

Greyhound racing a 'dying sport,' report for Legislature says

Posted: July 6, 2013 - 11:43pm | Updated: July 6, 2013 - 11:49pm

[View this story on the All-Access Members site](#)

By [Matt Dixon](#)

TALLAHASSEE | Greyhound racing is a “dying sport” that has been hemorrhaging revenue for years, according to a study of commissioned by the Florida Legislature.

It's part of a larger comprehensive review that the House and Senate Select Committee on Gaming will dive into during next spring's legislative session. The Legislature paid \$400,000 to have New Jersey-based Spectrum Gaming Group conduct the two-part review.

The first 307-page report, released last week, gave an overview of all aspects of the state's gaming industry, but painted a particularly bleak picture for facilities that offer greyhound racing. “Handle,” or the total amount wagered, has plummeted over the past two decades.

“Total handle for the 13 facilities that ran greyhound racing fell from \$933.8 million in [fiscal year] 1990 to \$265.4 million in [fiscal year] 2012, a decline of 67 percent,” the report read.

Facilities that have greyhound racing lost \$35 million on racing in 2012. They rely on card rooms, which made \$39 million in 2012, to offset those losses.

“There are just too many other things to do out there today,” Jamie Shelton, CFO of Jacksonville Greyhound Racing, said in the report. “The older folks are not being replaced.”

That company has consolidated its operations by using each of its three greyhound permits at its Orange Park facility.

After snagging approval from a state regulator in 2012, the company was able to open a 70-table card room at the former Garden Ridge store on Monument Road, across the street from Regency Square. The company needed approval because state law does not allow a pari-mutuel facility to open without operating a track.

The company transferred its pari-mutuel license from the dog track on McDuff Avenue, which closed in 2009.

The industry has tried to legalize so-called “decoupling” in recent years to allow companies to close money-losing dog tracks while operating profit-making card rooms. Current law stipulates that a facility must run 90 percent of the total races it ran prior to opening a card room.

“Decoupling [removing the requirement for minimum performances] will help us in the short run as we would run fewer races which, in turn, will lower our operating costs,” Michael Glenn, general manager of the Palm Beach Kennel Club, said in the report.

Spectrum Gaming reported that up to six greyhound tracks may close if the 90 percent rule was tossed. Legislative efforts to do away with the rule have failed during past legislative sessions.

The lone voice of optimism in the report was that of longtime lobbyist Jack Cory, who represents the Florida Greyhound Association.

He said that greyhound racing could bounce back if track owners invest in their facilities.

“He noted that some of them have let them deteriorate to the point where going to those tracks is unpleasant,” read the report.

Matt Dixon: (352) 233-0777

[Share](#) | [2](#) | [Email](#) | [Print](#)

[Subscribe to The Florida Times-Union](#)

[Back to Top](#)