

NEWS & POLITICS

# Riding Along with the Volunteers Rescuing Pets from the Guadalupe Flood

Kerrville and Austin Pets Alive have rescued many dogs  
and cats whose owners and homes have been lost.



By Sasha von Oldershausen

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**Superman, who was found alone on a large pile of debris after the devastating floods in Central Texas, was rescued by Austin Pets Alive! volunteers.**

**Courtesy of Austin Pets Alive!**

Hours after the Guadalupe River receded, a brown pitbull named Hulk, whose family and half their riverside house were swept away by the July 4 flooding, returned to the wreckage of his home. He settled atop a torn-up

floorboard, turned up his nose, and sniffed the air. A day later, he hadn't budged, and friends and neighbors called Kerrville Pets Alive, a local nonprofit no-kill animal shelter, concerned that the dog might be hurt. When the shelter sent its vet team to assess the situation, it found that he wasn't injured—he was waiting for his family to return.

On social media, scattered among the now-ubiquitous photos of missing persons are the faces of their best friends: dogs and cats. As Kerr County officials, along with state and federal agencies, continue their days-long search, Kerrville Pets Alive has led a parallel effort to locate displaced animals and reunite them with their families. In Hulk's case, the shelter was able to locate a surviving family member who had lost everything in the flood—including her phone—and found a foster home for the dog while his owner regained her footing.

Austin Pets Alive! has quickly become a crucial partner in these efforts. Lindsay O'Gan, who works for APA, arrived in Kerrville on the Fourth hours after the catastrophic flood had torn through whole neighborhoods, the death toll steadily rising. "We didn't know what we were getting into," O'Gan said. "We just kind of drove straight in." She soon began coordinating with the Kerrville shelter, helping create a Google form that pet owners or their friends and family members could use to provide information and photos of

missing animals, forming a makeshift database for the shelters to reference. Unlike in the disaster response for missing people, there is no centralized system for lost and found pets, making the task of reunion a challenge.

"One of the hard parts is that almost every one of these animals that I'm working on, their people are all missing or deceased," said O'Gan. "And so it's a lot of coordinating with friends and family."

At the Kerrville Pets Alive office, which occupies a small house on high ground that was unaffected by the storms, volunteers fielded an endless stream of calls, trying to connect found animals with their families or recover the deceased. They accepted donations of pet food and animal crates, which they stacked high outside the building, and distributed the supplies to those in need. In a nearby trailer, two veterinarians who'd traveled from Austin to assist in the rescue efforts gave vaccines to a litter of stray kittens that had been recovered from a local's front porch.



**Donated food.**  
**Sasha von Oldershausen**



**Donated crates.**  
**Sasha von Oldershausen**

Each of the rescued animals came with its own remarkable story: A dachshund had climbed into the built-in bookcase of its owners' home, above the waterline, and hid there. Two cats crawled up high into a kitchen pantry. At a trailer park in Ingram, where single-wides had been lifted from their pillars and turned inside out and a Toyota Tacoma hung six feet off the ground in a pile of debris, half a dozen cats crept delicately around the wreckage. "Animals are so smart," said Ellen Jefferson, the CEO and president of Austin Pets Alive.

The Austin shelter was able to mobilize quickly in part because it was pulling on experience built over years of responding to increasingly frequent Texas disasters. In fact, crisis response has become an unexpected but regular part of the work of the nonprofit animal shelter, which operates solely on donations. Jefferson got her first taste of emergency response during the Bastrop County Complex fire of 2011, which consumed some 32,000 acres and killed two people. "That was the first time that my eyes were open to what happens in disasters and how animals are not part of the equation," she said. Residents were forced to evacuate, and many had no choice but to leave their pets behind. With the permission of homeowners, APA was able to break down doors to recover many stranded animals. It provided similar support during Hurricane Harvey and the 2021 failure of the Texas electric

grid following that year's February winter storm.

Much of its work involves making room for incoming animals by relocating existing shelter pets, helping to ease the burden on government-run facilities where euthanasia is practiced. "We've transported over ten thousand

animals since [2021 Winter Storm] Uri to other states that have fewer animals," said Jefferson.

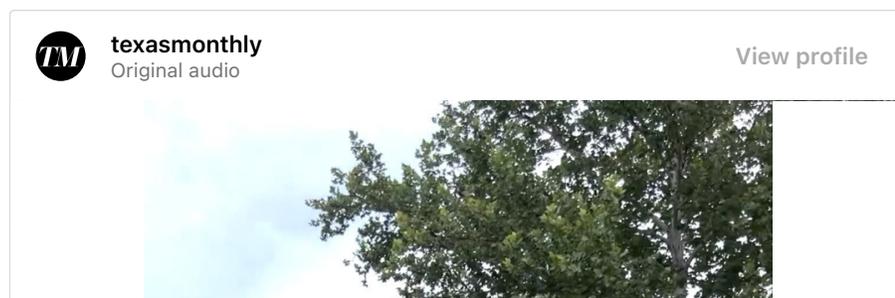
Many pets, of course, didn't survive the Guadalupe floods. Mike Wong, a soft-spoken animal control officer for Kerr County, told me he'd recently been called to retrieve a dog found in a tree. The dog's owner had also perished, but a family member was able to recover the animal's remains for cremation, offering a trace of closure.

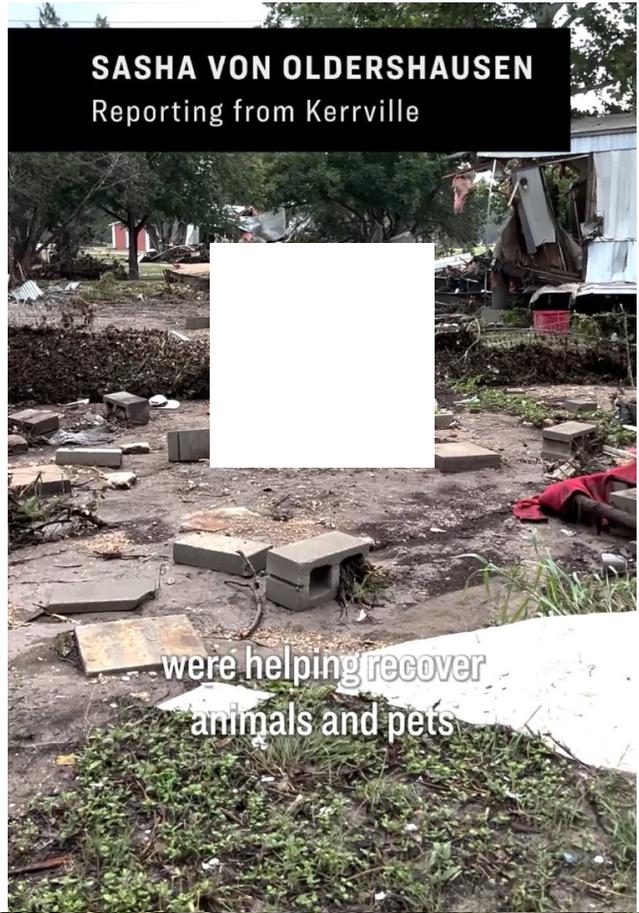
Like many in Kerr County, Wong has spent much of the past few days scouring the river. During one of these walks, he discovered Daisy, a yellow Lab mix, wandering on the south side of the Guadalupe. Her owners, a family that had been camping at an RV park in Kerrville, were still missing after the flood, though the father's body had been discovered downriver. Daisy rode shotgun in Wong's truck, accepting head scratches and neck rubs from him. "She was fine," he said. "Just tired from swimming."

Wong drove to Grimes Funeral Chapels, in Kerrville, to meet family members of Daisy's missing owners, a reunion coordinated by KPA's director, Karen Guerriero. After leaping out of the truck, Daisy spun around in a circle, delighted by the attention of her family. They checked her collar for its telltale pattern of pink and blue flowers. "That's Daisy," one of them said tearfully.

It was—for the moment, at least—a desperately needed measure of relief.

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