

CASEY: As Deyerle group plans meeting about wolf dogs, local owner defends breed

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Brittany Doss of Roanoke is outraged. The mother and animal lover is upset about a word that appeared three times in Thursday's column. She left me multiple voicemails Friday and Saturday.

The term was "beasts," which referred to [a pack of wolf hybrids being kept at a house at 3580 Windsor Road](#) in the Deyerle neighborhood.

Complaints about those animals [go back to 2022](#), if not earlier, and usually stem from the creatures escaping their confinement. One former next-door neighbor, Ron Sink, told me he moved to Roanoke County to avoid the creatures.

Last week, at the prompting of Councilwoman Evelyn Powers, the Roanoke City Council began discussions of possibly regulating or banning the creatures by ordinance. [Virginia law specifically grants those options to localities.](#)

This upcoming Thursday night, the animals will be a subject of discussion at a regular meeting of the [Greater Deyerle Neighborhood Association](#).

When I called her back Monday morning, Doss was adamant that the animals in questions are not "beasts." She said I never should've applied such a negative term to them. Fear of the creatures is based on "propaganda" and "uneducated bullcrap," she told me.

"The slanderous article you put out is detrimental to my dog," Doss told me.

She owns a 4-year-old male "wolf-dog" named Khaos that's about 41% wolf, she said. He's one of six pets and five children in her home (the youngest child is 9). She also owns a Doberman-Great Dane mix named "Dravyn."

She said there's a distinction between a wolf-dog and a wolf hybrid that the public doesn't understand. One parent of a wolf hybrid is pure wolf, she said. That's not necessarily true with a wolf-dog.

Owning a wolf-dog is "the most rewarding experience as an animal owner you can find," Doss told me. "The way you worded it was derogatory." She was talking about "beasts."

[Merriam-Webster's online dictionary](#) defines "beast" as "a four-footed mammal as distinguished from a human being, a lower vertebrate, and an invertebrate." So I feel on firm ground using that term.

Either way, on June 26, the wolf hybrids in Deyerle escaped once again. And once again they caused havoc and panic in the neighborhood.

At least three of the critters chased and savagely downed a full-grown doe in Jim and Sandra Ryals' yard on Mud Lick Road. The scene horrified residents who witnessed and photographed the attack.

An animal control officer issued four citations to owner Thomas Blanding. Three of the charges were allowing a dog to run loose. One was for failing to provide reasonable care for an animal. All are Class 4 misdemeanors punishable by a fine of up to \$250. Blanding is scheduled to be in Roanoke General District Court on Aug. 5.

Sandra Ryals, who witnessed the deer attack, will be at Thursday's Greater Deyerle Neighborhood Association meeting, which begins at 7 p.m. at Covenant Presbyterian Church, 1831 Deyerle Road. So will Evelyn Powers, the city councilwoman who broached the issue at last week's Roanoke City Council meeting.

Association President Adam Mastrangelo told me the June 26 deer attack and resulting discussions on social media have raised many questions among Deyerle residents. The purpose of the meeting is to "give everybody an update on what has transpired," he said.

There are indeed many questions swirling around wolf hybrids. Just one is, why aren't they already regulated?

In Virginia, the animals used to be — at least on paper. In 1992, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries included wolf hybrids on a list of non-native (exotic) animals, which meant owners had to obtain a special permit to keep one.

But in 1995, DGIF reclassified wolf hybrids as domestic dogs. According to news accounts, the Virginia Department of Health opposed the reclassification. But game officials said the earlier regulation was unenforceable.

Virginia's law allowing localities to regulate canine hybrids came later.

Virginia code explicitly says localities may regulate or ban the keeping of wolf-hybrid canines.

Another question concerns the animals' propensity to attack humans. The website [DogsBite.org](https://www.dogsbite.org) maintains a list, [Fatal Wolf-Dog Hybrid Attacks – The Archival Record from 1980 to December 2024](#). The current total is 25 fatalities, most of them children.

The youngest victim, in March 2019, was an 8-day-old baby girl in Lee County, in far Southwest Virginia. The most recent death was in 2023, when a wolf-hybrid killed a 3-month-old infant outside Birmingham, Alabama.

Yet another question concerns whether Virginia requires wolf hybrids kept as residential pets to be vaccinated against rabies. When I posed the question to the Virginia Department of Health, I heard from Dr. Julia Murphy, the state's public health veterinarian.

"State law does not require that wolf hybrids are vaccinated," she wrote in an email. "That being said, I always encourage people to check to see if any local ordinances may speak to the ownership or care (including vaccination) of wolf hybrids."

Jan Keister, a dog lover and (non-lawyer) administrator of The Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley, raised perhaps the most fundamental question of all in an email to Mayor Joe Cobb. (Keister copied me.)

The gist was, the city should be very careful in wording any ordinance about wolf-hybrids.

"I have seen lots of difficult dog ordinances that fall apart due to bad definitions," Keister warned. "The difficulty is in the legal definition.

"A dog is a domesticated animal of the species *Canis lupus familiaris*, bred for companionship and various tasks. A wolf is a wild animal of the species *Canis lupus*, known for its pack behavior and hunting skills.

"A wolf hybrid (or wolfdog) is a cross between a wolf and a dog, or between two wolfdogs.

"The key differences lie in their origins, behavior, and interactions with humans. Wolves can be tamed, and dogs can go wild (as in two popular Jack London books), and dog breeds like the Husky and Malamute look like wolves, so how do you tell dogs from wolves and define them legally?"

So as you can see, there's still lots to hash out regarding wolf hybrids and whether anything should or can be done about them in the city of Roanoke.

I'm sure we'll learn more Thursday night, at the Greater Deyerle Neighborhood Association meeting.

Maybe I'll see you there.

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