



1,000 UVic bunnies to get reprieve south of the border

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An animal activist has been granted a permit to transport 1,000 rabbits from the University of Victoria to an animal rescue sanctuary in Texas, saving them from a planned cull.

The Ministry of Environment has given its official approval to Laura-Leah Shaw, a former federal Green Party candidate, to transport the bunnies to the Wild Rose Rescue Ranch. in East Texas.

"They were the only organization that got back to me," said Shaw. "Out of all the places in North America, and they had the capacity."

The university had originally planned to trap and eradicate all but 200 of the furry creatures, but another animal lover was able to obtain a B.C. Supreme Court injunction to prevent this for the time being. Both sides are next due in court Aug. 20.

That extra time allowed Shaw to find Wild Rose, which offers a 50-acre sanctuary. It will even provide a 600-square-foot facility in order to acclimatize the animals to the warmer Texas weather.

Georganne Lenham of the Rescue Ranch said she was happy to accommodate the rabbits when approached by Shaw with the idea.

"We have a love of animals. I'm particularly fond of rabbits, and was happy to help. We'd love to have them live out their lives free and content."

Brought together by an Internet meme

The way that Lenham and Shaw found each other is a story unto itself.

A few years ago Georganne wrote a short story entitled "Noah and the Bunnies," about a homing pigeon that was in her rehab and took a certain motherly instinct to some orphaned bunnies. She emailed the story to a friend, and before anyone knew, it had gone viral and landed in Laura-Leah Shaw's inbox. That's when Shaw contacted the Wild Rose, and that's how 1,000 rabbits may be saved.

Lenham added that she has never had such a large number of animals offered to her ranch but gets calls all the time.

"We're a licensed rehabilitator in the state of Texas, so my name and number is available to different agencies around the state such as game wardens. If there is an orphaned animal, they'll usually bring it to me."

A community effort

Patty Pitts, a media communications liaison at UVic, confirmed that the university is on board with the idea -- provided that the logistics of collecting, transporting and neutering the rabbits are taken care of in a timely manner.

Shaw says she will begin removing the rabbits from UVic's campus as soon as she can, and was scheduled to talk with administrators later this week. That means it's possible Friday's court decision won't matter either way.

A non-profit animal rights group called Fur-Bearer Defenders has donated \$50,000 for the veterinary costs of spaying and neutering. Volunteer groups and fundraising have already started to pay for the transportation of the rabbits.

Adrian Nelson, a media spokesman for the group, says they have many members in the area who support saving the UVic bunnies.

"We rely solely on donations, and when one of our members brought this cause to our attention, we were happy to step forward."

Shaw is also in talks with two other sanctuaries that want to take in some of the rabbits. One is being constructed in Coombs, B.C., which will be able to take in around 400, and the other is a private residence on Vancouver Island that has offered to take up to 60 rabbits.