



HIGHLANDS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Animal Control to become part of HCSO in March

SEBRING -- By a 5-0 vote Tuesday (Feb. 21) morning, the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners approved the Highlands County Sheriff's Office's proposal to take over operation of Animal Control.

Animal Control will fall under the HCSO umbrella on March 29 and from that point forward will be known as Animal Services. The current Animal Control employees will become civilian members of the HCSO, with an HCSO lieutenant -- who has yet to be named -- serving as their immediate supervisor. Animal Control has been without a director since the retirement of Darryl Scott in May of 2016.



Following a discussion among the commissioners about the cost of the proposal, Commissioner Ron Handley said, "The positives far outweigh the negatives. Long-term, it's certainly going to benefit the county." Handley then made the motion to approve the request.

"Animal Services will be a natural fit for the Sheriff's Office," Sheriff Paul Blackman said. "Many of their cases come through our Consolidated Dispatch Center, and our deputies and detectives are the ones who do follow-up when criminal charges stem from an animal abuse or neglect case. This will also give the Animal Control staff enhanced technology and support systems so they can be more efficient, and the use of inmate work details will help keep down the cost of maintaining and improving the facility. We also will focus on increasing community partnerships with the Humane Society and other animal advocates.

"The addition of Animal Services to our agency is part of the 100-day plan I developed after being elected, and I thank the commissioners for embracing our vision."

Animal Services division will be part of the HCSO's Specialized Services Division, which includes the agricultural and K-9 units.

“I look forward to working with the current Animal Control staff for a smooth transition. I think the combination of our two agencies is going to be a benefit for Highlands County’s citizens and its animals,” Hood said. “The addition of the Animal Control staff to the HCSO will make for a more streamlined process when investigating cases of animal abuse and neglect as well as violations of county ordinances. We will also use the Sheriff’s Office social media to help spread the word on animals that are available for adoption as well as livestock that will be auctioned, which will hopefully equate to more animals finding homes.”

Photo: Capt. Darin Hood and Business Administrator Rob Reed speak to the county commission Tuesday.