

Newfoundland Pony owners shun federal designation

Say heritage animal would be better protected by staying under provincial legislation

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Newfoundland Pony owners and advocates are always looking for ways to protect the endangered animals, but they believe a proposal to register them under federal legislation is not the way to go.

The hardy little horses numbered about 8,000 in the early 1960s, but dwindled to only a hundred or so by the mid-1980s.

Once used to haul everything from wood to caplin, they were needed less and less with the advent of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles.

Thus the push to protect them under provincial legislation, which occurred in 1997 under the Heritage Animals Act and included the Newfoundland Pony Order.

That made it illegal to transport the animals out-of-province without a permit, and designated the Newfoundland Pony Society as the group responsible for registering, promoting and protecting them.

Gail Hansford developed the Newfoundland Pony Sanctuary in the Goulds.
(CBC)

To that end, talks took place over the years about registering the pony under the federal Animal Pedigree Act, with an aim to gaining purebred status.

Jack Harris, who as an MHA pushed to have the pony protected under provincial legislation, believes handing over control to the feds would be a big mistake.

He says the federal act is meant for farm stock and breeding animals, and could signal a return to the days when the ponies were moved out of the province on meat trucks.

Harris says that's not on for a heritage animal like the Newfoundland Pony.

"There is a real fear that the Newfoundland Pony, as it is, would be lost and a new pony would be created ... like the Newfoundland dog which is Newfoundland only in name," said Harris, who's a pony owner and also on the board of the Newfoundland Pony Society.

Similar fears

Gail Hansford, who developed the province's Newfoundland Pony Sanctuary in the Goulds area of St. John's, harbours the same fears.

"I would just like to be able to keep our heritage here on the island and that's it. I'm very strong about that," she said.

"Once they go federal, God only knows what could become of them. They're out of our hands."

The Newfoundland Pony Society has since assessed the process of registering the pony under the federal act, and is recommending the idea be scrapped.

They say it has the potential to lessen the protection the animals now have under provincial legislation, and could even lead to a loss of heritage status.

The final decision on whether to transfer control of the Newfoundland Pony to the feds rests with the provincial government.

