

NEWS RELEASE

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

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FWC TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETINGS ON DEER-DOG HUNTING PROGRAM EXPANSION

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) North Central Region is holding two public meetings to discuss the proposed statewide expansion of the deer-dog hunting registration program.

This is in response to a decision by FWC Commissioners during the April Commission meeting held in Tallahassee, where they voted to move forward with the statewide expansion of the registration program for deer-dog hunting on private lands for the 2005-06 hunting season. Commissioners based the decision on the overall success of the pilot program in the Northwest Region during the 2004-05 hunting season.

The first meeting is May 10 in Chiefland at the Tommy Usher Community Center, 506 S.W. Fourth Avenue, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. The second meeting will be May 12 in Lake City at the Columbia County School Board Auditorium, 528 W. Duval Street, from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

"The purpose of these two meetings will be to provide information about the registration process and the success of the pilot project in the Northwest Region," said Roland Garcia, Regional Director for the North Central Region.

This proposed program would require a no-cost registration for anyone using deer-dogs on private property statewide during the deer-dog training season and during any open deer-hunting season when the taking of deer with dogs is permitted.

In a report presented to the seven-member Commission, FWC staff recommended statewide expansion with no significant rule changes due to the program's effectiveness in

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addressing conflicts between landowners and deer-dog hunters, and the positive feedback received from everyone involved, including law enforcement personnel.

The report stated that 70 individual properties representing 57 deer-dog hunt clubs participated in the Northwest Region pilot program. These properties ranged in size from 40 to 31,000 acres and were located in 14 of the 16 counties within the region. Only Escambia and Franklin counties were not represented, because they did not have any registered deer-dog hunting clubs.

During the past hunting season in the Northwest Region, there were 87 deer-dog hunting complaints, down 36 percent from 137 during the 2003-04 hunting season. Only five of these 87 complaints were associated with registered deer-dog hunting clubs. In contrast, a review of the complaint data for the North Central and Northeast regions reflected an increase in complaints.

The FWC will focus on making sure the public is fully informed about the new registration program by doing a comprehensive mail-out to dog-hunting clubs. A final report that includes any comments received at the upcoming public meetings will be on the agenda for consideration at the FWC's June 15-17 meeting in Daytona Beach.

Four public meetings will be held outside of the North Central Region at:

- Sebring - May 9, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 PM EDT, Sebring Civic Center, 4509 West George Blvd.
- Blountstown - May 16, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 PM CDT (8:00 to 10:00 PM EDT), Calhoun County Court House Annex, 20859 Central Ave.
- Brooksville - May 17, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 PM EDT, Southwest Florida Water Management District Headquarters Auditorium, 2379 Broad Street
- Ocala - May 19, 2005, 7:00 to 9:00 PM EDT, Marion County Agriculture Extension Service Auditorium, 2232 N.E. Jacksonville Road

More information about the proposed statewide deer-dog registration program is available online at MyFWC.com/hunting.