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Local News

U.S. Humane Society Holds Meeting on Maui

Presentation addresses productive lobbying for animal issues.

Trisha Smith

POSTED: September 23, 2010

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Pup nap. Hawai'i currently has no laws that regulate puppy mills, backyard breeders or pet stores, so there is no way to track if any mass breeding operations that "put profit over animal welfare" are taking place or even when, where and how these dogs were raised before consumers purchase them. The Humane Society of the U.S. urges residents to support upcoming county and state efforts to enact regulation laws to control this activity, and asks potential owners to adopt from a local shelter rather than purchase a family pet.

On Thursday evening, Sept. 9, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) Hawai'i Chapter and the Maui Humane Society (MHS) held a grassroots meeting to discuss current and upcoming legislation and campaigns for animals.

Because this is an election year, and the start of the new biennium cycle of the legislative session is just around the corner, the organizations were compelled to address the roles communities play in protecting animal welfare across the isles.

A few dozen residents—including some primary candidates—squeezed into the MHS Conference Room in Pu'unēnē to learn how to get involved in the upcoming local, county, state and federal legislation process impacting animals, including hot topics such as cockfighting, feral cats and reef fish removal.

MHS welcomed HSUS Hawai'i State Director Inga Gibson, who filled up the bulk of the meeting with several presentations regarding her experience, the accomplishments of the organization last legislative session and its future goals.

She asserted a passion to celebrate animals and confront cruelty, and discussed how vital it is for residents to communicate with elected officials and policymakers, because "thousands of bills are introduced each session." "Building a rapport with your local humane society staff, as well as writing letters to the editors of publications, is very important when lobbying for animal rights," said Gibson.

A resourceful handout on how individuals can help animals included tips on personal behavior, volunteering, fundraising and networking, and training courses to become an active advocate. View the complete list at hsus.typepad.com/wayne/ and search "50 Things You Can Do for Animals."

Robert Wintner, executive director of the Snorkel Bob Foundation, and Rene Umberger of www.forthefishes.org urged attendees to help them in continual efforts to end the aquarium reef fish industry, or as Wintner called it "wildlife trafficking for the pet trade." There are currently no state laws that set limits on the amount or species of reef fish taken from our ocean waters. And, according to Gibson, 99 percent of reef fish taken from Hawai'i are dead within a year.

Gibson also discussed HSUS-Hawai'i's upcoming protection campaigns involving problems such as puppy mills, feral animal and wildlife

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control issues, long-distance transport and the sale of foie gras. Her disturbing statistics revealed examples of how thousands of pigs are trucked across the Mainland from the Midwest, and are then shipped to Hawai'i over five or more days arriving either alive or dead, only to be slaughtered and processed and sold as "fresh pork."

South Maui resident Barbara Steinberg disclosed her activist group's continued desire to fight next session to ban foie gras (fatty duck or goose liver) in local restaurants. Last year, anti-foie gras advocates were able to get legislation passed through one Senate committee and

they plan to push even further next session. Visit www.banfoiegras.com.

Gibson relayed her aggravation with the "outrageous, sick, family event" of cockfighting, and how Hawai'i carries an average fine of \$25 per conviction. "That fine is joke, and we need to support efforts where spectators of this animal cruelty are convicted as well," she said, also mentioning Hawai'i is ranked last in dogfighting laws, and is the only state without spectator laws. She said HSUS Hawai'i has "the momentum this year to strengthen penalties."

Rep. Angus McKelvey—who was named the HSUS Hawai'i 2010 Humane Representative of the Year—discussed the shark fin bill (SB 2169) he "championed" last session. The "pro-animal legislator" played an integral part in passing a law to protect sharks from being killed to supply the market for shark fins. The bill took effect on July 1, and the prohibition on the retail sale of shark fin soup and fin products takes effect on July 1, 2011.

"We couldn't have done this without the local fishermen who stepped up in support of the ban, and for all the 'unlikely alliances' we formed in the community to help get this bill through," said McKelvey.

He said participation such as this is what it takes "to get things done," and that it's "good for the community as a whole to take care of its animals."

McKelvey also stressed that introducing bills with "broad titles" is unproductive. Since some bills are amended so many times, the intended language is lost. The lawmaker also agreed with attendee Mike Moran's idea that it was critical to introduce duplicate measures to the House and the Senate.

The public is able to utilize a helpful Website (www.capitol.hawaii.gov/) to follow bills of interest, and even see how their lawmakers voted throughout the process. The Maui presentation also encouraged residents sign up for email updates to receive the latest news and action alerts from HSUS at www.humanesociety.org.

"As animal advocates, it is our responsibility to educate and inform those individuals and groups in positions to make changes of issues we are concerned about," said Gibson. "If we don't, who will speak for the animals?"

Contact HSUS-Hawai'i Director Inga Gibson at (808) 922-9910 or the Maui Humane Society at 877-3680, ext. 32, for more information. And, don't hesitate to report any suspected illegal animal activity by calling the toll-free, confidential tip-line at (877) TIP-HSUS.

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