



JOE PELLE  
Sheriff

# Boulder County Sheriff's Office

**To:** CAACO Board of Directors

**From:** Sara Spensieri

I am writing you to recognize my agency for our excellence in officer response to multiple requests for assistance that occurred last fall during the Fourmile Fire. Monday September 6, 2010 was supposed to be a quiet Labor Day holiday. Mid-morning we heard dispatch air that a fire had started in a very remote mountain community. My co-worker Brandy Perkins and I knew that there was a high wind warning in effect and started to worry when multiple fire agencies were dispatched instead of just one. As I was driving I saw the plume of smoke in the air disseminating from the Fourmile Canyon area and I knew it was going to be a catastrophic event because my co-workers and I have experienced several forest fires in our county.

As First Responders for the Sheriff's Office our initial response to the area was for people evacuations. The animal evacuation protocol is so well known that our Parks and Open Space Rangers opened the Fairgrounds for livestock as soon as we were on scene. As the fire and scene quickly progressed exponentially we paged other off duty Animal Control Specialists to respond in for help with animal evacuations. Terri Snyder and Evelyn Willis drove in to help with equine evacuations at a dude ranch and animal intake at the Fairgrounds.

In the afternoon I responded to the Emergency Operation Center to help with Emergency Support Function 11A which is Animal Protection. I started to receive phone calls from the public asking Animal Control to rescue their animals. Because it was a holiday a lot of people were out of their homes when the evacuations were ordered and road blocks went into place. It was very difficult explaining to people that I would put them on a list and we would start going to specific houses as soon as the fire was under control. All of us worked into the evening hours, long past our normal shift and agreed to respond back to work first thing in the morning.

On Tuesday morning we came up with an initial list of animal evacuation requests and tried to formulate a plan. It was challenging to come up with an operations plan because of the remote location and different access points. This fire was much larger than any other I had been involved with and in the end was the largest, most expensive fire in Boulder County's history. Jennifer Appelman had come in to help with evacuations and also two Animal Care and Control Officers from the City of Boulder. After talking with the people involved at the state level it was decided that we would request help from the American Humane Association. This incident had become so large that it was now at a federal level, Type I and we had to get clearance from the fire department to enter the scene to begin doing evacuations and welfare checks. Much to our dismay, we entered the perimeter in the early afternoon. We responded to 25 homes on that first day, and we stopped doing evacuations once nightfall set in for everyone's safety, as the fire was still very active.

On Wednesday, we met first thing in the morning to formulate a new operations plan. I had taken many more calls for animal evacuations and now had a list several pages long with information. Incident Command told us that it may be weeks before residents were allowed back into their homes. We started giving out assignments and enlisted help from other local agencies. Contact was made with the local fire departments and information was exchanged on who was taking care of which animals. Wednesday was much more productive because they were starting to gain control of the fire so we had access to 49 more homes.

Thursday was an extremely difficult day for all of us. Incident Command had told the public that certain areas were being allowed to return to their homes. As the plan was going into action the weather shifted and Animal Control was needed to assist Deputies in people re-evacuations. After the day's events we pleaded with our Sergeants to at least try a few evacuations and after nightfall we were able to visit 6 homes.

On Friday citizens were allowed to return to their homes on the outskirts of the fire perimeter. The homes in the heart of the fire zone were starting to request evacuation of animals that we had previously only done welfare checks on earlier in the week. Over the weekend very few new animal evacuation requests were being submitted so we resumed our normal working schedules.

Overall we interacted with literally hundreds of affected citizens. We received animal evacuation requests for 112 of the 600 evacuated homes. 108 completed calls of evacuations and welfare checks resulted in 43 animals reuniting with owners. Some of the small livestock and feral cats that we could not catch were provided with food and water and checked on multiple times throughout the incident. Besides just cats, dogs and horses, we helped birds, chickens, donkeys, fish, guinea pigs, goats, lizards, mice, sheep, snakes and turtles. While helping the animals we found none that were exhibiting signs of malnutrition or dehydration. Only 2 burned cats were located after citizens returned to their homes. When these animals were found we went above and beyond to try and locate the owners including using our evacuation database.

This whole experience has been a whirlwind of emotions and a huge learning experience for all of us. We felt devastated telling people that not only did we not find their animals, but that 15 of the homes we checked had burned to the ground. Then we would reunite a person with their cat and they would be crying tears of joy. We worked for a week straight without knowing what challenges the next day would bring. We showed up to work every day as early as we could and stayed as late as we were needed, even on our days off. We put our personal lives on hold because we are truly committed to helping the people who depend on us and the animals in need.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that the Boulder County Sheriff's Office Animal Control Unit (Brandy, Evelyn, Jennifer, Sara & Terri) deserve the **Colorado Animal Control Agency of the Year Award** because of the enthusiasm, dedication and hard work that we give to our community during an emergency and on a daily basis.

Thank You.

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