

Minnesota Federation of Field Trial Clubs, Inc.

*Dedicated to promoting Sporting Dogs and Competitions,
throughout the State of Minnesota*



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Keystone Woods draft plan response 11-9-2023

Keystone Woods Wildlife Management Area will create a multitude of new outdoor opportunities to Twin Cities metro residents, and the Minnesota Federation of Field Trial Clubs is pleased to know the tradition of gun dog training, trialing, and testing remains a part of the conversation. The Kelly Farms property has long served as the only outlet for gun dog events in the greater Twin Cities metro area, and we hope that will continue in the years to come.

A properly trained gun dog contributes more to conservation than just the humane recovery of game. Passion for dog training leads directly to involvement in conservation organizations, and local economies are also positively impacted through organized events. We're intent on recruiting the next generation of conservationists, and the Kelley Farms property helps us accomplish that goal.

"Three years ago, I got a puppy not knowing what I'd do with him until I started working with the Northern Flight and Land of Lakes retriever clubs," said Allison Mellin, an adult-onset hunter who discovered her passion for conservation at Kelley Farms. "I had never been involved with hunting before, but since then I've grown to love this world. Without access to Kelly Farms, I don't know that I would've taken the leap into this space."

The dog training opportunities at Keystone Woods will further extend an existing successful partnership between our organization and the state (Four Brooks WMA near Milaca), and put us on par with our neighboring states of Wisconsin (Richard Bong State Recreation Area along with several other areas) and Iowa (Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt) that have long incorporated dog training grounds within public lands. With those successful examples of collaboration between public access and gun dog training in mind, we're very excited about the opportunities Keystone Woods presents. This property will offer hunters, conservationists, and dog trainers, new and old, the chance to connect over our shared passion and broaden our communities through recruitment, retention, and reactivation.

We believe training grounds that are both designated and year-round are essential to the success of gun dog training at Keystone Woods. Designated grounds will minimize wildlife disturbance and allow participants to easily identify boundaries where training is permitted (very helpful to a new user). As it stands right now, 23% of the property will be designated as gun dog training area leaving 77% for wildlife production. Furthermore, wise choices in grass planting (short and sparse growing varieties) in the designated training areas will minimize encounters with nesting birds. Year-round accessibility keeps options open for those developing a young dog — and provides a maintenance outlet for those with an experienced hunting companion.

We know this is still a work in progress and do have questions.

- Are there opportunities to include additional grounds or conditional use of non-designated grounds? Kelly Farm's long history of organized dog events includes times where more grounds are desirable. More grounds (with water sites in particular) enable greater participation. In particular, the area south and west of Barker Lake fits our clubs needs very well.
- We are interested in the capacity of parking lots. With these grounds being multi-use parking could become a challenge.
- Will ATVs and/or horses be allowed on designated grounds to accommodate equipment moving for permitted events?
- Will there be perimeter fencing on the designated areas, and what might that fencing look like? Since two of the proposed areas are along a very busy Manning Avenue, our organization would like to have input on perimeter fencing.
- Is there the possibility to enhance perimeter fencing with tree or bush buffers?
- Training gun dogs often requires the use of properly identified pen-raised game birds and non-toxic shot. This is a very important component.
- How will our clubs partner with the state to maintain the grounds for safe and accessible gun dog training? Will mowing be allowed on designated areas? Every organization who trains at Kelley Farms cares deeply about the property, and we all want to do our part to ensure the health and success of the land going forward.

Estimates by our organization say we have averaged 20 weekend events and 50+ training events a year across our clubs. Another reasonable estimate is that 1000+ people from near and far participate in those events every year. Each of those groups spend money near the grounds and stay engaged in hunting activities, all because of the existence of this property like these examples of current club members.

Ben, 14 years old, was very excited that he would be able to train his own hunting dog and complete a 4-H project at the same time with his parents' help. Ben and Berkley (brittany) were the first in their family to participate and qualify the multiple passes for a AKC Junior Hunter title. They are working on the next level.

Stephanie works as an ER nurse and is not a hunter. Her hunting friends invited her to the training, they had a blast! The drive from Shoreview was about 30 minutes. Most likely, it would have be a lost opportunity for training if it was a longer drive.

The Minnesota Federation of Field Trial Club members look forward to a partnership with Minnesota Department of Natural resources that will promote both the retention of current hunters, and the recruitment of new ones.