe incidents of trespass including hounds running on their property without permission, as well as hound handlers found on property without seeking permission, or running hounds on property after being denied permission.

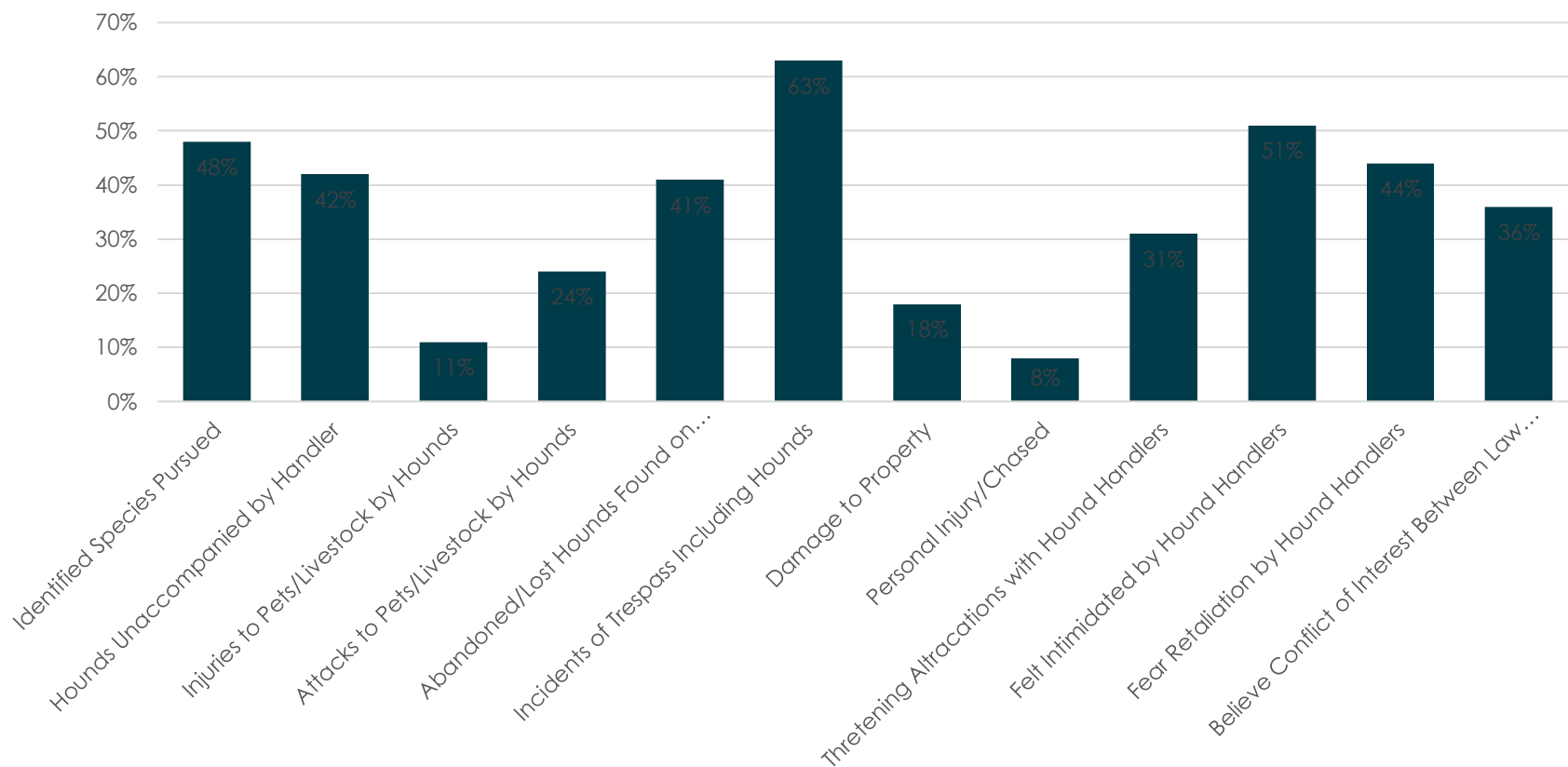
Personal Injury, Property Damage and Threats

18% of respondents describe damage to property caused by hunting hounds, including downed fencing, damaged landscaping and gardens, injury to self and livestock, dead wildlife left on property, vandalism and litter. 8% describe direct encounters with hunting hounds resulting in personal injury or being chased, while 31% report threatening altercations with hound handlers, including being unwillingly detained by hound handlers' trucks on public roads, or even their own, private driveways. 51% of respondents report they "feel intimidated by hound handlers," while 44% fear retaliation from handlers for reporting confrontations to law enforcement.

Interactions with Law Enforcement

36% of respondents believe a conflict of interest between law enforcement officers, including game wardens, and the sport of hound hunting exists, either because of relationships between law enforcement officers and hound handlers, or because the officers are known to participate in hunting with hounds. Respondents describe being given false information by law enforcement officers, including local sheriffs and game wardens, as well as filing reports upon which no action was taken.

Findings



Conclusions

The survey was designed to elicit specific reports of the types of adverse incidents encountered by people who experience trespassing, property damage or personal injury, or threatening behavior by hunting hounds and their handlers. We believe the ability to preserve anonymity was integral to the effectiveness of the survey as a vehicle to report these adverse incidents, especially in light of the compromised confidence evinced in law enforcement by respondents. These results highlight a need for more impartial response on the part of law enforcement, as well as the need for greater oversight and enforcement of activities involving the use of hunting hounds on private and public lands.

Acknowledgements

Wright, Heathcliff L, Graphics Design

Appendix A | Survey: Adverse Hound Hunting Related Incidents

The Protecting Native Forests and Wildlife Subcommittee of the Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter is conducting a survey to determine the frequency and severity of hounding-related experiences you may have encountered where you reside. The survey is anonymous: no identifying information is being requested. A comments section is provided at the end of this form. Completed surveys may be returned to Elizabeth Huntley before conference close, or mailed to: Elizabeth Huntley c/o Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter, 754 Williamson St, Madison, WI 53703

What county do you reside in? _____

Frequency of Events and observations made

1. Have you ever observed hunting hounds on your property? YES / NO

2. Do you recall how many hounds you saw?

__ 1-4

__ 5-8

__ More than 8

3. How often have you observed hunting hounds on your property? Once/2-5 times/More than 5 occurrences/Too many times to count

If YES, were you also able to observe what animal(s) the hounds were pursuing?

YES/NO

List species if YES _____

4. If you have observed hunting hounds on your property, were they accompanied by (a) handler(s)? YES / NO

5. Have hounds on your property attacked your pets and/or livestock? YES / NO

6. Are you personally aware of incidents of hounds attacking others' pets and/or livestock? YES / NO. If "YES", please describe in comment space below.

7. Have you ever found abandoned/lost hound(s) in or around your property? YES / NO.



8. If "YES", what action did you take if any? Contacted law enforcement/Contacted game warden/ Contacted local humane society or animal control/Took animal in to _____
/Other

Trespassing on private land

9. Were you ever asked by a hound handler for permission to be on your property for the purposes of hunting? YES / NO
10. If you were asked, and you replied "No," did the hound handler trespass on your property anyway? YES / NO
11. If YES, what action did you take? Nothing-fear retribution/Contacted local law enforcement/Contacted local Warden/Contacted WI DNR/Contacted WI Humane Society/Other

Threats to self, property, pets, livestock by hunting hound handlers

12. Have you ever experienced damage to your property that you know or suspected was due to hounding activities? YES / NO If YES, please describe in comments below.
13. Have you ever experienced injury to (a) pet(s) or livestock that you know or suspected was due to hounding activities? YES / NO. If "YES", please describe (text box provided for explanation).
14. Have you ever been chased and/or injured by (a) hound dog(s)? YES / NO. If "YES", please describe with approximate date in comments below.
15. Have you ever been directly confronted by (a) hound handler(s) and threatened with bodily harm? YES / NO If YES, please describe in comments below.
16. Have you ever been left an anonymous note that you suspected to be left by hound handlers that threatened you and/or your pets/livestock with harm? YES / NO
17. Do you personally know of anyone who has experienced real or perceived threats/persecution by hound handlers? YES/NO If YES please describe in comments below.
18. Do you feel intimidated by hound handlers? YES / NO
19. Do you fear retribution from hound handlers if you report incidents involving their activity to local law enforcement? YES / NO



Law enforcement / Game Warden response to complaints, and conflicts of interest

20. Have you ever contacted local law enforcement, the local game warden, and/or the WDNR about any problem(s) you have experienced with hound handlers? YES / NO

21. If "YES," what kind of response did you receive?

Warden or Officer responded, but nothing was done.

The Warden/Officer followed up by contacting the suspected hound handler(s), and followed up with you.

The Warden/Officer never responded.

Other.

22. Do you ever see any local game wardens in the vicinity of your property? Never/On-occasion/All the time

If YES, is there any particular time of the year when you see them most often? Circle all that are applicable: Deer season/Bear season/Wolf season/Turkey season/Bobcat sea-son/Other

23. Are you aware of any law enforcement officer and/or game warden who also participates in hounding activities? YES / NO

24. If "YES," have these been the same individuals who have responded to your complaint(s) about hounding? YES / NO

25. Are you aware of law enforcement officers / game wardens who have personal relationships with hound handlers? YES/NO

If "YES," do you suspect a possible conflict of interest in performing their duties? YES / NO

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey. Please add any additional comments below. You may share your contact information if you wish. The Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter will not share your contact information without your permission.

Appendix B | Survey Comments

Received from respondents reporting incidents, edited.

Hounding should not be allowed all over the state. It's a free-for-all in the national forests, and it's wrong. Oconto, WI

Please end this cruel sport. Bayfield, WI

I do not support running animals with hounds as a hunter. Florence, WI

Living in the North woods at this time of year is uncomfortable. Hounders are everywhere, running dogs on bear, blocking roads. Washburn, WI

Bear hounds have a negative impact upon wildlife and forest users. I believe hunting bears and wolves with hounds is one of the cruelest "sports" imaginable and separates bear families. Macon, GA

I live in the UP and am sick of bear hunters' lack of respect for land owners and care for their dogs. This is definitely a sport that should be stopped. Houghton, MI

I respect the Native cultural relationship with the wolf. We have had a gutted bear (left) on our property. Douglas, WI

I have found at least 5 lost hounds along the highway. One had foot injuries. Ontonagon, MI

Huge conflict of interest, but we are afraid. Dane, WI

I believe about ten years ago, Rep. Frank Boyle attempted to pass an ordinance to protect property owners from uncontrolled hounds. Ashland, WI

Bear hunting with hounds promotes unsafe situations for residents in bear country. Burnett, WI

Why run hounds in July when wolves have pups and in areas known to be inhabited by packs? Tax payers should not be paying for this. It is a scam. Bayfield, WI

Hound hunting is cruel to the hounds and animals being hunted. Gogebic, MI

Bear hunters with hounds seem to feel they can trespass. They have a strong enough lobby to pre-vent any repercussions. Chippewa, WI

Men standing with trucks and ATVs and radios blocked me on a road on Federal public land. Three cubs ran in front of me. Location withheld



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People have a right to protect their pets and livestock and not be afraid in their own homes. Fond du Lac, WI

Coyote hunters argued with me when we denied permission to hunt on our land. We do not support hounding at all. Manitowoc, WI

I'm dismayed this form of cruelty is considered a legal form of "hunting" in Wisconsin. It's dreadful and causes harm to a variety of wildlife species, not just the "target." St Croix, WI

I do not approve of hound hunting and believe it should not be practiced. Grant, WI

I don't believe in hound hunting for any animal. Price, WI

No animal should be taught to attack another animal and kill it. Location withheld

My experience during my 28 years as a municipal clerk is that hound hunting does cause problems. Eau Claire, WI

Hound hunting should be stopped. Under no circumstances should those dogs be paid for by tax payers after fights with wolves. Hunters are well aware what will happen to these dogs. Marathon, WI

The few times I've called law enforcement for trespassing, they tell me there's not much they can do. They've told me the hounders have a right to park in front of my driveway and run their dogs on my property. Polk, WI

I am very distressed that my state allows hunting of wolves and that the legislature circumvented the necessary period for monitoring. Hunting wolves and bears with hounds is despicable. Dane, WI

I hate hunting of any kind with dogs. I don't understand why it is ok for bear dogs to "train" in our national forests in the summer, harassing wildlife. Price, WI

Please, please, let's do something to stop this! Langlade, WI

Hounders' lack of respect for private property, and just the peace and quiet of my area are being totally disrupted when they run a bear or wolf through the area. Burnett, WI

There's no reason for hound hunting period. Even when they know (wolves have killed) a dog in the area, they still let them go and the hunter gets repaid. I won't go outside if I see them. Oconto, WI

I do not agree with letting dogs chase wild animals for "sport." It's disgusting. Wood, WI

(They have) no regard for trespassing on private land. Milwaukee, WI



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Thank you for investigating this problem with wildlife management. Cuyahoga, OH

Hounding is unethical. Hounders train their dogs to destroy other animals. Hounders trade, sell, or dump their dogs once they stop performing. Bayfield, WI

I am a member of the NRA and Sierra Club. I believe hunting is a right, but the use of dogs to harass, maim, kill other animals is murder. Douglas, WI

I live next to hunting hounds and they are very noisy. There have been a lot of complaints, because we have no noise ordinance. I live in the country for nature, not barking dogs. Polk, WI

This problem is WAY bigger than me bugging [local law enforcement]...We have a very large dangerous problem with armed gangs of armed criminals breaking laws and terrorizing people. Some people find the level of lawlessness downright frightening. Town of draper has elderly residents that are afraid for their safety. Sawyer, WI

They threatened to burn a cabin down not far from my place if the property owner called the war-den. They stole the property owner's trail cam[era] which had proof of them trespassing with their hounds. County withheld, WI