



ENDANGERED EQUINES SUMMIT

OVERVIEW

February 9-11, 2018
College Station Texas

Submitted by Yvonne Hillsden

In February of 2018, I had the honor and pleasure of being the sole representative for the Canadian Horse breed, at the Endangered Equines Summit, which took place February 9-11 at Texas A&M University in College Station Texas.

This summit came about due to the challenges being faced by all rare breeds, but particularly by equines as more horse, donkey and pony breeds face extinction now, than ever before in history.

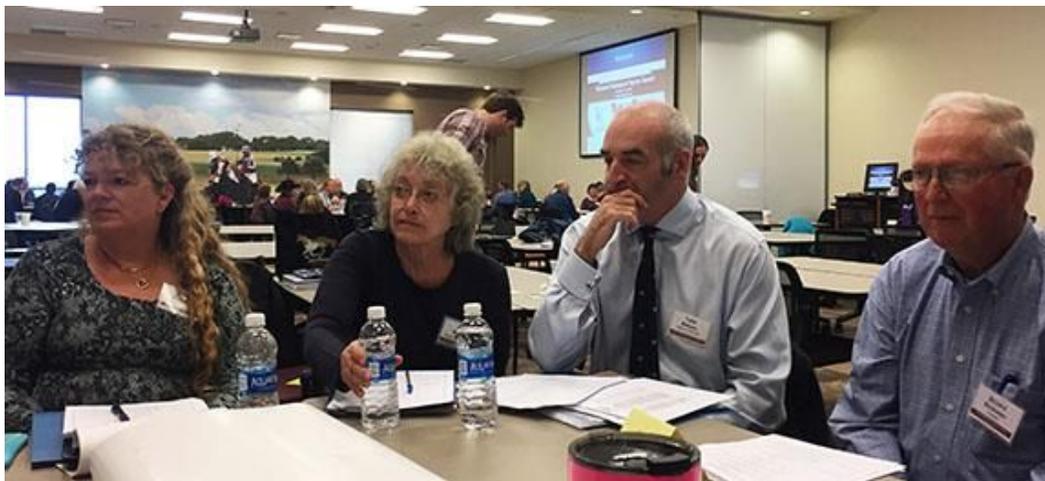
With a grant from the USA Equestrian Trust, the first efforts to try to stabilize equine breed decline and to stabilize the remaining diversity began in 2107 with collaboration between Texas A&M university, Virginia Tech, Heritage Livestock Canada (formerly Rare Breeds Canada), Rare Breeds Survival Trust, and the Livestock Conservancy with a goal of bringing together a small select group of representatives from many different horse breeds to participate in the first Endangered Equines Summit.

The culmination of all this planning occurred at the first annual Endangered Equines Summit which took place in February of 2018. The delegates, carefully selected to represent approximately 50 different endangered horse breeds associations and registries, represented thousands of horse owners internationally. Together with leaders of scientific, rare breed and horse communities, this group was tasked with identifying what they felt to be the leading causes of breed decline, what could be done to stabilize this, and to develop a list of achievable and fundable action points.





The final takeaway was a plan of action as well as a long-term vision whereby the attendees could continue networking and to work towards developing long lasting partnerships. These will serve to strengthen and revitalize conservation efforts which are otherwise far too difficult to achieve with small pockets of rare breeds working alone in isolation. It is hoped that this conference will be the first of many to follow.



From the conference, a new working group called the Endangered Equine Alliance has been now been formed, along with a lovely new logo that they want all rare breeds to feel free to share (see top of first page). Here is their new website: <http://livestockconservancy.org/index.php/what/internal/endangered-equine-alliance>

I am happy to announce that the CHBA will be a member of this new and exciting alliance, and that they have graciously allow me to continue to be the official Canadian Horse liaison for this group.



For more information on this exciting conference and the Endangered Equine Alliance, please see the following white paper provided by the Livestock Conservancy and Endangered Equine Alliance for much more detail:
<http://livestockconservancy.org/images/uploads/docs/ConservingEquineDiversity.pdf>

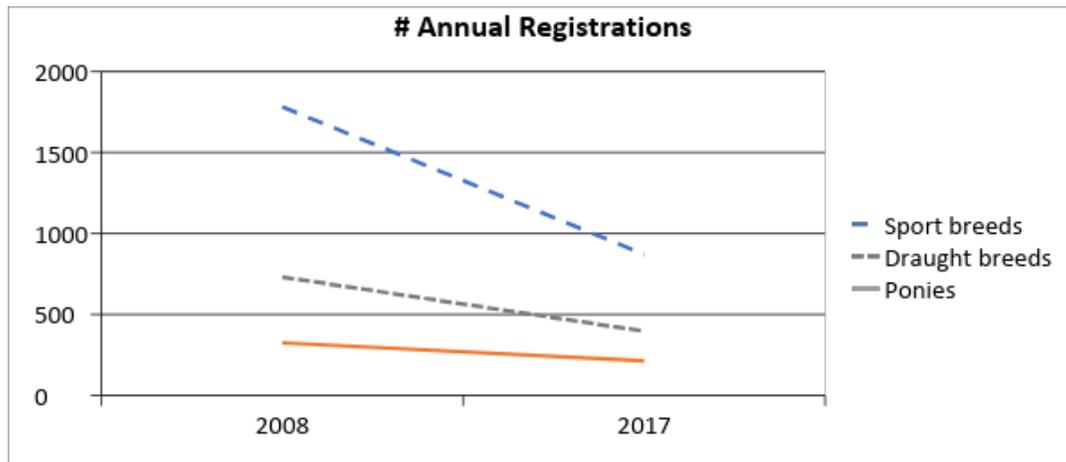
The following is a one page summary from the summit. For more detailed information, please see the link above.



ENDANGERED EQUINE ALLIANCE

THE LIVESTOCK CONSERVANCY PARTNERS WITH
EQUINE BREED ASSOCIATIONS TO SAVE RARE BREEDS

Annual registrations of horses in the United States have declined precipitously over the past 10 years, and waning interest in equines has imperiled rare breeds. Foal registrations have declined 50% since 2008. Endangered breeds of donkeys have experienced similar declines. Urgent actions are necessary to reverse these trends.



At The Livestock Conservancy's Endangered Equine Summit, representatives of 50 breed associations, the sport horse community, and equine scientists gathered to develop strategies to protect endangered equine populations for the future. Advances in assisted reproductive techniques were of special interest. Participants also developed recommendations for improved marketing and communication.

A clear message from participants is the need for an umbrella group such as the Livestock Conservancy to coordinate these efforts. Important partnerships with the American Horse Council and National Animal Interest Alliance also emerged from this joint work.

Among the recommendations for next steps are:

- *Develop marketing skills of owners and share best practices that succeed*
- *Work within breed associations to build new interest and demand, not only among people who are already interested in horses, but by creating hands-on opportunities for the "non-horse" public*
- *Establish regional ambassadors and collaborative marketing initiatives among breeds and with sport disciplines*
- *Use DNA analysis to identify genetic diversity and secure it within each breed*
- *Establish a national equine semen collection to preserve genetics for an unknown future*
- *Improve availability of breeding and genetic advice for equine breeders and owners*

A White Paper summarizing the recommendations will be made available to you by early April, along with new on-line communication venues to share resources. The Livestock Conservancy and its partners, the newly formed Endangered Equine Alliance, will seek funding through grants and interested donors to take action for the future of endangered equines. Please contact us if you wish to be included in the forefront of this effort.

On a personal note, I was very honored to be asked to attend this conference by Heritage Livestock Canada (formerly Rare Breeds Canada) on behalf of the Canadian Horse. As many of you may know, my husband and I have been involved with Canadian Horses now for the past 25 years, and it is a breed that I feel very passionate about. I have done a lot of research into the breed over the years, looking at bloodlines and developing bloodline tables that were used for many years. Most recently, I have been doing a lot of number crunching of our breed population statistics, which for our beloved Canadian Horse, are looking pretty grim. With only about 100-150 foals being registered each year, it is looking pretty tenuous for our breed's survival. So this conference aligned perfectly with my breed interests.

I attended the conference largely at my own cost, with a \$250 grant from the CHBA for which I was very grateful as this did help offset my accommodation costs. I travelled to down to Texas with two other ladies: Pat Morris from ON and Gertrude Maxwell from SK, who were there representing both Heritage Livestock Canada and the Newfoundland Pony. Thankfully, through a connection at Heritage Livestock Canada, we were put in touch with another rare horse breeder of Cleveland Bays, Gabrielle Gordon, who lived outside Fort Worth. She offered to host the three of us, which was incredibly kind and generous of her! And host us she did, rolling out the famous Texas hospitality in full splendor, touring us around and allowing us to sample and experience such famed fares as grits, Tex-Mex and Texas BBQ. She couldn't possibly have been a more congenial, kind and generous hostess. And she had absolutely beautiful Cleveland Bay horses to die for!



After a long day of flying from the wintery north, the three of us Canadians gradually assembled in Texas, not without some glitches as Pat's plane got delayed for a day due to bad weather. The following day, we did the long four hour drive down to College Station where Texas A&M University is located. Suffice it to say, what an incredibly beautiful facility! Every one of us were drooling over it and wishing we had something similar in our area.

The conference kicked off that night with a meet and greet in a local restaurant. They did some ice breaker rare breed trivia games which were a great way to kick things off, and to encourage everyone to mix and mingle and get to meet the other rare breed representatives.

I also got to circulate and meet the scientists and researchers whose articles I have read, but whom I never dreamed that I would actually get to meet in person. The likes of Dr Gus Cothran who has done so much valuable DNA research on our breed, and Dr Phil Sponenburg who has written many articles on color genetics etc. That was a real highlight for me!

The following two days of the conference itself were a whirlwind of activity, education, networking, and so much information that my brain literally spun. Wow! So many grim facts how each and every one of these vulnerable breeds are declining. In some cases, it appeared that there was quite a lot of politics, in fighting and just downright dysfunction within breeds which is SO damaging and clearly just ends up tearing them apart. Worst of all, it ends up disenchanting those who are potentially interested in those breeds, literally driving them away. After hearing some of these stories, I am happy and proud to say that in comparison, our Canadian Horse breed seems very cohesive and progressive in so many ways.

As many of you know, I am very passionate about the breed, and as such, am not shy to speak up, or to promote as much as I can, in any way possible. When I arrived, no one knew what a Canadian Horse was. When I left, they sure as heck did. But in a good way. Comparatively, it seems that our breed has been very progressive in many ways (DNA typing, microchipping for identification, allowing reproductive technologies), and we have accomplished many firsts and have so many passionate breed supporters and promoters with so many great ideas and programs that it served as a real shining example to many of the others. Sure made me feel very proud to be Canadian and to represent our Canadian Horse!!! ©

In the end, so much new information was gained and able to be taken home and now to be shared – for example the many new innovations in genetics and reproductive technologies was remarkable.

The wealth of ideas and shared information and experiences was incredible. I can't even begin to describe how incredibly special it felt to be in that room, sharing this experience with such a passionate group of like-minded individuals with common goals. The sense of cohesiveness and cooperation in the room was palpable. As was the tremendous sense of enthusiasm and passion which made it all so very heartwarming, not to mention incredibly exciting! In the end, I think I can safely say that we all left feeling energized, enthusiastic and with such a wonderful renewed sense of optimism.

After the conference ended, we did the long four hour drive back to Ft Worth, chattering away non-stop about what we had experienced. And, as it turned out, it was a good thing that I had brought my winter clothes from Canada. And so much for a warm holiday in Texas in the winter. We ended up driving through a massive ice and snow storm on our way home from the conference. Brrr!!!

