MAKING TRACKS

A PUBLICATION OF ANIMAL PROTECTION NEW MEXICO - NOVEMBER 2026



It’s the Year of the Horse. Is the state ready to invest in their well-being?

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friend of the Animals,

When we look around us, we have to acknowledge the real threats that ongoing climate change is unleashing on our communities. The events unfolding across the state—fires, floods, high winds, extreme drought, and extreme temperatures—need to serve as an immediate call to action for all New Mexicans. There is an urgency for thoughtful and inclusive community planning to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people and animals who can quickly find themselves in harm's way.

APNM has been leading in this regard by recognizing these signs years ago and working to develop solutions and approaches. In 2024, with the help of Rep. Tara Lujan and the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District, we embarked on a thorough animal services assessment in that region, but also extended the assessment and findings to statewide needs, gaps, and opportunities. The four assessment focus areas—dog/cat sheltering, animal control, equine rescues and programs, and animal emergency management—are crucial elements for safe, healthy, humane, and prosperous communities.

A key finding from the report, Animal Services in New Mexico, is the absolute necessity for establishing a statewide animal protection department with the authority, responsibility, and resources to coordinate solutions to statewide problems involving animals in our communities. The report is a roadmap for proactive and essential endeavors for the foreseeable future.

APNM will remain at the forefront of those insisting on systems, resources, and infrastructure that translate to a livable and thriving New Mexico for all who call this place home. And I know you won't be surprised that many of Animal Protection Voters' legislative priorities already in motion for the 2027 session involve strengthening and creating infrastructure and funding for it that relate to this groundbreaking report.

We are relying on you, your financial support, and your collective actions to help us turn these vital plans into reality to benefit all New Mexicans. Thank you for all you do!

With deep gratitude,

Elisabeth Jennings

Elisabeth Jennings
Executive Director

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New Mexico is home to one of the continent's most romantic icons of the Southwest: horses. They are part of New Mexico families and carry deep historic significance among our Indigenous cultures.



Reverence for horses is also global: The horse is the seventh animal represented in the twelve-year cycle of the Chinese/Korean lunar calendar. February 17, 2026, through February 5, 2027, is the Year of the Fire Horse—symbolizing freedom, energy, speed, forward drive, and bold leadership.
But what happens when a horse, donkey, or mule needs help? Who is there to care for them if they are abandoned or neglected? What can be done when grazing land is depleted? The State of New Mexico must demonstrate determination coupled with action to improve equine welfare—and this is the year to do it.

The Equines at Our Homes

In the case of domestic equines—horses, donkeys, and mules—the New Mexico Livestock Board will step in to seize cruelly treated, neglected, or abandoned equines. Once in the custody of the Livestock Board, an equine is typically taken in by one of the 13 registered equine rescues in our state—whether it's through the Livestock Board's process for placing estray animals or through a court's ruling that an abused or neglected equine cannot return to the property from which it was seized.

Just like New Mexico's dog and cat shelters, the state's network of equine rescues is regularly at or over capacity. These organizations provide services that benefit communities across the state, partnering with the Livestock Board, local law enforcement, Tribal agencies, and individual owners who may need to surrender an equine for various reasons.

But unlike dog and cat shelters, none of the state's 13 registered equine rescues are government-run. Instead, all of these New Mexico equine rescues are nonprofit organizations funded primarily through private grants and donations.

In 2013, the State Legislature established the Equine Shelter Rescue Fund—the only source of government funding for equine rescues. This fund was intended to contribute to the costs incurred by the rescues in providing a vital service that benefits the State. To create revenue for the fund, the Legislature simultaneously approved a new tax check-off,

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Photo: Scott Baxter

allowing New Mexico residents to donate their state tax refunds to the Equine Shelter Rescue Fund. An initial legislative appropriation of $250,000 was also made in 2014, and that was meant to be spent immediately to support the rescues and their beneficial work.

Since then, tax check-off donations have generated only around $10,000 per year, and only four subsequent legislation sessions have resulted in modest appropriations to the Fund. In the Fund's 14-year lifetime, a total of only $1 million has been appropriated, which averages only about $71,000 per year. This is not nearly enough. As a result, the rescues are left with little to no state assistance for the majority of the time. So today, because the Equine Shelter Rescue Fund has no significant annual funding sources, it currently has almost no funds to support the rescues.

The operating expenses of New Mexico's 13 registered equine rescues total $3.7+ million every single year, not counting capital expenditures. This is what it costs for these organizations to provide critical care, training, adoption services, sanctuary to unadoptable animals, and other vital community services—but the State is not doing its part to support them.

These gaps in government investment in services make caring for these equines increasingly difficult, especially with rising costs of feed, veterinary care, and the utilities needed to operate the rescues.

What happens when the rescues are at capacity and cannot take in an equine? In cruelty and neglect cases, the courts may determine that the best thing to do for the animal is to return them to the property from which they were originally seized until the case is adjudicated, even if that puts the animal at risk. Equine owners without means may abandon the equines. Or horses may be sold at auction—making it likely they will be bought by a kill-buyer and slaughtered as part of the international horsemeat trade.

It is imperative that equine rescues receive appropriate government compensation for their services to help build individual and collective sheltering capacity and limit the number of equines being placed into dangerous situations. Meaningful government funding will also incentivize more rescues to become registered, increasing accountability to welfare standards and broadening our state's equine safety net.

Photo: Heidi Baxter/APNM



The Equines on the Land

In addition to domestic equines, New Mexico is home to thousands of free-roaming horses. Most of these horses were born on the range, and many are wary of humans. Such horses live in close-knit family bands and can be found on even the most rugged terrain in the state. But some are domestic horses who, for one reason or another, ended up homeless or abandoned by their people rather than being surrendered to an equine rescue. Over time, as horses breed and form family bands, it is difficult to distinguish betweeen a "wild" horse and a "feral" horse—but they all roam free on the land.

Although beautiful to see as you drive down I-25, these free-roaming horses are at the mercy of habitat degraded by drought and climate change. With each passing year, we see more instances of free-roaming horses moving closer to humans in search of food and water. Sadly, this can lead to conflict with humans, such as vehicle strikes, property damage, or perceived competition with agricultural interests, as well as negative impacts on habitat.

Gone are the days when robust large-carnivore populations would naturally keep herd numbers in check. Without responsible herd management by humans, populations can grow beyond what the available habitat can sustain. Without humane relocation options, there are few tools available to move animals out of areas where they cannot survive safely. The result is too often a cycle in which horses suffer, communities struggle, and local officials and volunteers are left trying to respond with inadequate resources.

One of the most effective ways to address the growing numbers of free-roaming horses is to give local governments the tools they need to humanely manage population growth. This can be done by partnering with qualified experts and implementing herd management plans that prioritize on-range management strategies. One proven strategy is the use of fertility control, such as the PZP immunocontraceptive vaccine, to target the underlying cause of population growth: reproduction rate. On-range fertility control can stabilize the population and reduce it over time.

This need extends to Tribal horse herds as well. Tribal communities across New Mexico are already working to address growing horse populations and the challenges that come with them. Many desire humane, innovative solutions but lack access to funding and resources. Investing in humane herd management programs and training for Tribal members to administer on-range management tools like fertility control help communities develop long-term solutions in line with their values while creating jobs and building valuable local expertise.

The Time is Now

The State needs to make equine welfare a priority and provide the reliable funding and infrastructure necessary to protect these animals and the communities that care for them.

New Mexico has an opportunity to invest not only in the welfare of these horses, but also in the people and communities working to care for them. With the right resources, we can build a more sustainable approach to equine welfare: a system that supports rescues, gives communities humane tools to manage free-roaming herds, and creates opportunities for more New Mexicans to be part of the solution.

The 2027 legislative session is the year for New Mexico's Legislature and our new Governor to step up for equines. Our state has the resources and the expertise to do better.



BUILDING A HUMANE NEW MEXICO

New Mexico is made up of strong, resilient, and resourceful people. But when it comes to protecting animals, there is only so much our people can do—when our state infrastructure has fallen far behind.

The devasating consquences are starkly felt, especially in rural New Mexico. Animal shelters are often pushed far beyond capacity. Animal control officers are scarce, and many lack the training and resources they need. Families experiencing a crisis may have nowhere to turn when they need temporary care or other support for their animals. When wildfires or other disasters strike, communities struggle to evacuate the animals in our care.

These are not isolated problems. They are symptoms of a larger system that was never built to be able to meet New Mexico's needs today.

Photo: Mattie Allen



THE IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

For decades, Animal Protection New Mexico has worked alongside communities across the state to address these challenges—passing stronger laws and policies, improving enforcement, and securing millions of dollars for programs that help animals and the people who care for them. But we have learned an important lesson: Lasting change for animals requires more than individual programs or local laws. It requires effective, statewide infrastructure.

Infrastructure for animal protection means more than buildings. It includes resources and equipment, a trained professional workforce, effective government systems, strong and enforceable laws, reliable funding, and coordination among the agencies and communities responsible for animal welfare.

Today, New Mexico's animal welfare system is fragmented—and parts of it nonexistent. Animal-related programs and responsibilities are scattered across roughly a dozen state agencies, many of which have only limited authority over animals or are being asked to address animal issues that fall outside their primary mission. Meanwhile, major issues remain completely unaddressed at the state level, leaving cities, counties, Tribes, nonprofits, and individual residents to tackle them on their own, in small pieces—or not at all.

The solution is not simply to ask local communities to do more with less. It is to build a statewide system that gives communities the tools and support they need to succeed.

That is why APNM has launched an ambitious but absolutely necessary campaign to establish a New Mexico Department of Animal Protection.

A HOME FOR ANIMALS IN STATE GOVERNMENT

A State Department of Animal Protection would provide something New Mexico currently lacks: a central home for animal welfare policy, resources, coordination, and oversight. It would consolidate existing programs and funds that serve animals, establish authority over issues that currently fall through the cracks, and serve as a statewide hub for assessing needs and developing solutions.

Its responsibilities could include administering grants to strengthen shelters and animal services; supporting animal cruelty investigations and prosecution; improving standards and oversight for facilities and businesses that care for animals; coordinating across state agencies; supporting minimum training and certification for animal control officers; and establishing a statewide framework for the humane management of free-roaming horses, including on Tribal lands.

Animal protection issues deserve a rightful place in state governance. But the mission goes beyond animals—it lifts up the state of New Mexico as a whole.

Strong animal services infrastructure helps create safer, healthier, more resilient communities.

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Adoptable kitten at Stray Hearts Taos. *Photo: Heidi Baxter/APNM*

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Affordable veterinary and spay/neuter services can help families keep their animals and reduce pressure on shelters. Crisis services can help people and animals remain together through difficult circumstances. Better training and coordination can help law enforcement respond more effectively. Reliable funding can help rural communities build capacity instead of perpetually responding to emergencies. Investment in the many animal-related professions can create multipe workforce development opportunities across the state.

Building that future will take vision, collaboration, and sustained investment. But New Mexico has never been afraid to imagine a better way forward.

It is time to build the infrastructure to make it possible.

SUCCESS STORY
Sandoval County's New Animal Resource Center



Anne Ryan became Community Services Director for Sandoval County about a decade ago. With a background in social work and someone who understands the unmistakable link between animal and community wellness, Anne couldn't help but notice the dire need for an animal services facility that was commensurate with the county's size and needs.

In 2010, Sandoval County had become a new Class A county, meaning its population exceeded 126,000 people. But at that time, the fast-growing county's animal shelter facility was woefully inadequate, consisting of a dated, poorly constructed and maintained impound structure in San Ysidro, without proper funding, equipment, staff, and processes.

Over the course of the next several years, Anne and several others worked every angle possible to secure support for a state-of-the-art facility that would





Photos (clockwise): Anne Ryan, former Community Services Director for Sandoval County and current Community Services Director for Santa Fe County; photo by Daniel Fresquez. Chief, a once traumatized Shepherd, adopted by Sandoval County Comm. Kathering Bruch. He attended commission meetings, sat up on the dais, and served as a live ambassador for county animals and their needs; photo by Comm. Bruch. Groundbreaking ceremony for the shelter (attended by Rep. Melanie Stansbury); photo by Steven McFadden.

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appropriately serve the citizens of the third most populous region in New Mexico. The list of project advocates and friends is too long to name everyone, but the following individuals provided critical support:

US Rep. Melanie Stansbury (who secured $1.5 million in federal funds for the shelter project); State Senators Craig Brandt and Brenda McKenna; County Commissioners Katherine Bruch, David Heil, James Holden-Rhodes, and Kenneth Eichwald; County Manager Wayne Johnson; Bob Hample (the temporary shelter's first volunteer); Carroll Petrie Foundation; Kelli Mortensen (1st shelter hire); Kim Jaramillo (2nd shelter hire and now Assistant Director, Sandoval County Animal Care Services); Dr. Barbara Merickel (contract veterinarian); Corrales Kennels; Larry Tafoya (Animal Control Officer); Joe Gonzales (Under-Sheriff); and Corrales-based nonprofit rescue, CARMA (led by Barbara Bayer and Bill Woldman).

How the Big Idea Became Reality

In 2020, advocates began working with policymakers to include the larger permanent shelter project on the county's priority capital funding list for the state legislature, and it remained there for multiple years. In the meantime, advocates secured county funding for a temporary nine-kennel facility—a significant upgrade from the San Ysidro impound—along with an animal care handler. Located on the main campus for the county, the facility was visible to the public and policymakers on a daily basis, underscoring the need for services and a facility that matched the size of the growing county and its needs. Advocates used creative approaches such as leveraging a corporate discount for the temporary structure and using available county public works resources for site preparation, plumbing, etc. They also began connecting with county staff to help with fostering and adopting animals. Coincidentally, veterans became adopters of dogs with traumatic backgrounds.

Fast forward to February 2026, Sandoval County officially broke ground on an $8.7 million, 22-acre Animal Resource Center campus in Bernalillo, NM. The new modern layout features a 7,350 sq ft main facility, 60 kennels, separate quarantine spaces, and a public dog park—fully replacing the temporary setup that has been overwhelmed by demand for nearly a decade.

For the permanent shelter now under construction, the total project budget is supplemented by $7.5 million in general obligation bonds approved by commissioners alongside other pooled local sources in 2024. The new Animal Resource Center is slated to open in 2027.

Anne Ryan, the initial driving force behind the project, was named Sandoval County Director of the year in 2021, and it is clear she deserved that recognition! APNM offers its enormous gratitude to Anne and all her collaborators who were determined to see a top-notch animal resources facility established in their region and made it happen!

Key Takeaways

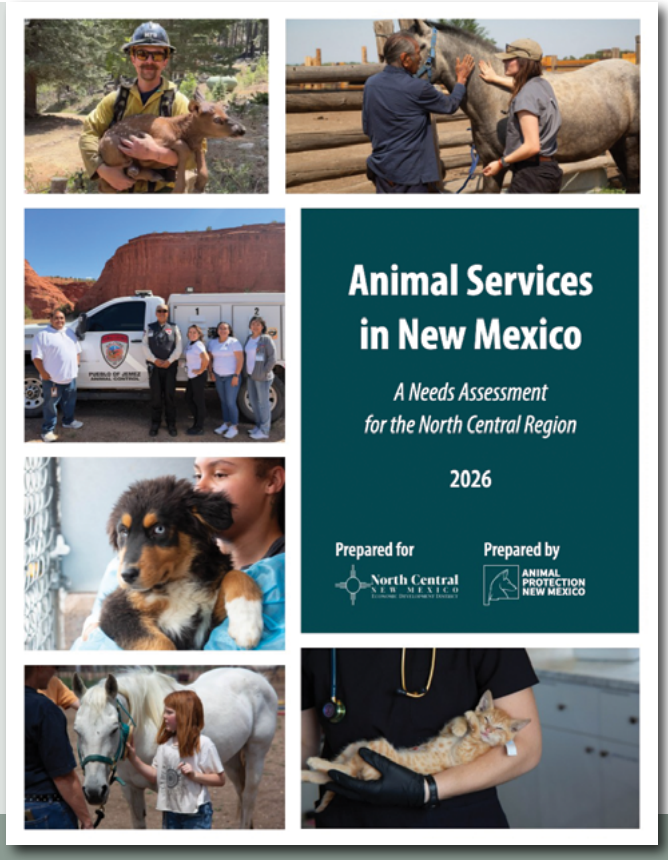
- Work with *where you are* and *what you have*
- Engage with policymakers
- Ask for what you need
- Make the challenges and issues visible to the community
- Help decision-makers understand the connection between animal issues and public safety and community wellness
- Be tenacious
- Be creative
- Build allies everywhere you can
- Ensure the project can endure through changes in government staff and allies
- Adopt the attitude that it can be done, even if the entire path is not yet clear

...A stray dog wanders down a New Mexico road, ribs visible beneath a dirty coat. A concerned witness calls the county sheriff's office—but it results in no response.

...At a city shelter, kennels are full. Staff are juggling more animals than they have space, time, or money to care for.

...On Tribal lands, a natural resources director is trying to manage the consequences of a growing herd of free-roaming horses—animals whose presence affects not only their own welfare, but the land and water around them.

...And somewhere else in the state, a wildfire is approaching. There are plans for people to evacuate. But what happens to the horses, cattle, dogs, cats, and other animals who might be left behind?



THE FIRST REPORT OF ITS KIND:

An Animal Services Needs Assessment in New Mexico

These scenarios may sound like separate problems. They are not.

They are symptoms of a larger problem that has been building quietly for decades: New Mexico has never developed the statewide infrastructure needed to adequately manage the complex web of animal-related needs facing its communities.

That is the finding at the heart of a new 2026 report from Animal Protection New Mexico: Animal Services in New Mexico: A Needs Assessment for the North Central Region.

The first assessment of its kind in the state, the report takes a close look at what happens when the systems responsible for animals are asked to do more with less—and what happens to communities when those systems fail. APNM interviewed more than 100 people who encounter these problems firsthand: shelter directors and animal control officers, veterinarians and rescue workers, law enforcement officials and emergency responders, Tribal representatives and local government leaders.

The assessment began in the north central region, encompassing eight counties and 16 federally recognized Tribes. But its implications reach far beyond that geography.

Law enforcement may lack adequate resources

When an animal shelter reaches capacity, animal control officers may have nowhere to take the next stray or abandoned animal they encounter. Officers are forced to make difficult decisions about which calls can be answered and which must wait. Law enforcement may become involved in situations that it is not equipped to handle. Local governments absorb additional costs. Nonprofit rescues are called upon to fill in the gaps.

One failure creates another.

The same pattern appears in other corners of the

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animal services system.

A free-roaming horse herd is not simply an animal welfare problem. Unmanaged horses can affect vegetation, soil, water, roads, property, and public safety. A community without a plan for evacuating animals during a wildfire is not simply unprepared to protect animals. It may also put people at greater risk if residents refuse to evacuate without their animals—or attempt dangerous last-minute rescues.

When animal services fail, the consequences do not stop with animals. They affect public safety, public health, local government budgets, law enforcement, emergency response, economic development, and the quality of life of our communities.

Local communities cannot solve statewide problems alone

The assessment also reveals something more hopeful: New Mexicans are already doing remarkable work.

Local officials, nonprofits, Tribal communities, veterinarians, first responders, shelter employees, and volunteers are finding ways to respond to problems every day. They stretch budgets, build partnerships, take in one more animal, transport one more horse, answer one more call.

But a community should not have to invent its own solution from scratch to a problem that exists on a statewide scale.

A rural county should not be expected to independently develop the expertise and infrastructure required to manage a major regional animal-related disaster. A shelter should not be left to shoulder the consequences of statewide pet overpopulation. And an individual rescue should not be expected to solve systemic failures in equine management.

New Mexico needs to build an animal welfare system capable of supporting its communities.

Building the missing piece

The report's answer is a significant one: New Mexico needs a dedicated Department of Animal Protection.

A dedicated agency could continually assess animal service needs across New Mexico, identify gaps between agencies and communities, coordinate and distribute resources, administer funding and grant programs, regulate animal-related facilities, support complex cruelty investigations, coordinate programs currently scattered among different entities, and develop long-term strategies for animal protection and services.

In other words, it could give New Mexico something it currently lacks: a central entity responsible for looking across the entire system and state.

That shift—from reacting to individual crises to building infrastructure that prevents them—is the larger opportunity.

What this report means for New Mexico

This moment offers New Mexico a chance to step back and see the larger picture—to ask: What systems should exist to solve New Mexico's animal welfare and services problems?

APNM plans to use the report as a foundation for pursuing stronger systems, infrastructure, and funding statewide. The findings and recommendations within the report chart the course.

But building those systems will require more than one organization. It will require policymakers, local governments, Tribal communities, animal shelter and welfare professionals, veterinarians, law enforcement, emergency responders, and engaged advocates to recognize that they have a stake in the outcome and come together to seek solutions.

New Mexico can build an animal services system that is coordinated rather than fragmented, proactive rather than reactive, and adequately resourced rather than perpetually stretched to its limits.

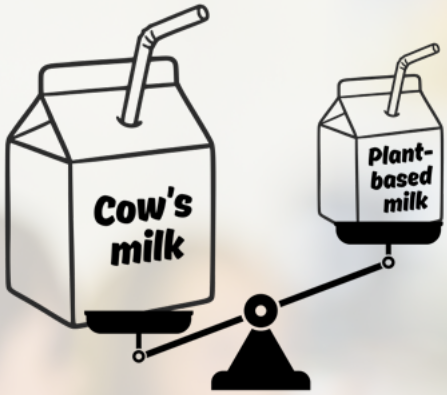
The current failures are interconnected. The solutions must be, too.

PLEASE JOIN US IN THIS EFFORT!

Do you believe in this vision? Do you have ideas to contribute? Do you have a story to share that demonstrates the importance of this report and the campaign to create a State Department of Animal Protection? ***We want to hear from you.***

Please visit apnm.org/animalservicesreport to read the report and share with others. Then, fill out the form on the website to add your name to express your support and/or tell us how you see the findings from the report or a future Department of Animal Protection impacting your work and life.

By taking decisive, strategic action together, New Mexico can ensure that "humane treatment of animals" becomes a lasting cornerstone of the Land of Enchantment.



DAIRY'S NOT FAIR:

New Mexico's Children Must Have Non-Dairy Options in School Breakfasts and Lunches





Animal Protection New Mexico's report, ***Dairy's Not Fair: Why New Mexico's Children Deserve Plant-Based Milk Options in Schools*** (read it by visiting apnm.org/dairyreport) lays the foundation for our work going into the 2027 legislative session. The data are clear: with upward of 60% of New Mexico students being predisposed to lactose intolerance, our state's school children deserve—and urgently need—a non-dairy beverage option in the school breakfast and lunch lines. APNM is committed to making that a reality.

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The Dairy Milk-Only Policy in New Mexico Schools Is Problematic

Currently, federal reimbursement guidelines under the National School Lunch Program require a carton of dairy milk to be included in every school breakfast and lunch. The only time a non-dairy alternative qualifies for reimbursement is if the request is tied to a medical disability—in this case, lactose intolerance—and a parent or doctor note is required.

Any other request for a non-dairy option—cultural, ethical, religious, dietary preference—is considered "discretionary" and does not have to be honored by the school. Even if the discretionary request is met, the non-dairy beverage is reimbursed at the same rate as dairy milk, which becomes a burden to schools as the most often used alternatives (fortified soy or pea milk that is nutritionally equivalent to dairy milk) cost up to one dollar more per carton. School Food Authorities are required to absorb that extra cost.

Even under the medical disability option, our children are losing out. For example, many families do not know there is a process for requesting a non-dairy beverage. And some children cannot handle the stigma of managing a special request in the food line while waiting for their alternative to be brought out. These children either drink their dairy milk and suffer some level of gastrointestinal distress for the rest of the day, or they take the dairy milk and throw it away, causing themselves to miss out on key proteins and nutrients necessary for energy, attention, and learning.

Children whose discretionary requests are not honored face the same consequences: either they go against their religious, cultural, or moral belief systems and drink the dairy milk, or they miss out on the same vital proteins and nutrients as the lactose-intolerant child.

This is wrong from both a health equity and waste standpoint. New Mexico's diverse population means that a majority of the student population is predisposed to lactose intolerance. Further, given that 23% of New Mexico students live in food-insecure households, already marginalized students are the ones missing out on the health benefits of a fortified beverage, as most of these children get the majority of their calories while at school. If they cannot drink the healthy beverage of their choice, they experience an even further disruption to their food security.

Data also show that 45% of dairy breakfast milk cartons and 29% of dairy lunch milk cartons are thrown away. Some students have admitted to "sneak" throwing away their milk so that they will not feel ill and also will not face consequences (get in trouble) for wasting food. Why should schools give sole preference to dairy milk when it's clear that many students do not drink it?

Our children deserve better than this.

APNM Is Leading to Fix the Problem: Offer Non-Dairy Milk Options in All School Breakfasts and Lunches

Luckily, there is a fix. New Mexico already has two laws in place that can support these efforts:

- The **Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act** passed in 2017, which ensured that children whose parents did not pay their lunch fees were not punished or discriminated against, and
- The **Healthy Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act** passed in 2023, which amended the 2017 Act to include the Healthy Universal School Meals (HUSM) provision.

HUSM requires that all children receive free breakfast and lunch, despite family income. An additional component requires school meals to be healthy, not just filling, and it does this by requiring schools to purchase New Mexico-produced food and scratch cook at least 50% of offerings in each meal. Schools are also required to offer culturally relevant meals.

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Those schools that do not meet these rules receive less reimbursement from the State, and they are forced to cover the excess costs generated from the free-meal policy through funds from their local School Food Authority.

Requiring school meals to be healthy, as HUSM does, means that the health of each and every child is a responsibility that must be addressed by school meal policy. And to meet this responsibility, schools should ensure that children who cannot drink dairy milk—for whatever reason—are given a non-dairy healthy option. Further, the culturally relevant provision should be implemented to cover not only cultural but also religious and ethical reasons for wanting non-dairy milk alternatives.

APNM and APV are currently exploring the path forward to get non-dairy milk options into schools. We are engaging with the New Mexico Public Education Department and legislators to explore what steps can be taken to ensure health equity for all New Mexico school children.

New Mexico's children deserve healthy and appropriate breakfast and lunch options in school. APNM intends to ensure that each New Mexico child can reach for the healthy, safe, and preferred beverage of their choice in our school system.

Federal level	New Mexico Policymakers Must:
1	Voice their support for efforts to remove the dairy milk mandate in USDA school meal programs.
2	Support federal legislation, such as the The Freedom in School Cafeterias and Lunches (FISCAL) Act (H.R. 2539/S. 1236), which improves access to plant-based milks in schools by allowing public schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program to offer a variety of milks, including plant-based and soy milk, without requiring a doctor, parent, or guardian note and by allowing the USDA to reimburse schools for these purchases, just as they do for dairy milk.

State level	New Mexico Policymakers Can Improve Access to Plant-Based Milks in NM by:
1	Developing and implementing policies that require public schools in New Mexico to offer plant-based milks alongside cow's milk and, in so doing, stand up for New Mexico students by resisting attempts by the USDA and the dairy industry to coerce the consumption of cow's milk by children.
2	Allocating state funding to make plant-based milks more available and easier to access in schools statewide.
3	Educating the general public about the relative merits of traditional and plant-based alternatives to dairy so that they can make informed decisions about their health, nutrition, and the broader impacts of their food choices.
4	Enforcing existing regulation and introducing more stringent regulation of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.
5	Limiting state tax breaks and economic development incentives that directly or indirectly support industrial animal agriculture in New Mexico.

Serving Domestic Violence Survivors and their Animals in Southern New Mexico

Thanks to APNM's Companion Animal Rescue Effort (CARE) services, New Mexico continues to lead when it comes to co-sheltering for domestic violence (DV) survivors and their companion animals.

Over 50% (well above the national rate of 19%) of NM's DV shelters can house survivors and animals together. This is critical for the mental health and safety of families and animals alike. And Southern New Mexico's rates are even better. Currently 80% of the 10 DV shelters in southern NM are able to temporarily house survivors and their animals. CARE hopes to bring that number to 100% statewide.



YOUR VOICE REALLY DOES MATTER

One of the most effective ways to help create change is to stay informed and speak up about the issues that matter to you.

Your elected officials represent you and your communities. They should hear from their constituents about the topics that matter to them. You can call, email, or set up a meeting with your legislators, even outside of the legislative session. You do not need to be an expert; sharing your personal experience and explaining why an issue matters to you can be one of the most powerful ways to make an impact.

You can also stay involved year-round by following the issues you care about and learning when important decisions are being made. **You don't have to wait until the legislative session begins to make your voice heard; contact your legislators today and let them know you support strong animal protection policies.**

During the legislative session, consider attending a committee hearing or contacting your legislators when a bill comes up for a vote. Every message helps remind our elected officials that their constituents are paying attention and care about what happens in our state.

When New Mexicans speak up and stay engaged, our elected leaders take notice. Together, we can help create meaningful change in our state.

If you are unsure who your legislators are, you can find them by going to https://www.nmlegis.gov/Members/Find_My_Legislator

Animal Protection Voters is developing our priority legislative agenda—but we already know it will include pursuing:

- An up to $20 million appropriation into the Animal Welfare Program Fund to support animal welfare infrastructure, programs, and services.
- A $1 million appropriation into the Equine Shelter Rescue Fund to help provide reliable support needed to care for New Mexico's seized, neglected, and/or abused equines.
- Legislation to allow animals to be included in domestic violence orders of protection.
- Legislation to fix and improve the animal cruelty statute.
- Legislative funding for a pilot project(s) that will reduce barriers to access to non-dairy milks in schools in select districts.

SAVE the DATE

Animal Protection Lobby Day
Thurs. Feb. 4, 2027

STATE LEGISLATIVE FOCUS

When the State Animal Cruelty Law Falls Short

In recent years, prosecutors handling animal cruelty cases have encountered troubling gaps in the law. In some cases, prosecutors have said that the current statute does not allow them to charge as a felony the starvation or dehydration of an animal—even when that neglect results in death. When someone recklessly mistreats an animal and causes serious injury or death, the conduct may be charged only as a misdemeanor.

The current state animal cruelty law lacks a strong, clear definition of "animal." In fact, it specifically exempts reptiles from the law's protection. So when some young men broke into a Las Cruces home and killed the homeowner's pet turtles and snakes, it was impossible for law enforcement to bring any animal cruelty charges.

Further, the law's vague terminology has resulted in case law that leaves most wildlife unprotected as well. In State v. Cleve, a 1999 New Mexico Supreme Court case, the Court determined that the cruelty statute protects only wildlife "in the wild." This interpretation has prevented cruelty charges in multiple cases in recent years where trappers caught endangered Mexican wolves in leg-hold traps and bludgeoned them to death.

Another problem was revealed when the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled in a 2004 case, State of New Mexico v. Charles River Laboratories, that the statute's exceptions were interpreted in a way that allowed the intentional abandonment of, and failure to provide veterinary care to, gravely ill chimpanzees to qualify for an exemption. Neglectfully allowing chimpanzees to bleed and choke to death was sanctioned as allowable "practice of veterinary medicine."

Even when animals are rescued from cruelty situations by law enforcement, the problems don't end. New Mexico's current law can leave shelters responsible for caring for animals for months—or even years—while ownership and criminal cases wind through the courts, with no foolproof mechanism to ensure that those costs are recovered. In one Bernalillo County hoarding case, animal control officers seized more than 70 dogs after years of documented neglect. The county ultimately spent more than $60,000 housing seven of those dogs whose owner refused to relinquish them. Six of those dogs were ultimately euthanized, after spending years stuck in shelter kennels, because they remained too fearful and unsocialized to be safely adopted.

These are not the outcomes New Mexicans expect from

New Mexicans understand what animal cruelty looks like. And when someone intentionally or recklessly causes an animal great bodily harm or death, New Mexicans believe there should be meaningful consequences.

But sometimes, New Mexico's state animal cruelty statute gets in the way.

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a law designed to protect animals. And these results are not what the authors of the state cruelty statute, last updated in 2001, ever intended.

Crafting the Right Solution

Animal Protection Voters has been working to identify and address the statute's weaknesses. In 2024, we commissioned statewide research, including a telephone survey and focus groups, to understand what New Mexicans believe the law should do. The findings, combined with legal and policy research, helped shape a comprehensive set of proposed amendments.

We are now in the process of reaching out to key stakeholders to finalize our set of recommended changes. We hope that this may result in legislation introduced in the 2027 state legislative session.

On the table are changes that would establish clearer minimum standards of care, strengthen protections against abandonment, close gaps in the definition of "animal," require animal possession bans for certain cruelty convictions, improve the process of caring for animals seized from cruelty cases, and strengthen reporting requirements and protections for veterinarians and social workers who report suspected abuse. The proposal also considers expanding rehabilitative interventions for people convicted of animal neglect or cruelty and exploring innovative tools such as courtroom animal advocates.

The goal is straightforward: Make New Mexico's animal cruelty law work the way New Mexicans expect it to work.

And there is a broader reason to get this right. The connection between animal cruelty and violence against people is well established. Effective animal cruelty laws give communities better tools to intervene when abuse occurs—and can help stop dangerous patterns of behavior before they escalate.

Animals deserve laws that protect them from cruelty, and New Mexicans deserve laws that work.



STATE ANIMAL WELFARE FUNDING

Updates and Critical Next Steps

The last year has seen extraordinary wins for animals in New Mexico, with the disbursement of over $6 million in public funds to 61 municipalities, counties, and Tribes since October 2025. These funds directly support animal welfare and sheltering needs.

This funding has been distributed under two separate mechanisms, overseen by the New Mexico Board of Veterinary Medicine and the Department of Finance and Administration, respectively.

	Under the Affordable Spay/Neuter Law (enacted by Senate Bill 57, passed in 2020)	Under the Animal Welfare Program Fund (passed as House Bill 113 in 2025)
What the funds support	Support of low-cost spay/neuter services through fees collected from pet food manufacturers that sell cat and dog food products in New Mexico.	Funds distributed for infrastructure improvements. Projects included roof repair, updated HVAC systems, animal play yards, surgical suites, indoor and outdoor kennels, drainage improvements, and fencing. Although infrastructure projects take time to implement/complete, already there are notable successes.
Where the funds are held	The funds are put into the Animal Care & Facility Fund, controlled by the Board of Veterinary Medicine, and are then released through a competitive grantmaking process.	The fund is overseen by the Department of Finance and Administration.
Amount	The first disbursement was made in October 2025, with **$1 million** granted to 28 entities.	Created with a one-time appropriation of **$5 million.**
Results to date	As of July 2026, over 5,400 dogs and cats have been spayed/neutered—a success by any measure, considering these are interim figures through the first half of the grant period.	Over two grant application phases (October 2025 and July 2026), the entire $5 million has reached 33 entities. As one recipient stated, "This is the very beginning of our ability to quarantine or hold animals in a humane way."



While we can, and should, all bask in this success and appreciate that animal welfare has had a good year, we all know that much more support for animal-related services is needed. Recent setbacks to the Affordable Spay/New Law have temporarily paused disbursements [see Update from the Courtroom on page 20].

And the Animal Welfare Program Fund needs replenishment from the state, preferably on an annual basis. Although $5 million for the Animal Welfare Program Fund was a strong initial investment, it is not nearly sufficient. Twenty grant requests remain unfilled due to exhaustion of the funds, and even for those shelters that received funding, the average award of $116,000 covers only the most basic improvements. Further, needs exist beyond brick-and-mortar infrastructure and include community education, equipment and training for Animal Control Officers, and programs that support community health and public safety.

As such, Animal Protection Voters will be heading into the 2027 legislative session looking for another significant appropriation for the Animal Welfare Program Fund, requesting a full $20 million.

We know that investments and improvements in animal welfare infrastructure and systems have a positive and lasting effect within our New Mexico communities. We all need to raise our voices in unison and ask for the funding that will ensure that we build on today's successes and create more for tomorrow, so that we have safe, healthy, livable and humane communities. Please see Actions You Can Take on page 15.

Adoptable dogs resting at Española Humane. *Photo: Grace Montaño Irwin/APNM*

PINE HILL: APNM facilitated an equine wellness clinic at Pine Hill School in partnership with the Ramah Navajo Chapter Department of Natural Resources, Dr. Hilary Clayton, and Dr. Clara Maxam, serving 45 equines, including two castrations.

TAOS: APNM facilitated an equine wellness clinic at Taos Pueblo in partnership with the Pueblo's WarChief's Office, Dr. Hilary Clayton, Dr. Clara Maxam, Farrier Zhenna Sophia, serving 29 equines, including three castrations.

TUBA CITY (AZ): APNM facilitated an equine wellness clinic in partnership with the Navajo Nation Veterinary Program and a team of compassionate veterinarians and farriers from the Flagstaff area, serving 64 equines, including five castrations and eight mares treated with PZP.

ALBUQUERQUE: Our ***Dogs!Dogs!Dogs!*** event at Winrock Town Center in May was a big success. Hundreds of attendees learned about APNM's work and enjoyed activities including mini yoga sessions for kids, face painting, and dog safety and behavior demos. A highlight of the event was adoptable dogs from Bernalillo County Animal Care Services and PACA/Albuquerque Animal Rescue, nine of whom found loving homes during the event.

BELEN: After our Cruelty Helpline received a tip that a Belen pet store improperly recommended and sold toxic Sevin insecticide dust to treat a kitten's fleas and ticks, APNM filed a complaint with authorities. Consequently, the NM Department of Agriculture issued a cease and desist against the store for pesticide repackaging and referred the case to the federal EPA, and the New Mexico Board of Veterinary Medicine undertook an investigation for practicing veterinary medicine without a license.

LAS CRUCES: APNM and APV have a new presence in Southern New Mexico, thanks to the help of two amazing volunteers, Mari Rodriguez and Dina D'Argo. Over the last several months, we've been able to table at the Las Cruces Farmers Market and are incredibly grateful for the work Mari and Dina have been doing to help our organizations connect with a new pool of supporters and provide information on many of our programs!

A horse receives dental care from Dr. Clara Maxam during our Taos equine clinic. *Photo: Heidi Baxter/APNM*

See cruelty or neglect?

Call **APNM Animal Cruelty Helpline**
877-5-HUMANE
(877-548-6263)
We can help and refer the situation to the right agency in your area.
CONFIDENTIALLY.



UPDATE FROM THE COURTROOM

Passing a law can be a hard-won victory. But for animal advocates, the fight doesn't always end when the Governor signs the bill. Sometimes, the next battle moves to the courtroom.
Two major animal protection laws championed by Animal Protection Voters have faced legal challenges in recent years. One has emerged from the courts with its protections intact, and the other remains at a critical crossroads.



The Ongoing Fight for Affordable Spay/Neuter

In 2020, New Mexico became the fourth state in the nation to adopt a proven funding mechanism for affordable spay/neuter services. Senate Bill 57 established a small annual fee on large pet food manufacturers that sell products in New Mexico, generating more than $1 million each year for spay/neuter programs.

The premise is straightforward: invest in preventing unwanted litters before communities are overwhelmed by them. The funding helps providers reach underserved communities, expand veterinary care, and prevent the births of animals who might otherwise face abandonment, neglect, or euthanasia.

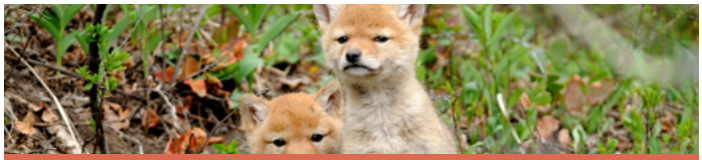
However, the pet food industry—led by the Pet Food Institute, a Washington, DC-based corporate lobbying group—challenged the law shortly after SB 57's passage, seeking to overturn New Mexico's Affordable Spay/Neuter Law as unconstitutional. The lawsuit has been winding through the courts ever since.

In 2024, Animal Protection Voters intervened directly in the case, filing a counterclaim asking the court to affirm the law's constitutionality. In November 2025, we filed a motion for summary judgment, arguing that the law violates neither the US Constitution's dormant Commerce Clause or Equal Protection Clause nor New Mexico's anti-donation clause. The Pet Food Institute followed suit, filing their own motion for summary judgment. After a hearing in May 2026, the case remained under advisement.

Then came a disappointing turn: in August 2026, the First Judicial District Court granted partial summary judgment to the plaintiffs.

Animal Protection Voters respects the court, but we disagree with the ruling and are evaluating our options, including a potential appeal. We continue to believe in both the effectiveness and legality of this law.

The stakes extend far beyond the courtroom. Since its passage, the program has generated more than $1.3 million annually for spay/neuter services, with communities, shelters, veterinarians, and families across New Mexico relying on those resources. The law may have suffered a legal setback, but the need it was designed to address has not gone away.



A Victory for Wildlife and Public Lands

The outlook is very different for another landmark law Animal Protection Voters played a key role in enacting.

In 2021, New Mexico passed Senate Bill 32, the Wildlife Conservation and Public Safety Act, widely known as "Roxy's Law." The law prohibits traps, snares, and wildlife poisons on New Mexico public lands, with limited exceptions for public safety, scientific research, wildlife management, and other narrowly defined circumstances.

Trapping organizations challenged the law's Tribal religious and ceremonial trapping exemption in federal court. In September 2025, a district court dismissed the lawsuit, finding that the plaintiffs lacked standing and that their claims were not ripe for judicial review. Desperate to continue to litter public lands with traps, the plaintiffs appealed.

In June 2026, the US Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit affirmed the dismissal.

Animal Protection Voters and Animal Protection New Mexico joined Humane World for Animals in filing an amicus brief supporting the state's defense. The ruling leaves Roxy's Law—and its prohibition on indiscriminate trapping devices on public lands—in place.

These two cases offer very different reminders about what it takes to turn legislative victories into lasting protections. One law is still fighting for its future in court. The other has survived its legal challenge and now stands as part of New Mexico's landscape.

In both cases, the lesson is the same: passing a law is not the finish line. It is a commitment that sometimes requires years of advocacy, legal work, and persistence to implement and defend—work made possible by our relentlessly compassionate supporters.

Remembering Champions for Animals

Gary Dontzig, Animal Advocate

It is with a heavy heart that we share the news of the passing of Gary Dontzig, a resident of northern New Mexico and long-time supporter of both Animal Protection New Mexico and Animal Protection Voters, earlier this year.

Gary was an accomplished actor, television writer, and producer who won three Emmy Awards during his decades-long career. But despite his remarkable professional achievements and celebrity, he was always approachable, kind, and generous to all he encountered.

After moving to New Mexico, it was his enormous caring heart that drew him into APNM/APV's orbit.

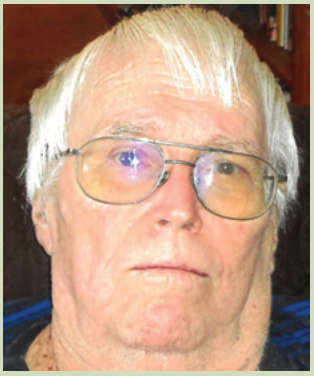


Gary with his beloved dog, Fiona. *Photo by Rob Lang.*

Gary supported our work for decades, encouraged us when we experienced setbacks, and also acted independently to rescue dogs and cats, many of whom were lucky enough to share his home for the balance of their lives. Gary was often part of the crowd of supporters attending our annual donor appreciation parties to celebrate our community of caring New Mexicans and all we've achieved together.

One of Gary's last generous acts was to remember both APNM and APV in his estate planning, helping to bolster our work for years to come and ensure New Mexico's animals have the chance to thrive in this Land of Enchantment.

Larry Caudill, Wildlife Conservationist and Animal Advocate



The Animal Protection New Mexico community has been mourning the passing of long-time APNM supporter, wildlife advocate, and community activist, Larry Caudill, earlier this year.

Larry had been a strong voice for conservation for years at New Mexico Game Commission meetings when APNM's Lisa Jennings first met him in the mid 1990s. At the time, APNM was pushing for first-ever quotas for cougar hunting in New Mexico, and Larry was one of just a few from the hunting community who openly gave support for cougar-killing limitations.

Larry understood that the common myth about cougars harming deer hunting opportunities was just that: a myth. He understood that cougars and deer, together on the landscape, constitute a balance that nature has established to strengthen both populations.

Larry cared deeply about the protection and conservation of all wildlife. He specifically talked with APNM about wanting to see stronger protections for New Mexico's reptiles and amphibians. And prior to trapping restrictions on New Mexico's public lands, Larry publicly called for specific protections for reintroduced river otters from the perils of traps.

Larry recognized that APNM's work for all animals was in alignment with his core values, and as a result, he remembered APNM in his estate planning. In keeping with his caring heart, his generous bequest is supporting all of our work to protect both wild and domestic animals from harm.

Photo courtesy of the Caudill family.

Add *Vegan* Biscochitos to the Menu this Holiday Season!

Holiday season meal planning can feel overwhelming for vegans. For many families and communities, holiday foods center on savory meats and desserts full of butter and milk. A vegan can feel out of place and, let's be honest, hungry.

And yet, simple changes to ingredients can result in meal offerings that are just as good as, if not better than, traditional food choices. Here is a generations-old New Mexican cookie that is often found at holiday gatherings, with a vegan twist!

For more recipes, visit https://apnm.org/category/plant-based-eating/

INGREDIENTS

1 cup vegetable shortening
½ cup sugar (plus extra ¼ cup for topping)
1 Tbsp chia seeds
3 Tbsp water
3 cups flour
1 ½ tsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
1-2 tsp anise seed
3 Tbsp orange juice

DIRECTIONS

In a small bowl, combine chia seeds and water. Set in refrigerator for at least 15 minutes to allow the chia seeds to soak up the water.

Using a handheld mixer, beat together shortening and sugar until creamy. Add chia and beat until very fluffy.

Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt; add to creamed mixture.

Stir in orange juice and anise seed.

Roll dough out on floured board to ¼ inch thick and cut into desired shape(s).

Combine ¼ cup sugar and cinnamon and sprinkle tops of each cookie.

Bake at 350° for 20 minutes or until light brown.



Photo by Jessi Princiotto/APNM



Retirement Plan:

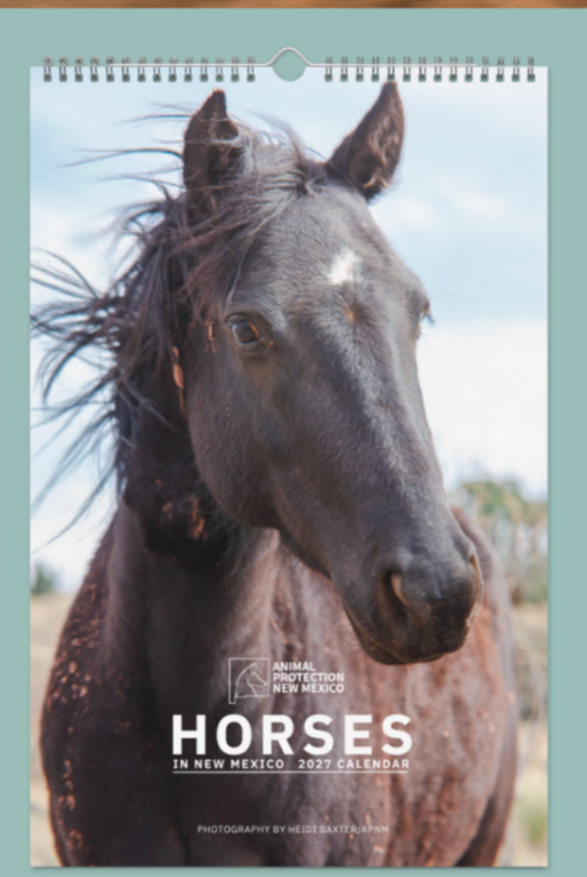
Choose animals, get a tax benefit!

If you have/own an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), you must take a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from the account each year upon reaching the age of 73 to 75 (depending on your birth year). The good news is that the RMD can be made directly to a qualified charity like Animal Protection New Mexico, and that donation will simultaneously help you avoid paying some income taxes, assuming you don't need those funds for your annual living expenses.

Also, an IRA owner may make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from the account beginning at age 70½. A QCD allows individuals over age 70½ to transfer funds directly from their IRA to a charity like Animal Protection New Mexico, providing a tax benefit for the IRA owner. CAUTION: If the funds are distributed to the IRA owner first, the owner cannot take advantage of the tax savings. Also, QCDs are exclusive to IRA accounts (you cannot make them from workplace giving plans like 401ks, for instance.)

If you'd like to make an online QCD/RMD gift, please have your financial advisor contact APNM's Development Department for more details at development@apnm.org.

Celebrate the Beauty of New Mexico's Horses



Just in time for holiday gifting, you'll love our 2027 wall calendar, **Horses in New Mexico.** Featuring artful images of New Mexico's horses taken by APNM's Digital Communications Manager and photographer, Heidi Baxter, at our equine clinics, at equine sanctuaries, and in the community.

Each month celebrates the beauty of New Mexico's horses and includes major holidays plus animal holidays, and full and new moons. This 11" x 17" calendar makes a wonderful gift for those who love horses and want to be reminded of their magnificence every day of the year.



Order the
2027 Horses in New Mexico
calendar online at **apnm.org/shop**

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Photo by Michael Anthony Photography

César Díaz

Serving APNM as the Education and Outreach Director, César Díaz brings over 20 years of experience in classroom education, humane education leadership, and community engagement. He has been selected for the Humane Educator Spotlight by Gryphon Press and is a member of the Association of Professional Humane Educators where he previously served on its Executive Board.

César has a BA in Writing and Rhetoric from Edward's University and an MFA in Creative Non-Fiction from the University of Arizona. His early career includes reintegrating formerly incarcerated individuals into the workforce and assisting students throughout the southwest in their drive to be first generation college graduates. Most recently, César worked as a Writing and Literature Professor at Austin Community College and taught Creative Writing at the University of Arizona.

César and his wife Rachelle are deeply devoted to senior shelter dogs, adopting and caring for four in the last eight years.

When asked why he has chosen humane education, César states simply, "It is the culmination of my love for animals, my passion for advocacy, and my desire to work with underserved communities. The work of humane education merges compassion with empathy and is a way to reach both children and adults."