

RE: abandoned domestic rabbits

We are gravely concerned about the growing proliferation of domestic rabbits abandoned on public and private lands by irresponsible owners. Many rabbit rescue groups would like to rescue these victims of human neglect and provide them with a safe environment either for future adoption or to live out the rest of their lives in a protected enclosure. At the same time, we would also like to work towards a solution that would mitigate this perpetual problem of unwanted domestic rabbits dumped in the wild. Hence, we wish to solicit your support for the following items, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you in person at your constituency office in Langley. Our requests are in bold.

1. Starting with the most pressing issue is the rescue aspect. Currently there exists time-consuming bureaucracy pertaining to the rescue of domestic rabbits who have been abandoned. The *BC Wildlife Act* classifies abandoned domestic pet rabbits as wildlife and under Schedule C they are considered an invasive species. This categorization under Schedule C prohibits their rescue, thus limiting the ability of rescue groups to readily capture abandoned domestic rabbits and provide them with needed medical attention. We are of the opinion that this inclusion under Schedule C is a biased classification, as dogs and cats are not considered wildlife upon abandonment, nor are they native by any means. Thus, dogs and cats can be readily captured and rescued by animal protection agencies such as the SPCA. Although strictly speaking, rescuing is prohibited, many rabbit rescue groups are already rescuing these rabbits, particularly the sick or injured ones, such as RAPS, SARS, and Bandaid for Bunnies in the Lower Mainland.

The number of shelters and rescue groups specifically for rabbits in the Lower Mainland are unable to keep up with the demand to rescue the ever-increasing number of abandoned domestic rabbits, as well as providing medical attention and care for them. Without being able to readily rescue them (as in the case of dogs and cats), the abandoned domestic rabbits multiply quickly when unsterilized and many of the newborns succumb to the elements, predators, and/ or illnesses without proper care. Domestic rabbits do not know and cannot acquire the proper nutrition in the wild. Unlike stray dogs and cats, domestic rabbits are prey animals who cannot defend themselves and cannot hunt for food. This urgency to readily rescue abandoned rabbits for their survival much exceeds that of stray dogs and cats. Hence, it is crucial that the *BC Wildlife Act* does not restrict the efforts of rabbit rescue groups or the public from rescuing these victims of human neglect. These domestic prey animals (rabbits) are no different from domestic dogs and cats in terms of their domestication, and are not well served by classifying them as wildlife rendering rescue efforts difficult. Once abandoned rabbits are captured, they can be sterilized to curtail further

population expansion. **In that regard, we strongly request that domestic rabbits be taken out of Schedule C and be removed from the *BC Wildlife Act* completely.**

2. The next level of concern is the unchecked abandoning of domestic animals, but in particular domestic rabbits for the reasons stated earlier. Specifically,
 - a) domestic rabbits are prey animals and do not hunt for food such as dogs and cats,
 - b) they cannot acquire proper nutrition in the wild, and
 - c) they are strict herbivores, not omnivores or carnivores.

The problem particular to rabbits is the ignorance many rabbit owners have regarding their survival ability. Unwanted domestic rabbits must be surrendered to rabbit rescue agencies throughout BC. **Thus, we recommend enforceable legislation with substantial graduated penalties for pet abandonment to deter irresponsible owners from dumping their pets, in particular, rabbits. The fine structure could be based on species, with the highest fine for rabbit abandonment. To facilitate this, we strongly suggest an addition to the provincial *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* to allow prosecution of domestic pet abandonment, with attached penalties.**

To date, municipalities throughout Metro Vancouver and GVD do not have a joint strategy for enforcement of pet abandonment. **In this regard, we recommend a provincial tip line associated with the SPCA for the public who witness or know of people who have abandoned their pet.**

3. The UBCM passed a motion to ask the provincial government to ban all sales of pet rabbits in pet stores throughout the province. There currently exist too many unwanted rabbits already in rescue organizations as well as those in the abandoned population at large. Even if every person who wants to adopt a rabbit gets one, there will still be too many left behind.

First, we urge the BC Government to adopt this recommendation from the UBCM.

Second, we solicit the Government's sanction for regional districts such as Greater Victoria District, Metro Vancouver, and the Okanagan to establish rabbit refuge centres in addressing the high numbers of abandoned rabbits as well as those already in shelters operating at full or overflowing capacity.

4. We also recommend a **Code of Practise** pertaining to rabbits for breeders and agricultural clubs to govern the breeding, care, and identification of rabbits.

Sincerely,
Patricia Tallman, Ph.D.
Environmental Policy Consultant, Township of Langley

Rabbit organizations in support of this initiative:

Carmina Gooch, Rabbit Advocacy Group of BC

www.rabbitadvocacy.com

Lisa Hutcheon, Small Animal Rescue Society of BC

www.smallanimalrescue.org

Cindy Howard, Band-aids for Bunnies

<http://bandaidsforbunnies.wordpress.com/>

Olga Betts, Vancouver Rabbit Rescue & Advocacy

www.vrra.org