

WON'T YOU PLEASE ADOPT ONE OF US?

A Report on Animal Control and Animal Care Services

January 25, 2011

Summary

The 2010-2011 Grand Jury (GJ) received a complaint regarding animal neglect and cruelty. Upon investigation of the complaint, the GJ found the issue had been resolved.

The Animal Control (AC) and Animal Care Services (ACS) became two separate departments on February 22, 2009 in an effort to provide better field enforcement service to the public. The GJ concluded that an overview of the new structure was in order.

AC is a division of the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office (MCSO). ACS is a division of the Mendocino County Public Health and Human Resource Agency.

Mendocino County is geographically unique; many areas in the County are small, solitary and isolated communities. The small communities are separated by many miles of mountainous terrain and require hours of drive time between each locale. A mobile spay/neuter vehicle, called the CARE-A-VAN, is used to provide services in these outlying areas.

The Mendocino County Board of Supervisors increased all fees related to Animal Care Services in September 2010, depending on services rendered.

Methods

The GJ reviewed the following documents: the Policy & Procedure Manuals for the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office Animal Control Officer Field Operations and for the Animal Care Services, including the Code of Ethics for both entities.

The GJ interviewed Animal Control and Animal Care Services staff, officers, and administrators as well as the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office staff. The GJ conducted a site visit to the animal shelter facility in Ukiah on October 19, 2010.

Background

The ACS facility is located on Plant Road in Ukiah. It is the only county-run animal shelter in Mendocino County. The Ft. Bragg Animal Shelter was closed on July 31, 2010 due to budget constraints.

Since the shelter closed, the animals are taken to the Ft. Bragg Sheriff's substation, placed in an outdoor kennel and transported to the Ukiah shelter.

Findings - Animal Control

1. The Department of Animal Control/Animal Care Services became two entities on February 22, 2009.
2. Animal Control operates under the MCSO.
3. All service calls are dispatched through MCSO.
4. Animals, taken in by an Animal Control Officer, are housed at the Animal Care shelter located on Plant Road in Ukiah.
5. The Animal Control staff consists of:

- one Supervisor who works Monday through Thursday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
- two full time Animal Control Officers who work Monday through Friday, 40 hours per week, one in Ukiah and one in Willits,
- one part-time officer who works Tuesday through Friday, 30 hours per week,
- weekends are covered by the MCSO.

6. Animals, picked up outside the Ft. Bragg city limits, are held in outdoor cages at the substation until an officer can transport them to Ukiah. Officers generally make one or two transports per week, more if necessary. Animals are usually held approximately three to four hours until transported.

7. The MCSO has contracted to provide services to the following:

Hopland Band of Pomo Indians	Cahto Tribe of Laytonville	Manchester / Pt. Arena Rancheria
Redwood Valley Rancheria	Sherwood Valley Rancheria	Yokayo Rancheria
City of Pt. Arena	City of Willits	

8. The MCSO does not have a contract with the following:

Round Valley Reservation	Guidiville Rancheria	Pinoleville/Pomo Nation
Coyote Valley Rancheria	City of Ft. Bragg	City of Ukiah

9. At the time a dispatch call is made, circumstances such as location of animal, time, and other pending calls, determine how and when a response can be made.

10. The following field priorities for public safety require immediate response:

- loose vicious or bite dogs,
- livestock on the highway,
- loose dogs on the highway,
- dogs in livestock,
- rabies exposure to public (sick skunks/foxes/ raccoons/bats).¹

11. The following are classified as *nuisance* in nature and are of the lowest priority:

¹ Mendocino County Sheriff's Office Animal Control Officer Field Operations Manual

- stray impounds,
- loose dog complaints,
- barking dog complaints.

12. Citations can be issued for all complaints, except for rabies exposure to the public.
13. Animal Control Officers are not peace officers; however, they can perform peace officer duties in compliance with their assignments.
14. A Mendocino County Animal Control Officer can issue citations for violations of County Code and State Law. The more commonly used citations are for *Unlicensed Dogs* and *Dog at Large*.
15. The Animal Control website is not current or user friendly.

Findings - Animal Care Services

16. ACS is responsible for sheltering stray, abused, and unwanted animals in Mendocino County.
17. ACS is a program within a division of the Mendocino County Public Health and Human Resource Agency.
18. ACS staff consists of the following:
 - one full time Program Administrator,
 - contracted part-time Veterinarians,
 - one full time Spay/Neuter Adoption Coordinator,
 - one full time Registered Veterinarian Technician,
 - one full time Clinic Technician,
 - two full time Animal Control Assistants,
 - one full time Animal Facility Attendant,
 - two extra help Animal Facility Attendants, one full time and one part-time.
19. ACS staff hours of operation are limited to the public due to budgetary cuts. Hours of operation at the shelter are:
 - Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.,
 - Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
20. Volunteer workers enrich the lives of the animals by bathing, grooming, and interacting with them. Volunteers are not allowed to clean cages (a union position task) or work at the counter (involves handling money).
21. A volunteer program through the MCSO and ACS allows two female inmates to assist at the shelter Wednesday through Saturday. The shelter provides transportation.
22. The fee to surrender dogs and cats by their owner, who resides *in* Mendocino County, is \$40.
23. The fee to surrender dogs and cats by their owner, who resides *outside* Mendocino County, is \$103.

24. According to State regulations, the *Hayden Mandate* provided that stray, non-aggressive animals could be held at the shelter for six business days before being euthanized, for the following reasons:

- to give pet owners more time to locate lost animals,
- to give unclaimed animals more time to be adopted or transferred to an animal rescue group.

25. In 2010, the *Hayden Mandate* was suspended, giving the individual counties discretion for the number of days before euthanizing animals. Mendocino County uses the four-business day exception.

26. Spaying and neutering fees for adopted dogs and cats are \$20.

27. Adoption fees vary; approximately \$150 for dogs and \$100 for cats, depending on the number of vaccinations, including spaying, neutering, heartworm testing, licensing, and microchip implant for identification.

28. Science Diet Company donates 1,000 pounds of dog food and 500 pounds of cat food per month. ACS pays for the shipping.

29. At the time of the GJ visit, the ACS housed 132 cats and 61 dogs. The shelter was found to be neat and clean. The GJ observed a spay/neuter procedure in progress

30. The *CARE-A-VAN* is a Mobile Spay/Neuter Adoption and Disaster Preparedness Vehicle. This vehicle is a 26-foot, state-of-the-art “surgery on wheels” and can service up to 25 pets per day.

31. In 2009, the *CARE-A-VAN* provided services to over 359 animals.

32. Currently, the *CARE-A-VAN* provides spay/neuter and vaccination services two times a month to the following towns and Rancherias:

- Laytonville,
- Cahto Tribe of Laytonville,
- Covelo,
- Ft. Bragg,
- Hopland Band of Pomo Indians,
- Point Arena Inland Humane Society for Mendocino County.

33. There are certain days of the year, advertised through the Ukiah Food Bank and Homeless Shelter, that the *CARE-A-VAN* provides spay/neuter services without cost to the transients with pets. These services are also available at the shelter with a voucher provided by Anderson Valley Animal Rescue or other non-profit agencies.

34. Vouchers for animal services may be obtained through the following agencies: Spay/Neuter Assistant Program (SNAP), Anderson Valley Animal Rescue, Second Chance Animal Rescue, and the Eileen Hawthorne Fund.

35. There is a ten-day time period for an owner to return an adopted animal to the shelter. The Mendocino County Auditor’s Office refunds the adoption fee within 30 days.

36. At the time of the GJ visit, the ACS website was not current.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. Animal Control Department readjusts its schedule to provide weekend coverage by an Animal Control Officer. (Finding 5)
2. Animal Care Services utilize the *CARE-A-VAN* to expand services throughout the County for more than two days a month. (Findings 30-31)

Discussion

The GJ, after reviewing the new structures for ACS and AC, finds that the services provided to the citizens and the animals have diminished.

People with limited incomes cannot afford fee increases resulting in a larger number of animals being abandoned rather than taken to AC. This could also result in more animals running wild.

The Ft. Bragg community is actively involved in trying to decrease the impact created by the closure of the animal shelter.

The ACS website is currently updated.

The GJ believes the AC and ACS are doing the very best they can with such limited resources, both monetary and staffing.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Sheriff (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Public Health and Human Resource Agency (Findings 15-34; All Recommendations)