

Rural Crime and Animal Cruelty

December 19, 2013

County Departments - Sheriff, District Attorney & Agriculture Focus on Rural Crime and Animal Cruelty

The Siskiyou County Animal Cruelty Task Force will hold its first meeting on December 27, 2013, at 12-noon. The meeting will be held at the Yreka Campus of the College of the Siskiyous' (Administration of Justice Classroom), located at 2001 Campus Way, Yreka, CA. The building is the first structure on the west side of the road, north of the Siskiyou County Behavioral Health Services Building. Recently, the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office, District Attorney's Office, and Department of Agriculture conducted a meeting to coordinate and synchronize the conduct of rural crimes and animal cruelty complaints brought to the attention of law enforcement authorities. Several strategies were developed by Sheriff Jon Lopey, District Attorney Kirk Andrus, and Agricultural Commissioner Pat Griffin. Included in the plans moving forward rapidly will be the development of an Animal Cruelty Task Force (Siskiyou County ACT). According to District Attorney Kirk Andrus, the purpose of the task force will be to formulate better strategies, develop education programs, evaluate best practices, and provide opportunities for county citizens to help authorities more efficiently respond to animal cruelty or neglect cases. Task force members, from a variety of backgrounds, will be invited to participate, including ranchers, the Cattlemen's Association, Farm Bureau, private sector animal rights' advocates, veterinary professionals, and private business, along with the Sheriff, District Attorney and County Agriculture Department.

The Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office is working with the Department of Agriculture to better coordinate the response to an investigation of animal neglect and abuse cases in Siskiyou County. According to Sheriff Lopey, "I have met with the Farm Bureau, ranchers, and citizens who have expressed concern over the response to some investigations of animal abuse and neglect cases in Siskiyou County. We have agreed to direct calls for Animal Control services to the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office's 24-hour dispatch phone number to ensure we track and respond to calls more efficiently; moreover, we have agreed to assist Animal Control officers with the conduct of complex criminal investigations involving animal-related crimes in our jurisdiction. We have also agreed to provide assistance and support when possible after hours for calls when Animal Control investigators are not available. The Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office has also appointed two Livestock Deputies (Deputies Darrel Lemos and Joe Hopper) to help investigate rural crimes involving livestock which could include cattle thefts, rustling, destruction or willful damage to animals or herds, theft of farm implements or equipment, willful destruction of fences or property, or brand-related violations.

Animal Control will respond to most calls involving neglected and abused animals, especially dogs and cats and they can be contacted at 841-4028. The SCSO will be

available to assist Animal Control officers with complex investigations and Livestock Deputies will assist with livestock-related offenses. SCSO assistance should be obtained by calling 9-1-1 if the call is an emergency, or, if a routine call requiring a response from a deputy, call the SCSO 24-hour dispatch phone number of 841-2900.

According to District Attorney Kirk Andrus, the Animal Cruelty Task Force (Siskiyou County ACT) will help us develop additional strategies to respond to rural crimes and animal cruelty cases. This involves developing a plan to initiate needed training, consult with experts, develop alternatives for people who may not be able to properly care for their animals, compile a list of animal response volunteers, develop hay or feed banks, identify animal foster care resources, and to discuss periodic news releases and a website for citizens. The first Siskiyou County ACT meeting will be held to introduce the public, involved county, private and rural participants and organizations to the overall concept of the task force and to determine membership and a plan for future activities.

It is a public meeting and all members of the public and impacted organizations are invited to attend. Mr. Andrus stated, "It is vitally important to honor the commitment to vigorously prosecute people who through willful neglect or intent, injure, abuse or neglect animals. This will not be tolerated in Siskiyou County, but we are also determined to develop alternatives for people who do not have the means with which to properly care for their animals. Our aim is to bring our resources together to respond to these situations, including preventing them where possible."

According to Pat Griffin, Agricultural Commissioner, "We will do all we can to work with other county agencies to maximize our response and investigative capabilities in response to calls involving animal neglect or cruelty. We are working as a team and I am convinced we can do a better job responding to and resolving these types of crimes in the future."

Bottom line, according to Sheriff Lopey, "We as county department heads are working together to better respond, investigate and ultimately mitigate rural crime and animal neglect or abuse cases in Siskiyou County." Anyone with questions about the meeting scheduled for December 27th should contact the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office at (530) 842-8300, or, the Agricultural Commissioner at (530) 841-4028.