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I started metal detecting in 1985 when I lived in SW Iowa. In 1997, I started working for Elaine Schrader at Pro Mack South, a metal detecting/prospecting retail store, in Apache Junction, Arizona.

In 2000, Elaine was diagnosed with cancer and I purchased the store from her. Since I was involved with the store and a member of several clubs in the western states, the Federation of Metal Detector and Archaeological Clubs (FMDAC) www.fmdac.org contacted me in 2002 and asked for my help. I volunteered to be the Western States Chapter VP; the Chapter included 8 states at that time. In 2005, I moved up to the role of the Chapter President and remained there for 5 years besides operating the Pro Mack South store. Over that time as a FMDAC Officer, I was able to help several situations around the nation to change. We helped open up a few parks and stop counties from enacting laws against detecting.

How to change or fight the laws!

By Mike Smith, Former FMDAC Officer

Over the years people have asked me how we can change a law or rule on banning detector use in the city, county or state that they live in. Each situation is slightly different but I will try and give you some pointers on how it can be done. I have been successful in helping get changes implemented around the country through these acts.

First you have to have a key group of people willing to do the work, if not you will never succeed. They need to gather information such as the exact rule or law you would like to change. You can get this from the city, county or state departments that it come out of, such as the Parks Department. Plus you need to have accurate contact information such as the City Council, County Board, or State Department or Legislators names, phone numbers and email addresses. Without these two important pieces of information you will go now where. Complaining is fine but unless you complain to the right people nothing will get done.

Groups have been successful by just emailing in mass to these “people of power”. A lot of them do not even know your group/hobby exists. But you may have to attend a Board Meeting or two if the email campaign does not work.

- I would suggest you have some calm, cool people attend the meetings. You do not need any hot heads saying something that will alienate these people that you are trying to win over. It is ok to bring a group for support but pick out a few to do the talking.
- You might want to gather up the “trash” that you find while out detecting to show them that you are helping them and society out. This “trash” will consist of pull tabs, nails, rusty pieces of metal, needles, live bullets or any number of items that people could get hurt from and they could get sued over.
- You might be able to set up a demonstration on the proper way of recovering an object out of the ground so as to convince them you will not “destroy” the vegetation or property. Be careful and do not use the word “dig” because to some people that might mean a hole big enough to bury a car in. Use the words “pop” or “slice” the item out, especially if it is a park your trying to get opened up to detecting.

- Show them the “Code of Conduct/Ethics” and how you will abide by it.
- Bring newspaper clippings/internet articles to prove that metal detecting is good for the community and helpful to the archaeological society.
- Bring your awards from the community and police departments to show that you are part of the community and willing to help out.
- You might point out the economic benefits of detecting, like purchasing fuel to get there, eating out, purchasing equipment, it all adds to their tax income.
- Also the benefit of exercise for many retirees that enjoy the hobby.
- How someone that loses a ring, jewelry or car keys would benefit by allowing detecting.

It might take a petition to help your cause. I have helped write a few over the years. Not only can you have your group members sign it but members of the community. A lot of businesses that sell detectors in your area would help you gather signatures. Set up a table at the local library, supermarket or sporting goods store, with permission of course. See if the members of the local “Historical Society” would not help you out. I bet most would, if you promise to donate the items found, of historical interest to the community.

Work with the city or county police departments. Tell them how you can help them solve crimes with your detector. I know of cases that have been solved by a local metal detector club or individual by locating the missing weapon or bullet for the police department. There are clubs out there that can help you set up a “Metal Detecting Crime Unit” in your group. Sponsor a community event, set up a metal detecting hunt for the community kids (cost you less than \$100 in change and your time), anything to win over the minds of the people in the community. Make sure when you find and return a ring or piece of jewelry, that it is announced in the local newspaper or TV channel. All of these types of activates help prevent a law from being enacted or will help in getting one overturned.

There are even national organizations that will help you such as the FMDAC, AMDA or WWATS, you just have to ask! They can rally members from across the country to flood the government offices with emails, letters and phone calls on your behalf. If it is “government” land then it belongs to you, so do not give up. If you need help, contact me and I will do my best to help you out.
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