



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 31, 2026

New Report Exposes Systemic Gaps in New Mexico Animal Services, Calls for Statewide Department of Animal Protection

Regional assessment draws on more than 100 interviews and identifies urgent infrastructure and service needs across state and local animal welfare systems

SANTA FE, N.M. — A new report from Animal Protection New Mexico (APNM) reveals significant, serious gaps in the systems responsible for protecting animals, responding to animal-related emergencies, and maintaining community safety across New Mexico—and calls for a coordinated statewide strategy to address them.

Animal Services in New Mexico: A Needs Assessment for the North Central Region (2026) is the first assessment of its kind in New Mexico. The project was commissioned by State Representative Tara L. Lujan and financed by GRO Funds administered by the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District. The assessment and report were prepared by APNM, drawing on more than 100 interviews with animal shelter and rescue personnel, animal control officers, veterinary practitioners, law enforcement officials, emergency response experts, Tribal representatives, local government officials, and other professionals working on the front lines of animal welfare.

The study area encompasses eight counties: Rio Arriba, Taos, Colfax, Mora, San Miguel, Santa Fe, Los Alamos, and Sandoval. It also includes 16 federally recognized Tribes located partially or completely within the study area: Jicarilla Apache Nation and the Pueblos of Taos, Picuris, Ohkay Owingeh, Santa Clara, San Ildefonso, Pojoaque, Nambé, Tesuque, Cochiti, Santo Domingo (Kewa), San Felipe, Santa Ana, Sandia, Zia, and Jemez.

Although the assessment focuses geographically on north-central New Mexico, its findings reveal interconnected challenges that extend throughout the state. The report calls for a coordinated statewide approach to animal protection and services—including the creation of a dedicated New Mexico Department of Animal Protection.

“These are not isolated problems,” said **Jessica Shelton, Chief Strategy Officer of Animal Protection New Mexico**. “They are symptoms of deficient systems that have developed over the past century without the state infrastructure, coordination, and resources necessary to meet New Mexico’s needs.

APNM: PO Box 11395 Albuquerque NM 87192

APV: PO Box 11651 Albuquerque NM 87192

1111 Paseo de Peralta Santa Fe NM 87501 505-265-2322 apnm.org apvnm.org



When animal services fail, the consequences do not stop with animals. They affect public safety, public health, local government budgets, law enforcement, emergency response, economic development, and the quality of life of our communities.”

The report examines four core pillars of New Mexico’s animal services sector:

- Animal shelters—which are confronting overcrowding, limited resources, and increasing demands for care and services;
- Animal control programs—many of which lack the staffing, funding, infrastructure, and capacity needed to effectively respond to animal-related issues;
- Equine shelters and programs—which face significant challenges responding to abandoned, abused, neglected, and free-roaming horses; and
- Animal-related disaster preparedness and response—which is under-resourced and insufficiently coordinated for communities to safely evacuate and shelter animals during wildfires and other emergencies.

“Good policy starts with understanding the needs of the communities it is intended to serve,” said **Monica Abeita, Executive Director of the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District**. “This assessment brings together the experiences of people working across multiple communities and sectors to identify challenges and opportunities that might otherwise be considered in isolation. We hope the findings will help local and state leaders have a more informed conversation about how to strengthen animal services and better support the communities they serve.”

Pueblo of San Ildefonso Governor Christopher A. Moquino issued the following statement on behalf of the **Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council Board of Governors**:

“Our Pueblo communities face a wide range of challenges and unique circumstances when addressing animal control, protection, and welfare. These challenges extend beyond dogs and cats to include equine and livestock needs, and are compounded by limited funding, education, resources, and appropriate housing and infrastructure.

This is a regional issue, not one that can be addressed by an individual Pueblo, county, or municipality alone. We must continue to coordinate, share best practices, and make the most effective use of available resources through collaboration and partnership.

APNM has assisted with important first steps to assess needs and gauge capacity across our region. This work can help strengthen policies, procedures, coordination, and ultimately the care, protection, and safety of animals and the communities responsible for them. We look forward to continued progress and to working collaboratively toward sustainable solutions.”

APNM: PO Box 11395 Albuquerque NM 87192

APV: PO Box 11651 Albuquerque NM 87192

1111 Paseo de Peralta Santa Fe NM 87501 505-265-2322 apnm.org apvnm.org



“New Mexico’s counties are committed to serving their communities, but local governments cannot solve every systemic challenge on their own,” said **Joy Esparsen, Executive Director of New Mexico Counties**. “This assessment highlights areas where stronger state-local coordination could make a meaningful difference—not only for animal welfare, but for the public safety, emergency response, and community services that counties are responsible for providing. A thoughtful statewide approach should build on the expertise and experience of local governments while giving communities the systems, tools, and resources they need to respond effectively.”

The report documents how these gaps can create cascading impacts.

- An overcrowded shelter can place additional demands on local government and law enforcement.
- Unmanaged free-roaming horse populations can create land, water, public safety, and animal welfare challenges.
- Communities without adequate disaster planning may be unable to evacuate large numbers of animals during an emergency, putting both animals and people at risk.

Together, these challenges place an unnecessary financial and operational burden on local governments and taxpayers while contributing to preventable animal suffering and community risks and dangers.

A Statewide Solution

One of the report’s central findings is that many of the challenges facing local communities cannot be solved through isolated, local efforts alone. A centralized **New Mexico Department of Animal Protection** could:

- Continually assess and prioritize animal service needs throughout the state;
- Request, consolidate, and distribute resources;
- Administer and coordinate funding and grant programs, itself or in collaboration with other state agencies;
- Regulate animal-related facilities;
- Support cruelty investigations and enforcement;
- Coordinate programs currently spread across multiple entities; and
- Develop long-term statewide strategies for animal protection and services.

“New Mexico has a patchwork of agencies, programs, and local systems responsible for different pieces of animal protection, but no single entity has the authority or resources to see and coordinate the whole picture,” Shelton said. “A Department of Animal Protection would give New Mexico the infrastructure needed to move from reacting to crises to preventing them, lifting up whole communities in the process.”



The report provides recommendations intended to help policymakers and community leaders strengthen New Mexico's animal services infrastructure and develop a more effective, sustainable, and humane statewide system.

APNM is encouraging state and local policymakers, animal welfare professionals, veterinary professionals, law enforcement agencies, emergency responders, Tribal leaders, and animal advocates to review the assessment and work with APNM to advance its recommendations.

"Humane treatment of animals and overall community safety should not depend on a person's ZIP code," Shelton said. "It's time for a statewide push to ensure every New Mexico community has access to the resources, services, and infrastructure necessary to protect animals and the people who care for them."

Read the Report

Animal Services in New Mexico: A Needs Assessment for the North Central Region (2026) is available to the public in a digital, interactive format, with a printable PDF also available.

Read the full report: <https://apnm.org/assessment>

Download the PDF: <https://apnm.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Animal-Services-in-New-Mexico-A-Needs-Assessment-for-the-North-Central-Region-2026.pdf>

ABOUT ANIMAL PROTECTION NEW MEXICO:

Founded in 1979, APNM is a nonprofit organization operating statewide with a mission to advocate the rights of animals by effecting systemic change, resulting in the humane treatment of all animals.

ABOUT ANIMAL PROTECTION VOTERS:

Founded in 2002, APV's mission is to actively promote and support animal-friendly legislation at the local, state, and federal levels; build an effective political voice for animal advocacy in New Mexico; and hold New Mexico's elected officials accountable on animal issues.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Jessica Shelton
Chief Strategy Officer, APNM and APV
jessica@apvnm.org
505-220-6656

###