

## **Denver should target dangerous animals, not an entire breed**

By Rocky Mountain News

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Some laws, even if crafted with the best intentions of public safety in mind, just belong in the doghouse.

Denver's ban on pit bull ownership within city limits is a reaction to those dogs who have been raised to act violently. And if a dog - no matter what the breed - causes harm to a person, then it's within the city's right to protect the community.

But a blanket ban under which officials can seize a pooch based on whether it looks like it has characteristics of an American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier or Staffordshire Bull Terrier is unfair - because most of the animals are clearly not violent.

Consider what happened to Forrest, a mixed breed slated for euthanasia after the young dog had escaped twice from its Commerce City owner and was later picked up in Denver. Forrest hadn't attacked anyone. The dog even got its name, said owner Chris McGahey, because its mild-mannered temperament reminded McGahey of Tom Hanks' title character *Forrest Gump*.

Whereas too many owners abandon their pets (hence crowding at shelters in the first place), McGahey should be commended for hiring lawyers and working to save the pooch that he'd adopted when the pup was just a month old.

True, the fact that dog owners are warned after their canine is picked up once should have spurred McGahey to take greater responsibility to ensure Forrest didn't escape again. But escape he did, and the ball was in Denver's court. After the city claimed it was in the right in slating Forrest for destruction, McGahey and supporters sprang into action with a Sunday protest outside the Denver Municipal Animal Shelter on Jason Street.

The next day, the city relented and began crafting a deal to release Forrest to the Best Friends mega-sanctuary in Utah, which will then drive the dog to St. Louis. Under the agreement that was still tentative Wednesday evening, the dog would be put up for adoption, and McGahey would never see Forrest again.

Luckily, as a nonviolent animal who happens to be of the wrong breed, Forrest benefited from a protest and deluge of public sentiment that saved his life. Animal Care and Control Director Doug Kelly said Wednesday, though, that Forrest's case has spurred a city policy change. They'll now be getting bullish on the banned breed: Rather than be subject to a lethal injection, the dogs will be deported to an approved rescue organization in another state.

But the ban has left a sad legacy. In 2005, when it went back into effect after legal wrangling, more than 1,000 pit bulls were picked up; 726 of those were euthanized. The next year, 727 of 952 pit bulls were put to sleep. And last year, 215 of the 355 pit bulls taken into animal control's custody were killed.

Forrest's case should serve as a catalyst for Denver to not only change its policy on lethal injections but to rethink its breed-specific ban altogether - and repeal it.

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