

## Response to Grand Jury Report

**Report Title: 6.3 County Delivery of Animal Control Services**

**Report Date: June 9, 2014**

**Response by: Thomas Allman, Sheriff, Mendocino County**

### FINDINGS

I (we) agree with the findings numbered: F3, F4, F8, F12, F13, F14, F15, F16, F17, F18, F19

I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2, F5, F6, F7, F9, F10, F11, F20, F21, F22, F23, F24

### Recommendations

Recommendations numbered R4(c), R4(d), R4(e), R4(h), R4(i), R4(j), R8, R9, R11 have been implemented.

*Attach a statement describing the implement actions.*

Recommendations numbered R3, R4(g) have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

*Attach a statement with the schedule for implementation(s).*

Recommendations numbered R2, R5, R7, R10 require further analysis.

*Attach an explanation, and the scope and parameters of the analyses or studies, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.*

Recommendations numbered R1, R4(a), R4(b), R4(f), R6 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

*Attach an explanation.*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

  
Thomas D. Allman, Sheriff-Coroner

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

08-15-2014

Number of pages attached: \_\_\_\_\_

## FINDINGS

- F1. **“Manual re-entry of data is costly, inefficient, and introduces the possibility of transcription errors.”**

Disagree wholly. Animal Control Officers use the Mendocino County Sheriff’s Office computer program (Aegis) to write reports, locate subject information, and document calls for service. The Chameleon program is used by Mendocino County Animal Care for kennel management, clinic management, and running the licensing program. The two programs serve separate functions and thus no information is unnecessarily duplicated.

- F2. **“Animal Control Officers often have difficulty making contact with Animal Care while in the field.”**

Disagree in part. Due to the rural nature of the County, cell phones, which are provided to Animal Control Officers by the Sheriff’s Office, are unreliable in certain areas of the County. In addition Animal Care has recently had a telephone line dedicated for use by Animal Control Officers.

- F3. **“Information access limitations restrict efficient handling of loose and stray animals because no background information is available to officers in the field.”**

Agree. Animal Control Officers have no other choice then to take animals without identification (tags and /or licenses) to the Animal Wellness Center.

- F4. **“Not being able to return stray animals directly to their owners leads to a more costly process for both the public and the Animal Control/Care system.”**

Agree.

- F5. **“Not all data about an individual case is necessary to proceed on most licensing (small animal) cases. Large animal abuse or neglect cases require more extensive information from both Aegis and Chameleon to proceed.”**

Disagree in part. While all known information must be entered into the Aegis system by the Animal Control Officer before any case (licensing, stray animals, abuse) whether large or small animals are involved, no information is needed from Chameleon for an abuse or neglect case to proceed.

- F6. **“Animal Control does not have adequate policy and procedures to meet the best practices criteria for handling large animal abuse or neglect cases.”**

Disagree wholly. Animal Control Policy is adequate for the handling of large animal abuse neglect cases.

- F7. **“There are no mutually agreed upon written procedures that cover responsibilities, contacts, logistics, and other items for large animal integrated operations involving the community and multiple agencies of the County.”**

Disagree. Mendocino County has a both a large (LAEP) and small (SAEP) emergency plan that cover roles, responsibilities, contacts, and logistics involving the community and multiple agencies of the County.

- F8. **“The Sheriff’s Office Animal Control unit logs an extensive number of calls beyond the capacity of current staffing level.”**

Agree.

- F9. **“The absence of an Animal Control Officer stationed on the coast represents a serious risk to public health and safety.”**

Disagree in part. Animal Control Services within the Fort Bragg city limits are provided by the Fort Bragg Police Department. The unincorporated areas of the coast are handled by the Mendocino County Sheriff’s Office. An animal related call which threatens public safety, will be handled by a Patrol Deputy in the event that an Animal Control Officer is not in the area or has an extended response time.

- F10. **“Coastal calls require at least two extra hours of officer time.”**

Disagree in part. see F9.

- F11. **“There is an egregious degradation of coverage on the coast.”**

Disagree in part. While staffing levels have diminished, resulting in extended response times, the Sheriff’s Office Animal Control continues to responds to all animal calls for service.

- F12. **“Staffing levels directly impact available and timely service.”**

Agree.

- F13. **“The absence of a County Animal Care Shelter on the Coast requires extensive transportation costs.”**

Agree.

- F14. **“The closing of the County’s Fort Bragg Animal Care Shelter has added to the overload at the County Animal Care Shelter in Ukiah.”**

Agree.

F15. **“The impact of budget decreases has degraded services for the entire County.”**

Agree.

F16. **“Animal Control Officers are a visible presence of County Government.”**

Agree.

F17. **“Animal Control Officers are more than dog catchers. They are underpaid for the level of training they are required to have and the responsibilities they perform.”**

Agree in part. Animal Control Officers perform a job requiring extensive training, skill, and knowledge making them more than dog catchers. A survey of surrounding Counties (Trinity, Humboldt, Sonoma, Del Norte, and Lake) found salaries, required training, and job duties, for Animal Control Officers in Mendocino County to be comparable.

F18. **“Animal Control Officers do not have safety officer retirement benefits equal to those of a Probation Officer I.”**

Agree.

F19. **“A comparison of job descriptions reveals a higher level of responsibility of the Animal Control Officer than that of the Deputy Probation Officer I. (Appendices A and B)”**

Agree partially. Job descriptions are not equal in either scope or duties and thus can not be compared. However, Mendocino County Animal Control Officers often assist law enforcement officers with duties outside their regular scope of responsibilities.

F20. **“Veterinarians are not paid in a timely fashion when providing services to the County.”**

Neither Agree or Disagree. Veterinarians are paid in accordance with County policy and procedures. The County Auditor should be the respondent to this finding.

F21. **“There is a disagreement between veterinarians and Animal Control over interpretation of what Animal Control can and cannot do.”**

Disagree wholly. Veterinarians are frequently consulted by Animal Control, often acting as the final authority and expert witnesses, in cases of abuse and neglect.

F22. **“Veterinarians and Animal Control Officers are concerned about the District Attorney’s lack of prosecution of animal abuse or neglect cases.”**

Disagree wholly. The District Attorney Office continues to vigorously prosecute cases of animal abuse or neglect in the County.

- F23. **“The District Attorney’s reluctance to prosecute animal abuse cases, for whatever reason, has led to abusive owners keeping the abused animals longer.”**

Disagree wholly. Abused or neglected animals are removed by Animal Control prior to cases being filed with the District Attorney and their decisions have no standings on our investigations.

- F24. **“Lack of prosecution leads to Animal Control putting more emphasis on working with abusive owners longer in an attempt to alter owner behavior before proceeding with removal of the animals.”**

Disagree wholly: Abused or neglected animals are removed by Animal Control by the facts of our investigations and at times consultations with veterinarians, specialists and the District Attorney’s Office.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Grand Jury Recommends that:

- R1. **“Animal Control Officers be given the technology and equipment to access the animal care database from the field. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)”**

Recommendation partially implemented. The Sheriff’s Office is currently upgrading all patrol vehicles to increase the information available in the field.

- R2. **“Animal Control and Animal Care be re-integrated into one operational unit under the Sheriff’s Office. (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5)”**

Recommendation requires further analysis. This decision will ultimately be made by the Board of Supervisors. The Sheriff’s Office supports this recommendation if a feasibility study shows that efficiency can be improved.

- R3. **“Animal Control and Animal Care develop joint policies and procedures for handling large animal removal and subsequent care. (F6, F7)”**

Recommendation not yet implemented. Will be implemented once large and small animal emergency plan is integrated and complete by December 2014.

R4. **“Animal Control develop and regularly update formal policy and procedures for investigation and handling of large animal abuse or neglect cases. Policies and procedures including: (F6, F7)”**

**a. Addition of the investigating officer’s notes to the written case file**

Recommendation not implemented and will not be implemented because they are unwarranted or are not reasonable. Officers use written notes to refresh their memory to ensure reports are factually accurate and will not be included in case file.

**b. When to close an animal abuse or neglect case**

Recommendation not implemented and will not be implemented because they are unwarranted or are not reasonable. Each case varies in scope, circumstance, and fact thus a one size fits all policy on when to close a case is impossible. A case is closed once the Officer or the Animal Control Supervisor determines whether or not a crime may have occurred.

**c. Documentation of animal condition per best practices**

Recommendation Implemented. Animal Control currently has a policy for documenting the animals’ condition in the case of abuse.

**d. Decision Tree regarding when to call a Veterinarian**

Recommendation Implemented. Animal Control Officers use independent judgment, based on facts and circumstances, to decide if veterinarian should be called to assist in our investigations.

**e. Decision Tree regarding when to confiscate an animal**

Recommendation Implemented. Animal Control Officers use independent judgment, based on facts and circumstances, to decide if an animal should be confiscated.

**f. Logistical check list for animal removal**

Recommendation will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are unreasonable. Each case varies in scope, circumstances, and fact, thus a logistical check list is unreasonable.

**g. Procedures for removal and transport of large animals**

Recommendation not yet implemented but will be in the future. Will be implemented once Large Animal Emergency Plan and Small Animal Emergency Plan are fully integrated by December 2014.

**h. Decision Tree regarding when to perform field euthanasia**

Recommendation Implemented. Animal Control Officers follow procedures set forth in California Penal Code 597.1(e) by gaining their immediate supervisors approval prior to performing euthanization in the field.

**i. Filing a case with the District Attorney**

Recommendation Implemented. Cases are filed with the District Attorney once a determination has been made that a crime may have occurred.

**j. Complainant confidentiality rules**

Recommendation Implemented. Officers follow standards set forth in Animal Control Officers Code of Ethics.

**R5. "The County Administration restore the level of staffing of the Sheriff's Office Animal Control unit to at least four Animal Control Officers and restore appropriate funding. (F8, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13, F14, F15)"**

Recommendation is fully supported by the Sheriff's Office. This recommendation would really enhance services to the coastal communities.

**R6. "The Animal Control Officers' salaries should be made at least commensurate with that of a Deputy Probation Officer I. (F16, F17, F18, F19)"**

Recommendation is supported by the Sheriff's Office but can only be implemented after review by Human Resources.

**R7. "Animal Control Officers be given the opportunity to join MCERA Safety Officers classification. (F18, F19)"**

Recommendation require further analysis but we are in process of obtaining permission from SEIU to let the animal control officers go under Deputy Sheriff's Association but having them classified as safety officers will ultimately rest with the Board of Supervisors.

- R8. **“The Sheriff’s Office personnel and the County Contracts Office personnel meet with the veterinarian community to let them air their grievances. (F20, F21)”**

Recommendation. The Sheriff’s Office supports this recommendation.

- R9. **“The Sheriff’s Office and the County Contracts Office act in accord with their best knowledge to solve the issues. (F20, F21)”**

Implemented.

- R10. **“Board of Supervisors pass a County ordinance which forbids individuals found guilty of animal abuse from owning animals for a set period of time. (F24)”**

Recommendation requires further analysis: Terms of probation are set by the Judge upon conviction of animal abuse. However, if the Board of Supervisors find an ordinance necessary, or the decision to pass such a ordinance is at their sole discretion.

- R11. **“The District Attorney and the County Sheriff meet to establish guidelines setting forth the standards necessary to refer a case to the District Attorney’s Office for prosecution. (F22, F23, F24)”**

Recommendation Implemented. The District Attorney’s Office and the Sheriff’s Office often meet and consult to discuss guidelines, standards, and review cases involving animal abuse.