LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL
Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **February 22, 2005, Work Session** AGENDA ITEM NO.: 2
CONSENT: REGULAR: **X** CLOSED SESSION: (Confidential)

ACTION: INFORMATION: **X**

ITEM TITLE: **Feral and Stray Cat Management**

RECOMMENDATION: Hear a report from representatives of the Lynchburg Humane Society and Spay Virginia regarding options concerning feral and stray cats and provide staff direction.

SUMMARY: Feral cats are defined as being wild or not domesticated. Staff has been asked to research and present options for dealing with the overpopulation of cats, particularly feral cats. Feral cat colonies can be found at various residential and commercial sites throughout the City. Dealing with feral cats is not a new issue for the City and is a common problem in many places throughout the United States.

Council should be aware that a non-profit organization called FERAL (**FE**line **R**escue **AL**liance) currently serves the Lynchburg area. FERAL focuses on a Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) and feral cat rescue program. FERAL is currently managing multiple feral cat colonies in the City. Information regarding FERAL is attached.

Staff has met with the Animal Warden and representatives from the Humane Society and Spay Virginia to discuss this issue. Attached is a proposal from the Lynchburg Humane Society that addresses cat overpopulation and stray cat management.

PRIOR ACTION(S): None.

BUDGET IMPACT: As outlined in the proposal from the Lynchburg Humane Society:
One-time contribution towards a spay/neuter clinic: $20,000 (FY 2006 non-profit budget request)
Annual recurring costs (for three years):

Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return Program Costs:	Staff	$30,000
	Supplies/Equipment	5,000
Public Education		2,000
Total Annual Recurring Costs		$37,000

CONTACT: Bonnie Svrcek, Deputy City Manager 455-3990

ATTACHMENT(S): Cat Overpopulation and Stray Management Proposal
About FERAL
Stray and Feral Cats
Making Feral Cats Welcome in Your Community

The Lynchburg Humane Society, Inc.
3305 Naval Reserve Rd.
Lynchburg, VA 24501
www.lynchburghumanesociety.org

Cat Overpopulation and Stray Management Proposal

2005 – 2007

Presented to Lynchburg City Council January 2005

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Section
1

The Lynchburg Humane Society, Inc.

Organization Perspective

Vision:

The Lynchburg Humane Society is dedicated to creating a community where our relationship with animals is guided by compassion and in which animals are respected for their intrinsic value, and where the human-animal bond is strong. We envision a community in which people satisfy the physical and emotional needs of domestic animals; protect wild animals and their environments; and change their relationships with all animals, evolving from exploitation and harm to respect and compassion.

Mission:

The Lynchburg Humane Society in compliance with state and local laws, and in accordance with its principles and beliefs shall:
Provide care and shelter for domestic animals in need.
Treat all animals with respect regardless of species or gender.
Reunite, as a priority, lost animals and their owners.
Find permanent, loving, and responsible homes for homeless animals.
Humanely euthanize those animals that remain un-adopted or are deemed unsuitable for adoption.
Promote surgical sterilization as the only effective, long-term solution to the pet overpopulation crisis.
Use every interaction with the public as an opportunity to make a positive change in the community by promoting responsible pet ownership and the treatment of all living creatures with compassion, respect, and dignity.
Treat each other and those who interact with us, with respect regardless of race, color, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, disability, marital status, and veteran status.

Reputation & Reliability:

The City of Lynchburg has a long-term (20+ year) contract with the Lynchburg Humane Society, Inc. to provide animal sheltering services for the City that they, by State law, are required to provide.

Community support for our organization's mission has been consistent and strong during our 60+ years of operation.

The LHS Team:

Our leadership team is made up of a diverse group of professionals who volunteer their time and talents.

Our Board of Directors is representative of the community:

Julie Passmore	Account Manager – RR Donnelley
David Firth	Project Manager – Areva
JoAnn Beehler	Quality Manager – BWX Technologies
Shelley Stone	Director Spay Virginia
Eunice Paulett	Realtor
Paul Goodjohn	Engineer – Ma/com
Wayne Driskill	Shelter Operations Manager

Our President and CEO has been a part of the organization since 1981. The shelter Operations Manager has been employed since 1978. Several Board Members have been volunteers and/or directors for a decade or more. We have a strong, effective and stable team that strives to be informed regarding the issues faced by our organization and that actively participates in all aspects of our mission.

Section
2

Overview – the stray/unwanted cat problem

Cat overpopulation is a direct result of animals left un-sterilized and allowed to breed unchecked. Abandoned and unwanted owned animals become stray animals that multiply at alarming rates.

Well-intentioned individuals try to care for these animals but quickly become overwhelmed by the sheer numbers.

- One un-sterilized female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 cats in only seven years.
- One un-sterilized female dog and her offspring can produce 67,000 dogs in six years

Free roaming cats generate nuisance complaints to Animal Control and City officials. Stray cat management in particular is an emotionally charged issue of concern to a large number of Lynchburg citizens. The level of frustration has increased over the last few years, as the community sees no action being taken to address the stray/feral cat issue.

A call to the City usually results in a "we don't do cats" answer which causes citizens to attempt to take matters into their own hands; perhaps attempting to trap and relocate strays to other areas of the city, or accidentally trapping owned cats or even wildlife -- thus increasing the risk of rabies exposure.

To combine stray/feral cat colony management, neutering, and public education campaigns together is to craft a comprehensive plan to sterilize cats and manage feral cat colonies and to address cat-related problems in the community. Such a plan is widely acknowledged to reduce feral/stray cat populations, and the associated problems, over time and is accepted as being justifiable for animals for whom there are no other alternatives.

The LHS believes that the City will be best served by a strategic approach to long term management of the cat/dog overpopulation problem and we believe that our organization, with support from the City, is best able to manage this program in the most cost effective manner.

The situation did not develop overnight and it isn't going to be resolved overnight. We anticipate the need for a three-year, three-pronged approach to feral/stray cat management and pet overpopulation in general within the community.

1. Give priority to the start up of the SpayVa low-cost spay/neuter clinic. This clinic is the subject of a non-profit grant request submitted to the City on 1/13/05 and nothing else anyone does will have any impact unless the flood of unwanted litters of puppies and kittens is shut off.

2. Implement a large scale feral/stray cat management (Trap/Neuter/Vaccinate/Return) program with a paid coordinator (as an employee of the LHS)

3. Develop and implement a full-scale public education campaign to promote voluntary confinement, ID and voluntary compliance with minimum standards of responsible pet ownership of both dogs and cats.

What approaches work

Sterilization – reduced cost clinics

The pet overpopulation epidemic is so staggering that for every animal born in the United States to have a home every human being would have to own 6 dogs and 9 cats. So, a family of four…2 parents and 2 small children would have to own 24 dogs and 36 cats.

Rescue agencies cannot find homes for all the animals that need one and shelters cannot continue to kill animals as a means of population control. Low cost spay neuter is key to bringing the pet overpopulation problem under control. On average 85% of the clients at the Humane Alliance in Asheville, NC [1] have never taken their pet to a veterinarian because of the cost associated with doing so. If an individual does not have the resources to spay or neuter, or vaccinate their pet the result is unwanted, homeless puppies and kittens.

Colony management

Since 1993, the San Francisco Humane Society's Feral Cat Assistance Program has sterilized over 10,000 cats, preventing the birth of many additional thousands of stray cats. Community response to the program has been "overwhelmingly positive" [2] according to the SFSPCA. Citizens now have a place to turn for hands-on assistance, practical advice and moral support as they try to help the City's homeless cats.

In the City of Cape May, New Jersey, complaints about cats dropped by more than 40% in the four years since managed feral cat colonies were established.[3]

In Portland, Oregon, Animal Control saw a 35% decrease in incoming cats after implementation of their TNVR program.[4]

Public Education

More often than not, people act out of love for their animals and it's more effective to build bridges to reach them rather than erect barriers that may keep them from doing the right thing. The effect of education, though, will be limited unless people are given the means to act. When touting the benefits of sterilization, for instance, people must have access to subsidized spay/neuter clinics. In order to request the community's help in curbing problems posed by feral cats, we have to have a program in place to allow them to do so.

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[1] www.humanealliance.org
[2] www.sfspca.org
[3] Community Approaches to Feral Cats
[4] ASPCA Animal Watch Fall 2003

What Approaches Do Not Work

Eradication/slaughter

In general, communities do not support eradication programs. While some vocal individuals may demand the slaughter of the animals, the public outcry from such a practice is even more vocal. While people may not want to deal with the cats, they are equally reluctant to kill them – or to be responsible for them being killed.

Historically, communities have responded to cat-related conflicts by using methods that do not provide long-term solutions, such as live trapping and euthanizing. Such an approach is labor and cost-intensive and alienates cat owners and the community.

Progressive communities develop, implement, regularly evaluate, and update comprehensive management and education programs about cats and animal care in general. Such programs must be pragmatic approaches designed to reduce cats' suffering and respond to cat-related conflicts, yet must remain acceptable to people in the community. Live trapping and euthanizing is a short-term solution for any location unless the food and shelter that attracts the cats are removed from the habitat[5]. If outside feeding by people, dumpsters and other food sources are not eliminated, cats from nearby areas will move into the vacuum left by the cats that were trapped and euthanized [6]. In most cases a few cats will manage to avoid being trapped and continue to reproduce. This leads to repeating the trap, remove and euthanize cycle and does not provide a solution to the problem.

In some communities, more than 30 years of trapping and euthanizing has done nothing to reduce the feral cat populations.

Legislation

Bans on feeding and sheltering are unpopular and ineffective as well as difficult and expensive to enforce. Cat licensing and ownership limits are also extremely unpopular and do nothing to solve the overpopulation problem. Licensing alone will not eliminate homeless animals or make people more caring and responsible pet owners – but it will significantly raise the cost of animal control within the City.

Doing nothing

While doing nothing is always an option, the pet overpopulation and stray cat problem will not go away without intervention. Complaints will continue and frustration will increase along with the number of stray cats. Today's problem exists because of decades of doing nothing.

[5] (Neville and Remfry 1984;Universities Federation for Animal Welfare 1995; Zaunbrecher and Smith 1993)
[6] (Tabor 1983; Passanisi and Macdonald 1990)

Section
3

The Spay Virginia Spay/Neuter Clinic

Background

"Spay Virginia" is a program of the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies that brings together private and municipal shelters, rescue groups, local governments, and veterinarians to address the problem of pet overpopulation and the abundance of unwanted dogs and cats in the Commonwealth. These groups work with the Spay Virginia Director to assess the needs in each region, identify existing services and resources, expand established working relationships, and evaluate demographics. A specialized plan is then created for each region.

Spay Virginia has 5 regional programs in place and is working to develop plans in the other 7 regions. Each regional program is unique and is designed to meet the needs of the region.

The Spay Virginia South Central Region (SVSCR) is a coalition of animal care professionals, animal welfare groups and animal control agencies from Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Campbell, Halifax and Pittsylvania Counties and the cities of Bedford, Danville and Lynchburg.

The Need

During the past two years the coalition has met numerous times working to assess the area's needs. The average per capita income in this region is $18,051, making the cost of traditional spay/neuter services too high for the average citizen. The region's shelters receive over 23,000 dogs and cats annually, and euthanize 78% of them. The number of dogs and cats entering these shelters increases each year. SVSCR has partnered with Humane Alliance Spay/Neuter Clinic in Ashville, NC. They have been in operation for the past ten years and service 20 Western North Carolina counties performing over 16,000 surgeries annually. A lengthy meeting between the Piedmont Veterinarian Association, Humane Alliance and the directors of Spay Virginia, to explain the intentions of the SVSCR was very successful. The veterinarians left with a sense of comfort and understanding with what the goals of the region are.

Clinic Operations

After the initial start up funding is raised for the clinic it will be self-sustaining through revenue from operations. The average cost will be $42.50 per surgery. Vaccinations will be available at the time of surgery for an additional $5. The staff of the clinic will be trained to handle feral cats and will have the equipment and knowledge to successfully participate in the proposed TNVR (Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Return) Program.

To start up the clinic $140,000 is needed. $50,000 has been raised from the members of the South Central Region coalition, corporate contributions, charitable grants and private donations.

Requested Support from the City of Lynchburg

A grant application has been submitted to the City requesting $20,000 towards the clinic start-up costs.

The clinic forms an integral part of the Cat Overpopulation and Stray Management Program.

Section
4

A TNVR (Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate & Return) program

Program Management

The Lynchburg Humane Society proposes to hire a full-time coordinator who will be responsible for:

- Administering and ensuring compliance with all aspects of the TNVR Program.
- Recruiting, training (safety and health) and managing volunteers as well as coordinating the Public Education aspect of the program.
- Maintaining complete and accurate records of all colonies, their caretakers and population changes.
- Providing each Colony Caretaker with necessary materials to manage their colonies.
- Pursuing grants applications and other funding opportunities to expand/improve the program, reduce cost to the City and fund additional equipment/supplies.

Colony Management

Informal feeding initiatives should be discouraged for a variety of reasons including property damage and complaints that stem from such situations. Individuals involved in an informal initiative will be actively encouraged to work under the LHS TNVR umbrella program, attend basic training, agree to work within the program guidelines and maintain minimum colony management requirements.

Minimum Colony Management Requirements:

- Colony caretaker, back-up caretaker contact information and colony location details.
- Written permission from land-owner for maintenance of the colony.
- Colony population detail .
- Re-homing of socialized animals in the colony.
- Documented regular feeding/watering and monitoring schedule.
- Placement of a basic shelter (provided by the program).
- Placement of a basic feeding station (provided by the program).
- Removal from the colony and surrender to the LHS of diseased or injured animals for euthanasia.

Examples of Success

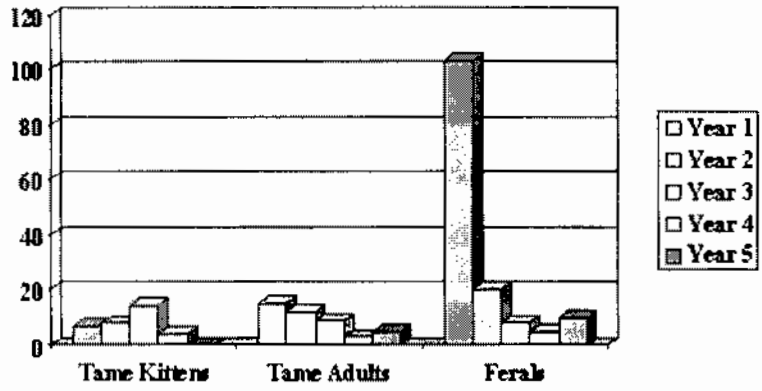
Stanford University Cat Program [7]

Implementation of this program and its diligent upkeep has resulted in a healthy cat population, which is not reproducing and is steadily declining through natural attrition (death of aged cats) and adoption into homes. Since the implementation of the comprehensive program, the number of homeless cats on campus has declined from an estimated 1,500 at the program inception in 1989 to approximately 200 cats currently living on campus. This successful program has been recognized nationally as a model for the care and management of homeless cats.

Texas A&M University Campus [8]

The goal of the program is to manage the feral cat population through a trap-test-vaccinate-alter-return-monitor (TTVARM) program. The program has been considered a success with fewer cats, a decrease in complaints related to cats on campus and a positive view of the program in general. The following graph shows the figures for total cats and kittens on campus, including both feral and tame animals.

AFCAT 5 Year Summary (August 1998 - August 2003)



Requested Annual Support from the City of Lynchburg

Supplies and equipment: traps, safe handling, shelters etc.	$5,000
Payroll/Taxes – 1 FTE	$30,000

[7] http://www.stanford.edu/group/CATNET/about.html
[8] http://www.cvm.tamu.edu/afcat/5years.htm

Section

5

Public Education Campaign

The Goal

We believe that by educating, encouraging and providing the tools necessary for individuals to be good "pet neighbors" they will take the necessary steps to make their animal's welcome members of the community. If people are made aware of a problem, they are usually willing to do the right thing – providing that the appropriate resources are made available to them. Education is the key.

The Plan

Design and Implement a voluntary "Minimum Standards of Responsible Pet Ownership" program for dogs and cats. Neuter – Vaccinate – Identify – Confine – Care.
Develop and implement a public education program that makes people aware of the role they play in solving the animal related problems in the community.

Redesign the LHS program offering to address the most prevalent issues. Referrals from City Animal Control and local civic groups such as Meals of Wheels, Social Services and others, will enable proactive identification of potential problems and intervention to head off conflicts.

We propose to implement new programs and expand existing programs such as:

- **Spay/Neuter** – as described earlier in this proposal
- **TNVR** – as described earlier in this proposal
- **Voluntary cat confinement** – companion cats are safer and healthier and often happier when confined to the home.
- **Project Safety Net** - Sometimes animals act like animals. This program provides pet owners education and support, including behavioral re-training assistance, information on pet-friendly housing, spay/neuter information and re-homing assistance, so that they may retain rather than relinquish or abandon their pets.
- **Humane Education** – expand existing relationship with the City Partners in Education program to provide educational programs for area school children and youth groups.
- **Companion animal identification** - promotion of a microchip id system for cats and conventional licensing with tags for dogs.

Requested Support from the City of Lynchburg

- Contribution toward print Advertising and Production of Public Service Announcements costs $2,000
- Quarterly space in City water bill mailings for educational materials
- Cooperation and Assistance from Animal Control in identifying problems and referrals
- Addition of responsible pet ownership, adoption promotion and lost pet assistance pages to the City web site with links to the LHS web site.

Section
6

Summary of Anticipated Results

We anticipate that the three-pronged approach, comprehensive public education campaign implemented in conjunction with a low cost spay/neuter clinic and a managed TNVR program, will result in a significant reduction in Lynchburg's stray cat and companion animal related conflicts within three years.

Over a three year period we expect to see:

- A reduction in the number of nuisance cat complaints
- A reduction in the number of nuisance companion animal calls to Animal Control
- A reduction in animal intake numbers
- A reduction in the euthanasia of healthy animals
- An increase in the number of rabies vaccinated companion animals
- An increase in companion animal adoptions
- A positive change in the public perception of the City's management of the long-standing stray cat issue

Summary of support required from the City:

- Low Cost spay/neuter clinic. One time $20,000 non-profit grant request in under consideration by the City Budget Office.
- TNVR Program implementation. A commitment of $35,000 annually for each of 3 years.
- Public Education: A commitment of $2,000 annually for each of 3 years as well as cooperation and assistance from City Animal Control and access to City water bill mailings and web site links.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of :

The Lynchburg Humane Society by, Julie Passmore, President

Spay Virginia South Central Region by, Shelley Stone, Regional Director

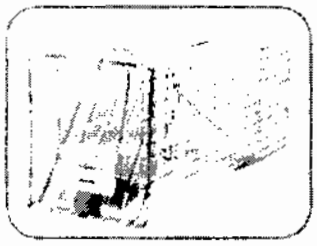
About FERAL

FERAL FEline **R**escue **AL**liance is a non-profit organization focusing on a Trap-Neuter-Return and feral cat rescue program serving the Lynchburg, Virginia area.
We work with the community to promote and assist with the reduction of the feral cat population. We believe a managed T-N-R program is the most humane and effective method of reaching this goal.

How FERAL Works

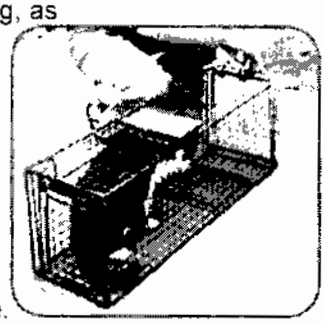
Find Caretakers - The first step of our program is to find people in the community who are currently feeding a feral cat or a feral cat colony. We call these people feral cat caretakers. These cats are easily recognizable as feral, or wild, rather than strays. A stray cat is one which has been recently abandoned and most likely will show up on your door step crying for food and possibly wanting to come into your house. Most stray cats will also allow you to pet them or even pick them up. A feral cat, on the other hand, will most likely hide or run away when a human gets too close. They will certainly not allow you to pet them nor pick them up. Most ferals seem to just appear from no where and stay close to wooded or sheltered areas where they feel safe. *To read more about Stray and Feral cats, please view our Stray and Feral Cats information sheet.*
Once we have determined if a cat is stray or feral we are ready to take action. If stray, we will assist in trying to find a home for him or her. However, if we determine that a feral cat colony exists, the next step is to trap them. Trapping and neutering them is very important because if we do not sterilize these feral cats and they continue to be fed, they will simply begin to reproduce and in a very short period of time, a caretaker could find dozens of cats on their hands.

Trap - It is extremely important not to try trapping ferals without the proper equipment and experience. These cats are, in fact, wild and will defend themselves fiercely when they feel they are in danger. Serious injuries can result without using the proper tools and techniques.



Neuter - Once a feral cat, or cats, has been trapped it is time to take them to a licensed veterinarian to be spayed or neutered. (We set up appointments with our vets prior to trapping.) We typically drop the cat(s) off in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon, once surgery is complete. During the surgery the cat is also given a rabies shot, treated for minor wounds, and may also be treated for fleas and tested for feline leukemia/FIV. The right ear of every cat is tipped, as well. By removing the very tip of the ear, this an easy way to keep track of which cats have been sterilized and which have not. It is vitally important to hold the cat(s) in the trap overnight before releasing back into the colony. Should we release a cat that may still be groggy from the anesthesia, it is possible that the other cats will attack this one as they perceive it to be weak, resulting in possible

Return - Releasing the cat is the final step. This is done no sooner than the following morning after his/her spay or neuter surgery. The cat should easily be accepted, by the other cats, back into the colony and the caretaker resumes regular feeding, as



before.

These four steps should be repeated until the entire colony has been

serious injury or even death.

sterilized. Leaving even one unsterilized cat could eventually result in unwanted kittens.

Our Story

The love for animals has been evident our entire lives. Ever since we can remember, we've been involved in animals' lives in some way or another. During the year 2000 we, the founders, met through our local humane society. We were both volunteers and found we had a lot in common and agreed on most animal-related issues. As our volunteer work became more involved, we realized the need for a feral cat program to support the surrounding communities. We came together in 2002 and began implementing an unofficial T-N-R program on a small scale. As more and more people heard what we were doing and more calls started coming in, we decided we needed to make it official. As a result, FERAL was founded in 2004. Now, as a more formally organized program, supported by the community, we hope to develop FERAL into a fully managed T-N-R program for the Lynchburg, Virginia area.

Success Stories

-pictures & write-ups of adopted feral kittens coming soon . . .

STRAY AND FERAL CATS

FERAL Feline Rescue Alliance • 1079 Rivermont Terrace • Lynchburg, VA 24503

DONATIONS@FERALRESCUE.ORG • WWW.FERALRESCUE.ORG

What is a feral cat?

A feral cat is either a cat who has lived his whole life with little or no human contact and is not socialized, or is a stray cat who was lost or abandoned and has lived away from human contact long enough to revert to a wild state. Feral cats avoid human contact and cannot be touched by strangers. Never attempt to pick up or pet a feral cat.

Is "feral cat" another term for "stray cat"? What is the difference between a stray cat and a feral cat?

"Feral" is not another word for "stray." A stray cat is a domestic cat who has been abandoned or has strayed from home and become lost. A stray cat may be skittish in your presence, but because stray cats once knew human companionship, they can usually be re-socialized and re-homed.

Adult feral cats usually cannot be socialized and are most content living outside. Feral kittens up to eight or ten weeks of age, on the other hand, can often be tamed and placed in homes.

How can I tell if a cat is stray or feral?

Observe the cat's appearance and behavior. A stray cat is likely to approach you, although usually not close enough for you to touch him. If you put food down, a stray cat will likely start to eat it right away. A stray cat is often vocal, sometimes talking insistently, and may look disheveled, as if unaccustomed to dealing with conditions on the street. A stray cat may be seen at all hours of the day.

A feral cat is silent, will not approach humans, and generally will be seen only from dusk to dawn, unless extraordinarily hungry and foraging for food. A feral cat has adapted to conditions and is likely to be well groomed. If you put food down for a feral cat, he will wait until you move away from the area before approaching the food.

I would like to find good homes for the feral cats I have been feeding. Is this possible?

Generally, no. Adult feral cats usually cannot be socialized and will not adjust to living indoors. A great deal of time and effort can go into attempting to tame an adult feral cat, with no assurance of success. This time and effort is far better spent sterilizing feral cats to break the cycle of reproduction. Stray cats and kittens up to eight or ten weeks of age can usually be socialized and placed in homes.

I discovered some cats outside. Who can I call to come and get them?

The first step is to determine if the cats are tame or wild. If the cats are tame, they may belong to people living in the neighborhood. Observe the cats to determine if this is so. Post "lost cat" flyers throughout the neighborhood. After a day or two, if you determine that the cats are feral (wild), and you decide to contact animal control or the humane society, they may come and get them, but the cats will almost certainly be killed. Even no-kill shelters find feral cats impossible to adopt out because they are wild.

Fortunately, there is a solution. Feral cats live in colonies and congregate near food sources. Feral cat colonies can be managed with a nonlethal method called **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)**, in which cats are humanely (and painlessly) trapped, spayed or neutered, and returned to their colony site where volunteer caretakers provide them with food, water, and shelter.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the only chance feral cats have of living safe, healthy lives without reproducing. But TNR is a hands-on project requiring commitment from one or more volunteer caretakers, often with help from feral cat advocates living in the area.

For information on starting a TNR program in your neighborhood, please email us at wecare@feralrescue.org or call 1-877-88FERAL and leave a detailed message.

Making Feral Cats Welcome in Your Community

Alley Cat Allies
The National Feral Cat Resource

(formerly: Community Benefits of Feral Cats)

What the Neighbors Don't Know, You Must Tell Them

Most of the people in your community probably don't know the facts about feral cats or the benefits of managed feral cat colonies. They don't know:

- The cats are regularly provided with food, shelter, and veterinary care.
- The cats could have lived in the area for many years and have surely developed a strong bond with their home territory.
- The cats have developed a strong bond with each other and the people caring for them, but are not tame and cannot be adopted into homes.
- The cats pose no health threat to humans or other animals.
- By sterilizing and then managing colonies of healthy feral cats, you can reduce and effectively control the number of cats in the area.

As a feral cat caretaker, your job is just as much to address the concerns of neighbors as to trap, sterilize, and care for the cats. A caretaker can forestall many problems by establishing and maintaining a friendly dialogue with people living near a feral cat colony. Present information in a reasonable, professional manner and you will give them confidence that you know what you are doing and care about their interests.

Explain tactfully that the cats have lived at the site for a long time, that they have been (or will be) sterilized, which will cut back on annoying behaviors, and that a managed colony will be stable and healthy. Also explain that if the present colony is removed, new, unsterilized cats are certain to move in and the problems will recur.

Address individual complaints by listening patiently and asking questions that uncover the specific problem. In most cases, when a neighbor demands that all the cats be removed, it is because of a single, resolvable situation involving just one or a few cats. Maintain a constructive, problem-solving attitude in order to uncover the real objection. The next section, Addressing Specific Concerns, lists ways to alleviate many complaints.

Carry a supply of Alley Cat Allies' brochure "The Humane and Effective Solution" to pass out. If the neighbors express interest, arrange to show the ACA videos The Humane Solution and Trap-Neuter-Return. These short training videos fully explain where feral cats come from, what TNR is and why it is the best solution, and what action you (and thousands of people nationwide) are taking to improve living conditions for the cats while controlling their population and solving a community issue. (See Resources, below, to obtain the brochure and videos.)

Addressing Specific Concerns

There are straightforward solutions to most concerns about feral cats. Enact these solutions before situations get out of hand and the cats will be viewed in a more positive light:

- Neighbors are often bothered by nuisance behaviors associated with breeding, such as roaming, fighting, yowling, spraying, and the birth of endless litters of kittens. The only solution is to humanely trap and sterilize the entire colony. This is the keystone of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and the single most effective way to eliminate nuisance behaviors. If during the TNR process you place the tame strays and socialized kittens into adoptive homes, the number of cats will be immediately reduced, often by half.
- Keep the cats' feeding stations or areas clean and trash free. Many caretakers build attractive but inconspicuous shelters and feeding stations.

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When painted dark brown or green, these structures blend into the environment.

- Never put out more food than the cats will finish in one meal. Remove what they don't eat after 30 to 45 minutes and always clean up the area. This will discourage wildlife from showing up to eat the leftovers and forestall complaints about unsightly feeding stations.
- Cats can be discouraged from climbing on cars or other private property by gradually moving their shelters and feeding stations away from these areas. The cats will follow the food and shelter.
- If fleas are a problem, have your veterinarian treat for fleas when the cats are spayed or neutered. Change the bedding material or hay in the cats' shelters regularly. Some herbal products deter fleas. Sprinkling mint, dried pyrethrum flowers, or a non-toxic herbal flea powder beneath the bedding may work.
- When cats are using gardens as litter boxes, build one or more sheltered litter boxes or place sand or peat moss in strategic areas for the cats to use as litter. Cats prefer sand or peat moss to garden soil and will use the litter areas you provide. Scoop regularly to alleviate odors and flies. Be prepared to scoop more often in hot weather.

There are many safe, low-tech methods to discourage feral cats from hanging out where they are not wanted, such as in the neighbors' gardens, yards, porches, or vehicles. Always offer to provide and apply these methods at your own expense. Consider pooling resources with other caretakers, if possible, to cover the cost of such items.

Situation: Cats digging in a garden or lounging in a yard or on a porch

Strategies:

- Embed wooden chopsticks or 10-inch plant stakes into the soil every eight inches.
- Cover exposed ground in flowerbeds with large attractive river rocks to prevent cats from digging (they have the added benefit of deterring weeds);
- Plant the herb rue to repel cats or sprinkle dried rue over the garden.
- Obtain Cat Scat, a non-chemical cat and wildlife repellent consisting of plastic mats that you cut into smaller pieces and press into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes that are harmless to cats and other animals, but discourage digging.
- Scatter fresh orange and lemon peels or spray with citrus-scented spray.
- Cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, and pipe tobacco repel cats. Other suggestions include oil of lavender, lemon grass, citronella, eucalyptus, and mustard.
- Apply cat repellent (available at pet supply stores) liberally around the edges of the yard, the top of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants. The repellent called Reppers comes highly recommended by ACA staff.
- Install an ultrasonic animal repellent or a motion-activated water sprinkler, such as the Scarecrow (Contech).

Situation: Paw prints and/or scratches on vehicles

Strategies:

- Discourage cats from climbing on cars or other private property by gradually moving their shelters and feeding stations away from such areas.
- Purchase an appropriate cover for the car or other vehicle. This has been known to put an immediate end to complaints.

See Resources section, below, for sources of some of the products listed in this section.

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Addressing Further Concerns

Some neighbors may fear that feral cats could pose a risk to their children or health, or to local wildlife. Explain diplomatically that feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats will not attack anyone unless they are cornered. The neighbors can avoid any risk by never touching the cats and by washing their hands after gardening, if they think the cats have been in their garden.

Also advise neighbors to teach their children not to approach or touch any animal that is not their own. Children should always ask an adult for help if they think an animal may be trapped, sick, or injured, or if they find a baby animal.

In general, cats are poor hunters of birds. Even the most skilled among them take very few birds compared to small rodents and insects. Other animals such as raccoons, foxes, and opossums get along with adult cats in their own fashion. Kittens, however, are at risk because wild animals may consider them to be prey.

In Conclusion

As a feral cat caretaker, you are the cats' guardian and public relations agency. You are their only source of help, should unhappy neighbors or property owners complain to animal control. This is why you must always maintain current, accurate health records, including vaccination data and photographs, for all the cats in your colony or colonies. It is also why establishing a friendly, open relationship with the humans living in proximity to feral cats can forestall problems and make the environment happy, healthy, and safe for all the residents. ■

Resources

Brochures and videos

The following can be ordered from Alley Cat Allies at 202.667.3630, ext. 101.

- "The Humane and Effective Solution," an Alley Cat Allies brochure
- The Humane Solution: Reducing Feral Cat Populations with Trap-Neuter-Return (10:00)
- Trap-Neuter-Return: A Humane Approach to Feral Cat Control (24:00)

Numerous other guides, factsheets, and flyers to assist with caring for feral cats are available by mail or can be downloaded from www.alleycat.org.

Products

Reppers
Price: $15.99
Available at: Drs. Foster & Smith
Website: http://www.drsfostersmith.com
Phone: 1-800-381-7179

Cat Scat
Price: $12.99 (sold in a set of 5)
Available at: Gardener's Supply Company
Website: http://www.gardeners.com
Phone: 1-888-833-1412

Scarecrow
Price: $79
Available at: Contech
Website: http://www.scatmat.com
Phone: 1-800-767-8658

These products and many other animal repellant devices can also be found at local pet stores and at online retailers.

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