

MORE DOGS THAN BONES

DOG OVERPOPULATION ON THE NAVAJO RESERVATION

A PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY BY EMMA KISIEL

Front cover image: Highway 191, between Wide Ruins and Klagetoh, AZ
Back cover image: Highway 160, outside Red Mesa, AZ

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The Navajo Nation is a 26,000-square-mile American Indian reservation in Arizona and New Mexico that contains an estimated 160,000 stray dogs and cats. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are 180,000 residents on the Navajo Nation. Proportionally, there is one homeless dog for almost every resident and at least six stray dogs for every square mile. The inability to pay for veterinary services has led to this overpopulation problem: 43 percent of Navajo people live below the poverty level, the per capita income is just above \$7,000, and the unemployment rate is 42 percent.

There are differing opinions regarding the dog's role in the Navajo culture. Some believe the dog is considered sacred, "a spiritual people" that should be respected, not feared or pushed aside. Others feel Navajo tradition is that the role of the dog is to guard the home and herd the sheep, not to be kept as a pet. According to the Navajo creation story, when the dog was in question the holy people asked, "What are we going to do with this animal, should we do away with this animal?" The dog replied, "No, I will be forever the watchdog, my place will be at the door."

The Navajo Nation currently lacks an effective Animal Control Program and adequate animal shelters. Currently, there are only five Animal Control Officers employed to address animal control issues for the entire Navajo Nation. These Officers can only provide “priority” services, such as response to bite cases and livestock damage, and not aggressive enforcement of laws, vaccinations, adoptions, pick-up of stray/unwanted animals, dead animal disposal, and assisting with spay/neuter clinics. Over 3,000 reports of attacks and other dog problems are filed in one year.

According to Navajo Nation Animal Control Laws, pets must be fenced in or tied up, vaccinated, and licensed, and all animals must be sterilized before adoption. During “roundups” or “animal sweeps,” Animal Control Officers check all strayed and loose dogs, usually in a physically rough manner. Loose and unlicensed dogs are impounded and can be reclaimed for a \$25 fee. Other fees and citations apply for unlicensed dogs. Unclaimed dogs are euthanized, and at times more than 100 dogs are put down in a week's time.

Many dogs on the Navajo Nation show signs of disease, starvation, neglect, and abuse. Some dogs have never experienced human care. The two most common diseases on the Navajo Nation, distemper and parvovirus, can be prevented with vaccines. There is a serious lack of funding and a long history of budget cuts for shelters and clinics, yet when mobile spay/neuter clinics offer free services, not enough pet-owners come forward with their dogs.

On the Navajo Nation, there are more dogs than bones to feed them. Their over-breeding is a sign of a real lack of human care and responsibility. These animals are more *dogs* than they are piles of bones on the side of the road. All dogs should have a home and be properly cared for. They cannot exist as wildlife.

*The greatness of a nation and its moral progress
can be judged by the way its animals are treated.*

Mahatma Gandhi

Highway 160, outside Teec Nos Pos, AZ



Outside Tuba City, AZ



Highway 160, outside Tuba City, AZ



Highway 191, outside Klagetoh, AZ







Highway 264, outside Window Rock, AZ
puppies living 50 feet from the highway
and their mother's body



Highway 264, outside Window Rock, AZ



Parking lot, Bashas' Diné Market, Window Rock, AZ





Outside a small housing project along Route 9, NM



Express Gas Station, Klagetoh, AZ

Bottles
Filled

PROPANE
EMERGENCY
SHUTOFF

PROPANE
EMERGENCY
SHUTOFF



McDonald's, Tuba City, AZ



Highway 160, outside Dennehotso, AZ







Bashas' Diné Market, Window Rock, AZ



Bashas' Diné Market, Window Rock, AZ



Highway 160, outside Red Mesa, AZ



Outside Tuba City, AZ





Bashas'

Diné Market

DELI



Highway 264, outside Window Rock, AZ



Highway 89, outside Cameron, AZ



Outside Tuba City, AZ



Ways you can help

Support organizations like the Navajo Nation Puppy Adoption Program

Donate to organizations like the Navajo Nation Veterinary & Livestock program, Tuba City Humane, Plateauland Mobile Veterinary Clinic, Spay Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP), and Blackhat Humane Society
(Find out how at desertanimalcompanions.org)

If you live near the Navajo Nation, contact a shelter to see if you can help by fostering an animal

Share this book with your friends and family and educate others about the dog overpopulation problem on the Navajo Nation

You can help keep dog overpopulation and homelessness from becoming a problem in your area by choosing to adopt an animal from a shelter and by licensing and spaying or neutering your pet.

The images in this book were made in March of 2010.

The information in the introduction of this book comes from the following sources:

Desert Animal Companions: People Helping Animals on the Navajo Nation

<http://www.desertanimalcompanions.org/>

“Desert Dogs” documentary

http://www.hilderproductions.com/Desert_Dogs.html

Navajo Nation Animal Control

http://www.nndfw.org/nnac_plea.htm

Navajo Nation Demographics

<http://www.navajobusiness.com/fastFacts/demographics.htm>

“Rez Dogs” documentary

http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/rez_dogs/

