We are gratified to serve as the emergency shelter and headquarters for the rescue. I can’t say enough about the HSUS staff who made it happen. With poise, power, and grace, they harnessed and coordinated a fairly darn complex set of logistical, legal, and communications issues. Pets Alive performed spay/neuter surgeries yesterday on nine of the rescued dogs. They will never be forced to breed again.

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• 3 states that produce more than half the puppies sold in U.S. pet stores—Missouri, Oklahoma, and Iowa—enact laws to crack down on abusive commercial breeding operations

• 677 dogs and 9 other animals are saved from squalor and neglect by HSUS teams deployed to puppy mill raids; staff assist local authorities in an additional 4 raids involving 544 dogs

• A 1,000-store milestone is reached when hundreds more retailers take the Puppy Friendly Pet Stores Pledge not to sell puppies
Missouri: The Most Important Battle Yet

Feet bloodied from wire cages. Rotten teeth. Skin and eye and ear infections. Parasites. Bones protruding. And in the case of Tessa (shown below), hair so matted that her back legs were snarled together, toenails so overgrown they curled into her foot pads, and gum disease so severe that all but one of her teeth were eventually pulled.

These are the symptoms of weak laws that allow the puppy mill industry to flourish unchecked. The cure is clear—better laws to regulate the 10,000 mass breeding operations across the nation. But getting those laws approved is a state-by-state battle.

In 2010, The HSUS won one of its greatest victories: citizen approval of a measure to require breeders in Missouri, the state with the most puppy mills, to keep no more than 50 breeding dogs and give them adequate food, water, shelter, space, exercise, veterinary care, and rest between breeding cycles. Winning passage of the new law involved collecting more than 190,000 signatures to get the measure on the ballot and combating a smear campaign by the Missouri Farm Bureau. When Proposition B passed in November, state legislators set about trying to undo it; five months later, Gov. Jay Nixon signed a repeal bill and enacted what he termed “compromise” legislation that dramatically weakened the original provisions of Prop B. But The HSUS isn’t going away without a fight; we plan to strengthen the surviving Prop B protections, hold officials accountable for their stated support of strong enforcement, and launch a 2012 ballot initiative to preserve citizen-approved laws.

“When the people vote on an issue, the majority rules, and the elected officials should respect that,” says Michael Markarian, chief operating officer for The HSUS.

Major milestones in the campaign against puppy mills were reached outside Missouri. Legislatures passed similar laws in Oklahoma and Iowa; the states with the second and third largest numbers of mass breeding facilities. Hawaii and Louisiana also strengthened regulation, bringing the number of states passing such laws to 16 since 2008.

Meanwhile, The HSUS’s Puppy Mill Task Force, supported by Maddie’s Fund, drove truckloads of rescued Missouri dogs to Illinois, Colorado, and the East Coast for adoption. Relinquished by high-volume breeders who were closing down their operations, they included breeds ranging from shitzus to Labradors.

When first rescued, the dogs had matted fur, fearful demeanors, and sad eyes. One very skinny animal died almost as soon as she arrived at the emergency shelter. Inside her stomach was string and a ball of foil, trash that bore witness to slow starvation, says task force manager Justin Scally. “The dog was obviously foraging on whatever she could find.”

Tessa was luckier, surviving six years of hellish confinement before being rescued by the Humane Society of Missouri. Now the “spoiled rotten” Yorkshire terrier leaps onto the bed for a kiss every night, says owner Marva Bulva. “They’re not taking care of these dogs,” Bulva says of puppy mill operations. “I don’t care whether it’s a German shepherd or a Mexican Chihuahua; you just don’t do animals that way.”

No More Business As Usual: Pam Sordyl of Clarkston, Mich., has made a name for herself by hitting puppy millers where it hurts most: in the wallet. Sordyl’s “Adopt, Don’t Shop” pet store protests have been instrumental in the closure of three Michigan Petland stores. The number of the chain’s stores nationwide has dropped from 140 to 95 since the 2008 release of an HSUS investigation into its dealings with puppy mills.

Sordyl also single-handedly recruited 90 pet stores to take The HSUS’s Puppy Friendly Pet Stores Pledge to never sell puppies—a feat that helped The HSUS sign up 1,000 before the end of the year. For Puppy Mills Campaign outreach coordinator John Moyer, the milestone had become a personal mission requiring nonstop emails and phone calls. On Dec. 24, Moyer received a message from a chain saying that all 38 of its stores would take the pledge. He’d beaten the deadline. On to the next 1,000.

Who Rescued Whom?: The treatment of dogs at the hands of puppy millers “hurt my heart and my feelings,” says 12-year-old Micah Staub, who has made it his mission to help care for those rescued from cruel mass breeding operations.

Micah’s learning disabilities have often led to teasing from other kids, but he found acceptance and fulfillment working with 30 of the dogs he rescued. His pride was a boon for a boy who “gets so few things that he can be proud of,” says his mother. In addition to the Bloomfield, Ind., raid—described by one participant as “three days of … animal welfare shock and abuse,” says his mother.

In December, Micah was made an honorary task force member. His pride was a boon for a boy who “gets so few things that he can be proud of,” says his mother. In addition to the Bloomfield, Ind., raid—described by one participant as “three days of … animal welfare shock and abuse,” the task force took part in four other puppy mill raids in 2010, saving 677 dogs from misery.

Newfound Friends: Finn is a little brown dog who carries a big stick: His best friend happens to be Amanda Hearst of the Hearst publishing family. She purchased Finn from a Manhattan pet store, unaware that he was born to a puppy mill mother who had probably never left her filthy cage or felt a loving touch.

Shaken when she learned this, Hearst visited HSUS-rescued puppy mill dogs and saw for herself the results of chronic neglect and abuse. “It’s shocking that anyone can rationalize that,” she says. Hearst founded Friends of Finn, asking her other best friends, including Georgina Bloomberg, Dylan Lauren, Kick Kennedy, and Annie Churchill Albert, to join her in putting puppy mills out of business. Selling tables and soliciting auction items for The HSUS’s Make History Gala in New York City, Friends of Finn helped raise $1 million to support our campaign to shut down puppy mills.