

Other Issues

Here we will discuss important issues that didn't fit into the other chapters of this booklet. They are extremely important to wolf-dog hybrid ownership.

The Rabies vaccine issue

Rabies is a zoonotic disease, meaning that it occurs in and is transmissible to all mammals. It affects the brain and central nervous system, and is always fatal if not treated immediately after an exposure to the saliva of an infected animal. Treatment must begin before symptoms appear, to be effective. Although the new treatments are less time consuming they can still be very painful.

The USDA does not recognize the canine rabies vaccine as being effective in wolves and wolf-dog hybrids, although it is recognized as effective in all breeds of domestic dogs. This controversy began in the mid 1980's, when these exotics became the "in vogue" canine to own. At that time, an effort by the Wildlife Education and Research Foundation began to initiate challenge testing for ultimate approval of the canine rabies vaccine by USDA, for wolf-dog hybrids. The groundwork had been laid; all of the liaison work had been done. Officials had been contacted for permission to do the testing. Vaccine companies were solicited for the acquisition of the actual vaccines; promises were made by these companies to label the vaccine for wolves and wolf-dog hybrids after the successful completion of the testing. There were veterinarians onboard, and litters of pups had been procured to be used in the actual testing.

All of this would have cost \$500,000. Though many throughout the country were involved in fundraising, very little toward the goal was actually raised. The effort had to be abandoned due to a lack of funding, even though a few had sunk their life savings into the effort.

Since that time, many lobbying efforts have been attempted with AVMA, USDA, and even with the US Congress. Money has been donated to these efforts, but they have all failed.

Most now believe that the only way the rabies vaccine will be officially recognized for wolves and wolf-dog hybrids is via challenge testing. That means injecting live rabies virus into vaccinated and unvaccinated animals, under full scientific protocol, and watching the results. Testing titer levels on the survivors must than be completed. Not a pretty picture, but that's the reality of the procedure. For a complete scientific study, the test must be duplicated at least once with the same results.

What does this mean for you as an owner? Many vets will not vaccinate a known wolf or wolf-dog hybrid against rabies, as it is 'off label' use of the vaccine. In

most areas rabies vaccine is a controlled substance and can only be obtained from a veterinarian. We at WATD believe wolves and wolf-dog hybrids that are vaccinated against rabies are as safe from contracting the disease as any breed of domesticated canine. But, as the vaccine is not recognized as effective by the governing bodies, any reported incident of a wolf or wolf-dog hybrid biting or breaking the skin of a human in any way will usually result in the death of the animal. The animal's brain will then be removed, and tested at the state lab for the disease, as this is the only accurate method of testing for rabies currently available. The owner is typically responsible for all costs involved, and would most likely be sued in civil court as well.

The Wolf IS At The Door, Inc. believes this to be a political issue, but also acknowledges that federal rulings must be followed. It would come as a great surprise to see the rabies vaccine approved for use in wolves and wolf-dog hybrids without challenge testing. The money needed for that will have to come from those who choose to own a 'piece of the wild'. The testing would cost significantly more today than the price tag of 20 years ago.

Breed Specific Legislation

Though there is no such breed as wolf-dog hybrid, these animals do constitute a type of canine. Breed specific legislation means that certain breeds are banned in certain areas of the country. Since wolf-dog hybrids cannot be an official breed with all the various dog breeds and wolf subspecies involved, it is easier to ban the type—any canine with recent wolf heritage.

There are currently thirteen states that have banned captive wolves and wolf-dog hybrids from private ownership. Another sixteen have some regulations at the state level that restrict ownership in some way. The other states that responded to inquiries on policy are not reporting any regulations or bans at this time. This list could change at any time. (Appendix1)

It is up to the prospective wolf-dog hybrid owner to know not only state, but also county and city/town laws governing the possession of these exotic canines. An example—California does not permit any F1 wolf-dog hybrids (one parent pure wolf) to be kept in the state. Certain counties in California have banned private ownership of wolf-dog hybrids altogether. You must know your local ordinances.

You might ask why wolves and wolf-dog hybrids are banned in some jurisdictions. The usual catalyst that causes governing bodies to ban specific groups of animals is a series of irresponsible acts perpetrated by owners and breeders. A serious bite or death incident will normally begin the process in earnest.

The biggest problem enforcing such bans is identification of the animal -proving that it is indeed a wolf-dog hybrid. The Dog Genome Project is currently working on genetic identification of different breeds of canines. Although dogs and wolves are genetically similar, they are not identical, just as they do not look identical.

The majority of wolf-dog hybrid breeders either don't know the laws of all areas they sell to, or care more about the money than the fate of the pups they produce. Many will sell these exotic animals to people in restricted or illegal areas. It is up to you, the buyer, to make sure you are not breaking the law. Animals have been confiscated and euthanized just because of their wolf heritage when sold into illegal areas. Are you willing to face that? Are you wealthy enough to fight a major court battle over your canine companion, or move to another area due to Breed Specific Legislation?