

Pacific Animal Foundation

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Open Letter to BC Mayors and Councils:

Feral cats are found in every city, every community and every country. In fact, another name for a feral cat is a "community" cat. Feral cats are unsocial with humans, either because they were born outside in a vacant lot or alley, or they were once a house cat that strayed from home and eventually reverted to their wild instincts.

With no owner to spay or neuter them, they can reproduce every 60 days and, left unchecked, the numbers can soon be out of control. Sooner or later, every municipality is faced with the challenge of feral cats as residents and businesses call Animal Control. For decades, the traditional response from Animal Control has been to kill the cats and even so-called "Humane" Agencies have offered to "euthanize" any feral cat brought to them. Not only is this method ineffective and inhumane, but it is costly and never-ending for taxpayers. New feral cats just move into the now vacant territory and the cycle begins again ("the vacuum effect").

Thankfully, in reviewing these archaic practices, common sense and intelligence have arrived and public officials are now learning about a very successful and effective practice called **Trap/Neuter/Return ("TNR")**. Feral cats are humanely trapped, taken to a veterinarian for spay/neuter and vaccination, and then returned to their original territories. There are advantages to this practice: No new kittens are born and the sterilized adult cats live healthier lives. The females no longer reproduce and the nuisance behaviours associated with unneutered male cats (yowling, spraying and fighting) are mitigated with neutering.

Whether or not "welfare" is a priority for your municipal council, the business case for TNR is overwhelmingly superior. Every municipality in the country is looking for ways to reduce costs, and animal control budgets can provide that reduction if the right programs are in place.

By implementing a municipal long term **Trap/Neuter/Return** program, the investment will pay off in the form of significantly reduced numbers of kittens born on the street and surrendered to pounds. That, in turn, will be reflected two ways - lower intake animal control costs for the municipality, and stopping future numbers from increasing exponentially to populate the municipality and/or enter the shelter system. TNR halts the numbers, reduces them, and it's **humane**.

Feral cat rescue groups have been practicing TNR in BC since the early 1990's - 20 years now. If TNR were not successful in reducing numbers of feral cats in a jurisdiction, then new TNR programs would not be springing up around the USA and Canada. TNR is starting to become mainstream and the old practice of "trap and kill", written into city and municipal codes in the 1940's and 1950's is being updated. More and more, the public is demanding that healthy but unadoptable animals not be killed for control purposes.

Spaying and neutering feral cats is the primary and most important issue. Any official obstacles such as colony registration or feral feeding bans should be removed to streamline the process. Return of the cats to their original colonies is highly recommended over relocation which can slow down and hamper the Trap/Neuter/Return project.

Sanctuaries for feral cats are not a viable option. They are expensive to run, usually filled to capacity very quickly and, often because they are at maximum capacity, animal welfare standards can be compromised.

Feral groups in BC have provided the information and leadership to communities with their expertise, gained from 20 years of hands-on street trapping and monitoring feral colonies.

It is time municipal officials recognize the contribution of feral cat rescue groups and invite them to work **with** public officials in mapping a TNR strategy for their jurisdiction and finding ways to fund TNR through the municipal animal control budget. The groups have carried the financial burden for whole communities and it is not their sole responsibility to do so. It is the *whole* community's responsibility.

Our common goal is to reduce the number of free-roaming feral cats. We need to do this humanely and with fiscal responsibility. The sooner municipalities embrace and implement TNR, the faster the numbers will come down and nuisance calls and overflowing shelters will be a thing of the past. Public support will be easier to obtain if your community is not attempting to control through killing.

Any solution to tackle the cat overpopulation challenge in your jurisdiction **MUST** include a TNR program for feral cats.



These two cats were TNR'd in 2005 and are fed daily by caregivers. No more kittens for the neighbourhood.