



SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

Marine veterans Chris Miller and Megan Lowry with the Wounded Veterans of Oklahoma, rescue a horse from floodwater in Orange, Texas, after torrential rains from Hurricane Harvey.

NEIGHBORS

Helping

Neighbors

**Hurricanes Harvey
and Irma challenged
horse owners in
Texas and Florida.**

By Kathy A. Johnson

ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, MY FAMILY AND I SPENT ALL DAY watching the weather as Hurricane Irma swirled north toward our home in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area. I was talking to my stepmom on the phone when our power went out around 7 p.m., and we nervously settled in for a long night of listening to the wind howl and playing cards by lantern light.

By bedtime, even though Irma was expected to weaken to a Category 2 by the time it reached us, I still worried about damage to our home and about how my American Quarter Horse, "Tank," would fare as he weathered the storm at the barn where I board him.

In a span of just 16 days, two of the most powerful and devastating hurricanes in recorded history thrashed first Texas and then Florida, affecting millions of people and their animals. Some were able to evacuate, taking their animals with them, while some were forced to make the wrenching choice to leave their animals behind. Others sheltered in place, preparing their homes, properties and livestock as best they could.

It's hard enough to evacuate human family members and small pets, but what would you do if your horses were in the path of the storm? That's the situation AQHA members and other horse and livestock owners found themselves in during the 2017 hurricane season.

Harvey Soaks Texas

HURRICANE HARVEY MADE LANDFALL AS A CATEGORY 4 STORM August 25 near Rockport, Texas, about 188 miles southwest of Houston. Maximum sustained winds were clocked at 130 mph, but it wasn't the wind that did the most damage. Slow-moving Harvey drenched southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana with 40 to 65 inches of rain, breaking all-time U.S. tropical cyclone rainfall records and leading to catastrophic flooding.

Horse and livestock owners scrambled to find high ground for their animals, and venues such as Ford Park in Beaumont, Texas, and Sam Houston Race Park in Houston offered shelter to displaced horses and other animals. AQHA members made Facebook announcements offering their property as a safe place for those affected by the rising waters.

"Harvey was different than most hurricanes. Most hurricanes come in, hit the coast, then they calm down and they dissipate.... Harvey kept dumping rain and rain and rain. The communities that would have been minimally impacted by Harvey if it had been normal, were subsequently impacted by flooding," says Angela G. Clendenin, public information officer for Texas A&M University's Veterinary Emergency Team.

VET's roster of volunteers joined members of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Texas Equine Veterinary Association, the Texas Veterinary Association, the Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps, local veterinarians personally affected by the storm and other groups in caring for the affected animals over a vast area of southern Texas. They did everything from check-ups on search and rescue dogs to treating small and large animals. Some animals were sent to the Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences for further treatment and care.

But the team didn't just treat injuries caused by debris. Angela says the challenge of getting livestock out of flooded areas left the animals vulnerable to water-related injuries such as cellulitis.

"You know how it is when you're in the bathtub too long and your skin kind of shrivels? It's the same concept, but the skin starts sloughing off. And the longer your animals are in

the floodwaters, and the higher they were in the floodwaters, the more skin will slough off," Angela says.

Animals left in floodwaters were also at risk for hoof rot, respiratory disease and flesh-eating bacteria.

"There will probably still be signs and symptoms of things to come, probably issues related to inhaling or ingesting toxic floodwater," she says.

Angela says horse and livestock owners who want to prepare for flooding like that from Hurricane Harvey should do several things, including determining the topography of their land and whether there is enough high ground to shelter their animals. If not, they should find out if their county has a plan in place to shelter residents' livestock. Ask, "What is the process of getting there? What resources do owners need to have to move the number of animals they have? Don't wait for the flooding to be coming. Make pre-arrangements if possible," Angela says. "Also, understand you will likely need to

provide hay, feed, feed buckets, things like that for every day that you're gone. And the reality may be that it's two weeks before you're even allowed to go back to where your home is or was."

If you evacuate your horses, take your vet records with you. Shelters will usually require proof of a negative Coggins test. Put some form of identification on your animals if you have to leave them, cut fences to allow them to seek high ground, or if you have to transport them to a large-volume

shelter. This might be a paint brand or some sort of tag that identifies the animal as yours. Once you've done that, take a picture of it with your phone.

"This makes the process of reunification quicker and more secure," Angela says.

She also recommends that horse owners who live in an area prone to flooding make sure their animals are up to date on vaccinations: "Flooding brings mosquitoes, and mosquitoes bring all the mosquito-borne diseases animals are prone to."

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

AS HURRICANE HARVEY APPROACHED, AQHA DIRECTOR Kenneth Banks of Schulenburg, Texas, offered high ground, as well as hay, trailers and even a tractor to those in the path of the storm. After the storm passed, Kenneth and his team were involved in cleanup efforts, as well as searching by air for missing and dead cattle.

On August 30, he wrote on Facebook, "Tonight I could not be more proud of the people of Fayette County. The Banks Ranch team spent the afternoon helping with the cleanup. ...



Horses that stood in floodwater, like this one in Wharton, Texas, faced potential health issues like cellulitis.

ANA RAMIREZ/THE VICTORIA ADVOCATE VIA AP

There were sooooo many volunteers working. Every house had 10 people working. The food/clothing donation center was often eight cars deep dropping off items. Tractors, trailers, loaders and people with 'gloves and a broom' were everywhere. The work was being done by the people. No law enforcement to control looters was required. Just neighbors helping neighbors. Working people helping working people. If only all of America could see this. If only the news broadcasters would show the good in our people, our country, our government officials. I am proud to be part of this show of mankind's ability to love and care and help each other."

From Key West to Tallahassee

WHILE THE MAJOR ISSUE WITH HARVEY WAS RAINFALL THAT caused flooding, it was Hurricane Irma's winds that did the most damage. Irma boasted 185-mph winds for 37 hours, but was "only" blowing 130 when it made landfall at Cudjoe Key the morning of September 10.

Once she swept through the state, more than 13 million Floridians had lost power, the largest outage in U.S. history. At one point, 62 percent of the state was without power. Nearly a third of the state's population, 6.5 million people, evacuated.

The storm was so large and its path changed so much that horse owners from one end of the state to the other were affected. Many owners, including the barn where I board, felt it would be safer to shelter in place rather than evacuate and made preparations accordingly, buying extra feed and hay and policing the property for anything that could

become a missile in high winds. We also stockpiled water in every available container since it was almost a certainty that we would lose power for an extended period.

Down south in Key West, mounted police officer Mike Wolf evacuated with his American Quarter Horse mount, BC Super Starburst, another mounted police officer and two more police horses on September 7. The horses were stabled by the Orange County Sheriff's office at the old Disney stables, while the officers stayed in hotels.

"The Orange County Sheriff's office took really good care of us," he says.

They returned 12 days later.

"We had to wait for Key West to have a sustainable source of running water so we would be able to reliably provide water for the horses," Mike says. The stables where the police horses are kept were mostly unharmed, with just debris that had to be removed and tree damage — unlike Officer Wolf's own home on Cudjoe Key, where Hurricane Irma first made landfall. It sustained major damage from wind and water.

AQHA Director and Quarter Horse halter- and performance-horse breeder Anne Prince of Palmetto, Florida, not only sheltered her own horses in place, but she also opened her barn to evacuees. Before the storm, Shinn Performance Horses of Venice, Florida, had already made arrangements to evacuate to Anne's barn. Then Anne began fielding panicked calls from other horse people.

"These people were desperate and crying, trying to find some place to take their horses," she says. Her barn's large



"Pinky," a South Florida racehorse, loads up for a 300-mile evacuation north to Ocala, Florida. Her trainer had already taken 30 horses and was loading 10 more to escape Hurricane Irma.

MIKE STOCKER/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL VIA AP

stalls enabled her to double up horses that got along, and she ultimately ended up housing about 60 horses.

"The horses were great! They seemed to know this was a stressful situation and they needed to get along," she says.

Anne's farm lost power for about 20 hours but sustained no major damage. By Monday afternoon, they experienced some coastal surge flooding from Frog Creek, and it took about 48 hours for the water to recede.

Three weeks after the storm, she still had a few horses that couldn't be taken back to their homes because of flooding and storm damage. She was treating a few cases of scratches, but mostly the horses were unscathed.

Anne says, "We live on a peninsula surrounded by water, and we're all so interconnected. It was heartwarming to see horse people, especially Quarter Horse people, step up and take care of each other."

To the north in Tallahassee, Dr. Steve Fisch, an AQHA director, and his practice, AVS Equine Hospital, sheltered as many horses as could fit in the 32-stall, poured-concrete barn while still leaving room for injured or sick horses needing treatment.

Irma changed course about 12 hours before it was supposed to hit Tallahassee, according to Dr. Fisch, and he experienced only a 48-hour power outage. A generator powered the water well and ran critical parts of the equine hospital.

At my barn and at home, we lost power for four days and had major cleanup to do, but no damage. Tank and all the other horses were safe, though my heart skipped a beat when I saw that he had managed to rid himself of two of the three forms of ID I'd put on him, and there was a tree down on one of the fences so he could have gotten out.

Even though the challenges Texans and Floridians faced after the hurricanes were different, one thing remained the same: the animal community helping and caring about each other.

As Anne says, "It was heartwarming how many people picked up the phone or texted to see how we were."

I also received multiple emails from online acquaintances, texts and phone calls from friends and family members, and even the offer of a home with power to stay in when we still had no electricity days after Irma passed.

In Texas, Angela was particularly

"It was heartwarming to see horse people, especially Quarter Horse people, step up and take care of each other."

— AQHA Director Anne Prince

dinner. It's humbling.

"We're there to serve, and yet here are these people showing up with a smile, and you would never know that they've just lost everything. They came to help us and to support us. That goes beyond humbling." 🐾

Kathy A. Johnson is a Tampa Bay-area freelance writer and AQHA member. We haven't forgotten about the third major storm of the 2017 hurricane season, Maria, which struck the northeastern Caribbean in late September. In 2016, there were 123 American Quarter Horses in the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, 160 in the Dominican Republic and smaller numbers on other Caribbean islands. As of mid-October, with little communication coming from the islands, we had not heard how they weathered the storm. The fourth hurricane of the year, Nate, came in October and caused widespread damage in Central America, where we have 207 Quarter Horses in Costa Rica and 844 in Panama, plus others in neighboring countries.



Dr. Laurie Shelton, a member of the Veterinary Medical Reserve Corps, works with a fourth-year veterinary student from the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences to care for a horse in a shelter after Hurricane Harvey.

TIM STEPHENSON/TEXAS A&M COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE & BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES