

Public Workshop for Proposed Animal Care Standards

Equine Workshop Minutes

December 8, 2011, 3:30 – 5 PM

Scope of Workshop:

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss specific animal care standards for horses.

Attendance: Approximately 30 people, including animal control officers, veterinarians, horse owners, horse outfitters, Alaska Equine Rescue and private citizens. All comments listed below are from citizens or organizations (where specifically noted) unless noted as DEC comments or responses. “OPEN” items are noted for further research and will be discussed further during future sessions.

1. Body Condition Scoring (BCS):

- Guide service #1: BCS standards are likely to work well. Horses need to be fattened up prior to winter ranging. Different breeds may have idiosyncrasies that make them run skinnier or fatter while still being healthy. There is no way to move these remote horses.
- Guide Service #2: Who would be the first person to do an assessment in an investigation? Confiscation from a remote location might not be feasible or practical. It might even be detrimental to the animal. DEC: The law officer and the veterinarian consultant would be the first to do an assessment (already written in statute).
- AK Equine Rescue (AER): We are currently working with the Alaska State Troopers on a protocol for handling varying levels of underfed horse cases. In brief, it calls for confiscation of the horse if a BCS score of 1-2 at this time of year, or a feeding protocol to be implemented for BCS scores of 2-3, with 30-60-90 day follow-ups. AER actually pays for the veterinarian to do the assessment.
- Guide Service #1: When contacted with a complaint, the investigator should first contact the outfitter. Unfounded complaints happen. There needs to be a protocol for investigators. Complaints can be filed with AER anonymously, vs. by name for complaints to law enforcement.
- *DEC Comment:* The proposed language defines horses with a BCS score of 2 as being inadequate, with a 3 being the minimum standard. This is consistent with other state standards. It is true that a horse scoring a 3 is arguably classified as thin on the score card, and may need intervention, this would depend on the physiologic state of the animal and/or if the body condition is being maintained

under the recommendation from a veterinarian due to some medical condition. A minimal standard of 2 ensures (as best possible) that the first assessors will be able make a definitive determination of the need for intervention, and to ensure that the nutritional intake is increased before the animal reaches critical starvation status. No horse breed should exist at a score of 2. The draft has language that allows for improving body conditions within a “reasonable period of time”.

- *DEC Comment:* The internet links to the proposed BCS standards were down today. The Henneke system is commonly used and may be easily found at many internet sites. Whatever BCS system may be adopted will be made permanently available.

2. Transportation:

- How can an investigator know if a horse is trailered for over 48 hours or some other lengthy period?
- Could Border Patrol ask this question and try to educate transporters of horses?
- How can we ensure that horses are able to withstand transport?
- How does the draft language fit with Canadian rest stop rules?
- It can be difficult to move animals through Canada and take the horse out of a trailer every 28 hours.
- *DEC Comments:* It could be difficult to determine how long a horse has been on a trailer or without food and water, for that matter. A witness would be required. The 28 hour rule in draft is consistent with U.S. Federal rules on animal movement. Canada has its own requirements for rest stops for animals in transport. For purposes of enforcement, it would seem most practical to “start the clock ticking” once an animal has entered Alaska. It seems unlikely that a horse would be kept on a trailer for more than 28 hours on the Alaska road system, and there would seem to be plenty of opportunity for rest stops along the road. Veterinarians who write health certificates on animals for interstate or international movement are required to include statements about the animal’s condition and its ability to withstand expected temperatures.

3. Shelter: No specific rules for horses exist in the current draft regulation. The statute states that the minimum standards require compatible environment with protecting and maintaining the good health and safety of the animal.

- Discussion centered on what is adequate and how that might be defined further in regulation.
- Free ranging horses do fine finding their own natural shelter.

- More “domesticated” back yard type horses, typically confined to smaller spaces, need more shelter provided to them. They may not have any natural shelter to utilize. They need protection from wind and rain. Three side walls and a roof would be an adequate shelter.
- There could be general verbiage similar to the dog section that further defines adequate shelter for horses.
- Lower BCS scoring horses need more protection from the elements, such as blankets, although for healthy horses, blankets tend to do more harm than good. They compress the existing hair coat and decreasing its insulative capabilities as well as discourage the development of a heavier hair coat in general.
- A horse tied to a tree “all the time” under a blue tarp is a very questionable shelter/living situation.
- *DEC Comment:* DEC will review other state and federal regulations for more specific verbiage that could be applied. This particular issue might best be left more open to determination by a veterinarian, based on the overall situation and condition of the animal. (OPEN)

4. Food and Water:

- “Daily access to water” is vague. Recommend “has clean, unfrozen water available at all times”
- Horses don’t all have open water, some eat snow and do fine. Mineral blocks encourage eating snow.
- Wild ranging horses accustomed to that existence probably do fine on snow.
- Fairbanks North Star Borough Animal Control: It is not practical to offer unfrozen water at all times.
- Mat-Su Animal Control Veterinarian: It is difficult to separate out different types of horses for water offering.
- Veterinarian (by e-mail): Suggest the following statement be added to the document:
 "A source of palatable water is available to maintain hydration".
 "A source" can be many forms (snow or liquid). "Maintain Hydration" could be as needed, either once daily watering or free choice. For example, where I grew up, in the winter we often cut a hole in the ice once a day for livestock (both cattle and horses).
- *DEC Comment:* It could be defined by “accessible” water source. That would cover the fact that ice or tightly packed snow is not “accessible”.

- *DEC Comment:* Scientific studies show that free ranging animals adjust to eating snow through the winter without their physiology and welfare being compromised. Owners of such animals know this to be the case as well. DEC will consider options for wording to better address the issue of adequate water for horses. Participants are invited to submit other ideas for such verbiage. (OPEN)

5. Most common examples of inadequate horse care seen:

- AER: #1 is lack of feeding
- Horse with only a tarp for shelter, tied to tree or stake as only means of confinement, i.e. no fencing present.
 - Such situations cause leg abrasions and rope burns, neck injuries and neurological problems, poor digestion/colic (DEC: a potentially fatal condition), rope knocks over water bucket, muscle atrophy, bad hoof problems, can't escape predator or just the annoying neighbor's dog.
- Should there be a rule for minimal confinement area, as with other species? Regular exercise could change the equation for minimal area. (*DEC Comment:* But it could be difficult to quantify or verify.)
- The word "grooming" could be added to section (f); the requirements for commercial hire horses.
- What is the definition of "routine" as in "routine hoof care"? Perhaps another word would be better.
- *DEC Comment:* Routine has not yet been defined as it applies to this section. Alternate verbiage might be better and will be explored. Hoof care might be better incorporated into another section under horses. Complaints have previously been received by the DEC about commercial horses living in such a quagmire of mud for many months that their hooves and feet were in terrible condition. (OPEN)
- Can there be language in the regulation to ensure that an equine veterinarian is consulted for investigations? Could there be a provision for a 'second opinion' in regulation? Veterinarians without equine experience might not be able to make as good a determination about an animal's status.
- Mat-Su Animal Control Veterinarian: Most any veterinarians could do the exam needed to assess minimal care standards. In cases where there are more complex medical questions, they consult with equine veterinarians.
- E-mail participant: Laws are meant for enforcement. Animal Control may accuse an owner of neglect before a thorough investigation is complete. Many times, a new horse owner needs assistance due to lack of knowledge,

funds, or time. It makes for a very bad experience for the new horse owner when a complaint is filed, Animal Control arrives, and the owner is guilty until proven innocent.

I suggest that a statement be included that "all efforts be made at an intervention in order to assist an owner", before a formal investigation is initiated.

- *DEC Comment:* We understand that there are only a few veterinarians who routinely do equine work within the state. Statute requires only that a veterinarian licensed in Alaska be consulted. We do not have statutory authority to further define any of the enforcement section of the law, which contains the investigation protocol. Even if we had such authority, and wanted to further define the protocol, it would be difficult to say exactly how much experience with horses would be acceptable, or how that might be measured. The Office of the State Veterinarian may act as a consultant in potential abuse cases and can also provide guidance to local animal control officials on interpretation of the regulations. This issue points out a challenge identified in other workshops...that is cases of ignorance or minor neglect that may not warrant criminal charges, but need intervention. That said, we have not heard of any actual cases of criminal charges being filed without just cause. We wonder how many local citations are even successfully fought (citations under local codes are not within the authority of the DEC). Alaska lawmakers have decided that animal cruelty is a criminal offense and have entrusted the justice system to serve our citizens, as with any other criminal laws.