

Animal Welfare Groups Target Greyhound Tracks

Welfare groups launch campaign to change minds, amend laws and do away with greyhound tracks

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Two animal welfare groups are trying to bring about the end of greyhound racing, which has been declining for years, with an aggressive effort to change laws and public opinion in the states where dogs still race.

GREY2K USA and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals believe racing is cruel and are embarking on a broad-based lobbying effort. The centerpiece is a study that documents more than 11,000 injuries to racing greyhounds and 909 deaths from 2008 to 2014.

The groups are distributing thousands of copies to lawmakers, government officials and others in the seven states with tracks. They also plan a media blitz and are trying to line up legislators to introduce bills outlawing the sport.

"It was time to go for broke because the industry is nearly dead and what's left to save is thousands of dogs," said Carey Theil, executive director of GREY2K USA.

The groups plan to unveil the study Wednesday and then barnstorm through the states that allow racing, starting with Florida, which has 13 of the nation's 21 tracks.

Gary Guccione, executive director of the National Greyhound Association that represents dog owners and breeders, acknowledged greyhound racing is struggling but said it's unfair to characterize it as cruel. The animal groups distort data to further their agenda, he said.

"The industry is not inhumane," Guccione said. "It is very much responsible and very much looks out for the welfare of the racing greyhound from birth through its entire life."

Guccione answered accusations by critics that the dogs are caged nearly 22 hours a day, isolated when they are in the kennels, fed inferior food and forced to run in circles when racing.

He said the dogs are docile and enjoy being in their cages for many hours each day. There are all kinds of people in the kennel areas each day, so the dogs get well socialized, Guccione said. The meat they eat may not be fit for humans, but it is fine for dogs, he said. Finally, the dogs love to race, Guccione said, noting they get very excited every fourth day, when they get to race.

Greyhound racing peaked decades ago and has struggled to attract new fans as sports entertainment and

gambling options proliferated. Most tracks now offer casino gambling, and both sides agree that without the revenue they could not survive.

Besides Florida, the only tracks left are in Alabama, Arkansas, Texas, West Virginia, [Iowa](#) and Arizona. Four states allow racing but don't have tracks: Oregon, Connecticut, [Wisconsin](#) and [Kansas](#).

Attendance at tracks and wagers on greyhounds have fallen precipitously. In 2012, \$665 million was bet nationwide, down 66 percent from 2001, according to the study.

Florida dog tracks lost over \$42 million on racing from June 2012 and November 2013, according to state filings.

The animal rights groups hope the study provides the impetus for states to do away with racing. The report shows 758 greyhounds were euthanized after suffering serious injuries while racing between January 2008 and November 2014.

"People don't realize how treacherous the life of a greyhound dog is ??? broken legs, skulls, backs, severed toes, electrocution, even cardiac arrest because of the stress," said Nancy Perry, senior vice president of ASPCA Government Relations. "We want people to understand this isn't dogs playing in a park but literally running for their lives."

The information used in the study, which goes back 13 years, was taken from state records, industry statements and news reports, GREY2K said. There are nearly 600 sources or citations in the study.

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