



4004 East 800 North
Battle Ground, Indiana, 47920
P:: (765) 567-2265
F: (765) 567-4299
W: WolfPark.org

Wolf Park's Position on Pet Wolves and Wolf-Dog Hybrids in the Possession of Private Persons. by Erich Klinghammer, Director, WOLF PARK

1. We are NOT against anyone possessing captive wolves or hybrids. Nor do we advocate legislation that would make it illegal to possess such animals. We have long recognized that telling people that they cannot possess these animals will not prevent them from breeding or owning them.
 2. From our experience with captive wolves, not only at WOLF PARK, but elsewhere as well, and through contacts with hundreds of hybrids, by reading newspaper accounts, and consulting with lawyers involved in litigation where pet wolves, hybrids, as well as dogs have attacked, injured and even killed people, we have amassed ample evidence that shows that when kept in improper conditions, these animals can pose grave danger to people - especially to children.
 3. To help people who contemplate owning wolves or hybrids, and to better handle potentially dangerous dogs safely, the INSTITUTE OF ETHOLOGY at WOLF PARK offers wolf behavior seminars, three times a year, for a number of years. The results have been most gratifying. After hands-on experience with our socialized wolves some people have decided against obtaining pet wolves or hybrids, while others recognized that to keep these animals safely they would have to invest in building proper facilities, as well as having additional help available, in case the owners had to travel, became ill, or even died. Thus, we are helping people to make informed decisions about owning these animals.
 4. The way such animals are often kept does not usually meet the social and behavioral needs of the animals. They frequently languish in small cages, or are tied to chains, with no quality of life to speak of.
 5. To safeguard the lives of innocent children, and to insure a reasonable quality of life for the animals, we at WOLF PARK put our efforts into educating people for responsible ownership of these animals. Owners should comply with existing laws in the states and municipalities in which they live. Failure to do so has often resulted in lawsuits, and sometimes in the confiscation of the animals, with great expense and emotional hardship for all concerned.
 6. When called upon to testify in court, before legislative bodies, or when consulting on pending legislation, or in court cases, we simply render an opinion to the best of our knowledge and experience. The safety of people, especially children, is our primary concern.
 7. By rendering an opinion, we do sometimes affect the outcome of a court decision. A decision may go against, as well as for, an individual owner and his animals. We do not take sides. Our testimony has saved many hybrids, wolves and dogs from destruction. In other instances animals may have been euthanized by governmental agencies.
- We have resisted all efforts to elicit from us testimony in favor of a particular position by either the defendant or the plaintiff. We have helped with our testimony to stop a community from enacting breed-specific laws. i.e. banning a particular breed, when some dogs of that breed had killed a child. Instead we rendered an opinion as to whether or not the particular animal had been kept safely.
- In our opinion the responsibility always rests with the breeder or owner of the animal. - We saved Mickey, a pet wolf who had killed a child in Wayne, Michigan, from being euthanized. We were widely criticized for this action by some people, and were praised by others. Mickey lived out his life at WOLF PARK as a living example as to why a pet wolf does not belong unattended on a chain in an unfenced yard.
8. From analysis of situations in which pet wolves, hybrids and dogs have killed or maimed people - almost always children - we have a fairly good idea about what conditions precipitate such attacks. They may be dominance-related, but more often a child who has tripped, cried and struggled to get up, triggered the prey-killing response, because the child resembled wounded prey in some way.
 9. We have drawn up guidelines, as to how pet wolves and hybrids can be kept safely, with the help of hybrid breeders, owners, behavioral scientists, and a USDA inspector. These guidelines have been made available to any interested party, from responsible owners to governmental bodies considering legislation. Our function is to educate people and to help save children.
 10. On several occasions we have called local authorities when a pet wolf or hybrid was kept unattended on a chain or escaped repeatedly. We then suggested ways to safeguard the animals and prevent attacks on people. We have also warned owners who in our opinion were not keeping their animals safely. In some cases we like to think that we have saved lives. In a few others, where our warnings were not heeded, preventable attacks occurred, and children were mutilated. These cases involved pet wolves, hybrids as well as dogs.
 11. We have been criticized for not telling the good points of pet wolf and hybrid ownership. That is not our job. We try to save lives of children, and help to insure a good quality of life for animals in captivity through our education programs.



4004 East 800 North
Battle Ground, Indiana, 47920
P:: (765) 567-2265
F: (765) 567-4299
W: WolfPark.org

12. We are disturbed by the fact that many breeders and owners misrepresent the potential danger to life and limb which improperly kept animals pose. We deplore the lack of adequate facilities in which many animals are kept. We especially deplore the fact that time and again when preventable accidents have taken place, the innocent animal is killed. It is never the animal's fault, but always the owner's, whether she or he was aware of the danger or not.

13. Responsible hybrid breeders and owners agree with us. There are, however, many owners and breeders who, instead of acting responsibly, attack our position of responsible ownership of these animals. Usually, when restrictive laws or ordinances are passed, the responsible owners suffer most.

It has been our observation that the hybrid-owning community, with some notable exceptions, has done little to police its own ranks. In fact no such mechanism exists. Furthermore, the owners who cause most of the problems, do not even belong to any hybrid organization at all where they might at least obtain some useful information.

There should not be any surprise then that, officials charged with public safety, will attempt to control the breeding and owning of pet wolves and hybrids. It is a sad fact that when a dog kills a child the reaction is very much different than when a pet wolf or wolf-dog hybrid kills one. The old fear of the wolf is still very much in the minds of many people.

14. Finally, we are concerned that pet wolves and hybrids improperly kept, when they do cause damage negatively affect the image of the wolf in the wild. Hence, we all should do what we can to prevent this by practicing and promoting responsible ownership.

8/16/1999