

Recommendation Related to a Request to Expand Use of Tracking Dogs

to the

Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board



Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
Agency of Natural Resources
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Public request to expand the use of licensed leashed dog tracking services outside of the big game legal hunting seasons and to allow trackers to charge for their services.

Recommendation

Summary of Issues for Consideration:

October 16, 2024, Board member Noel requested that the Board discuss a request received by the public regarding licensed leashed dog tracking:

- (1) Extend the use of licensed leashed dog trackers beyond the big game seasons and the 24-hour period after the seasons, to include species permitted to be removed under human conflict tags
- (2) Allow trackers to charge for their services, at least provide the ability to charge for fuel money to maintain their service areas and potentially expand their areas of service

Department Recommendation:

The Department recommends that Licensed Leashed Dog Tracking be allowed outside of the normal big game seasons, but the leashed dog tracker must contact the local State Game Warden as described in Title 10 Appendix 12 Section 4.5. This change will require an amendment to Appendix 12 (Leashed Tracking Dogs) Section 3.1.

The definition of big game in Appendix 12 (leashed tracking dogs) should be expanded to include moose. The allowance to track moose is currently specified in Appendix 33 (moose management rule) but including it in Appendix 12 would be clearer.

The Department also recommends that leashed dog trackers remain volunteers and not be allowed to seek reimbursement for expenses or charge for their services. Trackers should still be allowed to accept gifts and donations under their permits.

Department Response to Proposal:

Comment/Question: “ My name is Mandi Harbec, I have been a licensed leash dog tracker for 10 years and have some concerns regarding the limitations of our permits. In the past few years with the increase of bears has come an increase of property destruction which results in more nuisance bear tags being issued. I have encountered on more than one occasion where a hunter issued a nuisance tag has shot and wounded the animal and is unable to locate or prove that the animal is still living, in which case the hunter then contacts us hoping we may be able to bring a dog out to help them locate the animal. However the limitations of our permits do not allow us to track any big game animal outside of legal hunting seasons and the 24 hour period immediately following. In these cases we are not able to help locate these animals and many times they may go to waste. We are asking that the fish and game board please consider allowing us to help in these special instances as one of our many goals is to decrease them number of game animals going to waste each year. My second concern is regarding our inability to charge for our services. Due to hunters not wanting to donate to us we have had to considerably decrease the are in which we will service leaving many hunters with the disadvantage of not being able to get a tracker. We spend a great deal of money out of pocket willingly to provide this service to hunters, however each year we loose time from our full time jobs and money as well as time with our families to help hunters who don’t even offer to cover the gas that it cost to get to them. We are asking that the board reconsider the limitations regarding charging for our services to at least allowing us to charge for our gas money so that we are able to continue this amazing service and service a larger area.”

Response:

- 1) The Department supports the expansion of the use of a Licensed Leashed Dog Tracker outside of the normal big game seasons if the tracker notifies the area warden as described in Title 10 Appendix 12 Section 4.5.
- 2) That the definition of big game in Appendix 12 (leashed tracking dogs) should be expanded to include moose. Allow the tracking of deer, moose, and bear. The allowance to track moose is currently specified in Appendix 33 (moose management rule) but including it in Appendix 12 would be clearer.
- 3) The Department recommends that the leashed dog trackers remain volunteers and be prohibited from seeking reimbursement for expenses or charging for their services.

Other Information to Consider:

The Department's concerns include:

- Potential abuse of reimbursing for travel expenses and/or charging for services to create a business instead of being volunteer work.

Potential positives in the Department’s view:

- Potentially increasing recovery of wildlife removed in conflict situations for utilization.