

[Print Article](#)

Print This Story

State plans hunting space

By Monte Mitchell

JOURNAL REPORTER

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission wants to add a new 1,800-acre state gameland for deer hunting on Pond Mountain in Ashe County. A horseback-riding trail system would also be opened there for four months of the year.

The proposals are among the state's proposed hunting, trapping and fishing rules for 2010.

The state is having a series of public hearings on the proposals. The public hearing for Northwest North Carolina's counties will be at 7 p.m. Jan. 14 at Mount Airy High School's auditorium.

After hearing and considering all the public comments, the commission will meet in March to decide whether to adopt the proposals.

The proposals would also establish a new state gameland in Bladen County.

The hunting proposals include extending squirrel season to the last day of February. Fishing proposals include standardizing regulations statewide by decreasing the 46-inch size limit for muskellunge on the French Broad River in favor of a statewide regulation of 42 inches.

To read all the proposals, visit www.ncwildlife.org, and click on "proposed regulations."

The Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust, a nonprofit land conservancy based in West Jefferson, organized the \$14 million deal to preserve 1,800 acres on Pond Mountain. The money has come from a variety of sources, and the deal had called for the land to be held as state gamelands.

The top of Pond Mountain is a 5,000-foot, relatively flat open ridge that offers a 360-degree view of peaks and wilderness that includes North Carolina's Mount Jefferson, Three Top Mountain, Elk Knob, Grandfather Mountain and Sugar Mountain; Virginia's White Top Mountain, the Jefferson National Forest, Grayson Highlands and Mount Rogers; and Tennessee's Cherokee National Forest.

"It is gorgeous," said Isaac Harrold, section manager for state and private lands programs for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

Harrold said the state has closed on part of the 1,800-acre Pond Mountain property and is working to acquire an adjacent 200-acre tract.

He said the plan now is to allow horseback riding on designated trails May 16-Aug. 31, although the full system might not be ready for that until the 2011 season. Deer hunting could start there in fall of 2010,

under the proposal.

The Pond Mountain property had been owned by a Christmas tree farmer. The land extends almost to the very northwest corner of North Carolina.

There are many small ponds on the tract, in part because of the topography, which has two saddle-like gaps along the top. Rain water runs like creeks down the gravel roads. The property has about 17 miles of springs and streams that feed into creeks that flow into the New River.

mmitchell@wsjournal.com

336-667-5691