



To: Rep. Trevor Squirrell, Chair  
Sen. Mark MacDonald, Vice Chair  
Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules

October 5, 2023

### **23-P15/10 V.S.A. Appendix §44, Furbearing Species**

*Act 165 – Page 3, Section 3: The recommendations made by the Fish and Wildlife Board do not meet the legislative mandate to develop a reasonable and effective means of control for hunting hounds.*

I'm an animal behaviorist with over twenty years professional experience and have two published books on dog behavior and training. I wanted to speak on the issue of control of hunting hounds. The Fish and Wildlife Dept. and Board were to address the issue and seek input. I reached out to the Board multiple times to speak, but was never invited to present information or share knowledge. To my understanding, the Board invited two hounding enthusiasts who promoted remote training collars as a means of controlling hounds. These are already used by most, if not all, hounders.

Predatory aggression and prey drive are the hardest behaviors to control from a training perspective. If anyone has experienced a dog fight, you are aware of how frenzied it can be. Sic'ing a bunch of dogs on a coyote or a bear is a form of dog fighting. Hunting hounds are caged, kenneled, or tied on chains 24/7, and then let loose to chase down and attack animals. These dogs are in a high state of arousal. They are not capable of learning or deciphering verbal or auditory signals while in fight and flight mode.

The use of e-collars is contraindicated for animals with aggression. When these collars are used correctly, behavior is suppressed, not extinguished. The aggressive behavior can resurface at any time, without warning, and usually does so with more severity.

The use of shock reduces a dog's bite threshold and can elicit redirected aggression and aggression in dogs with no prior aggressive history. If a dog's bite threshold is low, the dog is more likely to bite. The use of shock collars increases a dog's propensity to bite, as well as biting intensity and severity. This is one reason why professional animal behavior and veterinary organizations are against using them.

Remote training collars are shock collars. They can be marketed as electronic stimulation devices, e-collars, training collars, e-touch, stimulation, tingle, TENS unit, remote delivery collars and remote trainers. They are manual, radio controlled systems that allow you to deliver a shock to the dog's collar from a hand-held transmitter. The first step in using them correctly is to understand the limitations. They range from 150 yards to 2 miles. However, maximum range is based on "line of sight" — this means to get the full range out of any remote training system

there should be nothing between the transmitter and the receiver. The terrain needs to be flat and open. This does not apply to the woods and mountains of Vermont.

A GPS system does not control a dog, nor is it a training substitute.

Hand-held transmitters can have multiple buttons or levers to set for individual dogs. Hounders usually hold these while wearing gloves which makes handling them cumbersome. There is considerable potential for e-collars operators to deliver mistimed electric shocks since one transmitter can be used on multiple dogs.

In hounding, the animal being chased or targeted determines where and in what direction the hounds will go, not the hounder or person holding the transmitter. Therefore, the animal being chased determines the dogs' behavior and course of action, not the hounder, collar, or remote training system.

Hounds are mostly out of sight and often not in close proximity to each other. The dogs are in a constant state of motion and exhibit multiple behaviors at one time. These behaviors vary between dogs.

Individual dogs respond to shock differently on any given day. How they respond varies according to the dog's energy level, mood, emotional state, frustration level, pain threshold, distractions present, and environmental conditions. Therefore, one handler being able to control multiple dogs on one transmitter is extremely unreliable.

Gun Dog Supply, an e-collar seller online, states on its website that if the hunter is staring at the transmitter, he is not keeping an eye on the dog. If the hounder can't see the dog, it negates the efficacy or point to these collars.

A shock itself provides no information. The shock from the collar is a punishment. For punishment to be effective in training, three criteria must be met – consistency, timing, and intensity. For timing, the shock must be administered within, at most, a second or two of the behavior. Since hounders cannot see their dogs, this is impossible.

Remote training collars are dependent upon the handler being able to deliver the shock as a behavior is performed and for the dog to understand what the shock means. Unless timing is impeccable and the handler knows exactly what they are shocking for, when, and how to apply it, the dog does not associate the shock with any behavior, but easily associates the painful sensation of shock with other factors in the environment such as the location the dog is in, other animals or dogs, odors, and people.

The irony to employing remote training collars to control hounds is that using them correctly is in direct opposition to hounding and the motivations of hounders. Since shock is a punisher, its goal is to inhibit behavior. Hounds are baited and taunted to chase and attack an animal. They are encouraged to exhibit predatory aggression. Therefore, the shock cannot be paired with the target animal because, if used correctly, the dog will have an aversion to that animal. This is why shock

collars are used on dogs for snake aversion training, to teach dogs to avoid and retreat from certain species of poisonous snakes.

With regards to safety of companion or working dogs, hounds cannot differentiate between dog breeds. Even professionals who work with dogs have difficulty assessing a dog’s breed upon visual examination. In one study, professional trainers, behaviorists, and veterinarians identified breed composition in mixed-breed dogs by visual appearance with less than 50% accuracy when compared to DNA analysis ([Victoria Voith, 2013](#)).

There are over twenty dog breeds that look like bears and nineteen breeds that look like coyotes (See lists below). This does not include all of the mixed-breed dogs, nor variations within breeds related to a dog’s coloring, conformation, or size. Companion and working dogs have been attacked by hounds for this reason.

Coonhounds and Foxhounds are not classified as “Sporting” dogs, nor are they considered “Herding” or “Working” dogs by the American Kennel Club. Therefore, any reference to coyote, bear, or raccoon hounds being sporting dogs is a misnomer.

“Sporting” dogs are spaniels, setters, retrievers and pointers — none of whom are used for animal fighting. Any legislation that affects hunting hounds would not necessarily impact sporting breeds.

Schutzhund is bite work to control aggression or training a dog to bite and release on cue. This is a full-time sport that requires regimented and consistent training with one handler and one dog. It does not involve a handler chasing multiple dogs running after a prey animal.

The “training season” for hounding is a veil or euphemism for an extended hounding season. The use of remote delivery or shock collars may sound good on paper to those who lack knowledge on how dogs learn, but to those who have an understanding in animal behavior analysis, it’s a farce.

<b>Purebred dogs that look like bears</b> (Not including mixed breeds or variations within a breed):	<b>Purebred dog that look like coyotes</b> (Not including mixed breeds, German Shepherds, or variations within a breed):
Portuguese Water Dog Black Mastiff Cane Corso Swedish Lapphund Estrela Mountain Dog Portuguese Sheep Dog Whetterhoun Bouvier des Flandres Beauceron Briard Puli	Czechoslovakian Vlcak Icelandic Sheepdog Chinook Belgian Laekenois Belgian Malinois Tervuren Berger Picard Norwegian Buhund Swedish Vallhund Alaskan Malamute Anatolian Shepherd

<b>Purebred dogs that look like bears</b> (Not including mixed breeds or variations within a breed): (Con't)	<b>Purebred dog that look like coyotes</b> (Not including mixed breeds, German Shepherds, or variations within a breed): (Con't)
Pumi Black Russian Terrier Newfoundland Tibetan Mastiff Bearded Collie Belgian Sheepdog Bergamasco Sheepdog Giant Schnauzer Dutch Shepherd	Leonberger Siberian Husky Carolina Dog Jindo Taiwan Dog Treeing Tennessee Brindle Finnish Spitz Norwegian Lundehund

A couple and their dog were seriously attacked in 2019 while on a hike. The dog was a black Portuguese Water Dog. The husband used bear spray on the hounds which did not stop them from attacking. The couple were experienced hikers and were attacked for 45 minutes (until the hounder and person accompanying him appeared). The hounder had no control over the dogs. Upon arrival, the hounder punched one of the dogs in the face, ostensibly, for not differentiating between a bear cub and a black Portuguese Water Dog (This is from personal correspondence with the victim who was attacked.).

I have been contacted by a governmental official over concerns about hunting dogs and finding lost hounds on their property. One of the dogs was in very poor shape, malnourished, and neglected. This official was greatly concerned for the dog's welfare. The hounders eventually pulled up in their truck. One of them walked onto the property, grabbed the dog roughly, threw the dog into the dog box, and then they quickly drove off. The hounder never apologized, made eye-contact or acknowledged the home owner who was holding the hound at the time.

It is not right that the only recourse for people who are attacked or whose animals are injured or killed by hounds is to file individual lawsuits and litigation. It's also not right that hounders from out of state can 'train' their dogs in Vermont and then leave the state with no repercussions or consequences for their behavior.

Hounding needs to be banned for public safety. The majority shouldn't have to suffer so a small few can engage in an activity that is inherently cruel, dangerous, and disrespectful to neighbors and land owners.

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