

EL DORADO COUNTY
2015-2016 GRAND JURY
REPORT



**WEST SLOPE ANIMAL SHELTER:
BEST IN SHOW**

CASE 15-06 • JUNE 2, 2016

Public Release
JUNE 9, 2016

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The process of acquiring land and building a new animal shelter was long and arduous. Previous grand juries reviewed the process and community complaints about the costs and delays. Recommendations were made by previous grand juries that improved the county's property acquisition. After construction commenced, the 2013-14 grand jury noted that "This new animal control facility is an example of the effectiveness of those new procedures in that it will open this fall on-time and on-budget and at a reasonable cost to tax-payers."

This year's grand jury endeavored to determine whether the facility has continued to operate in the manner the 2013-14 grand jury hoped it would after it opened in December 2014. The shelter's operations were the focus of a facility inspection of the West Slope El Dorado County Animal Services Facility at 6435 Capitol Avenue in Diamond Springs. The shelter and business office in South Lake Tahoe was not included in the facility inspection, or this report.

BACKGROUND

The El Dorado County, California, Code of Ordinances, Title 6, also known as the County Animal Control Ordinance regulates "...the control and humane treatment of animals within the boundaries of the county for the protection of the safety and welfare of the public." It delineates the administrative provisions of Animal Services, animal regulations, dog requirements, impoundments, regulation of commercial animal establishments, non-commercial kennels along with catteries¹, wild animal provisions, spay and neuter clinics, grazing lands management, control of wild stallions, and regulations for apiaries² and beekeeping.

Animal Services includes field services, rabies control, disaster preparedness and shelter operations.

Field Services enforces state statutes and county ordinances including regulation of animal care and welfare, investigations of citizens' complaints in response to reports of loose or injured animals, and inspection of and licensing for animal establishments and kennels.

The rabies control program investigates animal bites and exposure risk to rabies, provides rabies vaccinations to animals and processes dog licenses for which evidence of rabies vaccination is required.

Disaster preparedness includes emergency shelter planning for household cats and dogs, livestock, horses, birds and exotic pets. It encourages use of a published emergency preparedness checklist for citizens' use in the event of an evacuation caused by natural disasters such as wildfires.

¹ A place where cats are bred or housed temporarily (like a dog kennel).

² An apiary (also known as a bee yard) is a place where beehives of honeybees are kept.

Pet adoptions for dogs, cats, horses and other animals housed at the shelter is a major function of shelter services. The west slope shelter is open for adoptions Monday through Saturday and is closed Sundays and holidays. Pet adoptions follow a strict protocol. Adoption fees cover the cost of spay or neuter sterilization, basic veterinary services, microchip identification and a one-year dog license for El Dorado County residents. Shelter Services also handles dog licensing, complaints, public concerns about bites, and taking reports of injured or dead animals.

Animal Services has a foster care program to provide temporary housing for lost and found pets. The El Dorado County animal shelter is primarily a holding and adoption facility for stray pets, or pets confiscated because of abuse or neglect. Owned pets are accepted for adoption from a family in crisis when the shelter has space available. Animal services works closely with a network of nearby local shelters in California and Nevada to place eligible animals with families.

The shelter accepts monetary donations from the public and local pet organizations to house, feed and provide medical care to the animals. A current *needs list* of other desired donation items is available at the Animal Services website.

METHODOLOGY

- On-site visit to the West Slope Animal Services Facility in Diamond Springs
- Research of the El Dorado County website
- Review of the El Dorado County, California, Code of Ordinances, Title 6 - Animals
- Interviews with animal services administration and office staff
- Review of the El Dorado County Grand Jury 2013-2014 Final Report, "Past Animal Control Facility Mistakes Have Prompted A Better Real Estate Acquisition and Leasing Process for El Dorado County"
- Review of El Dorado County Animal Services print media

DISCUSSION

The Diamond Springs shelter facility opened in December 2014. It has many unique features for housing a variety of animals. Dog runs can be configured from 21 to 28 spaces as necessary, the feral dog kennel has nineteen spaces, and several quarantine rooms house *biter*s. Aggressive dogs are kept in a separate *dangerous* dog area, while animals rare to an animal shelter like reptiles or birds are housed in an *exotic animal room*.

A flat four-acre site in Diamond Springs encompasses the El Dorado County Animal Shelter facility. A 17,000 square foot building includes 5,000 square feet for additional storage and expansion when needed. There is a 1,000 square foot barn and a one-acre outdoor exercise area.

At the time of the grand jury visit, 40 cats were in residence. A room for adoptable cats has 41 cages and a community cat room houses four to six cats. A litter of unweaned kittens can be kept together in another area. Separate dog and cat food storage areas are in close proximity to the dogs and cats. There is also a storage room for bedding, litter, and toys along with a separate sick bay for cats.

Animals are vaccinated at intake and relevant data entered into a computerized database that was established in 2003. Animal records are retained for seven years.

A medical procedure area and a separate post-operative recovery room having six kennels is where in-house spay and neuter procedures are performed weekly on adopted animals prior to leaving the shelter. The facility is considered a *low kill* shelter. Euthanasia is used only on animals with severe medical conditions, extreme aggressiveness or animals that are otherwise not adoptable. A laboratory with refrigeration for maintaining medicines and vaccines is adjacent to an evaluation room.

Cleaning materials and other chemicals are stored in the *chemical room*. Throughout the facility floors and walls are waterproofed with an epoxy resin coating that won't deteriorate or mold, making them easy to clean. To reduce odor and airborne microbes, three separate systems deliver filtered air that is not mixed with air from other areas of the facility.

A 1,000 square foot paved barn with a turn-out area and exercise yard has six stalls for large animals like horses and cows. It can be used in emergency evacuations to house livestock. The entire facility is surrounded with fencing with partitions available when needed. Goats, emus, sheep, pigs, horses, cows, pot-bellied pigs, rabbits, chickens and roosters can be housed. At the time of the grand jury visit there was an emu and a rooster in the outside area.

In addition to animal spaces, there are administrative offices, an evidence room to preserve chain of custody having lockers and a safe, a laundry room with heavy-duty washers and dryers, a kitchen area and cleaning supplies room. The staff break room has lockers for employees with separate bathrooms equipped with showers — animal control is not always a neat and tidy business. The front office is home to their resident cat, "*Bullitt*".

As many as 40-50 volunteers work during a typical week to bathe, hold, exercise or just socialize with the animals. Some volunteers foster animals until they are ready for adoption. Many volunteer groomers help adoptable pets feel and look their best, helping them find their forever home. Volunteer groomers use an adjustable grooming table and a step-up tub for larger animals, thanks to generous donations from a local organization. Potential new pet owners can interact and take photos with a specific animal they are interested in adopting in one of four *get acquainted* rooms. There is a definite need for a full-time volunteer coordinator.

Animal Services has five full-time officers with highly specialized training. Officers attend the California Animal Law Enforcement Training Academy where the curriculum includes education and training in laws of arrest, search and seizure and firearms. Animal Services officers are considered peace officers; they are charged with the enforcement of animal-related laws and ordinances in El Dorado County. The officers carry weapons and have the authority to serve search warrants and make arrests. Daily duties may include taking reports on lost and found pets, scanning for microchips and providing care for shelter animals. They may also perform adoption services, youth and adult education throughout the community, dog licensing and rabies vaccinations. Some staff have dual responsibilities. For example, the Operations Manager doubles as a Field Officer.

People for Animal Welfare of El Dorado (PAWED), a volunteer organization, raised \$250,000 for the new shelter. There is a donation plaque displaying the names of some individuals and organizations that helped fund the animal shelter with numerous amenities such as cages, other necessary items and the anesthesia equipment. PAWED was the largest donor that provided many of the amenities as well as dog and cat food, kennels, blankets, cat poles, and other much needed items to run an efficient shelter.

COMMENDATIONS

The El Dorado County Animal Shelter is commended for their services to the citizens and animals of this county. It is clean and well maintained. The staff and volunteers are dedicated to their mission.

FINDINGS

- F1. The El Dorado County Animal Shelter is a facility providing state-of-the-art animal care services while serving as an example to improve Animal Services in other counties.
- F2. The Animal Shelter is well-equipped for emergency preparedness for all types of animals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. A full-time staff position of volunteer coordinator is recommended.

ATTACHMENTS

- <http://www.edcgov.us/animalservices>

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Responses to both findings and recommendations in this report are required by law in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05 on or before August 1, 2016 from Chief Animal Control Officer Henry Brzezinski.

Address responses to:

The Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury
Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court
1354 Johnson Blvd.
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

The Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court additionally requests that the responses be sent electronically as a *Word* or *PDF* file to facilitate the economical and timely distribution of such responses. Please email responses to El Dorado County Grand Jury reports to: courtadmin@eldoradocourt.org.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.