

The State of Animal Welfare in Southwest Missouri

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INTRODUCTION

In April 2005 Spay Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Missouri State University Center for Research and Service (CRS) partnered to conduct an animal welfare assessment survey of all known companion animal organizations in a nine-county area of southwest Missouri. Two surveys were developed, one for rescue and animal advocacy agencies and one for shelters and animal controls. The purpose of the surveys was to provide an assessment of animal welfare in southwest Missouri. The surveys also provide an inventory of information and resources which can be used in future collaborative projects between organizations.

A total of 47 surveys were mailed to area agencies. Three surveys were returned as undeliverable. Of the 44 remaining surveys, 27 were completed for a response rate of 61%. This included 19 shelters/animal controls and eight rescue/animal advocacy groups. In addition, two organizations did not return surveys but did provide statistics for 2004. The 15 organizations that did not respond included a rescue group, a shelter, and 13 small animal control agencies. The following organizations participated in the survey:

4 The Hounds Basset Rescue, Inc
All Creatures Animal Rescue & Sanctuary
Alliance for The Welfare Of Animals
Aurora Police Dept Animal Control
CARE (Castaway Animal Rescue Effort)
City Of Ash Grove
City Of Crane
City Of Greenfield
City Of Miller
City Of Niangua
City Of Ozark Dog Pound
City Of Strafford
Douglas County Animal Welfare
Emmanuel's Tails No-Kill Shelter
Greyhound Pets Of America-Springfield, MO
Humane Society Branson Tri-Lakes Area
Humansville Dog Pound
Lockwood City Dog Pound
Mastiff Hope & Friends Of Rescued Mastiffs
MO And KS Boxer Rescue/Midwest Boxer Rescues
Nixa Animal Control
Polk County Humane Society
Southwest Missouri Humane Society
Springfield-Greene County Animal Control
SW MO K9s
Taney County Animal Control
WeCare-Webster County Animal Rescue, Inc.

HIGHLIGHTS

Following are some of the survey highlights:

- The number of animals coming into animal controls and shelters decreased by 5.4% from 2003 to 2004.
- The number of animals adopted, reclaimed by owners, or in foster care also declined.
- The number of animals euthanized declined, but this was clearly due to a lower number of incoming rather than an increase in adoptions or reclamations.
- Of the 11 shelters or animal controls that adopt animals, six require spay/neuter before adoption and five do not.
- Not a single agency reported using Neutersol, the sterilization-by-injection method available since 2003 for puppies 3-9 months old.
- Only one animal control organization picks up cats, although cats were taken in by six area shelters in 2004.
- Only one organization listed dog registration as either a source of funding or a service offered. Although a question was not explicitly asked about registration, it can be reasonably assumed that registration is virtually nonexistent among animal control agencies in southwest Missouri.
- Only two shelters or animal control agencies serve multiple counties. Most are limited to a single city or county as the area served.
- Three agencies euthanize animals at their facilities. An additional seven have arrangements with local veterinarians to euthanize for them. The only method of euthanasia reported was by injection.
- Three shelters or animal controls reported being open on weekends.
- The number of dogs taken in by rescue groups increased by 46.2% between 2003 and 2004, primarily due to a large increase for one group. The number of adoptions rose by 50.2% during the same period.
- The average reported cost per animal for rescue groups was \$197, four times as high as the average of \$45 reported for animal controls and shelters.
- All rescue organizations require spay/neuter before adoption, although only half have the requirement for dogs of all ages.

RESULTS

Each survey question is listed below, followed by a summary of the responses. Results are presented first for shelters and animal control agencies and then for rescue and animal advocacy organizations.

ANIMAL SHELTERS/ANIMAL CONTROL AGENCIES

What are the primary services offered by your organization?

The most common service offered was animal control. Animal control was described as picking up stray animals and returning them to their owners, quarantining/observing animals in bite cases, and providing temporary shelter. Other services reported included spay/neuter, adoption, investigation of abuse, humane education, licensing, providing shots, testifying in court, trap and release of wildlife, and euthanasia.

What is your primary source of funding?

The primary source of funding reported was taxes or city funding. Other sources included donations, fundraisers, adoption fees, and a thrift shop. Only one organization listed dog licensing as either a source of funding or a service offered.

What counties/areas do you serve?

Most agencies listed the area inside their city limits or county as the area served. Only two organizations served multiple counties. One took special-needs animals from other states.

2003/2004 statistics

Of the 19 agencies that responded to the survey, 16 provided statistics for both 2003 and 2004. So that meaningful comparisons can be made, the data reported in Table 1 are only for those 16 organizations.

As seen in Table 1, the total number of incoming animals decreased 5.4% from 2003 to 2004. These numbers were derived by subtracting transfers to shelters from the total number of incoming to eliminate duplication. For example, if an animal control transferred 500 dogs and cats to a shelter, those 500 animals would have been counted twice had they not been removed from the equation. Therefore, the “adjusted incoming” numbers in Table 1 more accurately reflect the true number of incoming animals to shelters and animal controls in southwest Missouri.

Animals transferred to rescue organizations were not subtracted from the total.

Table 1
2003 – 2004 Shelter/Animal Control Statistics

	2003	2004	Percent change
Total Incoming	21,489	19,936	-7.8%
Dogs	13,135	11,884	-9.5%
Cats	8,330	8,023	-3.7%
Feral Cats	24	29	Not calculated
Minus transfers to shelters	1,614	1,127	-30.2%
Adjusted incoming	19,875	18,809	-5.4%
Number reclaimed by owners	1,415	1,252	-11.5%
Number adopted	8,526	8,432	-1.1%
Number in foster care	201	184	-8.5%
Number euthanized	8,788	8,409	-4.3%
Facility capacity	1,139	1,139	0%

While the number of incoming animals is down, which is very good news, other areas are down as well, which is not good news. There were fewer animals reclaimed by owners, fewer adopted, and fewer in foster care. Fortunately, the number of animals euthanized also declined, but this was clearly due to a lower number of incoming rather than an increase in reclamations or adoptions. Generally speaking, a decline in incoming animals usually results in an even larger decline in euthanasia because each animal has a better chance of being adopted. That did not happen in 2004 because of the accompanying reduction in reclamations, adoptions and number of animals in foster care.

Where do your animals come from?

Some organizations took animals from multiple sources, including owners, animal controls, or strays. Others—primarily animal controls—took in animals from a single source, variously described as “dogs running at large,” “stray or unleashed,” “off streets,” or “lost, runaway, abandoned.”

What is the primary reason(s) for euthanasia at your facility?

Of the 19 shelters or animal controls surveyed, only three actually euthanized animals at their facilities. An additional seven agencies had local veterinarians that euthanized for them. An equal number of respondents reported euthanasia due to lack of space, illness, and aggression. It should be noted that some organizations reported the reasons for euthanasia, even if it was done off-site at a veterinarian's office rather than at their facility.

How long do you hold an animal prior to euthanasia?

Answers to this question ranged from five days to "forever." Several organizations said the length of time an animal was held depended on the circumstances.

What is your method of euthanasia?

The only method of euthanasia reported was by injection.

What is your average cost per animal?

The average reported cost per animal was \$45. Total costs obviously varied depending on how long the animals stayed at the facility.

What is the average length of stay for an animal?

The average length of stay reported varied from three days to one year, with the vast majority of agencies reporting average stays of 5-10 days.

What is the maximum length of time you will keep an animal?

Answers ranged from seven days to "forever." Most organizations reported holding animals a maximum of two weeks.

Does your organization require spay/neuter surgery before adoption?

Six organizations required spay/neuter before adoption—three for animals of all ages, one for animals over the age of six months, and two for animals over an unspecified age.

Five organizations adopt animals but do not require spay/neuter before adoption. Respondents who answered "no" to this question were asked to describe their spay/neuter policy. One had a certificate program. Another required owners to pay the cost of spay/neuter surgery at a veterinarian's office and bring the receipt before they were allowed to take the animal home. The other three had no actual policy.

This question was not applicable to the eight organizations who do not adopt animals.

Do you use Neutersol?

No agency that responded to the survey reported using Neutersol, a sterilization-by-injection method available since 2003 for puppies 3-9 months old.

Does your organization have a spay/neuter certificate program for your animals?

Two agencies reported having spay/neuter certificate programs.

Do you have a spay/neuter clinic on-site?

Only one organization reported having an on-site spay/neuter clinic.

What are your hours of operation?

Hours of operation varied from “appointment only” to 24/7 availability. Most organizations were open during business hours on weekdays. Three organizations reported being open on weekends.

Do you have an emergency contact/service when closed?

Nine organizations reported having an emergency contact. In all cases, the contacts were either the police or sheriff’s department.

Do you participate in a pound seizure program?

One organization reported being part of a pound seizure program.

RESCUE AND ANIMAL ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

What are the primary services offered by your organization?

The primary service offered by the organizations surveyed was to find homes for the animals they handled, all of which are dogs. Some deal with only purebred dogs, while others place mixed breeds as well. (No cat rescue groups are known to exist in the immediate area, although there are some in other parts of Missouri that serve the entire state.) Other services offered included vaccinations, spay/neuter, medical care, assistance with behavior issues, public education, and animal advocacy.

What is your primary source of funding?

All rescue organizations reported donations as a source of funding. In addition, three groups reported receiving funding from adoption fees; two groups used fundraising as an income source; and two groups received some funding from the national rescue organizations with which they are affiliated.

What counties/areas do you serve?

Several specific counties were listed as service areas: Christian, Douglas, Greene, Ozark, Webster and Wright. One organization served all of southern Missouri, while three others were statewide. Four groups listed service areas outside Missouri which included Arkansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and Iowa.

What are your requirements for accepting an animal?

Two of the responding organizations did not accept animals. The others reported a variety of requirements, including “that it needs a home,” “we accept on a space-available basis” and “must be adoptable.”

Do you offer any alternatives for an animal that you will not accept?

Reported alternatives included posting the animal’s picture on www.petfinder.com (an internet-based pet adoption service) and referrals to training classes or other rescue groups.

2003/2004 statistics

Five rescue organizations reported incoming numbers for both 2003 and 2004. One had no incoming numbers to report. As seen in Table 2, the total number of incoming animals increased by 46.2%, primarily due to a large increase for one rescue group. One other group also reported an increase in the number of incoming dogs, but three reported decreases between 2003 and 2004.

Fortunately, the number of adoptions increased as well—by a reported 50.2%. It should be noted that one organization which takes in a large number of dogs and adopts them into new homes did not provide any adoption numbers. Therefore, the number of adoptions listed in Table 2 is not a true representation of the actual number adopted by the rescue groups that responded to the survey. Otherwise, the data obtained for rescue groups should be fairly complete since all but one organization returned surveys.

Table 2
2003 – 2004 Rescue Group Statistics

	2003	2004	Percent change
Total Incoming	796	1,164	+46.2%
Dogs	796	1,164	+46.2%
Cats	0	0	-
Feral Cats	0	0	-
Number reclaimed by owners	3	5	Not calculated
Number adopted	536	805	+50.2%

What is your average cost per animal?

The average reported cost per animal was \$197, significantly more than the \$45 reported for shelters and animal controls.

Where do your animals come from?

Rescue groups reported getting their dogs from a variety of sources. The most common was owner surrenders, cited by six groups. Other common sources were shelters (three groups), strays (three groups), and pounds (two groups). Still other sources were all-breed rescues, the racing industry, legal confiscation, and breeder surrender.

What is the average length of stay for an animal?

Responses varied widely, from two weeks to two years or “until adopted.”

What is the maximum length of time you will keep an animal?

All of the rescue groups surveyed indicated that they would keep dogs “forever” or “until adopted.”

Do you adopt animals outside of southwest Missouri?

All rescue groups reported adopting dogs outside of southwest Missouri.

Where do animals go if you can no longer keep them?

Two organizations reported that this circumstance does not happen and two more reported it as being “unlikely.” One reported that its dogs would go to another rescue if they could no longer keep them and another reported that its dogs would go to the Southwest Missouri Humane Society.

Do you have an active foster program?

All rescue organizations reported having an active foster program.

Does your organization require spay/neuter before adoption?

The six organizations that adopted dogs all require spay/neuter before adoption—three for dogs of all ages, one for dogs over the age of four months, and two for dogs over the age of six months.

Do you have an emergency contact/service when closed?

Five of eight organizations reported having an emergency contact.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The animal welfare assessment survey successfully gathered data from all the major shelters and animal controls in southwest Missouri, as well as all major rescue and animal advocacy organizations. The information presented in this report gives a fairly complete picture of animal welfare in the region.

One way to check the veracity of the data gathered is to compare it to euthanasia rates which are compiled from a national source. The July/August 2005 issue of *Animal People* reported that the euthanasia rate for the Springfield area was 16.9 per 1,000 residents. Data obtained from the animal welfare assessment survey, coupled with 2004 population estimates, also yielded a euthanasia rate of 16.9. Southwest Missouri is slightly above the national rate of 15.9.

The reported decrease in incoming animals was a very encouraging sign and is hopefully the beginning of a long-term trend. However, the results of the survey did raise four areas of concern:

The hours of operation of some shelters and most animal control agencies are not conducive to adoptions. Only three of eleven shelters or animal controls that adopt animals reported being open on weekends. Hours of operation for agencies that adopt animals or return significant numbers of pets to their owners could save time, money, and lives by changing their hours so that more people who work full-time could visit their facilities. This need not involve additional hours of operation, just different ones, and could easily be accomplished by changing hours so that the facilities are open at least one evening per week and at a half-day on the weekends.

There appears to be little, if any, pet registration required by animal control agencies in southwest Missouri. Requiring owners to register their pets could produce a much-needed source of revenue. Differential registration, in which pet owners with unsterilized animals pay more to register their pets than owners with sterilized animals, can be particularly effective. In King County, Washington, such a fee was implemented in 1992. The number of unsterilized animals registered fell by 60% from 1990 to 2000, while the number of sterilized animals registered more than doubled over the same period.

Animal organizations in southwest Missouri appear to be doing little to address the problem of free-roaming cats. The problem of feral or free-roaming cats is not one that will go away if ignored. Cats are prolific breeders and good mothers. However, only one animal control organization surveyed picks up cats. The most effective method of dealing with free-roaming cats is TNR (Trap Neuter Return) in which the cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated and returned to their territory. Free-roaming cats form colonies around a food source, often a dumpster near a restaurant or other food-producing business. If these cats are trapped and euthanized, others will quickly fill the void. If the cats are sterilized, however, the colony will stabilize as the cats stop reproducing. Nuisance behaviors such as fighting and urine-marking will be reduced as well, and

public safety will be increased because the cats are vaccinated. As long as there are plentiful food sources, there will be free-roaming cats. Given the number of restaurants, grocery stores, and school cafeterias in cities throughout southwest Missouri—not to mention the number of well-meaning individuals who feed stray cats—the scope of the problem is obvious.

Animal organizations in southwest Missouri continue to release dogs and cats to new owners before they are spayed or neutered. Although 12 of 17 organizations surveyed who adopt animals do require spay/neuter before adoption, only six have that requirement for animals of all ages. The other six only require spay/neuter for animals over a particular age, usually six months. This means that a significant number of puppies and kittens are still being released unsterilized. In addition, five organizations have no spay/neuter requirement before adoption. Releasing animals unsterilized is counterproductive and contributes to the very problem that many of these agencies are trying to solve—an overabundance of unwanted dogs and cats.

Spay/neuter remains the most important and cost-effective tool available to fight pet overpopulation and its importance cannot be overstated. Each intact dog, for example, costs U.S. taxpayers \$35 in animal control expenses, compared to \$12 for a sterilized dog. Several steps could easily be taken to increase the number of animals sterilized in southwest Missouri:

- When an owner claims an animal, animal controls could waive the impound fee if the owner agrees to get the animal sterilized. The owner could be required to make the surgery appointment and show a receipt that the surgery has been paid for before the animal is released.
- Agencies that adopt could easily change their six-month spay/neuter requirement to four months. A majority of veterinarians in southwest Missouri are willing to perform the surgery at four months of age (or earlier in some cases). This would eliminate numerous accidental litters produced at an early age. Many owners are not aware that pets, especially cats, can go into heat at a very early age.
- Animal control officers who deal with cases in which pet owners are clearly low-income and have not had their animals sterilized could refer the owners to agencies such as SNAP or SNCO (Spay Neuter Clinic of the Ozarks) for financial assistance. SNAP would be glad to provide flyers for this purpose.

The missions of animal controls, shelters, and rescues are quite different. Generally speaking, the goal of a shelter or rescue is to protect animals, while the goal of an animal control agency is to protect the public from animals. Nevertheless, decreasing the number of incoming animals, as well as the number euthanized, is in the best interest of all of these organizations. The suggestions listed above, some of which require little if any cost, could serve all animal organizations in southwest Missouri by saving money, increasing public safety, and saving the lives of more dogs and cats.