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Fears about what El Niño had in store for the West Coast were realized during the first two weeks of February when, one after another, a chain of severe storms slammed into California. The fierce weather system caused dangerously high surf in coastal areas and brought record amounts of rainfall, causing creeks, rivers, and lakes to overflow their banks. The resulting floods and mudslides forced the evacuation of thousands of people along with their pets, horses, and other livestock. In all, more than half of California’s 58 counties had been declared disaster areas by the end of the month.

Early on, WCRO staff and The HSUS’s disaster services section were on alert status and in contact with state and local emergency services officials, area veterinary disaster coordinators, and animal care and control agencies throughout the state. We issued press releases advising pet owners to prepare in the event evacuations were ordered and urging hotels and motels to suspend no-pet policies for evacuees with pets. As weather conditions worsened, The HSUS sent Disaster Services Manager Jorge Ortega and WCRO’s Eric Sakach and Geoff Simmons to the hardest hit areas of Northern California to assess local agencies’ needs and provide assistance. As the team traveled throughout the affected areas, they delivered and arranged for the delivery of pet food and other emergency supplies to animal shelters, boarding kennels, veterinarians, and Red Cross evacuation centers.

The HSUS team also helped shelter workers unload rescued animals brought into local animal shelters and assisted in obtaining emergency funds for one Northern California animal shelter that had been partially destroyed by mud slides. Although additional HSUS staff were standing by to provide more help if needed, the team found that most local animal care agencies had the situation under control. Many reported being inundated with displaced pets and rescued livestock, but operating according to emergency operating plans. “This has been a widespread and terrible disaster for people and animals,” said WCRO Director Eric Sakach. “But it certainly could have been much worse if not for all the emergency planning and preparation over the past year!”

More storms related to the El Niño phenomenon were expected through April.

ProPAW and The HSUS Submit 732,000 Signatures to State of California To Ban Traps and Poisons

Wildlife Protection Measure Almost Certain To Secure a Place on November 1998 Ballot

Protect Pets and Wildlife (ProPAW), a statewide California political committee spearheaded by The HSUS and six other groups, submitted more than 720,000 signatures to the state in February in an effort to qualify a statutory initiative for the November 1998 ballot to ban cruel and indiscriminate traps and poisons.

“This was an enormously powerful and successful petition drive,” declared campaign manager and HSUS staffer Aaron Medlock. “More than 13,000 Californians volunteered to work on the campaign and nearly

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Domestic Violence Investigation Leads to Cockfighting Operation

WCRO Staff Assist El Dorado County Authorities in Search

On December 16, WCRO Director Eric Sakach and Program Coordinator Geoff Simmons assisted authorities with El Dorado County Animal Control (CA) after evidence of cockfighting surfaced during a domestic violence investigation by the El Dorado County Sheriff’s Department. According to the complaint, the victim told deputies that her husband hit her when she refused to allow their six-year-old son to go to a cockfight with him. Deputies observed numerous game fowl on the property during their investigation and notified animal control authorities who, in turn, contacted WCRO for assistance. After a search warrant was obtained by El Dorado County Animal Control Supervising Officer John Vail, WCRO staff lent their expertise to animal control officers and sheriff’s deputies during the search, which resulted in the seizure of cockfighting paraphernalia, implements, cockfighting publications, and more than 60 game fowl. The suspect, who was wanted by the police and not present when the warrant was served, later surrendered to El Dorado County law enforcement authorities and has since pled guilty to animal and spousal abuse charges.

Legislative Update

Following an update on legislative activity and a listing of bills. HSUS staff is constantly in contact with state legislative offices and local activists to assist in passage of humane legislation and to stop bills considered inhumane. We cannot guarantee that The HSUS position on the bills will remain as reported here, as bills may be unfavorably amended. Note: Nevada and Oregon are not in session during 1998.

California

The California Legislature is in the second year of a two-year session. Bills that failed to pass last year may be given a second opportunity in 1998. Below you will find an update of bills that passed or failed during the first session and a listing of new legislation.

- A.B. 21, by Assemblyman Keith Olberg, allows any person or company that obtains an incidental “take” permit for the killing of protected species to by-pass the stricter California Endangered Species Act if the species is federally protected. Passed
- A.B. 68, by Assemblywoman Valerie Brown, will repeal the 45-year-old Attorney General’s opinion that pets adopted or sold through animal shelters are taxable. Currently, taxes are assessed on any fee associated with adopting a pet including: donations, spay/neuter deposits, health exams, microchipping, disease testing, and deworming. This bill, initiated by the Board of Equalization and The HSUS, was held in committee. A.B. 68 has been turned into a two-year bill in order to keep it from being killed. HSUS position: Support
- S.B. 78, introduced by Sen. Mike Thompson, will extend existing provisions that allow taxpayers to contribute portions of their state income taxes to the Rare and Endangered Fish, Wildlife, and Plant Species Account in the Fish and Game Preservation Fund. Passed
- S.B. 80, introduced by Sen. Quentin Kopp, will allow any municipal animal shelter or humane society to contract with veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians (RVTs) to purchase sodium pentobarbital for euthanasia. The HSUS and other animal protection organizations believe the passage of this bill will spur those shelters still using carbon monoxide chambers to switch to more humane sodium pentobarbital and encourage animal shelters to hire RVTs, who may raise the standard of care given to animals in shelters. Passed

Gov. Wilson Signs Bill Aiding Agencies in Enforcement of Animal Fighting Laws

California Gov. Pete Wilson has signed S.B. 196, which allows animal control agencies to impound fighting animals and birds on the property where they are seized if the animals cannot be humanely transported or housed. It also gives agencies the authority to euthanize abandoned fighting animals or birds seized in connection with illegal animal fighting events after 14 days, following a magistrate’s acceptance of a sheltering agency’s petition. Initiated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department and The HSUS, this legislation also provides a means for shelters to recover costs for the upkeep and care of seized fighting animals from those convicted of animal fighting offenses. WCRO’s Geoff Simmons and Eric Sakach both testified and worked on the many amendments to this bill, which became effective January 1.
Despite repeated efforts by The HSUS and other animal protection organizations to end the inhumane slaughter practices and unsanitary conditions in San Francisco's live-animal markets, animals destined for those markets continue to suffer. As reported in the Spring 1997 WCRO Regional News, video documentation and repeated news coverage of the live-animal markets, including disturbing video showing groups of frogs in bags being slammed against the sides of glass containers and turtles being dismembered while fully conscious, failed to persuade the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to adopt more stringent regulations for the live-food market industry. The HSUS and other animal organizations stepped up the pressure on the live-food markets by approaching the California Fish and Game Commission (CFG) to seek a state-wide ban on the importation of turtles and frogs headed to live-food markets.

In a related hearing, this time before the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), WCRO Staff again testified on the cruel and inhumane treatment reptiles and amphibians receive while being transported. The lack of adequate shipping standards governing the transport of reptiles and amphibians into the U.S. has resulted in the needless injury and death of countless turtles, lizards, snakes, and frogs. The HSUS encouraged the USFWS to, at a minimum, adopt the reptile and amphibian shipping standards of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The HSUS also supported the USFWS's proposal to improve upon the IATA standards to: bar the use of corrugated board or corrugated cardboard boxes (which collapse under pressure, especially when wet with excreta), require veterinary health certificates, prohibit the import of animals when wet with excreta, maintain optimal temperature throughout the transport process, and reduce the number of hatching turtles that can be enclosed in each compartment of a box, from 62 to 25.

WCRO Testifies Before Board of Veterinary Medicine

In October, WCRO Program Coordinator Geoff Simmons attended a California Veterinary Medical Board hearing to testify on proposed euthanasia technician training regulations. Simmons testified in favor of the new euthanasia training regulations and made several suggestions to strengthen the training criteria, including requiring that veterinarians and veterinary technicians have an accepted course outline and create a time-line for shelters to comply with the new regulations.

WCRO Helps to Organize a Safe Pets Program for Sacramento

Often, the only lifeline to a sane world for victims of domestic violence is the family pet. However, when family violence reaches a point where the abused must flee or face grievous harm, what happens to the pet? Most domestic violence shelters cannot accept pets. Faced with a seemingly impossible decision to either leave the family pet in an abusive situation, find a relative or friend who can watch their animal, or surrender the animal to an animal shelter, many women choose to stay in an abusive situation to protect their pets.

WCRO organized and facilitated a meeting between representatives from Women Escaping A Violent Environment (WEAVE—the local women's shelter in Sacramento), the Sacramento District Attorney's Office, Sacramento-area animal shelters, the Peninsula Humane Society in San Mateo, and law enforcement to discuss implementing a program to shelter animals belonging to women caught in domestic violence. All participants agreed that a program ensuring the safety of pets in these situations was absolutely necessary for the Sacramento area. "We will be meeting again to discuss how to implement the program from an animal sheltering perspective," said WCRO's Geoff Simmons. "We were particularly pleased that the supervising deputy district attorney for the domestic violence division requested that those law enforcement officers responding to domestic violence situations add pets to their list of at-risk family members who may need to be removed from a home. We hope this arrangement will give women an added impetus to leave a violent partner." We Need Your Help

As part of our First Strike campaign, we are interested in identifying existing programs targeted toward juveniles who have either abused animals or are at risk of doing so. If you have such a program or know of one, please contact Kim Roberts at The HSUS, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037; (202) 452-1100.

WCRO Participates in Cycle of Violence Meeting Hosted by California Teachers Association

On the heels of The HSUS's annual symposium on the First Strike campaign, WCRO's Geoff Simmons attended a meeting hosted by the California Teachers Association. The purpose of the meeting was to help identify individuals and organizations with similar interests that are willing to work together to design a workshop on stopping the cycle of violence. Participants showed great interest in the First Strike campaign and working with The HSUS toward common goals. The WCRO is planning a series of First Strike seminars for the West Coast in 1998.
Animals’ Needs in Disasters Gain Recognition

In August, WCRO received a proclamation from Yuba County’s Board of Supervisors honoring The HSUS for its service during the Great Floods of 1997 (see Spring 1997 WCRO Regional News). Yuba County was the hardest hit area in the state with three human deaths, a substantial loss of animal life, inestimable property losses, and the evacuation of 38,200 people. We are pleased that we were able to assist the people and animals of Yuba County during that catastrophe, and we have since been able to donate some much-needed equipment to Yuba County’s animal control officers.

The Great Floods of ’97 and concerns about the El Niño phenomenon have served as a wake-up call, not only for the animal care and emergency management communities, but also for animal owners. Over the last six months, we have seen unprecedented attention to the need for planning for animals in disasters.

At the invitation of the California Animal Control Directors’ Association, we participated in an emergency preparedness training conference held in Sacramento in August. More than 50 animal control officers attended the meeting.

In August, I was pleased to accept a reappointment to the California Veterinary Medical Association’s (CVMA’s) Disaster Preparedness Committee for 1997-98. I was also appointed to the Flood Emergency Advisory Team for the Office of Emergency Services (OES)/Coastal Region to help ensure that local emergency managers include provisions for animals in their planning. In October, I participated in a disaster preparedness workshop held in conjunction with the Wild West Veterinary Conference in Reno, Nevada. That same month, I had the privilege of participating in the El Niño Community Preparedness Summit in Santa Monica at the invitation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (see page 2). Press coverage of the summit was extensive. I believe the fact that animal concerns were included as part of such an event is proof that progress is being made in the field of emergency management. The needs of animals in disasters are finally being recognized.

On the heels of the El Niño Community Preparedness Summit, I joined with representatives from the American Red Cross, CVMA, and various state and local agencies to present information about animals in disasters before more than 100 emergency managers, veterinarians, and animal services personnel attending a meeting sponsored by the OES in Oakland, California.

In November, I had the pleasure of addressing the Redwood Empire Veterinary Medical Association’s Animal Disaster Volunteer Program in Santa Rosa, California. More than 50 veterinarians, registered veterinary technicians, and citizen volunteers attended the presentation along with representatives from Sonoma County Animal Control and the American Red Cross/Sonoma County Chapter.

Of course, being prepared for emergencies is an ongoing challenge for animal care professionals and pet owners alike. People tend to put off the need to be prepared until they’re actually confronted by some terrible event, and then it’s too late. Being prepared for emergencies is an ongoing responsibility for everyone. If you’d like to receive free information about pets and preparing for disasters, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to WCRO. Please, do it today.

Contacting WCRO

Write: HSUS West Coast Regional Office
P.O. Box 417220
Sacramento, CA 95841-7220
Call: (916) 344-1710
Fax: (916) 344-1808

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