FL Closer to Animal-Friend Plate

We’re on our way! Despite some setbacks, the Florida animal-friend license plate is closer to reality. Once it’s available, the license plate could provide millions of dollars for the sterilization of dogs and cats throughout the state for years to come.

On December 1 of last year, SERO staff, on behalf of the Florida Animal Friend Coalition, delivered more than 22,000 surveys to the state Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to start the process of getting the license plate approved by the Florida Legislature. The surveys represent Florida drivers who are interested in purchasing the plate when it becomes available.

The state requirement that was not met was one requiring a $60,000 fee to pay in advance for the development of the plate. However, the legislation filed to create the plate also allows for the first proceeds from plate sales to pay that fee.

The primary sponsors for the Florida continued on page 2

SERO Responds to Disasters on Two Coasts

Fall 2003 brought natural disasters to both coasts of the United States. In September, Hurricane Isabel moved inland as a Category 2 storm impacting North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland. In October, Southern California experienced the worst wildfires in its history. SERO Director Laura Bevan joined the HSUS National Disaster Animal Response Team (N-DART) to help animals on both coasts.

Isabel Animal Impact Light Thanks to Preparation

Hurricane Isabel brought wind and water damage to the states it impacted. In North Carolina, the State Animal Response Team (SART) coordinated the opening of 13 temporary animal shelters set up near Red Cross shelters for human evacuees. This allowed pet owners to keep their animals close by until the storm waters receded and they could return to their homes.

National DART’s job was to conduct damage assessment. Bevan coordinated the teams that spread out across the coast, checking on animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and the overall impact of the storm on animals. Aside from discovering a destroyed poultry farm with about 400 chickens injured and roaming loose, The HSUS quickly determined that overall the state’s animals had fared well.

“I think all the work and preparation paid off during Hurricane Isabel,” says Melissa Seide Rubin, HSUS vice president of field services. “For the most part, local officials were able to take care of their own needs.”

California Firestorms Wreak Deadly Havoc

The Southern California wildfires were a different situation. At least five victims reportedly died with their dogs by their side. Another victim was critically burned when she apparently tried to save her cat. Others died trying to evacuate their horses through the flames. Those were the kinds of scenes The HSUS tried to prevent as N-DART worked with local humane and animal control officials to urge residents to take preparatory steps as the fires approached. We also helped to evacuate animals when they were in the path of the flames or when they were in restricted areas where the owners were not able to provide care.

Bevan and HSUS disaster team member Melissa Forberg of Walton County, Florida, traveled to San Bernardino County to join more than 25 N-DART members and volunteers working with local animal services and the Humane Society of the San Bernardino Valley to set up a huge pet-continued on page 2
T he Florida Manatee will maintain its endangered status in Florida for at least another year. Last November, the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) postponed consideration of downlisting the manatee from endangered to threatened. SERO staff joined other members of the Manatee Coalition, including Save the Manatee Club, to oppose the downlisting at an FWC meeting in the Keys. “The proposal to downlist the manatee was based purely on political considerations, not whether this gentle mammal was actually out of the woods,” said SERO Director Laura Bevan. “In fact, scientific studies, including one by FWC’s own Florida Marine Research Institute, have determined that Florida’s manatee population could be reduced by more than 50 percent within the next 45 years.” The Commission tentatively plans to reconsider downlisting the manatee later this year. With the number of manatees dying at all-time highs, the Manatee Coalition will continue to oppose efforts to reduce protections for this species.

Legislative News

S ERO is supporting the following bills in our region. To learn more, visit www.hsus.org/sero.

Alabama
- SB 41, humane euthanasia of shelter animals and certification of euthanasia technicians
- HB 91, mandatory sterilization of animals adopted from shelters

Florida
- HB 2115.S.B.1306, animal-friend license plate
- S.B. 1418, prohibition of Venezuelan rodeo, in which bulls are flipped by their tails

Mississippi
- S.B. 2703, an upgrade of animal cruelty laws, including felony provisions
- H.B. 109 allows non-economic damages to someone whose pet is intentionally killed by another

South Carolina
- Bonding provisions for the care of animals seized during animal cruelty cases (no number at this time)
- S. 783 targets animal hoarders and sets up bonding provisions to cover the cost of animal care in such cases
Director's Report

By Laura Bevan
Director of the Southeast Regional Office

Fifty Years to be Proud of!

Happy 50th anniversary, HSUS! In 1954, a small group of humanitarians created a national animal protection organization with the vision of making the world better for animals and humans alike. Their vision was summed up in this statement: “The HSUS is dedicated to creating a world where our relationship with animals is guided by compassion. We seek a truly humane society in which animals are respected for their intrinsic value, and where the human-animal bond is strong.” That sounds wonderful—even easy—but the last 50 years have been filled with challenges and setbacks our founders couldn't have imagined.

My personal history with The HSUS began in 1987, when I became SERO's program coordinator. Armed with a love of animals and a family history of involvement with local humane societies, I didn't comprehend the breadth and depth of HSUS's involvement in all kinds of animal issues. I also had no clue that my job would include seeing some of the most horrendous cruelties perpetrated on living creatures and dealing with people in some of their most selfish, barbaric moments. Thankfully, the balance is that some of the most wonderful people are on the animals' side, and it is invigorating to work with them. It is both the best and worst of jobs.

Of course, working for The HSUS is more than a job. There is no 9 to 5 with an hour lunch. It is more a way of life, working to accomplish what we want, and the need to do so never ends. Just in the last 17 years of our joint history, the organization and the issues have expanded dramatically. In the Southeast region alone, we have been at the forefront of such issues as animal sacrifice, greyhound racing, drug use in horse racing, animal fighting, hog dog rodeos, disaster planning and response, and the protection of the manatee. We have passed major legislation concerning humane euthanasia of shelter animals and livestock, felony animal cruelty, banning dog and cat fur products, regulating pet dealers and dangerous dogs, creating animal-friendly license plates, and much more.

The HSUS's 50th anniversary gives us an opportunity to look back over the past half century and reassess our goals for the next 50. It is also a time for me to look back over the past 17 years. If I chose my most notable contribution to HSUS's history, it would be my involvement in the development of disaster planning and response for animals. Hurricane Andrew changed my life and shifted The HSUS from an organization that simply responded to help animals impacted by disasters to one that leads the charge for local, state, and the federal governments to include animals in their emergency plans. In the 12 years since Andrew, we have come so far, but we still have a long way to go. Here's to the next 50 years!