

Foxhound Training Facilities Under Investigation

Facilities that allow dogs to chase down foxes, coyotes, and bobcats for sport are under investigation for illegal wildlife trade.

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A multi-state investigation involving the illegal buying, selling, possession and transportation of wildlife has resulted in 18 arrests in four states. The suspects allegedly released foxes, coyotes and bobcats into enclosed areas where they would be chased down by dogs for sport, according to the Associated Press.

Foxhound training facilities are legal, however permits require that wildlife be provided with adequate shelter, food, water, and escape dens beyond the reach of dogs. And operators must maintain proper documentation for facility activities.

The investigation in Virginia began in 2006. Covert agents soon realized that the scope of the criminal activity reached far beyond the state's borders. Wildlife were apparently trapped and sold in western states and illegally transported to Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia for use in training facilities. The agents infiltrated the illegal interstate market, buying and selling the animals and gaining access to foxhound training facilities.

In Virginia, Conservation Police Officers with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) conducted a statewide inspection of 41 foxhound training facilities, shutting down 36 for violations of their permits.

"We have long suspected that some activities within these training facilities were outside of the intent of the permits, but it took some time to gather sufficient evidence to launch a full-scale investigation," said Chief of Law Enforcement Col. Mike Bise of the VDGIF. "Once we got in, we saw that the problem was more serious and more widespread than suspected,"

As a result of the arrests, 55 foxes, 25 coyotes, and two bobcats were seized, the Associated Press reports.

The investigation is ongoing.