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News & Views You Can Use

Florida Herpes Abates 'Snowbirds' Start Migration

by Laurel Scott

The outbreak of equine herpesvirus-1 (EHV-1) that struck Florida in December affected its show, racing and polo communities, with a total of six deaths attributed to the neurological form of the virus at press time. It also prompted Maryland equestrians looking to compete on Florida's winter circuits to postpone their travel plans.

At this writing, the worst of the outbreak appears to be over. During its critical stages, the state had quarantined 10 premises in Wellington, Morriston, Loxahatchee, Jupiter and Indiantown, with half of the quarantines occurring in the Wellington area. By Jan. 20, with no new cases reported since Dec. 29, all of these quarantines had been lifted.

In the wake of the outbreak, appropriate precautions were taken at Calder Race Course and Tampa Bay Downs. Many Florida polo clubs made adjustments to their play schedules. While some area horse shows were either canceled or postponed, Stadium Jumping Inc., which oversees several major series at the Palm Beach Polo Equestrian Club in Wellington, extended its entry deadlines and issued strict protocols to ensure that its facilities stay virus-free. So, at press time, Maryland "snowbirds" who hadn't opted to stay home or compete elsewhere were preparing to ship their horses to Florida as usual.

Needless to say, the precautions they should take once in Florida – and upon their return to Maryland – have been a hot topic of discussion.

Local Outlook

At a Jan. 11 meeting of the Maryland Horse Industry Board's new Equine Health Advisory Committee, *The Equiry* learned

that the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) has stayed informed about the Florida outbreak since, as state veterinarian Guy Hohenhaus put it, "the rumors first hit the internet."

As he explained, "We have spoken on several occasions to Wellington officials, the Florida state veterinarian's office, and others in that state with knowledge of events. I am fully satisfied that the Florida regulatory response is adequate at this time to protect Maryland equine health interests. Maryland retains the full range of regulatory options to address a deterioration in that situation. Deterioration which threatens Maryland is considered unlikely at this time, and any additional regulatory actions by this agency would impose an unnecessary and unproductive regulatory burden the equine industries, in particular those in Maryland."

Here are Hohenhaus' answers to some questions posed by members of the Maryland equestrian community:

Q: If a Maryland owner is determined to send his or her horse to Florida, what is Florida currently requiring in terms of health papers on incoming horses? What is the easiest way for people to find out what Florida is requiring, particularly as it seems to be changing on an almost daily basis?

A: [It's the] same as always. All this is on the Maryland Department of Agriculture Animal Health website. Florida permits, 850-410-0900; the United States Department of Agriculture 50 State Info, <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/sregs/>; and Florida Animal Health, <http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/ai/index.shtml>.

Q: What should a Marylander do if his or her horse is stabled in Florida (or anywhere else) during

an outbreak and he or she wants to bring the horse home?

A: There is no additional requirement imposed by Maryland on horses with recent travel to Florida. A current [negative] Coggins (within one year) is still the standard for horse import to Maryland from Florida. If one is concerned, [one] may opt to obtain an interstate health certificate for the horse. If the horse is involved in a movement restriction imposed by Florida, then that state will dictate when movement can occur.

Q: What else can be done at the state level to ensure that suspect horses from Florida or any other affected state do not enter Maryland, or if they do, that they are properly handled and properly quarantined?

A: There is a decades-old system of movement documentation [that] works well. We are engaged in ongoing discussions with Florida to continuously update our risk assessment.

Q: Should Maryland stable owners/managers allow horses from Florida back into their facilities, and if so, under what circumstances?

A: As always, we ask owners to comply with law, regulation and common sense – and not knowingly expose healthy animals to infected or exposed animals. This includes common sense isolation of new arrivals to a facility and regular involvement of a veterinarian.

Q: Should Maryland stable owners require anything specific from the owners of horses returning from Florida?

A: They may want to ask additional questions concerning the travel history of the animals and whether there is any known or suspected contact with involved premises.

Q: How should Maryland stable owners/managers handle a horse that's been in Florida once it arrives back in their barn? Does the MDA have any recommended protocols?

A: [We] recommend a minimum of two weeks' segregation from resident animals (separate structure, minimum 40 feet from resident animals, including no fenceline contact [under] 40 feet).

Q: How can someone ensure that a horse that is being delivered to his or her facility – and that was picked up in, say, Georgia or South Carolina – did not travel with a horse from Florida?

A: One could, were the horse enrolled in National Animal Identification and properly tagged with an RFID [radio frequency identification].

Q: Are there any laws regulating the shipping companies and their practices with regard to EHV-1?

A: [There are] no specific laws. Shippers are held to the same standards as an owner when moving animals both inter- and intrastate.

Q: When do you deem it safe for Marylanders to ship horses into Florida or any state where such an outbreak has occurred? What kinds of precautions should one take under those circumstances, and what kind of safeguards should one look for at any facility (private stable, clinic, showgrounds) receiving the horses?

A: We defer to Florida officials to manage affairs of their state. It would be imprudent to ship an animal into a restricted facility, whether or not the facility was allowed to accept new arrivals. In cases where Florida officials have compartmentalized the movement restrictions – i.e., a fraction of barns on a facility – the decision to

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Be sure to include your full name, phone number and address. All submissions become the property of The Equiry.**

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enter rests with the comfort level of the owner.

Q: Would there ever be a point at which Maryland would ban a horse from entering a state or a facility?

A: Maryland law does not provide for restricting movements of healthy/otherwise eligible animals into another state. Maryland can restrict movements across our borders, but an export restriction would be based on problems within our state. At the request of another state, we would assist in restricting movements to that state.

Q: If a Maryland stable owner is not able to provide any of the "best management practices" recommended by MDA, and therefore prohibits a Florida horse from unloading at his or her farm, where could that horse go?

A: That is an issue of private property, and the state has no jurisdiction unless animal health law has been violated or regulatory action is appropriate.

Q: Will there be any provisions made by the state for quarantining returning Florida horses?

A: [There are] no provisions at this time; no need for that contingency [is] anticipated. Were there a need to control movement across Maryland borders, it would be accomplished in an effective and expeditious manner by this agency.

Rumors & Restrictions

The MDA has monitored several suspected cases of equine herpes this winter. The cases occurred at Baltimore's Pimlico Race Course and at two Baltimore County farms. A "Hold Order" was put on one of the farms as a precautionary measure, but that has since been released, and all of the test results from these cases have been negative.

"We have restricted movement on several farms based on reasonable suspicion, but all have checked out clean thus far," Hohenhaus explained. "We have also worked with several properties to address rumors of herpes in an informal fashion, when there has not been evidence sufficient to regulate."

On Jan. 20, the Maryland Jockey Club – whose facilities were im-

pacted by the herpes virus last year – lifted the second of two bans this season on horses shipping in from Florida.

At press time, ANY horses shipping into MJC facilities were still required to have a health certificate dated within 72 hours of arrival with a rectal temperature and a veterinarian-signed certificate of inspection verifying that the horses represented on this certificate: a) had not originated from a barn with a confirmed or suspect case of herpes virus; b) had not shown signs suggestive of this disease; c) had not been febrile within the previous three weeks; d) had not originated from nor been stabled on a premises under quarantine or restriction due to EHV-1 or from a facility that had herpes virus diagnosed during the previous 30-day period; and e) had been vaccinated against EHV-1 no less than seven days and no greater than 90 days beforehand.

For updated information on herpes-related matters, please visit www.equiqry.com and click on "News & Resources."

Let the Games Begin!

Annapolis Reopens

by Nancy Hill

The 423rd session of the Maryland General Assembly convened on Wednesday, Jan. 10, and a new governor was sworn in on Jan. 17.

As expected in the first year of a four-year term, all kinds of changes have already taken place in Annapolis. New leadership has been appointed/elected and many committee memberships have changed.

Of special interest to the equine community is the fact that Delegate J.B. Jennings is no longer a member of the House Environmental Matters Committee, which deals with issues pertaining to animals, hunting, agriculture, natural resources and open space. Jennings is in the feed business and has been a big advocate for horse issues. He is now assigned to the Ways and Means Committee, which hears tax matters and will hear slot machine legislation, if introduced. It is certain, however, that Jennings will continue to be a tremendous help in horse-related matters.

Delegate Virginia Clagett, an avid horsewoman, was elected vice chairman of the Anne Arundel County Delegation. Clagett is a member of the House Environmental Matters Committee and serves on agricultural and natural resources subcommittees. She, too, has been tremendously helpful to the equine community.

Sen. David Brinkley, a longtime horseman, has been elected by his fellow Republicans in the Senate to be the minority leader. He is a member of the Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus and the Maryland Rural Caucus. This should benefit the horse community.

Also in the Senate, Roy Dyson has become the vice chairman of the Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee. Sen. Dyson, too, is a member of the Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus and the Maryland Rural Caucus. Both Brinkley and Dyson are longtime friends of agriculture and rural endeavors and have an innate understanding of the importance of horses in Maryland's tradition and economy.

On the other hand, Gov. Martin O'Malley has thus far represented an urban area, and no one seems to have a grasp on his positions, if any, regarding rural or country sports. Let's hope that he listens well and is willing to learn. We do know that he is earnestly interested in saving Maryland's horse racing industry; how he plans to do so is still not known. However, he has promised to do "everything possible to protect horse racing in Maryland, including its crown jewel, The Preakness." He has also promised to "fully fund Program Open Space to protect Maryland's parkland and natural resources from the pressures of sprawl."

The state's budget is always an issue of interest. The reported \$400 million structural deficit, which is due to an unfunded education mandate passed by the General Assembly in the 2002 session, needs to be addressed. The talk is that "tax reform or overhaul" (translation: tax increases) will be needed and will be addressed in the 2008

General Assembly. This, of course, is bad news for all of us. Other issues that affect all Marylanders include "clean" cars and other environmental initiatives, possible abolition of the death penalty, increased subsidized health care, and early voting.

All in all, the first year of a four-year term is one of political posturing as new legislators and the new governor feel their way through the legislative process. The session's opening day, however, seemed filled with optimism. How long the "honeymoon" will last is anyone's guess!

The Maryland General Assembly's website, mlis.state.md.us, is packed with all sorts of information. You can find the status of legislation, bill hearings, legislators' biographical information, contact information, and much, much more.

STAY TUNED! Next month's column will provide more detailed information on legislation of interest to the equine community.

Nancy Hill is a lobbyist in Annapolis and has been a lifelong horse person.

Sharpsburg Charges Filed

According to the Humane Society of Washington County, Barbara Reinken, owner of the Sharpsburg farm where 74 ailing horses were seized on Dec. 2, surrendered herself to authorities on Dec. 22 in response to criminal charges filed against her. She was formally charged with 73 misdemeanor counts of abuse or neglect of animals and four felony counts of aggravated cruelty to animals. She has reportedly been released on bond.

At press time, the criminal trial was scheduled for 1 p.m. on Feb. 22 in Hagerstown.

Also on Dec. 22, the civil hearing involving a petition brought by Reinken for the return of all of her horses was reportedly given a continuance. The court date had not been established at this writing.

Of the 74 horses seized at the Sharpsburg property, one died en route to a veterinary facility and two have reportedly been eutha-

No one seems to have a grasp on Gov. Martin O'Malley's positions, if any, regarding rural or country sports.

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nized. The 22 horses who were not sent to Days End Farm in Lisbon or to other private farms after their confiscation were relocated to another Washington County farm on Dec. 17. According to a HSWC spokeswoman, the society will continue to care for them at the new location.

"We are working very hard to make sure we do not lose any more horses," stated Paul Miller, executive director of the HSWC. "It is still too early to say definitely that the remaining horses are out of the danger, however."

For more information, visit www.equiery.com and click on "News & Resources."

Immigration Reform Returns

Several members of Congress recently re-introduced a comprehensive agricultural immigration reform bill. The Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits and Security Act of 2007, known as the AgJobs bill, is the same bill that was passed in the last Congress by the Senate as a part of the comprehensive immigration reform bill. This legislation is supported by a broad coalition of agricultural industries, including the American Horse Council.

The horse industry relies on alien workers to fill entry-level positions at breeding farms and ranches, using the "H-2A Agricultural Worker" program to bring them into the country as tempo-

rary, non-immigrant help.

However, there are drawbacks to the current system. The admission process is long and cumbersome. Another concern is the required wage rate and how it is determined. Only the H-2A agriculture worker program sets the required wage, based on the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR). All other temporary worker programs use the Prevailing Wage Rate, which is determined state by state and region by region. In addition, many are concerned that they would lose some alien workers during any transition period if they prove to have insufficient documentation. Finally, the H2-A program permits a worker to stay up to 10 months in the United States. Some in the horse industry would like to have alien workers for a longer period.

The re-introduced bill satisfies most of the concerns of the horse industry, particularly with respect to the Adverse Effect Wage Rate paid, the application process, and the "regularization" of current workers who may not have work authorization. This latter "earned status" adjustment program provides a transition solution that would allow any undocumented workers to earn the right to legal status and avoid the need for a large importation of guest workers and a disruption in industry practices.

USDA Updates Private Quarantine Proposal

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) published a new and updated proposal on Dec. 13 that would permit the establishment and operation of permanent, privately-owned quarantine facilities that

The need for additional quarantine space has increased dramatically.

would be approved by APHIS and maintain the same level of biological security standards as other APHIS-operated facilities. The horse industry is an international industry, and increasing numbers of foreign horses are being brought into the U.S. for racing, showing, sale and breeding.

There are presently three facilities through which horses may be brought into the U.S. permanently. According to the American Horse Council, which supports the proposal, the need for additional quarantine space has increased dramatically and more facilities are needed to handle the additional commerce. Once rules are adopted, private industry can step in under USDA requirements and fill that gap.

The USDA has asked for public comment on the specifics of the proposed rule. Comments are due on or before Feb. 12. Send an original and three copies of postal mail or commercial delivery comments to Docket No. APHIS-

2006-0013, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238.

If you wish to submit a comment using the internet, go to the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>, select "Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service" from the agency drop-down menu; then click on "Submit." In the Docket ID column, select APHIS-2006-0013 to submit or view public comments and to view related materials.

WE GET MAIL!



Paved but Still Approved

The following letter was forwarded to The Equiery by a trail-riding reader.

My name is Jeff Murphy, and I am an officer assigned to the mounted unit of the Maryland Park Police. My partner and I

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ran into the riders today from the College Park trail ride [members of TROT riding along the Paint Branch trails]. There is some information I would like to pass on to them if you could.

We had originally told them that horses were not permitted on the Hiker/Biker trails in Prince George's County. We have been told this for many years, from many sources. When I returned to our stables I was discussing this stop with my sergeant. He has been on the mounted unit for 20+ years. He told me that horses were allowed back then.

However, once the paths were paved, everyone assumed that horses were now not allowed, as is [true] on most paved paths – which I believe is what's in Montgomery County. We have not seen horses on these trails for years. My corporal, who has been on the unit for 11 years, has never seen them, either. He thought horses were not allowed on paved pathways, as well.

Nonetheless, my sergeant and I went through and looked up all the trails in Prince George's County in our park inventory book. It turns out that all of them are still approved for horses at this time. So until I am told otherwise, horses are still allowed on all trail systems, as well as Patuxent River Park and Cosca Regional Park in Prince George's County. If you are ever questioned again, just be polite

and advise them that Officer Murphy from the mounted unit researched it, and it is still allowed in the books. However, if you do take a trip on the Northwest Branch trail, please use caution and ride in a group, as that area is a high crime area.

Please pass my apologies to the group, and we hope to see you on the trail again. If you have any question regarding the other trails in the PG Park System, just contact me.

Respectfully,

Officer J. Murphy #301

Flying Rumors Grounded

Dear Editor:

Just a thanks for keeping us “up north” informed about what is happening in Wellington and Ocala, Florida. Rumors fly during a crisis, so a competent source of qualified information is greatly appreciated!

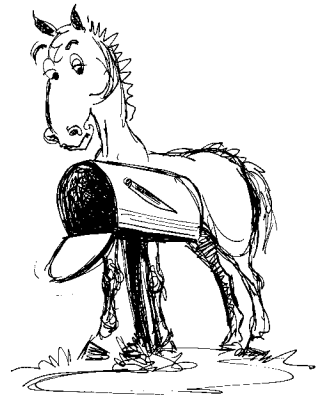
People have to make decisions that involve so much ... the risk of the health of their horses, shipping on commercial carriers, financial commitments for travel, lodging, grooms, rental cars, stalls, insurance for traveling horses, etc., hinge on these decisions.

It is important to be able to

make these decisions based on the most current and correct information. We appreciate your unbiased approach. Thanks again for your effort on behalf of the Marylanders planning to travel south this year.

Hoping for the best,

A Marylander



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