Opinion: Americans have funny relationship with animals

By Hal Herzog

We Americans like to think of ourselves as animal lovers. But is this claim true? One way to answer this question is to follow the money.

According to government, industry and interest group stats, we spend about $50 billion on our pets annually and donate another $6 billion to animal-related and environmental charities. This sounds like a lot until you compare it to the amount we collectively devote to killing members of other species: $72 billion on hunting and fishing, $60 billion on animal research and $240 billion on meat, poultry and seafood.

In short, Americans fork out nearly seven times more toward harming animals than toward protecting them.

Our cultural schizophrenia over the treatment of other species is also reflected in our behavior. In 2010, PETA named Bill Clinton Man of the Year because he had forsworn the consumption of animal products and become a vegan – no meat, no dairy, no honey. Yet on CNN last year, while extolling the benefits of his new vegetable-only lifestyle, the former president casually added, “Now I try to eat salmon once a week.”

Hal Herzog is a professor of psychology at Western Carolina University and the author of “Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It’s So Hard to Think Straight About Animals” and the blog Animals and Us.

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