

## Vermont Department of Fish &amp; Wildlife

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules  
Rep. Trevor Squirrell, Chair  
Sen. Seth Bongartz, Vice Chair  
Bradley Showman, Legislative Counsel

**DATE:** August 19, 2026

**RE:** Proposed amendments to Final Proposed Wildlife rules  
10 App. V.S.A. § 2, *Report, big game*,  
10 App. V.S.A. § 12, *Leashed tracking dogs*

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On Wednesday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, the Department of Fish and Wildlife filed four Final Proposed rules with the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR), on behalf of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board: 10 App. V.S.A. § 2, *Report, big game*, 10 App. V.S.A. § 2a, *Big game; tagging*, 10 App. V.S.A. § 5, *Bow and arrow and crossbow standards*, and 10 App. V.S.A. § 12, *Leashed tracking dogs*. As noted in the complete filing forms, the four Final Proposed rule filings had not changed since the filing of the Proposed rules.

Subsequently, two issues were raised regarding the proposed rule language in the Big Game Reporting rule and the Leashed Tracking Dog rule, which the Department proposes to address through the following amended rule language:

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**1. 10 App. V.S.A. § 2, *Report, big game*:** In the Final Proposed filing for this rule, the Department proposed the following revision to the language:

(d) The Commissioner shall pay to the authorized agent a fee of no less than \$1.00, to be determined by the Commissioner, for each report taken on species where reports are required by law.

The intent of the proposed amended language is to allow the Department to reimburse agents at authorized big game reporting stations *more* than the \$1 per reported animal, as currently permitted. The fee has been \$1 since 1971. The number of big game reporting stations has declined sharply since 2020, limiting hunters' reporting options and often forcing them to travel long distances to report their animals as required. This proposed increase in reimbursement is intended to incentivize stores throughout the State to act as authorized reporting stations, making it easier for hunters to report their animals.

On Thursday, August 13, the Department received questions from Legislative Counsel regarding the proposed revision to subparagraph (d), including questions about the Commissioner's



authority to determine the reimbursement dollar amount, the guidelines the Commissioner would employ in determining the reimbursement amount, and whether the funds that would be distributed through this reimbursement have been appropriated to the Department.

In response, the Department intends to increase the reimbursement to \$5 per report. The Board declined to directly designate the \$5 reimbursement in the rule because the Department's ability to provide this reimbursement will be budget dependent. The Board did not want to obligate a specific dollar amount in case the Department is unable to account for that increase in their budget.

To clarify the funding source, the Department does not draw from the General Fund to cover this reimbursement. The Department is able to leverage federal license funds and Fish and Wildlife Special Funds to cover this reimbursement. Through the budgeting process, the Department is granted a specific appropriation authorizing the expenditure of special funds to reimburse big game reporting stations. This spending authority has already been granted for the 2027 budget, and the Department doesn't anticipate an increase in upcoming budget cycles. While this payment is called a "fee" in the rule language, it is important to highlight that this is not a traditional fee; it is a reimbursement paid to the voluntary operators of big game check stations. The funding source is federal and fish and wildlife special funds earmarked for this purpose, and the costs are not passed on to Vermont taxpayers. The hunters who report their animals at these check stations do not pay any money.

To eliminate any ambiguity around the Department's discretion in setting the reimbursement dollar amount, the Department is proposing to amend the Final Proposed rule language as follows:

(d) The Commissioner shall pay to the authorized agent a fee of no less than \$1.00 and no more than \$5.00, to be determined by the Commissioner, for each report taken on species where reports are required by law.

The Department intends to increase the reimbursement amount to \$5 at the Board's direction, but the rule language is intended to maintain flexibility to reimburse at a lower dollar amount should the Department not be granted commensurate spending authority in future budget cycles.

**2. 10 App. V.S.A. § 12, *Leashed tracking dogs*:** The proposed changes to this rule are intended to allow for the use of leashed tracking dogs outside of the designated big game hunting seasons. Leashed tracking dog licensees can provide valuable assistance in locating big game animals that have been injured outside the hunting season under a variety of circumstances, including by vehicle collisions or during depredation efforts to mitigate crop damage.

Currently, the use of leashed tracking dogs is only permitted during big game seasons and the 24 hour period immediately following the last day of a big game season. The proposed rule changes would allow leashed tracking dogs to be used year round to track and find dead, wounded or injured big game.



During internal discussion with the Board, it was flagged that Section 4.4 of the rule still makes reference to the 24-hour period following a big game season, and under the proposed rule, that reference is no longer necessary and potentially confusing.

Section 4.4 specifically addresses the type of firearm a leashed tracking dog licensee may use to dispatch a wounded animal. The language is necessary to allow for the use of a weapon large enough to quickly dispatch a wounded animal, but to prohibit traditional hunting weapons, which should not be used outside of the legal hunting seasons. Under the proposed rule, a leashed tracking dog licensee will be able to use the authorized firearm at any time during the year that they are tracking a big game animal pursuant to their license. As such, the Department is proposing the following revision to Section 4.4, to eliminate confusion and make the amended rule language consistent throughout:

4.4 The licensee may use a handgun of no less than .35 caliber with a barrel length of not less than four inches to dispatch a wounded or injured big game animal, ~~and during the 24 hour period immediately following the last day of a big game season,~~ provided that the licensee complies with all other provisions of federal, state and local laws and regulations concerning possession and discharge of firearms and the conditions of a license granted under this rule.

Thank you for your consideration.



Hannah Smith  
General Counsel, Department of Fish and Wildlife