

BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT 2009-2010

BUTTE COUNTY ANIMAL CONTROL AND SHELTERS

SUMMARY

The 2009/2010 Butte County Grand Jury took a pre-announced tour of the four animal shelters operating within Butte County and investigated aspects of the relationship between the shelters and the animal control divisions of Butte County, City of Oroville and City of Chico. The Northwest SPCA in Oroville and Butte Humane Society in Chico are privately funded and managed nonprofit shelters. The Northwest SPCA shelter contracts with Butte County and the City of Oroville, while the Butte Humane Society contracts with the City of Chico for the care of animals. Private agencies are not subject to Grand Jury review. Accordingly, our review of these sites was to help us understand practices and standards in the shelters operated by the public agencies that are subject to the Grand Jury's review. This report focuses on the two remaining shelters, Paradise Animal Shelter and Gridley Animal Haven, as well as Butte County Animal Control and Chico Animal Control. All shelters and agencies expressed a need for the use of credit cards for payment of the fees assessed.

To assist the Butte County Grand Jury's analysis, a matrix was compiled to highlight and compare a few of the features and functions of each of the Butte County animal shelters and animal control facilities. (See Appendix A.)

Butte County Animal Control is a branch of the Department of Public Health. One of the concerns of Butte County Animal Control and the Grand Jury is the safety of the animal control officers. Often they are in rural areas where cell phones and radio communications are frequently unavailable and where they sometimes encounter hostile citizens. This Grand Jury believes Butte County Animal Control should be placed under the Sheriff's department in order to better monitor the officers' locations.

The Butte County Grand Jury found that the Butte Humane Society facilities, which are owned by the City of Chico, are inadequate and in many ways greatly substandard. The facilities are old and too small for the large number of animals that fall within the City of Chico Animal Control's jurisdiction. Under these conditions, the possibility of exposing the animals and staff to disease and injuries is greatly increased. We urge the City of Chico to search for a location more conducive to the care of animals and the safety of staff.

We concluded that Gridley Animal Haven has made several positive changes since it was last reviewed by the 2007/2008 Grand Jury, but is still in need of improvement.

GLOSSARY

euthanasia – a painless chemically induced death

habitual offender – an animal whose owner has failed to control and has been picked up by animal control officers a number of times

microchip – a device placed under the skin for identification purposes

PASH – Paradise Animal Shelter Helpers

RDA – Redevelopment Agency

strays – animals picked up by animal control or brought in by a concerned citizen

surrendered – animals brought in by owner

BACKGROUND

Having heard some negative reports about the conditions of animal shelters, the 2009/2010 Grand Jury decided to review the four animal shelters and two animal control agencies in the county. Of particular interest was the progress, if any, made by the Gridley Animal Haven since the Grand Jury's report of 2007/2008.

APPROACH

Report findings were gathered during the tours and follow-up visits.

- Butte County Animal Control presented a very informative orientation of the responsibilities and tasks for the agency.
- Previous Grand Jury reports were reviewed.
- Each of the four shelters and two agencies was visited.
- Several unannounced visits were made to all four shelters and two agencies to clarify our concerns and receive verification of information gathered on our visits.

Butte County Animal Control Fiscal Year 2008/2009 Matrix:

For the purposes of clarification, each agency is listed by the duties they perform and services they provide. Paradise and Gridley Animal Haven are both animal control and shelters for their respective jurisdictions. Next, Northwest SPCA and Butte Humane Society are independently owned. Northwest SPCA contracts with the City of Oroville and Butte County for shelter services while the Butte Humane Society contracts with the City of Chico for those services. The last category is strictly animal control. These agencies do not house animals. They enforce the law and place any animal retained in the facility with which they are affiliated. The information contained in the report is based on 2008/2009 statistics obtained from each shelter and agency visited. (See Appendix A.)

DISCUSSION

The 2009/2010 Butte County Grand Jury reviewed all four shelters to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the tasks and procedures required to operate animal shelters in Butte County. Each shelter uses the same basic procedures. Animals are housed in separate areas upon intake. There is a mandatory hold of five days for unidentified strays. All animals are checked for basic illness and/or diseases and scanned for a microchip. After the holding period animals are observed for sociability. If it has been determined they are adoptable, the animal is given further tests to insure good health. Spaying and neutering is mandatory in Butte County when adopting an animal. The fee structure varies by shelter and agency. While in the care of the shelters, the animals are given food and appropriate care. They are socialized, walked, and viewed on a daily basis by facility employees and volunteers. The process for cats and dogs is similar. Cats are placed in special areas. Because they are a bit more sociable, several cats are often contained in the same room as opposed to cages. Every opportunity is given to find the animals a new home.

Most animal shelters may have exotic creatures and farm animals in their care. These animals are given the same care and concern as domesticated household pets, with the same optimistic future of a new home.

Each shelter has the same policy: if space is available, an animal is given every chance for a new life. When animals are in a hopeless condition, they will be euthanized.

It was reported to us, by at least two agencies/shelters, that the majority of repeat service calls come from a small portion of the populace and are considered habitual offenders. Animal control officers spend a large amount of their time responding to calls and attending to animals due to a small percentage of owners who habitually allow their animals to run freely. The Butte County Grand Jury believes that the fees should be increased for repeat violations.

Paradise Animal Shelter

When the Grand Jury visited this combined animal control agency and shelter, we were greeted by the attending officer. The shelter is operated under the guidance of the Paradise Police Department. Two full-time officers and two part-time staff manage the shelter, respond to calls, and offer educational programs to the community.

Assisting at the shelter is PASH, a non-profit organization totally dependent on donations. This organization pays the fees for adopted animals to be spayed or neutered, their medical needs, and sheltered animal care.

During the 2008 wildfires, they responded well to the emergency evacuations. Since that time, they are even better prepared to handle future emergencies. The Grand Jury was impressed with the operation, the cleanliness, and availability of the animals to the

public. Our only concern identified was the lack of isolation cages for new intakes and quarantined animals.

Gridley Animal Haven

The Grand Jury met with the Chief of Police and the Animal Control officer for our tour. This center is operated under the guidance of the Gridley Police Department. The shelter has a small-town atmosphere operating with one full-time and one part-time officer. The agency also provides animal control and shelter services to the City of Biggs.

As an example, the hours of operation are from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm, but the officer is often out on calls or other related issues. This puts limitations on an animal being recovered in a timely manner by its owner or for possible adoptions. The animals are exercised only when time permits. The outdoor area designated for the animals to receive fresh air is a portable cage, the size of one parking space, with no grass. A partial wall within the shelter is an attempt to separate the new intake and quarantined animals from the general animal populace. We also discovered the animals are placed in foster care homes or sent to another county after five days at the shelter.

Both the Chief of Police and Animal Control Officer reported to us that a high percentage of the calls for service were from habitual offenders. Animal Control officers devote a large percentage of their time responding to calls for animals due to a small percentage of owners allowing their animals to run freely.

Gridley Animal Haven has made several improvements since the last inspection in 2008. However, this Grand Jury feels a need for better accommodations for the animals as well as a more conducive way for the community to access the shelter.

Northwest Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)

The Grand Jury met with the Director of Northwest SPCA and enjoyed a comprehensive tour of this model, state-of-the-art animal shelter. Northwest SPCA is an independently-owned, non-profit shelter and has a contract with the Butte County Animal Control and the City of Oroville for services. The building was built three years ago with the use of the City of Oroville's RDA funds. The director designed the facilities. A great deal of thought was put into the design. Each animal is housed individually in a clean, well-ventilated area. New intakes are separated from the adoptable animals. The ill and quarantined animals are completely separated thus giving greater measure for the health and safety of both staff and animals.

Staff and volunteers keep the kennels clean, and the animals are exercised daily in one of many spacious exercise areas. The exercise areas allow for socializing with other animals and people. Potential adoptive families may also utilize the exercise area to become acquainted with the pet they have selected. This shelter also has on-site veterinary and grooming services. These ongoing efforts for the comfort of the animals, staff, and visitors is very commendable.

When the Butte County Animal Control office is not open, owners attempting to reclaim their animals are unable to do so. Northwest SPCA is independently owned, and it is currently not allowed to receive any Butte County monies. As a result, the animal owner and animals must wait until Butte County Animal Control office is open to pay county related fines and fees. Accordingly, animals cannot be released to their owners on weekends and holidays until the County offices are open. However, residents of the City of Oroville are able to pay fees directly to the Northwest SPCA and reclaim their animals at any time the shelter is open.

Butte Humane Society

Butte Humane Society is an independently owned, non-profit shelter and has a contract with the City of Chico. The shelter is located on city-owned property at 2579 Fair Street, Chico. In the opinion of the 2009/2010 Grand Jury, this facility is in great need of attention. The building is old and in need of replacement. Because of the size of the building, the animals are crowded, particularly the cats. These outdated and inadequate facilities are difficult to keep clean and do not have separate intake and adoption areas, making it appalling. Such conditions and crowding creates a much greater likelihood of injuries and the transmission of diseases to the animals and staff.

The Grand Jury believes if the city sold the current property and invested in a location similar to the site recommended by an independent study (Shelter Planners of America, 2009), a win – win resolution could be possible. Not only would the problem of improper care and housing be resolved, the animals would have a greater exposure to the public and a better chance for adoption.

A new facility could also solve an additional issue in Chico. Currently Butte Humane Society has to transport animals outside of the city for spay and neutering. In discussions with staff at both the Butte Humane Society and Chico Animal Control, the Grand Jury was advised that they wanted a local spay and neutering facility. The animals are currently transported to Gridley for this procedure. A facility in the Chico vicinity is needed. A much needed low-cost spay and neuter clinic could also be housed in a new facility. These suggestions, along with other opportunities, could result in additional revenue for the City of Chico. We strongly recommend new facilities be a number one project for the City of Chico.

Butte County Animal Control

The Butte County Animal Control is an agency within the Department of Public Health. A staff of six provides coverage five days a week on all animal related issues in the unincorporated areas of Butte County. Its office operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm and is closed on weekends and holidays. This office is located on Mira Loma Drive in Oroville. Rescued animals and strays are taken to the Northwest SPCA facility which is contracted by Butte County for shelter services.

The Sheriff's Department and Dispatch has weekend responsibility along with the on-call Animal Control officers for responding to calls for animal control assistance. The Grand Jury recommends that all animal control dispatch calls go through the Sheriff's office. This would be consistent with the Grand Jury's understanding that most rural counties have Animal Control under law enforcement agencies. This would allow continuity within both departments and a greater level of safety for the Animal Control officers. Information provided to the Grand Jury revealed 90% of calls for service were generated by 10% of the populace.

All personnel have been trained for emergency situations such as the fires Butte County experienced in the summer of 2008. In such a situation, the rescued animals are taken to the Gridley Fair Grounds or the California State University Chico farm where they are housed until they are reclaimed.

City of Chico Animal Control

The City of Chico Animal Control is one of the divisional operations of the Chico Police Department. The staff of three works seven days a week from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Their office is in a small room located at the Chico Police Department. After regular business hours, all incoming calls roll over to the police dispatch team. If a response is required, an on-duty officer is dispatched.

The City of Chico Animal Control has a contract with Butte Humane Society for shelter services. After regular business hours, the Chico Police Department has access to two exterior cages for placement of animals.

Both City of Chico Animal Control and Butte Humane Society have expressed a dire need for a low-cost spay and neuter clinic. This clinic would eventually save the City of Chico revenue by reducing the number of unwanted animals being born. The reduction of unwanted animals would result in fewer animals being euthanized and fewer calls for services by the animal control officers.

FINDINGS

- F1. In Butte County, 90% of calls for service are generated by 10% of the population, who are habitual offenders.
- F2. Animal control has a much easier time identifying the owners of animals with implanted micro chips.
- F3. Gridley Animal Haven does not have adequate separate accommodations for new intakes and quarantined animals. Currently they are in the same area with adoptable animals.
- F4. Gridley Animal Haven does not have an alternate, reliable contact phone number posted when the officer is not available.

- F5. Gridley Animal Haven is still in need of improvement to the facilities. Currently the animals remain in a cage where they eat, sleep, and defecate. They are only exposed to exercise when taken for a walk if someone is available or to a portable caged area in the asphalt parking lot. The caged area is small, the size of one parking space, and has no grass.
- F6. The Butte County Animal Control is a division of the Department of Public Health.
- F7. The Town of Paradise needs a separate intake and quarantine area for the animals.
- F8. The facility currently being utilized by the Butte Humane Society, which is owned by the City of Chico, is old, inadequate, outdated, and in poor repair.
- F9. The City of Chico does not have a low-cost spay and neuter clinic.
- F10. Most facilities have expressed a desire to be able to accept credit cards for payment of all imposed fees and fines.
- F11. Butte County does not allow the Northwest SPCA to collect imposed fees and fines. Animal owners must make payment of county fees and fines directly to the Butte County Animal Control, thereby precluding owners from retrieving their pets whenever county offices are closed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. Owners of animals who are habitual offenders should be subject to increased fees for repeat violation.
- R2. Owners not wishing to have a microchip placed in their animal should be subject to additional fees.
- R3. The City of Gridley should take immediate action to completely separate new intakes and quarantined animals.
- R4. The City of Gridley should post reliable contact numbers when an officer is not on site.
- R5. If the City of Gridley wishes to continue operating an animal shelter, it should research an available location for Gridley Animal Haven more conducive to animal care and availability of animals to the public for adoption.
- R6. The Butte County Board of Supervisors should consider placing Butte County Animal Control under the jurisdiction of the Sheriff's Department or Butte County Animal Control should be dispatched through the Sheriff's Department for increased officer safety.
- R7. The Town of Paradise should provide the Paradise Animal Shelter with an area for new intake animals as well as a separate, secure quarantine area.
- R8. The City of Chico should acquire property and build a new animal shelter facility. The City is encouraged to consider using the Northwest SPCA as a model. We strongly feel this should be a priority project.

- R9. The City of Chico should establish a much needed low-cost spay and neuter clinic. This clinic will lower the expenses being incurred by the city for so many unwanted animals.
- R10. The Grand Jury recommends that all agencies not currently accepting payment of fees and fines by credit card should do so.
- R11. Butte County should develop a mechanism to enable Northwest SPCA to collect county fees and fines.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §§ 933 and 933.05, the 2009/2010 Butte County Grand Jury requests responses from the following:

- Butte County Board of Supervisors
- Butte County Chief Financial Officer
- Butte County Department of Public Health
- Butte County Sheriff
- The City of Chico
- The City of Gridley
- The Town of Paradise

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “Needs Assessment, Feasibility, & Building Program Study for: Butte Human Society 2579 Fair Street, Chico, California,” Rev.1, October 15, 2009, prepared by Shelter Planners of America, 533 Cedar Drive, Watsonville, CA 95076.

Reports issued by the Civil 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 Civil Grand Jury. The California State Legislature has stated that it intends the provisions of Penal Code Section 929 prohibiting disclosure of witness identities to encourage full candor in testimony in Civil Grand Jury investigations by protecting the privacy and confidentiality of those who participate in any Civil Grand Jury investigation.
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APPENDIX A

Matrix of Animal Shelters and Control Facilities

APPENDIX A – MATRIX OF ANIMAL SHELTERS AND CONTROL FACILITIES

ANIMAL SHELTERS AND ANIMAL CONTROL IN BUTTE COUNTY - FISCAL YEAR 2008-2009

Hours of Operation	Animal Control and Shelters Paradise		Animal Control and Shelters Gridley Animal Haven		Northwest S.P.C.A. Operating in Oroville		Butte Humane Society Operated in Chico		Animal Control County of Butte**		Animal Control Chico**	
	Tues - Sat 11a - 4p	7a - 3p or appointment	Mon - Fri 8a - 4:30p	Sat 12n - 3p	Tues -Sun 12n - 6p	Mon - Fri 8a - 5p	Mon - Fri 8a - 5p	Mon - Fri 8a - 5p	Mon - Sun 8-5	Mon - Sun 8-5	Mon - Sun 8-5	Mon - Sun 8-5
Budget	\$231,450.00	\$104,096.00	\$865,416.00	\$800,000.00	\$1,230,105.00	\$1,230,105.00	\$1,230,105.00	\$574,297.00				
County Funds	0	0	\$463,000.00	0	\$1,230,105.00	\$1,230,105.00						
City Funds	\$231,450.00	\$78,072.00	\$256,000.00	\$385,000.00								
Other	0	\$26,024.00	\$146,416.00	\$417,000.00								
Staff:												
Full Time	2	1	10	12	6	6	3					
Part Time	2	1	4	5	0	0	0					
Volunteers	15 - 20	1	15	82	0	0	0					
SWAP	1 +	0	20	12	0	0	0					
Vehicles	3	1	3	2	8	8	2					
Cost per animal	\$175.00	\$250.00	\$150.00	\$130.00								
Annual requests for services	13283 *1	780	1232	does not track	7452	7452	3522					
Form of payment	cash/check/credit card	cash/checks	cash/credit cards	cash/credit card	cash/checks	cash/checks	cash/check					
Kennels:												
Dogs	15	13	56	78	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Cats	3	11	100	2 rooms + 50 cages	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Annual intake	1316	400	6770	6300	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Adoption	566	51	1079	2179	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Euthanasia	384	66	4874	2237	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Fees:												
Recovery of animal fees	\$30.24 - \$42.56	\$4 day + variable fee	\$7.50 day + intake	\$9 day + intake								
License-altered	\$13.00	\$10.00	\$10.00	n/a	\$12.50 / .22.50	\$12.50 / .22.50	\$11.00 / 24.50					
License-not altered	\$26.00	\$20.00	\$20.00	n/a	\$25.00 / 45.00	\$25.00 / 45.00	\$22.50 / 50.00					
Adoption Dog	\$24.00	\$8 + spay/neuter	\$80.00	\$75.00	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Adoption Cat	\$18.00	\$8 + spay/neuter	\$40.00	\$55.00	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Spay / Neutering	Required	Required	Required	Required	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Veterinarian	No	No	Yes, volunteer & students	No	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Micro Chip	Not Offered	Not Required	Yes	Required	n/a	n/a	n/a					
Internet/Web	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					
Educational Programs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					

*1 all calls to department

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