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Mat-Su dog breeder faces 50 counts of animal cruelty

WILLOW: Officials pick up 110 animals, but also find 22 that died.

Anchorage Daily News/adn.com

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A Mat-Su man faces 50 counts of cruelty to animals after state troopers and borough officials found 22 dead dogs and 110 other dogs that were ailing, troopers said.

Frank Rich, 53, of Willow was arrested and taken to the Mat-Su Pretrial Facility, troopers said.

Animal-care staff with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough were working late into Monday evening to remove about 110 dogs from Rich's property in the Montana Creek area, the borough said.

Most of the dogs being rescued are malnourished and dehydrated, troopers said.

Another 22 dogs already had died from exposure, starvation and dehydration, troopers said.

Richard Stockdale, the borough's Animal Care & Regulation manager, said most of the dogs are huskies, a few are malamutes.

The borough said Rich is a dog breeder.

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PHOTO: Dogs seized after alleged neglect

150 dogs seized from breeder's home

January 11, 2011 | by Jackie Bartz and Channel 2 News staff



Jackie Bartz/KTUU.com

MONTANA CREEK, Alaska — Animal care staff in the Mat-Su Valley worked through the night Monday to remove more than 150 dogs from a breeder's home.

Alaska State Troopers arrived Monday evening at the

Montana Creek home of 53-year-old Frank Rich of Willow, near Mile 92 of the Parks Highway, to investigate a report of animal neglect.

Troopers say when they arrived at the house on Kashwitna Drive, there was no food or water for the dogs. There were about 150 dogs on the property.

Troopers say nearly all the dogs were malnourished and dehydrated. The animals were shivering and eating snow and their own feces. An additional 22 dogs that had already died were found on the property, apparently dead from

exposure, starvation and dehydration. They say there could be more dead dogs on the property.

About 30 of the dogs are puppies. Some are just a few weeks old.

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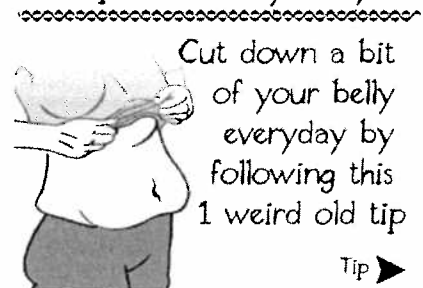
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Rich is held on \$5,000 bail. If he posts bail, he cannot own dogs.

Rich told troopers he lost his job in October and was having a tough time supporting the dogs for his breeding operation.

Mat-Su Borough Animal Care & Regulation Manager Richard Stockdale said Animal Care removed the dogs from Rich because of the lack of care. There were 157 of his dogs at the shelter Tuesday morning.

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"It is huge, I mean right now we are at full capacity, you see we're closed today just so we can process them through," Stockdale said.

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He said most of the dogs were huskies. "Most animals are emaciated and dehydrated," Stockdale said.

Animal Care is asking the community for donations of money and the dogs' current brand of food, Hills Science Diet Advanced Fitness. The shelter needs the specific brand of dog food, money, zip ties, tarps, outside kennels, blankets and metal food bowls to help with the influx of dogs.

Supplies to help out can be dropped off at the Willow Fire Station and the Anchorage Animal Shelter.

Officials are also asking the public to come in and adopt other dogs -- not the dogs removed from Rich's house -- to alleviate pressure on the facility and let workers treat the incoming dogs. The facility is offering a discount on adopting the dogs that were already there.

Officials say Rich's dogs will not be up for adoption any time soon -- it depends on the outcome of the trial, or if Rich signs over control.

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Seized dogs finding new homes

PALMER — In the wake of a ruling ordering dozens of abused dogs be turned over to the Mat-Su Borough, some of the more than 150 animals seized early this year have started to find homes.

But if you're looking to adopt a husky mix, be patient.

"We have a few that are out for adoption just because of their health," said Animal Care and Regulation Manager Richard Stockdale. But most dogs still have a way to go, he said. "They're doing OK, but they're not quite ready to do the adoption thing."

Some of the dogs are headed to the correctional farm at Point MacKenzie, where inmates will care for them. Stockdale said he likes that arrangement because the farm has more manpower than he does and the dogs will get more attention.

But while having the dogs at the farm will relieve some of the burden on his staff, some of the challenges are going to get worse. One dog has already had a litter of puppies. Another is very close. Stockdale said several of the female dogs arrived at the shelter pregnant.

The dogs, most of which were emaciated and dehydrated — and some of which had already died — were seized Jan. 10 from the Willow-area home of Frank Rich. As in most dog seizure cases, the borough said it could not adopt the dogs out immediately. The borough set to work on seizing the dogs permanently. Rich appealed a forfeiture notice the borough filed, which sent the case to borough administrative hearing officer, Karen Jennings. On Feb. 10, Jennings ruled in the borough's favor.

However, that might not be the final word on who owns the dogs. Rich has 30 days to appeal and send the case to state Superior Court. Borough Attorney Lisa Thomas said Thursday that she has received no notice that Rich has taken this route.

But while that uncertainty remains, Stockdale said he's proceeding with the process of rehabilitating the dogs and getting them adopted. He said that is the right move.

"The forfeiture was upheld," he said. "They're now the borough's dogs."

Thomas backed him up on that point. The case's status, she said, is that right now the dogs are the borough's property.

Running parallel to the borough's process is a criminal case filed at the Palmer Courthouse — set for a hearing today — in which Rich is charged with 50 counts of animal cruelty.

Jennings' ruling contains hints of what a potential jury in Rich's criminal trial might see.

According to borough staff, Rich first showed up on their radar in October 2002 when he applied for and received a kennel license, which subsequently expired in 2005.

In April 2006, the borough received a complaint of 20 puppies running loose on Kashwitna Road. Rich was warned about the loose dogs and told to apply to renew his kennel license. In 2007, the borough got another complaint, this time about aggressive dogs getting loose from his property. An animal control officer sent to investigate "observed unsanitary conditions in the dog lot," a borough report says. Rich was cited for those unsanitary conditions and for having an unlicensed kennel in August

2007.

A week later, Rich applied for a license. The borough agreed to put down 24 of his dogs to reduce the numbers in the kennel. Even with the reduced numbers, Rich failed the inspection necessary for the license. His kennel was inspected again in September 2007.

“While the dogs were no longer standing in mud and water, the conditions were still unsanitary,” Jennings wrote.

Finally, in October 2007, Rich passed an inspection and got a license, which expired in October 2010. He didn’t stay on the right side of the law for more than a year, though. In late 2009, the number of dogs on his lot had swelled to 155, which was above the 127 allowed by his license. He was issued a warning.

In April of last year he applied to renew his license. The borough hasn’t ruled on that application yet.

The ruling also contains a few snippets of how Rich tried to explain himself when animal care officers came to seize his dogs. He told them that the dead dogs had looked healthy and “suddenly died.” He said he’d quit his job two months prior to their arrival and that money had been tight. He’d sold a vehicle and other things to pay for dog food. He said he prioritized feeding the puppies because he could sell them and use the money to feed the adults. He said there was no water for the dogs because it would freeze when he put it out, “so the dogs eat snow.” He said he didn’t call the borough because he worried all his dogs would be put down, and anyway he said he “did not want to burden the borough.”

Jennings takes particular notice of testimony that Rich could have gotten water for the dogs at a nearby spring and that some of the dogs were found in a heated cabin on the property.

“Rich had a free source of water available and in addition, since the cabin was heated, could have kept the water from freezing so it could be provided to the dogs in his lot. Rich’s failure to provide the most basic of needs, water, when he had the capacity to do so is evidence that he cannot be relied on to care for the dogs if they are returned to him,” Jennings wrote.

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Woman sentenced to probation in animal-cruelty case

September 24, 2010|by Ashton Goodell

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — She's been called a cat hoarder, but an Anchorage woman convicted on several counts of animal cruelty says she tried to give stray animals a better life. District Court Judge Alex Swiderski sentenced 54-year-old Deborah Allen Thursday for mistreating several dozen cats and dogs.

Allen won't be spending any time in jail, but will be on probation for 10 years. Animal-rights activists say Allen's good intentions to adopt strays almost killed her animals.

The city removed 32 animals from Allen's home last October. On Thursday, Swiderski ordered at least another 50 pets to be turned over to Animal Control as part of her sentencing.

The prosecutor, Herbert Viergutz, says Allen took on too many animals and couldn't take care of those she was trying to save. Several of them were skinny and sick, with lung congestion and coughs.

The animals have been kept as evidence for nearly a year at Animal Control -- but Allen claims the animals were in better condition under her care than they are now.

Both sides want the animals to find health, happy homes.

"Ms. Allen's rights to all of her animal victims should be forfeited immediately, thereby allowing all the animals at Animal Control a chance to find a new and loving home," Viergutz said.

"I tell you, Judge, if nothing else, if you don't have any respect for me or if you are going to give me jail time fine -- but please, please, please do not send my animals to Animal Control," Allen said.

Swiderski told Allen she could no longer care for or own animals. He said with a mental evaluation and a recommendation from a psychologist, he might consider allowing Allen a few personal pets.

Contact Ashton Goodell at agoodell@ktuu.com

Homes sought for animals from cruelty case

October 01, 2010|by Ashton Goodell

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Anchorage Animal Care and Control plans to remove dozens of animals from an Anchorage woman's home and animal shelter this weekend. A judge ordered Deborah Allen to turn over all of her animals after she was found guilty of animal cruelty.

At least 50 cats are waiting to be removed from Allen's home -- more than Animal Control can usually take on at once. Several shelters have stepped forward to help adopt out the animals, but even with the extra help, 50 cats and a handful of dogs is a lot to handle.

When Vickie Young with Polar Pug Rescue and Friends first saw her dog, Nym, she didn't even know she was a poodle. Her hair was matted down and covered in feces. Young adopted all the dogs removed from Allen's home.

"A far cry from when we first got them -- they were scared to death of people," Young said.

Several of the dogs had skin infections and eye problems from poor living conditions and a lack of medical care.

"They were in pretty rough shape: they had several inches of matting, which then causes them to have bacteria on the skin, and then the skin starts rotting away," Young said.

The dogs are doing a lot better now; most are healthy and ready to adopt, and Young has no doubt they'll find homes quickly. The problem is the cats -- Animal Control already has 11, and is expecting at least 50 more.

"We've had multiple calls about the dogs, but we have yet to receive a single phone call about the cats," said Animal Control's Brooke Taylor.

"We are very, very up-front with people when we have special-needs animals, and we have a lot," said Sally Clampitt with the Alaska Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. "Really healthy, talented, fabulous animals don't always end up in Animal Control."

Animal Control removed more than 23 cats from Allen's house last year, but didn't have the space to take in all the animals. It's still trying to make room and find other organizations to take on the rest of the animals staying at Allen's animal shelter, Chateau Pampered Purr.

Allen didn't want to talk on camera, but it's still possible she might pursue a civil case against Animal Control. She claimed in court that the shelter didn't adequately take care of the animals they took away from her, and she wants a third party to adopt the animals out.

Animal Control is ready to start adopting out the healthier animals, and will keep a waiting list of those interested in any of the animals still recovering.

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