

LARGE ANIMAL EVACUATION GROUP (LAEG)



www.smclaeg.org



www.CECportal.org

Trailing Exercise 20AUG16

Ember Ridge Ranch, Moss Beach

POST-EXERCISE REVIEW

Prepared by OES Coastside Coordinator Nicholas Gottuso

During disasters, such as flooding and wildfires, we have plans and resources in place to safely evacuate people who may be threatened. In the rural portions of San Mateo County, many residents also own large animals that must be removed from danger. These residents might be home when disaster strikes, and they might not. They might have enough trailers and trained help on hand to effectively evacuate their large animals themselves, and they may not. If they don't, the results could be catastrophic.

In order to meet this need, the Coastside-based San Mateo County Large Animal Evacuation Group (LAEG) stands ready to assist. LAEG may be requested by Fire personnel, Sheriff's Office personnel, or through the on-call OES duty officer via Public Safety Communications (911). The team trains regularly, and the most recent class was held at Ember Ridge Ranch in Moss Beach on Saturday, August 20th, 2016. Most LAEG members also belong to the Coastside Emergency Corps (CEC.) Membership in LAEG is one of the several qualifying skills for volunteers who want to join the CEC. Several non-LAEG members of the CEC also attended this training session, along with Coastside/CalFire personnel.

The service provided by LAEG to the animal owners of San Mateo County appears to be fairly straightforward at first glance, but as I learned, there is a lot to it. Imagine arriving at the scene of a nearby wildland fire to a property you've never visited. Panicked 1,000 pound animals need to be approached by a stranger, calmed down, herded out of a corral or stable, and then convinced to climb aboard a trailer they likely have never seen before. Add to the problem that some of these animals may have never been in a trailer, and it becomes immediately clear that the handler must have the finely-tuned and very specific skillset and mindset to make this all work under unusually difficult circumstances. The right training and practice is absolutely critical for a successful outcome.

LAEG's members have a fleet of personally-owned trucks and trailers capable of safely evacuating horses, cattle, llamas, goats, donkeys and other large animals, with pre-arranged holding locations out of the area to house them until it is safe to return home, or until the animals' owners make other arrangements. Many LAEG members are also ham radio operators and CERT graduates.

Topics for the hands-on training included different trailer types, bridles, ropes and tethers, techniques for herding and directing different kinds of large animals, and the very subtle psychological tricks used to get the animals to calm down and climb into the trailers. Even the way your head is facing while walking alongside an animal makes a big difference in the success or failure of the trailing.

Several veteran LAEG members provided outstanding instruction, including Stacy Claitor and her husband Jim (he's not currently a CEC member, but we're working on that!)

Stacy oversees TKREF (TomKat Ranch Educational Foundation) teaching animal health and well-being while working towards the holistic grazing goals of the TomKat Ranch, as well as running Land & Livestock Management. She and Jim have raised cattle since childhood. Both are certified in Bud Williams Low Stress Livestock Handling, and have been sharing their knowledge via clinics for several years.

LAEG veterans Linda Freifeld, VP & Treasurer, and Kris Thoren, VP & Secretary, provided instruction on Goat Handling and demonstrated, along with all of the instructors of the day, how important quiet body language is when working with large animals.

Also on scene Saturday was Todd Azevedo, a professional animal handler and transporter. With over 28 years in the industry, Todd is a highly accomplished trainer of horses and riders.

Todd has extensive experience in horse handling and has participated in numerous extractions and emergency evacuations in both Santa Cruz and San Benito counties. Todd is truly a "Horse Whisperer" with an uncanny ability to communicate with animals he has never met before. His instruction and insight were invaluable, and his participation was greatly appreciated.

LAEG members provided important instruction and assisted with the success of the training day. They included:

Sharon Montoya Bretz – President, LAEG – spearheaded the training and made introductions, kicking off the day

Linda Freifeld - Treasurer, LAEG – provided the goat module instruction

Kris Thoren - VP, Secretary LAEG – provided the safety briefing and the goat module instruction

Robin Camozzi - Manages Ember Ridge Ranch, LAEG member

Mark Hawthorne - Handled the food for the day, LAEG member

In addition to the LAEG and CEC members present, Coastside/CalFire Battalion Chief Ari Delay and the crew from Station 44 participated in the training. Chief Delay has lived on a Coastside ranch his entire life and is a very experienced animal handler in his own right. Our firefighters are the most likely first responders to call for the assistance of the LAEG, and they work closely together.

Along with the many Coastside volunteers who are CERTs, ham radio operators, Red Cross Shelter workers, medically trained, or ICS/EOC trained, the dedicated members of the Large Animal Evacuation Group selflessly give their personal time and talents to improve the safety and wellbeing of their communities during times of need. Residents of the Coastside, and those who have large animals throughout San Mateo County, are fortunate to have them.



Todd Azevedo instructs LAEG members and Fire crew in how to approach large animals



LAEG members (above) and Station 44 crew (below) herd cattle towards corral exit and trailer as Stacy Claitor instructs them





Even for a pro like Todd, getting nervous animals to cooperate is not always easy, but he made it happen





Chief Ari Delay was a natural



Linda Freifeld and Kris Thoren handled the goat module



The San Mateo County Large Animal Evacuation Group and friends after a successful day of training to help our big four-legged friends during disasters, in the true spirit of dedicated volunteerism and community service