

Animal Law

Theme Introduction

By Ann Griffin

This theme issue of the *Michigan Bar Journal* is published in cooperation with the SBM Animal Law Section. You may ask, what is animal law? The Animal Legal Defense Fund provides a clear and comprehensive definition:

It's a combination of statutory and case law in which the nature—legal, social or biological—of nonhuman animals is an important factor. It encompasses companion animals, wildlife, and animals used in entertainment, research, and raised for food. It permeates and affects most traditional areas of the law—including tort, contract, criminal, trust/estates, family, environmental, administrative, and constitutional law.¹

Animal law began to emerge as a specialty area of the law in the late 1970s but really gained traction in the 1990s. The Animal Law Section was established in 1995 and is believed to be the first section of its kind in the country.²

The significance of this timeline is that students in law school today—and attorneys like me who came to appreciate the connection between animals and the law after practicing for a while—have the unique opportunity to learn about animal law from pioneers in the field like David Favre, who wrote one of the articles featured in this issue.

Favre is a faculty member at Michigan State University College of Law. His article, “Animal Consortium: A New Use of an Old Action,” is an excellent example of the creative ways animal law practitioners strive to achieve justice for humans and animals while at the same time raising the value of animals in society.

One of Favre's colleagues at MSU College of Law, Carney Anne Nasser, is using her experience in legislative and regulatory matters and impact legislation to direct one of just two animal welfare clinics in the country. This innovative clinical experience gives students the opportunity to learn about animal law while working on projects that will elevate the status of animals in society and continue to develop more favorable laws.

While few attorneys have the opportunity to devote their entire careers to animal law, some practitioners devote part of their practices to this rewarding field. Examples of the types of cases animal lawyers handle, whether on a full- or part-time basis, can be found in Barbara Goldman's comprehensive summary of the animal-related cases litigated in Michigan within the past five years. Rebecca Wrock's article offers another example of how attorneys can help animals even if animal law is not their full-time career. She provides practical



advice for estate planning attorneys working with clients to provide for their animals' wellbeing after they are no longer able to do so.

The Animal Law Section is relatively small but very active with committees focused on legislation and litigation, a recently reactivated committee for prosecutors working on animal-related cases, a team of mentors for new members, an informative newsletter, and an active presence on social media (follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Animal-Law-Section-of-the-State-Bar-of-Michigan-1671014726460307/>). We welcome anyone with an interest in improving animal welfare. To quote the tagline on the section's website, “We are their voice.”³ ■

Ann Griffin is chair of the State Bar of Michigan Animal Law Section. She is the director of advocacy for the Michigan Humane Society. From 2008 to 2010, she managed a low-cost feline spay/neuter program for MHS. She began her career in Dykema's Detroit office focusing on corporate immigration law and then spent 16 years with her alma mater law school in administrative and teaching positions.

ENDNOTES

1. Animal Legal Defense Fund, *Animal Law 101—What is Animal Law?* <<http://aldf.org/about-us/saldf/animal-law-101/>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed June 1, 2018.
2. SBM Animal Law Section, *Bylaws of the Animal Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan* (1995) <<https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/MICHBAR/871edf0a-0824-49b7-9289-ca23577cca1c/UploadedImages/pdfs/bylaws.pdf>>.
3. SBM Animal Law Section <<http://connect.michbar.org/animallaw/home>>.