

March 31, 2011
Special Called Meeting

The Martin County Board of Commissioners held a Special Called Meeting on Thursday, March 31, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in the Martin County Auditorium, Riverside High School, 1260 Godwin St, Williamston, North Carolina.

ASSEMBLY

Chairman Elmo “Butch” Lilley, Vice Chairman Tommy Bowen, Commissioner Ronnie Smith, Commissioner Derek Price, Commissioner Bob Hyman, County Manager W. Russell Overman, County Attorney J. Melvin Bowen and Clerk to the Board Marion B. Thompson.

Chairman Lilley called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The Chairman welcomed those in attendance and introduced the board members and administrative staff.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Smith and the invocation was offered by Commissioner Bowen.

AGENDA APPROVAL

Vice Chairman Bowen made a MOTION, with a SECOND by Commissioner Smith to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was unanimously APPROVED.

PURPOSE AND GUIDELINES FOR MEETING

Chairman Lilley started by stating that the purpose of the meeting was for the Board of Commissioners to receive Public Comments on the controversial issues of Hunting Deer with Dogs in Martin County. And that no decision would be made at the meeting.

Manager Overman restated that no decision would be made at the meeting. A legislative process would have to be followed before any changes can be made in hunting laws. A resolution would have to be approved by the Board and forwarded to Martin County’s senator and representative in the General Assembly for consideration and adoption. Due to the timely nature of the process, no new legislation would probably take place until the following season.

Written comments will be accepted at the County Manager’s office.

Speakers at the public forum were residents of Martin County, property owners in Martin County, business owners of Martin County, or a representative of a resident or property owner of Martin County.

The following **Martin County Local Hunting Laws** were handed out at the meeting by the Board of Commissioner.

In Martin County it is unlawful to:

- Hunt with or discharge a firearm on, from, or across the right-of-way of any highway or public road.
Possess a loaded firearm outside the passenger compartment of a vehicle while on the roadway or highway right-of-way, unless the person is the owner of lessee of the land abutting the right-of-way or has in his person the written permission of the owner of lessee of the land abutting the right-of-way to hunt on the land, dated within the last 12 months, or the person has a concealed carry permit and is only carrying a loaded, concealed weapon. (2008)
- Discharge a rifle of greater than .22-caliber, except from an elevated position in which the rifle is a minimum of eight feet above the ground. (1989)
- Buy or sell a dead fox, fox pelt or other part thereof. (1977)
- To take deer from any vessel in the Roanoke River, or its tributaries, except for those portions of the river and its tributaries that are adjacent to the border with Washington County whether the vessel is under power or not. (2008)

PUBLIC COMMENTS

SUPPORT CHANGES IN LAWS

On behalf of property owners, Mr. Joe Ayers, Mr. Lee Haislip, Mr. Corwran Tyson, Mr. E. H. Williams, Ms. Sarah Koch and Mr. Robert Deen voiced their position on hunting deer with dogs. A petition of several hundred signatures entitled “*Petition For Control of Dog Hunting of Bear and Deer in Martin County*” has been given to the Clerk. Listed below are some of their suggestions and concerns.

- Support stronger enforcement of current laws by Wildlife Resources and Law Enforcement for law breakers.
- Support changes to laws to protect the rights of the property owners.
(Submitted information to support their views)
- Concerned about trespassers.
- Concerned for property owners’ safety and being threatened.
- Agreed situation needed to be addressed.
- Expressed lack of concern and respect for property owner’s rights.
- Hunters are not being held accountable.
- Hunters need to be more self policing.
- Not trying to ban hunting deer with dogs.
- Suggested working together to fix problems.

SUPPORT CURRENT HUNTING LAWS

A large number of residents and non-residents signed petitions entitled "*Petition for Hunting with Dogs in Martin County*" and "*Petition to Support Dog Hunting in Martin County*". Both were given to the Clerk to the Board. Attorney Henri McClees, Oriental NC, representative of the North Carolina Dogs Association spoke on behalf of the hunters. In addition to Ms. McClees, the following residents, hunters, property and business owners stated their concerns, suggestions and position in support of current laws: Mr. Alvin Barrow, Mr. Del Locke, of Jumping Run Hunting Club, Mr. Rufus Smith, Mr. Chuck Hough, and Mr. David Bell, Mr. Russ Ayers, Mr. Bob James, Dr. Ben Shelton, Mr. Brian WishAll, Mr. Nick Weaver, and Toby Langley.

- Hunters feel they are being attacked unjustly
- Hunting deer with dogs is a tradition and part of the culture
- Large positive impact on the economy
- Support stronger enforcement of current laws by Wildlife Resources and Law Enforcement for law breakers.
- Suggested holding off on local legislation; wait on consideration of bills in General Assembly
- Agreed there are situations that need to be addressed.
- Agreed there are a few isolated incidents where safety was an issue.
- Each club should police themselves.
- Need to address problems on both sides.
- Humans are the problem, not the animals.
- Believe opposition wants to ban hunting deer with dogs.
- Each other's rights should be respected.
- Suggested joining together to resolve these issues.

Dr. Shelton read a portion of a Resolution to Reaffirm Support for Hunting with the Use of Dogs signed by Gordon Myers, Executive Director and Steve Windham, Chairman of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

COMMENTS

Chairman Lilley recommended that the group join together to resolve the problems. He reiterated that no decision would be made at the meeting. Hunting is a privilege and not a right.

Vice Chairman Bowen reminded the group that no board member plans to ban hunting deer with dogs. Let's solve our own problems and not Raleigh.

Commissioner Price added that the laws are in place. He commended the small group for speaking out against a large group. Legitimate concerns have been stated. Safety is at risk. Population control of deer is needed. Commissioner Price thanked the group for being civil.

Commissioner Smith added, as he sees it, both sides want respect from each other. Three to four generations hunting at one time creates communication issues. Communication and working together can solve the problem.

Commissioner Hyman added that some sources quoted as being creditable are giving out incorrect information. Try to verify information that you receive.

Another Meeting on Hunting Deer with Dogs

Chairman Lilley thanked all for attending. Another Special Called Meeting on hunting deer with dogs will be schedule at a later date and time using the same method of notification and public forum.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Commissioner Price made a MOTION, with a SECOND by Commissioner Smith, to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously APPROVED, and the meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Elmo "Butch" Lilley, Chairman

Marion B. Thompson, Clerk to the Board