TRUFFLE HUNTING WITH DOGS

Field Ethics & Environmental Stewardship

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Truffle hunting with dogs is, at its best, a practice of deep attention — to your dog, to the forest, and to the living systems beneath your feet. As this practice grows in North America, the choices each of us makes in the field carry more collective weight than ever before. **This guide exists because the forest keeps track, even when we don't.**

WHY IT MATTERS

Most people, when they think about damage to truffle sites, think about raking. Raking is genuinely harmful. But there's another kind of damage that receives far less attention: what happens when well-intentioned hunters visit the same location too often.

Truffles are the fruiting bodies of mycorrhizal fungi — organisms living in symbiotic relationship with host tree roots. These underground networks move carbon and water between trees, support seedling establishment, and help entire forests respond to stress. Research shows mycorrhizal fungi are among the most sensitive organisms to soil compaction, with some sites showing no full recovery even years after disturbance ends.

What this means in practice:
A single team moving through a site once causes minimal disturbance. The same team returning week after week — or multiple teams concentrating on one known location — creates cumulative compaction that degrades the very ecosystem producing the truffles they're seeking.

Truffles are also a critical food source for northern flying squirrels, deer, elk, and black bears — animals that eat truffles and disperse spores that allow fungi to reproduce and spread. When sites are heavily trafficked and fungal networks are compromised, the impact moves up through the food web.

Every hole left open is a micro-disruption that, in aggregate, leaves a site ecologically degraded — not so different, in effect, from what raking does.

Working with a dog doesn't make you an ethical truffle hunter. Your behavior in the field does.

SIX CORE PRINCIPLES

1. **Fill Every Hole**
   Fill each excavation completely before leaving. Pack soil back in, restore surface material, and replace any duff or ground cover disturbed.
2. **Rotate Your Sites**
   No single location should carry your entire season. Multiple sites allow each area time to recover — and produce better hunting.
3. **Find Your Own Ground**
   Finding your own locations is part of the practice. It builds real skills and reduces pressure on sites that are already known and loved.
4. **Harvest at Maturity**
   Harvest only ripe truffles. This begins in training — working with ripe truffles from the start builds an accurate odor picture and teaches your dog to identify maturity in the field. Immature truffles haven't yet developed the compounds that support wildlife and spore dispersal.
5. **Move Thoughtfully**
   Avoid retracing the exact same path repeatedly. Distribute your movement so ground can recover between passes rather than absorbing concentrated foot traffic.
6. **Keep Locations Private**
   Sharing specific site locations starts a chain that's very difficult to stop. Once a site is widely known, the collective impact compounds quickly and is rarely reversible.

FIELD CHECKLIST

- ☐ Fill every hole before leaving the area
- ☐ Replace all duff and surface material
- ☐ Rotate between multiple locations across the season
- ☐ Harvest only mature, ripe truffles
- ☐ Distribute foot traffic — avoid retracing the same lines
- ☐ Pack out all non-organic materials (flagging tape, markers, etc.)
- ☐ Do not share or record identifying location information

SOURCES

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SPUN — Society for the Protection of Underground Networks. spun.earth

That's the kind of truffle hunter the forest needs.

This document may be shared freely with anyone who cares about the future of this practice.