

## Setting Brush Fires by Loretta Baughan

*"It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds." -- Samuel Adams, patriot, politician and Declaration of Independence signer*

Such is the case with a small group of animal rights true believers, mostly from the southeast portion of the state of Wisconsin, as well as Clark County, and their ongoing decade of failed efforts to enact anti-pet, anti-pet owner, anti-pet breeder legislation. Yet, they press on... shrieking "puppy mills".

This phenomenon is not exclusive to Wisconsin. "Brush fires" are being set across the country in states, cities and towns - from sea to shining sea. The animal rights activists will point to a dog authorities may have confiscated in a raid of a sub-standard breeder with its fur all matted and dirty then scream the state has a "puppy mill" problem. I hate to see any animal needlessly suffer, but just by virtue that the authorities DID raid and confiscate dogs from a sub-standard breeder raising them in filth is PROOF that current laws work.

Why are our citizens so quick to jump on the bandwagon and allow these radical animal rights activists and their cohorts in the media to manipulate them into believing there are "puppy mills" under every rock? Why don't people demand the facts when these outrageous, sensationalized claims are being shouted from the rooftops by every television news cast interested only in their ratings, and perhaps in advancing the animal rights agenda, too? It's because the public, for the most part, has been conditioned to believe the news casters and what's inked in the paper. We all have busy lives, so rather than ask tough questions and take the time to look for the answers ourselves, we are content to be spoon fed by the media and their animal rights activist darlings.

It's all part of the animal rights activists' play book to magnify a so-called problem then provide what they claim is a "solution". But it isn't. And so, we are willing to give up a little bit of our freedom to do as we see fit with our own dogs (which are our legal property) in order to save the pitiful dogs in wire cages splashed across the morning paper or filmed for the news at six? Believe me, they won't be satisfied to stop there. Soon they are shrieking "puppy mills" again, magnifying the so-called problem and promoting another "solution". But now, they have accustomed the public to accept a loss of liberty - a loss of their freedom - and the next time they want more control, the public will be more willing to give just a bit more. After all, it's for the animals, right? No. It's the slippery slope. Just as you can boil a frog by slowly turning up the heat, the animal rights fanatics work to incrementally achieve their agenda goal of no pet breeding, no pet ownership and no use of animals at all.

*"Wisconsin is now a popular state for puppy-millers," said Joni Geiger, executive director of the Oshkosh Area Humane Society. "More and more shelters are being drawn into this because we're seeing more and more puppy mills." -- Recent dog rescues raise concerns about puppy mills in Wisconsin, The Associated Press/Oshkosh Northwestern, 3/17/2008*

*"Wisconsin isn't just the land of cheese and Packer fans anymore. It's swiftly becoming known as one of the leading puppy mill states in the nation along with Minnesota." -- Wisconsin becoming known as puppy mill state by Jennifer Ollanketo, grant coordinator/admin asst., contributed by Cheryl Rosenthal, education coordinator Oshkosh Area Humane Society (OAHS), Oshkosh Northwestern, 5/22/2008*

Really? So where's the *proof* to support these outrageous claims?

Over the past five years, of 58 incidents reported in Wisconsin newspapers involving dogs, six allegedly involved people who were breeding dogs - with just four identified as "puppy mills", according to petabuse.com. The remainder were cases of neglect, abuse, abandonment or hoarding. However, by virtue of the fact that these cases surfaced, is proof that existing laws are working.

According to Ms Ollanketo: *"A 'puppy mill' can be anyone who perpetually breeds and sells animals out of their home, basement, garage, or backyard for monetary gain without consideration for even the basic needs of the dogs they are breeding and the puppies being produced."*

Home-raised puppies are the public's very best source of puppies. These dogs are treated as family members - and pups are raised with plenty of attention, loving care and socialization. Many hobby breeders, hunters, folks who participate in dog shows, obedience, agility, hunt tests, field trials or other dog-related activities raise and sell puppies each year. These are your friends, neighbors and fellow citizens who care greatly about their dogs and their puppies' homes.

Ollanketo's reckless comments are intended to create suspicion of all dog breeders who offer home-raised puppies for sale to the public. For the few unscrupulous people who may not be "providing for the basic needs of the dogs. and puppies", there are existing neglect or anti-cruelty laws to deal with these instances that only need to be enforced. Additional

laws are unnecessary.

*"The Oshkosh Area Humane Society opposes all puppy mills because they fail to provide a humane standard of care for the animal's physical and behavioral need. Puppy Mills are commercial kennels where most animals are bred for the pet store market or private sale. As an alternative to purchasing puppy mill dogs, the OAHS encourages consumers to adopt from their local shelters and rescue groups and only purchase a "purebred" dog from a reputable breeder. A reputable breeder is one who breeds for temperament, mental well being as well as characteristics of the breed,"* writes Ollanketo.

Who decides which breeders are "reputable"? Not everyone can afford a purebred dog. Not everyone wants a shelter or rescue dog. Unfortunately, due to behavioral issues, many shelter or rescue dogs are not suited to families with young children or other pets - and are identified as such on PetFinder.com. Many people want a dog for a specific purpose, such as hunting, herding or sledding - purebred or not. People who breed these working dogs often invest as much care and effort into developing their bloodlines as those who breed show dogs. If these animal rights extremists were to have their way, Wisconsin citizens' freedom to choose where they purchase their next puppy from would be limited to shelters, rescues or a very small group of elite purebred breeders deemed "reputable". **According to OAHS, every other type of breeder is a "puppy mill"**.

*"There is no doubt that dogs from puppy mills, large or small, affect humane shelters. As many as 70 percent of the dogs in some Wisconsin shelters are from puppy mills. Dogs from puppy mills not only put a strain on already-slim medical and staff resources but can also result in higher euthanasia rates due to shelter overcrowding. In addition, puppy mill dogs are often difficult for shelters to place in homes because they frequently have behavior and/or medical issues,"* Ollanketo writes.

Let's look at the facts.

The OAHS' website directs potential pet purchasers to a website called PetFinder to view the shelter's available animals. According to PetFinder, (5/25/2008) OAHS currently has 65 available pets: 55 cats and, surprisingly, just *ten* dogs. Of these, three are strays, four have behavioral problems and all are mixed breeds. Just one is said to have been rescued from a "puppy mill".

Checking other animal shelters from around the state on PetFinder, it quickly becomes evident that *most shelters have far more cats than dogs*. Of the dogs listed, the majority are strays, some are owner surrendered, and only a tiny minority are said to have originated in "puppy mills". **Most of our shelters do not have any so-called "puppy mill" dogs at all.**

Exactly which Wisconsin shelters were Ms Ollanketo referring to that supposedly are over-burdened with 70% puppy mill dogs? Facts simply do not support that gross exaggeration. Without any evidence to back their claims, how can Geiger, Ollanketo and Rosenthal presume a "puppy mill" problem exists in Wisconsin at all - let alone shamelessly slander the reputation of our fine state and its citizens?

Surely, these dogs deserve good homes and it's commendable for our hard-working shelters to take them in, care for and find them new owners. But, for a small group of vocal animal rightists to misrepresent the facts in order to manipulate the emotions of the public and legislators to enact their agenda into law is fraudulent, to say the least. They are, indeed, "setting brush fires in people's minds".

Rather than waste precious time and resources advancing misguided legislation, it's time to take another approach to deal with shelter woes. Since most of the animals populating our shelters are cats, why not encourage counties to require yearly cat licenses, if they don't already? Fees collected could assist shelters with their expenses in caring for cats. Exemptions could be allowed for farm cats that perform rodent control.

In Wisconsin, at least one large animal shelter, the Dane County Humane Society, spent \$20,000.00 last year (2007) on paid lobbyists (1) for their ongoing efforts to enact animal rights legislation. Their April 2008 board meeting minutes reveal that they ended 2007 with a \$550,000.00 (2) net loss, partly credited to their legislative efforts. It appears that this shelter's board of directors need a serious reality check to get their priorities straight and exercise sound fiscal judgment. I can't help but wonder if the citizens who donated to the shelter knew that their dollars would be spent to line the pockets of a lobbyist firm - or if they gave their money intending and trusting that it would be used to directly care for homeless animals?

For areas that have a feral cat problem, trap-neuter-release (TNR) programs have showed significant improvements in controlling that population. Shelters should **not** be housing and attempting to "adopt" feral cats. (3) These cats are not tame, but are of value keeping rodent numbers in check. If shelters were truly interested in solving problems, rather than spend money on lobbyists, excess funds could be better spent funding a trap-neuter-release program, providing low-cost or free spay/neuter services to their community and offering low cost or free obedience classes to the public.

Local animal shelters are not a place for irresponsible pet owners to “dump” sick or aged pets or those in need of surgery. But this happens every day. As the majority of shelter dogs are either stray mixed breeds or owner-surrendered, it is important to educate the public in caring for their pets, promoting obedience training, being responsible pet owners and enforcing leash laws - all of which could go a long way towards alleviating the strain some shelters are experiencing and greatly reduce the numbers of dogs in our shelters.

Sadly, some dogs with behavioral issues become revolving door shelter dogs. Rather than continue to adopt them out to another family, if it is possible to rehabilitate them, the shelter needs to do so - then teach the new prospective owner how to effectively handle the dog. Shelters that do not rehabilitate are doing a great disservice to both the dog and the prospective new owner because they are setting these dogs up to fail. That said, in some instances some dogs may have very serious behavioral issues - such as a history of aggression or biting - and there is no responsible option but to euthanize them.

Many struggling shelters suffer from mismanagement and are lacking in people with animal husbandry experience, financial management, leadership, business skills - and just plain old-fashioned common sense. Counties and municipalities that provide funds to these shelters would be wise to lend a hand in these skill areas so that their local shelter can become more efficient and cost-effective. In the long run, this approach would benefit all - the pets, our shelters and our communities.

Let's work together in finding real solutions and not fall prey to the radical animal rights activists who busy themselves so dilligently with "setting brush fires".

Sources:

(1) - Dane County Humane Society Board of Directors Meeting, May 16, 2007: “Legislative Update - Ellen Markey: Ellen handed out a draft on the “Proposal to Amend Wisconsin Statutes Governing the Disposition of Dogs and Other Animals That are Alleged to Have been Trained For or Used In An Organized Animal Fight”. This proposal needs a bill sponsor and lobbyist which costs approximately \$3200.00/month. The board discussed different ways we could raise money for this change in legislation process. *Cathy Holmes proposed that DCHS allocate \$10,000.00 to start this legislative change process. It was seconded by Jan Viney. Bridget Bush offered a friendly amendment agreeing to accept the motion but increasing the amount to \$20,000.00 Motion amendment was seconded by Ellen Markey.*”

[www.giveshelter.org/about/board/minutes20070516.pdf](http://www.giveshelter.org/about/board/minutes20070516.pdf)

(2) - Dane County Humane Society Board of Directors Meeting, April 16, 2008

[www.giveshelter.org/uploadedfiles/file/Minutes%2016April08.pdf](http://www.giveshelter.org/uploadedfiles/file/Minutes%2016April08.pdf)

(3) - [www.alleycat.org/](http://www.alleycat.org/) Alley Cat Allies

*Setting Brush Fires* by Loretta Baughan published in *Spaniel Journal*, July 14, 2008

© Copyright Loretta Baughan 2008, all rights reserved worldwide

Article may be viewed at [www.spanieljournal.com/36lbaughan.html](http://www.spanieljournal.com/36lbaughan.html), freely linked to or distributed via PDF file.

Copies printed from PDF may be distributed to club members, puppy buyers, veterinarians, legislators, etc...

Do not copy and post this entire article to discussion groups, website or emails.

Posting the first 2-3 paragraphs followed by a direct link to this article is permissible.

Please contact author for magazine or newsletter reprint permission: [loretta@spanieljournal.com](mailto:loretta@spanieljournal.com)