

December 6th, 2023

Testimony on Senate Bill 545

Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

Thank you, Chairman Stafsholt and other Senate committee members, for having a hearing on Senate Bill 545, relating to hunting wild animals with the aid of a dog, dog training on wild animals, and dog trialing on wild animals in the northern portion of the state.

The bill evolves around Natural Resource Administrative Code 10.07 (1)(i), which states that hunting or pursuing any free-roaming wild animal with the aid of a dog or dogs is prohibited from May 1st to June 30th in that portion of the state north of highways 8, 53, 54, 13, 29, and 22.

Essentially, if your dog is off a leash and barks at or pursues any wildlife, you are in violation of these rules. These rules unfairly discriminate against those north of the arbitrary line compared to Southern Wisconsin.

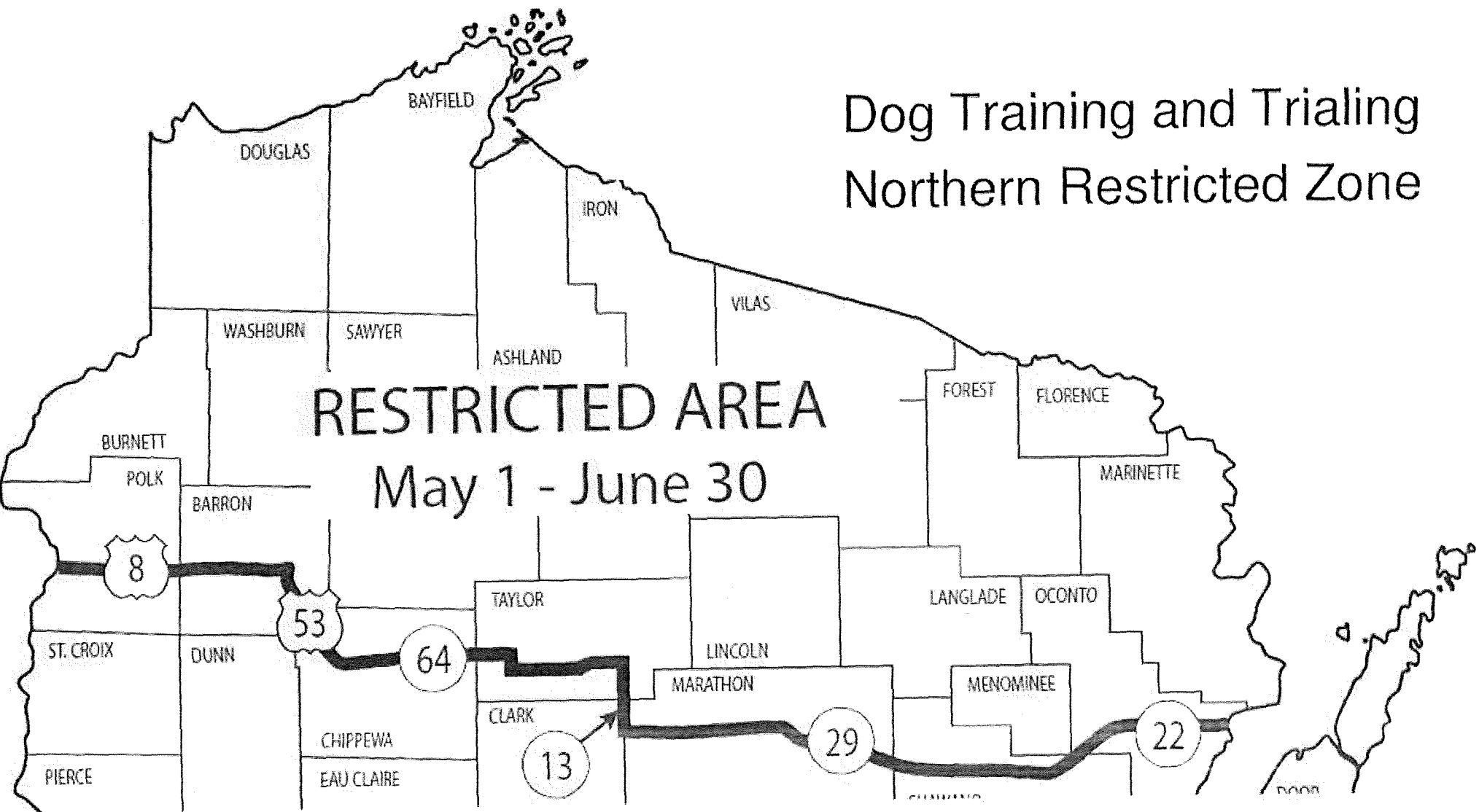
Senate Bill 545 would delete NR 10.07 (1)(i) from the Department of Natural Resources' administrative code and any other codes related to it.

These rules make no sense if you think about them. If a dog runs off below the Northern Restricted Zone for any free-roaming animal, that isn't an issue, but if it runs off above the Northern Restricted Zone, then it is an issue. It makes no sense.

The intent of the rules was to control the training of dogs used for hunting bears. Wisconsin now has a very sound and restrictive bear dog training season that covers the original concern these rules tried to address. These rules have outlived their time, and it is time to repeal them so that Northern Wisconsin is compatible with Southern Wisconsin.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work on this bill with my colleague from the Senate, Senator Quinn. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.

Dog Training and Trialing Northern Restricted Zone



AB 512 / SB 545 Fact Sheet



The administrative protections that would be eliminated by this bill are very much still needed.

- Hounding with dogs is damaging. Unsupervised GPS-tracked dogs, especially larger packs of dogs, do collateral damage to the landscape of wild and potentially even endangered animals.
- Decreasing requirements for dog trialing is a blow to public safety. There have been numerous instances nationwide of hunting dogs attacking people including one this year in Georgia where a hunter sustained nearly 300 bite wounds from someone else's dogs.
- The time restriction of May-June is the Spring breeding and migration period for animals in this area, this is an especially sensitive time to protect and is a needed intent of the original rule.

FALSE: These regulations are antiquated. They were intended to prevent out of season hunting or running of dogs, and now that we have well-established seasons there is no need.

- We've had established seasons in Wisconsin for a very long time. The first closed hunting season in WI was established in 1851, the first 20-day season was set in 1909, Open season were eliminated in 1933, and the first statewide fixed gun deer season was 1986.
- These regulations were put in place to prevent abuse and protect our state's natural resources as well as livestock farmers and are still necessary.
- Our current rules provide more training seasons now than when these rules were created and we still have farmers and landowners with issues of dogs and hunters trespassing.

FALSE: These rules mean pet owners could be fined for just doing what pet owners do. For example, if their dogs bark at or go running after wild animals while walking them off leash in the spring.

- This is a misinterpretation of the regulations. These regulations specifically address "dog trialing" and removing these sections would not have any impact on northern dog owners who are covered under 174.02 and 174.042.
- According to the DNR, this is not true as a warden would have to prove there was training and when checking on the last five years, no fines or citations have been issued.

FALSE: These rules unfairly discriminate against those north of an "arbitrary" line in the Northern Restricted Area.

- For decades we've had hunting rules and regulations differ by established zones, of which this regulation fits into DNR Zone 1. There are all kinds of different rules based on the needs of those zones from hunting hours to allowed harvest. This is no different.
- Zone 1 is also markedly different than other areas of Wisconsin with significant natural resources and forested land including the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.
- Because the vast sections of this zone are national forest, the rules created to govern this area when taking resources off the land and protecting species are different including the federal Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, Federal Land Policy and Management Act as well as Endangered and Regional Forester Sensitive Species.



Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

2023 Senate Bill 545

Hunting Wild Animals with the Aid of a Dog, Dog Training on Wild Animals, and Dog Trialing on Wild Animals in the Northern Portion of the State

December 6, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Stafsholt, and members of the Committee. My name is Scott Loomans, and I am the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Policy Specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 545, related to hunting wild animals with the aid of a dog, dog training on wild animals, and dog trialing on wild animals in the northern portion of the state.

Senate Bill 545 would repeal rules that prohibit dog training from May 1 to June 30 in a portion of the state. The current rule was a part of a rule package in the late 1980s. Looking at historical records associated with the Wisconsin Conservation Congress statewide hearing questions, which informed the rule package, there were public complaints about illegal training of bear hunting dogs and trespass violations during the spring, that were occurring in large numbers in northern Wisconsin, followed by demands that the DNR solve the problem. Furthermore, petitions received from the Douglas County Board and the Town of Wascott required the department to respond to similar concerns.

Because year-round hunting seasons exist for many species, enforcement of the July 10 – August 31 bear-dog training period is extremely difficult. Field wardens and wildlife managers recommended elimination of dog use from hunting wildlife as well as pursuit and training on wild animals during the April 1 to July 9 period north of State Highway 29 to: 1) eliminate the illegal pursuit of bear under the guise of running coyotes and other species, and 2) to provide additional protection to wildlife during the spring breeding period. Dog trials and training on captive wildlife would still be allowed by permit.

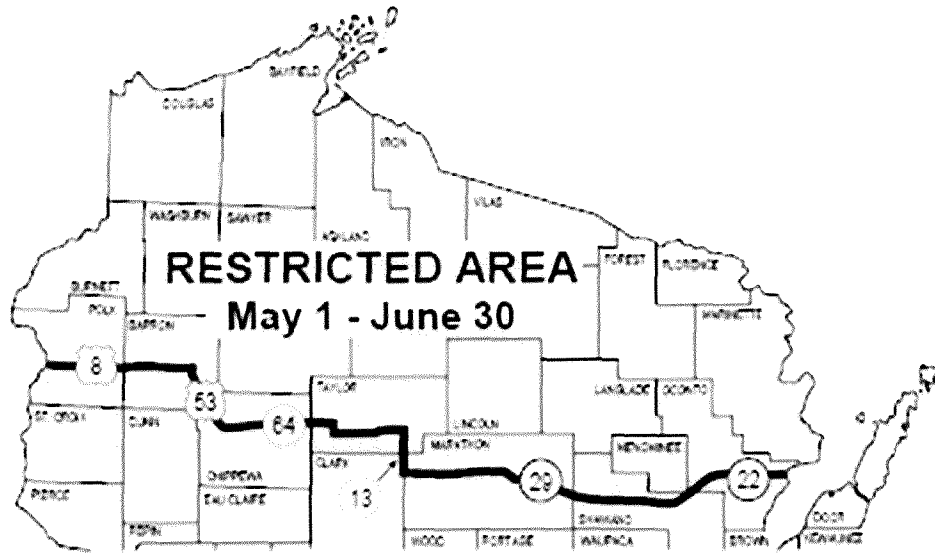
The statewide hearing question/proposal asked: “Do you favor the elimination of hunting with dogs as well as pursuit and training of dogs on free-roaming wildlife during the period April 1 to July 9 North of State Highway 29?”

Spring hearing input did not support the proposal. In recognition of this sentiment, DNR staff met with representatives of the major organizations and developed the following rule modifications which were then approved at the statewide Conservation Congress convention.

1. Modify the season closure dates from April 1 – July 9 as proposed to May 1 – June 30.
2. Expand the legal bear dog training period from July 10 – August 31 to July 1 – August 31.
3. Exempt sanctioned dog trials under DNR permit from the closure.
4. Modify the boundary from north of State Highway 29 to that shown in the attached rule.

This is largely the rule that is in place today, although the period for training dogs that are used to track and trail bears has been extended so that training is now allowed at times when hunting bears with dogs

is also allowed. Shown below is a map of the closed area that currently exists in rule. Training is closed throughout the restricted area in the map including both private and public lands.



Since 1987, we have created an exception in the northern restricted zone to allow hound dog training on raccoon and rabbits. A person may train dogs on captive or free-roaming raccoons and rabbits in the northern restricted zone from May 1 to June 30, provided they get a license and meet certain conditions.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage
328 NW Main St.
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

December 6, 2023

Subject: Letter of Support for Senate Bill 545 - Hunting Regulations in Northern Wisconsin

Dear Chairman Stafsholt and Members of the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage,

The Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association (WBHA) supports Senate Bill 545, relating to hunting wild animals with the aid of a dog, dog training on wild animals, and dog trialing on wild animals in the northern portion of the state.

WBHA has a long-standing commitment to responsible and sustainable hunting practices, as well as the preservation of Wisconsin's rich hunting traditions. We believe this legislation offers a balanced and science-based approach to hunting regulations in the specified northern portion of our state. There is no scientific reason why the northern portion of our state should be regulated differently than the southern portion.

Senate Bill 545 proposes the repeal of several Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administrative code provisions that regulate hunting, dog training, and dog trialing on free-roaming wild animals in the northern part of the state during certain periods. WBHA supports an individual's ability to go to these areas with their dogs without restrictions.

On the same note, we want to emphasize our support for the existing Wisconsin laws regarding hound training seasons for bear. These laws have played a crucial role in ensuring the safety and well-being of both hunters and their dogs during hunting activities.

In consideration of the above, we urge you to lend your support to Senate Bill 545. We believe that the proposed changes align with the goals of the Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association and will positively impact the sustainable management of wild animals in the specified region.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the well-being of Wisconsin's natural heritage. We look forward to the continued collaboration between the legislative body and organizations like ours to ensure the responsible enjoyment of our state's rich hunting traditions.

Sincerely,

Konkel, Sharlene

From: Laura Menefee <menefee.laura@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 05, 2023 6:17 PM
To: Sen.Stafsholt; Konkel, Sharlene
Subject: Withdraw SB545

Allowing hounding activity in Northern Wisconsin would be a disaster.

Despite what they say, and want the public to believe, hound handlers DO NOT have “control” of their GPS collared dogs being tracked from miles away. These dogs are NOT trained to track and pursue “only target” species - they kill, injure and maim fawns, ground nesting birds, coyotes, foxes, wolves including pups, bobcats including kittens.

Two additional months of training would likely increase trespass issues that are already a problem in many areas of N WI, and would greatly increase dog/wolf conflict, leading to tens of thousands more dollars in taxpayer-funded payouts for hounds killed and injured by wolves. Our already overworked and understaffed WDNR does not have the resources or personnel to enforce hounding regulations in the field for an additional two months. Please withdraw SB 545

Laura Menefee
Sturgeon Bay, WI 54345
Ass't Prof Literature, Ret.

Wildlife Conservation Education
Nature Photography
Endangered Species Coalition
Society for the Preservation of Poultry Antiquities
National Wolfwatchers Coalition
Wisconsin Wolf Trackers
Wolf Patrol
Executive Committee, Sierra Club, Fox Valley Group

One planet. One life.

Konkel, Sharlene

From: Kathleen Wendling <kwendling@msn.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 05, 2023 4:41 PM
To: Konkel, Sharlene; Sen.Stafsholt
Cc: Sen.Felzkowski; Sen.Tomczyk; Sen.Spreitzer; Sen.Hesselbein; Sen.Quinn; Rep.Green
Subject: SB545

As northern Wisconsin residents, avowed conservationists, long time dedicated hunters, and breeders/trainers of hunting dogs, we are strongly opposed to SB545. Current administrative code provides vital protections for Wisconsin game and non-game species alike during the most vulnerable time in their life cycles – the spring and early summer nesting/birthing/rearing season. SB545 would remove these minimal protections and allow free running hunting dogs unrestricted access to critical wildlife habitat at this sensitive time, resulting in:

- Disturbance to ground nesting birds such as ruffed grouse, woodcock, turkey, waterfowl, and a host of songbirds including federal and state endangered and threatened species such as Kirtland warblers and spruce grouse.
- Disturbance to newborn and/or young whitetail deer, bears, bobcats, and endangered American martens, likely contributing to increased juvenile mortality and, ultimately, recruitment. The resulting inevitable killing of young wildlife would violate state statutes which prohibit the killing of wildlife with dogs. This would have a long-term negative impact on the populations of the very species that proponents of this bills hunt in the established fall seasons.
- Free running hunting dogs during the current closed period of April 15 through July 31st would be at high risk of injury and/or death from inadvertent encroachment on wolf den sites with young present. Such voluntary and unnecessary exposure could place participating hunting dog owners in violation of state animal welfare statutes.
- Less restriction on the training of hunting dogs in southern Wisconsin is not a logical rationale for removing important restrictions in the northern portion of the state. More logical would be to expand current northern Wisconsin restrictions to statewide status. Furthermore, both the applicable science and anecdotal observation supports actually lengthening the closed period dates for northern Wisconsin from the current April 15 through July 31st, to April 15 through August 15th to avoid unnecessarily disturbing ground nesting birds incubating/rearing late, or second, broods.
- This ill-conceived bill is an obvious attempt to accommodate a small faction of Wisconsin hunters who use sporting dogs – hound hunters, who purchase less than one percent of the 4,554,015 total hunting licenses sold in the state. These bills will be vigorously opposed by the non-hunting citizens of Wisconsin and aid the recruitment of new “anti-hunters”. That the result will be the further vilification of hunters in general, and hound hunters specifically, is a foregone conclusion. Unfortunately, the exponentially larger group of, ethical, conservation minded, hunters who pursue upland birds and waterfowl with hunting dogs will inevitably be “painted with the same brush”.
- SB545 is an ill-conceived, irresponsible, legislative initiative which ignore established, proven, wildlife management principles, and would subjugate the values and opinions of the great majority of Wisconsin citizens to those of a myopic, vocal, minority. This bill is an affront to the citizens of Wisconsin, and an embarrassment to the legislative bodies who have brought them forward. I urge you to abandon this ill-conceived initiative and encourage its sponsors to redirect their energy to proactively and productively addressing the consequential issues of broad concern to their constituents, rather than promoting the ecologically unsound agenda of a minority faction of sporting dog hobbyists and their advocacy organization(s).

Sb 545/Ab512 was introduced on Oct, 23, 2023 in the Wisconsin legislature to expand hound hunting in Northern Wisconsin from May 1 - June 30. It's Spring when animals are giving birth and nursing their offspring.

Black bears and other hibernating animals are hungry and searching for food. Furbearing animals are searching for food and training their offspring survival skills.

Elk calves are born in Clam Lake area in late May/early June, are nursed for up to 4 weeks, then become members of their group.

Northern Wisconsin and the Central Forest is the remaining wolf range for the gray wolf. The 2 additional months that the hound hunters want to expand hounding, would place their dogs in **extreme harm** just when wolf families are on the land with young pups, just out of the den.

If enacted the law would repeal restrictions from hunting wild free-roaming animals that live in this section of the state during Wisconsin birthing season. Authors of this bill propose repealing the off-leash rule on Department lands open to public hunting that are not designated open to dog training. These are multi-use lands including camping, hiking, bike trails.

Hounds instinctively run almost any animal. My rescue beagle hound Heidi, must be on leash unless free in fenced dog park. Occupied dens and ground nesting animals will be destroyed by off-leash dogs. Many young inexperienced animals will be run down, many killed or injured. Hounding during Spring birthing of most wild animals can orphan baby animals who are not yet mobile to keep up with parents, and will likely die from slow starvation and /or predation.

Just plain common sense should question the motives of the authors of this bill. **The current restrictions are inherent in the scientific principles found in the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.**

There is growing opposition to hounding in Wisconsin. Wildlife is for all of us to enjoy in the great outdoors. I strongly oppose this bill.

Dear Committee Members,

I am opposed to AB 512 which would repeal current WDNR administrative codes prohibiting hunting or pursuing free-roaming wild animals from May 1st - June 30th in the northern part of WI.

This is a critical time of the year in which wildlife are raising their young and the impact of running dogs through this area would have immense negative impacts upon young wildlife and endangered growing plants.

The implications of this bill would be broad reaching and would include additional negative pressures on land owners in the northern part of our state.

My husband and I live in a rural area of NW Wisconsin, and we have had multiple issues with individuals illegally running their hounds on our property. We have been told directly by local hound hunters that they "can go anywhere we want to" and they have told us that they "do not have control over our dogs".

Trespassing issues are a huge problem, and if this bill passed it would lead to even more conflicts.

Most hunters that I have spoken to do **not** support this bill as it is common sense to protect the wildlife that will later be hunted. From an ecological, social and ethical standpoint this bill makes no sense and will lead to an increase in conflict.

I am asking that you oppose AB 512.

Thank you,

Dana Herman
Shell Lake

12/5/2023

Konkel, Sharlene

From: Adrian Wydeven <adrianwydeven@cheqnet.net>
Sent: Monday, December 04, 2023 10:08 PM
To: Sen.Stafsholt; Sen.Felzkowski
Cc: Sen.Tomczyk; Sen.Spreitzer; Sen.Hesselbein; Konkel, Sharlene
Subject: SB545
Attachments: AW SB545-AB512.docx

Dear Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage:

I understand your committee will be holding a hearing on SB545 on December 6, 2023, to consider opening hound training opportunities in May and June across northern Wisconsin. I urge you to reject this bill because it sets poor public policy for the following reasons:

Comments on SB545,

Reasons I opposed this bill include:

- Potential disturbance to ground nesting birds such as grouse, turkey, waterfowl and others.
- Disturbance to elk calves and deer fawns born at that time, and disturbance to other young wildlife like bear cubs, wolf pups, bobcat kittens and others.
- Likely result in occasional death to young wild animals, which violates state law that prohibits killing of wildlife with dogs.

Likely will result in illegal early training of hound on bears which would be difficult regulate if hound training on other wildlife is allowed in May and June.
- Comparisons with southern WI are not reasonable because there is a lot less public land to run hounds, and most of the public lands in S WI are DNR lands that do not allow dogs to run free from April 15 through July 31.
- Running dogs in May and June would likely increase dogs killed by wolves protecting pups at den sites; wolves are using den sites from late March until mid-June.
- Running hounds in May and June would create difficulty for DNR to live capture and radio collar wolves, and would reduce DNR ability to carefully monitor the wolf population. Currently live-trapping stops when dog training starts in July.
- Two additional months of training would likely increase trespass issues that are already a problem in many areas of N WI, including running dogs through cattle pastures with young calves.
- Likely to reflect badly on humaneness and ethics of hound hunting by training at times when there are so many vulnerable young animals on the landscape.

Overall this would be opposed by most deer hunters, upland bird hunters, northern livestock farmers, and northern landowners

Konkel, Sharlene

From: Jason Maloney <annin7777@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 04, 2023 3:35 PM
To: Konkel, Sharlene
Subject: Public Comment-SB 545

I am writing to oppose Senate Bill 545 which would allow hounding in northern Wisconsin between May 1 and June 30 each spring. I live in Bayfield County in far northern Wisconsin. Training dogs off leash in wild areas of our state will disrupt nesting of game and songbirds as well as the rearing of mammals like deer. In fact, allowing hounding will disrupt the reproductive cycle of most wild animals in areas where hounding takes place. The hound hunting I have seen over the past few years on public lands consisted of people driving around in trucks with dog crates on the back while packs of their dogs ran loose on their own through miles of forest. We already have plenty of this "hunting" going on in northern Wisconsin. We don't need to have it going on during the spring too.

Senate Bill 545 is a bad idea.

Jason Maloney
Washburn, Wisconsin



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 545
Presented to the Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage
Megan Nicholson, Wisconsin State Director
The Humane Society of the United States
December 6, 2023

On behalf of the Humane Society of the United States and our supporters in Wisconsin, I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 545, I urge you to oppose this dangerous and reckless bill.

Each year, during one of the longest hound-training seasons in the nation, resident and nonresident hunters pursue black bears. Neighboring states' permit hounding for much shorter durations. For example,

- Michigan's restricts hounding from Apr. 16 – Jul. 7.
- Minnesota restricts hounding from Apr. 16 – Jul. 14.
- Iowa restricts training Mar. 15 – Jul. 15, and
- Illinois restricts hounding between Apr. 1 – Aug. 31.

Spring is a precarious time for ground nesting birds and other wildlife. It would be detrimental to allow packs of GPS radio-collared hounds to run the woods and fields when ground-nesting birds, deer fawns, elk calves and bear cubs are extremely vulnerable. The potential for sporting dogs in training to harm, disturb, maul or kill wildlife would undoubtedly increase. This goes against the very principle of ethical wildlife conservation and proper land stewardship.

In pursuit of wildlife and out of sight of the owner, hounds frequently trespass onto private property, including family farms. Packs of marauding hounds cause skittish livestock, like sheep and cattle, to bolt. Allowing hound training during springtime would be an additional risk to the safety of young calves and lambs. Rural landowners often complain about hounds running through their lands and hunters trespassing to retrieve dogs. Expanding the training season will undoubtedly increase landowner complaints.

Hounding is also extremely unpopular. After the February 2021 Wisconsin wolf hunt, where nearly 90% of wolves killed by trophy hunters had been chased down by hounds, Remington Research conducted a poll. It found that 66% of Wisconsin voters oppose the hounding of wolves and most 67% of voters believe hound hunting is nothing more than state-sanctioned dogfighting. Furthermore, citizen resolutions to allow off-leash dog training have failed to garner majority support on the Wisconsin Conservation Congress' [Spring Hearing Questionnaire](#).

This reckless behavior harms taxpayers. The majority of [wolf-hound conflicts](#) occur during the current bear hound-training season. Lengthening the season to allow free-roaming packs of dogs to run through wolf den sites will increase conflicts between wolves and hounds. Since 1985, state taxpayers have funded [\\$1,078,664 \(\\$1.08 million\) in compensation payments to houndsmen](#) (for both hounds' deaths and vet bills), and this money pays houndsmen who knowingly and recklessly put their hounds in harm's way—yet are compensated at up to \$2,500 for each hound killed. Compare that to Wisconsin farmers who only

received \$215,109 for cattle deaths by wolves. While the majority of taxpayers support compensation for livestock and pet depredations, they do not support payments to resident and nonresident hound hunters.

It would also harm the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' wolf research. The DNR captures and collars wolves in May and June when there is no dog training. Expanding training season would make it difficult, if not impossible, for the DNR to capture wolves for research, population, and health monitoring. Also, the proposed, expanded season would put wolves and hounds into conflict at wolves' den sites.

We urge you to stop the practice of hounding in Wisconsin, not expand it.

Sincerely,

Megan Nicholson
Wisconsin State Director
The Humane Society of the United States
mnicholson@humanesociety.org