

Cases Seek “Legal Personhood” for Animals

The Nonhuman Rights Project is currently preparing to bring cases in multiple state courts seeking “legal personhood” for animals. Legal personhood is similar to, but more encompassing than, “standing,” with the overall goal being for animals’ interests, as purported sentient beings, to be representable in court. Currently animals are viewed, in almost all instances, as various forms of property, and property, in itself, obviously does not have rights. These expected court actions are no secret. Professor Steven Wise, noted animal-law scholar, lawyer, and founder of the Nonhuman Rights Project, has presented details of the cases in many forums. (See, for example, Steven M. Wise, “Legal Personhood and the Nonhuman Rights Project,” 17 *Animal Law* 1 (2010)). I also should add that I have contributed research for the cases, but currently am not involved.

Groundbreaking in Scope

The cases are groundbreaking and unprecedented in nature, and involve the participation of many accomplished and dedicated individuals. Professor Wise understands the uphill climb ahead of him. Selling the idea that the term “personhood” should attach to animals is a herculean task in an environment where animals still are generally looked upon as much further down the “chain” than humans. Our jurisprudence, a reflection, overall, of societal mores, will take substantial bending to accommodate the goals of the Nonhuman Rights Project.

Conservative Approach to Battle

However, Professor Wise and his team are going about this in the proper way. Years in the making, the team is taking a conservative path in its approach to battle. Nothing is being rushed and all potentialities are being analyzed. Furthermore, the cause itself is one that, deep down, most humans can embrace on some level if it is presented in the right manner and at the correct time and place. Humans understand that animals are more than simply physical property.