

Hurricane Katrina Dogs Return to Original Owners

Two dogs displaced by Hurricane Katrina are rejoining their owners in Louisiana after lengthy legal battle.

Posted: May 23, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

A St. Bernard and a Shepherd mix who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and wound up being separately adopted in Florida are being returned to their original owners after a lengthy legal tug-of-war.

But the Floridians who adopted the animals in the hurricane's aftermath will get visitation rights as part of the deal.

The male St. Bernard and the female Shepherd mix were owned by Louisiana residents Steve and Doreen Couture. When Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Coutures' home in 2005, they had to leave the dogs during an evacuation.

Eventually a family member took the dogs to a rescue shelter at St. Bernard Parish. There, they were left under the Coutures' name but were later turned over to the Pinellas Humane Society in September 2005 and adopted out the following month.

The Coutures tracked the dogs' new owners to Florida, but the new owners refused to return the animals. So the Coutures sued them and the Humane Society of Pinellas County in July 2006 in an effort to reclaim the dogs.

A trial had been scheduled to start July 9, but over the past few weeks the Coutures managed to agree to settlements with both new owners.

"This is what we wanted from the beginning, our dogs to be back with us, to be back home," Doreen Couture said during a May 22 news conference in Tampa, Fla., announcing the settlement.

The Coutures' dogs were among 288 dogs, cats, and turtles brought to the Tampa area by the Humane Society of Pinellas after the storm devastated the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts. Most of the animals were adopted out.