

## WILDLIFE CENTER FOUNDER REMOVED FROM BOARD

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*The Winchester Star*



*Dr. Belinda Burwell, shown here at the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center in 2012, has been removed from her position as director of the board. (Photo by Jeff Taylor/The Winchester Star)*

**MILLWOOD** — Blue Ridge Wildlife Center founder Dr. Belinda Burwell has been removed as the nonprofit organization's director of the board.

"It was decided that the interests of the organization are best served by ending the service of Dr. Belinda Burwell as director," an organization press release announced Friday.

"The mission of [the center] is to rescue and care for native wildlife, educate the public about wildlife issues and concerns and conduct wildlife research throughout the region it serves," the statement reads. "Those principles include a clear separation between duties and responsibilities of the organization's Board of Directors and the organization's employees, as well as term limits for directors to ensure accountability."

The announcement should conclude what has been a recent conflict between Burwell and the center.

Burwell, a veterinarian, founded the center about 15 years ago to rehabilitate injured wildlife with help from her father, Charles Burwell.

She started the center as a medical hotline, and in 2004, began operating on land owned by her family's trust off Tilthammer Road in Clarke County.

The center currently operates out of an 800-square-foot cottage, while a new \$1.3 million building, expected to open early next year, is being constructed.

Burwell had served as the center's veterinarian and on the Board of Directors since the beginning.

In 2010, her position became salaried, she said during a Friday phone interview.

"I know after that a couple of board members were uncomfortable — can you be on the board and be on the staff?" she said. "Not that there was anything that went wrong, but there were a couple board members that were uncomfortable."

In 2012, a three-year term limit for board members — who are unpaid — was established, with the support of Burwell. She and a second original board member were grandfathered in as lifetime members, Burwell said.

In October 2014, Burwell resigned as executive director of the center, but stayed on until David Bancroft was hired in April.

"I was way overworked and I wanted help," Burwell said, "But the people who've taken over don't understand enough about what we do there. Mistakes are being made. That's what makes me sad. It's really a big mess."

Burwell was then contracted to provide veterinary services at the center until Dec. 31.

But on Sept. 15, Bancroft asked her to leave the property, she said.

"I had a contract with them, but I'm not allowed to go to the property so that kind of nullifies the contract," she said. "I've asked several times if I could come and check on the animals and they've said, 'No.'"

When asked in a phone interview Friday if Burwell still had access to the center, Lisa Goshen, chairwoman of the Board of Directors, replied, "At this time, no."

When asked if Burwell's contract would be renewed for 2016, Goshen replied, "I don't want to talk about employment issues."

A temporary veterinarian is working with the center until a full-time one is hired, Goshen said.

The temporary vet is "not a wildlife vet, but she's a vet," she said.

Burwell, who is working at Roseville Veterinary Clinic in Clarke County, is continuing to treat wildlife, she said.

"I'm still seeing animals," she said. "Unfortunately, I can't see them and hospitalize them... at the facility that I started. I'm kind of back where I started, but I'm still helping wildlife. I'll always do that."

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