Nuisance or Neighbor?

Our office can attest to an increase in the frequency of human/wildlife conflicts. We know because of the many requests we receive regarding humane ways to live with wild animals such as pigeons, geese, beavers, raccoons, coyotes, deer, moose, and black bears. Unfortunately, many people reach out to “nuisance” wildlife control operators first. While many use humane methods to resolve problems, others do not. And homeowners who use their services often don’t know exactly what they’re paying for. Consequently, a thriving industry has developed without outside oversight to ensure that conflict resolution is appropriate, lasting, or humane.

To address this issue, The HSUS contacted every state wildlife agency to advocate regulatory or statutory oversight of the growing nuisance wildlife control industry. We also created a model bill and a compilation of the best-known practices from the state agencies themselves. NERO put this information into practice recently when our office was asked to provide expertise to the group Humane Coalition.

To help ensure that “nuisance” wildlife is handled humanely and that consumers are protected, NERO advocates regulating wildlife control operators.

NERO Rallies to Fight Factory Farming

NERO recently renewed its battle to stop the infiltration of factory farming in Vermont. When we learned about the pending expansion of Highgate’s Vermont Egg Farms (VEF) to more than double its size, we joined forces with a state-wide collaborative, the Working Group for Sustainable Agriculture, to participate in a public rally and open hearing to reveal the hidden costs of large-scale food production. Without successful intervention, it’s only a matter of time before the corporation expands its current flock of 100,000 laying hens to the intended size of 700,000.

Readers may recall that NERO was actively involved with efforts to stop VEF from building its factory farm in the state back in 1995. Since that time, many of the warnings that The HSUS and other environmental groups gave to officials and citizens about the negative impacts of factory farming have come true. Inhumane animal handling and transportation practices, harmful pesticide use, loss of property values, and improper manure management practices are all high on the list of repercussions.

Laying hens probably endure more restrictive physical conditions throughout their lives than any other farm animal. Most of us think of chicken farms as barnyards where hens run about freely, happily clucking and pecking at the ground and laying their eggs in straw-filled nests. The truth is, 95 percent of all eggs produced in factory farms like those owned by Vermont Egg Farms in Highgate, Vermont, crowd laying hens into tiny “battery” cages where they remain jammed together for up to two years—their entire lives.

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“battery” cages, giving each bird as little as 48 square inches of actual living space. They will remain jammed together for up to two years—their entire lives—with virtually no room to spread their wings and no place to perch or lay their eggs comfortably. They will endure painful foot and bone injuries, de-beaking, and stress.

The HSUS actively promotes raising livestock and poultry under conditions that satisfy their physical and behavioral needs. NERO will continue the fight to stop the ever-expanding influence of factory farms in Vermont and throughout the region. As a consumer, you can use your buying power to help with these efforts by not supporting businesses that raise animals in intensive confinement systems like those used by VEF. When you purchase only humanely raised meat and dairy products—or live a vegetarian lifestyle—you send a message to retailers that you care about the humane treatment of animals. For more information about factory farming and choosing a humane diet, check out www.hsus.org/farm.
Cruelty investigator for the Central Vermont Humane Society, with NERO Director Joanne Bourbeau (right).

NERO Gives Scholarships

For shelter staff, animal control officers, and other “front line” animal welfare professionals, opportunities to take advantage of training can be elusive, given tight budgets that are often earmarked for more immediate needs.

Fortunately NERO was able to provide six $500 scholarships to diverse animal care and control agencies throughout our region so that staff members could attend the HSUS Animal Care Expo, held last April in Miami Beach, Florida. Generously underwritten by the Hill’s pet food company, these scholarships enabled recipients to gain new skills and up-to-date information prior to the many conferences and workshops. Topics ranged from animal adoption strategies and behavioral evaluations to cruelty investigations and disaster planning.

The investment that Hills and The HSUS have made in these scholarship recipients is already paying off. As one recipient wrote, “I work at a small shelter, and without this help, I would never have been able to go to a national conference.”

NERO must also report with great sadness the death of Elizabeth (“Bettsy”) Shaw. Bettsy and her late husband Adm. James C. Shaw worked closely with NERO to administer the scholarship fund, which was created in honor of their son Christopher. Bettsy was a spirited, energetic, and determined woman who recognized the importance of cultivating a humane ethic in young people and who pursued this conviction enthusiastically. She will be sorely missed.

If you would like to assist future recipients by contributing to this scholarship fund, donations can be made payable to The HSUS (with “Shaw-Worth Scholarship” written on the memo line) and sent to our office. NERO has already supplied the following recipients with materials on the investigation of equine cruelty, and we look forward to NERO’s continued promotion of this important program running.

Bettsy stands proudly with the 1993 Shaw-Worth Memorial Scholarship recipient.

2002 Shaw-Worth Announcement Bittersweet

The Shaw-Worth Memorial Scholarship, established in 1965 to recognize outstanding animal advocacy efforts by young people, is awarded each year to a New England high school senior and provides tuition assistance in the amount of $1,500. This year’s winner, Adam McIntosh from Rutland, Vermont, is a charter member of Rutland’s City Cat Allies. He manages a colony of spayed and neutered feral cats, providing them with food, a safe environment, medical care, and proper supervision. Adam also participates in the Rutland Area Disaster Animal Response Team, serves as a member of the Rutland Town Council 4-H Club, and has been involved in a number of the programs offered by the Rutland County Humane Society. He plans to continue his advocacy work for stray and feral cats at college and would like to pursue a career in law enforcement.

NERO plans to continue promoting training and scholarship opportunities throughout New England in order to help people help animals, and themselves!

A New Era for Maine’s Animals

Maine’s Animal Welfare Program has taken on a new face and direction since NERO first became involved with efforts to improve the state’s response to animal cruelty complaints. A newly hired director for the program faces the challenge of revisiting it amidst staffing changes, legislative changes, and severe budget cuts. In response, the Department of Agriculture decided to hold a day-long working retreat to which it invited a wide spectrum of interested parties—critics and supporters alike—including NERO Program Coordinator Hillary Twining.

The purpose of the retreat was to build community through shared planning across diverse interests; to generate a shared image of a healthy, vibrant animal welfare program; and to create a program action plan. Attendees formed implementation teams to address funding, training, and the public, and establishing a statewide spay/neuter program.

As a member of the implementation team on training for state humane agents, animal control officers, and others, NERO plans to work closely with the program director to provide assistance and expertise. NERO has already supplied the following recipients with materials on the investigation of equine cruelty, and we look forward to NERO’s continued promotion of this important program running.

2002 Legislative Update

Connecticut

Increased funding for the state’s subsidized spay/neuter program for municipal shelter animals came with the signing of the Animal Population Control Program bill. Animal welfare advocates hope that this financial boost will prevent any additional suspensions of this popular and vital program.

Although passed overwhelmingly by both the House and Senate, the governor vetoed SB 78. It would have placed restrictions on a long ignored but very important animal cruelty and public safety issue—the tethering and confinement of dogs.

Maine

An Act to Clarify the Law Governing Unlawful Solicitation to Benefit Law Enforcement Agencies was signed into law in April. Championed by Maine Vest-A-Dog, it will allow third-party, non-profit organizations to raise money to benefit law enforcement agencies by purchasing bulletproof vests for the state’s police dogs. Currently more than 35 of the 60 police canines are still in need of these protective vests.

Massachusetts

NERO is closely monitoring and advocating several animal bills pending in the Legislature. Funding for state-wide animal sterilization programs through special license plates, discretion choice for students, increased penalties for animal cruelty, and mandatory cross-reporting of both child and animal abuse between social service and law enforcement agencies are among the legislative issues being addressed.

New Hampshire

Efforts to boost financial assistance for animal sterilization were also successful in New Hampshire with the passage of SB 406. It raises the co-payment for owners sterilizing their pets.

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Director’s Report

By Joanne Bourbeau
Director of the New England Regional Office

Individual Efforts and Teamwork: A Winning Combo

Each year The HSUS names winners of our legislative achievement award, given to individuals who have advanced animal protection legislation. New England’s 2001 winner, Robert Fisk from Falmouth, Maine, was cited for his award or even successfully pass legislation, Welfare Program reviewed and improved, advanced animal protection legislation. penalties for animal cruelty; and his for this distinction, and thank him for his House of Representatives to ban circus New England’s 2001 winner, Robert Fisk championing legislation to increase the worth mentioning. They didn’t win an award, but the collaborative effort put forth by members of the Vermont Humane Federation in this year’s legislative session deserves recognition and praise as well.

H679, An Act Relating to Aggravated Animal Cruelty, would have made several improvements to the state’s animal cruelty statute. Besides closing loopholes in the state’s felony provisions, it would have defined the term “animal hoarder” and required mandatory psychological counseling for both hoarders and juveniles convicted under the animal cruelty statute. It also would have improved and clarified shelter size requirements for outdoor dogs, defined adequate housing, food, water, and exercise requirements, and added minimum spacing standards for cats.

It sounds like a reasonable piece of legislation, right? It’s a shame that success in politics is rarely contingent on reason. From the very beginning, this bill was a collaborative effort of animal welfare professionals, supportive legislators, and concerned citizens. There are many people I could single out for their leadership efforts, but I won’t. That’s because it was the awesomeness of our collaboration that struck me as truly special and unique. Shelter personnel and law enforcement officers passionately testified on behalf of the bill’s merits, lawmakers worked tirelessly on making amendments that would satisfy both supporters and detractors, a professional lobbyist donated his time to keep the wheels turning, and citizens contacted their legislators to enlist their support at every step.

Despite the many, many roadblocks in our path—such as misleading media reports about the intent of the bill and lawmakers who stated that they didn’t think their constituents wanted them working on “these types of issues”—the group never wavered. Right up until the final hours of the legislative session, animal welfare advocates were present to speak on behalf of Vermont’s animals.

An e-mail forwarded to our group by Vermont State Sen. John Campbell sums up the effort. “While we may not have achieved total victory in this legislative session, we have made our presence and issues known and have set the stage for success in next year’s Legislature. Everyone should feel proud that the Vermont General Assembly is now on notice that animals do matter, and those who seek their protection will be heard! People, like yourselves, who support protection and humane treatment for animals, must rally together to form a cohesive, politically savvy group who understand the importance of electing representatives that will, at the very least, listen to the concerns and observations of the animal protection community.”

I couldn’t have said it better myself, Senator. Remember his words when you vote in your next political election. Legislators need to know which issues are important to their constituents, and for those of us dedicated to creating a better world for all of Earth’s inhabitants, animal protection is at the top of the list.

The NERO Regional News is a publication of The Humane Society of the United States, New England Regional Office, P.O. Box 619, Jacksonville, VT 05342-0619; 802-368-2790. Joanne Bourbeau, director. The office is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and is closed on federal holidays. © 2002 by The Humane Society of the United States. All rights reserved. A COPY OF THE LATEST REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION FILED BY THE HSUS MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING THE HSUS, OFFICE OF THE TREASURER, 2100 L ST., NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20037, 202-452-1100. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT. Printed on recycled paper.