



RESTORING TRADITION:

The Weimaraner's Role in U.S. Conservation

SUBMITTED BY: A. FRUTOS

Recovering game using hunting dogs is not a new phenomenon. In the United States the Weimaraner has generally been used to hunt upland game and waterfowl species: Doves, Ducks, Geese, Grouse, Chukar, Pheasants, Pigeon and Quail. They make great companions in the field with their keen sense of smell, endurance, and intelligence. Watching a Weimaraner work in the field is one of the most beautiful sights to see.

I can vividly replay the scenarios in my head of the moments when we're walking the field searching for a bird to hunt and you see your dog becoming "birdy." The slowing down in pace, the carefully placed paws, and the nose, wet, stuck up in the air and then to the ground, all working to locate the source of the scent. It's almost magical when that wind adjusts just right and your dog's head snaps to the side and freezes into a solid point, not a single muscle twitching, and their nose flared as they breathe in the odor from the game they have located for you. As you walk closer and the bird flushes, you shoot!

The sound of dead weight hits the ground 50 yards ahead of you and your dog takes off running to the spot where they

nose is working overtime as they enter the area where the bird had fallen, but all the sudden your dog B-lines it to the left and away from the area where you originally saw it hit the ground. At a smooth sailing movement, you watch as your dog rounds a few sage brushes, under an old barb wired fence, and suddenly they leap into the air to snatch the wounded bird who couldn't fly high enough to get away. You stand there a little embarrassed and disappointed your shot wasn't a clean one, but relieved the bird didn't get away and go to waste, all thanks to your trusted hunting partner.

Hunting with the Weimaraner has evolved over the years, especially in the United States, and to some the topic surrounding the hunting nature and skill of the Weimaraner in the field is an extremely controversial one. I love to



ments on these posts, but I kept seeing a suggestion for an organization called United Blood Trackers.

I found their page online and looked to see where these trackers were located using their online mapping program. Unfortunately, there was only one name in the state of Utah and only one located on the eastern border of Colorado. I reached out to the only Utah contact and while he too was newer at tracking, he recommended a few items to us to get started. One, purchase and read John Jeanneney's book called "Tracking Dogs for Finding Wounded Deer;" two, take a few calls and inform each hunter that we are brand new, but that we would just like to see how the dog reacts on a fresh trail; and three, become familiar with Utah's leash tracking dog laws. He didn't have much training experience but described that some dogs just have the "It" factor and will track game without any training or enticement. So, I quickly ordered the book and began diving in while awaiting our first call.

October 1st, 2022, was the day we received our first call for assistance to locate a wounded mule deer in the central mountain of Utah. A friend of ours had heard that we were interested in using our dogs to track and locate game that had been shot, but never recovered. It was late at night when I received the first text from the wife saying her husband was coming off the mountain and out of service, but that he had shot a deer and couldn't find it. She wanted to see if we would be willing to make the 2 hour drive out to the

mountains in hopes of recovering the deer for their family. We quickly answered yes and awaited the call from her husband for more details. Once in service he called, and we chatted about what happened. We asked a series of questions for details to paint as clear of a picture as we could and those included details of the location of the hit site, pictures and/or videos of evidence of blood, weapon type, estimated shot placement, distance of the shot, direction of the animal's travel, animal's reaction to the shot and any other additional details that could be helpful.

We set up a plan to meet before sunrise at 6:00am at the base of the mountain. After connecting and reviewing the details again we took off up the mountain to start the track at the hit site. I had previously familiarized myself with the tracking laws for the state of Utah and recognized that while we had two dogs with us on this trip, we would only use one at a time for the purpose of tracking while keeping the other one with my husband who was there to scout for our upcoming hunt which happened to be on the same unit but for the following season.

research a variety of topics in my down time, and I found myself wanting to learn more about the history of the Weimaraner. I am no expert by any means, and a complete amateur at best, but looking to understand the past of the Weimaraner — where the breed is now and where the breed is going — was of great interest to me.

In Virginia Alexander's book, *Weimaraner Ways*, it reads "The [Weimaraner] is an indispensable partner of the German hunter, who lives by the maxim 'a hunt without a dog is no hunt' and by a strict code of sportsmanship. It is considered unsporting to hunt without a well-trained dog that can track wounded game to enable the hunt to end [the animals] suffering as soon as possible."

The chapter goes on to describe the original use of the Weimaraner in the field as not only a pointing dog for upland and waterfowl game, but also used for hunting and tracking small and big game species. All of this to show just how versatile the Weimaraner was bred to be. This piqued my interest and got me thinking; Weimaraner's hunting and tracking big game? How does that fit into modern day hunting and more specifically, how does that fit into the North American hunting model?

In mid-august of 2022 the hunting season kicked off with archery mule deer and rocky mountain elk hunts. The thought of hunting big game with Weimaraner's was still fresh in my mind and after I had joined several Utah hunting Facebook pages, I noticed several posts where hunters were inquiring about local tracking dogs to help them

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which meant the mountain received quite a bit of rain. The blood trail at the hit site was preserved by the tree canopy so we started there and indicated to the first dog, Becks, to begin searching. He worked his way from blood drop to blood drop moving downward on the mountainside. With visible blood the trail is easy to follow with the human eye, but as a new tracker I was happy to see the dog working the line that we could clearly see without having to give him a whole lot of direction.

Slowly though the trail dissipated and as we came to the clearing in the trees the blood had completely vanished from the previous night's rainfall. We would be relying solely on the dog's scenting abilities to follow the deer's interdigital gland scent which would emit a hormone when wounded and that is completely invisible to the eye.

Becks immediately became confused and began frantically searching around for the scent trail. We went back and forth between last blood and the opening on the rocks a few times before becoming too frustrated and flustered that I decided to call him off the track. We hiked back up to the last blood one last time and realized that our puppy, Lottie, who had been with my husband the whole time, had expressed interest in a slightly different direction on new blood none of us had seen.



We made a switch in dogs, and I gave her full rein just to see what she would do. Her tail started wagging, her nose dropped low to the ground, and she started following a brand-new trail of blood that none of us had found. She worked her way about 15-20 yards before also coming to the clearing from the trees. I began to worry that she too may have lost the trail, but I allowed her some time to work to see what she would turn up.

Slowly and methodically, she searched the ground back and forth with her head bobbing up and down smelling the ground and then smelling the air, smelling the ground and then smelling the air. She continued to work downhill towards the next set of trees. There we walked through some tall grass, a few baby aspen trees and to our complete surprise, the dead deer! She did it! She just tracked and located her very first deer!

The reaction from the hunter was just priceless. I'm sure he too began to lose a little bit of hope when there wasn't any visible sign of blood when we left the first set of trees and went back into the open. He was completely shocked but so excited that the buck was located and that he would be able to take it home. At the end of the track we reviewed the track distance from hit sit to where the animal rested, the deer traveled just over 1,000 yards with a muzzleloader shot to the liver before he finally expired. It was extremely rewarding to see that this deer wasn't going to go to waste and instead would be going home to feed a family instead.

October 26th, 2022, we received another call for recovering another mule deer, but this time in our back yard just 15 minutes from home. This call was a little tricky being the deer had jumped onto private property and due to trespassing laws, I asked the hunted to obtain written permission to allow us to track and retrieve the deer before





Rocky Mountain Big Game Recovery (“RMBGR”). RMBGR is a growing non-profit organization dedicated to building a network for trackers and creating a source for hunters to refer to when in need. The idea is that by building a tracking network they would be able to assist more hunters in more states and recover more animals which ultimately means less big game being left out to waste away.

We loved the purpose and motivation behind the organization and decided to become official members that year. One of my favorite aspects of the organization is that they don’t ask for money for the work that they do. The organization is focused on the animal’s recovery, the hunter’s education, and the voice that we have as hunters in protecting our rights to hunt. Each season since the start we’ve responded to a variety of calls between mule deer and elk. We are not always successful on our tracks, but being out there and doing our best to give the hunter their highest possible odds is rewarding.

We’ve traveled up to 3 hours from home all in the hopes that we can recover someone’s lost big game animal. In December of 2023 I was elected to become the secretary of RMBGR for the 2024 season. We hosted a booth at the Western Hunting and Conservation Expo in Salt Lake City and the members hosted several other booths at locations in Wyoming and Colorado. Our organization has trackers in Washington, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, and Arizona.

In May of 2024, RMBGR hosted a tracking seminar and testing certification weekend. There Lottie and I earned our UBT I certification through the national organization United Blood Trackers and became the first and only certified tracking team in the state of Utah. At the end of our tracking test the two judges complimented Lottie by explaining that she was a hardworking dog, easy to read and track with and that they would recommend her to any hunter looking for assistance.

The 2024 tracking season begins for us in mid-August each year so by the time this article prints we will have been in season for a few weeks. My hope is to share our experience, journey and encourage other Weimaraner owners to get out there and restore tradition by putting their dogs to work in a hunting environment that they were built to thrive in. Seeing that a Weimaraner can track a big game species, point a covey of wild birds, retrieve your waterfowl from the middle of the pond and still come home to be the best companion and friend is the ultimate definition of true versatility to me!

we responded. Lottie responded to the call with me and immediately took to the track. Once given the start command to begin tracking she took off following a visible line of blood that quickly disappeared. Every so often I would spot a pinpoint droplet of blood on the ground which solidified the trail we were on. She worked her way from the first fence at the hit site, around the hill and down, over another fence, and into a thicket of oak brush. She picked up the pace as she got further down the mountain rounding a large bush to where the deer had finally rested. That track ran approximately 900 yards and the recovery meant the meat wouldn’t be left to waste and a new hunter would be able to take home their very first harvest.

After the 2022 season I was contacted by a gentleman, Scott Gillespie, out of Colorado. He had seen our success and the work we were putting in taking calls in Utah. He explained that he was the president of a newly found