

# Nonprofit comes to the rescue of Reservations' stray pets

*Since 2006, the nonprofit has helped pet owners spay or neuter more than 750 dogs and cats.*

By ARLA SHEPHARD  
MASON COUNTY LIFE

When Amy Loudermilk used to visit the Squaxin Island Reservation for work, she and her colleague would often see stray, malnourished dogs and cats.

The same was true when she visited the Skokomish Indian Reservation on Hood Canal and every other reservation that she served through her work at an intertribal housing authority.

"Every time I walked up to the Chehalis Tribal Center, there were three or four dogs begging for food," Loudermilk said. "People said they were dumped. Everywhere, we'd see malnourished, stray dogs running around and tipping garbage cans. But there was never anyone to call."

The lack of resources for animal control on reservations motivated Loud-

run by volunteers, funded through grants and private donations and serves Chehalis, Nisqually, Skokomish, Squaxin Island and Shoalwater Bay Reservations.

Pet owners living on those reservations or who are members of those tribes are eligible for the spay and neuter program. It costs pet owners \$5 to fix their animal.

Rez Animal Resources pays the rest of the pet's medical bill for the spay or neuter. Pet owners can also apply for emergency medical care for their pet, where the nonprofit pays up to \$300 for services and procedures.

The nonprofit also rescues dogs and cats, with a total of 112 pets rescued since 2006.

"Most people know there's Animal Control or the Humane Society, but people don't realize that they don't usually serve Indian reservations," Loudermilk said. "There's no safety net here. If there were stray dogs around, you didn't know whom to call. There were few places to go."

After several employees at the Squaxin Island Tribal Center reported getting dog bites while out for a walk during lunch, the tribe hired an animal control officer in 2008, said Jim Reinhold, the res-

ervation's part-time animal control officer.

"Rez Animal Resources is the best thing that's ever happened to this reservation," Reinhold said. "When I first started, animals were running rampant. I've heard recently that it's nice not seeing dogs running after you now."

In his first year on the job, Reinhold created the tribe's first animal control ordinance, which defines dangerous dogs and what to do with them. It requires owners to license their pet every year, providing Reinhold with an up-to-date rabies vaccine certification, among other rules.

Most tribes do not have animal control ordinances or they do, they are not enforced because there are no animal control officers, Reinhold said.

Because tribes do not fall under the jurisdiction of the state, Washington's animal control laws do not apply, he added.

Reinhold works closely with Rez Animal Resources to connect pet owners with the tools they need to take care of their pets.

"Any help we can get to support the pets, we'll take," he said. "The first year was the most difficult. It was an educational adventure. Many people said, 'This is the rez,



PHOTO COURTESY AMY L.

Amy Loudermilk helps feed a dog on the Chehalis Indian Reservation. Loundermilk, a volunteer with Rez Animal Resources and Education, provides low-cost spay and neuter programs and emergency medical funds for pets on the Skokomish and Squaxin Reservations.

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PHOTO BY ARLA SHEPHARD

Amy Loudermilk, left, works with Jim Reinhold, the Squaxin Island Reservation's part-time animal control officer to connect pet owners with the tools they need to take care of their pets.

we don't have to do that.' Now, almost everyone knows that there's an organization here that will help take care of their pets."

When Reinhold started, Rez Animal Resources had only provided five spay or neuter vouchers at Squaxin Island and had never paid for emergency medical care for a pet.

Since then, 73 pets on Squaxin Island have received emergency medical care, with 22 pets so far receiving care this year, the largest number the nonprofit has served in any year on the reservation.

The number of spay and neuter vouchers handed out in Mason County has al-

so risen dramatically since 2008, from five that year to 66 pets spayed or neutered so far in 2013.

The increase is partly a result of Reinhold's presence at Squaxin Island and the volunteers at each of the reservations where the nonprofit works, Loudermilk said.

"We have three board

members and all of us have full-time jobs on top of this," she said. "We started slow because we needed to make connections at each of the reservations. We're always looking for more volunteers to spread the word."

In particular, the nonprofit is looking for people to volunteer their homes as foster homes for rescued pets.

Loudermilk and one other person serve as the only foster homes for all of the dog and cats rescued and adopted out since 2006.

"If we had more foster homes, we could help a lot more pets," she said. "We also get a lot of calls from other reservations to help there, but there's no way I can do more without more volunteers."

The difference has been tremendous on the Squaxin Island Reservation, Reinhold said.

"This is about changing the mindset of the whole tribe," he said.

For more information on Rez Animal Resources, call 253-370-6392, visit <http://www.rezanimals.com/help.html> or write to PO Box 8640, Lacey, WA 98509.

To contact Jim Reinhold, call 360-432-3953. ■

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Accepting the award on behalf of MGH&FC are: (l-r) Terry Megiveron, chief of provider services; Eileen Branscome, COO; Nancy Trucksess, commissioner; (back – counter clock wise) Don Wilson, commissioner; Shelley Dunnington, administrative assistant; Rick Smith, CFO; Scott Hilburn, commissioner; and Eric Moll, CEO.



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