



Pro Bono Work for Animal Rights Skyrockets

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When Bruce Wagman of [Schiff Hardin](#) told management at one of his first law jobs that he wanted to do pro bono work in the area of animal law, the firm told him that wasn't an option. So Wagman left.

Flash forward more than a decade, and animal law has become one of the [fastest-growing areas of study in the U.S.](#), with nearly 100 courses available to law school students (just nine schools offered such courses in 2000) and more high-profile litigation than ever.

Now, statistics from 2008 show that Am Law firms contributed a record number of pro bono hours to the Humane Society of the United States and the Animal Legal Defense Fund, two of the country's leading animal rights organizations -- and those that pursue litigation most aggressively. (A third, the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, did not respond to repeated requests for comparable figures and interviews.)

In 2008, major firms contributed 10,273 pro bono hours to the Humane Society, up from about 6,500 in 2007. The Animal Legal Defense Fund doesn't track pro bono work by the hour, but the organization signed up 113 new volunteer attorneys -- a record, and a jump from 98 in 2007 and just 63 in 2006.

"Lawyers are cold calling me," says Wagman, the ALDF's general outside counsel. "I don't have to solicit anyone."

Elizabeth Day, a partner at DLA Piper, was one of those who called Wagman out of the blue last year after hearing him discuss dogfighting on National Public Radio, both lawyers say. Day called him at Schiff and asked if he would speak to a group of interested lawyers at DLA, she says. Now, the firm has about two dozen associates (plus Day) working on pro bono matters that range from [the rescue of a group of chimps from a troubled Texas facility](#) to creating corporations that could file civil suits against organizations for mistreating animals. (Individuals who say they observe mistreatment of animals often have traditionally had trouble proving the standing necessary to file litigation.)

"I thought it would be a great way to get our lawyers involved," Day says.

Neither organization released the names of the firms that do the most pro bono work, though Wagman complimented DLA, [Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher](#) and [Morrison & Foerster](#) for their increased commitment to animal rights.