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SA's Wild Animal Orphanage closing

As sanctuary shutter, Boris the bear is in need of a new home.

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It's official: On Tuesday, August 31, the board at the [Wild Animal Orphanage](#), a troubled animal sanctuary on the edge of Northwest San Antonio, decided to close its doors. A formal press release will be sent out this coming week.

“Due to our overpopulation, [and the fact that] we don't have the ability to care for the animals in the manner that we would prefer, we've decided to dissolve the orphanage and find new homes [for the animals],” WAO secretary Suzanne Straw told the *Current* on Saturday. “WAO is cooperating with the Texas Office of the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Division in their ongoing investigation of WAO. That's been going on for many years and we're partnering with them on how to best handle the situation. They have not put any demand on us. But even for a couple of months before this vote was cast, we were in the process of finding homes for as many of our animals as we could.”

Straw was responding to questions posed by the *Current* about an alleged offer by the OAG: Relocate the animals in 60 days and close WAO's doors, or refuse and be forced to shut down immediately. One of the current owners [denied the suggestion](#) last week that the sanctuary may be closing.

At one point, the WAO held about 400 animals at its two locations off Talley and Leslie roads. Now, most of the animals have been relocated or are in the process of being relocated. But the process is more complex than just finding a place willing to host the animals.

“[The new homes] have to be USDA-approved facilities and, if they're not, they have to at least meet or exceed the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act,” Straw said. “We won't willy-nilly put our animals wherever someone offers to take them. We'll research diligently and make sure these are the right homes for our precious animals. But now that we have decided to dissolve, we are on a very aggressive timeline trying to get them placed. We're not going to close our doors until every single animal has been found a new home. [If after 60 days] no homes

are found, we'll keep fundraising and feeding them and caring for the animals that are left."

Rumors of animals being eliminated in case no homes are found after the 60-day period are unfounded, said Straw. "We have a very strict policy," Straw said. "We're not going to euthanize any animals unless a veterinarian determines that to be medically necessary. And that was part of our resolution of August 31."

Boris, a bear between 17 and 19 years of age, is a particular concern to some animal lovers who have been following the WAO saga. But Straw said the animal's age is not why Boris hasn't found a new home yet.

"It's more about co-habitation," Straw said. "Just like humans, some bears get along better with others, some prefer solitude. All these things must be taken into consideration. He's such a sweetheart and a star among our visitors, and we want to find a home for him soon. He's on a list of sanctuaries that are trying to determine if there's a home suitable for him. He's considered by several facilities, but we still don't have a home for him. We have 23 bears total, and 20 are going next week. Depending on availability, Boris may or may not go with them."

Legal wrangling continued up to the day before the vote to dissolve, with a settlement offer presented on Monday by the attorney for former owners Ron and Carol Asvestas. The offer suggested they would withdraw a 2009 lawsuit in exchange for being reinstated at their former \$100,000 salaries and 11 months of lost wages.

While that opportunity seems to have gone by the wayside, the organization is still accepting donations to feed the animals until they are relocated, Straw said. "As far as donations go, we definitely need donations to keep on feeding the animals. Our goal is to find homes within 60 days. If we need to extend that goal, so be it, until we find homes for every animal. In the meantime, we need food, veterinary care, transport, and gas. ... We'll continue to fundraise, but ideally we'd like to find a non-profit organization that will receive donations on our behalf and disperse them as needed."

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