
Huntin' News and Notes

Florida Dog Hunters & Sportsman's Association
915 Bloxham Cutoff Rd., Crawfordville, FL 32327

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Working Together Pays Off

Increased Penalties Proposed for Habitual Offenders

During the fall months, not only were your representatives of the Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsman's Association busy in the woods, chasing the ever-elusive whitetail, they were also busy working with representatives of other sporting organizations working on a proposal to increase fines and penalties for habitual offenders of the Hunter Responsibility rule.

At the request of the Commission, FWCC staff held a series of stakeholder meetings to seek consensus for a legislative proposal that, if adopted, would provide for higher fines and penalties for those hunters who habitually violate the dog-trespass provisions of the Hunter Responsibility rule. Proposals were made by private land owners

who want to curtail hunting with dogs, private land owners who don't want to see the sport ended but do want dogs to stay off their land, and by several sporting groups representing the hunting interests.

In November, the consensus of the stakeholders was to present a proposal to the Commission that would seek to update the fines and penalties for all recreational hunting and fishing violations, that would include a provision to address the habitual offender of any and all game/fish rules. The Commission, at its December meeting, didn't necessarily reject this overall re-write, but they did direct staff to reconvene the stakeholders for the purpose of also bringing forward a legislative proposal to address the Hunter Responsibility habitual offender for the upcoming legislative session.

In January 2005, the group met again and a proposal was developed that was ultimately adopted by the Commission to be included in their 2005 Legislative Agenda. This proposal would

leave the currently penalty in place for a single infraction of the dog trespass provisions of Hunter Responsibility. A second conviction within three years of the first conviction would result in a minimum mandatory fine of \$250. A 3rd conviction in 4 years would result in a minimum mandatory fine of \$500 and a mandatory suspension of a hunting license for 1 year. A 4th conviction within a 5 year period would result in a minimum mandatory fine of \$1000 and a mandatory suspension of a hunting license for 3 years. In addition, anyone convicted of deliberately casting dogs for the purpose of taking deer without landowner permission would face a mandatory \$1,000 fine and a mandatory suspension of the hunting license for one year.

While these fines may seem severe to some, any responsible hunter should have nothing to worry about. The leadership of the Commission and the Florida Legislature tasked responsible dog hunters with developing meaningful reforms to the penalties, in an effort to protect the long-term health of this sport in Florida. We feel this is a responsible approach and one that should be embraced by all hunters.

FWCC Action Results in

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leave the currently penalty in place for a single infraction of the dog trespass provisions of Hunter Responsibility. A second conviction

Management Area Changes

At the February 2005, FWCC meeting in Panama City, the Commission took action on three items of much interest to those who hunt deer with dogs.

The first action taken dealt with a proposal to eliminate deer dog hunting on the Big Bend WMA - Spring Creek Unit. A number of WMA users made a plea to the Commission to not shut down the unit, or to at least allow hunting for one more year while suitable replacement land was sought. A number of hunters from adjoining private still-hunt leases spoke in support of the plan to shut down the unit. Although the Commission seemed interested in pursuing replacement land for the hunters who now hunt on the Spring Creek Unit, they did not want to allow another year of hunting with dogs for deer on Spring Creek.

The second action was a recommendation to close the Escambia River WMA to hunting for deer with dogs. During this discussion, a number of hunters and their children addressed the Commission and asked why this area was being suggested for elimination when there were little, if any complaints. Commissioners asked the same questions of FWCC staff. Staff indicated that they were trying to be proactive, as they thought in the next few years the number of complaints would rise. The Commission overruled the staff proposal and decided to allow for the continuation of dog hunting for deer on the Escambia WMA.

The issue affecting the most dog hunters was the proposal to address hunting for deer with dogs on Blackwater Management Area. This WMA has been a problem for dog hunters for many years.

Certain sections of the WMA contain numerous in-holdings which, in some cases, have created points of conflict between private land owners and the dog hunters.

Leadership of the FDHSA and the Allied Sportsmen's Associations of Florida worked diligently with local hunters of Blackwater and Rep. Greg Evers, who represents the area, to develop a solution that would be less restrictive than the one proposed by staff of FWCC.

In the end, a compromise solution was developed that increased the number of quotas proposed by FWCC staff for Blackwater from 200 to 400 per season plus exempt hunters; that creates a two-tiered season substantially longer than that proposed by staff; and, that removes some of the problematic lands from the allowable dog-hunt area. In exchange for the land that was removed, however, the Commission indicated support for seeking other state lands in the nearby area that could be converted to dog hunting. While this proposal that was adopted may seem like a loss of land and opportunity for some, it was certainly much better than the plan proposed by FWCC staff.

4th Annual Fur, Feather and Fins Legislative Cookout

The 4th Annual Fur, Feather and Fins Legislative Cookout, honoring the Florida Legislators' Sportsmens Caucus will be held on March 16, 2005 in Tallahassee at Goodwood Plantation. The Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsman's Association, through its membership in the Allied

Sportsman's Associations of Florida, Inc., is a sponsor of this great event. It gives sportsmen and women from around the state an opportunity to meet and get to know Florida legislators who support all of our sporting activities.

Join FDHSA as an Individual Member

Many have joined the Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsman's Association as individual members and we want to remind you of this opportunity. The hunters from Escambia WMA said they wish they known they had this opportunity to join, as it could have made their efforts much easier at the last FWCC meeting. If you are already a member, let others know we exist. Tell them about our new web site, which can be found at www.fldoghunters.org.

The cost is minimal, starting at \$15 per year to \$40 per three years, and is intended to basically cover the costs associated with developing, printing and mailing newsletters at least three time per year. If you have already joined, please encourage your hunting buddies to join, too.

For further information, please write to FDH&SA, 915 Bloxham Cutoff Rd., Crawfordville, FL 32327, or call 850-575-3333 and ask for Rusty McKeithen.