

Bark Ark to the Rescue of Cats and Dogs

Florida-based animal rescue team debuts flood rescue project.

By Soraya Gutierrez

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A cat stranded by floodwaters cries out moments before rescue by the Bark Ark team. Call Kevin Roderiques team commander of the new Bark Ark. He's in charge of a fleet of six airboats capable of rescuing pets from hard-to-reach areas after a natural disaster, such as the recent Midwest flooding.

"It's a shame because a lot of animals did die because of people not having access to them," Roderiques said. "My heart goes out to the animals, too."

The FL-3 Airboat Search and Rescue team, in conjunction with the American Airboat Search and Rescue Association, this week launched the Bark Ark, an emergency pet and animal flood rescue project. The mission of the Bark Ark project is to access, evacuate and relieve the suffering of animals, pets and livestock stricken by flooding.

Six airboats can be deployed to rescue pets after natural disasters. While the program is in the early stages, two airboats are available for deployment, he said. Each boat is 14 to 18 feet long and can carry up to 3,000 pounds.

"These are for small pets, dogs and cats that are stranded by flooding," he said. "They are versatile for rescue work because they can go from dry land to water."

The Bark Ark project has been under development since Hurricane Katrina and the devastating flooding of New Orleans. The flooding in the Midwest re-enforced the need for a rapidly deployable animal rescue team, and the Bark Ark meets that need, he said.

Once the call comes in for help, the Bark Ark can deploy within 24 hours, anywhere within the United States, with specialized flood rescue watercraft that can rapidly access and evacuate animals stranded by floodwater. In the event that large numbers of domestic animals are stranded, rescuers can deliver food and veterinary care to them.

The team of 31 rescue volunteers includes off-duty firefighters, police officers and paramedics. The Bark Ark is available to assist state and federal agricultural and wildlife agencies, national, state and local humane societies and veterinary organizations.