

J Fitzwilliam



October 2, 2023

To: Honorable Members of Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules
Re: Department of Fish and Wildlife Department/Rulemaking Act 165 and Act 159
From: Jane Fitzwilliam, Lead, Vermont Coyote Coexistence Coalition

Dear Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

ACT 165

The General Assembly through the rules required under this section intends to reduce conflicts between landowners and persons pursuing coyote with the aid of dogs by reducing the frequency that dogs or persons pursuing coyote enter onto land that is posted against hunting or land where pursuit of coyote with dogs is not authorized. In addition, the General Assembly intends that the rules required under this section support the humane taking of coyote, the management of the population in concert with sound ecological principles, and the development of reasonable and effective means of control.

Control of Dogs

VFWD's (Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department) recommendation for control of dogs is what most coyote hounders are already doing, which means no change to the status quo. VFWD considers control of dogs to mean: *the transportation, loading, or unloading of dogs from vehicle(s); and the handling, catching, restraining, or releasing dogs to pursue coyotes. GPS collars with track log and training/control functions or separate GPS and training/control collars shall be required to locate and track dogs at all times while in pursuit of coyotes. At no time shall dogs be in pursuit of coyotes without a GPS track log being maintained by the permit holder.*

A GPS and shock collar do not communicate what land is posted, nor does it offer any “training or control” when the hounder can’t even see where their hounds are. Having visual control would offer better control, but still presents problems. Control of any dog requires a physical presence close enough to witness any unintended action and move in to prevent it. Additionally, even hounders know their GPS collars don’t work. (Please see the attached screen shot from a hounder’s Facebook page clearly showing their GPS collars don’t work.)

Additionally, on page 4 of Act 165, it states:

A definition of control to minimize the risk that dogs pursuing coyote:

(A) enter onto land that is posted against hunting;

(B) enter onto land where pursuit of coyote with dogs is not authorized; (C) harass or harm people or domestic animals; and

(D) cause other unintentional damages to people or property.

In response to (C): There is no way for hounders to know if their hounds are chasing a domestic dog, cat, deer or person versus their intended target. In April 2021 in Fairlee, VT a woman’s dog was viciously attacked by four coyote hounds while running alongside its owner. The hounder was nowhere in sight. VFWD’s definition of control would not reduce the chances of something like that happening again.

Additionally, a coyote hounder who participated in the January 2023 working group said that the hounds sometimes split in different directions while pursuing coyotes. It’s not possible to control hounds simply with GPS and shock collars.

Limit on Number of Dogs

VFWD’s recommendation of four hounds does not meet the “humane taking of coyotes” as mandated in Act 165. Allowing four hounds, with GPS collars, to pursue one coyote is unfair. Our recommendation was one hound.

Seasons and Shooting Hours

VFWD is recommending a summer coyote hound training season that will result in increased conflicts with landowners and also introduce animal welfare concerns since coyotes are birthing then. Coyote hounders can train their hounds using drags and other methods that don’t involve pursuing coyotes during the summer months.

The coyote hound-hunting season recommended by VFWD is already the time of year when most hounders run their hounds, when there's snow. The season is too long, resulting in more opportunities for conflicts with the public.

Legislative intent includes the following: management of the population in concert with sound ecological principles. VFWD has not provided any science-based evidence that supports this. Hounding is antithetical to sound ecological principles.

Prohibitions

Act 165 asked VFWD to consider prohibiting baiting. Our recommendation is to ban it outright. During the summer working group, VFWD offered the following: *No person shall place bait to attract a coyote for the purposes of training a dog to catch/strike the scent of a coyote.*

After the working group concluded, VFWD rescinded their restriction on bait and baiting in all forms will still be allowed.

ACT 159

While VCCC did not sit on the working group for Act 159, we do not believe that VFWD met legislative mandates, especially as it relates to trap setbacks on lands where the public may be reasonably expected to recreate. Also, a 50-foot setback does little to protect a dog from being trapped and killed.

Act 159 is a bill aimed at improving animal welfare and all VFWD has done is try to enshrine trapping in the constitution by **seeking to redefine trapping as hunting** without ever communicating this substantive change to the public.

That alone should be grounds for LCAR to reject this rule.

Additionally, VFWD was asked to institute humane methods of killing animals. Currently trapped animals are beaten with bats, drowned, choked, "thoracic compression" aka stomping on the chest and other gruesome methods. VFWD's rule before you is punting the issue by waiting for the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies to come up with their recommendations, but they currently allow all of these methods, so we have little faith that their recommendations will meet humane standards. This is a dangerous loophole that cannot be allowed to advance.

We ask you to please reject the rule before you and take these issues up via the legislature in January, since Fish & Wildlife has proven that they are unable to rise to the challenge.

On behalf of the Vermont Coyote Coexistence Coalition's supporters, I thank you for considering our letter.

Sincerely,

Jane Fitzwilliam

Jane Fitzwilliam
Lead, Vermont Coyote
Coexistence Coalition
Vermontcoyote.org



Northeast Hunting With Hounds

I lost range on my Garmin when dogs crested a rocky slope. Anyone have problems with GPS not being reliable. I spent four figures on these damn collars.

1

4 comments

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J.R. Williams

Yes you gotta keep moving around so you have service with the gps and collars happens all the time when your in the hills and creek bottoms so it's good to have someone in the woods and one in the truck on the road and to have radios is a must also

Like Reply 13m

Reply to J.R. Williams...



Timothy Farrar Sr.

Pretty much a line of sight tool. Rocks or not ridges block signals.

Like Reply 4h



Raymond Taylor

They only range so far.

Like Reply 9h



Dennis R. Cochrane

Know collar will give you a range when the dog goes over the top of slope and drops in a hole.

Like Reply 34m