

Stray dog population takes toll on reservation

By D. "Bing" Bingham
Spilyay Tymoo

It starts like this: On a cold February night a stray female dog comes into heat. The chemical signal is given and she has no problem finding interested males. Three months later a litter of puppies is born.

And this female isn't the only one having puppies. No one knows how many stray dogs are on the reservation.

"We have a lot of dogs that are strays," says Nancy Collins, Tribal Sanitarian. "People don't really own them, they may feed them occasionally. They may stay at somebody's place, but the people don't really own them, so there's no real responsibility to see the dog is taken care of."

Dog over-population is a problem. It costs the community real dollars:

According to former OSU Extension Agent Bob Pawelek, in 1996 dog damage to livestock on the reservation reached an all-time high of \$87,000. Since then the figures have settled to between \$15,000 to 20,000 yearly.

And dog over-population takes a toll on the community when people become afraid of dogs. "I've had community people tell me they used to walk in the evening with their husbands other family members or just a friend down the road," said Collins. "But they don't do that anymore because they're afraid of the dogs."

Afraid for good reason it seems.

In 2001 Warm Springs had five times the national average for dog bites. And that seems to be the tip of the iceberg: many dog bites aren't reported, especially when they happen on a weekend. To date, though, no bite has been fatal.

But there have been serious attacks, such as the one against a young West Hills boy, who was mauled by a pitbull. He's scheduled for reconstructive surgery soon.

"When we get new people at the clinic," says Collins, "I tell them if they are walkers or joggers, they should carry a stick with them when they go out, to have something to hand the dog besides their arm."

The number of dog bites on the reservation held steady in the low to mid twenties per year

through the mid nineties. During 1997 and 1998 a dog catcher was hired by the tribes and the number of bites dropped to five and fourteen, respectively.

The dog catcher position was closed in 1998. For the next three years the number of dog bites bounced up into the low 30s per year. The complaints started rolling in. Kaipo Akaka, environmental health technician, was detailed to the job.

"Two springs ago I could walk around and see females sitting on litters all over, on sidewalks, in back of the police station," he says. "I was sticking dogs in the kennel, and there's a mother with a litter right next door."

Akaka went to work on the dog problem. "When I saw these dogs around I called all over to see who would take them," he says. "I called the Madras animal shelter. They said no. I called Bend, they said, 'Try Portland.' I called Portland. We've survived off the Portland animal shelter. They say, 'If you can get them to us, we'll take 'em.'"

Akaka drove the dogs to the Portland Animal Shelter that night. "They were biters," he says, "but they took them. They had to put them down."

From that point Akaka dug into the reservation dog problem. One of his tools was Madras Animal Hospital. He used them to spay, neuter and vaccinate the dogs.

"I think we're pushing about 400 dogs that we've spayed or neutered from the reservation in the last two years," says Jerud Rhen, veterinarian from Madras Animal Hospital.

He continues, "Because of what Nancy and Kaipo are doing, I see fewer and fewer stray dogs brought in. In my mind the program they have been running - taking the stray dogs in to get spayed, neutered and vaccinated, then trying to get them shipped to a separate area - has really helped."

But it isn't without cost. The average spay or neuter per dog costs between \$90-100. While the average minor surgery costs between \$350-400 per animal.

The money doesn't all come out of the tribe's or the owner's pocket. There's the Daisy Fund.

The Daisy fund was created by an elderly Central Oregon woman who passed on her es-



Stray dog suffering from mange.

Photo courtesy of tribal sanitation.

"If you've ever had something that just itched and itched and itched, that's what the dog feels like 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

Sanitarian Nancy Collins

tate to aid spaying and neutering of local animals, the highest priority being dogs on the reservation. The fund, which spends approximately \$28,000 annually, is administered by the Deschutes County Humane Society.

According to Mary Jo Deuel, Jefferson County's representative for the Daisy Fund, 258 dogs were funded in 2002, and 145 were funded in 2003. Of those dogs, 76 percent and 47 percent, respectively, were from the reservation.

But too many dogs on the reservation create other problems - like disease.

Dr. Rhen figures that first year in 2001 he saw as many as five cases of parvovirus a week, and 85 to 90 percent of the dogs were from the reservation. These days he's down to one or two per week during the summer with about 50 percent coming from the reservation.

The cost of parvovirus can't be measured in just dollars and cents. Sometimes the cost is sentimental.

According to Nancy Collins: "I have someone who brought in a little border collie puppy that came from his grandfather. It had come to him before his grandfather died. It was special to him, but it had contracted parvo and the puppy ended up dying. That person lost a special puppy that had been given to him. For a kid losing a puppy is

traumatic. Losing that dog to a disease like parvo is hard. It's not a nice disease. It's hard on the animal, it's hard on everybody watching the animal. Basically it just wastes away."

Parvovirus isn't the only disease common on the reservation because of dog over-population - there's mange.

Mange is relatively easy to treat. A small bottle of medicine will run about \$125. But the cost to the dog is much higher.

"If you've ever had something that just itched and itched and itched," says Collins. "That's what the dog feels like 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's horrible. They will itch themselves raw. It's very uncomfortable for the dog. I think the dog pays the higher cost of having mange."

There are all kinds of costs to dog over-population on the reservation. Part of the price is being paid by other people.

"If any average dog were to come in for a spay or neuter, most of the time they come in the morning and go home that evening. And that's all we see of them," says veterinarian Jered Rhen. "Some of these reservation dogs are borderline sick and we decide we should try to help them out a little bit. We will donate some medical supplies and time to help the dogs out."

He continues, "When we see reservation dogs, more often than not, they're here for at least two nights and sometimes three. We spend an extra day or two and give them some food, water and kennel time, trying to help those dogs out."

Even Madras Animal Hospital receptionist Phelecia Arizmendi helps with the donations.

At one time she housed and fed as many as 30 stray dogs

from the reservation at her home while she worked to place them. Another time she kept a batch of puppies for four weeks.

When you ask her why, she answers, "It's not the stray dog's fault. I hate to put them out in the wild, if we can find them a home. Especially when they're starving. How can you just send them out there with nothing?"

When Akaka was handed the dog problem in 2001, dog bites on the reservation were at an all time high of 33 per year. It took nearly all his time, but the number of dog bites started to decrease. Slowly at first [26 in 2002], then more quickly [13 in 2003].

"Kaipo was spending almost his entire time working on dogs and that doesn't count the five or 10 percent that I was spending on dogs," says Collins. "But that's just one small program that we do, and that can't be our entire program. We can't afford that much time spent on dogs."

According to his job description, Akaka is supposed to spend no more than 10 percent of his time on dogs. "When we do 10 percent, we're not hitting hardly anything," says Collins. "We're doing the vaccination clinics, we're doing some mange treatment, and we're not really doing a lot of spays and neuters. A lot of the success of the pro-

"We're not collecting as many strays to spay and neuter. We'll have more puppies in the next six months."

Kaipo Akaka

gram has been because Kaipo has spent that time. He's put in a lot of his own time and money. That's a lot to ask of a person."

With tribal fiscal difficulties, Akaka has been asked to cut back on the amount of time he spends handling dogs. "I've worked myself into line with the protocol," he says. "I close the door and stay inside and do my paperwork like I'm supposed to."

And the results are showing. As Akaka travels the reservation, he can see the dog population growing again. "You can see more dogs out there," he says. "We're not collecting as many strays to spay and neuter. We'll have more puppies in the next six months. You can see the results."

On a cold February night a stray female dog will go into heat. A chemical signal is given and she has no trouble finding interested male suitors. Three months later another litter of puppies is born. And then another, and another.

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Mad cow not likely a problem here

By D. "Bing" Bingham
Spilyay Tymoo

Just before Christmas the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the first confirmed case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy - mad cow disease - in the country. Immediately, nations around the world placed an embargo on U.S. beef, and the prices plummeted.

The offending cow turned out to be a 6 and 1/2-year-old from a dairy in Canada. She was born before the ban of feeding cattle protein to other cattle.

To date there has been no other confirmed case of mad cow disease in or around the U.S.

Is the reservation affected by mad cow disease? Well, yes and not likely.

The cattle prices are down and probably will stay that way for a while. But Clint Jacks, OSU Extension Agent for

Jefferson County, doesn't think the prices will be as bad as everybody expects.

"The confidence the American consumer has in the beef industry is beginning to show," he says. "There has been a drop in beef production, but I don't think it's going to be as huge as a lot of people thought."

He feels there's a reason why

consumers are showing some confidence.

"The meat packing industry has done a very good job of voluntarily removing all the tainted meat and tracing back anything that was mixed with that meat," he says.

Even though some of the compromised meat ended up in Oregon, Jacks feels the odds are

pretty high against anything like that happening in Central Oregon.

Even so, he suggests it's a good idea to remember that a lot of imported beef is not as closely checked as American beef. "The beef we import is the lower end products like hamburger from Argentina and other places," Jacks said.

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