

About 150 folks gathered on a cold, wet weekend in College Station Texas to hammer out ways to protect and promote endangered equine in North America. Attendees were on hand from the US, Canada, and the UK and included breed and breed association representatives, veterinary and animal science experts in genetics and reproduction, sport organization representatives, and various others including representation from the American Horse Council, the Livestock Conservancy, Heritage Livestock Canada, and the UK's Rare Breeds Survival Trust.. The event had a stated goal of bringing together promoters of rare equine breeds in order to develop strategies for cooperative efforts to stabilize their populations and ensure their longevity. Three CBHSNA directors and one member were on hand throughout the weekend.

Gabrielle Gordon hosted the Canadian contingent and ensured they arrived safely in College Station. Serving as the official society representative she participated in the marketing and information strategy session on Saturday and delivered Sunday's group wrap up on addressing genetic diversity challenges within breeds.

Milinda Ellis was also on hand in her role as the head of the International Cleveland Bay Registry and sat in on the technical and genetic strategy working group on Saturday and the **marketing/promotions/networking/fundraising** breakout on Sunday.

Bill and Stephanie Meredith served as volunteers in support of the TLC staff on Saturday and participated in the "Building Interest and Demand for the Breed(s)" and "Feasibility/Steps Toward a National Semen (actually genetic material) Repository" during Sunday's breakout session.

There was a significant tenor of cooperation and goodwill among the conference attendees and a spirit of opportunity. The Livestock Conservancy Staff are collating the notes and proposals over the next several weeks and looking for opportunities to take action on several suggested initiatives.

**Several highlights from round table and breakout sessions are noted below:**

- Cloning is real; it is a viable option, especially in cases where populations are critically low or no other genetic material is available. Costs are still very high at \$70k (per BioGen), but are anticipated to fall dramatically over time.
- Preservation of genetic material is more than just semen collection and storage. While Mare genetic tissue can be stored oocytes can be fertilized and embryos frozen for later insemination ensuring the genetic longevity of both stallion and mare lines.
- Shipping frozen semen to/from UK is a significant challenge. Semen collected for overseas shipment must undergo the proper quarantine and collection protocol AT THE TIME OF COLLECTION. Straws can not be retroactively tested and approved for export.
- Drs. Phil Sponenberg, Lief Anderson, and Gus Cothran spoke at length on genetic sampling and creating a genetic screen of a population of ~30 horses. These allow us to

determine allele frequency and assess the frequency of mutations within a population. All seemed confident that the genetic screening was standardized across entities and that sharing information “should” not be a problem and should be encouraged. Clearly, this does not always hold true transnationally.

- It was reported that the The Plant and Animal Genetic Resources Preservation site in Ft. Collins is not an option for equine preservation do to rules put in place by congress in its establishment. This may be an area where AHC can lobby congress for a rule change.
- It is imperative that rare breed enthusiasts join together in local/regional exhibition of their animals. I was surprised at how many “other” rare breeds are relatively close to our location in TX. There are strength in numbers/voices and economies of scale in sharing marketing, rental, venue opportunities.
- We must get our horses into the public. AHC reports that the sport organizations currently hold the most credibility and visibility in the US equestrian scene. We may encourage our breeders and enthusiasts to increase there competition/showing programs where feasible and attend more expos, parades, etc. with our breed name being featured.