



SPOTLIGHTING / NIGHT HUNTING – Frequently Asked Questions 7/1/20

Q: What is the law regarding spotlighting?

A: Between sunset and sunrise, no person may use or possess night-vision equipment or throw or cast the rays of a spotlight, motor vehicle headlight, or other artificial light onto a highway, or into any field, pasture, woodland, forest, or prairie, for the purpose of spotting, locating, taking, attempting to take, or hunting any animal, if the person is in possession or control of a firearm, bow, or other implement by which an animal could be killed.

Q: What is “night-vision equipment”?

A: An electronic or battery-powered device that enhances a person’s ability to see in the dark.

Q: What is “artificial light”?

A: A man-made light or lighting device that projects lumination for an unaided eye.

Q: Are there exceptions for raccoon hunting with dogs at night?

A: Yes, residents may use a handheld light while on foot to take raccoons after they have been treed by dogs. No nonresident may use a dog as an aid in taking raccoons.

Q: Are there exceptions for landowners and their guests?

A: Yes, there are several exceptions that allow a landowner and others to hunt at night provided the restrictions found in state law on land area, weapons, age of individual, species, and accompaniment are followed.

- (1) A person who owns or occupies land and up to two guests accompanying the person may use an artificial light and night vision equipment on the person’s land, to take jackrabbits, coyotes, beaver during its hunting season, foxes, raccoons, opossums, badgers, skunks, and rodents, provided they use:
 - a. A shotgun and shotshells; or
 - b. A firearm and a cartridge having a bullet diameter of less than .225 inches;
- (2) If a person who is at least 18 years of age owns or occupies land, that person may grant permission for up to two guests to hunt unaccompanied on that person’s land for jackrabbits, coyotes, beaver during its season, foxes, raccoons, opossums, badgers, skunks, and rodents, and such guests may use night vision equipment, provided they use:
 - a. A shotgun and shotshells; or
 - b. A firearm and a cartridge having a bullet diameter of less than .225 inches.

Q: What about the use of lights while trapping?

A: A person may use a handheld light while on foot to engage in lawful trapping activity and to take trapped fur-bearing animals.



SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF GAME, FISH AND PARKS

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Q: Is night hunting allowed on lands owned, leased, or managed by the Department of Game, Fish and Parks?

A: No, the Department does not grant permission for individuals to use artificial light/night vision on GFP owned, managed, or leased properties. It is not illegal to hunt unprotected species and predators/varmints at night using only ambient light/moonlight or for a person to use a hand held light while on foot, to take raccoons after they have been treed by dogs.

Q: What about Walk-In Areas?

A: No, the Department leases exclusive hunting rights through a contract with the landowner and does not grant permission for individuals to use artificial light/night vision on Walk-In Areas.

Q: What about other publicly owned lands; state or federal?

A: Night hunting with the aid of artificial light or night vision is prohibited on these other areas.

Q: Can I use a spotlight or other artificial light to locate animals if I don't have any weapons along?

A: Unless an individual qualifies under one of the aforementioned exceptions, it is illegal to cast the rays of a spotlight, or any artificial light other than a motor vehicle headlight, into any field, pasture, woodland, forest, or prairie for the purpose of spotting or locating any wild animal between 10 p.m. and sunrise, from September 1 through January 31. Outside of these timeframes, it is permissible to use any artificial light to locate animals provided you do not possess or control a firearm, bow, or other implement by which an animal could be killed.