

Sand Fire animal rescue coordination lacking



El Dorado County Fairgrounds has plenty of room to take more horses from the Sand Fire. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed and Susan Wood

PLACERVILLE – Lack of communication is affecting people who have horses in the Sand Fire area.

The CalFire recording says the El Dorado County Fairgrounds is not accepting horses and that instead they will be taken to Rancho Murieta, but that is not the reality.

Twenty-eight horses were at the fairgrounds as of Sunday afternoon. There are eight more stalls to accommodate at least 20 more horses and a 2-acre pasture nearby. Lead volunteer coordinator of the effort, Kevin Banks, told *Lake Tahoe News* with what's been lined up in El Dorado County, about 60 to 100 more animals can be taken in.

He was busy working the phone near the arena of the fairgrounds on July 27 securing spots and trying to find out why El Dorado County Animal Services wants animals to go farther than they have to.

Banks showed up at the fairgrounds on Saturday to do what he could. He said there is no official plan in place that he is aware of for people to deal with animal evacuations in a case like this.

The fire started July 25 when a vehicle drove onto dry vegetation. The blaze has burned 3,800 acres and is 50 percent containment, with 10 houses and seven outbuildings lost. Evacuations and road closures are still in place.



Rita Uhren and Chris Navratil clean stalls at the fairgrounds where they are caring for evacuated horses.

It is burning in the wine regions of El Dorado and Amador counties. Unlike Saturday, the smoke on Sunday afternoon was not visible nor could one smell it in the American River canyon.

One inmate firefighter was hurt.

Small animals – like domestic pets, goats and sheep – are being housed at Ponderosa High School in Shingle Springs.

The fairgrounds has the horses.

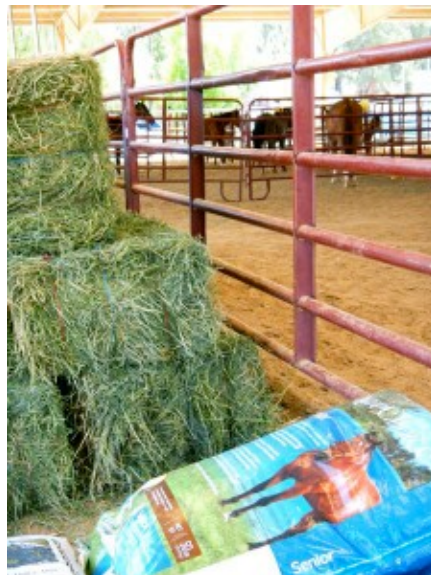
Helping Banks on Sunday with the horses were Rita Uhren, Jamie Buetler and Chris Navratil. Navratil works for Nickers Horse Sitting. They are coordinating efforts, secure boarding,

cleaning stalls, feeding animals and making sure horses have water.

One stud was a bit restless and had to have his pen reinforced so he wouldn't get out.

"My horse was evacuated during the Santa Cruz fire, and I just thought that I should help out here while their houses are being threatened. These are beautiful animals," Uhren told *Lake Tahoe News*.

A couple of the horses are unidentified because they got loose and it wasn't their owner who brought them to safety.



Donations of feed for horses is needed.

Lee's Feed & Western Store in Shingle Springs has been the primary store to donate supplies – mostly hay and other food. The store is also accepting donations that will be passed along to those caring for animals rescued from the Sand Fire.

Banks and Buetler didn't give much credit to the coordinating agencies. They said county Animal Control, which *Lake Tahoe News* is trying to reach, and South County Large Animal Rescue have provided misinformation on space and are sending people down to a Sacramento-area facility.

SCLAR, which is based in Somerset, does not self-deploy, but instead has to be requested by Animal Services.

SCLAR told *Lake Tahoe News* animals are usually taken to a predetermined location, and that is usually Rancho Murieta, though some will go to the fairgrounds or a ranch that an owner requests.

Aimee Vukovich, director of SCLAR, said horses, pigs and goats have been picked up from the Sand Fire.

“We provide transportation for animals that are in danger where people evacuate and whatever reason they can’t get them out,” Vukovich told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We try not to leave anything behind.”

She did not have a count on the number of animals they have retrieved.