

NATDA STEWARDSHIP SEAL

Dog-Hunted, Environmentally Stewarded — Harvest & Provenance Certification

Draft Standards Outline v0.1 · Prepared July 2026 · For Internal Circulation Only

1. The Problem

Raking — dragging a rake or hand tool indiscriminately through the forest floor to expose buried truffles — is still the default harvest method across much of the wild-truffle world. It pulls ripe and unripe truffles alike, tears the underlying mycelial network a site depends on to keep producing, exposes and damages host tree roots, and on sloped ground causes erosion that compounds the damage for years. A site raked hard enough can stop producing at commercially viable levels altogether.

Dog-guided harvest solves the indiscriminate-collection problem — a trained dog indicates only ripe, aromatic truffles and leaves the rest to mature — but it is not automatically harmless either. Heavy, repeated foot traffic across the same productive patch causes a slower version of the same underlying damage: compacted soil, disrupted mycorrhizal networks, and declining yields over time. A credible standard has to address both mechanisms, not just the more visible one.

Raking is the easy target because it's visibly destructive and practiced by people outside the dog-hunting community. Repeated, unmanaged foot traffic from dog teams can cause the same category of harm through a slower mechanism — a credible standard has to hold itself to that too.

2. What It Is

The NATDA Stewardship Seal certifies a harvest lot, not a handler. It assures a buyer that a specific batch of truffles was located exclusively by a scent-trained dog — never raked or mechanically disturbed — and can be traced from ground to sale. It is a second, separate NATDA certification track, distinct from the WTD/CTD/MTD dog-and-handler credential.

The dog credential certifies who is qualified to hunt. The Stewardship Seal certifies how a specific harvest was actually conducted.

3. Scope

Context	Standard Applied
Orchard Harvest	Cultivated truffières — established client orchards and NATGA member farms. Core standard applies in full.
Wild Harvest	Non-cultivated, forest-foraged ground. Core standard applies, plus a stricter site-rotation cap (Section 4).

4. The Standard — Four Pillars

Pillar	Requirement
Harvest Method	Dog indication only. Excavation by handler hand tool or, where appropriate, supervised digging by the dog itself, limited to the depth needed to reach the specimen. No rakes or mechanical soil disruption. No mouthing of truffle by dog. Immature or unripe truffles left in ground.
Site Stewardship & Restoration	Duff and soil replaced after every dig. Visit frequency capped per site per season. Site rotation logged — wild-harvest ground held to a tighter cap given cumulative foot-traffic impact.
Chain of Custody	Every lot is assigned a Seal number at the time of dig, logging the date, handler + dog ID, species, and weight. Precise site location is not centrally logged — retained privately by the handler as an audit-ready record to protect confidential or private landholding sites.
Handler Certification & Audit Compliance	Issuing handler must hold an active NATDA credential (floor TBD — WTD vs. CTD, see Section 7) and agree to Stewardship Seal audit terms, including producing harvest records if selected for audit.



5. Certification Mechanics

- Issued per harvest lot, not annually — each batch sold or shipped carries a Seal number (e.g., Seal #0001), mirroring the CTD-001 registry model.
- Enforcement rests on certifying the harvester, not observing every harvest — unrealistic given how many wild-hunting sites are private and undisclosed. NATDA instead audits occasionally: a random sample of active handlers each season, plus any handler flagged by a buyer complaint or suspected violation.
- Audited handlers produce geo-pinned, timestamped photo evidence of the dig site (pre- and post-restoration) within a set window. A smartphone with location services is sufficient — no dedicated app required at launch. Location data is retained only for audited records, never published, and deleted after a defined retention period.
- Fee model: TBD — likely a small per-lot or flat seasonal license fee for high-volume farms, priced separately from exam fees.

6. Governance

Administered by the NATDA board under the same benefit-corporation accountability structure as the dog credential. A dedicated Stewardship Seal committee seat can be added once volume warrants it.

The Seal carries no legal force — no law requires a handler to earn it, and NATDA has no authority to compel one to. Its leverage is market awareness: as buyers and diners come to understand what a dog-only, non-destructive harvest actually requires, the Seal's absence becomes informative in its own right, without NATDA having to enforce anything. The one piece of hard, legal enforcement available is narrower — trademark protection against a handler falsely claiming the mark without having earned it. Adoption is driven by demand, not mandate; false claims are the one thing actually policed.

The Seal isn't a rule anyone has to follow. It's a claim anyone can choose to earn — and once buyers know what it means, its absence says something too.

7. Open Questions for Circulation

- Handler eligibility floor — WTD (wider adoption) vs. CTD (stronger buyer trust)?
- Should wild-harvest lots carry a visibly distinct mark from orchard lots, or the same seal with a footnote?
- Per-lot fee vs. flat seasonal license for high-volume farms?
- Legal review of "certified" / "verified" language before any consumer-facing retail use.
- Audit sampling rate — what share of handlers or lots per season, and how are for-cause audits triggered?
- Retention window and access controls for any geo-located audit evidence collected.
- Volume reconciliation — should cumulative Seal-numbered weight per handler-season be checked against a plausible yield ceiling, to catch relabeled non-Seal product?
- Segregation — how does a handler keep Seal-eligible harvest physically and administratively separate from unaudited or purchased product before sale?
- Enforcement ladder — should suspension be preceded by a formal noncompliance notice and correction window, rather than being the sole consequence?
- Species/origin verification — should audits include an option for DNA or spectroscopic species testing, given documented fraud substituting cheaper species for premium ones? (Perhaps if questioned by consumer; for-cause audit)
- Independent audits — at what scale, if ever, does NATDA move from self-administered audits to accredited third-party auditors, with rotation to avoid familiarity bias?

8. Next Steps

- Circulate this outline to the OTF board, NATGA, and trusted parties for early feedback.
- Resolve the open questions in Section 7 — handler eligibility floor and audit sampling rate are the two that most shape everything downstream.
- Incorporate feedback into v0.2, alongside the NATDA Standards Document, ahead of the first pilot Stewardship Seal cohort.

