

# Wyoming Livestock Board handles animal abuse concerns

By Fred Emerich  
and Jimmy Dean Siler

The Wyoming Livestock Board (WLSB) is responsible, by state law, for “the welfare of every living dumb animal in the state.”

The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, through the Game and Fish Department, provides for the control, management, protection and regulation of all wildlife in Wyoming. The WLSB gets the rest. This broad-brush approach causes the enforcement arm of the WLSB a great deal of concern due to workload, shortage of enforcement officers, and the fact they have tended to concentrate on livestock matters, rather than dogs, cats, and other pets.

The WLSB receives 20 to 30 calls a month involving animal welfare. Most involve thin horses, no food or water for corralled horses, or dogs chained outside houses without shelter. Some come from people dissatisfied with the health or condition of a pet they have purchased and call WLSB instead of settling the problem with the pet store or kennel where purchased.

Most calls from concerned citizens are to the WLSB office in Cheyenne



or to local law enforcement and even brand inspectors. These calls are routed to one of the four enforcement officers across the state for investigation. Assistance on some calls is requested through the sheriff's department, Wyoming Highway Patrol, and brand inspectors.

As more people move to small acreages and keep livestock, the number of calls has increased, but only one call in 10 is substantiated upon investigation by the WLSB.

About 10 to 15 percent of actual animal abuse problems stem from people moving to Wyoming who have a limited knowledge of livestock and do not understand five acres of land will not feed five horses year-round without feeding hay or other supplemental feed. Some of the complaints also come from individuals not aware of the difference

between an old horse and a starving horse.

Some cases are indeed animal abuse. Abuse might include allowing horses to become emaciated, with no hoof care, no dental care, or inadequate food and water. Some abuse cases are found to be ignorance of the needs of an outside animal rather than intentional neglect. A lot of cases have discovered animals that have been imported illegally into the state with no ownership or travel documents or health certificates.

There are resources available to assist new small-acreage owners understand livestock rearing. They include the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service, large-animal veterinarians, and the barnyardsandbackyards.com Web site.

When a substantiated animal abuse occurs, the

enforcement officer will usually apply for a cost-of-care bond in the county clerk's office within that jurisdiction. This bond amount will be calculated to cover the cost of feed, housing (if the animals need to be moved), veterinary examination and drug expense, and other care-related expenses. The bond is in effect for 90 days. The owner must pay a cash bond of this amount within 10 days or relinquish ownership of the animals to WLSB, which is the bond-applying agency. The owners may voluntarily relinquish ownership at any time during this 10-day period. If the owner pays the cost-of-care bond, the animals will usually be cared on the owner's land, but they can be moved to other facilities, such as a local veterinary office, by the enforcement agency. The owner will also need to appear in court and could be subject to a fine or seizure by the court.

Sometimes stray (abandoned with no proof of ownership) animals must be sold by the WLSB. The state cannot support these animals because of the time, money, and manpower needed to assure adequate welfare. Before

these animals can be sold at public auction or sale barns, they must receive health care, feed, and observation.

Court cases tend to take one to two months to complete. Maintaining these animals until resolution of cases can be very costly. Feed, housing, veterinary care, and sometimes euthanasia and disposal all add to the time and cost of animal welfare cases. Costs per day can be \$20 to \$30. Euthanasia can cost \$50, and disposal or burial fees can be \$50 to \$100.

Veterinarian care could cost \$25 a day. The examination and cost of treatment is variable.

What some individuals believe is abuse might not be determined or treated as such under the law. Animal welfare cases are not simple. Opinions by casual observers unfamiliar with proper livestock care can cause extra work for enforcement officers and competent owners; however, some cases are valid. The WLSB is always ready to investigate all complaints, valid or otherwise.

Public education by the WLSB, veterinarians, community colleges, universities, extension, 4-H and FFA, revised laws, and more enforcement personnel could be the first step in combating this growing problem.

The WLSB encourages individuals who suspect abuse to report it, either to the WLSB, their local law enforcement, or the nearest animal shelter/control. First-hand information is preferred with as many details as possible such as animal identification and location.



*Fred Emerich is a field veterinarian with the WSLB, and Jimmy Dean Siler is the animal enforcement officer administrator with the organization. Emerich can be reached at (307) 777-6443 or femeri@state.wy.us, and Siler can be reached at (307) 777-6441 or jsiler@state.wy.us*

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