

When deciding how to best spend your time, money, or effort supporting rescues, it can be somewhat difficult to decide where to direct your limited resources. Many of us who love animals look for ways to help them through donations, volunteering, or adopting, and for most it is important to ensure you are spending your resources wisely. As with anything, animal rescues run the gamut from impeccably run, to poorly run, this checklist list can assist a person in deciding if they wish to support a particular rescue or not. It's unlikely a person will find a rescue with a "perfect score", when compared to this list, but it can be used as a helpful guide; it is up to the person doing the research to decide what their own acceptability thresholds are when distributing funds or allocating their time.

Before you begin, it's important to ascertain the mission of the rescue in questions, as rescues with different missions will function in slightly different ways. The mission statement can typically be found on the website or Facebook page in the "about" section. You can also look up any 501(c)3 EIN number online. If the rescue is a registered non-profit this will tell you information such as board members, how long the rescue has been in operation, if they are up to date on tax paperwork, and their mission.

Herd Health

- The herd health standard followed by the rescue meets or exceeds the standards they put forth for potential adopters.

Preventative care:

- All animals receive at least once yearly vaccines for the entire herd (caveats for animals unable to receive vaccines, such as highly allergic animals or new intakes who are still too medically fragile. These should be a rare exception. Inability to handle animals is not a valid reason to not vaccinate or do preventative care. If a rescue has many unhandled animals they must have facilities to safely handle them). Ideally equids receive twice yearly vaccines.
- All equids receive yearly sedated dentals carried out by a vet or under supervision of a vet.
- A worming and parasite protocol is designed with help of a vet. Animals are free of parasites before joining the herd.
- The rescue demonstrates a species-appropriate diet of quality feed, managed in correct amounts, for each animal.

Routine care:

- There are routine hoof trims (absolute minimum once every 8 weeks for most animals, medical cases and corrective trims must be undertaken much more frequently.)
- There is routine grooming, which, at minimum, helps to remove any shedding winter coat, and to ensure animals don't have any lice, ticks, injuries, cactus spines, etc that can be picked up on pasture.

- There is routine handling of all animals to ensure they are safe to interact with potential adopters, volunteers, farriers, vets, and general personnel.
- Animals are an appropriate weight. In donkey rescue it's very common for animals to arrive obese, but a responsible rescue will work to ensure those animals slowly and safely return to an appropriate weight. A quick way to check this would be to choose an overweight animal on the rescue's social media, and search their page for that animal's name. Looking through historical posts of that animal, is it losing weight? Gaining weight? Remaining the same level of obese or overweight?

Veterinary care and follow up:

- The rescue has one (or more) clinics or hospitals they typically use.
- The rescue seeks medical attention in a timely manner.
- The rescue does not seek medical information from social media in case of illness or injury.
- When an issue requires follow-up, such as bandage changes, the rescue appears to provide said follow up care.
- The rescue is forthright with medical fundraising and care, either through documentation/sharing of medical records and invoices, verbal statements from the vet, or statements from the rescue with which a reasonably competent and knowledgeable person can follow along, and which make sense with regards to treatment plans.
- The rescue is forthcoming with information surrounding emergencies and issues.
- The rescue seems to learn from/correct mistakes in care.
- Animals are reasonably sound of body and mind and appear to have a good quality of life, free of pain and illness.
- Animals are routinely evaluated for quality of life, and when the situation warrants it, are quickly and humanely euthanized.

Intake protocols:

- New animals are quarantined away from all existing animals.
- Animals receive an intake veterinary visit, including vaccines, Coggins/EIA tests, parasite control plan, and dental.
- All males are castrated (In Arizona a vet may choose to wait until cool weather and lack of flies, typically around mid to late October. Unless there is a specific medical reason, no rescue should leave a healthy male intact more than six months from intake, or a season change).

Animals

- The rescue takes in animals who meet their mission and goals.
- The number of animals does not exceed the capacity of the rescue.
- The rescue does not breed animals.

Facilities

- The facility meets or exceeds the requirements set forth by the rescue for potential adopters' facilities.
- There is sufficient space for all animals.
- There is sufficient shade and shelter for all animals. In Arizona this means not only is there shade, but there is ample shade for all animals to be in the shade with some room between them for air movement and no animals are bullied out of the shade. In colder climates it may mean all animals can easily fit within the shelter with room to move about, and have access to feed and water without fighting or bullying animals out of the shelter.
- There is sufficient fencing in good repair. Leaning, broken, or bent fencing, barbed wire, hog panel, uncapped t-posts, unanchored panels, rusted panels, fencing held together with twine or zip ties, are all examples of dangerous and insufficient fencing for equids.
- There is proper drainage and dry footing. Drainage should be such that animals have dry places to stand the majority of the time. Poor drainage leads to hoof problems such as abscesses and thrush, as well as flies and mosquitos, which are a nuisance and carry diseases.
- There is a medical/quarantine area away from the herd where sick or injured animals can be quietly kept and observed for situations like colic, illness, or injuries.
- Feed is stored in such a way that it remains dry, unwasted, and unspoiled. Hay is off the ground, on concrete or pallets, and under the cover of a barn, shed, freight box, or properly secured tarps. Feed such as grain and supplements are kept dry, out of the dust and dirt, and away from birds, rodents, and insects, and out of the reach of any equids who might get loose from a handler or sneak out of their pen.
- Hay and feed are clean and free of visible mold or spoilage.
- Any uncastrated or recently castrated animals are kept a significant distance from female animals and do not share a fenceline. This can be achieved through multiple layers of fencing, or by having a "buffer pen" of gelded animals.

Pest control, hygiene, and manure management:

- Animals don't appear unreasonably burdened by flies or pests, there is little to no stomping of feet, swishing of tails or constant shaking of heads. Fly boots, masks, and sheets, in good repair, are in use when necessary.
- Manure is dealt with in an expedient and sanitary manner. With very low stocking rates in large areas, generally fewer than two animals per acre, and wildlife or chickens to spread out manure piles, one can possibly get away with not removing manure, depending on the habits of the animals, but in higher density facilities, or animals in pens rather than pastures, manure must be scooped from the pens, and removed from the area, daily.
- Water troughs and buckets are clean, in sufficient number, and of the correct size for the animals present. Note size disparities of animals in the pens, if a pen contains mini donkeys but all the water troughs are for full sized horses, preventing them from easily accessing water when the levels in the trough are low, that is a problem. Remember: if

you would not drink the water in an emergency, you shouldn't expect an animal to drink it, dirty water tanks contribute to mosquitos, colic, and illnesses.

- There is little or no evidence of excess wasted hay in the pens and paddocks. Wasted hay wastes money, prevents proper soil drainage, offers a place for flies to breed, and encourages animals to eat unsuitable and unsafe spoiled hay, which can result in illness or death.

Education and Resources

- The rescue shares, directs to, or creates educational resources for current owners or prospective owners.
- The rescue shares when they learn new information, or uses instances and issues amongst their herd as learning opportunities. No one knows everything, and like vet clinics, rescues often have more opportunities than most to share out of the norm occurrences, so unusual happenings or learning opportunities should be shared whenever possible to help educate owners, prospective owners, and even other professionals like vets, farriers, and other rescues.

Website and Social Media

- Websites and social media are up to date, listing resident or sanctuary animals as well as animals available for adoption.
- Adoption requirements are available on the website.
- The number of animals present at the rescue is listed.
- Adoption agreements are available on the website for potential adopters to read thoroughly.

Adoptions

- Adoptable animals are listed on the website.
- Adopters must have references for a local farrier and large animal veterinarian.
- Adopters will undergo a facility check to ensure their facility is sufficient to house a new animal.
- Animals are gelded (if male), up to date on hoof trims, vaccines, dentals, parasite control, and training, which includes being able to be approached in a paddock, haltered, led, loaded in a trailer, and have their feet trimmed, unsedated, prior to being adopted out.
- Adopted animals leave the property. Some rescues also operate sanctuaries, with "sponsors" of animals within the rescue. In these instances a sponsor sends a predetermined amount of money each month for the care of a specific animal. However, some rescues will say animals are "adopted" and are therefore unavailable, while the animal still remains at the rescue facility, consuming the rescue's resources. If an animal is adopted, it must leave the rescue.
- Adoption frequency is in line with their stated mission. The rescue does not have an excess of adoptable animals while turning away prospective owners who meet their adoption requirements.

Red Flags

- The rescue routinely states they are on the brink of collapse or financial ruin, especially if no effort is made to minimize their animal numbers, or animals continue to be added.
- Animals seem to be sick or injured more than is generally expected of their population.
- Animals are regularly returned from adopters, suggesting there was not due diligence done in making a match or educating the adopter.
- Intake numbers seem high and unsustainable. This is especially true of equine rescues, as well-cared-for donkeys and mules can live to be 50 years old.
- Any routine upkeep or weather events are cause for crisis. If a rescue, in a location where it snows, routinely has animals falling sick every time there is a snow storm, due to insufficient shelter, or has a big dramatic crisis, for instance regarding simple maintenance, say, when a water line breaks, they are likely overextended in multiple ways.
- The rescue keeps/breeds personal animals at the rescue. This is especially problematic if the personal animals are kept with rescue animals, necessitating being fed together and sharing infrastructure. While it's not impossible to maintain appropriately divided and reimbursed funds ethically, especially in low numbers, the more personal animals are on the property, the more difficult it becomes.
- Any small unexpected-but-expected vet bill, such as a minor colic or minor laceration, which is just the nature of owning equids, throws the rescue into dire financial straits.
- Any red flags that may come up with a simple Google of the proprietor's name, especially if you return results with any fraud, financial crimes, or animal abuse or cruelty.
- Mistakes are repeated, such as allowing hay to get rained on and ruined on multiple occasions, or animals colicking from feeding on sand.