

Re: Feral Cats in Your Community – What to Do?

The following is a copy of an email, sent by Pacific Animal Foundation in July 2009, to the Mayor and Council of every Municipality in British Columbia.

Dear Mayor and Councillors:

Feral cats are found in all communities, and often Municipal Councils are asked by residents to deal with out-of-control feral populations. Few people or Councils are aware that there is a very cost effective and humane practice to control and reduce feral cat populations called “Trap/Neuter/Return” or “TNR”.

TNR has been practiced world-wide. Both experience and research clearly show it is highly successful in reducing feral populations. Many of the large animal welfare organizations in the United States are recognizing its effectiveness.

The definition of a feral cat is an unsocialized cat. Either it was born outside and never lived with humans; or it is a house cat that has been abandoned or has strayed from home and, over time, has become unsocialized to humans.

Adult feral cats, if caught, are **not** adoptable because they can rarely adapt to living in a home situation. If feral kittens are caught young enough (age 5 – 8 weeks) they can often be socialized enough to be adoptable. There is a critical window for socializing kittens and, if they are too old, they will remain wild.

The gestation period for a female cat is 60 days with an average of 4 kittens per litter; 2 – 3 litters per year and populations can expand rapidly. See attached **Cat Numbers Chart**.

Increasingly, members of the public are demanding TNR for healthy but unadoptable animals, as opposed to having them destroyed for control purposes. This reaction turns out to be a correct one, because attempts at destroying animals are bound to fail. Trap and kill (or remove) is not effective because you create a “vacuum effect”, a well-documented fact from years of research. New, unfixed feral cats will quickly move in to the territory of the removed cats and the cycle of reproduction will continue. When TNR policies are in place, no new kittens are born and these colonies stay stable as the fixed cats will not allow the numbers to grow. Through natural attrition, the numbers decrease.

There have been several recent news stories of BC communities dealing with feral cats.

Creston, BC

<http://www2.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/story.html?id=af06bfdf-4f33-4330-9a46-27edd6cbd01d>

Enderby, BC

http://www.bclocalnews.com/okanagan_similkameen/vernonmorningstar/news/44412017.html#disqus_thread

If your community has feral cats, the information available in this email will assist both your municipality and the cats. Enacting a TNR program will benefit your community by reducing your animal control costs. Fewer kittens and cats will be entering the system, thus reducing costs for kennel space, vaccines, food, litter and other medical expenses. See attached ***Lowering Animal Control Costs***.

Our non-profit volunteer group, Pacific Animal Foundation, has been practicing Trap/Neuter/Return (or "TNR") in North Vancouver for almost 17 years and has had enormous success in **humanely** reducing the local feral population. We have altered hundreds of feral cats and socialized small kittens for adoption.

The number of phone calls regarding roaming feral cats has dropped dramatically over this time and the decreased numbers of feral kittens being born has been noted by veterinary clinics on the North Shore. **Attached** are two letters to Council from local North Vancouver veterinary hospitals to substantiate this finding.

The following link is to our North Vancouver City Council presentation last October (2008) on the subject of feral cats. The link is from the City's website and should prove very helpful.

<http://www.cnv.org/attach/2008%2010%2006%20item%2005.pdf>

Two articles – Trap and Kill not effective:

<http://stafnj.org/print.php?show=145> and

<http://web.archive.org/web/20071009234949/www.alleycat.org/pdf/TNRnotTNA.pdf>

The idea of spaying and neutering animals started to become a focus in the early 1960's. We've now had nearly fifty years of education and experience impressing upon us the need to spay and neuter.

Media campaigns have helped spread the word. Many vet clinics now offer low-cost spay-neuter services. And yet, every pound, animal shelter, and welfare facility in the country continues to be filled to over-flowing with cats and kittens every year, and animal control costs keep going up. Why?

A recent scientific study published in the Journal of the American Veterinary Association indicates the **majority** of pet cats are neutered.

<http://www.alleycat.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=650>

So why is there continued overpopulation? Is it that the root of the overpopulation problem is not being addressed? Have you ever stopped and asked yourself – “Why does there continue to be cat and kitten overpopulation? Why are shelters and pounds flooded with kittens every summer, year in and year out?” **The feral cats have NOT been included in animal welfare programs and are ignored.**

Unless there is a Trap/Neuter/Return program operating in a community, **NO** feral cats will be spayed or neutered and therefore they will be reproducing on a continuous basis. Each community needs to implement a TNR program in its animal control contract to reduce the feral population. It cannot and should not be the sole responsibility of a volunteer rescue group to provide this service for a community. It is a “community” challenge that requires a “community” solution. If there is a feral rescue group operating in your municipality then a smooth running TNR program will still be “managed” by caring volunteers in the community who will be the ones (along with residents) who do the actual trapping, etc. but the municipal feral fund will help them. If there is no rescue group operating in your municipality, all the more reason to provide any caring and willing citizen working with feral cats with some spay/neuter financial assistance. See ***Spay-Neuter Stats re pet and feral cats attached.***

More information on feral cats can be found on our website at: www.pacificanimal.org along with our Council presentation for 2007 (including a PowerPoint presentation).

We hope this information is helpful to you.

Sincerely,

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Other helpful websites:

Alley Cat Allies:
http://web.archive.org/web/20080112152205/www.alleycat.org/resources_ancare.html

Neighbourhood Cats:
http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/RESOURCES_ADVOCACY_MATERIALS