

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2025 REGULAR SESSION

Committee Substitute

for

Senate Bill 721

BY SENATORS HAMILTON AND THORNE

[Reported March 20, 2025, from the Committee on
Natural Resources]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §20-2-5j of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating
2 to authorizing the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to track and locate certain mortally
3 wounded wild animals; establishing limitations on the use of dogs to track and locate
4 certain mortally wounded wild animals; requiring unmanned aerial vehicle operators to
5 possess a valid hunting license; requiring unmanned aerial vehicle operators providing
6 tracking services for profit to be licensed as an outfitter or guide; requiring certain
7 unmanned aerial vehicle operators to be licensed by the federal aviation administration;
8 and requiring the director to publish a list of outfitters and guides who provide dog or UAV
9 tracking services.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 2. WILDLIFE RESOURCES.

PART I. WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT.

§20-2-5j. Leashed dogs or unmanned aerial vehicles for tracking or locating mortally wounded deer, elk, turkey, wild boar, or bear.

1 (a) Notwithstanding any provision of this chapter to the contrary, a person who is legally
2 hunting and reasonably believes he or she has mortally wounded a deer, elk, turkey, wild boar,
3 or bear may use a leashed ~~dogs~~ dog or an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) as defined in §61-16-
4 1(3) of this code to track and locate the mortally wounded deer, elk, turkey, wild boar, or bear.
5 The hunter is also permitted to use a dog handler ~~of leashed dogs~~ or a licensed UAV operator to
6 track and locate the mortally wounded deer, elk, turkey, wild boar, or bear. Only one leashed dog
7 per handler or hunter may be used and, if the hunter is using a dog handler, the hunter may not
8 handle additional dogs for the handler. The hunter or the dog handler shall always maintain
9 physical control of the leashed ~~dogs~~ dog.

10 (b) The act of tracking or locating a mortally wounded deer, elk, turkey, wild boar, or bear
11 with a dog or UAV is hunting and the hunter, ~~and handler,~~ and licensed UAV operator are subject

12 to all applicable laws and rules. It is unlawful for a hunter, licensed UAV operator, or dog handler
13 to track or locate deer, elk, turkey, wild boar, or bear with leashed dogs or a UAV under the
14 provisions of this section unless he or she is in possession of a valid hunting license issued
15 pursuant to this article or is a person excepted from licensing requirements pursuant to this article,
16 and all other lawful authorizations as prescribed in this article. The hunter shall accompany the
17 dog handler and only the hunter may kill a mortally wounded deer, elk, turkey, wild boar, or bear.
18 However, any hunter who is physically unable to accompany the handler in the tracking and
19 locating of the mortally wounded deer, elk, wild turkey, boar, or bear may designate the handler
20 to kill the deer, elk, wild turkey, boar, or bear when located by the handler. The deer, elk, turkey,
21 wild boar, or bear shall count toward the bag limit of the hunter who fired the initial shot.

22 (c) Any dog handler or UAV operator providing tracking services for profit must be licensed
23 as an outfitter or guide pursuant to §20-2-23 of this code. Any UAV operator not operating on
24 property they own or lease shall be licensed according to regulations of the federal aviation
25 administration and set forth in 14 C.F.R. § 107, as amended. The director shall provide a list of
26 outfitters and guides who provide dog or UAV tracking services to the public prior to September
27 1 of each year.