



PROPOSED PLAN FOR THE HUMANE CAPTURE AND REMOVAL OF FREE-ROAMING DOGS ALONG THE HIGHWAY 280 CORRIDOR

Prepared for: Mayor Hubbard and the Sylacauga City Council

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Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council during your recent work session. As requested, this document sets out how the Greater Birmingham Humane Society (GBHS) proposes to approach the free-roaming dog population along the Highway 280 corridor, what each phase involves, how long it may take, and, importantly, what we will need from the City to carry the mission out safely and successfully.

We want to be candid at the outset about one point we cannot promise: a fixed completion date. As we explained in the work session, the single biggest factor in how long this process will take is whether the public feeding along the corridor can be stopped. We address that directly below.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND PURPOSE

GBHS recognizes that the situation along the Highway 280 corridor presents both an animal-welfare concern and a legitimate public-safety concern. Reports of free-roaming dogs entering businesses, roaming motel properties, fighting other animals, and exhibiting increasingly aggressive behavior have raised understandable concerns among residents, business owners, City officials, and law enforcement.

The purpose of this proposal is to reduce that risk using a humane, organized, and effective approach that addresses the entire population rather than isolated individual animals. The goal is not simply to catch the next dog. The goal is to safely and permanently remove the free-roaming population from the corridor while protecting the public, the animals, and the businesses affected by their presence.

GBHS believes that a successful outcome requires both immediate action and patience. A rushed effort that captures only a handful of dogs can make the remaining animals more difficult to catch and leave the underlying problem unresolved. A coordinated effort that combines feeding control, reconnaissance, humane capture, veterinary care, and post-capture evaluation offers the greatest likelihood of long-term success.

THE PRINCIPLES THAT SHAPE THIS PLAN

This is no longer a routine stray-dog situation. We are dealing with a large group of free-roaming dogs, 40 or more by current estimates, that have established territories, food sources, travel routes, and social bonds. They move between both sides of Highway 280 through the drainage tunnels, bed down in the wooded acreage behind the businesses, and are increasingly entering stores and motel properties.

Two hard facts drive every decision in this plan:

1. You cannot out-trap a free buffet.

As long as truckers, residents, and the encampment continue feeding the dogs, the dogs have no reason to enter any trap. Feeding control is not optional; it is the foundation everything else rests on.

2. You cannot catch a pack one dog at a time.

Animal-control professionals have long known that once a free-roaming dog watches another dog get caught, that dog becomes far harder to catch. Every failed attempt educates the rest. This is exactly the trap-shy behavior GBHS has experienced firsthand. The proven answer is to condition the group to a baited site over time and capture as many as possible at once.

WHY WE DO NOT RECOMMEND SEDATIVE BAIT

The Council asked about putting a sedative in the bait. We do not recommend it for two reasons we want on the record.

First, we cannot control which dogs eat the bait. The boldest dogs eat first and may take far more than intended, while the dogs we most need to reach may get none.

Second, dogs that eat sedated bait tend to wander off and "sleep it off" wherever they end up, which near this corridor can mean a roadway, a culvert, or private property where we cannot reach or account for them.

The safer, more reliable approach is to use cameras to learn the pack's behavior, control feeding, capture the dogs in a secure enclosure, and only then sedate them when the animals are already contained and cannot bolt.

THE GBHS APPROACH, PHASE BY PHASE

PHASE 1 — RECONNAISSANCE AND INTELLIGENCE

Before we attempt to catch any dog, we need to understand the whole group.

Using trail cameras placed at known feeding locations, den areas, and both mouths of the drainage tunnels under Highway 280, we will work to establish:

- A reliable headcount, confirming whether the population is 25, 40, or higher.
- The pack's daily movement patterns and which side of Highway 280 they favor and when.
- Every active feeding location and feeder, intentional or not.
- Which individual dogs are bold, aggressive, or particularly trap-shy so handling can be planned appropriately.

The tunnel crossings are natural choke points. Watching them tells us the pack's schedule and routes, which determines where capture has the best chance of success.

PHASE 2 — FEEDING CONTROL

This phase runs concurrently with reconnaissance and is non-negotiable.

The scattered feeding along the corridor must be stopped, including food provided by truck drivers, passers-by, and residents, as well as food associated with the encampment in the woods.

This is the part of the plan that GBHS cannot accomplish alone. It requires the city, the Police Department, Animal Control, and outreach to people living in the woods through the appropriate City department or social-service partner.

We are not starving the dogs. We are consolidating the food supply at controlled locations so that our bait becomes their reliable food source.

PHASE 3 — SITE SELECTION AND CONDITIONING

We will identify four capture sites in hidden locations set as far back from Highway 280 as terrain allows. Sites will be selected on both sides of the highway to keep the dogs and any subsequent handling activities as far from traffic as practicable.

At each site, we will place a large corral enclosure fitted with either a guillotine-style gate or a swing gate. These are designs that national experts frequently recommend for trap-smart dogs because only the gate moves, making the dog less likely to be struck by the trapping mechanism.

The gates will initially be secured open and baited daily.

Using cameras, we will monitor how the dogs begin using each site. This conditioning period is the step most people are tempted to rush and the step most responsible for success or failure.

Patience during conditioning is precisely what prevents the trap-shy failures GBHS has experienced in previous operations.

PHASE 4 — CAPTURE

When cameras show the largest number of dogs comfortably using a site, capture begins.

Because the four sites are separate, each can operate independently. We do not have to trigger all sites simultaneously. Each enclosure can be activated when that location contains the highest number of dogs. A trained handler monitoring a live camera feed selects the moment and activates the gate. We never trigger on the first dog entering the enclosure. Veterinary support will be staged and ready before any gate is activated.

To answer the Council's question directly: yes, veterinary support will be present on capture days.

Once a group is safely contained, veterinarians may chemically immobilize individual dogs when necessary, before handling and transport. This is substantially safer than providing sedatives to free-roaming animals because the dog is already secured and cannot flee into traffic or inaccessible terrain. All sedation and medication decisions will be made by the attending veterinarian.

PHASE 5 — STRAGGLERS AND SINGLE CAPTURES

No mass-capture effort catches every animal. The few dogs that do not enter the enclosures, or any individual too wary or too dangerous to corral, will be addressed afterward using single Missy traps or box traps, relocated as necessary, or by veterinary chemical capture under an approved protocol.

This is the one phase where individual traps become appropriate because we are no longer dealing with an intact pack but isolated animals.

WHAT GBHS NEEDS FROM THE CITY

This plan only works if the City and GBHS each carry their part. Several responsibilities must rest with the city, the Sylacauga Animal Control Officer, and the Police Department. The following are conditions GBHS needs the City to provide. The first three are prerequisites. We cannot responsibly deploy capture equipment until they are in place.

1. Feeding and dumping enforcement on both sides of Highway 280.

The City, Animal Control Officer, and Police Department must enforce the prohibition on feeding and dumping animals throughout the corridor for the duration of the operation. This includes outreach to people living in the woods and efforts to eliminate unmanaged food sources.

Without this, the conditioning phase cannot succeed.

2. Posted signage prohibiting feeding and dumping of animals.

The city should post signs at public locations throughout the corridor prohibiting feeding or dumping animals and identifying applicable penalties.

3. Written landowner permissions, coordinated through the City Attorney.

Capture sites will be located on private property behind commercial businesses. Written access permissions and liability protections must be secured before equipment is placed.

4. Security of GBHS cameras and equipment.

Cameras, corral systems, and related equipment will remain unattended in wooded areas. The City should assist in preventing theft, tampering, or vandalism.

5. Realistic time, not an overnight deadline.

Humane capture is a conditioning process measured in weeks rather than days. Success should be measured by results rather than an arbitrary completion date.

6. A single point of contact.

One designated City liaison empowered to make decisions quickly and coordinate communication among all parties.

TIMELINE AND THE HONEST CAVEAT

We were asked how long this will take, and we will not put a number in writing that we cannot stand behind.

What we can provide is a phase-based expectation:

- Reconnaissance: approximately two weeks of camera data collection while feeding control begins.
- Conditioning: typically one to three weeks per site once feeding control is effective.
- Capture and mop-up: staged as sites become ready, followed by trapping of remaining stragglers.

The variable that governs all timelines is feeding control.

If public feeding stops promptly, conditioning proceeds more quickly. If feeding continues, the dogs will continue ignoring our bait, and timelines will extend accordingly.

We would rather under-promise and successfully clear the corridor than rush the process and leave the problem worse than we found it.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND THE STAKES OF GETTING IT RIGHT

We share the Council's concern for public safety and treat it as the highest priority.

Reports of dogs entering businesses, fighting other animals, roaming motel properties, and becoming increasingly aggressive are real. Concern that someone, particularly a child, could eventually be bitten is legitimate.

That concern is the argument for properly resourcing this effort and beginning feeding-control and reconnaissance work immediately, not for rushing the capture process.

A rushed effort that captures only a handful of animals leaves the most cautious and potentially problematic dogs at large and harder to catch. A patient, well-supported effort clears the corridor.

AFTER CAPTURE: CARE AND OUTCOMES

Every dog captured through this operation will receive a thorough veterinary examination, a microchip scan for ownership identification, vaccinations as appropriate, diagnostic testing, and an individual behavioral assessment.

Recommendations regarding each animal's disposition will be made by veterinary and animal welfare professionals based upon the animal's health, behavior, safety considerations, and applicable laws and policies. Some animals may be suitable for return to an owner, adoption, transfer to a rescue partner, or behavioral rehabilitation. Other animals may present medical or behavioral conditions requiring a different outcome. Each animal will be evaluated individually according to accepted veterinary and animal welfare standards.

Once captured, all dogs will be impounded at the Sylacauga Animal Control facility for the required seven-day stray hold period.

Sylacauga Animal Services will remain responsible for determining the final disposition of each animal following expiration of the statutory hold period.

CONCLUSION

If Sylacauga puts these pieces together—humane capture, public safety, veterinary care, and prevention going forward—it will not only resolve the situation along Highway 280, it will create a model that other communities facing similar trapping challenges can follow.

GBHS is prepared to provide field expertise, veterinary support, and operational leadership. What we need from the city is enforcement of feeding and dumping prohibitions, posted signage, landowner permissions, equipment security, realistic timelines, and a single point of contact.

With those pieces in place, we are prepared to begin.

We welcome the Council's questions and look forward to working together.

Respectfully submitted,

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