NRRO Helps Dog Owner

It was a case of a dog yard grown out of control. One rural man kept 406 dogs at his Alaska home. He obviously needed help, and we saw this as an opportunity to reach a unique, non-judicial settlement.

At first, this case seemed like a routine one for the HSUS Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS), HSUS’s program that provides free veterinary care to needy communities. RAVS would sterilize the majority of the dogs so that the owner could stop population growth and start to place some of his animals. However, that direction changed considerably when the RAYS team visited the site two weeks before the scheduled clinic and found some dogs with health problems. There were also some humane issues to address.

After we established a good working relationship with the dog owner, we found that he was willing to release dogs for adoption. Over the course of three days, he released nearly half of his dogs to us, which created a happy but immediate problem.

The local veterinary, animal control, continued on page 4

An HSUS team member prepares one of hundreds of Alaskan dogs for a trip to an adoption facility.

Collies’ Camp Days Come to a Close

Much has happened in the continuing and complicated animal cruelty case that we now simply call Camp Collie. This case began on Halloween night 2002, when U.S. Customs officials stopped a tractor-trailer at the Canadian border north of Shelby, Montana (see spring 2003 NRRO Regional News). The 7 by 45 foot trailer contained 172 sickly and dehydrated dogs (mostly collies) and 11 cats.

The owners were charged with 180 counts of animal cruelty. But it took two jury trials and six months of intensive animal care before the couple was convicted and plans could go forward for sterilizing and adopting these animals. Thankfully, volunteers came from across the U.S. and Canada to care for and walk the dogs during their many months of confinement at the Toole County Fairgrounds as “evidence” in the trials.

A Crisis Arises

This past May, the Toole County Fair Board decided that the animals had to be removed from the Fairgrounds, where they’d been since they were rescued, to make way for a major improvement project. The Toole County Sheriff’s Office, Cascade County Humane Society, and NRRO searched for a new Camp Collie site. A warehouse in Great Falls fit the bill.

Always looking for ways to turn adversity into opportunity, we decided to make the relocation of the animals a disaster training exercise. A local animal foundation, the local humane society; and a military engineering squadron pooled resources to transform the warehouse into Camp Collie, Great Falls. The team power washed and sealed the 20,000 square-foot floor, supplied an emergency water supply; and assembled the portable dog kennels. The HSUS purchased most of the 70 portable dog runs needed to house the dogs in their new temporary home.

NRRO organized and facilitated the huge move that included 45 trucks of various sizes to carry the nearly 200 animals 100 miles from Camp Collie in Shelby to Camp Collie in Great Falls. At least 100 volunteers were stationed at each end of the trip to move the dogs, all the while following the rules for maintaining them as evidence in a criminal proceeding. At least eight squad cars from four law-enforcement agencies provided escort and traffic control once the mile-and-a-half-long convoy left Toole County for thecontinued on page 2

After many months and many miles, the dogs (and cats) of Camp Collie are finally in permanent homes.
HSUS’s Betsy McFarland, shown here with a Russian dog, joined NRRO Director Dave Pauli on a Humane Society International trip to evaluate Russian animal shelters. Dave Goes to Russia

This past May, NRRO Director Dave Pauli was privileged to be part of a Humane Society International (HSI) team to visit Moscow, inspect local animal shelters, and provide two days of training to veterinary and animal sheltering leaders from Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, him Macedonia, Russia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. By invitation, representatives from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, World Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals worldwide helped to design an animal welfare and education program for the students. The experienced HSUS team, along with Dr. Andrew DeGraaf, shared their knowledge of animal welfare and education with the Russian students. The students were able to witness the HSUS team’s efforts firsthand and were encouraged to continue their work in animal welfare. The program was a great success and the students learned a great deal.

Welcome to Camp Collie

Great Falls, Mont. VOLUNTEER HOURS: 9am-4pm
Welcome to Camp Collie. This camp was held at the Northern Rockies Wildlife Center. The camp was designed to provide a hands-on experience for volunteers interested in learning about wildlife and conservation. The camp was led by experienced volunteers who shared their knowledge and enthusiasm with the attendees. The attendees were able to learn about different species of wildlife, their habitats, and the importance of conservation. They also had the opportunity to participate in hands-on activities, such as wildlife identification and tracking. The camp was a great success and the volunteers learned a great deal.

Permanent Homes at Last

NRRO continued to play a team-building role when there was widespread disagreement about the procedure for sterilizing and adopting the dogs. After our office sponsored a conference call involving all the interested parties, it was decided that adopters must submit to both a background check (to search for animal or domestic violence or other crimes that might endanger the animals) and a home site visit to ensure that they are prepared to accept and care for the animals. NRRO co-sponsored a spay/neuter clinic in which 103 of the collies were spayed or neutered in preparation for adoption. In the end, about 30 dogs were adopted out to 25 of the volunteers who had worked so selflessly for the dogs over the past nine months. Cindy James was one such volunteer. James was attracted to her two dogs’ calm demeanor. “They weren’t barking,” she says. “They were quiet little souls, just waiting to see what would happen to them. They were so sweet amid all the chaos.”

Legislative Victories

The 2003 legislative session was the best in the history of our office. We had hoped to win at least one victory in both Wyoming and Montana, and we had been excited to just get one bill passed within the region (no positive animal-related bills were passed in our region in 2002). Instead, no fewer than seven bills that benefit animals passed this session. Primarily among them are two felony cruelty bills, which were hard-fought battles in Montana and Wyoming. In both states these bills faced committee tabling, and major overhauls, but also had huge public support. Both felony cruelty bills added important options for prosecutors, and they picked up momentum and support as they worked their way through committee hearings. HSUS members and animal rescue groups added to the voice of animal control, humane society, and law enforcement professionals to get stronger penalties both for felony cruelty bills.

Montana and Wyoming each passed bills that will ensure uniform euthanasia standards. NRRO hoped to create curricula that would allow students in both states to attend available training classes in either state. In the end, about 30 dogs were adopted out to 25 of the volunteers who had worked so selflessly for the dogs over the past nine months. Cindy James was one such volunteer. James was attracted to her two dogs’ calm demeanor. “They weren’t barking,” she says. “They were quiet little souls, just waiting to see what would happen to them. They were so sweet amid all the chaos.”

South Dakota and Idaho each had some progressive legislation pass. South Dakota passed a bestiality law, and Idaho strengthened several laws restricting game and fur farms. Our Montana coalition was also able to defeat a game-farm bill meant to overturn the restrictions gained in last year’s public referendum victory. This was not an easy victory, but was part of a very rewarding session. While thankful for the successes of this session, we are already working on draft legislation for the next two years. We have lost some followers in Montana and Wyoming to help write regulations that will support the important legislation passed this year. We also plan to support HSUS’s Pacific Northwest Office as it pursues getting felony animal cruelty passed in Alaska. Our office had intimated that effort, and we hope our experience in Montana will help achieve success in Alaska.

You’ve Come a Long Way from California, Baby

NRRO we get calls about stray animals all the time. So when we learned that a stray turtle had been found in the Billings, Montana, streets, dodging the wheels of oncoming traffic and the nose of an intrigued neighborhood dog, we weren't too surprised. When we arrived to investigate, however, we were in for a shock. We immediately knew that this guy was no close relative to our western box turtles or aquatic painted and snapping tortoises. His head, flat feet, and deep shell identified him as a male desert tortoise. We took the tortoise into our care and notified the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the local animal shelter, and the local newspaper. We also sent four digital photos to the San Diego Tortoise and Turtle Society, which quickly confirmed that we had a 13- to 20-year-old male California desert tortoise. The Billings Gazette even sent a reporter to cover our lost tortoise story. We expected a few calls the next day, either from the person who lost the tortoise or from people who would offer to take him in. We did indeed hear from the owners, who had legally brought the wild tortoise with them when they moved from California to Montana in 2002. Desert tortoises are federally protected, and only individual animals owned prior to the early 1970s can legally be kept in captivity. But we weren't expecting the call from another Montana resident with a second desert tortoise whom they had found in a local park last summer. We now have two desert tortoises to ship back to California, where the San Diego Tortoise and Turtle Society will oversee their care.

For now, the tortoise is in NRRO’s care, awaiting the arrival of his traveling companion and eating proper rations to ensure that he is healthy and happy for his trip back to California.

Your Help Needed to Make Wildlife Rescues and Other Projects Possible

NRRO is able to rescue animals such as the desert tortoises and other wild and domestic animals because, years ago, we established a fund we call the Animal Health Assessment Fund. This fund allows us to contract with veterinarians, buy special diets, or assist local law enforcement with the initial health evaluations of confiscated animals.

In 2003, several large cruelty cases plus the rescue of eight horses have depleted this fund. If you would like to help ensure that our office is available to address the next rescue or cruelty case—whether it be tortoises or toy poodles—please e-mail NRRO at arr@hsus.org to find out how you can help.
Happy Ending in Horse Neglect Case

In March 2003, a Montana Department of Livestock inspector called our office about 10 horses living in a small pasture who were the subject of concern among passers-by and neighbors. Would we help evaluate the horses and the conditions they were living in?

Upon arrival at the site, we saw that the horses appeared to be in poor shape. Spinal ridges were clearly visible even from a distance on at least two of the horses, which demonstrated either a serious illness or severe malnutrition. Two horses were eating fecal matter. Upon closer inspection, we found two carcasses, one from a horse who appeared to have died within the last five days. The pasture was overgrazed and posed many hazards, including poor fencing and dangerous debris. All agreed to impound the horses for further evaluation.

The horses were hauled to the local fairgrounds and veterinarians assessed their condition. The team presented photos and documentation to the county attorney, who charged the owner with animal cruelty. At the fairgrounds, the horses began a good feeding program and were wormed and vaccinated. The trial was then scheduled for mid-July. Since the fairgrounds were only able to care for the horses temporarily, they were moved to a ranch several miles away where a knowledgeable horseman has been caring for them.

NRRO visited the horses at the ranch twice within a three-month period, and the transformation was remarkable. The horses quickly went from emaciated, dull-coated, and lethargic to well-conditioned, shiny, and active.

The case then took a positive turn when the owner pleaded guilty to multiple counts of animal cruelty and surrendered all the horses to the county, agreeing to pay restitution. The trial would not be necessary, and the horses were now the property of the county.

Since The HSUS had paid for all the veterinary expenses and contributed a major portion of the boarding fees, our office was able to formulate an agreement with the prosecution and defense. The county would release the horses to NRRO for placement at a horse rescue organization instead of being sold by the sheriff’s office. This would ensure that the horses would become companion animals and not end up at the slaughterhouse.

There’s no place like home.

The HSUS has no property that should be permanently protected, please contact

The HSUS Northern Rockies Regional Office
490 N. 31st St., Ste. 215
Billings, MT 59101
406-255-7161

An affiliate of the Humane Society of the United States

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and mushing community were excellent in providing emergency shelter and animal transport. Locals adopted some of the dogs, as did HSUS team members, but most dogs required further evaluation. A coalition of mushers and shelter supporters provided several months of foster care for those dogs.

The dog yard owner still had nearly 200 dogs when we left Alaska. Now, though, all were spayed and neutered, vaccinated, and wormed. It was less than half the number he had owned. He also now has a network of local folks ready to help him care for his dogs.

Get the RAVS E-newsletter

No matter where in the world the Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS) team travels, you can follow along with the RAVS e-newsletter. Whether it’s a spay/neuter clinic on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming or an equine wellness clinic in Peru, readers can get a glimpse into the activities of these hard-working volunteer veterinary students (and the professional vets who oversee them), who travel to the neediest areas of the world to help the animals—and their owners.

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WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR ANIMALS? NRRO has several programs you can participate in. 

**Humane Education**

Humane education reaches children as well as adults. Speaking about dog bite prevention, pet care and responsibility, animal ordinances, the role of humane animal care and control, or the importance of spaying and neutering helps make your community safer for both animals and people. The rewards are many! Your community's dog bite statistics and shelter incidence will fall, animals will be better cared for, and people will be more apt to ask about solutions vs. surrendering their pets.

NRRO helps develop educational programs tailored to your community. Many people ask us, "What can I do?" Do you have any animal handling skills or the ability to travel far to join us in field events? If you are willing to make phone calls, or have computer access, volunteering to improve local animal ordinances or state legislation is an option. In 2003, NRRO celebrated numerous legislative victories and supported a number of local startup groups or special fundraisers. If the rest of the year keeps pace with the above we will be ecstatic, but also very over budget and very weary!

But we are just talking about the first six months of 2003, and we haven't even mentioned that Program Coordinator Suzy Hansen and I gave eight education workshp on HSUS Animal Care Expo and state association meetings. I can't forget to mention my involvement in the Russia project or our ongoing involvement in supporting a number of local startup groups or special fundraisers. If the rest of the year keeps pace with the above we will be ecstatic, but also very over budget and very weary!

**Helping to educate children or adults about kindness and responsible animal care** is one way you can improve your community. NRRO will be happy to help you develop a program and provide materials to make it easy and fun.

**Animal Handling, Clerical, Communications, Transportation, Food Services, Lodging for Volunteers, Human and Animal First Aid, and Technical Rescue** are just a few. If you are interested in being involved as a NRRO volunteer or disaster responder, please contact us for training events and information, or visit our Web site at www.hsus.org/norro for dates and programs.

**Animal Care Expo 2004 in Dallas**

When: March 10–13, 2004

Where: Dallas, Texas, at the Hyatt Regency Reunion

**The HSUS** has developed a dynamic education conference designed for anyone who works or volunteers to help animals. Animal Care Expo is a world-class educational conference combined with a full-scale international trade show, the goal of which is to help those in animal sheltering, care, control, and rescue do the best and most efficient jobs possible. Go to www.hsus.org/sheltering/general/expo_information.html to learn more.

**Contacting HSUS**

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**NORTHERN ROCKIES REGIONAL OFFICE**

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Promoting the protection of all animals

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES NRRO Regional News

The HSUS is the largest national animal protection organization in the United States. It promotes the protection of all animals by working to end animal suffering and to improve animal protection laws and policies. The HSUS is committed to achieving this vision through a wide range of programs and initiatives, including animal welfare education, legislative advocacy, and animal welfare litigation.

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