



Dec. 19, 2023

Senator Rob Stafsholt– Chair, Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage
Senator Mary Felzkowski– Vice Chair, Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage
P.O. Box 7882
Madison, 53707-7882

Dear Senators Stafsholt and Felzkowski,

On behalf of the Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society, which unites conservationists to improve wildlife habitat and forest health and promotes stewardship for our forests, our wildlife and our future, I am contacting you to convey RGS & AWS's strong opposition of Senate Bill 545.

RGS & AWS feels strongly that SB 545, which would repeal the Department of Natural Resources provision outlining certain hunting practices with dogs, is profoundly shortsighted. We believe that real and potential impacts that initially led to the establishment of these provisions have not been adequately considered. Further, there has been a lack of consultation with hunting organizations and the broader conservation community. In addition, we feel the DNR has not been sufficiently consulted about potential impacts to wildlife or law enforcement hurdles that would result by repealing these provisions. The administrative code that SB 545 would repeal was originally put into place to make it easier for law enforcement to enforce training restrictions for bear dog trainers. If SB 545 were to pass, RGS & AWS feels an unintended burden would fall on game wardens to enforce bear dog training restrictions.

Our members train and hunt with dogs to preserve and enjoy our sporting heritage. We understand that this heritage must be supported by conservation, and we realize that ground nesting birds – game and non-game alike – and small mammals can be negatively impacted by off-leash dogs roaming for training purposes in spring and early summer. Closures allow young wildlife (including white-tailed deer fawns and black bear cubs) to reach maturity without undo pressure, aggravation, and mortality. Juvenile ground nesting birds like ruffed grouse, American woodcock, sharp-tailed grouse, and spruce grouse lack strong flight feathers to evade predators or dogs. Professional and amateur dog trainers shared with the DNR their concerns that pressure from their activities could impact grouse, even though they openly run dogs only after the training season opens.

We acknowledge that changes are needed for dog training and trialing. However, SB 545 fails to adequately address – or resolve – underlying and existing problems. Currently, regulations are confusing and access to open public pre-season training grounds is limited. However, instead of repealing purposeful administrative code, RGS & AWS recommends that the DNR work with hunting groups to streamline and clearly communicate current regulations in a way that the public can easily follow. This includes the existing permitting process that currently allows dog trainers to apply for a permit to run dogs on private property in the northern zone during the closed period. RGS & AWS also feels that opportunities exist to expand training ground access in northern Wisconsin. Our willingness to capitalize on these opportunities can provide a path to compromise and better resource management.

SB 545 will only conflict with goals for healthy wildlife populations, hunting opportunity and law enforcement's ability to protect resources. RGS & AWS respectfully urges members of the Committee to **oppose Senate Bill 545**.

Best Regards,

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