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HSUS Keeps Things Cool for Animals Rescued from Fires

The wildfires that burned more than 460,000 acres of eastern Arizona and displaced an estimated 30,000 people from their homes also forced hundreds of animals into temporary shelters in at least five different locations. The majority of those pets, distressed but otherwise healthy, were returned to their owners, thanks to several animal organizations, including The HSUS.

The temporary animal shelters were set up shortly after the Rodeo and Chediski fires, which were first spotted on June 18 and 20 respectively, began displacing residents in the area. The HSUS's National Disaster Animal Response Team (N-DART) established a mobile emergency facility—a semi-truck, owned by Code 3 from Colorado, that's equipped with boats, a horse trailer, a four-wheel drive vehicle, cages, and a triage unit—in Eagar, where volunteer veterinarians saw 20 to 25 animals a day. Some animals had serious medical conditions, but most were treated for minor problems such as stress, lacerations, and smoke inhalation.

From their base in Eagar, HSUS's N-DART members also monitored an Apache Indian reservation in nearby McNary and Hon Dah, where more than 100 dogs were left behind when officials apparently told residents to leave immediately, without their animals. The N-DART members, some of whom came from places as far away as Florida, Maryland, Missouri, and Oregon, fed and watered the reservation animals daily.

In cooperation with state and local agencies—from the Arizona Humane Society and the Humane Society of Southern Arizona to the Payson City Council and its volunteer Police Department—N-DART members had earlier been operating an emergency shelter for dogs and cats in Payson, about 30 miles west of Heber.

During HSUS's tenure at the Payson shelter, volunteers assisted many animals, some of them rescued by N-DART members and some brought in by evacuees. But by June 28, The HSUS had transitioned out of Payson and shifted all operations over to the mobile unit in Eagar.

But not before some rather dramatic rescues.

Beginning on Monday, June 24, N-DART's Melissa Forberg and other team members joined firefighters, local police, and the sheriff's department in rescuing several animals from Heber. They also tried to rescue a pot-bellied pig and two horses.
In a Texas barn stands a skinny horse named Luke. Rescued from an auction and a saddened and compassionate HSUS member who visited an auction house for the first time, Luke had been bound for slaughter. He stood in a pen with several hundred other horses, most in poor condition, waiting to be placed on the auction block. No bidders looked his way. He was so thin and weak, he may as well have been invisible. Sharon Barrett, who negotiated his purchase before the auction began, then called SWRO Director Lou Guyton to help. Knowing the nutritional and medical needs of debilitated horses, Lou offered to keep Luke at her barn until his condition improved. His skin, bones, and scars reflected a haunting message.

Luke would not have survived such a trip. He was so thin and weak, he may as well have been a skeleton. Guyton to help. Knowing the nutritional and medical needs of debilitated horses, Lou offered to keep Luke at her barn until his condition improved. His skin, bones, and scars reflected a haunting message.

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Smoke billows from the horizon in a scene familiar to HSUS team members.

This is how Luke looked two weeks after a member checked on him from being sold for slaughter.

In the past few years, the people of Arkansas have seen a dog strangled and hung from a mailbox, a cat dropped from an overpass through the windshield of a moving car, and puppies doused with kerosene and set on fire. In addition, birds are still being forced to fight to a horrific, torturous death in many pockets of the state. Although cockfighting is illegal, news about underground cockfighting industry thrives, undeterred by the relatively weak misdemeanor penalties provided by the current cruelty to animals law.

A new law signed by Gov. Bill Owens creates the felony offense of aggravated cruelty to animals and changes the penalty for a second or subsequent conviction of animal cruelty from a misdemeanor to a Class 6 felony. The new law also mandates a state registry for cruelty offenses. It requires distribution of this registry to all sheriffs as well as compulsory counseling for children between the ages of seven and 10 who have committed acts of animal cruelty.

Additional news from Colorado is that the Pet Animal Overpopulation Authority Board, which allows Coloradans to designate voluntary contributions on their state income tax form, has resulted in a total of $243,493 in contributions to help the Animals in Disaster Authority.

In another victory for the animals, the Arizona governor signed a law that prohibits leaving an animal unattended in a vehicle with the doors closed and windows rolled up. The law authorizes peace officers to forcibly open a car to release an animal. It prohibits failing to provide veterinary assistance or knowingly or intentionally killing someone else’s animal. The law also further defines “torture.”

The HSUS's National Conference on Animals in Disaster in Fort Worth, Texas SWRO organized and hosted the event, which included presentations ranging from bioterrorism and the threat from foreign animal disease to developing community plans for animals in disasters.

Presenters included Bob Sessions, assistant executive director for the Maryland Urban Search and Rescue Task Force-One and his partner Sky, whose searches have included the Pentagon in September of 2001, the Oklahoma City Bombing, and the Oklahoma City’s train derailment in suburban Washington. Other presenters included Marilyn Haggerty-Blohm, executive director for the Center for Urban Animal Care and Control in New York City, whose administrative offices are two blocks from ground zero; George Gibson, deputy administrator of animal care for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.
One Saturday at the Spay Neuter Clinic

Saturdays are hectic, nonstop days for the staff at our HSUS Spay Neuter Clinic and Animal Wellness Center in Dallas, Texas. The surgery schedule is always full, with up to 55 animals of all shapes and sizes anxiously waiting in the kennels. It is not unusual for the clinic to have a line of pets and owners outside the door, with every chair in the waiting room full, and all four exam rooms occupied. Saturday is a day when the phones never stop ringing, the dogs never stop barking, and the challenges for our veterinarians are always present.

On this recent Saturday, the veterinary staff would be tested with several emergencies—each one a cherished pet, each needing urgent, immediate care. Perhaps the most challenging was an 85-pound American bulldog (Susie), who was unable to deliver puppies and in critical condition.

Dr. Kelly Bruner took the call, and from the information given to her by the dog owner determined that the dog was in serious condition and needed immediate care. The owner and her husband had both lost their jobs as a result of the September 11 tragedy, and she said they were struggling to pay bills and had no money for emergency surgery. Within an hour, she was on her way to the clinic with a very sick dog.

In the meantime, spay/neuter surgeries began. One of the first animals on Dr. Bruner’s table was a little cocker spaniel. As the animal was prepped for surgery by HSUS vet technicians, they discovered that she was a hermaphrodite, an animal possessing both male and female organs. This can often be a delicate surgery, but Dr. Bruner’s skills and practiced technique soon had the dog in recovery, successfully spayed and neutered, with an excellent prognosis.

Next up was a beautiful male boxer, and during his pre-surgery preparation, staff discovered that he was a monorchid, an animal with just one testicle descended. This surgery would require that Dr. Bruner perform exploratory surgery to locate the other testicle. Just as carefully, she searched with her surgeon’s skill and intuition, and finally located the organ within the dog’s abdominal cavity. Within a few minutes, the boxer was in recovery with a good prognosis.

Susie, the sick bulldog, had arrived, and was being assessed by the vet techs. She was very sick, unable to stand on her own, and had a temperature of 105, which was dangerously high.

While she was being assessed, Dr. Bruner was assisting another clinic vet. A small mother cat and her four kittens had been brought in, and the mother cat appeared to be suffering from poisoning. She was having seizures and drooling. Even after both veterinarians administered several life-saving measures, the cat died. Volunteer staff members provided the kittens with specialized foster care.

Dr. Bruner visited with the owner of the bulldog. The surgery would be extremely dangerous, but without it the dog would die. The owner listened carefully, gave consent for surgery, and then hugged her dog goodbye. The next four hours would be a waiting game, while Dr. Bruner applied her skills yet again. She would have the life of a six-year-old, beloved family companion in her hands.

During surgery, it was discovered that Susie’s puppies had not survived. Her internal organs revealed a massive infection. Staff gave her a blood transfusion to help replace some of the fluids lost during the difficult procedure. After almost an hour, the dog was placed in recovery and carefully monitored until she regained consciousness. She had a guarded prognosis.

By this time, nearly 30 of the day’s 48 animal patients had been successfully sterilized and were recovering well. All four kittens whose mother had died had been placed with staff. Another cat had been brought in to the Wellness Center with an injury, and had been diagnosed, treated, and released to the owner with strict instructions for care. Another 45 pets had received treatment. And the clinic’s reception area was still full of patiently waiting clients and their companions. It was another typical Saturday at the clinic.

Susie the bulldog has since fully recovered. Her family’s love and care helped her through those first days after surgery, proving again how strong the connection is between a family and their pet.

Many of our clients are unable to pay standard veterinary fees for one reason or another. Some have lost their jobs, some have limited income, and many simply find themselves at a place in time where they need a helping hand. All of them love their pets and deserve our respect and appreciation. We signed on for this job because we are committed to improving the lives of animals as well as the people who care about them. And we consider ourselves lucky to be able to help the Susies of the world.
Native Nations Program Heads to Utah

This past April, SWRO sponsored the first spay/neuter and education event for the Uintah-Ouray Reservation, home to the Northern Ute tribe in northern Utah. The event was a cooperative effort, combining the talents of volunteer, licensed veterinarians, and 30 veterinary students from across the country. Nearly 200 animals were spayed or neutered during the five-day visit. Additionally, 25 horses and approximately 450 dogs and cats received life-saving vaccines, worm medication, and minor medical procedures. These clinics have made their way to the Southwest region by way of The HSUS new program, Remote Area Veterinary Services (RAVS). RAVS’s goal is to bring excellent veterinary services to native nations and remote or economically stressed communities.

Besides spay, neuter, and vaccinations, HSUS will be working with reservations to assist them in establishing their own animal control programs. During the last several years, HSUS staffs have been working to develop and introduce a humane education component to the spay/neuter clinics held on the reservations.

HSUS events like this offer opportunities for pet owners as well as compassionate teachers such as Dirza Dittberner, a skilled volunteer educator with the Dumb Friends League in Denver, Colorado. Traveling as part of the team, humane educators got the chance to see and experience things they may never have a chance to again. They return to them in establishing their own animal control programs. The message of animal care and compassion is delivered in a fresh approach to a variety of cultures has been the key that is turning devastating situations into ones.

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