

Hunting Deer with Dogs: Conflicts, Negative Public Perception, and New Law

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Abstract: Hunting white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with dogs is a 400-year-old tradition in the Southeastern United States. Today, this method of hunting involves using dogs, vehicles, and public roads to trail deer. Frequently, deer and dogs cover vast acreages requiring large consolidated tracts to keep dogs off neighboring lands. Conflicts among landowners, still hunters, and dog deer hunters in ascending order of intensity are: blocking of public roads, trespass to recover dogs, and trespass by deerhounds. During the 2002–03 hunting season, these conflicts escalated in four counties and resulted in regulatory proposals which eliminated hunting deer with dogs in those counties. Six other counties were likely to follow. Combined, this represented 25% of the opportunity for hunting deer with dogs. Faced with this reality, the Georgia Dog Hunters Association successfully sought a statutory change to mutually protect landowners' and dog-deer hunting interests. Hunting deer with dogs now requires a permit that is specific to a tract of real property of at least 404.7 contiguous hectares for lessees or 101.2 contiguous hectares for property owners. All dogs and vehicles must be marked with the permit number and all individuals (16 years of age and older) hunting deer with dogs must possess a deer-dog hunting license. Permits may be revoked based on violations of laws or permit conditions. Individual deer-dog hunting licenses may be revoked based on violations of law. During the first year under these new laws and regulations, the Department issued permits to 384 clubs, covering more than 703,700 ha. Of these, 97% had few, if any, problems or violations and 3% had significant violations or problems. Two clubs had permits revoked. Since then, complaints have decreased and stabilized. Additionally, there have been no further permit revocations. Most landowners are satisfied, dog hunters are generally acquiescent, there has been no need for further county-level regulatory actions, and hunting deer with dogs is still an active and compatible tradition. The Department has a new tool to identify and control offending clubs without negatively impacting law abiding clubs who are abiding by regulatory guidelines. However, the Department still can seek county-level regulatory action.

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