

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Legislature looks to protect NM's animal population (3:00 p.m.)

By Mike Hainer

Posted: 03/08/2009 12:00:00 AM MST

Animal advocates and activists gathered Feb. 27 at the state's Roundhouse in Santa Fe to hear from state leaders regarding animal welfare reform bills introduced in our current state legislative session.

House Bill 159, the Animal Cruelty Bill revises and clarifies cruelty to protect both livestock and domestic animals. HB 781, the Equine Protection Fund, would establish a fund to assist with horses in need; HB 434, Domestic Protection Order, relates to family pets in domestic protection situations.

Senate Bill 127, the Animal Indemnity Bill, provides for a bond from animal owners to help pay for necessary care. SB 185, the Spay & Neuter License Plate Bill, helps with spay and neuter services in New Mexico. Some of these bills may pass both House and Senate and be signed by the governor to support animal welfare and quality of life in our great state.

The news conference and public meeting held last Friday was a packed house of residents from throughout the state. They appeared to let their legislators know how much they care about progress and animal welfare reform in their communities.

Gov. Bill Richardson, Attorney General Gary King, House majority leader Ken Martinez, and area legislators, Sen. Mary Jane Garcia and Rep. Andy Nuñez were all present and addressed the crowd.

Curtis Childress, director of Animal Control Services for the Doña Ana County Sheriff's Department also addressed the gathering. The message is now loud clear. Active community members, as well as elected and appointed leaders, are pressing for economic, social and political value through improved animal welfare services.

In most cases this means continued reform of publicly funded animal welfare services and addressing pet overpopulation.

Animal activists and advocates are also alive and well in Doña Ana County. Many are willing to work hard and help drive reform.

Some progress is being made, but many barriers to the urgently needed reforms are still in place. Local activists are eagerly preparing for active participation in the advisory board to the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley. After over a year of waiting, this promised opportunity is now postponed until next June.

In the meanwhile both the short-term and long-term benefits of resident involvement and contributions remain lost.

The activists and advocates must win out over wasteful practices that have doubled the cost of our shelter operations only to increase the number of homeless pets killed and disposed of in our landfill. If you are interested in making a difference you can participate in spay and neuter work, adoption or rescue work, or local action by joining the many people who are making a difference.

Voting your values to stop the rapidly increased costs of killing homeless pets, and electing officials that will drive reform is an essential step for our community.

Organizations working hard in our community today include Humane Society of Southern New Mexico, Spay and Neuter Action Program, Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary, Doña Ana County Animal Control Reserve Officers, Action Program of Animals, and numerous rescue groups.

You can also volunteer at our community animal shelter, the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley.

You can find contact numbers or Web site links for these groups on our Web site at www.hssnm.org. Just select the *Resources* page or the *community calendar* for more information on each organization.

Mike Hainer is president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.