

# **WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

## **2025 REGULAR SESSION**

### **Introduced**

## **House Bill 2510**

By Delegates Horst, Phillips, Sheedy, Moore, Bridges,  
Crouse, Hornby, Heckert, Masters, Worrell, and  
Jeffries

[Introduced February 17, 2025; referred to the  
Committee on Government Organization]

A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section, designated §20-2-65, relating to allowing for the use of drones with thermal imaging for the recovery of big game; providing for definitions; and providing for limitations.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

## ARTICLE 2. WILDLIFE RESOURCES.

**§20-2-65. Use of thermal imaging drones to recover big game; definitions; limitations.**

(a) Unmanned motor-driven air conveyances, commonly referred to as Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS), and drones, may be used to locate and recover big game, defined as black bear, deer, elk, and turkey, only in accordance with the following:

(1) A black bear, deer, elk, or turkey is harvested when a properly licensed hunter has struck an animal with a projectile fired from a legal hunting method during the open season.

(2) Any person operating an unmanned motor-driven air conveyance for the purposes of this paragraph must first obtain permission from the public or private landowner, or their authorized representative, prior to launching or landing a motor-driven air conveyance from or on such landowner's property. Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to authorize trespass to locate and recover big game.

(3) No person may possess or control a firearm, bow, or other implement whereby wildlife could be killed or taken while afield, whether acting singly or as one of a group of persons, during times when an unmanned motor driven air conveyance is in flight. This restriction shall not apply to the possession of concealable firearms, as otherwise defined in this code, provided such firearms are not used to take wildlife.

(4) Unmanned motor-driven air conveyances shall be operated in a manner that does not harass any wildlife. For the purposes of this paragraph, harass means to disturb, worry, molest, rally, concentrate, harry, chase, drive, herd or torment. No person, whether acting singly or as one of a group of persons, may pursue or take any wildlife that has been harassed by or with the aid of

21 an unmanned motor-driven air conveyance.

22 (5) The use of an unmanned motor driven air conveyance in accordance with this  
23 paragraph is specifically excluded from the definitions of pursue and take as defined in this code.  
24 Operators of unmanned motor driven air conveyances used in the recovery of big game as  
25 prescribed in this paragraph are exempt from hunting permit requirements, provided they are not  
26 the taker of the big game.

27 (b) An unmanned motor-driven air conveyance equipped with night vision, infrared, or  
28 thermal imagery devices may be possessed or controlled while acting singly or as one of a group  
29 of persons while in possession of any firearm, bow, or other implement whereby wildlife could be  
30 killed or taken, but only as specifically authorized by this code rule for the purpose of locating and  
31 recovering big game.

32 (c) A hunting license shall not be required to operate the drone when used for the purposes  
33 of this section.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to allow for the use of drones with thermal imaging for the recovery of big game.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.