HSUS Helps in Katrina’s Wake

As the National Guard entered New Orleans to quell civil disorder coming in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, members of the HSUS National Disaster Animal Response Team (DART) worked their way into the nearly obliterated regions of southern Mississippi and Louisiana. The situation could not have been more urgent, with reports of animals locked in homes, kennels, veterinary clinics, and other locations. It was a race against time for our first responders on the ground in the stricken areas.

The presence of HSUS personnel was good news for nearly 130 dogs and cats in Gulfport, Mississippi. There, HSUS team members rescued these animals from the animal shelter of the Humane Society of South Mississippi, which was flooded by the combination of a storm surge with an overflow discharge of human waste from the sewage treatment plant next door. Some animals swam in their cages for hours, somehow managing to keep their heads above water. Others were not so fortunate.

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An airboat moves down a flooded New Orleans street September 5 with animal rescue workers, a rifle-toting guard, and several rescued dogs. With thousands of stranded pets in the city, HSUS rescuers were frantically trying to reach as many animals as they could.

NRRO is Protecting Yellowstone Bison

If you've read past newsletters, you know that our office has helped bison herds on private and tribal lands, and worked on a project involving bison transferred from Teddy Roosevelt National Park to North Dakota's Three Affiliated Tribes.

Many of NRRO's activities have supported other bison organizations such as the Buffalo Field Campaign and its efforts to protect bison and bison habitat. We also joined other groups and coalitions such as the Greater Yellowstone Wildlife Alliance to promote national bison protection legislation last year. This year, we again networked with several environmental groups for an in-depth review of National Park Service (NPS) and Montana Department of Livestock animal handling techniques.

However our major concentration has been in working to protect Yellowstone bison and to help deal with the complex issues involving bison, brucellosis, and public lands policy. The brucellosis scare is at the heart of bison "management." Brucellosis is a bacterial disease that can cause abortions in bison and cattle. Although transmission of the disease from wild, free-roaming bison to cattle has never been documented, the fears of cattle ranchers outside the park fuel the program of containing bison herds on Yellowstone lands and of shooting or sending to slaughter those bison who stray out of the park.

Our office's involvement with bison goes back to 1997, when NRRO Director Dave Pauli was an invited member of Gov. Marc Racicot's Humane Bison Handling Task Force. Pauli toured Yellowstone's Stephens Creek facility with the other task force members, reviewed media reports, and interviewed officials with the Park Service, Montana Department of Livestock, and other agencies. It was a balanced and fair committee that included private, state, and U.S. Department of Agriculture veterinarians, and a professional bison manager. A summary to Gov. Racicot made it clear that there were many problems with the handling of bison at the Stephens Creek facility, including the primary concern that the bison were being handled, fed, processed, and transported like cattle rather than wildlife; these handling techniques may be unnecessarily stressful—and dangerous—when used with wild animals. Our report made a variety of recommendations.

The next few years saw fewer bison leaving the Yellowstone Park borders, and the issue of volume park bison handling did not come up. But in late 2003, projections of greater out-migration of bison and some additional proposed brucellosis testing and slaughter of all bison captured brought the issue back full force. In 2004, reports, complaints, and even videotapes came to light that showed many of the same poor handling techniques that had been practiced continued on page 3
Improving Crow Rodeo

It’s billed as the Teepee Capital of the World. It’s the Crow Fair, one of the largest powwows in the United States. This past July, the Crow Rodeo Committee contacted NRRO and asked us to assist them with public awareness about the humane treatment of animals during the Crow Fair Rodeo.

Our staff provided signs, animal protection gear for livestock, and consulted with committee members to make events more humane. Calves wore protective collars during the men’s roping event, and the women participated in a “breakaway” event in which the rope breaks when the loop goes over the calf’s neck. These measures help protect calves from injury during those events.

This recent networking with the Crow Rodeo Committee and tribal law enforcement has sparked renewed interest in implementing humane treatment of rodeo livestock and in pursuing enforcement of animal cruelty and neglect under the existing Crow Nation cruelty law. Animal issues have been a huge concern for Indian reservation residents within the Northern Rockies Region. State laws and county and city ordinances do not have jurisdiction on tribal lands, and animal cruelty and neglect often go unreported and unpunished. We look forward to working with the Crow and other tribal communities in the future to address these issues.

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Barry Real Bird with a NRRO-provided sign requiring humane treatment of animals during the Crow Fair Rodeo.

‘Off the Chain’ Reveals Betrayal of Man’s Best Friend

President Theodore Roosevelt so named one of his dogs, Teddy. So did Helen Keller. This breed of dog was the trademark of Buster Brown shoes and RCA Victor. Petey was the canine star of television’s “Our Gang.” And Shubby was the most decorated dog in American history, having received numerous medals and the honorary rank of Sergeant for his services during World War I. What do these famous dogs have in common? They were all American pit bull terriers.

How did such a beloved breed come to be feared as a “public enemy” that is now banned in more than 200 counties because their families do not want them anymore or because they are struggling to survive on their own? How did an imported breed come to launch a very special program called the Rez Dog Adoption Program. Every animal that we take to a shelter has a certificate that identifies him or her as an official Rez dog. It tells the animal’s name, which native nation he or she came from, and the unique qualities of a Rez dog. Although it may not seem like much, we hope that this official Rez Dog certificate reminds the animal’s new caretaker how honored and blessed they are to have such a survivor as part of their family.

Rez Dogs: Adopting the Best of Both Worlds

Our office has the amazing fortune of being able to help thousands of animals on the nearly two-dozen Indian reservations in our region. Because of our work, we have come to know—and befriend—hundreds of American Indians who share concern for our four-legged friends. While we are oftentimes called to assist people with the care of their own animals, we also visit the reservations on our own to help the unwanted strays—dogs we have affectionately come to call Rez dogs.

One way we try to help these dogs is by spending the majority of our summer teaming up with Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS), a program of The HSUS that helps teach veterinary students surgical and animal treatment skills through spay-neuter surgeries provided free to needy pet owners. Carefully supervised students in this program sterilize, vaccinate, and treat thousands of animals in our region every year.

Consequently, we come across dozens of animals in search of new homes, either because their families do not want them anymore or because they are struggling to survive on their own. We have transported these animals to shelters for adoption for years, but it has become more evident that these are not just ordinary dogs. Reservation dogs are special animals who have an incredible will to live. They are gentle, intelligent survivors, which makes them excellent lifelong companions and family members. Because of our continued amazement with these animals, we decided to launch a very special program called the Rez Dog Adoption Program. Every animal we take to a shelter has a certificate that identifies him or her as an official Rez Dog. It tells the animal’s name, which native nation he or she came from, and the unique qualities of a Rez dog.

This program has already been a huge hit in Montana, Wyoming, and North Dakota shelters, and we can’t wait to see the response in other states. If you would like more information about RAVS or our Rez dog program, please contact our office.

continued from “Bison,” page 1 in 1997. Some graphic footage showed stressed, overworked, and injured bison. Our office established a small team to visit the park. Some of the previously recommended structural improvements had been made, but the hazing, capture, and processing protocols were still livestock-based and now included even more invasive and stressful procedures than before. We immediately wrote a letter to NPS detailing our concerns.

This letter, plus a follow-up request to visit the park and videotape the capture corals in June 2005 resulted in a series of meetings with NPS that will end in a multi-agency conference on Yellowstone bison handling protocols.

We need your help in providing additional protection for this iconic herd of bison. Please support any federal legislation to protect Yellowstone bison, and be prepared to make phone calls, write e-mails, and speak out for bison if we ask you to put pressure on various regulatory agencies to support the recommendations of the 1997 Humane Bison Handling Task Force.
By Dave Pauli
Director of the Northern Rockies Regional Office

What Have I Done for Animals Today?

What have I done for animals today? It’s a great question, and one that I find myself using as a litmus test while talking to someone about a potential project. At the end of the day, will this project actually be a step in the right direction towards helping animals? The question also is a constant reminder that while some projects help animals directly, yielding instant benefits, others—such as legislation improvements—might just be seeds that won’t bear animal protection fruit for years.

In this vocation it is common to become heavily involved on far-reaching issues that foster long-term changes such as agriculture reform. I find it motivating to try and imagine the actual day-to-day benefits to animals that come from this work. This has made some slowly developing long-term projects seem a bit more immediate as they compete for my time. But sometimes the process works in reverse.

Here’s an example. We saw an ad—for an alligator for sale in a Montana newspaper. We knew the animal would probably die up as a mascot for some fraternity. So we called the seller to advise that selling the gator may be legal, but the way the gator got into Montana in the first place probably was illegal. The seller quickly offered to give us the gator so that we could ship him to a Florida rehab center. Ironically, someone else heard we had an alligator and offered to surrender his own animal as well. In speaking with that gator owner, we learned about a Montana pet store that was illegally importing and selling gators. When we called the Department of Livestock and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, we were told that these two incidents were enough to get alligators included on the “not allowed” species list for Montana and that the pet store would be told it could not import or sell any more alligators. The point is that sometimes small efforts to help one animal turn out to be catalysts that help the breed, group, or entire species. In this case, both reptilian “catalysts” were recently flown to Florida and are sunning themselves in outdoor ponds there.

I admit that sometimes when bogged down on an administrative conference call or buried in endless pages of budget documents, the answer to my question may not be obvious. But for the past six months, I can honestly say that at the end of each day, I have been able to list at least one thing that has had a direct and positive impact on animals. And that is a great feeling.

One of two NRRO-rescued alligators who helped prevent other gators from becoming pets in Montana.

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Promoting the protection of all animals

2005-2006 Law Goals

There are only two states in the country in which dogfighting is still a misdemeanor; one is Wyoming. But this may be about to change. Concerned Wyoming residents have contacted NRRO with the desire to amend the cruelty statutes to make dogfighting a felony offense.

This brutal crime is not listed as an illegal offense in many American Indian reservations’ ordinances. This lack of strong enforcement and weak laws within Wyoming could be the reason the number of pit bulls has increased and why, on April 5, 2005, five pit bulls were stolen from the animal shelter in Douglas, which was holding the dogs as evidence in a cruelty case. The HSUS has offered a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for stealing the dogs.

Felony animal cruelty laws have been passed in 42 states, but North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah are not among them. Cruelty seizures and complaints in these states have escalated. Some agencies hesitate to go forward with a cruelty investigation because of minimal penalties and the high costs of animal care during a trial. Felony status for animal fighting and acts of egregious cruelty elevates the seriousness of these crimes and increases the incentive of law enforcement and judicial officials to investigate and prosecute them.

NRRO is working to propose and pass felony legislation in all four states. If you would like to assist, contact our office. You can help make phone calls, write letters, and voice support to legislators.

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