

THE NEXT ENDANGERED SPECIES? By Patti Strand; Founder & Chairman, National Animal Interest Alliance

*Could **dogs** be the next endangered species?*

For nearly 30 years, groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)—groups that use animals in their fundraising campaigns—have worked zealously to restrict dog ownership and breeding in the U.S., and their work is paying off. The future of dogs and dog ownership in America is now threatened.

Raising funds under the banner of animal protection, PETA and HSUS have been able to disguise their anti-pet agenda from even their own pet-owning donors while critically wounding purebred dogs. They have accomplished this through non-stop propaganda and legislative campaigns that demonize all breeders, pushing laws that if passed would eliminate even the most careful and humane breeders, right along with the bad.

What has become clear is that eliminating purebreds is the key to dismantling dog ownership, a long-standing goal of radical animal rights groups. In a society where at least 74% of household dogs are already neutered and where very few parts of the country still have free-roaming dogs whose progeny could impact domestic dog populations, purebreds are the entire game, set and match. If you eliminate purebreds, you will greatly reduce and eventually eliminate dog ownership for most Americans.

It is not hard to imagine a society without widespread dog ownership. Such countries exist all over the world. America is unique when it comes to pet keeping. In many countries, dog ownership has always been limited to the rich; while a distinguishing characteristic of American pet ownership has been its widespread availability to all income levels. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, over 37% of US households own at least one dog, a much higher rate than any other country in the world. Even in times of economic hardship, Americans have understood the importance of pets in people's lives and developed programs to assure that animal lovers of modest means could still enjoy the comfort of a pet.

Because of fundraising hype and a practice called 'humane relocation', the true status of dog populations in the United States is unknown. Some fundraising groups still claim out-of-control *dog population* in their fundraising/legislative campaigns, but times have changed and that term is now outdated. It mischaracterizes the current problem as one of over supply, something that was generally true in previous decades, but which is better described today as a dog retention or dog distribution problem.

In many parts of the country, the Northwest, Northeast and Great Lakes Region for example, consumer demand outstrips supply to such an extent, there would be a tremendous shortage of dogs were it not for the importation of dogs from distant states and even foreign countries. Humane societies in high demand states import 10's of thousands of dogs annually from surplus states to meet local demand. Meanwhile, unregulated, fly-by-night parking lot peddlers import and sell dogs from Mexico, Puerto Rico, China and India out of the back of trucks. A small but growing number of animal shelters and sanctuaries actively pursue foreign dogs as well.

The importation of foreign dogs for the US pet trade suggests that American dog breeders, at least in some parts of the country can no longer meet demand. Statistics from bona fide dog registries, and

anecdotal information from dog referral services point in the same direction. Likewise, shelter impounds, which reflect long-term pet population trends show incredible declines over the last few decades and although some parts of the country are ahead of others, the downward trend is present virtually everywhere. If this trend continues as we expect it will, the shortage of dogs now evident in the North will spread across the U.S. In the meantime, unless American breeders can preserve their breeds in the face of anti-breeding zealots, dog breeding will be outsourced to foreign countries and Americans will lose the option to choose a healthy, well-bred dog of a breed they love.

Food for thought: Purebred dogs don't qualify for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) because they are domestic animals, but if they could be listed, it might be time to recognize that many long-standing AKC recognized breeds would already qualify for protection as threatened or endangered. Not only do they lack sufficient breeding pairs to assure their future, but we would argue that they meet 4 out of 5 of the listing criteria set out by the ESA, only one of which is required for listing;

- 1) Their habitat is threatened by urbanization, mandatory spay-neuter laws and unrealistic limit and zoning laws;
- 2) Their declines are exacerbated by the predation of radical fundraising groups that exploit problems in order to raise funds and push political agendas;
- 3) They suffer from a lack of enforcement of existing laws, leading the public to support ever more burdensome laws;
- 4) They suffer from manmade factors that affect their continued existence.

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