



National Forests in Mississippi University of Georgia Report on Deer Dog Hunting Executive Summary

Background:

Over the last decade, the National Forests in Mississippi (NFMS) has become the primary provider for deer hunting with dogs in the state. The Forest Service receives frequent, serious complaints from adjacent landowners related to trespass by deer-hunting dogs onto private lands. Like much of the southeastern part of the country, national forest system lands in Mississippi are often located on small, isolated tracts surrounded by private property owners as neighbors. In other cases, national forest system lands contain many private properties, or in-holdings, within the proclaimed boundary lines. Both of these geographical situations make it challenging to offer large enough blocks of land suitable for dogs to hunt deer without encroaching on private lands. This situation is not unique to Mississippi.

In July 2018, NFMS commissioned the University of Georgia (UGA) report “Evaluating dog-hunting for White-tailed Deer: Dog Movements, Deer Movements, and the Potential Suitability of National Forest Lands for Dog-hunting in Mississippi. It also commissioned UGA to interview state wildlife officials in the Southern Region regarding deer-dog hunting regulations. The purpose of this effort was to learn as much as possible from published sources and other states in the southeast on measures taken to reduce conflicts associated with hunting deer with dogs.

Report Highlights:

- 1) **Southern State Wildlife Agencies Review:** The UGA report authors write “Based on published regulations and dialog with state wildlife officials where dog-hunting currently occurs, we concluded that deer dog-hunting can remain a viable hunting tradition when clearly defined regulations determine when and where these activities occur to minimize conflicts among stakeholders. . . We believe a total ban on this long-standing tradition is avoidable when considering that other effective regulatory options exist.”
- 2) **Containment Areas:** UGA identified the home range of an adult female deer as about 390 acres and an adult male deer as about 1,000 acres. UGA noted that most dog hunting was contained within a 2.5 mile radius of a deer’s home range. UGA identified relatively few contiguous areas in which dogs would likely remain contained on Forest Service land.
- 3) **Corrective Collars:** UGA looked at the use of corrective collars, devices that allow hunters to track their dogs and provide behavioral correction. UGA interviewed conservation agency officials from states in the southern region and found that “Managers believed that correction collars were effective in reducing trespass issues and conflicts with adjacent landowners.” The report also noted: “Sufficient spatial separation of dog-hunting activities, including dogs, vehicles, and hunters, from in-holdings, adjacent properties, sensitive areas, and still-hunt areas is key to successfully implementing dog-hunting even when correction collars are required. Clear boundaries are necessary. Roads, watercourses, and fenced areas are ideal boundaries.”

Key Messages:

Over the last several years, we have seen an increase in the amount of and the seriousness of complaints related to private property trespass by deer hunting dogs. All methods of hunting offered on public lands should promote safe hunting practices, minimize resource damage and reduce the opportunity for user and adjacent landowner conflicts.

This report provides useful information that we hope will lay a foundation for a collaborative approach in finding actions that work for Mississippi. We commissioned this report to help further a conversation among the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, adjacent landowners, hunters and other forest users with the intent of looking for solutions to decrease user conflicts related to deer hunting with dogs.

Our focus is on promoting sustainable opportunities for all types of hunters and other user groups and decreasing negative impacts to adjacent landowners. We will continue to work with the public, key stakeholders and local communities to explore alternatives and solutions.