

Arkansas Mayor Releases 10 Dogs in National Forest

James Valley now faces arrest and possible federal charges for abandoning stray dogs.

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The mayor of Helena-West Helena, Ark., said that perhaps he did not act in the best interest of the dogs whom he recently released into the forest; however, he believed something had to be done in order to keep the 10 animals alive.

James Valley said Wednesday in a phone interview that he made the decision to let the stray dogs go because the city does not have the adequate resources to care for the animals. The city has not had a shelter since the local humane society shut it down five months ago because it was run down and unsanitary, Valley said.

As a result, the city was keeping 10 dogs in makeshift pens at a temporary fenced-in area outdoors at the sanitation department. It was not a healthy environment for the animals or the city employees, he said.

“Rather than getting better it was getting worse,” Valley said. “We either had to euthanize them or let them go, that’s what it boiled down to.”

He said he loves dogs and he wanted to give these dogs a chance to fend for themselves in the nearby forest. The mayor said that now “a bunch of people are upset” and he has received e-mail and phone messages from people calling him “every name under the sun.”

“I’m not hostile,” Valley said. “I love animals.”

Rather than call each other bad names, the mayor said he would like to rally the community to raise enough funds for a new animal shelter where animals can get proper care. He has received estimates from \$50,000 to \$250,000 for the construction of a shelter.

His next move is to work with the local humane society and ask the city council to commit to provide funding for a new shelter. As for the dogs, Gloria Higginbotham, president of the Humane Society of the Delta, said two dog rescues have been confirmed. Those two dogs were taken to be checked by a veterinarian and adopted out.

Valley faces arrest for his actions, according to The Daily World newspaper in Helena, Ark. Ruby Burton, director of the Humane Society of Southeast Arkansas, filed an affidavit of arrest with the Phillips County Sheriff’s Department on the mayor for abandoning 10 dogs who were housed on city property near the St. Francis National Forest. He could also be facing federal charges since he released the dogs in a national forest.