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REPORT OF THE PALM BEACH COUNTY ANIMAL  
ANIMAL REGULATION DIVISION

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The Palm Beach County Animal Regulation Division was established in 1970 by the Florida State Legislature through a special act for Palm Beach County. The Division provides primary animal control services for a human population of 652,195 in one of the largest counties east of the Mississippi, encompassing 2,578 square miles. The vast majority of the population is located along 45 miles of the Atlantic Ocean coastline. As the population has increased (Table I), the population center has moved further inland each year. The western expanses of the county are largely rural with farming as the main industry. Between the urban coastal areas and the rural western farming areas is an expanding suburban area.

There are 234,339 occupied households in Palm Beach County. Property owners occupy 171,736 of those households, while renters occupy 62,603. Each household is occupied by 2.42 people with a combined mean income of \$21,755.

Forty-eight percent is composed of males, while fifty-two percent is composed of females. The racial breakdown of Palm Beach County is as follows: White - 84.5%, Black - 13.5%, Other - 2%. The median age is 39.7. Over 30 percent of the population is age 60 and older, while 21.3 percent of the population is under 18.

TABLE I

<u>Population Trends In Palm Beach County</u>		
<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>% Increase (1970 base year)</u>
1960	228,100	--
1970	349,000	--
1975	481,500	37.6
1978	514,800	47.1
1980	576,900	64.8
1981	615,200	75.8
1982	637,900	82.3
1983	652,200	86.3
1990 (Projected)	989,500	182.7

ANIMAL DEMOGRAPHICS

No survey has ever been taken of the dog and cat population in Palm Beach County. Therefore, the dog and cat population estimates (using various formulas) should be considered as speculative only (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Estimated Dog and Cat Population  
(Based on formulae indicated below)

	<u>Dogs</u>	<u>Cats</u>
Schneider and Vaida (1975)	89,342	60,388
Nassar and Mosier (1980)	159,072	
Nassar and Mosier (1982)	127,479-159,724	74,049-114,168
Market Research Corporation	113,448	105,115

Based on personal knowledge of the Palm Beach County area, I would tend to believe that the most conservative formula would be more applicable to the area. Since a large proportion of the local population resides in condominium developments, which for the most part exclude pets, it seems that 1:7.3 (dogs) and 1:10.8 (cats) ratios would be reasonable.

Last year, Palm Beach County issued 50,632 rabies vaccination/license tags. Of that total, 37.3% were issued to non-sterilized dogs/cats (\$9.5 tag), while 46.3% were issued to sterilized dogs/cats (\$4.00). The remainder were issued to senior citizens (\$2.50 tag) or as duplicates (\$2.50 tag) with sterilization status not tracked. Eighty-three percent of the tags sold were for dogs, while 17% were for cats. Tables 3 and 4 provide further details of trends and numbers.

TABLE 3

Animal Licenses Issued and Sterilization Status  
(Percentages of total in parentheses)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Sterilized</u>	<u>Non-Sterilized</u>	<u>Senior Citizens</u>
1974	30,035			
1975	20,676			
1976	20,079			
1977	30,048			
1978	31,480	11,017 (35)	15,791 (50)	4,037 (13)
1979	27,170	10,133 (37)	12,379 (45)	4,123 (15)
1980	27,848	10,674 (38)	12,173 (44)	4,532 (16)
1981	35,938	14,651 (40)	16,092 (45)	4,808 (13)
1982	44,403	20,391 (46)	18,652 (42)	4,436 (10)
1983	50,632	23,459 (46)	18,901 (37)	7,762 (15)

TABLE 4

Animal Licenses Issued (Species)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Dogs</u>	<u>Cats</u>
1982	44,403	37,743 (85%)	6,660 (15%)
1983	50,632	41,771 (82%)	8,861 (18%)

From a historical standpoint, the percentage of tags sold for sterilized animals has increased each year since 1978 when the sterilized/non-sterilized tag differential went into effect. In 1978, 35 percent of all tags sold were for sterilized animals; while in 1983, over 46 percent of all tags sold were for sterilized animals.

For the ten years in which records have been maintained (1974-83), annual animal impoundments have gone from 7,422 (1974) to a peak load of 15,379 (1978). During 1983, the division handled 11,967 animals, of which 6,740 (56.3%) were dogs and 4,796 (40.0%) were cats (Table 5).

TABLE 5

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Strays</u>	<u>Unwanted (Handed in by Owner)</u>	<u>Other</u>
1974	7,422			
1975	10,780			
1976	13,198			
1977	14,955	9,070 (61)	5,182 (35)	703 (4)
1978	15,379	9,734 (63)	4,857 (32)	788 (5)
1979	12,402	8,101 (65)	3,547 (29)	754 (6)
1980	13,777	9,818 (71)	3,119 (23)	840 (6)
1981	12,901	9,769 (76)	2,205 (17)	927 (7)
1982	11,847	8,826 (75)	1,802 (15)	1,219 (10)
1983	11,967	8,839 (74)	2,178 (18)	950 (8)

It is interesting to note that from 1977, when stray animals were first differentiated from unwanted animals, the presence of stray/owner-unknown animals being handled increased from 60.6 to a peak of 74.4, in 1982. Similarly, the percentage of unwanted/owner give-up animals being handled decreased from 34.6 to 15.2 during the same time period.

The animal adoption rate has ranged from 9 percent (1975 and 1977) to 14 percent (1980). While the redemption/returned-to-owner rate has ranged from 7 percent (1975) to 16 percent (1982). It is believed that the redemption rate has been positively affected due to a more vigorous licensing program. Finally, the euthanasia rate has varied from 84 percent (1975) to 63

percent (1978-1981). For the past two years, the euthanasia rate has been at 67 percent and 68 percent respectively (Table 6).

TABLE 6

Disposition of Impounded Animals

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Adopted</u>	<u>Redeemed by Owner</u>	<u>Euthanized</u>	<u>Other</u>
1974	7,422	786 (11)	664 (9)	5,972 (80)	----
1975	10,780	962 (9)	755 (7)	9,063 (84)	----
1976	13,198	1,433 (11)	1,603 (12)	10,162 (77)	----
1977	14,827	1,312 (9)	1,955 (13)	10,065 (67)	1,470 (11)
1978	15,273	1,447 (10)	1,740 (11)	9,734 (63)	2,352 (16)
1979	12,411	1,568 (13)	1,436 (12)	7,852 (63)	1,555 (12)
1980	13,868	1,894 (14)	1,794 (13)	8,669 (63)	1,511 (10)
1981	12,830	1,673 (13)	1,862 (15)	8,044 (63)	1,251 (9)
1982	11,551	1,344 (12)	1,802 (16)	7,694 (67)	711 (5)
1983	(11,867)	1,378 (12)	1,764 (15)	8,066 (68)	629 (5)

The division has only just started recording the ages of impounded animals. During the six month period from October, 1983 to March, 1984, 3,627 dogs were impounded. Of these, 29 percent were younger than four months of age. Of 1,841 cats impounded, 43 percent were kittens. Animal releases followed a similar pattern with young (under 4 months) dogs accounting respectively for 39% of those adopted, 11% of those redeemed by owner, and 32% of those euthanized. The division has always responded to dead animal complaints (dogs, cats, livestock, and wildlife and the numbers are recorded in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Dead Animals Complaints

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>
1977	1,372
1978	2,261
1979	1,577
1980	1,416
1981	1,571
1982	1,422
1983	1,325

Palm Beach County is also served by two humane societies - The Animal Rescue League and the Boca Raton Humane Society. The majority of the animals handled by both facilities are brought in by the public. Last year, the Animal Rescue League reportedly handled 8,474 animals, while the Boca Raton Humane Society handled approximately 5,200 animals. Additionally, four

municipalities operate their own animal control programs, but all impound animals are released to the care of the county.

ANIMAL CONTROL DATA

The annual budget of the Department has bene increasing steadily in the past ten years (Table 8). In 1983, field enforcement services for the Palm Beach County Animal Regulation Division responded to 21,332 complaints. These complaints/calls are broken down in Table 9.

TABLE 8

Animal Budgets and Personnel

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Budget</u>	<u>Total Personnel Complement</u>
1970	\$ 26,893	6
1971	65,212	10
1972	126,408	11
1973	179,398	18
1974	320,393	32
1975	533,223	30
1976	551,413	33
1977	621,279	41
1978	761,368	45
1979	768,481	46
1980	954,582	54
1981	1,171,693	56
1982	1,285,599	56
1983	1,360,312	54

TABLE 9

Breakdown of Enforcement Calls

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Number</u>
Animal bite investigations	2,903
Injured/sick animal calls	1,232
Stray animal complaints	4,926
Dead animal removal	1,325
Cruelty/abandonment investigation	1,156
Stray livestock complaints	131
Animal in distress calls	87
Animal in season complaints	83
Possible vicious animal complaints	1,044
Pre-adoption investigation	165
Confined animal pick-up	5,798
Animal Nuisance (barking) affidavit investigation	172
Commercial animal establishment inspection	79
Humane trap delivery	162
Misc. complaints/calls	429
Nuisance honey bee investigations	40
Check shot and tag investigation	1,600

Animal Regulation officers as special deputy sheriffs issued 1,059 Notices-to-Appear (citations) and 727 violation notices (written warnings) to law offenders in 1983. The violation of a county ordinance or state law is prosecuted as a second degree misdemeanor, with the exception of an animal cruelty charge which is a first misdemeanor. A second degree misdemeanor is punishable by a fine not to exceed \$500 and/or up to sixty days in jail. Most fines range from \$40 to \$60 for violating the local animal control ordinance.

HUMANE EDUCATION

The division is in the process of completing 10 years of a public humane education program. Currently, three full-time Humane Education Specialists prepare and present various educational programs throughout the county. From 1975 to 1983, over 170,000 school children and teachers were given direct classroom training.

Evaluating the effectiveness of a humane education program has always been difficult. Pre-and post-testing of students to determine the relative effectiveness of in-school presentations has given positive results. Additionally, teachers have given good ratings to school programs. However, to measure the impact of humane education on community attitudes toward animals and the Department is very difficult. From a subjective standpoint, we feel that the humane education program has succeeded in establishing more

positive public feelings toward an agency that is normally scorned. Frequently, when officers are operating in a particular area they will receive assistance from neighborhood children, where in the past they were ridiculed and harassed.

#### SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAMS

Dog and cat spay/neuter programs in Palm Beach County have historically been controversial. A joint effort between the county and local veterinary association in 1975 to sterilize dogs and cats of indigents was terminated after only a few months of operation. Again in 1977 and 1978, a public spay/neuter program was begun by the county after a local philanthropist donated \$50,000. The clinic operated without regard to income, but collected \$17.50 and \$11.00 to complete spay and neuter surgeries respectively. After the \$50,000 gift had been expended, and the local veterinary association had filed a law suit against the county, the program was terminated when the Animal Rescue League dropped income restrictions with its own spay/neuter program. Less than 2,000 animals were sterilized at the county clinic during its operation.

After continued public demands for the county to offer some spay/neuter program, the idea of rebating money back to animal owners was begun by county ordinance in July, 1982. The cost of dog and cat license tags were increased three months prior beginning of the program. For each \$9.50 tag sold to a non-sterilized, \$4 was applied to the rebate program. Over \$11,000 had been collected when the program began. Dog/cat owners who wanted to receive \$20 (female) or \$15 (male) simply called or visited Animal Regulation to receive a rebate certificate. Once a veterinarian of the owner's choice certified that the animal had been checked was then sent to the owner. Veterinarians also have the option owner an instant discount and collecting the rebate themselves.

Since the beginning of the program, \$132,273 has been collected for the program through the sale of tags for non-sterilized animals. Just over \$100,000 has been rebated to pet owners for having their dog/cat sterilized. A total of 5,242 animals have been sterilized as a result of the program in the 21 months during which it has been operating. Of these, 3,023 were cats (1,744 female) and 2,219 were dogs (1,697 females). It is interesting to note that more cats than dogs have been through the program. Likewise, it should be noted that the proportion of male dogs going through the program has been very low.

In an initial research study of this spay/neuter rebate program, it was determined that 74% of the participants felt that the rebate was very important or important in their decision to sterilize their pet. The household income level of rebate program participants is given in Table 10.



TABLE 10

Household Income Level of Participants in Rebate Program

Under \$10,000	16.1%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	27.3%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	24.0%
\$30,000 - \$40,000	12.8%
Over \$40,000	14.0%
No response	5.8%

After some initial skepticism, most veterinarians seem to be very positive about the program. Some veterinarians have even lowered their own prices for sterilization. Only time and study will be able to determine the true effectiveness of such a program.

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