

# On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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## Turkey Dog

### Will Wisconsin take leash off of Fall season?

By Dick Ellis

Rather than waiting quietly with a “what-will-be-will-be attitude” as a misunderstood hunting tactic up for potential adoption in Wisconsin looms on the horizon, Jon Freis of Bonduel in Shawano County prefers to shout his message from the rooftops. It is a lack of understanding, he believes, that has prevented Wisconsin from allowing the use of hunting dogs during the Fall turkey season.

Hunting dogs for example, Freis stresses will not be used during the Spring season. They do not, then, interfere with or harass hens on the nest. Dog packs are not used to push birds. And by no stretch of the imagination, he personally knows, will a hunting dog working in harmony with a hunter guarantee a filled tag.

Freis knows too that education is the key to seeing a hunting practice adopted in the Badger state that has been used ethically, and without problem across the ages in states like Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia. So, Freis has sought the help of Wisconsin newspapers to look into the details and deliver the message to the masses. On April 13, after a successful pilot season in nine Wisconsin counties and a



*Keena, a four-breed mix, has been trained to scatter flocked turkeys during the experimental fall season in nine Wisconsin counties, refrains from chasing deer and sits still with her master as turkeys approach the ambush. The question of hunting turkey with dogs during the fall season will be put to Wisconsin citizens during the statewide spring hearings held in each county April 13. Photo courtesy John Freis.*

positive recommendation from the Natural Resources Board, the issue will be up for vote before sportsmen and women at the annual Spring Hearings held in every county of the state.

Spring Hearing statement 10 will read in part that “using dogs

to scatter or break-up flocks of turkeys in the fall so that the hunters can call them back is a traditional practice in some states. Other states have not experienced biological, safety or law enforcement problems.”

“....Following two years of

the trial season with dogs for fall turkey hunting in Crawford, Jackson, Juneau, Lacrosse, Monroe, Richland, Sauk, Vernon and Wood Counties, no problems have been identified with user conflicts or harvest. Biologists are confident that this opportunity can be expanded statewide during the Fall Season.”

“Do you favor allowing the use of dogs for turkey hunting statewide during the Fall season? 10. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

Freis said that like so many other Wisconsin hunters, he was introduced to traditional turkey hunting in the 1980s and learned the various tactics of spring and fall including calling, ambush and scattering. After hunting the birds in both seasons with friends in Marinette, Vernon, Sheboygan, Manitowoc and Oconto counties, he read with fascination an article on using dogs in turkey hunting and pursued the matter with DNR Bureau Director-Wildlife Management Tom Hauge. Although spring hunting offers a special excitement, the well-fed birds coming off of summer in autumn offer excellent hunting too, Freis said, and better table fare.

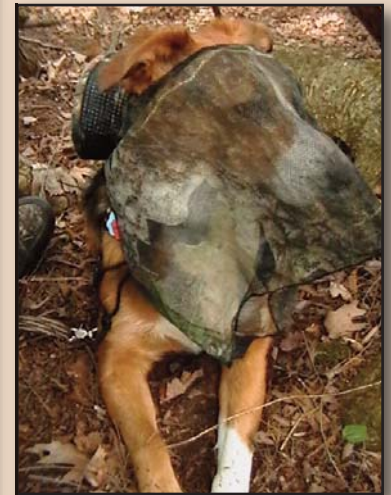
Hauge told Freis that the issue had already been brought before the public in 2002 and



Hunting turkeys with dogs have historical roots. Today, as Wisconsin contemplates a fall turkey season with dogs, many other states continue their own seasons long in tradition. Photo courtesy Jon Freis.



Jon Freis teamed up with Keena, a four-breed-mix to tag this 17 pound, two year old gobbler in Monroe County on October 6, 2008 during the pilot, experimental fall turkey hunt using dogs in nine counties of Wisconsin. The question of hunting turkey with dogs during the fall season will be put to Wisconsin citizens during the statewide spring hearings held in each county April 13. RIGHT: Keena, Jon Freis splendid turkey dog, has learned to sit still while garbed in camo awaiting the arrival of another bird her master tries to call in. Photos courtesy Jon Fries.



2003 at the Conservation Congress Spring Hearings. Hauge told Freis that he would not pursue the matter further without help because a large segment of the public did not understand the tactic. Freis offered that assistance founded the American Wild Turkey Hunting Dog Association (AWTHDA) and in 2004 began posting educational information at [www.turkey-dog.org](http://www.turkey-dog.org).

In reality, Freis said, using a dog for hunting turkeys, like any other hunting sport using dogs in tandem with hunter, allows a special bond to form between canine and master. Working as a team, as in pheasant hunting, duck hunting, grouse hunting, or other activities, fosters the ultimate field satisfaction. Specifically, the dog in turkey hunting substitutes for the hunter in a popular

fall tactic known as “scattering the flock”. This also helps aging hunters, like Freis, who are not as physically able to push birds.

A flock is spotted, and the dog instead of hunter is sent to pressure the birds to flight in all directions. Gobblers are more difficult to make fly. Toms, like jakes and hens and their poults, flock with birds of their own kind in fall. After the turkeys are successfully scattered, the hunter settles in to sound the calls that imitate the birds and hopefully reassemble the flock where he waits with his leashed, camo-clad partner in ambush.

“Sometimes you watch the dog going back and forth in the field and he just can’t get the Toms to fly,” Freis said. “The more turkeys the better chance of calling them back in. A big old Tom doesn’t care about rejoining the group. The real fun

is when you get so good at this that the dog sits still and waits with you. In spring you use cluck and yelps but in fall you use a much wider repertoire of calls.”

Freis related a 2008 hunting story of waiting on ambush in thick woods with Keena, his five year old four-breed mix as he sounded the reassemble calls after scattering birds off of a soybean field. Keena spun around on high alert and Freis didn’t need to be asked twice to follow her lead. He didn’t know if his dog had smelled or heard the approaching bird, but he trusted his partner, repositioned himself and 15 minutes later tagged the hen at 20 yards through a hole in the brush.

“It’s as exciting as can be,” said Freis, who stressed that Keena was taught from the beginning that turkeys were the

target and deer were not to be pursued. “Together, you scattered the flock and called them back and tagged a turkey. When you’re learning, any turkey tagged is a major accomplishment. Next year I may have let that bird go. But that’s the fun of it. There’s nothing wrong with the other tactics. This is just the most fun.”

“It’s like Keena is teaching me. Without her, I would have faced the wrong way. It’s like a good duck dog. Everyone in the blind ends up watching the dog’s head instead of the sky.”

For more information, connect with the American Wild Turkey Hunting Dog Association at [www.turkeydog.org](http://www.turkeydog.org) or contact John Fries directly at 715-758-6557, w4747 W. Slab City Rd., Bonduel, WI 54107.

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