

Sled Dog Killing Allegations Force Emergency Action

On January 31st, Mush with PRIDE board members were notified that a news story potentially involving the organization was quickly going viral through the Internet and news media. Allegedly, a commercial sled dog tour company in Whistler, British Columbia had killed 100 healthy sled dogs. Within a few hours it was rumored that the specific individual being implicated in the case was Mush with PRIDE board member and vice-president Bob Fawcett.

Mush with P.R.I.D.E. Board members were under considerable pressure to make swift, but well-considered decisions, while dealing with our own shock and grief. Hate email from animal rights activists, animal welfare advocates and even some of our own members filled our inboxes. MWP President, Karen Ramstead was kept busy handling many media calls.

In an organization in which volunteer board members are scattered across 2 nations and as much as 3,000 miles apart it's very difficult to move swiftly. Of immediate importance was determining whether or not our board member truly was the person implicated in the case. Having received numerous credible threats against his life, Mr. Fawcett had been removed to a 'safe house' and was incommunicado. Consequently it took about 24 hours for us to determine with a high degree of certainty that he was indeed the person being implicated.

A review of the by-laws determined that Article 3-D gives the board of directors the authority to remove a board member when just cause has been established and the best interest of PRIDE would be served. Without assigning any guilt or blame we felt the implication alone justified Mr. Fawcett's removal for the best interest of the organization. Once the vote was taken we authorized the distribution of a press release to be distributed as widely as available resources permitted.

"From Mush with P.R.I.D.E.'s President, Karen Ramstead..."

We are shocked and saddened to hear that one of Mush with P.R.I.D.E.'s Board members is being implicated in the mass killing of sled dogs in Whistler, British Columbia. The Board has passed a motion to remove Bob Fawcett from the Board of Mush with P.R.I.D.E. immediately.

Euthanasia should not be used for population control and what happened in this case is simply unacceptable. No responsible sled dog owner or caregiver treats dogs in this manner.

Mush with P.R.I.D.E. was created by mushers who love their dogs and feel strongly about promoting responsible and humane sled dog care. We are dismayed that the organization so many of us are passionate about is being tainted by this situation. It is revolting that those of us who take care of our dogs from puppies to geriatrics may be forced to wear the sins of those responsible for this atrocity.

Please bear with us as we struggle to come to terms with this horrid situation.”

Our most important tool for distributing accurate information is our web-site, www.mushwithpride.org. Today the Internet is the first place that people, including journalists, turn to for information. Unfortunately we were unable to contact our contracted webmaster to post the board’s statement and make some other necessary changes. We were able to quickly secure the assistance of another computer savvy technician who was able to access the web-site to post the press release but it was only through luck and a good network of contacts that we were able to make that happen.

To prevent similar delays in the future, we’ve changed webmasters. This required us to move the website to a different server. Board member Thom “Swanny” Swan has donated space on his Nor’ West Net hosting service to host the site. Should we face a situation in which we have an immediate need to post information in the future, either our new webmaster or Mr. Swan can do so on very short notice.

In addition to posting the statement, we also published the article “Caring for Dogs During Crisis”, which is a reprint of the article “Caring for Dogs During Tough Times” that was prepared by the education committee and published in the Spring, 2009 Mush with PRIDE newsletter.

While distributing accurate information to the public is important, it is even more important that we be able to provide accurate and timely information to our members. To that end we would like to encourage all of our members to join Mush with PRIDE’s official Yahoo group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mushwithpride/>. If you are not yet a registered member of that group we would encourage you to log on and join, as it is one of the fastest methods of providing information available to us.

With the immediately exigent work done, the board is now in the process of scheduling a teleconference meeting to select a new vice-president pro-tem, reorganize committee assignments that were impacted by Mr. Fawcett’s removal, and to initiate a new election of board members. Such an election is overdue because we’ve been unable to recruit candidates for the board over the past two years.

In order to elect a new board and get Mush with PRIDE back on track, we need YOUR help. Here are some things you can do to help Mush with PRIDE move forward:

1. Volunteer to serve as a director. Currently all 10 seats on the board are open. One of those seats is vacant due to Fawcett’s removal, and the other two openings are a result of former directors resigning their seats well before the Outdoors Adventures Whistler / Howling Dog Tours incident. The remaining board members would like to be able to present a slate of candidates that can give our members a variety of choices.

2. Please review the Mush with PRIDE Sled Dog Care Guidelines and ensure that your own kennel practices are consistent with PRIDE's recommendations. The current (3rd Edition) of the Guidelines are prominently posted on our website and are made freely available to all.
3. Contact board members with your suggestions on how Mush with PRIDE can best promote responsible sled dog care and the sport of dog mushing. We can be reached by Email to info@mushwithpride.org.
4. Support the business members and sponsors who have been so supportive of Mush with PRIDE.