

Maine Equine Welfare Coalition

Meeting #1

March 31, 2010

6:00pm at the Farm Bureau Office, Augusta

Meeting Minutes:

- Temporary Chair, Don Marean, welcomed the attendees and started us off on a positive note- Bring forward your positive ideas and energy and together we will be able to make a difference. He also extended thank to Jon Olsen of the Farm Bureau for the use of their building. Don then provided a brief history of the Equine Task Force that was formed last year in the Maine Legislature. Task Force members Janelle Tirrell, Louise Lester, Steve Dostie, Meris Bickford, and Janet Tuttle in attendance at this meeting were recognized. The final report of this Task Force is included with these minutes.

- Ground rules were mentioned as guiding principles- be respectful of all here, focus on positive efforts, steer clear of polarizing issues to the extent that they take us away from our core mission of helping horses in need here in Maine.

- Introductions were then made, including three remote attendees in Presque Isle, who joined us via conference call. We had 46 attendees including those on the call.

- Conversation then turned to some general ideas of where this group could proceed: Don Marean stated that there is a public access team all lined up to do educational shows that will air on public access channels across the state. June Phillips stated that the Horse Council is behind the efforts of this Coalition. Michelle Melaragno and Katie Lisnik pointed out the website of the Oregon Horse Welfare Council and mentioned that group's structure and subcommittee work, proposing it as a general model to follow.

- Meris J. Bickford of the MSSPA focused our conversation onto the core reasons why we are here- what problems are we trying to solve or address? The 2006 Equine Impact Study concluded that there are approximately 35,000 horses in Maine. According to minimal data from the Animal Welfare Program, they receive complaints on approximately 1% of those horses in a given year. Given the current economy, there are many free horses and many of them are coming into Maine from other states. Deb Plengey stated that the exact figures do not matter- If we set into place programs to assist, then we will be able to assist horses in need, be it 20 or 2,000.

- Janelle Tirrell succinctly divided our targets into three categories: #1, the uneducated family that acquires a horse(es) and has no clue how to properly care for them. #2, the people who know how to properly care for a horse, but have fallen on hard times, ie unemployed, medical issue etc, and need assistance in order to keep their horses until they bounce back, and #3, the incorrigibles- those who

know how to care for horses, but do not- chronic offenders who need to be dealt with within the legal system. If our group does a lot of work to help with the #1s and #2s, then that frees up the Animal Welfare Program and law enforcement to work on the #3s. Maddy Gray suggested that we can also assist on the #3s by having transport, foster, feed assistance available to the state and municipalities.

- Meris J. Bickford also contributed other ideas or core problems we may want to address: These included educating people on the expenses and needs of a horse, the problem of free leases and people not checking on conditions their horses are living in, lack of appropriate shelter for equine in many locations and the issue of overbreeding- how can we address the number of horses that are being born here in the state.

- The issue was also raised of past cases that some feel have been mismanaged- While all agreed that past cases can leave a bad taste in the mouth and caused feelings of frustration, the general consensus was that we're here to move forward in a positive manner and to think broadly- not become so focused on individual cases that we lose sight of the bigger needs.

- We then touched briefly on financial issues and enforcement. It was mentioned that town budgets are very tight, as is the State budget, and this has an effect on animal cruelty cases. Fundraising ideas were briefly touched upon- get kids involved, 4-H, pony clubs and girl scouts are always looking for projects to help animals. Louise Lester and Meris J. Bickford also pointed out that understanding the legal system and how people can help/hinder animal cruelty cases would be good to look into. Remember that District Attorneys are elected officials and can be urged to take animal abuse cases seriously.

- Beth McEvoy let the group know that the Animal Welfare Program sees a need for education across the state and would love assistance when it comes to dealing with uneducated horse owners who just need a bit of guidance. Someone else mentioned the idea of mentoring new owners.

- June Phillips mentioned the Horse Farm of Merit program of the Horse Council- this could help with the sharing of good ideas and possibly with the mentoring idea- "here is what an awesome horse farm looks like/accomplishes/provides".

Following along on the enforcement issue, Donna Hughes mentioned the idea of horse experts being deputized to assist with compliance issues- ie rather than a state humane agent making another trip to a location, a deputized citizen could make the visit to see if a proper shelter had been constructed or not. Kathleen Ross, ACO, stated that all Animal Control Officers should be acting in that capacity as that is part of their statutory duty as town employees.

- Discussion then moved on to action items- Donna Coffin and Deb Plengey brought us back to the mission of the group. The mission of the Oregon group was read and we all agreed with it. It was moved and voted on that we should follow the basic Oregon Horse Welfare Council model and will proceed with subcommittee formation. We then discussed and formed the following 6 Subcommittees:

1. Hay and Feed Bank
2. Political Action and Legal Issues

3. Temporary Foster Care and Rescue Homes
4. Veterinary Assistance
5. Resources
6. Public Awareness and Education

Attendees were able to sign up for various Committees during the meeting and subcommittee recruitment will continue as we move forward.

- We will also form a Communications subgroup, made up of members from each subcommittee, to make sure that we are communicating effectively between committees and to focus our message out to the public in a clear and consistent way.
- Moving forward, we agreed to move carefully and thoughtfully, with good legal advice, keeping in mind that we want to make some good accomplishments and not bite off more than we can chew immediately.
- Carole-Terese Naser also brought up the issue of horse slaughter and asked that it be considered as one more facet of the issues we face in Maine. The group reached a general consensus that any subcommittee that feels it appropriate can consider and work on the issue as it fits into their responsibilities and goals.
- **The meeting wrapped up at approximately 8:30pm. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 21st at 6:30pm at the Farm Bureau Office.**
- **Donna Coffin, with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension has created an interim webpage where we can post minutes, contact info etc. It is available at <http://extension.umaine.edu/livestock/equine/mhwc/>**
- **There is also a short online survey there. Please answer the few questions about subcommittees and how you prefer to be active in regards to meetings.**