Nuisance or Neighbor?

Our office can attest to an increase in the frequency of human/wildlife conflicts. We know because of the many requests we receive regarding humane ways to live with wild animals such as pigeons, geese, beavers, raccoons, coyotes, deer, moose, and black bears. Unfortunately, many people reach out to “nuisance” wildlife control operators first. While many use humane methods to resolve problems, others do not. And homeowners who use their services often don’t know exactly what they’re paying for. Consequently, a thriving industry has developed without outside oversight to ensure that conflict resolution is appropriate, lasting, or humane.

To address this issue, The HSUS contacted every state wildlife agency to advocate regulatory or statutory oversight of the growing nuisance wildlife control industry. We also created a model bill and a compilation of the best-known practices from the state agencies themselves. NERO put this information into practice recently when our office was asked to provide expertise to the group Humane Coalition.

NERO Rallies to Fight Factory Farming

NERO recently renewed its battle to stop the infiltration of factory farming in Vermont. When we learned about the pending expansion of Highgate’s Vermont Egg Farms (VEF) to more than double its size, we joined forces with a state-wide collaborative, the Working Group for Sustainable Agriculture, to participate in a public rally and open hearing to reveal the hidden costs of large-scale food production. Without successful intervention, it’s only a matter of time before the corporation expands its current flock of 100,000 laying hens to the intended size of 700,000.

Readers may recall that NERO was actively involved with efforts to stop VEF from building its factory farm in the state back in 1995. Since that time, many of the warnings that The HSUS and other environmental groups gave to officials and citizens about the negative impacts of factory farming have come true. Inhumane animal handling and transportation practices, harmful pesticide use, loss of property values, and improper manure management practices are all high on the list of repercussions.

Laying hens probably endure more restrictive physical conditions throughout their lives than any other farm animal. Most of us think of chicken farms as barnyards where hens run about freely, happily clucking and pecking at the ground and laying their eggs in straw-filled nests. The truth is, 95 percent of all eggs produced in “battery” cages, giving each bird as little as 48 square inches of actual living space. They will remain jammed together for up to two years—their entire lives—with virtually no room to spread their wings and no place to perch or lay their eggs comfortably. They will endure painful foot and bone injuries, de-beaking, and stress.

The HSUS actively promotes raising livestock and poultry under conditions that satisfy their physical and behavioral needs. NERO will continue the fight to stop the ever-expanding influence of factory farms in Vermont and throughout the region. As a consumer, you can use your buying power to help with these efforts by not supporting businesses that raise animals in intensive confinement systems like those used by VEF. When you purchase only humanely raised meat and dairy products—or live a vegetarian lifestyle—you send a message to retailers that you care about the humane treatment of animals. For more information about factory farming and choosing a humane diet, check out www.hsus.org/farm.

Factory farms like those owned by Vermont Egg Farms in Highgate, Vermont, crowd laying hens into tiny “battery” cages where they remain jammed together for up to two years—their entire lives.
2002 Shaw-Worth Announcement Bittersweet

The Shaw-Worth Memorial Scholarship, established in 1965 to recognize outstanding animal advocacy efforts by young people, is awarded each year to a New England high school senior and provides tuition assistance in the amount of $1,500. This year’s winner, Adam McIntosh from Rutland, Vermont, is a charter member of Rutland City Cat Allies. He manages a colony of spayed and neutered feral cats, providing them with food, a safe environment, medical care, and proper supervision. Adam also participates in the Rutland Area Disaster Animal Response Team, serves as a member of the Rutland Teen Council 4-H Club, and has been involved in a number of the programs offered by the Rutland County Humane Society. He plans to continue his advocacy work for stray and feral cats at college and would like to pursue a career in law enforcement.

NERO Gives Scholarships

For shelter staff, animal control officers, and other “front line” animal welfare professionals, opportunities to take advantage of training can be elusive, given tight budgets that are often earmarked for more immediate needs. Fortunately NERO was able to provide six $500 scholarships to diverse animal care professionals throughout New England in order to help people help animals, and themselves!

NERO Must also report with great sadness the death of Elizabeth (“Bettsy”) Shaw. Bettsy and her late husband Admiral James C. Shaw worked closely with NERO to administer the Shaw-Worth Scholarship fund, which was created in honor of their son, Christopher. Bettsy was a spirited, energetic, and determined woman who recognized the importance of cultivating a humane ethic in young people and who pursued this conviction enthusiastically. She will be sorely missed.

2002 Shaw-Worth Scholarship winner Adam McIntosh displays his award with presenter and NERO Program Coordinator Hillary Twining.

2002 Shaw-Worth Scholarship.

continued from “Nuisance,” page 1 for Wildlife Control Operator Rules in New Hampshire, which formed in response to rules generated by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department.

Although we appreciated the state’s willingness to address the need for better regulation, we testified at a public hearing about our concerns that the proposed changes fell short. Such needs as the humane handling and treatment of wildlife, protection of the public from exploitative or unfair business practices, and education of the public concerning means of resolving conflicts with wild animals that are environmentally sound, lasting, and humane were not addressed.

We are hopeful that our suggestions will be incorporated into the final rules.

continued from “Maine,” page 3 program with materials on the investigation of equine cruelty, and we look forward to ongoing collaboration. Reflecting on the experience, Twining commented, “The retreat provided an opportunity for everyone to leave aside old differences and channel our collective energy into partnerships that will build a stronger, more resilient Animal Welfare Program for the state of Maine.”

A New Era for Maine’s Animals

Maine’s Animal Welfare Program has taken on a new face and direction since NERO first became involved with efforts to improve the state’s response to animal cruelty complaints. A newly hired director for the program faces the challenge of revitalizing it amidst staffing changes, legislative changes, and severe budget cuts. In response, the Department of Agriculture decided to hold a day-long working retreat to which it invited a wide spectrum of interested parties—critics and supporters alike—including NERO Program Coordinator Hillary Twining.

The purpose of the retreat was to build community through shared planning across diverse interests; to generate a shared image of a healthy, vibrant animal welfare program; and to create a program action plan. Attendees formed implementation teams to address funding, raising, and planning the public assistance and expertise. NERO has already supplied the continued on page 2

NERO is closely monitoring and advocating several animal bills pending in the Legislature. Funding for state-wide animal sterilization programs through special license plates, discretion choice for students, increased penalties for animal cruelty, and mandatory cross-reporting of both child and animal abuse between social service and law enforcement agencies are among the legislative issues being addressed.

New Hampshire

Efforts to boost financial assistance for animal sterilization were also successful in New Hampshire with the passage of SB 406. It raises the co-payment for owners sterilizing animals through the state subsidized spay/neuter program, and will help to keep this important program running.

Vermont

S266 will allow municipalities to create local ordinances to address animal welfare infractions with civil penalties, giving law enforcement officers another tool.

The successful passage of An Act Relating to Roadside Dog Sates means that animals can no longer be sold along the state’s highways.

The state’s new “Good Samaritan” law will provide immunity from civil liability for people who help animals during emergencies and natural disasters.

2002 Legislative Update

Connecticut

Increased funding for the state’s subsidized spay/neuter program for municipal shelter animals came with the signing of the Animal Population Control Program bill. Animal welfare advocates hope that this financial boost will prevent any additional suspensions of this popular and vital program.

Although passed overwhelmingly by both the House and Senate, the governor vetoed SB 78. It would have placed restrictions on a long ignored but very important animal cruelty and public safety issue—the tethering and confinement of dogs. Currently more than 35 of the 60 police canines are still in need of these protective vests.

Massachusetts

NERO is monitoring and advocating several animal bills pending in the Legislature. Funding for state-wide animal sterilization programs through special license plates, discretion choice for students, increased penalties for animal cruelty, and mandatory cross-reporting of both child and animal abuse between social service and law enforcement agencies are among the legislative issues being addressed.

New Hampshire

Efforts to boost financial assistance for animal sterilization were also successful in New Hampshire with the passage of SB 406. It raises the co-payment for owners sterilizing animals through the state subsidized spay/neuter program, and will help to keep this important program running.

Vermont

S266 will allow municipalities to create local ordinances to address animal welfare infractions with civil penalties, giving law enforcement officers another tool.

The successful passage of An Act Relating to Roadside Dog Sates means that animals can no longer be sold along the state’s highways. The state’s new “Good Samaritan” law will provide immunity from civil liability for people who help animals during emergencies and natural disasters.

2002 Legislative Update

Connecticut

Increased funding for the state’s subsidized spay/neuter program for municipal shelter animals came with the signing of the Animal Population Control Program bill. Animal welfare advocates hope that this financial boost will prevent any additional suspensions of this popular and vital program.

Although passed overwhelmingly by both the House and Senate, the governor vetoed SB 78. It would have placed restrictions on a long ignored but very important animal cruelty and public safety issue—the tethering and confinement of dogs.

Maine

An Act to Clarify the Law Governing Unlawful Solicitation to Benefit Law Enforcement Agencies was signed into law in April. Championed by Maine Vest-A-Dog, it will allow third-party, non-profit organizations to raise money to benefit law enforcement agencies by purchasing bulletproof vests for the state’s police dogs. Currently more than 35 of the 60 police canines are still in need of these protective vests.

Massachusetts

NERO is closely monitoring and advocating several animal bills pending in the Legislature. Funding for state-wide animal sterilization programs through special license plates, discretion choice for students, increased penalties for animal cruelty, and mandatory cross-reporting of both child and animal abuse between social service and law enforcement agencies are among the legislative issues being addressed.

New Hampshire

Efforts to boost financial assistance for animal sterilization were also successful in New Hampshire with the passage of SB 406. It raises the co-payment for owners sterilizing animals through the state subsidized spay/neuter program, and will help to keep this important program running.

Vermont

S266 will allow municipalities to create local ordinances to address animal welfare infractions with civil penalties, giving law enforcement officers another tool.

The successful passage of An Act Relating to Roadside Dog Sates means that animals can no longer be sold along the state’s highways.

The state’s new “Good Samaritan” law will provide immunity from civil liability for people who help animals during emergencies and natural disasters.
Animal Cruelty, would have made several improvements to the state's animal cruelty statute. Besides closing loopholes in the state's felony provisions, it would have defined the term "animal hoarder" and required mandatory psychological counseling for both hoarders and juveniles convicted under the animal cruelty statute. It also would have improved and clarified shelter size requirements for outdoor dogs, defined adequate housing, food, water, and exercise requirements, and added minimum spacing standards for cats.

It sounds like a reasonable piece of legislation, right? It's a shame that success in politics is rarely contingent on reason. From the very beginning, this bill was a collaborative effort of animal welfare professionals, supportive legislators, and concerned citizens. There are many people I could single out for their leadership efforts, but I won't. That's because it was the awesomeness of our collaboration that struck me as truly special and unique. Shelter personnel and law enforcement officers passionately testified on behalf of the bill's merits, lawmakers worked tirelessly on making amendments that would satisfy both supporters and detractors, a professional lobbyist donated his time to keep the wheels turning, and citizens contacted their legislators to enlist their support at every step.

Despite the many, many roadblocks in our path—such as misleading media reports about the intent of the bill and legislators who stated that they didn't think their constituents wanted them working on "these types of issues"—the group never wavered. Right up until the final hours of the legislative session, animal welfare advocates were present to speak on behalf of Vermont's animals.

An e-mail forwarded to our group by Vermont State Sen. John Campbell sums up the effort.

"While we may not have achieved total victory in this legislative session, we have made our presence and issues known and have set the stage for success in next year's Legislature. Everyone should feel proud that the Vermont General Assembly is now on notice that animals do matter, and those who seek their protection will be heard! People, like yourselves, who support protection and humane treatment for animals, must rally together to form a cohesive, politically savvy group who understand the importance of electing representatives that will, at the very least, listen to the concerns and observations of the animal protection community."

I couldn't have said it better myself, Senator. Remember his words when you vote in your next political election. Legislators need to know which issues are important to their constituents, and for those of us dedicated to creating a better world for all of Earth's inhabitants, animal protection is at the top of the list.