

FROM THE NOTES OF  
**GABE WATERS**  
DIRECTOR OF ANIMAL CARE

**Oct. 12, 2018. Somewhere in Calhoun County following Hurricane Michael:**

I'm sitting in the food court of a truck stop in Calhoun County desperately trying to get the most out of the few bars of cellphone reception I have. With so many displaced animals, I'm frantically Googling names of potential partner shelters, relaying needs back to Naples and trying to map out the rescue plan for tomorrow. The thing that's most striking is how important and how sporadic communication becomes immediately after a disaster.

The destruction I am seeing—trees on top of houses, power lines dramatically mangled, flooded-out roadways—is going to take a long time to overcome.

Although we are here to provide services to animals in need, it's clear that the work should have started well before the storm. This is a mostly rural part of the state, and as such it doesn't have the access to the spay and neuter services that help prevent overpopulation. The animals in need here come not from households with two dogs, but from homes with seven.

Just moments ago, we rescued seven Chihuahuas from a manufactured home that was nearly split in two by a tree. It was a sad moment when the owner realized that, without a home, she couldn't care for these dogs anymore. Most of the dogs have been traumatized by the experience and will likely need months or more of behavioral care before they are ready to find new homes.

For homeless animals, we are working to secure transportation to Southwest Florida. We are providing some veterinary care, though we need more supplies. We are offering pet food to people who need it.

Animals provide us comfort and bring us joy, which is what the folks left in the wake of Hurricane Michael need. Seeing them suffer, without access to food and water or medical attention, compounds the misery. Coming across stray and displaced animals is heartbreaking on multiple levels.

We need to be ready for next time. We can take the lessons learned from this experience and make sure that fewer animals are in harm's way. With additional resources, we can send more transports to get animals sheltered before the storm. With a larger budget, can secure more food, water and medical supplies so that we are ready to deploy at a moment's notice.

We aren't going to stop hurricanes, but we can help lessen the suffering they cause for the animals.



*The home of the seven Chihuahuas nearly split in half by a large tree*



*Columbia, one of seven Chihuahuas rescued from the terrifying experience of Hurricane Michael*

*Gabe*