

ANIMAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS COLORADO (CUSTER COUNTY)

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

In October 2006 The PETS Act was signed into law following major flaws in preparedness seen with Hurricane Katrina. The PETS Act ensures that emergency preparedness plans address the needs of individuals with household pets and service animals following a major disaster or emergency. It also allows FEMA to provide all of the necessary equipment, supplies, shelter, etc. in times of disaster or emergency.

With Hurricane Katrina, it was realized that disaster preparedness plans are critical in providing the necessary organization and support to people and animals during these very hectic events. During 2020, Colorado experienced one of the worst wildfires in the state's history. With this, counties started creating disaster preparedness plans to include sheltering of animals within the community. Many counties have not reviewed or edited their disaster plans in many years and are need of changes.

Prior to 2021, Custer County never had a disaster plan for sheltering animals during a disaster. Custer County is known for its wildfires, flooding and severe snowstorms. My internship helped to create a disaster preparedness plan for Custer County to include livestock and household pets during these disasters.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Create a disaster preparedness plan to include livestock and household pets for Custer County.
- Find resources for supplies such as a CART trailer
- Plan to perform tabletop discussions and sheltering drills to prepare for these disasters

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR EDUCATION

I am currently a second year DVM student planning to become a rural veterinarian in Colorado with the potential to move back to my hometown of Westcliffe, CO, which is in Custer County. Learning more about disaster preparedness has allowed me to be more aware of biosecurity and organization during a disaster. During school we learn so much about animal disease and biosecurity concerns, which then follows into our careers as veterinarians. As potentially one of the only veterinarians in Custer County, I will be responsible for the lives of the animals brought into the shelter during a disaster and my knowledge gained from this internship and throughout school will be indispensable.

WHAT YOU DID

Throughout the summer, I attended mock disaster scenarios in which we were given a disaster and a space to set up a shelter for the animals. We discussed how to properly set up a shelter for small animals with concerns for biosecurity in mind. This brought up discussion on how best to organize the different species that would be present in the space and where to put sick or injured animals. These scenarios also included discussion on who would be contacted within the community to assist (volunteers, veterinarian, parks and wildlife officers, etc.).

I completed FEMA courses online to become certified under ICS-100 and ICS-700. With these certifications I was able to become a Colorado Volunteer Mobilizer to help with veterinary related duties during disasters and emergencies anywhere in Colorado.

I was also able to attend the Colorado Cattleman's Association Annual Conference in Grand Junction, CO. This allowed me to have important conversations with livestock producers about their concerns with sheltering livestock in a disaster and also the concerns of having veterinary care available in the more rural areas. This was useful to understand the livestock owners' needs and what could be helpful to include in the sheltering plans for them.

Lastly, I visited Westcliffe, CO to discuss the new sheltering plan with the county's extension agent and emergency manager. We were able to create a draft of the Custer County Animal Emergency Response Plan. We were able to come up with a list of valuable members of the community and multiple locations to be used as shelters depending on the type of disaster and where it occurs. We plan to use other resources such as a CART trailer with supplies for the animals that is always stocked and ready to go.

Figure 1.



Temporary disaster shelter

Barn fire

WHAT YOU LEARNED

I learned a great amount about the federal response system for disasters and the organization of FEMA.

Biosecurity measures and protocols were a major topic of discussion during my internship and I was able to learn all of the people involved and how biosecurity disasters are handled between and within states.

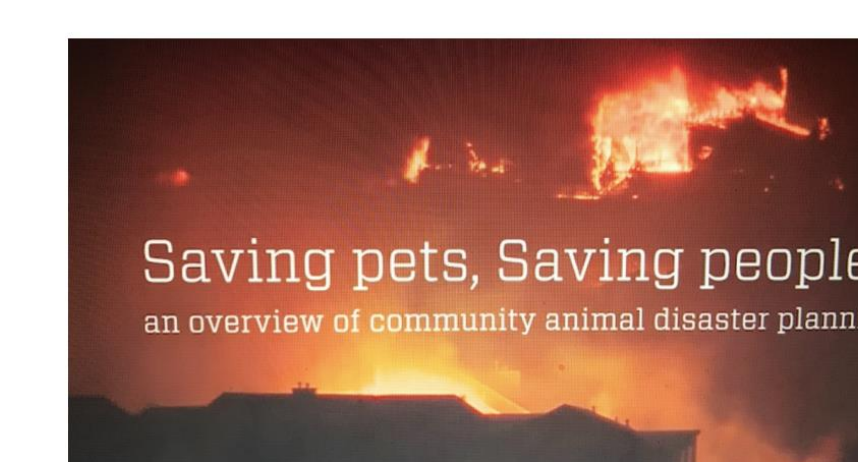
Learning how to set up animal shelters was invaluable and will be a useful tool for the entirety of my career.

I learned how to create and organize an animal disaster plan for my county and follow through with tabletop exercises and mock scenarios.

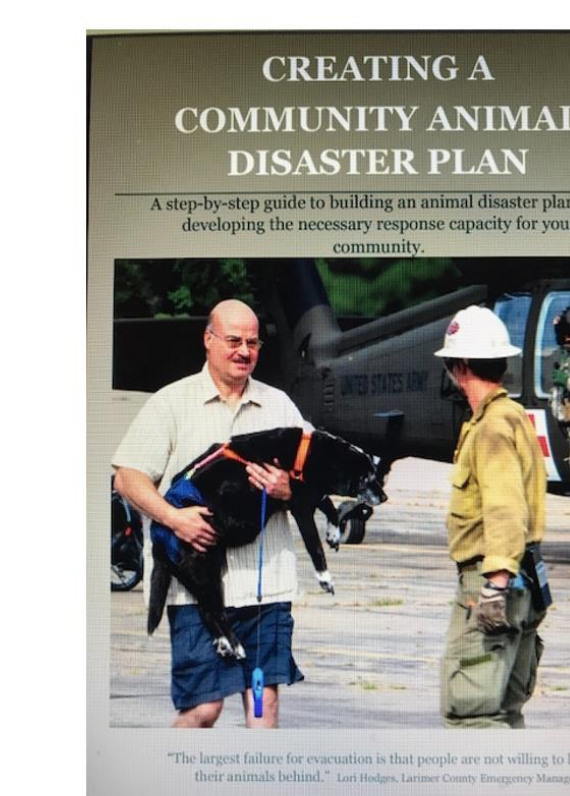


Figure 2. Disaster Planning Toolkit

Community Animal Disaster Planning



[http://extension.colostate.edu/
disaster-web-sites/
community-animal-disaster-
planning-toolkit/](http://extension.colostate.edu/disaster-web-sites/community-animal-disaster-planning-toolkit/)



NEXT STEPS

The next steps will be to bring together all of the people involved during a disaster and have a tabletop discussion about the plan. We then will create a mock sheltering scenario where we will practice putting the shelter together and running it smoothly.

The hope is to have the plan finalized and approved before the summer of 2022.