



November 10, 2023

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

23-P15/10 V.S.A. Appendix §44, Furbearing Species (ACT 165)

Dear LCAR Members:

There were a few concerns or questions members of LCAR had regarding hounding that were brought to my attention. I'd like to address them and I think you'll find this information helpful.

The questions were on whether hounds are different from other hunting dogs and whether or not they can discriminate between coyotes and domestic dogs. There was also some clarity needed on the differences between bear and coyote hounding.

Hounds vs. Other Dog Breeds and Beagles.

Any reference to 'Sporting' dogs by F&W and hunting lobbyists is inappropriately used and misleading. "Sporting" dogs are spaniels, setters, retrievers and pointers. They are used for hunting, but not for chasing down and attacking big game or for animal fighting (which is what coonhounds and foxhounds are bred for). Any legislation that affects "hounds" would not impact sporting breeds.

Coonhounds (American English, Bluetick, Redbone, Treeing Walker) and Foxhounds (American and English) are used for "big game." Large or big animals are raccoons, bobcats, bears, foxes and coyotes. Multiple dogs are used since larger animals can cause serious injuries to the hounds while trying to protect themselves and offspring.

In comparison to beagles, coonhounds and foxhounds are much more powerful and larger. Beagles are used to hunt smaller animals such as rabbits. Rabbits are considered "small game." Rabbits also run in a circle, so the dog continually keeps returning to the original chase point. Likewise, a pack of beagles is not needed to chase a rabbit. Beagles tend to be gentle and are much less aggressive than coon or foxhounds.

Banning the use of dogs to hunt bobcats, bears, coyotes, foxes and raccoons would **not** prohibit beagles from hunting rabbits.

Prey Drive and Training Recall

Hounds used for big game are dangerous when in a pack and chasing a target because they are in an extremely high state of arousal. Predatory aggression and prey drive are the hardest behaviors to control.

The American Kennel Club specifically addresses this strong prey drive and why recall is so important and challenging for these dogs:

“Many of the traditional methods for training recall aren’t enough. If they have a high prey drive, these dogs enjoy hunting so much that they’ll try to hunt rather than do almost any other behavior.

Regardless of any training you do, you will never wholly eliminate prey drive in dogs. The more opportunities your dog has to run off and chase, the more they will continue to seek the addictive high this provides. This is why management is such an important part of any program you undertake.” ([American Kennel Club](#))

This is also why coon and foxhounds routinely chase deer and nontarget animals. Non-target animals who are attacked and mauled by hounds are called ‘trash.’ This is hounding lingo.

Chris Bradley, President of the VT Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs advocates for hounding and at the LCAR meeting compared the efficacy of shock collars used for invisible fencing with remote training systems to control hunting hounds. It was a poor comparison. Keeping a dog within a permitted boundary is not the same as a dog retreating from chasing an animal while on the run. Ironically, prey drive is the number one reason dogs break through invisible fences and where invisible fencing fails to contain dogs.

Regarding invisible fencing:

“When your prey-driven dog is in a heightened state of arousal, they may still cross the boundary to get to their target, getting shocked in the process. No matter how good your dog’s recall normally is, it will usually go out of the window once they are in chase mode and dopamine (a feel-good chemical) has been released.” ([American Kennel Club](#))

The bottom line is pack mentality and predatory drive for dogs is far greater than any attention given to a handler.

Visual Sight and Control

In hounding, the dogs are nearly always out of sight of hunters. Hounders cannot see who or what their dogs are chasing. There is no way a GPS tracking or training collar will

address this concern which makes hounding so problematic, especially in regard to public safety and preventing hounds from running on other people's property.

Hounds Cannot Differentiate Between Domestic Dogs and Other Animals (Coyotes and Bears)

Hounds *cannot* distinguish between coyotes and companion or working dogs. They cannot distinguish between black dogs and bears. One quick google of 'hounds attack dog, pet, woman, or horse' will provide many examples of hounds attacking people and companion, domestic and non-target animals.

A couple and their Portuguese Water Dog, Willow, were attacked by hounds for 45 minutes in Ripton for this reason. Willow was seriously injured and there were multiple injuries to the owners. The hounds did not discriminate between Willow, a black dog, and a bear cub, nor should they be expected to. Companion and domestic dogs are routinely chased and attacked by hunting hounds. Because it's legal, it's not reported.

There are over twenty dog breeds that look like bears and nineteen that look like coyotes (See chart), *not* including mixed-breed dogs, nor variations within breeds related to a dog's coloring, conformation, or size.

Purebred dog that look like coyotes <i>(not including mixed breeds, German Shepherds, or variations within a breed):</i>	Purebred dogs that look like bears <i>(not including mixed breeds or variations within a breed):</i>
Czechoslovakian Vlcak Icelandic Sheepdog Chinook Belgian Laekenois Belgian Malinois Tervuren Berger Picard Norwegian Buhund Swedish Vallhund Alaskan Malamute Anatolian Shepherd Leonberger Siberian Husky Carolina Dog Jindo Taiwan Dog Treeing Tennessee Brindle Finnish Spitz Norwegian Lundehund	Portuguese Water Dog Black Mastiff Cane Corso Swedish Lapphund Estrela Mountain Dog Portuguese Sheep Dog Whetterhoun Bouvier des Flandres Beauceron Briard Puli Pumi Black Russian Terrier Newfoundland Tibetan Mastiff Bearded Collie Belgian Sheepdog Bergamasco Sheepdog Giant Schnauzer Dutch Shepherd

This is why pet dogs have been attacked mercilessly.

Even professionals who work with dogs have difficulty assessing a dog's breed upon visual examination. In a study, dog 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](#)). If professionals who work with dogs can't determine a dog's breed upon visual examination, it's unrealistic to expect hounds to.

Summary

Hounding and predatory aggression, especially when dogs are in a pack, is nearly impossible to control. This is why Fish and Wildlife considers requiring hounders to have visual or verbal control over their hounds a de facto ban.

Hounders do not control their dogs. This is why hounds routinely run into roadways, on private lands, and get lost. When coonhounds and foxhounds fixate on a target, they are relentless. Injuries can be fatal since the target, including a person, is being attacked from all directions by multiple dogs.

Fines and training collars will not prevent continued attacks, nor control these dogs. This is simply placation to hounders and Fish and Wildlife and does not address the serious problem of public safety and hounders routinely chasing dogs onto other people's property.

If you have any questions or would like further input, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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