

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



**ITEM: 3.8
(ID # 30142)**

MEETING DATE:
Tuesday, March 24, 2026

FROM : SUPERVISOR V. MANUEL PEREZ AND SUPERVISOR YXSTIAN GUTIERREZ

SUBJECT: SUPERVISOR V. MANUEL PEREZ AND SUPERVISOR YXSTIAN GUTIERREZ:
Approve the Recommendation From The Board of Supervisors Ad Hoc Committee For The Continuous Improvement of Animal Services to Reaffirm the Prohibition and Enforcement of Illegal Animal Dumping and Dogs Running at Large In. All Districts [\$0]

RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Reaffirm that the dumping and abandonment of animals is illegal under state law and County ordinance, and that allowing a dog to run at large in the unincorporated areas of Riverside County is prohibited by County ordinance.
2. Direct the Riverside County Department of Animal Services to prioritize investigation and enforcement of animal abandonment and dogs running at large cases to the fullest extent permitted by law;
3. Direct the Riverside County Department of Animal Services to return to the Board within 90 days with a report detailing enforcement activities related to animal dumping incidents and dogs running at large, including investigations, citations issued, criminal referrals, and geographic data identifying areas where incidents are occurring.

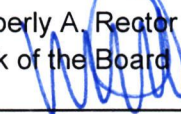
ACTION:Policy


Supervisor Yxstian Gutierrez 3/18/2026 
Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, Supervisor 4th. District 3/18/2026

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

On motion of Supervisor Perez, seconded by Supervisor Spiegel and duly carried by unanimous vote, IT WAS ORDERED that the above matter is approved as recommended.

Ayes: Medina, Spiegel, Washington, Perez, and Gutierrez
Nays: None
Absent: None
Date: March 24, 2026
xc: BOS-D4, BOS-D5, Animal Services

Kimberly A. Rector
Clerk of the Board
By: 
Deputy

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FINANCIAL DATA	Current Fiscal Year:	Next Fiscal Year:	Total Cost:	Ongoing Cost
COST	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
NET COUNTY COST	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
SOURCE OF FUNDS: N/A			Budget Adjustment: No	
			For Fiscal Year: 25/26	

C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION: Approve

BACKGROUND:

On July 30, 2024 (Item 3.5), the Board of Supervisors approved the establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee for the continuous improvement of Animal Services. This committee was tasked with working with the Department of Animal Services (DAS), the Executive Office, and interested parties to improve Department operations and respond to community expectations. The County of Riverside is committed to protecting the safety, health and welfare of the public and animals in our care.

In recent years, unincorporated communities throughout the Coachella Valley, such as North Shore, Mecca, Oasis, and Desert Edge, and the unincorporated communities of Anza, Cabazon, Good Hope/Meadowbrook, and Warm Springs have experienced a concerning pattern of illegal dog dumping and dogs running at large. Animals that are free-roaming or abandoned along rural roads, vacant lots, desert areas, and residential neighborhoods are often subjected to extreme temperatures, dehydration, starvation, injury, predation, and death. Animal abandonment and allowing dogs to free roam are unlawful, inhumane, and unacceptable.

These acts are not isolated occurrences; instead, they represent a growing pattern of reckless behavior that endangers both the animals and the public. Dumped and free-roaming animals are often found severely malnourished, injured, dehydrated, or suffering from untreated medical conditions. Many do not survive the harsh desert environment, extreme temperatures, and lack of water or shelter.

Dogs running at large and animal dumping in the Coachella Valley have significant public safety and public health implications. Stray and abandoned animals may:

- Wander onto roadways and highways, creating traffic hazards and contributing to vehicle collisions.
- Threaten residents, livestock, and pets.
- Become vectors for disease that can impact humans, livestock, and pets.
- Trigger fear and danger within residential neighborhoods when frightened or cornered.
- Create burdens on County animal shelters and taxpayers.

This pattern of dumping dogs is geographically tied to areas that are isolated or difficult to patrol regularly, making enforcement both challenging and essential. These abandonments place direct strain on Riverside County Animal Services, local law enforcement, volunteer rescue

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organizations, and County shelters, which are forced to divert limited resources to respond to situations that should never occur.

This conduct constitutes criminal abandonment under California Penal Code § 597s, which makes it a misdemeanor to willfully abandon any animal. Violators may face criminal prosecution, fines, and imprisonment. In addition, California Penal Code § 597 prohibits acts of cruelty and neglect, including failing to provide proper care and protection. Also, Riverside County Ordinance No. 6.08 prohibits dogs running at large in unincorporated areas of the County, and authorizes enforcement actions, administrative fines, and penalties.

A dog running "at large" is defined as being off the owner's property and not under direct control, such as:

- Off premises- Located anywhere other than the owner's or custodian's private property.
- Unrestrained- Not held on a leash (not exceeding six feet in length) by a person capable of controlling the dog.
- Voice control does NOT count- Physical restraint is required; the law explicitly states that "voice control, eye control, or signal control" does not satisfy the requirement for restraint.

Dogs found running at large can be humanely captured and impounded by animal services. Dogs running at large are legally classified as a public nuisance. Owners found in violation may be issued citations. Correcting the violation (such as obtaining a license or microchip) can sometimes clear the citation. Owners may be responsible for any costs of impoundment, including daily boarding, vaccinations, and medical treatments provided while the animal is held. Owners may also be held responsible if a dog injures a person or damages property.

Because the Coachella Valley includes vast rural desert open space, it has become a targeted area for these violations. This action reaffirms the Board of Supervisors' commitment to combating this trend with robust enforcement and community education, protecting vulnerable animals and safeguarding the health and safety of valley residents.

To address the persistent and targeted dumping of animals, and dogs running at large in the unincorporated communities of the Coachella Valley, Supervisors Perez and Gutierrez recommend the following coordinated enforcement strategy.

PROPOSED ENFORCEMENT STRATEGY

1. Criminal Enforcement

Animal Services will continue to prioritize investigation and prosecution of animal abandonment cases under:

- California Penal Code § 597s (willful abandonment of an animal – misdemeanor);
- California Penal Code § 597 (animal cruelty and neglect);

And investigation and prosecution of dogs running at large under:

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- Riverside County Ordinance No. 6.08 (Capture of Dogs Running at Large).

Violators may be referred for criminal prosecution to the fullest extent permitted by law, including fines, restitution for shelter and veterinary costs, and potential imprisonment.

2. Administrative Penalties & Cost Recovery

Administrative citations may be issued under County ordinance with escalating penalties for repeat violations.

Pursue full cost recovery for:

- Shelter intake and housing
- Veterinary care
- Microchipping and vaccinations
- Field investigation costs
- Resulting damages to public or private property.

3. Interagency Coordination

Animal Services will continue to coordinate with the:

- Sheriff's Department
- Code Enforcement
- Agricultural Commissioner
- District Attorney's Office

Abandonment and dogs running at large calls are high priority to the Department of Animal Services. The public is encouraged to call the department with any information regarding suspected animal abandonment so that the cases can be pursued as prosecutable criminal offenses.

4. Public Awareness and Education

Public awareness is also critical to prevent animal abandonment and dogs running at large. Residents should be informed of available alternatives, including legal surrender options, rehoming resources, assistance with keeping dogs confined, and shelter services. The County will support public outreach efforts by:

Posting signage in areas identified as high-risk dumping locations stating: "Animal Abandonment is a Crime – Violators Will Be Prosecuted."

Promoting bilingual outreach campaigns throughout the Coachella Valley highlighting:

- Legal surrender options at County shelters.
- Low-cost spay and neuter services.
- Microchipping availability.
- Criminal penalties associated with animal abandonment.
- Assistance available for keeping dogs confined.

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Fiscal Impact

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with this action. Enforcement activities will be conducted within existing departmental budgets. Where permitted by law, cost recovery efforts may offset County expenditures related to enforcement and animal care.

Impact on Residents and Businesses

This Board action will help improve public safety and quality of life for residents and businesses in unincorporated communities of Riverside County. Strengthened enforcement may deter illegal animal dumping and reduce the number of stray animals that pose risks to neighborhoods, motorists, and agricultural operations.

Reducing animal abandonment and dogs running at large also helps prevent threats to livestock, damage to agricultural property, and operational disruptions for rural businesses.

Overall, this action supports safer communities, protects vulnerable animals, and reinforces responsible pet ownership throughout Riverside County.