

# ANIMAL RESCUE—LARGE ANIMALS

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Animal owners care deeply, but occasionally lack knowledge. The **desire** to rescue is infinite; the **ability** to do so is limited. The need to rescue can be diminished with proper education, which is the responsibility of caring owners, breeders, and sellers.

While we cannot precisely define the line between humane and inhumane, grossly inadequate care is easy to spot. Obesity is the bane of our country—for all animals! Is it cruel? Is failing to prevent illness—by not de-worming, for example—inhumane? The failure to act can kill. Where is the line? When is “rescue” appropriate? By whom? Benign neglect—tincture of time—can be the best treatment for some conditions. Is it inhumane?

For egregious maltreatment, how, when, and by whom, should rescue be accomplished? Who is notified? Who can (legally) act? In a case of maltreatment and attempted rescue across a state line, is health inspection necessary (state vets can refuse entry to ill animals)? Who may act if an owner is absent or does not agree that maltreatment is occurring? If a veterinarian is required to determine an animal’s state of health, who pays? Who transports? Who pays if it is necessary to go to a university animal care facility? Presuming a successful save, who owns the animal at the end? What should happen to it? Who is qualified to accomplish rescues? There are many serious issues.

Who is qualified to accomplish rescues? We see people taking in animals that they have no idea how to handle, calling it a rescue to satisfy their own ego and desire. They are often incapable of proper care of the animal, physically and financially, and have inadequate facilities. The quality of life for the animal degenerates, rather than improves. Is it rescue?

Animals that are in need of rescue are, by definition, “special need animals.” They require special, sometimes extraordinary, care. It is expensive. Many people cannot bear an expense of that magnitude, and cannot give the necessary hours of daily care and training. And they lack the intrinsic ability to lose the battle for life, no matter what the expense and effort expended. Not all rescues end well.

We breed and sell llamas and alpacas. We go to great lengths to find good homes for our animals, and occasionally have to make a decision not to sell, in spite of our commercial need for economic survival. No matter how good a customer selection process may be, conditions can change after delivery is made. This past winter, we took back about a dozen animals we had sold, due to death, divorce, insolvency, illness, etc. Professional breeders have to be ready to step in when animals they have produced and sold become needy. This is not rescue. This is simply being responsible for our own actions. It is one of the many unseen responsibilities that sellers have to buyers, without buyers realizing it. It occurs well before any definition of “rescue” or “cruelty” is applicable.

The flip side of this is people of good intent, but little knowledge, who come to us with dreadful stories of maltreatment of animals. Generally we find that it is the observer who is uninformed. Animal owners are better educated than the observer realizes. The main point: People really do care. Observers, lacking knowledge and experience, should not act beyond contacting someone who knows what is going on and knows the requirements for care, be it the Humane Society, a veterinarian, or a competent, professional breeder.

Rescue is as intense an activity as one can undertake. Involve the Humane Society early. They have the legal right to act when no one else can. As whistle-blower, you may be asked to help make difficult decisions in the absence of others. Rescue does not mean you end up with a loving animal. It is highly unlikely to result in your owning a animal you want. It may be necessary to euthanize. Prepare for major expense. A simple broken leg, set and cast, or amputated at a university, can cost \$2,000 or more. The Humane Society needs money to continue. Be prepared. I know of only one well-qualified llama and alpaca rescue facility. They take only animals in good health. You do the vet work, and provide transportation to Montana. They live on donations—a tax-deductible gift for lifetime support is indicated.

People who think they have rescued animals often find themselves in over their heads. Animals they “rescued” were not, in fact, in need. The “need” was on the part of the previous owner to dispose of unwanted animals, and the “rescuer” had more heart than good sense. Some sellers dispose in this manner due to animal behavior or health problems. Don’t get caught! The animals are poorly served and you could be, too. Don’t become part of the problem!

Solutions? There are not enough. The first line of defense is to be informed and know what not to do. When our phone rings with a new owner who has just acquired an animal from a disastrous situation, we cringe. Someone has gotten rid of a problem; someone else just bought a problem, usually out of ignorance. Neither of these should occur! Never acquire an animal until you are well educated regarding its care and keeping, its history, its health requirements, its food and shelter needs, and what its normal behavior should be. Have a vet who will work with you. Be financially prepared for significant expense if an animal is ill. If it truly is a rescue, involve the Humane Society early.

If you want llamas or alpacas (or any other animal), educate yourself—but not by getting a rescue animal! Visit professional breeders. Examine their health care practices. Look over the

physical plant, fences, shelters, the feeding regimen, their vet care, their record keeping, and genealogy of the animals. Learn, learn, and learn. Become ready for ownership. After you have had the animals for an extended period, then, and only then, should you consider rescue.

How do you recognize an animal rescue situation? Rescue animals usually show physical signs of maltreatment, rope marks, ingrown halters, scars, behavior problems, being crippled, etc. Call the Humane Society or a professional breeder. The actual occurrence may have happened two or three owners back. Make no judgments yourself. That is the job of the Humane Society. Stay out of the way. You cannot help at this point. A big heart doesn't help; a big checkbook does.

For animals offered for sale, often the first clue is price. Llamas and alpacas sold through cattle and horse auctions often go for under \$400. Some are given away if the owner cannot handle them. Something is wrong with the story. Understand the problem. Think of how many animals a breeder would have to sell at that price to make a living. These animals have an unfortunate background. Some pseudo rescue operations sell llamas for \$100. The same answer—check carefully, know the background. Talk to everyone involved. Some unscrupulous dealers remove wee-old newborns from mom, and sell the baby with a bottle and no instructions—all the while giving assurances that they will be there to help if there is a problem. Don't count on it! Quietly go away, and call someone who wants to help you to be a happy owner. You and your new animals will then be happy together.