Disaster Volunteers Needed
by Mike Stoll

It’s time to talk about an unpleasant topic that could impact both community pets and shelter animals: drought conditions in southern Colorado and the potential for wildfire this year.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s drought monitor, Pagosa Springs and Archuleta County were experiencing “extreme drought” conditions as of mid-May. Extreme conditions also existed to the north, east and south of Archuleta County, while areas due west of the county were at the farthest end of the scale under “exceptional drought” conditions.

While it doesn’t mean that wildfire is inevitable this year, it certainly means that we would be very prudent to prepare. For those of us with pets, being prepared also means having a plan for taking care of our animals, as well as ourselves, in a natural disaster scenario.

For HSPS staff, planning for the safety of our own pets also extends to the many dogs and cats in our care at the animal shelter. The shelter population is often at its peak during warm-weather months. Upwards of 100 dogs and cats could be in residence at any one time. Providing a timely response to moving the shelter animals safely out of harm’s way will be our foremost priority in the event that fire or some other disaster makes evacuation necessary.

Creating and implementing an effective shelter evacuation plan is a fairly complex undertaking. There are substantial hard goods that have to be organized and moved, such as crates for animal transport, kennels for temporary housing, bedding, food, bowls, sanitation and cleaning supplies, and properly stored medications. Then there is the task of quickly evacuating the shelter population which will require the help of many people.

HSPS is putting out a call for additional volunteers to help with shelter evacuation. Volunteers need to be able to respond quickly and without reservation when evacuation becomes necessary, so each prospective volunteer must factor personal safety and obligations for the safety of family and others into a decision to assist the shelter animals. For those willing and able to help, HSPS is looking for drivers with vehicles capable of transporting multiple animals in crates. Horse trailers or other transports that can safely move numerous dogs and cats would be especially useful. We also need volunteers capable of helping to load animals and supplies at our shelter, and volunteers willing to help unload and provide basic animal care in a temporary shelter at the evacuation destination.

To volunteer or learn more about shelter evacuation: Contact Mike Stoll, Executive Director, 970-264-5549, hsdirector@humanesociety.biz or Liz Andreas, Shelter Manager, 970-731-4771, sheltermanager@humanesociety.biz.
Protecting Your Own Pets

The key to caring for our pets in a disaster is to plan ahead. An emergency situation can develop quickly and demand immediate action. Several websites provide great information on making a disaster plan for your pets. The website www.ready.gov/animals enumerates the basics of a good pet plan and includes a link to an Emergency Preparedness Pet Kit List brochure that can be downloaded. The brochure was developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in consultation with several national animal welfare organizations.