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March 20, 2025

Council File No.: 25-0006-S14
Council Districts: All
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The Honorable Members of the Los Angeles City Council
Neighborhoods and Community Enrichment Committee
c/o Office of the City Clerk
City Hall Room 395, City Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Attention: Eric Villanueva, Legislative Assistant

**SUBJECT: CF NO. 25-0006-S14 – DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL SERVICES REPORT ON THE
STATUS OF THE EFFORTS TO REUNITE PETS WITH THEIR GUARDIANS DUE TO SEPARATION
CAUSED BY THE PACIFIC PALISADES FIRESTORM AND RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD
REUNIFICATION NOT BE POSSIBLE**

Recommendation for Council Action:

NOTE AND FILE this report as this report is for informational purposes only.

SUMMARY

The Pacific Palisades Fire started on January 7, 2025 and was not 100% fully contained until January 31, 2025. The fire caused significant destruction with over 37,000 acres burned and more than 16,000 structures destroyed, including homes, businesses, places of worship and community spaces. In rushing to escape these dangers, many people were not able to take their pets. For many, separation from their pets during a time of crisis adds an additional layer of stress and discomfort. In a motion issued on January 14, 2025, Council issued specific instructions to the Department of Animal Services regarding the City's efforts to reunify those impacted by the fires with their animals.

BACKGROUND

On Tuesday, January 7th, the City of Los Angeles was hit by the 2025 Windstorm and Fire Event that led to devastating fires that swept through the Pacific Palisades and Sylmar areas. The City's

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Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated and all City Departments were required to send a representative to the EOC. Several evacuation sites were opened for people and their pets, and the Department of Animal Services staff began providing support onsite. Residents who evacuated with their pets were directed to six evacuation centers where they were provided support and various supplies to be co-housed with their pets. In addition, the City of Los Angeles set up two large animal evacuation centers; one at Hansen Dam and the other at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center. Animal Control Officers worked with LAPD's mounted unit to assist with the evacuation of animals. Animal Care Technician Supervisors oversaw the two large animal sites and took in horses, donkeys, ponies, goats, sheep, pigs, and poultry. As owners were able to reclaim animals, and the population at Hansen Dam dropped below a certain level, the Department decided to demobilize the site on January 23rd and transferred the remaining animals to the Los Angeles Equestrian Center.

Due to the firestorm moving so quickly, many people could not remove their pets and many animals remained in the affected areas. Los Angeles Fire and Police Departments closed roads and put orders in place to allow first responders to do their work and to protect residents' property and the public's safety. Department of Animal Services staff were at the two command posts to respond to requests from LAFD and LAPD when they received calls from residents about animals and pets remaining in the mandatory evacuation zones. In addition, staff were on standby at the shelters to respond at a moment's notice.

The City set up the LA Fire Evacuation Animal Services Hotline for people to report pets missing in the fire zone. Callers were prompted to answer key questions about their pet, their possible location and needs. To assist in responding to the hotline calls and with field responses, the Department requested assistance through the State's mutual aid process and assistance from experienced disaster responders such as California Animal Welfare Association. The Department also brought in an incident management team from the ASPCA, American Humane, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The Department also had additional assistance from Riverside County Department of Animal Services, City of San Bernardino Animal Services, Mission Viejo Animal Services, San Bernardino County Animal Care, Sonoma County Animal Services, and SPCA of Monterey County. Once law enforcement allowed non-Animal Control Officers to enter restricted areas, the field operation reached out to independent, self-deploying rescuers to bring our efforts together. Law enforcement allowed these rescuers into the area as long as they were accompanied by an Animal Control Officer.

A care team of trained Animal Control Officers from the Department of Animal Services and surrounding municipal jurisdictions were dispatched to seek the animals needing assistance. If an animal was inside an unburned house, the officers provided care for the animal sheltering it in place unless the owner requested that the animal be retrieved. If the house was damaged and we were unable to locate the reported animal, the Animal Control Officers left food and water in a safe place for the animal. The City also created the LA Fire Evacuation Animal Services form to make a report that could be found on the Department's website.

The City and County, in coordination with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, established the Disaster Recovery Center at the UCLA Research Park located at 10850 W. Pico Boulevard. The Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) was open seven days a week from 9am to 8pm. The Department had a staff member onsite to provide information about the services and resources the Department has to offer, like food, supplies, referrals for veterinary care and the Pet Food Pantry.

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REUNIFICATION STATS TO-DATE AND ONGOING EFFORTS

In all, a total of 380 animals were reunited with their owners in the field. All of the evacuated large animals that were temporarily housed at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center and Hansen Dam have been reunited with their owners. This was a total of 629 large animals reunited with their owners.

There have been a total of 64 animals taken into the shelters with owners impacted by the firestorm. For the animals that were taken into the shelter, the Department remained in contact with the owners and maintained the animals until such time that the owners achieved stability and were able to reclaim their pets. Only the following animals still remain in our care: 28 chickens, one tortoise, eight cats, one dove and six dogs (the dogs are currently maintained at the Northeast Valley shelter location operated by Paws for Life). The Department continues to remain in contact with the owners and is happy to extend the time these animals remain in our care as long as the owners communicate the need for additional time and the intention to reclaim their pets. Of the animals taken into shelter, only two dogs were adopted out due to the owners discontinuing communication regarding their desire to ultimately reclaim the animals.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annette G. Ramirez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Annette" being more prominent than the last name "Ramirez".

Annette G. Ramirez
Interim General Manager