

Testimony in support of SCR4 – Designates Border Collie as official state dog.

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I am writing in support of SCR4. In my opinion there can be no better choice for an Oregon state dog than the Border Collie. No other breed of dog has had as much impact on the state historically, economically or socially. Others have spoken to the historical links between the Border Collie and the state I will focus on the economic and social impact.

I have a PhD in Biology from the University of Missouri and worked for several years for cooperative extension in Washington teaching courses in how to run a small farm. I now run a small farm in Scio with about 150 head of sheep. My wife and I raise our sheep primarily for the wool and to sell as breeding stock and to people who need “dog broke” sheep to train young dogs on. A large portion of my income is derived from training herding dogs for farmers and ranchers and teaching people how to use and train their dogs. I also host several herding dog competitions each year that bring in people from all over the Pacific Northwest to compete with one another to see who has the best herding dog.

Role of Border Collie in Agriculture

Oregon’s agriculture, food and fiber industry is economically linked to approximately \$50 billion of sales. All told agriculture amounts to 10-15% of Oregon's economy and about 1/3 of that is livestock sales. Principal operators of farms and ranches make up less than 1% of the Oregon population, and even when you count paid and unpaid workers it still only amounts to about 4% of the state's population. Oregon ranks ninth in the nation in the number of sheep and 10th in wool production. Importantly, over 90% of the farm operations that have sheep have 100 or fewer breeding animals, and these farms contain 35% of the total number of sheep in the country. The number of small farms and their significance in the cattle industry as a whole is similar. Farm dogs don’t get counted in the labor statistics, but it is these dogs that help 1% of the population generate 10% of the state's economy, and it is the smaller operations that are the most dependent on dogs to make the business work.

It is an accepted fact that the Border Collie is the preeminent stockdog in the world today. Large commercial livestock operations across the state use herding dogs, and more often than not Border Collies are the dogs you will find helping with their operations. As a rancher in Wyoming once told me, “a good Border Collie is better than two cowboys, they work harder, they don’t complain and you don’t have to bail them out of jail on a Sunday morning.”

It is not, however, on the larger operations where Border Collies have the largest impact. Their largest impact is seen on the many small farms like my own. Those of us with small farms cannot afford hired help; in order to keep our operations profitable we must do the work ourselves. If you visit small livestock operations across the state you will find that many of them could simply not function, not be profitable, without the help of a good livestock dog and the vast majority of these dogs are Border Collies.

Examples abound of the value Border Collies bring to livestock farmers throughout Oregon. Morris, who runs a flock of about 600 breeding ewes in Brownsville, uses Border Collies every day in loading and unloading animals as they are moved around on grass seeds fields during the winter and spring and around the ranch moving sheep through treatment areas in in and out of pens. Jake, a sheep shearer from Crabtree, takes Border Collies with him to many of his jobs to help keep the shearing chutes loaded. Stacy and Gail this year discovered how much easier it is to take care of their sheep now that they have a trained Border Collie to help them instead of spending hours running around “playing herding dog” themselves. Shaun from Bend who I trained a dog for now cannot envision running his cattle ranch without her. Shane from the Medford area who now makes a significant part of his living training dogs for cattle ranchers all over the state and region. Ken and Sonja who each raise dairy goats and depend on their dogs to bring the goats in for milking twice a day. Lora who along with her own small farm is often called up to help moving and loading and even lambing commercial flocks in large part because of the quality of her dogs. These people and many more could be here today to testify to the value of the Border Collie to them and their business.

Impact of Sheepdog Trials

Competitions among sheepdogs have been a part of the agricultural landscape since the first competition held in Wales in 1873. Oregon has its own very rich history of herding dog competitions including the Northwest Championship Sheepdog Trial held in Scio. This year the Northwest Championship trial will celebrate its 80th Anniversary. It is the oldest continuously held sheepdog competition west of the Mississippi and, we believe, in the country.

Today the state is host to major sheepdog competitions in Heppner, Bandon, Scio (2), Marcola (2), Cottage Grove, Umpqua and Milton-Freewater as well as numerous smaller competitions throughout the year. While any dog can enter the competitions the top level is almost exclusively Border Collies. The United States Border Collie Handlers Association National Championship has been held in Oregon five times as well as regional championships in Corvallis (2), Milton-Freewater and Klamath Falls (2).

The large repeating competitions each generate between \$8,000 and \$15,000 in entry fees and sponsorships with the funds going to pay land owners, sheep providers, judges, sheep handlers and for prizes (both cash and merchandise). Competitors also contribute to area economies with lodging and restaurant purchases. The National and Regional Championships generate even more revenue for the hosting communities and surrounding areas.

The popularity of these events for spectators continues to grow, and fairs and festivals around the state are recognizing the draw that watching Border Collies do the work that they love has become. I have been called on to give demonstrations at Celtic festivals in Eugene, Springfield, Newport and in Washington state, as well as at schools and for other groups. Herding demonstrations have been held at the state fair and at county fairs in Linn and Benton Counties, to name just the ones I have personally participated in.

Border Collie induced lifestyle changes

Border Collies are used by livestock farmers throughout the state. Farmers and non-farmers alike compete with them in competitions but they also change lives. People get one as a pet, they get interested in herding through their dogs and from there they pull their people into the agricultural economy of the state. Just from my personal experience as a trainer of sheepdogs and their owners, I know of numerous examples of how people from other walks of life have been drawn into the state's agriculture economy through their dogs.

Wayne, an aviation engineer, became interested in herding because of a Border Collie-cross dog he had as a pet. Now five years later he has two more Border Collies and is buying a farm near Silverton to raise livestock. Charlotte, a corporate purchasing manager who acquired a Border Collie, now raises sheep and her family have started a wool processing business. Jodi, a veterinarian who started with a couple of rescue Border Collies, now raises livestock along with a thriving practice. Brenda and Roger, a couple who after retiring back to Oregon from Alaska obtained a Border Collie to do agility with but gave herding a try, now they have four Border Collies and raise sheep and cattle. Sonja, a psychologist who started bringing a German Shepherd to me to give herding a try, now has two Border Collies and a big place in the country where she raises rare breeds of sheep and goats. Then of course there is me, a former research scientist and extension service employee who gave it all up and moved to Oregon to raise sheep and teach people how to train sheepdogs.

These are just a few of the many people who have started or returned to farming at least in part because their Border Collies changed their lives.

Border Collies in service

If you look at any other activity where dogs aid people, whether it be therapy dogs, search and rescue, or service dogs, you will find Border Collies. Their natural intelligence and their desire—even drive—to work makes them excel in all kinds of service areas. The dog you see with us today, Goose, is an unusual example of a service dog. Todd Kenady came to me with a young Border Collie wanting to herd with it. Teaching the dog to herd and teaching Todd how to work with the dog is what I do, but we realized that this was not a typical situation. A number of the more complex tasks we ask these dogs to do involve the handler and the dog moving around among the livestock to herd them into pens and chutes and to sort them. We had to figure out how

to train the dog to work with the Todd's wheelchair. The stock react differently to someone in a chair than to someone on foot, so we needed to train a dog how to use the advantages of the handler being in a chair and compensate for the disadvantages. This was a new situation for me and I didn't know how to approach it, so I got in Todd's chair myself, and Goose and I went out with the sheep. He watched me moving around with the chair and the sheep, and after a couple of minutes figured out what was needed and split the sheep into the required groups. After a few more tries I picked up on what he was doing, and we are now teaching Todd's dog to work the same way.

A few weeks ago we had a sheep shearer come to our farm, and now for the first time Todd was able to help in the pens, getting the sheep into the shearing chute. Before long we expect that Todd will be able to do just about everything that needs to be done short of physically holding the sheep. Goose has shown us a new form of service dog, one that allows those with physical limitations to work on a farm with livestock.

Summary

No matter what breed of dog you look at you will find people who are strong advocates for the breed. There are many breeds of dog deserving of recognition and praise, however you will find no breed that people use in so many different ways, that participates in so many activities as the Border Collie. More importantly, the Border Collie is far more than a pet, far more than a dog for people who enjoy dog sports. The working Border Collie contributes more to the economy of the state than any other breed, perhaps more than all other breeds combined. There is no other breed that is so essential to making small livestock farms viable business enterprises.

In short making the Border Collie the state dog of Oregon shows that we value the contribution that they make to the state's economy, and that we value the many, many small farms that could not function without them. Border Collies have a dedication to their work and a work ethic that we can only hope to emulate.