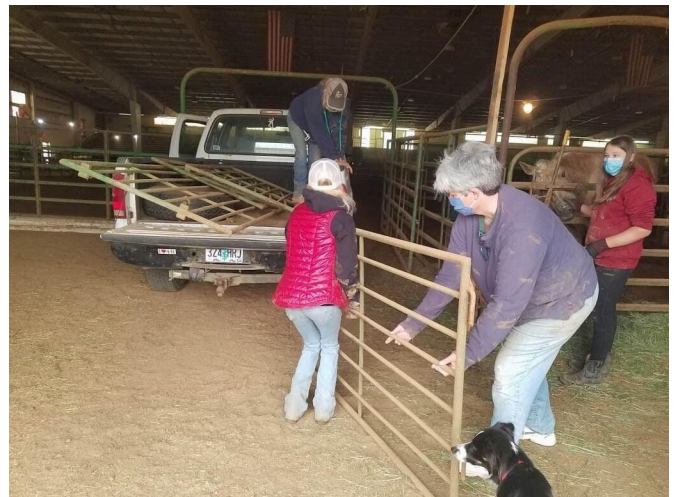


## Regional animal evacuation shelter stands ready

September 18, 2020



Evacuating with short notice is a nightmare at best. But what do you do when your extended family consists of horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, llamas, chickens or rabbits? It might be time to call Ruth Dixon at Curry County 4-H at the OSU Extension, located at the Event Center in Gold Beach.

Last week Dixon and 10 volunteers began work to make an evacuation shelter possible at the Curry County fair arena. The crew set up stalls, pens and animal crates in preparation to accept as many as 20 horses; 20 cattle; 100 sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas in combination; and 100 poultry and rabbits combined. They do not plan on taking in dogs and cats, which can be housed at local pet shelters, but that could change. In addition to offering shelter for evacuated animals, Dixon can help owners arrange for transport.

Dixon says she's benefitted greatly from her past experience during the 2017 Chetco Bar Fire when she set up a similar evacuation center. "Everyone will want to know why we set up before any shelter is actually needed," she said. "We are very prepared and proactive now because we've learned from the past. Us being prepared puts us at the top of the list for places to evacuate livestock."

She cites advance preparation and additional training as the key for a smoother operation this time if the shelter is needed. In addition to being the Curry County 4-H Educational Program assistant, she is an Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) delegate, My Youth Preparedness (My PI) coordinator in Oregon, and Gold Beach Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) director.

Ever since the Chetco fires started in 2017, Dixon says she's been working on making the animal evacuation process better. On the morning of Sept. 9, she started contacting everyone needed for approvals to set up the shelter. The Fair Board chairman Chris Brose granted permission first, along with Event Center manager Caitlyn Coleman.

Next she needed a waiver from the state veterinarian to bring horses and other livestock across state lines. The closest fire currently is just over the California border in Gasquet. The waiver allows livestock to travel into Oregon without required vaccinations.

Also required in these times of COVID-19, she needed to get an "event" permit to carry on the group's activities through OSU Extension's guidelines. Dixon says the project isn't all just work, but also rewarding and sometimes memorably fun. The last time they operated the shelter, the volunteers placed pallets to sleep on next to where the pigs were housed. "You would never know that pigs [passed gas] and belched so much without that experience," she laughed.

Once animals are checked into the evacuation center, only volunteers and trained staff are allowed to interact with the animals and provide care. It reduces the stress on the animals, Dixon explained, because they become anxious about being abandoned all over again after seeing their owners. The strict policy also eliminates the possibility of animals being stolen or harmed.

If anyone would like to make a donation, Dixon says that Curry County 4-H has an account at Gold Beach Lumber that people can add funds to, or they can contact her directly (contact info below). She asks that people not make any direct donations of food at this time since they do not know what will be needed. Also,

make sure to contact her if you need to bring any animals so they can receive them, fill out paperwork and set up care volunteers. “I learned in 2017 that I didn’t need to be there 24/7,” she said.

“Thank you to everyone that came out to help us be prepared for potential livestock evacuations,” Dixon said. “As many local facilities are filling up fast, we acted quickly to ensure a back-up option was ready and available for those in need. I also want to thank Jeremy Dumire, of Curry County Emergency Management and Caitlyn Coleman, Event Center on the Beach Director and the Curry County Fair Board for all of their hard work.”

For more information contact Ruth Dixon at 541-373-0554 or email [ruth.dixon@oregonstate.edu](mailto:ruth.dixon@oregonstate.edu)