

VANCLEAVE - The Coast's response to pleas for help from an organization that deals with starved and abused horses in Jackson County has been "overwhelming."

Neva Bailey with the Animal Protection and Education Association said, "It's astounding how people want to help."

Bailey recently expressed concern this winter will be particularly bad for horses because the economy is making it more and more difficult for people to keep them or maintain them properly. And starved horses take a lot of time and attention to recover.

Some have come to Bailey too late to save.

She said horse rescue numbers reached a peak this year and in early November, Bailey put out a cry for help.

She had 35 horses at her Vancleave ranch, most of them rescues. It was almost more than she could deal with.

But since last week, when a story ran in the Sun Herald, Bailey said she has received gift certificates, horse blankets, money and so many calls of encouragement and pledges of money that she's begun planning ways to divide pastures for better use, build lean-to shelters in the pastures and buy supplies for the winter.

She stayed on the phone all Wednesday, through the holidays and most of the weekend, she said Monday.

if the pledges come in, she'll be able to buy hay through March, she said. She has also signed on two crucial volunteers.

There had been earlier pleas for help and by Friday, the rescue population at her ranch had dropped to five because of successful adoptions.

"I had three people scheduled to come out Friday, but the weather stopped them," she said. that might mean homes for almost all of the horses Bailey doesn't consider her personal animals.

"I said, 'Holy smoke, we're running out of horses,'" she said Friday.

But at this point, if the right people come along, she said she would consider letting some of the others go as well.

After all, she said, with winter coming on, she needs to make room for the horses that are on the way. She knows of a herd of more than 8 on the coast that have been discovered in starving condition.

"We can always use help," she said. "We have 1,001 uses for any money or help that comes in."

By Karen Nelson