Additional information was provided in this version compare to Version 1.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff are proposing a change to the area specific rules for Blackwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to require all dogs used for pursuing or hunting deer, fox or coyote in that portion of the dog hunt area east of Belandville Road be monitored and equipped with a functioning Global Positioning System (GPS) or telemetry device (e.g., collar) with behavior correction capability. These proposed changes are a result of input received from area landowners and dog hunters in order to resolve conflicts.

This background report details the proposed change and staff recommendations for moving forward.

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The Blackwater Wildlife Management Area (Northwest Region) is comprised of 191,651 acres located in Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties. The Florida Forest Service (FFS) is the lead land manager. FWC established the area as a WMA in 1952 and manages hunting. There is a long history of deer and fox hunting with dogs on Blackwater WMA and surrounding areas.

Over the years, land use practices have changed. Many inholdings and surrounding parcels have been converted from agriculture and timberlands with dog hunting to small farms, residences or tracts with still hunting. This has resulted in conflicts, when dogs stray from the WMA onto private property or still hunt areas. The Commission and FFS have worked with stakeholders throughout the years and acted to reduce conflicts between hunters and landowners many times over the past 40 years and have included establishment of still hunt areas, reduction in season lengths and size of areas open to dog hunting, road closures, establishment of hunter quotas and Hunter Responsibility Rule and even fencing of some private in-holdings by dog hunters.

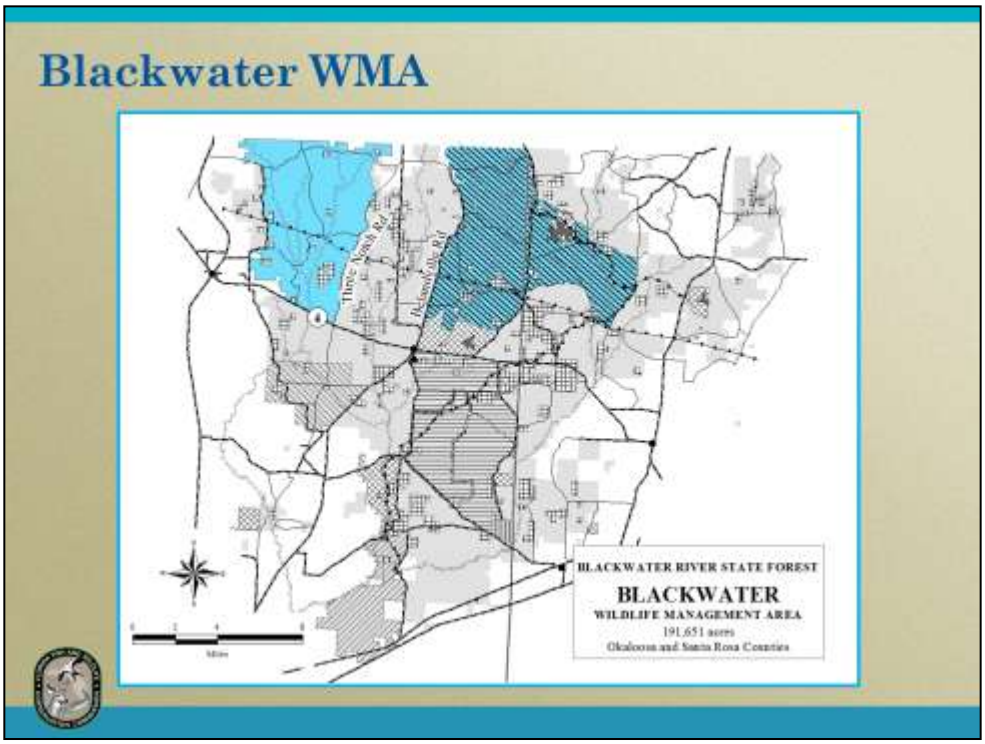
1972 – Still hunt area created
1982 – Season length in dog hunt area reduced from 79 to 51 days
1983 – Separate quotas established for dog (1000) and still (1200) hunt areas
1992 – Fox, raccoon, opossum and bobcat season restricted to dog hunt area
1995 – Dog hunt area reduced in acreage
1996 – Dog hunt quota reduced from 1000 to 775
1997 – Hunter Responsibility Rule adopted, which provides for criminal penalties when a dog pursues wildlife onto the lands of another
1999 – Dog hunt area reduced again
2005 – Dog hunt area reduced from 78,172 to 53,340 acres; dog hunt quota reduced from 775 each hunt to 400 for each hunt; dog hunting season reduced from 58 to 44 days; reduction in acreage open to fox hunting from 78,172 to 19,589 acres; closure of numerous roads to hunting
2012 – Fence constructed by dog hunters to reduce dog trespass onto private property

Although changes to regulations and configuration of the dog hunt area have helped reduce conflict, FWC and FFS continue to receive complaints about deer and fox dog trespass onto private land in certain areas, particularly dogs leaving the fox hunt area.

FWC Law Enforcement has targeted high complaint areas to address landowner concerns. Additionally, FWC and FFS staff have worked with organized hunting groups and landowners to improve communication and help resolve conflicts. Despite good faith efforts from both groups, complaints have continued.

There are limited additional regulatory options available to address this situation. Closing more areas to hunting deer, fox and coyote with dogs is possible, however, interest in hunting with dogs remains extremely high.

Tracking and correction collars would help hunters control their dogs and help address this issue. The closure and opening of additional roads on the area also may facilitate retrieval of dogs and minimization of conflicts.



On Blackwater WMA, the dog hunt areas are highlighted. Most recent landowner complaints originated in or adjacent to the dog hunt area east of Belandville Road, also known as the fox hunt area This area identified by diagonal hatching is the area affected by this rule change.

Staff proposes to require tracking and correction devices on all dogs used to pursue deer, fox and coyote in the area east of Belandville Road (19,589 acres).

Other proposals were evaluated, however staff believes this is the best option for balancing hunting opportunity while addressing landowner concerns.

FWC and FFS also are discussing identification of additional roads to be closed and opened on the area to facilitate retrieval of dogs and minimization of conflicts.

Staff would continue to work with hunters, landowners and FFS and enforce all regulations.

Tracking and Correction Devices

- Tracking and correction devices allow hunters to locate and correct dog behavior
- Some Florida hunters use this technology and have successfully reduced trespass
- Tracking collars are required and used effectively in some areas of other states

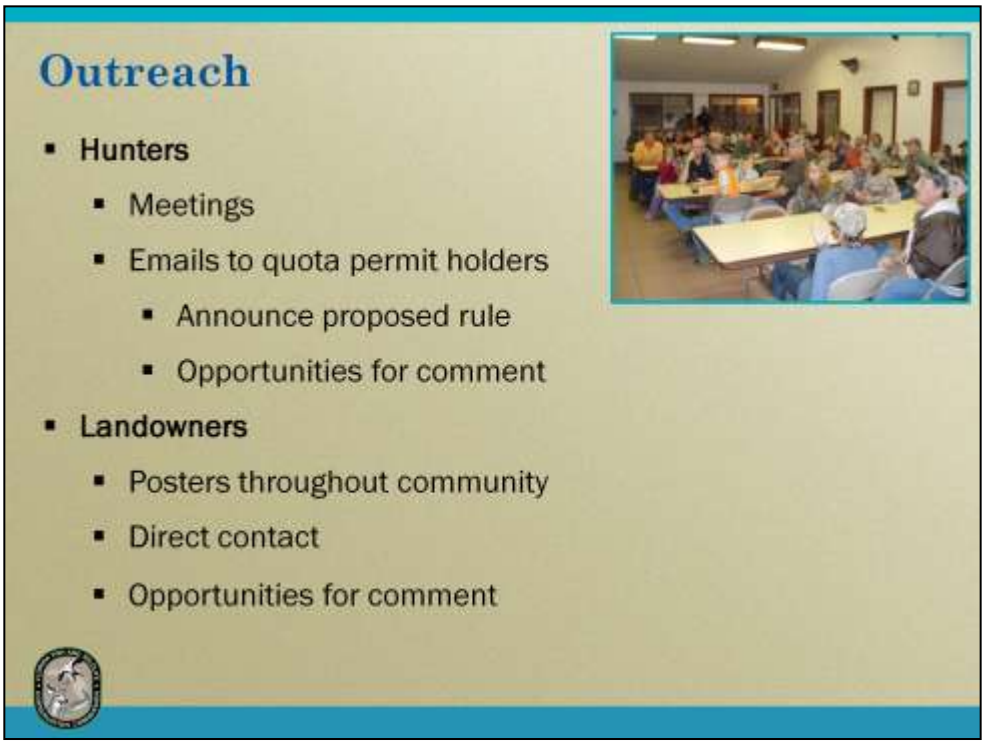
Tracking and control collars allow hunters to determine the location of their dogs and remotely correct the course of the chase. Several models are available, including global positioning system (GPS) and radio telemetry based technology. Some have integrated tracking and correction capabilities, while others require two separate units. The range of these devices is up to seven miles and would provide hunters the means to reduce the chance of dogs going into unauthorized areas.

Shown in the picture is a series of collars with integrated GPS tracking and correction capability.

Some hunters currently have this technology and it has been effective at reducing dog trespass for those users.

Tracking technology is required for dog hunting on some areas in Mississippi, South Carolina and Texas.

Mississippi – Caston Creek WMA (Mississippi Dept. of Wildlife and Parks)
South Carolina – Savannah River Site (US Dept. of Energy)
Texas – Lavon Lake (US Army Corps. of Engineers)



In addition to meetings, we sent an email to all Blackwater General Gun Dog quota permit holders over the past 3 years (~800 individuals) to inform them of the proposed rule and direct them towards our website to let us know their thoughts on the proposed rule. We received public comment on our website for over 3 weeks and received 119 comments.

Local WMA staff and Law Enforcement officers placed posters throughout the community notifying residents of a proposed rule and directing them to a website for them to provide their comments. Additionally, WMA and Law Enforcement staff were asked to spread the word as best they could throughout the community, specifically to private property owners they know, to let them know about this proposed rule and to inform them on how to provide their feedback through our website.

To meet the requirements of this proposal, each dog used for hunting deer, fox, or coyote must be equipped with either a GPS or telemetry tracking collar. Additionally, each dog must be equipped with a device capable of correcting dog behavior. It is possible to purchase devices with tracking and correction capabilities integrated into a single unit, or individual tracking and correction devices may be purchased.

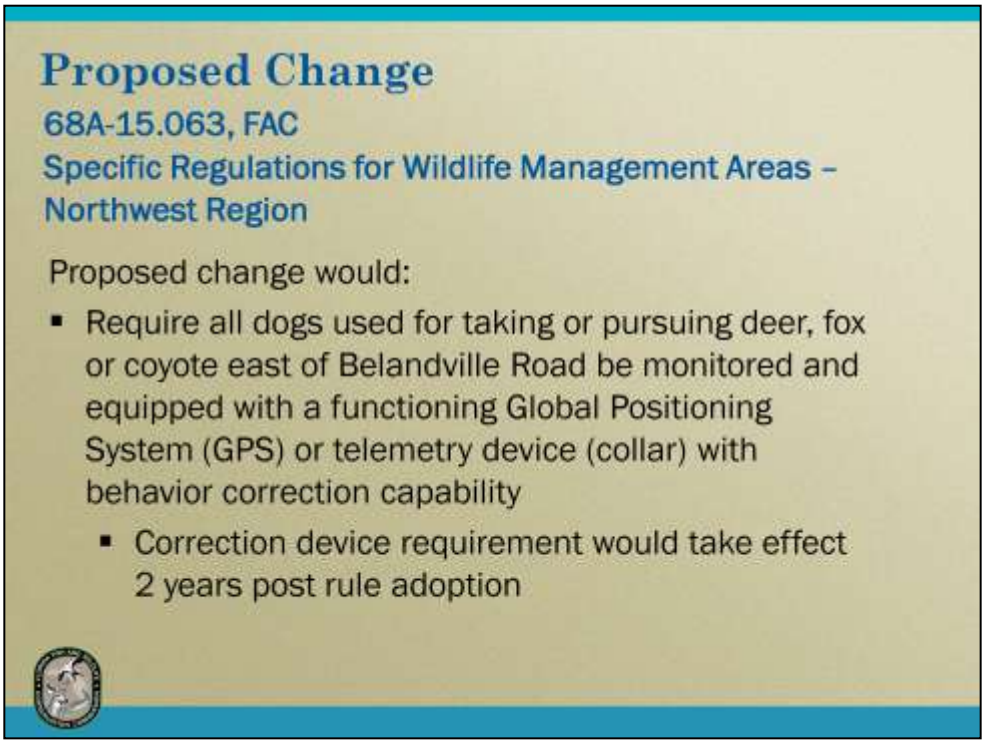
The cost of this equipment varies by model. Costs for receivers (GPS or telemetry) range from approximately $500 to $800 and the cost of collars range from approximately $150 to $300. Multiple dogs can be tracked by each receiver. For those currently using this technology, it is common that only one member of the hunting group owns the receiver while individual dog owners purchase collars only for their dogs.

While the cost of new equipment can be high, a number of individuals currently use this technology, and those unable to purchase this equipment would still be able to hunt in other portions of the dog hunt area.

Hunters requested a delay in the requirement for correction collars partly in response to the high cost, allowing time for participants to prepare for the purchase. Additional training is required for the dogs to understand and respond appropriately to the correction, and allowing more time for this training is another reason for the delay in the effective date of the requirement for correction devices. Performance of this equipment varies by model as well as terrain. Regardless of technology used, it would be the responsibility of each hunter to maintain contact with their dogs and not exceed the range of their equipment.

Correction devices come in many forms. The operator may choose to correct dog behavior with the use of tones, vibrations or electric pulses. These devices are widely used for dog training purposes. Some private landowners indicated that adoption of this rule would not stop trespass completely and therefore opposed it indicating that it was not adequate to resolve conflict issues.

FFS is supportive of this rule change.



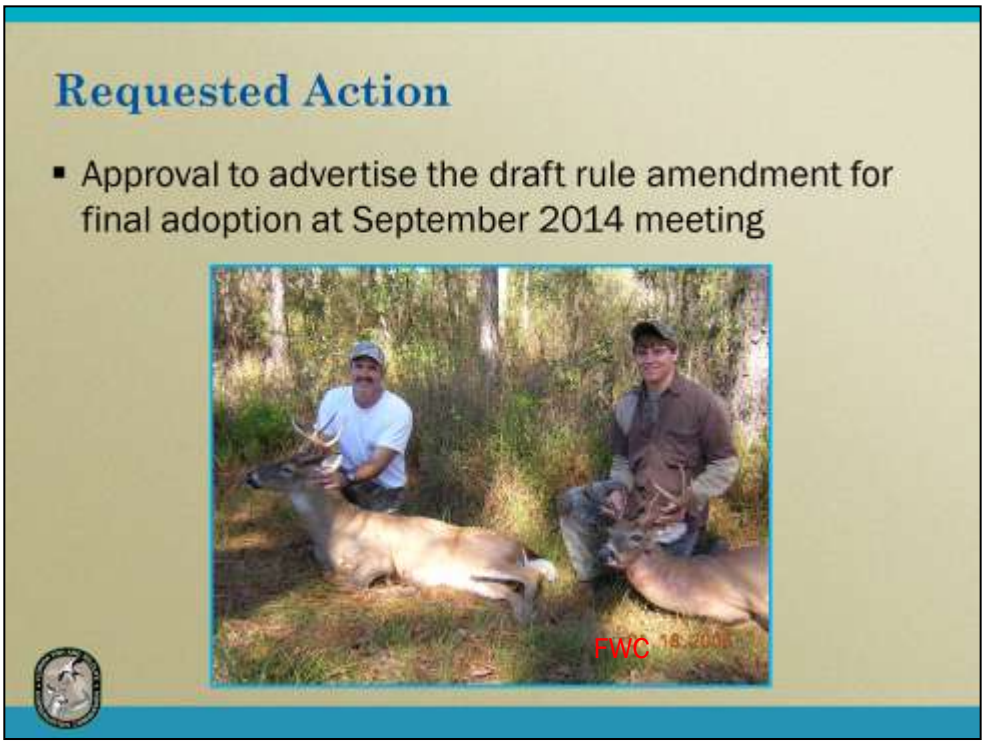
The proposed rule amendment would require all dogs used for taking or pursuing deer, fox or coyote east of Belandville Road be monitored and equipped with a functioning Global Positioning System (GPS) or telemetry device (collar) with behavior correction capability to help prevent dog trespass onto unauthorized property.

Proposed rule language:
The taking or pursuing of deer, fox or coyote with dogs is prohibited in that portion of the dog hunt area east of Belandville Road unless each dog is equipped and monitored with devices that allow remote tracking and behavior correction. The device(s) must be attached by a collar or similar means and must be used to prevent dog egress into unauthorized areas. The remote tracking device(s) would include Global Positioning System (GPS) or telemetry tracking. Effective Date: **The correction device requirement in this rule shall not take effect until 2 years after the rule is adopted.**

Based on feedback we've received during our stakeholder engagement, we are proposing that the tracking component of this rule goes into effect ASAP, and the correction component take effect 2 years after the rule is adopted.

The proposal includes a delay in the requirement for correction collars partly in response to the high cost, allowing time for participants to purchase the necessary equipment. Additional training is also required for the dogs to understand and respond appropriately to the correction. Therefore, the delay in the effective date of the requirement for correction devices provides enough time to train their dogs.

Leadership of the local dog hunting organizations was consulted in development of this proposal and is generally supportive of this rule with the 2 year delay of the correction component.



Staff is requesting Commission approval of the draft rule amendment for advertising and final public hearing at the September, 2014 Commission meeting. This rule would be in place for the 2014-15 hunting season.