





---

# Good dog. Good idea



By [The Oregonian Editorial Board](#)

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on August 31, 2010 at 9:19 PM, updated August 31, 2010 at 9:27 PM

Get outta here, Snoopy. Roll over, Beethoven. Pack it up, Pongo. Ditto Rin Tin Tin, Old Yeller, Hooch and all the other, lesser breeds. The border collie's path to becoming the official dog of Oregon should be as clear as the trail from the pen to the grassy field.

You might be forgiven for not knowing that there's a move afoot to anoint the border collie as the Oregon State Dog. But as writer [Jacques Von Lunen noted in The Oregonian on Tuesday](#), the effort has legs and some serious backing in the form of Gov. Ted Kulongoski, a Democrat, and state Sen. Ted Ferrioli, a John Day Republican. They support the official-dog effort by Baker County sheep herder Ron Folck, who sees the dog as part of the fabric of Oregon and a natural symbol of the state's tough resilience.

How like the border collie to steal a march on the competition. They get up early with work on their minds. They are alert, nimble and energetic. They are the preferred companions of many a shepherd and cattle rancher, for reasons bred into them as long as 500 years ago in Scotland and Wales. The border collie is, however, no one-trick doggie, as can be attested by anybody who has seen one catch a Frisbee or run an agility drill.

If the selection of a state dog was merely a popularity contest, the border collie would ignore it as irrelevant. Leave the primping to the Lhasa Apsos, is its motto. There's work to be done.

And indeed, there is work to be done. In a state facing massive, recurring deficits, a battered business climate and a stubborn recession, what is needed more right now than a skillful, energetic herder? What could be better than a border collie to corral the contrary forces of a fractious state, which faces serious threats to its well-being?

In fact, if the secret agenda of the border collie's backers were revealed, it would show that a designation as the state dog is only the first step.

The next: The border collie for governor.

---

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#)

© 2017 Oregon Live LLC. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Oregon Live LLC.

[Community Rules](#) apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[Ad Choices](#)



---

## Pet Talk: Eastern Oregon rancher rides herd on effort to name border collie the Oregon state dog

By Jacques Von Lunen, Special to The Oregonian

[Follow on Twitter](#)

on August 31, 2010 at 5:00 AM, updated January 12, 2011 at 11:25 AM

*(Update 1/12/11: [The bill has been introduced into the Legislature](#))*

UNITY -- Passing through Oregon cattle country, you see a lot of four-legged companions working with the ranchers. No, not horses -- cattle dogs, many of them border collies.

Prized for their intelligence, agility and herding instincts, border collies are a big part of everyday life here and have been for a long time.

The connection between rural Oregon and these dogs is so profound, one man has embarked on a campaign to have the border collie declared Oregon's state dog, which means the border collie could join the American beaver, the chinook salmon, the Western meadowlark and the Oregon swallowtail as an official state animal by early next year.

Ron Folck and his wife, Jeanne, live on a hill overlooking Unity, a hamlet in Baker County. Ranch land as far as the eye can see. The setting sun dapples the hills on a warm evening, and his border collies are rearing to get out of their kennel and herd some sheep.

Soon, each of the dogs takes a turn driving sheep this way and that, following Folck's hand signals and whistles. Finally, they bring the herd into the night pasture, where the sheep are safe from coyotes.

In the winter, this country is a lot less comfortable: five months of snow, with temperatures dipping below zero. There's a lot less to do then, which is why a few years ago Folck spent a winter studying the history of the dogs he appreciates so much.

What he found made him determined to get the dogs some recognition. Folck lobbied the U.S. Postal Service for years to release a border collie stamp. "I got into the finals a few times," he says. "But it (the stamp) was never published."

He then wrote to the committee responsible for gathering oral history for Oregon's sesquicentennial. This time things worked out. "Oregon's black and white heritage," as Folck titled his story about sheep dogs in the state, made it into the collection.

"That was kind of cool," the 72-year-old says, grinning shyly. But he wasn't done yet with his quest to immortalize the dogs. Eleven other states have state dogs. Some designations make a lot of sense: the Boston terrier is Massachusetts' state dog, for example. Others -- well, let's just say that the connection between dachshunds and Kentucky seems a bit tentative.

In Oregon, past and present point to the border collie as state dog, Folck says. And he has a couple of influential allies who don't often find themselves on the same side of issues: Gov. Ted Kulongoski and state Sen. Ted Ferrioli.

First, the governor's office sent Folck a letter praising the idea and suggesting he take it to the Legislature for a bill.

Folck did, by contacting Ferrioli, a resident of nearby John Day and leader of the state's Senate Republicans. Soon, Folck got a call from Ferrioli. "He said he'd love to do it," Folck said, something confirmed by Ferrioli's office.

"A border collie plays a big role in the senator's home district," Ferrioli spokesman Michael Gay said in explaining why Ferrioli will introduce the legislation written by Folck when the Legislature convenes in January.

And, since there's no public expense involved in the declaration -- no tax breaks for border collie owners or anything like that -- Ferrioli's office told him the bill is likely to pass, Folck says.

"It's just (to honor) the history, nothing else," Folck says.

And that history goes back quite a ways. Folck says sheep were part of building the West, brought in to feed the miners. Border collies soon followed. Breeds weren't identified as well back then, certainly not among the pioneers settling Oregon, but Folck estimates that dogs containing at least some border collie DNA came to Oregon in the late 1800s.

The settlers' number grew, as did their cattle and sheep herds. Central Oregon soon became a world hub for sheep's wool. The biggest exchange, in Shaniko, shipped four million pounds of wool in 1901, according to "This Was Sheep Ranching," the definitive history book of the trade.

Folck gets excited thumbing through his copy of the book. He points to an old photo taken near Heppner in the early 1900s. A herd of sheep on the march stretches from the picture's bottom edge to the horizon. Flanking the long line of woollies are -- what else? -- dogs that look an awful lot like border collies.

"It was big business back then," he says of the wool trade. "The dogs helped cut costs. One dog took the place of four or five guys on horses."

And it's not just ancient history. "My neighbors move cattle all the time with their dog on an ATV," Folck says. "They are highly mobile and go anyplace." (The dogs, not the ATVs.)

Oregon hosts large sheep dog trials, too. The annual competition in Klamath Falls is renowned around the country.

Folck loves his border collies -- he breeds a litter every couple of years, he says. But that doesn't mean he thinks everyone should have one. "They're so active and can be hard-headed," he says. "They're meant for working, for herding."

He's looking forward to the day when the dogs get the official nod in this state.

"There's so much history here that never gets told," he says. "The people of Oregon can be proud of their border collies."

-- Jacques Von Lunen

---

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement and Privacy Policy](#)

© 2017 Oregon Live LLC. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Oregon Live LLC.

[Community Rules](#) apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[Ad Choices](#)