



**FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE ANIMAL RESCUE AND REHABILITATION**  
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My name is Claudia Supensky and I am the licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator for For Heaven's Sake Animal Rescue & Rehabilitation (FHSARR) in Rochester, Washington. On November 9th, 2017, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) entered our property, seized three fawn and one elk calf and euthanized them based on a what we believe was a false claim of habituation. This action shook us, the wildlife rehabilitation community and the public to the core. It has been a traumatic experience, one that leaves wildlife rehabilitation centers in fear that there is no due process and almost no recourse to dispute what's seen as a prime example of government overreach.

After the seizure, FHSARR hired animal rights attorney Adam Karp and through many weeks of hard work, we came to a mutual agreement with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife that they will not euthanize the remaining 11 fawn at this time. This agreement builds in some protections against further seizure without due process. We don't expect any other deer to be removed to WSU for a nutritional study or otherwise taken for euthanasia. The story of how this all happened to begin with is long and complicated. I am happy to share what I can and give this short version of the situation as we have seen it unfold.

An individual came into our all volunteer organization through our normal process. We thought this individual was fairly knowledgeable and we saw great potential for this person to further a career in wildlife rehabilitation. During the time this person was here, I became seriously ill with pneumonia and had to rely on the volunteer's capabilities to manage operations when I could not (note: I was always available via walkie-talkie, cell phone, and during emergencies or times of the volunteer's absence). We have no idea what the motivations were, whether it was purely due to inexperience or if it were personal, but upon reading all of the documentation released to us through public disclosure, it is my opinion that this person's intentions were not good.

In my opinion, there were some staged photographs and videos taken and as well as those that were misleading (coddling, petting animals, etc.), all of which are prohibited activities clearly stated in our training manual and orientation. Information was reported to a the WDFW rehabilitation manager, a wildlife biologist. Most of the footage that was used was taken out of context, including videos showing elk and fawn approaching this person in an attempt to try to

prove habituation. Important information, such as the fact that they were still being bottle-fed was left out. In my opinion, there were many examples of things taken out of context or staged to make us look guilty. We were shocked when we saw the 29-page complaint. It was difficult to read these allegations knowing how misleading they were and how much trust and support we had given this individual. Instead of coming to me with these purported concerns, so that the matters could be explained and, if necessary, further addressed, she went behind my back. [Note: We have a veterinarian who comes once a week and sees all the animals. She even wrote to WDFW inviting a call to discuss the complaint. She was never contacted for her opinion of the animals or conditions here and our other volunteers were not contacted either.]

In short, while I was away at a meeting with the Board of Directors, we received a surprise visit from the WDFW rehabilitation manager and upon entering their enclosure, the fawns and elk calf approached her. They were still being bottle-fed as this was just prior to weaning. During this phase, they are fairly approachable, especially around bottle-feeding times. Note: during the rehabilitation process, the fawns are bottle fed and stimulated to go potty. They then go to bottles placed in racks, and from there, they graduate to a secure, back pasture with no human contact for the remainder of the winter/hunting season, to be released in February/March when natural food is more abundant. It was during the bottle feeding phase that the WDFW rehabilitation manager determined the fawns were habituated.

We have been following this practice for eight years and never had any objections from Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife. There are no WACs that dictate or suggest precisely when fawns should be released. We have 180 days for all wildlife brought into rehabilitation and can then request extensions when necessary. We turn in records every year with release dates of the fawns so our practice was no secret. Also of note, was that the concerned volunteer had only been at our facility for three months and had ~~never~~ been through a full deer rehabilitation season with us. This person had no idea what our outcomes looked like by the time we release fawns. Other volunteers who had been here longer can testify that the fawns are fully wild by the time we release them.

By November 1<sup>st</sup>, when the WDFW rehabilitation manager had come to inspect prior to the seizure, the fawns were already not approachable. The manager's comment was, "I don't need to see them. I already know they are habituated." We tried to reason with her. She promised that another wildlife biologist would come and evaluate the fawns. She stated that if the biologist said they were not releasable, they would bring in law enforcement to euthanize them. We all agreed that it would be good for another biologist to come to reinforce our opinion that the fawns were not habituated. We also were told that we would receive a report from her visit and a letter that we would have the opportunity to respond to.

A week passed and we did not hear from a wildlife biologist, nor did we receive any reports, a letter, or citations. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, the WDFW rehabilitation manager and ~~several~~ wildlife officers showed up with a trailer to take the fawns and elk calf. Unlike what was reported to the

WDFW Commission, the fawns did not gather at the gate, not even one of them. In fact, the ones they did catch had to be either lured with food and/or corralled into a fenced area and then sedated. Not being able to catch the others, they said they would be back in the following days. From there, they took the deer and elk and shot them.

At that point, the media got involved, and we contacted an attorney.

Where do we stand now? After many communications between our attorney and the State and hours of meetings and hard work, we have an executed agreement with the WDFW stating that the remaining 11 fawns will not be euthanized between now and March 16. WDFW will be allowed to inspect the fawns no more than once a month until the time they are evaluated for release.

As with other rehabilitation facilities, we have been routinely inspected each year and have never had a negative inspection. We have never had another complaint and we have released thousands of animals successfully. I am permitted (licensed) by WDFW to protect and preserve wildlife, and I do not receive compensation—yes, I work for free. It is a very difficult profession and rehabilitators do their best to maintain their licenses, obtain the required education, and follow the rules because we care about wildlife. We are an important arm of the WDFW, one that helps mitigate the impact the human population has on wildlife and liaises with the public. Without us, the public has nowhere to turn to when they find injured or orphaned wildlife.

I can tell you that I am proud of our facility, our volunteers, and all we have done to save the lives of thousands of animals over the years. What the WDFW did to the elk calf and fawn was wrong...they know it and we know it...but we can only hope that this will be the catalyst for big changes and that wildlife rehabilitation facilities will be treated more as respected partners with a voice.

For Heaven's Sake Animal Rescue & Rehabilitation is a non-profit, licensed, all volunteer organization. If you would like to contribute, you can donate to our general fund through PayPal on our web site (<http://www.fhswildliferehab.org>) or send a check to FHSARR, P.O. Box 12417, Olympia, WA 98508.

We do not know what the next months will bring. FHSARR has chosen not to accept any additional animals at this time. We hope and trust that the remaining 11 fawn will be treated with fairness and will have long, productive lives.

Claudia Supensky, Founder & Chief Executive Director  
For Heaven's Sake Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation