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Notice of Rulemaking Hearing

Hearings will be conducted in the manner prescribed by the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, T.C.A. § 4-5-204. For questions and copies of the notice, contact the person listed below.

Agency/Board/Commission:	Tennessee Fish and Wildlife Commission
Division:	
Contact Person:	Torrey S. Grimes, General Counsel Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency
Address:	TWRA Headquarters 5107 Edmondson Pike Nashville, TN
Zip:	37211
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Any Individuals with disabilities who wish to participate in these proceedings (to review these filings) and may require aid to facilitate such participation should contact the following at least 10 days prior to the hearing:

ADA Contact:	Randi S. Tarpy, Office of Human Resources
Address:	5107 Edmondson Pike Nashville, TN 37211
Phone:	615.781.6605
Email:	Randi.S.Tarpy@tn.gov

Hearing Location(s) (for additional locations, copy and paste table)

Address 1:	Lenox Event and Golf Co		
Address 2:	2100 Clubhouse Drive		
City:	Dyersburg, TN		
Zip:	38024		
Hearing Date:	01/09/2026		
Hearing Time:	9:00 AM	☒ CST/CDT	☐ EST/EDT

Additional Hearing Information:

Public Comment will be accepted in person on the day of the Hearing. Further, written public comments will be accepted until December 26, 2025, at the following email address: twra.rulescomments@tn.gov

Written public comment must include the following in the subject line: "DRONES"

Revision Type (check all that apply):

☒ Amendment
☒ New
☐ Repeal

Rule(s) (ALL chapters and rules contained in filing must be listed. If needed, copy and paste additional tables to accommodate more than one chapter. Please enter only **ONE** Rule Number/Rule Title per row.)

Chapter Number	Chapter Title
1660-01-33	Rules and Regulations Governing Tracking Wounded Deer
Rule Number	Rule Title
1660-01-33-.02	Deer Recovery Using Unmanned Aircraft

Place substance of rules and other info here. Please be sure to include a detailed explanation of the changes being made to the listed rule(s). Statutory authority must be given for each rule change. For information on formatting rules go to <https://sos.tn.gov/publications/services/rulemaking-guidelines>.

Rule Amendment

Rule 1660-01-33-.02 is created by adding the following as a new section:

Rule 1660-01-33-.02. DEER RECOVERY USING UNMANNED AIRCRAFT

- (1) Definitions.
 - (a) “Deer”, for the purposes of this Rule, also means members of the family Cervidae (i.e., elk) that may be taken on private lands consistent with incidental take of elk regulations.
 - (b) “Drone pilot” means an individual who possesses the knowledge and expertise to operate and control drones for a wide range of purposes and operates a FAA-registered drone and has a FAA Part 107, Remote Pilot License.
 - (c) “FAA” means Federal Aviation Administration.
 - (d) “ReadyOp™ form” means a web-based platform used for planning, coordination, and secure communication. Specific to the activities contemplated in this Rule, it shall be used for registration and reporting by drone pilots.
 - (e) “Remote Pilot Certificate” means official FAA-issued license that allows individuals to operate drones commercially under the Small Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Rule, Part 107 of Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations.
 - (f) “Thermal imaging” means the use of infrared (IR) cameras mounted on a drone to detect and visualize heat signatures.
 - (g) “Unmanned aircraft”, “unmanned aerial vehicle”, and “drone” mean any aircraft that is operated without the possibility of direct human intervention from within or on the aircraft. These terms are further defined as any aircraft with no human pilot, no crew, and/or no passengers onboard, but rather is controlled remotely or is autonomous. For purposes of this Rule, these terms all have the same meaning.
- (2) A drone may be used for the recovery of a deer, reasonably believed to be mortally wounded, in the following circumstances:
 - (a) When it can be reasonably concluded that a deer has been mortally wounded and cannot be located after attempts at location through traditional and historical tracking means.
 - (b) When the drone pilot and hunter are not in possession of a firearm or weapon that could be used for hunting deer.
 - (c) A drone may only be used for deer recovery thirty minutes after official sunset to midnight. In no event may a drone be used during legal hunting hours for that region of the state.
 - (d) Drones may only be used to recover deer over private property in which the hunter and drone pilot have permission to be upon.
 - (e) A drone may be authorized for recovery of elk during elk quota hunts only on public lands with permission of the Wildlife Manager for the public lands within the elk zone.

(3) Drone Requirements and Limitations

- (a) A drone must be registered with the FAA to be used for deer recovery. (Drone registration shall be made in accordance with the process established by the FAA at <https://faadronezone-access.faa.gov/#/>)
- (b) A drone used for the recovery of deer must be capable of using thermal imaging and be equipped with a light source powerful enough to visibly see if a deer is alive, mortally wounded, or dead. A light source may only be used to verify the status of the animal.
- (c) A drone shall not have any mechanism equipped to make animal calls or noise that could be used to scare or lure a deer.
- (d) A drone may not have any type of mounted weapon system or onboard netting system when used for deer recovery.

(4) Responsibilities of Drone Pilots

- (a) A drone pilot shall have Remote Pilot Certificate issued by the FAA.
- (b) In no event may a drone be used to hunt, harass, chase, drive, flush, attract, pursue, worry, or follow after deer or other wildlife while undertaking a recovery as contemplated by this Rule.
- (c) If a drone pilot conducts deer recovery services for a fee, the drone pilot shall make a one-time, no fee required, registration with the TWRA using a ReadyOp™ form provided on the TWRA website. The form shall include, at minimum, the drone pilot's name, address, phone number, email address, and Remote Pilot Certificate Number. The form shall also include the TWRA Region of the State in which the drone pilot intends to provide deer recovery services to hunters.
- (d) Before each deer recovery flight, a drone pilot must make notification to TWRA before deploying the drone using a dedicated ReadyOp™ form provided on the TWRA website. The form shall include the approximate location of the deer recovery, the drone pilot's Remote Pilot Certificate Number, the registration number of the drone intended to be used for the recovery, the name and/or TWRA ID number of the hunter for which the drone pilot is providing the deer recovery service.
- (e) When a deer is located, and it is not immediately apparent that the deer is mortally wounded, the drone pilot may not provide location assistance to the hunter, and the recovery session must be immediately discontinued. Providing assistance with a drone to locate a deer that is alive or not reasonably believed to be mortally wounded constitutes hunting and is illegal.
- (f) If a deer is found dead or mortally wounded, the location and/or coordinates of the deer may be given to the hunter.
- (g) If the deer is found still alive and not mortally wounded, location and/or coordinates may not be given to the hunter and the drone recovery must be discontinued. However, coordinates may be shared with the hunter by the drone operator thirty minutes after sunrise the following morning.
- (h) A drone pilot shall report the results of all recovery efforts to TWRA using the ReadyOp™ form indicating whether the recovery was successful and the duration of the recovery or attempted recovery.
- (i) A drone pilot shall be responsible for their compliance with all matters related to legal property ownership and access.

- (j) A drone pilot shall be responsible for their compliance with federal and state law, regulations, or guidelines relating to drone flight. Nothing contained in this Rule confers any license or authority to a drone pilot to take any action beyond the narrow and limited matters detailed herein. At all times, this Rule is subservient and supplemental to federal and state law.

Authority: T.C.A. §§70-1-201, 70-1-206, 70-1-302, and 70-4-135

I certify that the information included in this filing is an accurate and complete representation of the intent and scope of rulemaking proposed by the agency.

Date: 11/10/2025

Signature: _____

Name of Officer: Torrey S. Grimes

Title of Officer: General Counsel, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency

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Filed with the Department of State on: _____

Tre Hargett
Secretary of State