

Help create a new day for greyhounds

By Christine A. Dorchak and Deborah L. Foote | Posted: Thursday, March 21, 2013 12:00 am

New information reveals that dog racing in Texas needs to end. During the last several months, we have conducted a thorough review of hundreds of state documents, news reports, industry statements and financial records. The result is the new report “Greyhound Racing in Texas,” available at www.grey2kusa.org. A picture has now emerged of an industry that is cruel, inhumane and on the verge of economic collapse.

Today, Gulf Greyhound Park in La Marque is the only full-time, operational dog track in the state. Of the two other greyhound licensees, one track is closed entirely and the other operates as an off-track betting parlor. Between 2007 and 2012, the amount gambled on live dog races declined by a staggering 61 percent and attendance dropped by 52 percent. Even dog track executives and industry leaders now acknowledge that greyhound racing is dying in Texas.

For dogs, the racing industry offers little more than a life of confinement. Hundreds of greyhounds are kept at Gulf Greyhound Park, inside long, narrow buildings with rows of stacked cages that are barely large enough for them to stand up or turn around in. Greyhounds spend long hours in these cages. A few daily “turnouts” and several races during the month provide their only relief.

Yet when greyhounds are let out of their cages to race, they face the risk of serious injury. Records obtained from the Texas Racing Commission document 1,507 greyhound injuries at Gulf between 2008 and 2011. This includes 56 dogs that died and nearly 300 greyhounds that suffered broken legs.

More than just statistics, public records tell the stories of individual greyhounds who have suffered and died while racing.

In February 2010, a 1-year-old greyhound named Rags Carla suffered a broken leg and was euthanized. Two months later, her sister, Rags Patches, also died at Gulf. She fell and broke her neck during her last race.

State records also documented cruel live-lure training in Texas. A greyhound trainer recently surrendered his state license after a videotape revealed abuse of rabbits on his farm. According to official transcripts, screaming hares were tied to ropes and whirled around a track as bait for young greyhounds. Neither the Texas Racing Commission nor the greyhound industry approves of this kind of animal cruelty, and yet it happens.

Dogs are part of the fabric of our community. For millions of Americans, they serve as loving companions and family members. Sadly, the facts prove that racing greyhounds in Texas face a very different existence than the dogs who share our homes.

It's time for citizens, lawmakers and community leaders to acknowledge the serious problems that exist in the greyhound racing industry. We urge lawmakers to oppose any efforts to prop up the dog-racing industry and engage with us in passing reforms to improve the lives of racing dogs now.

Gentle greyhounds deserve better than a life of confinement and injury, and we are hopeful that our report will lead to a new day for greyhounds in Texas.