

California top state for how it treats animals, Nevada ranked 30th

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Nevada ranked 30th among the states in how it protects animals in 2011, scoring only 25 points out of a possible 66, the Humane Society of the United States said in a national report this week.

Ranking first with 46 points was California, followed by New Jersey and Oregon with 40 points. In last place was South Dakota with eight points, with Idaho second to last with nine points.

Nevada improved its score from 2010, but the organization noted that the state's laws regarding the possession of dangerous wild animals are weak. Nevada ranked 30th in 2010 but had 24 points, one fewer than in the 2011 report card.

The third annual rating evaluates the states on a wide range of animal protection laws, including animal cruelty codes, equine protection standards, wildlife issues, animals in research and farm animal policy.

“Our Humane State Ranking provides a big-picture look at how states are faring on animal-protection policies, and how they rank in the nation,” Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of HSUS, said. “There are some states that are adopting innovative and strong policies to protect animals, while others are lagging badly. Animal protection is a serious matter for tens of millions of Americans, and we hope state lawmakers fulfill their moral responsibility and help us crack down on abuses.”

Nevada's ranking was unchanged despite several measures

approved by the 2011 Legislature to further protections for animals.

They included Senate Bill 223, sponsored by Sen. Shirley Breeden, D-Henderson, and Sen. David Parks, D-Las Vegas, known as "Cooney's Law" after a dog brutally killed with a box cutter, was the highest profile animal welfare measure considered during the session. The new law makes willful or malicious cruelty to pet animals a felony on the first offense. Under previous law, a felony charge could be issued only after a third act of cruelty.

Also winning approval were:

- SB226, sponsored by Sen. Sheila Leslie, D-Reno, Parks, and Assemblywoman Peggy Pierce, D-Las Vegas, requiring the wildlife commission to regulate leg hold traps in congested areas.

- SB299, sponsored by Sen. Mark Manendo, D-Las Vegas, requiring commercial dog breeders to be licensed and to have regular county inspections, bans the stacking of cages and the use of wire floors in puppy mills, and prohibits the breeding of dogs younger than 18 months of age. The bill applies only to commercial breeders selling dogs as pets, and exempts hobby breeders.

- SB102, proposed by the Senate Natural Resources Committee, imposes civil penalties for illegally killing or possessing a trophy big game mammal, or for illegally killing or possessing certain wildlife species.

Not all measures were successful.

SB364, which proposed to ban horse tripping, a practice of roping a horse's legs used in some non-sanctioned rodeos, failed to win approval in the Senate Natural Resources Committee. Supporters of the bill, including the Humane Society, said the practice is cruel and does occur in some

non-advertised rodeos in Nevada.

Opponents said the proposal was an attempt to open the door to banning other types of rodeo events, and ultimately, rodeos themselves.