

My name is Keith Benning. I'm a former Rolette County Deputy Sheriff, and currently a municipal judge and the founder and manager of Turtle Mountain Animal Rescue. I founded TMAR ten years ago and knew nothing about animal rescue. I had no idea what I was getting into, but 8000 lives saved later, it was worth it. Every rescue shelter in the state is consistently full. As soon as space opens, that space is filled with more animals needing help. Many organizations like Souris Valley in Minot and Circle of Friends in Grand Forks have been struggling to stay afloat, but the endless cycle of animals keeps coming.

Spay and neuter efforts are the number one way to keep overpopulation in check. From just one unspayed female, her mate, and their offspring; if none are spayed or neutered, and all live to breed in 5 years they can create 12,288 dogs.

The breakdown is:

1 year: 16 dogs

2 years: 128 dogs

3 years: 512 dogs

4 years: 2,048 dogs

5 years: 12,288 dogs.

Cats have a five-year total of 11,801 cats.

The US department of agriculture says that North Dakota is one of 46 other states that are facing a vet shortage. Supply and demand dictates vet care prices. The national average for private practice spay in suburban areas is 200 to 250 and in rural areas it is 80 to 100. In North Dakota the average is over 400.00. Many vets in ND are dual practitioners that serve both household animals and livestock. It's often a struggle for them to serve both client bases. By decreasing the number of breeding animals in the population, it would after a few years allow vets to have more time for livestock. Just looking at 625 dog spays as proposed in the bill done in one year, by three years that would mean 160,000 less animals if there was a 50% mortality rate.

In North Dakota 63.7% of the voting public own cats, dogs, or both. We are an agriculture-based state, but it's also a big pet owner state. The area we serve is a reservation county, and the common misconception is that pet over population in North Dakota is a Native American issue. I can tell you from someone boots on the ground it's an income-based issue that goes hand in hand with affordable vet care. I have done animal disaster responses for hurricanes Harvey, Ida, Irma, Florence, Barry, and Michael. During those responses I worked in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas. I saw firsthand that ethnicity had nothing to do with overpopulation. It was all dependent on economics and affordable vet care. The less animals that are created, the fewer that come into shelters. North Dakota as a state is in the top 5 for the lowest euthanasia rates. That rate is low because of the tireless efforts of blood, sweat and tears of those of us in animal rescue. We have carried that burden for a long time and are now asking for your help.