



The Grouse Whisperer

While working on his property near Richmond, Maine, Brad Varney noticed that every time he came around the corner in his four-wheeler, a ruffed grouse strutted out of the woods. One day he decided to bring along some dried fruit and nuts. He started by tossing a variety of food on the ground. As time passed, the bird started eating out of his hand. The grouse's favorite food: dried cranberries.

Nonsportsmen Have a Bone to Pick ... with Dogs

Bird hunters sometimes have a bone to pick with their dogs. It's usually when a pointer busts birds or a flushing dog ranges too far. But according to Evan Heusinkveld, the Director of State Services for the United States Sportsmen, there has been a dramatic increase in nonhunters' legislative attacks on man's best friend in the past few years. "More than 150 bills have been introduced in the last two-years alone," said Heusinkveld. In 2011, the group tracked more than 50 bills in 21 states.

The objective of most of these bills is to reduce the negligence of pet owners as well as rogue or part-time kennels, and their range is as wide and diverse as the different sporting breeds themselves. Nebraska Legislative Bill 427 would require anyone who owns more than four dogs that are intended for breeding to be licensed as a commercial dog breeder. That means additional expense for mandatory microchipping and regular and routine inspections by the Department of Agriculture. In Rhode Island, Senate Bill 140 prohibits keeping a dog kenneled for more than 14 hours per day, regardless of the size of the cage. In Tulsa, cats and dogs older than 6 months must be spayed or neutered. Tulsa already limits the number of cats and dogs per household to five, of which no more than three may be dogs. The onus is on a bird hunter to file for an exemption and then to build a case of support in hopes of qualifying.

One would think that such bills are written to reduce the pet negligence that does unfortunately occur. But in many of these instances, sporting dogs and their owners become victims of these bills. "Local laws passed by your city council, county commissioners, or trustees have the same effect as a state law," says Heusinkveld. "The only difference is that a local law applies only to a specific area of the state like a city or a county. Simply put, if your local government passes a law that says you can't do something, then you can't do it. This makes local laws just as dangerous to sportsmen and sporting dog owners as state laws."

To avoid dogs and owners becoming collateral damage, the United States Sportsman's Alliance has formed a Sporting Dog Defense Coalition and encourages all sportsmen to become more knowledgeable on dog-related bills: www.ussportsmen.org.

Ohio Committee Passes Legislation Protecting Sportsmen's Access

The House Natural Resources Committee passed H.R. 2834, the Recreational Fishing and Hunting Heritage and Opportunities Act. This bill would protect fishing, hunting and recreational shooting on federal lands.

H.R. 2834 passed the Committee with strong bipartisan support by a vote of 29-14. This vital piece of legislation would require fishing, hunting, and recreational shooting to be included in all federal land planning documents and would fix numerous inconsistencies in federal law that are being exploited by litigious environmental groups to reduce hunting opportunities on federal land. This bill is strongly supported by the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance, Safari Club International, the National Rifle Association, and millions of sportsmen across the country.

"This legislation is vital given the Administration's recent actions toward hunters and recreational sport shooters," said Melissa Simpson, Director of Government Affairs for Safari Club International. "Sportsmen have repeatedly sought to collaborate with the federal agencies and have been greeted with proposed closures in areas such as the Sonoran Desert National Monument, where the BLM intends to close the entire one-half million acre national monument to shooters. There are some 63 shooting sites within the monument, closure of which will end access for sportsmen. Passage of H.R. 2834 is necessary to protect against these anti-hunting policies."

"Sportsmen are increasingly facing attacks aimed at stopping them from using public land," said Bud Pidgeon, President and CEO of the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance. "This bill closes the loopholes that anti-hunters have used time and time again to try to deny access for hunting, fishing and shooting. Now is the time to put a stop to it. We are extremely pleased and appreciative that the House Natural Resources Committee recognized the importance of this bill."