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**Local residents urged to protect Bland County by attending
June 4 hearing for Dogwood Kennels permit**
Best Friends Animal Society opposes issuing permit to puppy farm

KANAB, UT (05/29/07) – The national animal welfare organization Best Friends Animal Society is urging people in Bland County, Virginia, to oppose a conditional use permit application from a kennel where hundreds of dogs have died.

Dogwood Kennels, where 192 puppies and dogs died in a fire this March, is trying to get a conditional use permit to continue its commercial dog breeding operations. Dozens of dogs also died there last fall from distemper.

In addition to allowing deadly conditions and dangerous standards for the animals, Dogwood Kennels' owner Ivan Schmucker recently announced at a Bland County Planning Commission meeting that they are planning to spread the waste from their hundreds of dogs on farmers' crops as fertilizer. Dog waste typically contains worms, parasites and bacteria that present a health hazard to humans particularly if it is sprayed as fertilizer on vegetables and edible plants. There is also the danger the waste will leach into the groundwater and contaminate the community water supply.

The Bland County Planning Commission will consider Dogwood Kennels' application for a conditional use permit at a public hearing scheduled to start 7 p.m. Monday, June 4 at Bland County School Board Offices, 361 Bears Trail in Bastian, Virginia.

"High volume commercial dog breeders are all about the profits. It's time to put the well being of the public – and the dogs – first," said Julie Castle, Community Programs and Services director for Best Friends Animal Society.

"If the county gives them a permit, people's health and the lives of hundreds more dogs will be at risk. Not only has Dogwood Kennels been operating illegally and unsafely for years, but the operator has announced his intention to spread dog feces as fertilizer on human food crops.

"Dogwood Kennels is claiming that spreading the dog waste on crops won't be an issue because they will simply treat the waste with lime and redworms. I'm not so sure citizens want dog feces, treated or untreated on their food source, in their groundwater and water supply. Why risk transmitting parasites that can cause blindness, tissue and organ damage to humans?"

"And it's ironic that only after two tragic incidents at Dogwood Kennels are they seeking county approval to operate. This commercial dog breeder is as bad for people as they are for the puppies they sell through pet stores in New York, Beckley, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C."

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Castle further noted, "Even if the county agrees to issue the permit, officials should require better conditions for the dogs and also limits on the breeding. Many commercial dog breeding operations breed female dogs over and over until their bodies give out.

"Many times the dogs are inbred which along with the poor care, crowded conditions and lack of socialization, can cause illnesses, diseases and behavior problems in the puppies. People who buy these puppies may not know of any of these problems till they get them home. They are many times stuck with paying thousands of dollars in vet bills. Castle added, "It is estimated 25-30 percent or more of these purebred dogs end up in shelters, adding to the burden of local animal controls."

To learn more about Best Friends Animal Society and the truth about puppy mills please visit: <http://network.bestfriends.org/truth/news/>.

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About Best Friends Animal Society

Located on 33,000 acres in Kanab, Utah, Best Friends Animal Society operates the country's largest sanctuary for homeless pets and is home, on any given day, to about 1,500 dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, birds and other animals. Best Friends works globally with animal shelters and rescue groups to bring about a time when there will be no more homeless pets. Best Friends advances initiatives nationwide that promote community approaches to make the world a better place through kindness to animals, including adoption, spay/neuter, and humane education programs.

"Kindness to animals builds a better world for all of us."