UI Extension Forestry Information Series II
Fire No. 26

Wildfire Preparedness for Pets and Livestock

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Its fire season and you have taken steps to keep your family and home fire safe, but what about your animals? Most families own pets and many also keep small numbers of horses, goats, chickens, sheep and/or cattle whose emergency needs must be addressed. When battling a wildfire, firefighters will do what they can, but they are not responsible for evacuating animals - that responsibility is yours.

Firewise

Just as wildfire preparedness for you and your family begins with the home, all the places where your pets, commercial or noncommercial livestock spend their days and nights should be prepared as well.

Structures such as barns, coops and kennels, as well as corrals and pastures, should be just as Firewise as your home and its surrounding landscape. All structures and their surroundings should be included in your defensible space or have defensible space of their own. Links to information about how to make your structures and surrounding landscape Firewise are listed at the end of this article.

Evacuation planning

A good evacuation plan should include your pets, noncommercial and/or commercial livestock. Preparing animals for a wildfire evacuation requires an extra level of planning, preparedness and practice. The accepted sequence for safe evacuation is people first, then pets and livestock and finally property.

Identify evacuation routes. Fires can move quickly, so it is best to identify at least two evacuation routes. If towing trailers, drive all routes to ensure compatibility with the road's width and grade before a disaster strikes - a stuck trailer could prevent others from using the same way out.

Know where to take your animals. Most evacuation centers cannot accept animals (service animals are permitted). Contact your local fairgrounds, stockyards, equestrian centers and/or friends about their ability to shelter animals in an emergency.

Have transportation. Keep stock trailers in good repair and make sure your vehicle is tow-ready. If you don't have your own truck and trailer, make arrangements with local companies or neighbors. It takes extra time to evacuate animals, so practice loading trailers before wildfire threatens.

Share your plan. Family and neighbors should have a copy of your plan in the event you are not home



Service animals are permitted in evacution centers.

when a wildfire evacuation is ordered for your area. Make sure everyone has all contact numbers (cell phone, work, home, etc.).

Prepare emergency kits for pets and livestock. When building the kit, choose a container that is easily loaded into vehicles. Keep your emergency kits in an easily accessible, dry location where temperatures do not get hot or below freezing.

To begin, gather some handy tools:

- Large bin or tote with lid (preferably waterproof).
- Clear, waterproof, sealable plastic bags .
- A permanent marker for labeling contents.
- Pen/pencil and notepad for documenting special details and needs.

Emergency Preparedness Kit for Animals



Your kit should include:

Identification. All pets should be wearing properly fitted collars with personal identification, license and rabies registration tags. Include a relative's phone number in case you and your pet get separated. Provide ID for larger animals by using a livestock crayon or permanent marker to write your name, phone number and address on the animal or on their non-nylon halter. You could also shave your phone number into the animal's coat, braid a temporary ID tag into their mane or attach a neck band.

Copies of important papers and phone numbers. Cell phones and Internet access could be temporarily out of service, so include a paper list of all important phone numbers (veterinarian, animal shelter/boarding facility, neighbors/friends). Also include:

- Copies of current vaccination/medical records and health certificates, proof of ownership, pet health insurance policies, breed registration papers, brand inspection, photos of brands, bills of sale and current photos of each animal showing unique markings or tattoos.
- A list of all current medicines and doses.
- Written permission to care for your animals and instructions for accessing animal emergency kit(s).

Food and water. Store a three to seven day supply of food and water for each animal. Include non-spill bowls, buckets, can openers and spoons.

First-aid kit. Include cotton bandage rolls and tape, scissors, antibiotic ointment, medical-type gloves, isopropyl alcohol and saline solution. If possible, keep an extra supply of medications your animals take on a regular basis. Ensure each is labeled with the animal's name and description. Include a list of each animal's current physical disabilities or illnesses, emotional or behavioral problems and how to deal with them, special feeding schedule/requirements, dietary restrictions and/or allergies.

Waste disposal. Pack a small cat litter box, scoop and litter, plastic bags for waste disposal, newspapers, paper towels and disinfectants. For larger animals include dry shavings for stalls, a pitchfork, shovel, fly spray and masks, towels, trash bags, spray cleaner and hand sanitizer.

Miscellaneous items. Having personal items such as blankets, toys and treats can help calm your animals. Include:

- Non-nylon leads, ropes and halters (nylon melts).
- Leather gloves.
- Muzzle(s) (if needed).
- Grooming supplies, hoof pick, leg wraps.
- Wire cutters and a sharp knife.
- Portable radio.
- Batteries.
- Flashlights.



Once an evacuation notice is issued, put pets in individual carriers and load larger animals into trailers.

In the event of a wildfire

The call has come and you have been told to evacuate. ***Don't wait.*** Leaving early is the best way to ensure human and animal safety.

Dress for safety. Put on socks, closed-toed leather shoes or boots, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. Leather gloves, a bandanna and a hat can be handy.

Ready your vehicles. Hitch up trailers and park all vehicles facing the direction of escape. Put emergency kits into vehicles and LEAVE KEYS in the IGNITION.



Ready your animals. At the earliest sign of a wildfire, your pets should be brought inside and/or kenneled, and other animals brought into barns, pastures or coops. Once an evacuation notice is issued, put pets in individual carriers and load larger animals into trailers. Birds, rodents and reptiles should be transported in cages. Cover kennels and cages with a light cloth to minimize fear.

Contact the neighbors. Check with neighbors to see if they need assistance and tell them when you'll leaving and where you'll go.

Leaving your animals

During a wildfire, local animal rescue organizations work with law enforcement and fire departments to evacuate as many animals as they can, but sometimes landowners have to leave their animals behind.

If you cannot evacuate your pets, bring them indoors.

- NEVER leave pets chained or kenneled outdoors; the smoke and heat from flying embers are not only scary but dangerous to your pet's health.
- Put pets in an easily cleaned room that has adequate ventilation but NO windows (utility room, garage or bathroom).
- Do not restrain pets.
- Leave dry food and fresh water in non-spill containers. If possible, let a faucet drip water into a large container or partially fill a bathtub with water.
- Put a sign on your house on or near entrances informing responders that there are animals inside.

If you cannot evacuate your noncommercial and commercial livestock, turn them loose.



- Remove halters made out of nylon material as they can melt and injure your animals.
- Close, but do not lock, doors and gates so animals cannot re-enter barns and pastures.
- Hang a clipboard of important contact numbers in a highly visible area.
- Firefighters may cut fences or open gates to free trapped animals, so providing identification on each animal is important.

Caring for your animals after wildfire

Once you are given the "all clear," there are things you need to know, and do, to make your return safe. Dress for safety and do an initial inspection of your property.

Secure the area. Identify unstable trees and power poles, downed live power lines, spot fires, smoldering debris and ash pits.

Pasture animals safely away from areas that may experience flash and post-fire flooding. Animals have a natural instinct to seek higher ground when flooding occurs; ensure maximum access to minimize injury and death.

Locate your animals. Once you have a secure area, locate your animals. Animals are very sensitive and will respond to a fire that is anywhere within their sensory range. Normal reactions range from nervousness to panic and aggressive escape attempts.

Immediately provide clean water and a high-quality forage with a protein and mineral supplement to offset stress. Then:

Check animals for injuries. Animals are often injured or killed by running into fences and barriers while fleeing. Burns, lung inflammation and edema from smoke inhalation are common health problems. Have animals inspected by your veterinarian ASAP. Monitor animals for several weeks afterwards.

Report missing animals. Provide local authorities with the last known location, identification and disposition of any missing animals, especially if they are aggressive.

For those living in the wildland/urban interface areas of Idaho, there is no such thing as being too prepared for a wildfire event. Thorough planning and preparation safeguards not only the health and well-being of you and your family, but of your treasured pets and larger animals too.

For more information go to:

- **UI Extension Forestry** - www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/topic/fire
- **Idaho Firewise –** www.idahofirewise.org



Contact your local fairgrounds, stockyards, equestrian centers and/or friends about their ability to shelter animals in an emergency.

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WILDFIRES AND YOUR LIVESTOCK

Natural Disasters

Livestock can be lost, injured, or killed during a wildfire. Take the following actions to protect your livestock before a wildfire occurs and speed recovery after a wildfire has passed.

Before a Wildfire

- **Maintain detailed livestock records.**
  - □ Possible indemnity payments may be based on verifiable livestock records.
  - □ Records should be backed up in multiple locations, including digitally.
  - □ Records should be kept for multiple years of production.
  - □ Include the location of animals and fences on your property.
- **Use clearly distinguishable identification methods.**
  - □ Make sure animals have some form of permanent identification (ear tags, tattoos, electronic microchips, brands, etc.).
  - □ Pictures of animals, especially high-value animals such as horses, should also be maintained.
- **Employ land use practices that discourage fire spread.**
  - □ Limit weeds, debris, or highly flammable trees and bushes in fencerows.
  - □ Remove woody debris piles in a timely manner.
  - □ Remove non-native species that may not be suited for your environment.
  - □ During times of high fire danger or dormant vegetation, practice general fire prevention.

During a Wildfire

- **Above all, ensure the safety of your family and yourself in a wildfire situation.**
- **If it can be done safely, allow for animal movement.**
  - □ This could mean opening gates, cutting fences, or herding livestock into areas of lower fire risk (e.g. wheat pasture).
- **Proactively corral animals to prepare for off-farm movement.**
  - □ During a **Red Flag Warning**, some animals, such as horses, could be corralled to allow for fast movement.
  - □ If you have a vehicle designated for moving livestock, consider having it hitched to a trailer in a position to quickly load and evacuate animals.
  - □ Only consider this option if you have ample time.
- **Once you leave your property, do not return until told to do so by first responders.**
- **Communicate with neighbors and/or first responders.**
  - □ If animals are left on your property after you evacuate, let neighbors and first responders know to be on the lookout for your animals.
- **Use emergency identification methods.**
  - □ If animals are set loose, you can be creative with short-term identification methods.
  - □ Some producers have used spray paint to add personal identification marks on animals set loose during a wildfire situation.

After a Wildfire

- **Document livestock losses.**
  - □ Take pictures of dead livestock where they lay.
  - □ Document the location of livestock where they are found.
  - □ Do not move livestock until approved by insurance or local, state, or federal authorities.
- **Practice safe and humane euthanasia methods.**
  - □ Animals may be severely injured after a wildfire and need to be humanely euthanized.
  - □ Work with local officials to determine the safest and most humane means of euthanasia.
- **Dispose of carcasses.**
  - □ After documentation has taken place, check with local or state authorities for proper disposal methods (e.g. burial, rendering, composting, etc.)
- **Accept emotional or mental health assistance.**
  - □ Losing livestock can be a traumatic experience. Accept emotional or mental health resources that may be available after an incident.
  - □ Seek out help for dealing with long-term emotional stress.
  - □ Understand that grieving is a natural process after experiencing a major disaster.
- **Apply for federal assistance.**
  - □ Federal assistance related to wildfire losses may be available depending on the scope of the incident.
  - □ This information will be available from your local extension agent or FSA office.
  - □ State FSA offices can be found at https://www.fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/index.

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