

The Incidence and Implications of Road Hunting During the Dog and No-Dog Deer Seasons in Mississippi

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Abstract: To evaluate the incidence of road hunting during the dog and no-dog portions of the Mississippi deer season, the numbers of road hunting citations from the 1980–1981 and 1982–1983 hunting seasons were determined. Road hunting violations were significantly more common during the dog seasons than during the no-dog seasons. Although road hunting problems during the dog season were caused by unethical behavior of some deer hunters and not due to the use of dogs for deer hunting, the public impact may result in an unfavorable image of dog hunting. Deer hunters (especially during the dog season) must promote ethical behavior to ensure the future of their sport.

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Hunting white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) with the aid of dogs has been a traditional and popular sport in the southeast. Currently 10 southeastern states allow the use of dogs for deer hunting to some extent. The majority of the deer hunters in Mississippi during the 1976–1977 hunting season used dogs and favored their use for deer hunting (Lowe 1978). The use of dogs for deer hunting continued to be very popular during the 1982–1983 hunting season (Steffen unpubl. data). The deer season framework in Mississippi allows the use of dogs during specific portions of the season and places “no-dog” restrictions on other portions, providing “still hunters” and “stalk hunters” a time to hunt without the disruptions that may occur during dog seasons.

The conflict between "dog hunters" and "still hunters" over utilization of the deer resource has been debated from biological, traditional, moral, and ethical viewpoints. Studies have shown that in most cases, legally-used hunting dogs do not significantly influence survival or reproduction of deer (Marchinton et al. 1970, Sweeney et al. 1971, Gavitt et al. 1974). However, in mountainous habitat, hunting dogs may have more biological impact than in the coastal plain (Corbett et al. 1971). Marchinton et al. (1970) further discussed the pros and cons of dog hunting from a sociological standpoint.

One of the major public complaints made to the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation (MDWC) is the use of public roads by deer hunters. Not only are such activities illegal, but they also contribute to the deteriorating public image of hunting (Klein 1973). Although Marchinton et al. (1970) noted that some dog users hunt in a style that the public finds objectionable (e.g. road hunting, blocking traffic, using CBs), no comparison to still hunters has been documented. Since most road hunting grievances to the MDWC appeared to have been associated with the dog season, the objective of this study was to compare the incidence of road hunting between the dog and no-dog portions of the deer season.

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Methods

To evaluate the incidence of road hunting between the dog and no-dog portions of the deer season, the number of road hunting citations written by officers of the MDWC was determined from a computerized file of prosecution reports. Except for cases with concurrent headlighting violations, only infractions of the statutory road hunting law by deer hunters during the regular gun deer seasons were analyzed. All citations were considered regardless of their disposition.

Data were analyzed for the 1980–1981 and 1982–1983 deer hunting seasons. Prior to the 1980–1981 hunting season, prosecution reports were not computerized. The 1981–1982 hunting season did not have a concurrently enforceable road hunting law.

Eleven counties (or portions thereof) were closed to the use of dogs during the entire 1980–1981 deer season and therefore were not considered in comparisons between the dog and no-dog portions of the statewide season. All data from the 1982–1983 deer season were used since dog and no-dog restrictions were applicable statewide.

To test differences in road hunting violation rates between the dog and no-dog portions of the deer season, a 1 sample chi-square goodness-of-fit

test applying a correction for continuity was used (Steel and Torrie 1980). Expected violation rates were based on the total number of days available for dog and no-dog deer hunting during each year.

Results

Deer hunters were involved in 288 and 298 road hunting cases during the 1980–1981 and the 1982–1983 gun deer seasons, respectively. The 1980–1981 figure does not include the 11 no-dog counties which were excluded from the analysis. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the season dates, the number of days available to hunt, and the number and rate of road hunting violations that occurred for the dog and no-dog portions of the 1980–1981 and the 1982–1983 gun deer seasons, respectively.

Road hunting violations were more common, relative to the days available, during the dog seasons for deer than during the no-dog seasons. Based

Table 1. The season dates, number of hunting days available, number of citations issued for road hunting and the daily citation rate for deer hunters during the dog and no-dog portions of the 1980–1981 Mississippi gun deer season (data do not include the 11 counties which had no-dog restrictions for the entire season).

Hunting season	Season dates	Days available	Citations	
		N (% of Total)	N (% of total)	Citations per day
Dog	All dog days	30 (68.2)	267 (92.7)	8.90
	11/22/80–12/ 1/80	10 (22.7)	153 (53.1)	15.30
	12/27/80– 1/15/81	20 (45.5)	114 (39.6)	5.70
No-dog	12/13/80–12/26/80	14 (31.8)	21 (7.3)	1.50
Total gun deer season		44	288	6.55

Table 2. The season dates, number of hunting days available, number of citations issued for road hunting and the daily citation rate for deer hunters during the dog and no-dog portions of the 1982–1983 Mississippi gun deer season.

Hunting season	Season dates	Days available	Citations	
		N (% of Total)	N (% of total)	Citations per day
Dog	All dog days	41 (73.2)	274 (91.9)	6.68
	11/20/82–12/ 1/82	12 (21.4)	109 (36.6)	9.08
	12/18/82– 1/15/83	29 (51.8)	165 (55.4)	5.69
No-dog	All no-dog days	15 (26.8)	24 (8.1)	1.60
	11/ 13/82–11/19/82	7 (12.5)	21 (7.0)	3.00
	1/16/83– 1/23/83	8 (14.3)	3 (1.0)	0.38
Total gun deer season		56	298	5.32

on citations per day, road hunting was nearly 6 times more prevalent during the dog hunting seasons than during the no-dog season in 1980–1981 and more than 4 times more common in 1982–1983. Assuming that citations represented a random sample of all illegal road hunting activities occurring during the deer season, violations of the Mississippi statute occurred significantly more often during the dog hunting seasons in both 1980–1981 ($\chi^2_1 = 78.74, P < 0.001$) and 1982–1983 ($\chi^2_1 = 52.39, P < 0.001$).

Violation rates were not consistent between splits within the dog and no-dog portions of the season. Opening day during the 1980–1981 season occurred during a dog season while it fell within the no-dog portion during the 1982–1983 season. The opening day split during 1980–1981 produced a higher violation rate than did the second dog season (Table 1). The same trend was evident in 1982–1983 comparing no-dog splits (Table 2). Obviously, the increased hunting pressure associated with opening days produced more illegal road hunting activities (regardless of the method restrictions). Even with the relatively high opening day violation rates during the first no-dog split in 1982–1983, the rate was still lower than those found in any other dog season.

Discussion

There was no direct proof that the difference in the number of road hunting violations between the dog and no-dog portions of the deer season was attributable to dog hunters. Although these road hunters may represent only a small segment of all deer hunters, they were still much more prevalent during the dog seasons.

The Mississippi Code (97-15-13) states that “if any person shall hunt in, on or across any street . . . or public highway . . . , he shall be guilty . . .”. This relatively weak road hunting statement implies that hunters may legally stand along a highway while hunting, creating a difficult situation for conservation officers to enforce unless they actually see a hunter shoot. As a result, there were many other hunters observed by officers and not cited because they were “legally” hunting, but obviously hunting along the roads. These other hunters tend to be most obvious during the dog seasons.

Worse than the high rate of illegal road hunting activity during the dog season, is the resulting high visibility of hunters behaving in a manner which is perceived by the public as unsporting, unethical, unsafe, and illegal. The public attitude toward hunting is strongly impacted by the public perception of hunters (Klein 1973, Rohlfing 1978, Lorenz 1980). The dominant problems with hunting, as perceived by the non-hunting public, deal with the lack of hunter competence, training, safety, and regards for the rights of others (Rohlfing 1978). Since road hunting is the type of activity the public can easily observe, it does not matter what percentage of the deer hunters are using the roads while hunting. Dog seasons for deer hunting under the cur-

rent guidelines established by law and by the ethics of at least some of the deer hunting fraternity may be contributing to the decline in the public image of hunting.

Advocates of running deer with dogs claim tradition as a major justification. The tradition of dog hunting involves the use of dog drives with hunters placed on stands and remaining on stands until the drive ends (Milling 1967). As a result, early proponents of using dogs claimed safety as a major advantage (McBain 1961). Public perception of dog hunting in the "traditional" manner should create no more road hunting (and perceived safety) problems than still hunting.

The tradition of dog hunting seems to have changed for some hunters. Deer hunters are now tempted to follow a dog chase with the increased use of gadgetry (e.g. 4-wheel drive vehicles, CBs) (Lowe 1978) and improved road access in hunting areas. Klein (1973) noted that the use of sophisticated technological products detracted from the sporting image of hunting to the public. Since Jackson et al. (1979) found that waterfowl hunters who hunted in groups were more likely to violate the law and behave unethically, the group hunting typical of dog hunters (Marchinton et al. 1970) may also help facilitate illegal and socially unacceptable practices. These other visible attributes of deer hunters using public roads during the dog season (e.g. hunting in groups with the aid of vehicles) may further contribute to a negative public image.

Obviously the issue of "dog hunting" versus "still hunting" involves more than just the allocation of the resource among hunter groups. The more important issue encompasses hunter ethics in the eyes of the public. A very visible portion of the deer hunters during the dog season have failed to maintain acceptable quality in their activities. Tolerance of unsportsmanlike behavior by hunters may add fuel to the anti-hunting movement.

Stricter road hunting legislation will help alleviate unethical and illegal problems, but ethics can not be legislated (Jackson et al. 1979). Agencies may help minimize the public impact of road hunting by opening deer season during a no-dog segment.

Although road hunting violations were more prevalent during the dog hunting season, the problem was not the use of dogs for deer hunting. The problem was the result of unethical and unsafe behavior by some hunters during the dog seasons. Since road hunting violations increased with the dog seasons for deer, the public safety and perception problems may have also increased.

Anti-hunting advocates have demonstrated their strength by influencing public opinion through legislative action and public referendums (Goodrich 1979). Anti-hunting legislation is often promoted under the pretense of public safety (Wildlife Legislative Fund of America [1982?]).

Increased public disturbance with road hunting during the dog seasons may, at the least, result in the prohibition of dog hunting depriving ethical

dog users of their sport. Worse yet, road hunters may reflect on all hunters and jeopardize all hunting. The future of dog hunting (and all hunting) depends on hunters behaving in a socially acceptable manner (Klein 1973, Kerrick 1974) and becoming accountable for their actions. Hunter education must stress that when hunters use the roads, they not only risk a citation, but more importantly they also risk the continued privilege of hunting.

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