Developing an Effective Strategy to Decrease Costs and Permanently Reduce Feral and Stray Cat Populations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Carlita is one of 10 feral cats from a Sherman Park Neighborhood colony in the City of Milwaukee.

The Wisconsin Humane Society's mission is to build a community where people value animals and treat them with respect and kindness. Our goal is to save lives.
# Table of Contents

**Foreword**  
1

**Introduction**  
2

**Scope of the Problem in Milwaukee, Wisconsin**  
2
   Facilities for Abandoned Animals in Milwaukee  
   Current Strategy for Dealing with Feral Cats in Milwaukee  
   Annual Cat Statistics  
   Quality of Life  
   Citizen Complaints about Cats  
   Costs  

**Methodologies for Feral Cat Control**  
7
   - Trap-and-kill  
     *The Vacuum Effect*  
     *Over breeding*  
     *Abandonment*  
     *Lack of additional animal control resources*  
     *Waukegan, Illinois: a case study in the failure of trap-and-kill*  
   - Eradication and feeding bans  
   - Trap-and-remove  
   - Do nothing  
   - Trap-neuter-return  

**The Advantages of TNR**  
14
   - Feral and Stray Cat Population Reduction  
   - Successful National Models  
   - Cost Savings  
   - Reduced Nuisance Behavior and Fewer Complaints  
   - Caretaker Cooperation  

**Additional Benefits of TNR**  
19
   - Reduction in Wildlife Predation  
     *TNR reduces rather than encourages predation*  
   - Public Health  
     *Bites*  
     *Rabies*  
     *Other zoonotic diseases*  
     *Rat abatement*  

**Public and Private Endorsements of TNR**  
28

**Existing TNR Programs in Milwaukee**  
29

**MADACC’s Recommendation to Control Feral Cats**  
30

**WHS Recommendations to Control Feral Cats**  
30
   - Specific TNR Activities for Milwaukee  
   - Assessing Municipal Fees to Caregivers  

**Conclusion**  
32

**Appendices**  

A. *Model Legislation*  
33
B. *Maricopa County Endorsement of TNR Program*  
34
C. *National Position Statements on TNR*  
35
D. *ASPCA Policy Statement on Trap-Neuter-Return*  
36

**Acknowledgements**  
37
Developing an Effective Strategy to Decrease Costs and Permanently Reduce Feral and Stray Cat Populations in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Foreword
The number of free-roaming cats who have never had contact with humans and have been born and lived their entire life on the streets of Milwaukee is alarming. They are offspring of stray and free roaming cats, territorial creatures who have adapted to eating rodents or from garbage cans and dumpsters. They are commonly referred to as feral or wild.

For the past several decades, a wide variety of well recognized organizations and experts have been studying the issues surrounding feral cats and how to decrease their numbers and resolve community concerns about them. The ASPCA, the Humane Society of the United States, the American Association of Feline Practitioners, the American Animal Hospital Association and other prominent groups have established positions on the best strategies to address the management of feral cats.

A common debate regarding the management of feral cats includes discussion of whether to use lethal vs. non-lethal methods to control population. Some communities ignore the problem in hopes that climate and predators will keep the population in check. Others trap and euthanize the cats regularly or when they receive a complaint. In the past several years, many communities have developed a network of caregivers to perform Trap Neuter and Return or TNR; a systematic method to spay or neuter healthy feral cats, provide veterinary care and return them to their habitat under the supervision of conscientious caregivers who would make sure that any tame cats or kittens would be taken off the street and adopted.

A large body of information has been collected about the approaches being conducted to reduce the cat population and those will be explored in depth in this paper. In addition, recommendations for strategies to implement cost saving and community-wide population control for feral cats will also be addressed.

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1 “Feral” refers to cats living outside human homes and have reverted to a wild state, while “stray” refers to cats who have been recently abandoned and are still domesticated. Most street cats are feral and tend to live in family groups referred to as colonies.
Introduction

Spaying or neutering an animal is undisputedly the best method to control population and is widely seen by every professional humane and veterinary association as the primary method to end animal overpopulation. Providing education about the necessity to spay or neuter animals and providing access to sterilization programs have been effective strategies in reducing the number of animals flooding into humane societies and animal control agencies.

The Wisconsin Humane Society shares community concerns about how to keep people and animals safe as well as how to effectively use resources and contain tax payer costs. The following list of questions and concerns about the management of feral cats will be addressed in this paper.

- If there are too many cats, why not trap and euthanize them?
- Would a ban on feeding cats and eliminating their food sources be effective?
- Do feral cats impact quality of life in our neighborhoods?
- What if a feral cat bites someone?
- What about disease transmission and public safety?
- Aren’t free roaming cats killing birds and other small wildlife?
- Do free roaming cats provide any benefit to the community?
- What is the most effective method to control feral cat populations?
- How can people in Milwaukee reduce the feral cat population?

Scope of the Problem in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

How many feral cats live in Milwaukee? Exact figures on the cats’ population are not available, but can be estimated. Dr. Julie Levy, DVM, a professor at the University of Florida, Gainesville and one of the leading academicians in the feral cat field, recently evaluated demographic studies on the topic and concluded that, “[f]or purposes of estimating the size of a community’s feral cat population, it is reasonable to estimate 0.5 cats per household.”

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According to 2000 census materials, there were approximately 377,720 households in Milwaukee County. Using the formula developed by Dr. Levy, we can estimate that there are nearly 190,000 feral cats in Milwaukee County.

**Facilities for Abandoned Animals in Milwaukee**

Ordinances in Milwaukee County require that stray animals be taken and held for owner redemption for seven days at the Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC) located at 3839 W. Burnham Street in West Milwaukee. Organized as an intergovernmental entity for the nineteen municipalities in Milwaukee County, 100% of municipal services are funded by taxpayers. MADACC receives approximately 13,000 animals annually and they are not chartered to accept surrendered animals.

According to the MADACC website, “The purpose of MADACC is to provide:

- Shelter, care and disposition of stray dogs and cats,
- The search and recovery of lost pets,
- County quarantine services of biter animals for rabies observation,
- REFERRAL services for wildlife problems, and
- To promote responsible pet ownership through client education and the licensing of dogs and cats.”

The Wisconsin Humane Society (WHS) accepts surrendered animals from throughout the region, but receives no tax dollars. Animals with a known guardian who wishes to relinquish legal rights and responsibilities bring their animal to WHS. Funds to operate the Wisconsin Humane Society are provided by generous donors and through fees for services. WHS programs and services include the following:

- Accepting relinquished animals and abandoned animals from other animal welfare organizations
- Maintaining the largest animal adoption program in Wisconsin
- Providing extensive veterinary services for WHS animals
- Operating a spay neuter clinic for animals from low income households
- Maintaining Wisconsin’s largest wildlife rehabilitation hospital
- Offering youth and adult education programs
- Conducting animal behavior workshops, training and behavior intervention
- Providing volunteer opportunities for more than 800 people annually
- Supervising foster homes for convalescent medical care and under-socialized animals
- Advocating for compassionate treatment of animals

WHS cares for nearly 20,000 wild and domestic animals annually. In 2005, the Ozaukee Humane Society merged with WHS and is now a division of the Wisconsin Humane Society. This merger has created further economies for both organizations. Additional information about WHS is available at www.wihumane.org.

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3 About Us; Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission, see http://www.madacc.com
In addition to MADACC and WHS, there are a variety of other groups in Milwaukee, many organized simply to rescue and re-home abandoned cats, many providing extensive services. Comprised of caring individuals who have been successful in attracting a network of volunteer foster homes or adoption sites, some at retail stores or in malls, open during limited hours each week; all of these groups combined are estimated to be caring for an additional 1,500 cats annually. Neighboring counties all have animal welfare organizations.

Current Strategy for Dealing with Feral Cats in Milwaukee
Although there has not been a concerted effort on the part of government officials to round up feral cats and euthanize them, feral cats that have been brought to animal control or trapped by them or Department of Neighborhood Services are routinely euthanized. Because of limited resources, feral cats have been ignored unless government officials receive a complaint. Thus, common practice in Milwaukee for dealing with feral cats has been a mixture of “trap-and-kill” - so named because feral cats are not adoption candidates and invariably end up being euthanized when captured - and doing nothing. Research documents that because of feral cat population dynamics, trap-and-kill has no impact on the overall number of cats, creating no more than short-lived dips in their levels. The method is particularly ineffective when practiced sporadically and in random locations as has been the case in Milwaukee for many years.

Ordinances prevent the release of a cat outdoors and as such, caregivers found feeding feral cats have reported to WHS that they have received a citation from the Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS) and are asked to dismantle any shelters that they have constructed to protect the cats in inclement weather. Others have stated that animal control euthanizes cats that appear to be part of a feral colony, as evidenced by the fact that they have been sterilized, ear tipped and microchipped, rather than return them to the person listed on the microchip.

Annual Cat Statistics
As illustrated in the table below, the number of stray dogs entering MADACC decreased 23% from 2000 through 2005, a consistent decrease every year, however, the number of cats entering MADACC, although fluctuating slightly, remains relatively static. MADACC received 12,267 animals during 2005; 7,272 were cats and as was the case in all previous years, by far the largest number of any species handled. Historically, 60% of the animals entering MADACC are cats. On average, MADACC captured 7,406 cats per year and only 297 or 4% of them were redeemed by their guardian in 2005 versus the 32% of the dogs that were redeemed by their owners. Statistical information about animals at MADACC may appear regularly on their website; www.madacc.com or is available by contacting them directly and making an open records request.
The Wisconsin Humane Society regularly accepts on average 5,300 cats per year. And, although the number fluctuates slightly, the demand for charitable services to help cats remains consistent.

Petfinder.com, a national internet search engine where potential adopters can search for adoptable animals, on any given day, lists twice as many cats in need of homes than dogs in the Milwaukee, demonstrating that there are far fewer homes available than cats.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cat Intake</th>
<th>Cats Euthanized</th>
<th>% Euthanized</th>
<th>Dog Intake</th>
<th>Dogs Euthanized</th>
<th>% Dogs Euthanized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>7219</td>
<td>4004</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>5934</td>
<td>2862</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>7425</td>
<td>4918</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>5766</td>
<td>3048</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>7095</td>
<td>4694</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>5273</td>
<td>2554</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7727</td>
<td>4810</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>5145</td>
<td>2151</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>7698</td>
<td>4981</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>4747</td>
<td>1828</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>7272</td>
<td>6010</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>4567</td>
<td>2152</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44,436</td>
<td>29,417</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>31,432</td>
<td>14,595</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission’s Animal Admissions and Dispositions Report for January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2004, of the 4981 cats euthanized, 42% were not adoptable. Some of those cats never had a chance because they were the offspring of cats that have never been socialized and thus, too fearful of people to be approached or handled.

Quality of Life
The unchecked reproduction of feral cats can have a burden on people’s quality of life. As catalogued by Dr. Margaret Slater, DVM, of Texas A&M, another leading veterinarian in the field, complaints include such behaviors as, “spraying, fouling yards and gardens with feces, yowling and fighting; sick, injured, or dead cats; and dirty footprints on cars.” The cats have commonly been accused of driving people from their gardens and backyards with the noxious odor of unaltered males spraying and waking residents at night from the noise of fighting and mating. (See page 18 for resolution to citizen complaints.)

Citizen Complaints about Cats
MADACC receives hundreds of calls to obtain assistance with stray cats every month; many from people who want free roaming or feral cats removed from their yard or neighborhood. According to the City of Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services, they also receive citizen complaints about cats. According to representatives of

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4 Slater, Margaret R., DVM, Community Approaches to Feral Cats, p. 39 (Humane Society of US Press, 2002) [hereinafter referred to as “Slater”].
DNS, in the first six months of 2005, they received 200 complaints about cats in the City of Milwaukee.

WHS received more than 300 calls for assistance specifically with feral cats in 2005. In addition, more than 4,000 calls were received for assistance from people who could no longer care for their own cat in 2005.

Because of the ubiquitous nature of stray cats, many people cite that they obtained their cat from the street and as a result, many of those cats are less likely to obtain veterinary care or spay/neuter surgery. Eighty percent of the people whose income qualifies for subsidized spay or neuter services through the Wisconsin Humane Society’s Spay Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) request services for their cat.

Costs
The impact of the feral and stray cat population goes beyond quality of life issues and includes the cost and effectiveness of our community’s animal control system. The unneutered street cat population serves as a constant source of new cats and kittens. Because MADACC is the organization responsible for holding stray cats, feral cats contribute to a financial burden of maintaining this government service. In 2000, MADACC expenses to perform animal control for the nineteen municipalities in Milwaukee County were $1,479,644. In 2005, expenses were $2,003,466, a 35% increase; twice the 17.48% rate of inflation for the period between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2005.\(^5\) MADACC’s expenses increased 9% in 2005, despite the fact that animal intake in 2005 was at a five year low.

The cost to perform animal control under the current system of trap and kill or ignore the problem has been costly, according to statistics shown in Tables A and B.

### Table B
History of MADACC’s Operating Expenses Since Inception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Annual Expenses</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
<th>Animals Received</th>
<th>Per Animal Cost</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$1,479,644</td>
<td></td>
<td>13,552</td>
<td>$109.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>$1,612,197</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13,707</td>
<td>$117.62</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>$1,633,841</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>12,829</td>
<td>$127.35</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>$1,800,800</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13,331</td>
<td>$135.08</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$1,835,581</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12,928</td>
<td>$141.98</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>$2,003,466</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12,267</td>
<td>$163.32</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there were enough resources to implement a concerted plan to trap and euthanize feral cats, the task would be difficult. Even if the animal control or DNS officers spent every working hour trying to capture the cats, they would never get more than a small

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\(^5\) Bureau of Labor Statistics, see http://www.InflationData.com; published by Financial Trend Forecasters
percentage. But, if they did want to try to capture them all, the task would be daunting. For example, if there are 190,000 feral cats in Milwaukee and it took 30 minutes to trap and transport each cat, it would take 12 full-time remarkably efficient trappers and considerably more staff to receive and euthanize the cats since current animal control staff handled approximately 12,300 animals last year.

Based upon the potential for success, animal control and DNS officers’ limited time could be better spent on more immediate and solvable problems. Thus, the present situation in Milwaukee needs to be addressed to maximize tax dollars, improve quality of life; reduce complaints and to engage neighbors in community problem solving.

### Methodologies for Feral Cat Control

#### Trap-and-kill

Trap-and-kill has been the traditional approach of animal control in the United States towards free-roaming cats for decades. To date, it has not shown itself to be an effective method to reduce feral populations, as reflected in the fact that the current feral cat estimates in this country now run into the tens of millions. Trying to remove the cats doesn’t work to lower their number because it fails to take into account critical environmental factors and feral cat population dynamics. Where practiced, trap-and-kill only results in turnover—new feline faces, but not fewer. There are a number of reasons for this, including (a) the “vacuum effect,” (b) over-breeding by untrapped cats, (c) abandonment of domestic cats and, (d) lack of animal control resources.

#### The Vacuum Effect

The “vacuum effect” was first chronicled by wildlife biologist Roger Tabor during his studies of London street cats. He observed that when a colony of feral cats was suddenly removed from its territory, cats from neighboring colonies soon moved in and began the unchecked cycle of reproduction anew until the population was back up to its former level. As explained in another study, “the presence of feral cats in a place indicates an ecologic niche for approximately that number of cats; the permanent removal of cats from a niche will create a vacuum that then will be filled through migration from outside or through reproduction within the colony, by an influx of a similar number of feral cats that are usually sexually intact; and removal of cats from an established feral colony increases the population turnover, but does not decrease the number of cats in the colony.”

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6 Slater, p. xi.
Migration of new cats into recently vacated territory can be traced to two factors: first, feral cats are present at a particular location for a reason - the habitat provides adequate food and shelter. Second, no feral colony is an island, but is part of an extensive ecosystem containing similar colonies, one adjoining the next. As a result, if a colony is removed from its territory, but the habitat is left unchanged, neighboring cats will move right in to take advantage of the food source and shelter that remains. Reproduction and population growth ensue until the natural ceiling is again reached, that being the number of cats the habitat can support.

Eliminating all food sources is virtually impossible. Once a cat is spotted by a kind soul who starts to leave food, a food source is created. People are going to feed outdoor cats no matter what, as the ineffectiveness of feeding bans with serious civil and criminal consequences has demonstrated. It is also difficult in institutional settings, whether it’s jails, restaurants or apartment complexes, to adequately seal dumpsters and other garbage containers to keep out feral cats.

**Over-breeding**

The trapping and removal of every member of a feral colony is a difficult and time-consuming task. Even TNR activists have great difficulty in capturing 100 percent of a colony and must allow at least several days of trapping efforts to accomplish this. When busy animal control personnel attempt to trap a feral colony, inevitably some cats are left behind. With less competition for the food and shelter that remains, these cats reproduce faster and more of their offspring survive until the carrying capacity of the habitat is again reached.

**Abandonment of Cats**

Unaltered domestic cats are constantly being abandoned into our streets, often by uneducated owners who do not realize problem behaviors by sexually intact cats could be readily resolved by neutering. Without monitors and caretakers to work with animal control to deal with strays and in the case of ferals, to quickly capture and either fix or adopt out these former domestics, they too, are available to repopulate any suitable habitat made vacant by trap-and-kill efforts.

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11 E.g., a court in Fort Lee, NJ, where feeding any animal outdoors is banned, recently fined a stray cat feeder $300 and threatened her with a 30 day jail term if she continued. Nonetheless, Neighborhood Cats has documented the ongoing feeding and care of scores of feral cats in the township.
12 Clifton, Merritt, “Street Dog & Feral Cat Sterilization and Vaccination Efforts Must Get 70% or Flunk,” *ANIMAL PEOPLE*, October 2002.
Lack of Additional Animal Control Resources
Few communities, including Milwaukee, have the resources to devote to trap and remove a significant percentage of the feral cats in the county, as described above. If the resources were available, helping to defray the cost of spay or neuter surgeries would be a far better investment in long term cost containment and citizen satisfaction.

Waukegan, Illinois: a case study in the failure of trap-and-kill

Waukegan, Illinois is a township of 88,000 located on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Waukegan's long-standing method for controlling their feral cat population has been the traditional trap-and-kill. Recently, the town has made news by trying to effectively ban TNR. The town’s council enacted an ordinance that forbids the release of any cat except into an outdoor enclosure. To build and operate such an enclosure, a kennel license must be sought and paid for. In addition, a prior ban against feeding stray cats is in effect. Stiff fines enforce these provisions.

According to Tina Fragassi, the local animal control warden, her agency has trapped and removed approximately 500 feral cats each of the past eleven years. In Ms. Fragassi's view, this steady number reflects the success of Waukegan's policies in controlling the cats. The truth is just the opposite and points to the futility of trap-and-kill. That every year 500 cats need to be trapped indicates the feral population is remaining at the same level. The feline faces may be changing, but the total number of cats is staying the same. As a result, every year in Waukegan the same amount of time and increasing wages is invested in animal control seizing 500 cats, the same cost is incurred by the township in adhering to mandatory waiting period and euthanasia requirements, and the same number of complaints is made. By contrast, a successful animal control approach would mean fewer and fewer feral cats in the community as reflected by continually falling seizures, costs and complaints. This is the goal of TNR. As explained by Dr. Slater, TNR “should be considered an interim solution to the problem of feral, free-roaming cats – the first step towards reducing the size of the colony through attrition.”

Illinois became the first state in the nation to pass a law to help fund sterilizing feral cats. The law also gives protection to caretakers. A Pet Overpopulation Control Fund was

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14 Ibid.
15 Hamill, Sean, Chicago Tribune reporter, interview of Tina Fragassi.
16 Ibid.
17 Slater, p. 14.
established to help control government costs by providing subsidized sterilization of feral cats.\(^{18}\)

**Eradication and Feeding Bans**

Eradication of feral cats, defined as the one hundred percent removal of all feral cats from an area, has been advocated since at least 1916.\(^{19}\) The method has proven successful, however, only on small, uninhabited islands after decades of intensive control measures including poisoning, hunting, trapping and introduction of infectious feline diseases.\(^{20}\) One of the best-known examples of the difficulty of eradication is Marion Island, a small uninhabited island (12 miles x 8 miles) located southeast of South Africa between South Africa and Antarctica.\(^{21}\)

In 1949, a group of scientists left the island, leaving behind 5 unneutered cats. By 1977, there were an estimated 3,400 cats preying on ground-nesting seabirds.\(^{22}\) Deliberate infection of the feral cat population with Feline Panleukopenia Virus (feline enteritis) followed and killed around 65% of the cat population by the early 1980’s.\(^{23}\) Many of the remaining 35% developed immunity to the disease and continued to breed.\(^{24}\) Between 1986 and 1989, 897 cats were further exterminated by hunting. Traps with poison baits were then used to kill the cats who eluded the guns. No cats have been seen since 1991. In 1993, sixteen years after it was begun, the eradication program was declared a success.\(^{25}\)

The methods used on Marion Island – introduction of infectious disease, shooting and poisoning – would be unfeasible in a populated area such as Milwaukee for safety, cost and aesthetic reasons.\(^{26}\) Even assuming such techniques could be employed, the vacuum effect discussed earlier, which was not present in a geographically isolated situation like Marion Island, would likely outpace eradication efforts.

Despite these considerations, Akron, Ohio recently undertook an attempt to eradicate all free-roaming cats within its city limits. On June 25, 2002, the City Council passed a cat confinement law that authorized the animal control warden to seize and euthanize any cat

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\(^{18}\) Illinois Public Health and Safety Animal Population Control Act 094-0639


\(^{20}\) Levy, p. 380.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Id.; Berkeley, pp. 123-124.

\(^{24}\) Hartwell (see fn. 71, *supra*).

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Levy, p. 381.
at large if left unclaimed. Animal control reportedly requested an additional annual budget of $410,385 to trap-and-kill what they estimated would be a total of 3500 cats. Over the next two years following the law’s enactment, a total of 2750 cats were picked up and killed. It is too soon to say whether the law will eventually have its desired effect of eliminating free-roaming cats or whether, as in Waukegan, animal control will continue to seize a consistent number of cats on an annual basis. But it is already abundantly clear that the trap-and-kill program has had serious negative side effects. The killing has spawned extreme divisiveness within the community between animal advocates and municipal officials, has given rise to at least one lawsuit, has created negative publicity for Akron on a national scale, has cost the city hundreds of thousands of dollars between the trapping efforts and litigation, and has shipwrecked the county animal shelter because of the sudden deluge of cats.

Akron represents the antithesis of what is needed to successfully control feral cat populations on a large scale. According to Dr. Levy, “Clearly, any realistic plan to control feral cats must recognize the magnitude of the feral cat population, the need to engage in continuous control efforts, and the significance of the public’s affection for feral cats. The most successful examples of enduring community-wide animal control have incorporated high-profile non-lethal feral cat control programs into integrated plans to reduce animal overpopulation.”

Feeding bans are usually a part of eradication programs. Because cats are territorial, they rarely leave the area. Even if caregivers do comply with a feeding ban, cats can live weeks without food and continue to reproduce. The malnourished cats are more susceptible to disease and spreading parasites such as fleas, making the situation worse and creating more sympathy for the cats and their plight. In addition, without a regular feeding schedule, cats become much more difficult to trap or monitor.

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27 Akron OH Municipal Code, Title 9, sec. 92.15; see also, Sangiacomo, Michael, “Akron law to trap, kill cats is OK, judge rules,” Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 6, 2004.
32 Akron referred to by Florida resident as having “a national reputation for using the most ineffective, expensive and morally reprehensible means of dealing with feral cats,” (Letter to the Editor, Miami Herald, December 21, 2003); Akron website’s message board closed down due to deluge of angry emails from around the world (Sangiacomo, supra, Cleveland Plain Dealer).
33 Summit County Executive Director James McCarthy “has blamed Akron’s cat law for worsening shelter problems,” (Abraham, Lisa, “Animal Shelter Review Approved – Summit County will bring in national experts to evaluate the troubled program,” Akron Beacon Journal, Jan. 23, 2004).
34 Levy, p. 381.
**Trap-and-remove**

Compassionate callers reporting feral cats often initially seek the adoptive placement of the cats or their relocation to a safer place. This “trap-and-remove” approach is impractical on a large scale. Socialization of feral cats is an uncertain process, and even if the time and resources existed to implement socialization on a widespread basis, there are not enough available homes for them. As it is, completely tame cats already in some city shelters available for adoption are euthanized for lack of space. Regarding relocating the cats, Dr. Slater writes, “Transfer to a new location is rarely recommended because finding a suitable site can be difficult, time consuming, and stressful for the cats and often has low survival rates at the new site.”

Furthermore, trap-and-remove creates the same vacuums in the original territory as trap-and-kill and so will likewise have no long-term impact on feral population levels. That would mean that cost savings and stress on animal control programs would not diminish.

**Do Nothing**

The growth of an uncontrolled feral cat population, as with any wild species, will level off when the cats exceed the capacity of the habitat. Beyond capacity, population control comes in the form of starvation and disease. As confirmed by the historical information provided from MADACC, the problems associated with unneutered feral cats remain.

**Trap-Neuter-Return**

A significant body of compelling evidence has recently been conducted that reveals that the most effective method to significantly reduce the population is not to ignore or euthanize healthy feral cats. Rather, providing a regular source of food and care, including the trap, sterilization and re-release of feral cats ultimately reduces the population, eliminates unnecessary suffering, nuisance behaviors and neighbor complaints. As reported in this paper, research also shows that cats in managed cat colonies remain healthy and do not prey on birds and wildlife at rates previously documented and over time, far fewer cats and birds will have the potential to be impacted.

One of the most powerful arguments for Trap-Neuter-Return as a method of feral and stray cat control is also one of the most basic; nothing else works. Whatever its imperfections in practice and theory, TNR is the only animal control methodology that has shown a reasonable chance of controlling feral cat populations in an urban environment like Milwaukee. Trap-Neuter-Return is not a quick

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35 Slater, p. 12.
fix and as a result, people who just want the cats to disappear will continue to associate a variety of concerns with the cats, regardless of the veracity of the claims. However, none of the concerns raised about feral cats will be reduced without a reduction in the cat population. To achieve this, TNR is the only approach with hope of success, as an examination of the available alternatives makes clear.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs involve several steps:

- Volunteers trap the cats living in the area, commonly referred to as a colony.
- Cats receive veterinary intervention in the form of neutering, ear-tipping,37 rabies and other appropriate vaccinations.
- Cats receive a permanent identification, called a microchip; a tiny transponder painlessly implanted between the animal’s shoulder blades.
- Cats are returned to their home territory where they are then fed, sheltered and monitored on an ongoing basis by a designated volunteer caretaker.
- Testing the cats for infectious diseases as deemed necessary by a veterinarian.
- Wherever possible, kittens and friendly adoptable adults are removed from the colony and offered for placement in homes.

Communities of all sizes have embraced TNR programs. In the five years since the method was brought to New York City by Neighborhood Cats, a great deal has been accomplished. Hundreds of local feral cat caretakers have been trained to practice TNR. Free spay/neuter services for ferals are provided by both the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and the Humane Society of New York and thousands of feral cats have been altered. Several city agencies have utilized TNR to successfully address their own feral cat problems, including the Parks Department, the Correction Department, the NYPD and the Department of Sanitation. In addition, the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals has embraced TNR by forming the New York City Feral Cat Council, a coalition of local organizations involved in implementing the technique.

The impetus for communities to engage in TNR can be attributed to its many proven advantages over more traditional methods of animal control, including permanent reduction of feral and stray cat populations, cost savings to animal control and the elimination of nuisance behaviors like spraying and fighting. In addition, by returning the ferals to their territory, TNR allows the neutered and vaccinated cats to provide the public health benefits of rat abatement and protection against rabies transmission from wildlife species. The lower feral population also helps to lower potential for predation on birds and wildlife by the cats. Unlike any other method known, Trap-Neuter-Return holds out the realistic possibility of a permanent, long-term solution to feral and stray cat overpopulation and all its associated ills.

37 “Eartipping” is the universal sign of a neutered feral cat and involves removing the tip of the left ear in a straight line cut.
**How do TNR programs operate?**

Many community members consistently see cats in their neighborhood that are too frightened to be approached. Realizing that the cats are homeless, conscientious people attempt to obtain information about the options available for the cats and sometimes begin leaving food out for them. After acknowledging that the cats cannot be easily placed in homes, many contact animal control to trap and euthanize, others decide that they can learn how to solve the problem without having the cats euthanized. Some who ask to have the cats trapped and euthanized begin to realize that it may not be possible to trap them all and that even though many can be trapped over time, additional cats consistently appear. Those people that are committed to the long term care of the cat/s begin feeding at the same time and location every day, leave food out for only a short time and keep the area clean so that other animals will not be attracted to the feeding area. Often at their own expense, they obtain food, veterinary care and try to socialize kittens and find them homes. Habituating the cats to the feeding schedule allows caregivers the opportunity to trap them for sterilization by withholding food and then setting a humane trap. If done improperly, the caregiver may never be able to get the cat into a trap. Regular contact with the colony allows the caretaker the opportunity to know the cats and monitor their behavior, health and habits. Cold climate programs usually include shelters.

Some people are able to enlist the assistance and support of neighbors who share in the responsibility of caring for the cats. Groups of neighbors feeding, monitoring and caring for the cats can help to expand the safety net and often expedites colony management.

**The Advantages of TNR**

**Feral and Stray Cat Population Reduction**

TNR reduces free-roaming cat populations through two means – first, by the removal of adoptable cats, and, second, through attrition outpacing births over time. An excellent example of both means is provided by the twelve year old TNR program practiced with municipal approval and cooperation in Newburyport, a popular coastal town in Massachusetts. In 1992, after attempts to eradicate the approximately 300 cats living on the town’s waterfront had failed, the municipality agreed to allow a TNR project. In 1992 through 1993, a private organization, Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society, trapped all of the cats and kittens. 200 were removed for adoption, resulting in an immediate population decline of over 66 percent. The other 100 cats were returned and then closely monitored over subsequent years. Some died or disappeared, while others became adoptable and were removed. Presently in 2004, there are 17 cats left,

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38 Slater, p.14.
39 [www.mrfrs.org](http://www.mrfrs.org)
40 Correspondence, Stacey LeBaron, President, Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society, July 15, 2004.
representing a decline of 83 percent from the original number returned, and a drop of 94 percent from the 300 cats present prior to the initiation of TNR. 41

Successful National Models

Where TNR programs have become community-wide and institutionalized, the impact has been considerable. When practiced not just anecdotally at select sites, feral cat population reduction has been dramatic, as reflected by lower intake and euthanasia rates. 42 In San Diego County, from 1988 through 1991, stray cat intake rates for municipal shelters were rising at a rate of approximately 10% a year, peaking in fiscal year 1991-1992 at a total of 19,077 cats, of whom 15,525 were euthanized. 43 In 1992, the Feral Cat Coalition of San Diego was founded and began implementing TNR on a county-wide basis. Two years and 3100 neutered feral cats later, stray intake rates had dropped by 35% and euthanasia by 40% with no other plausible explanation for the declines other than the TNR efforts. 44 45

According to Kathy Kelson from the Feral Cat Coalition, “Prior to 1993, the problem of homeless cats in San Diego was reaching crisis proportions. With cats going into heat at 4 months of age and having 2 to 3 litters per year, area shelters were reporting that the number of impounded and euthanized cats was increasing at 15% every year. The resulting costs were enormous.”46

In San Francisco, beginning in 1993, the San Francisco SPCA combined with San Francisco Animal Control to introduce a comprehensive city-wide TNR program, one that combined no cost spay/neuter with educational initiatives and incentives for getting feral cats altered. From 1993 through 1999, cat impounds dropped by 28%, euthanasia rates for feral cats dropped by 73%, and euthanasia rates for all cats fell by 71%. 47

Maricopa County, Arizona, is one of the most heavily populated and rapidly growing regions in the country. Maricopa County Animal Care & Control introduced a TNR program (entitled Operation FELIX) as part of a comprehensive spay/neuter and adoption program. As a result of the overall program, there was a drop in the euthanasia rate from

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41 Ibid.
42 Reducing the feral population lowers euthanasia rates in primarily two ways. First, fewer feral cats are brought into shelters and euthanized. Second, fewer feral kittens means friendly cats already in the system face less competition for shelter space and homes and are spared euthanasia.
44 Ibid.
46 The Race to Outpace Feral Cat Overpopulation; A Symposium presentation by Linda Kelson, Feral Cat Coalition Board Member
25 cats per 1000 county residents to only 9 cats per 1000. FELIX was considered so successful that the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors has passed a resolution declaring TNR the official county policy for feral cat control, see Addendum A.

In southern Florida, where local TNR programs were introduced in the early 1990's, euthanasia by animal control has dropped by half with most of the decline attributed to fewer cats being killed. For example, in 2001, all shelters combined in the Fort Lauderdale/Miami corridor euthanized 14.1 cats and dogs per 1000 residents, compared to 33.0 per 1000 in 1997. In Tampa, where TNR has not been implemented, the euthanasia rate in 2001 was 32.4 cats and dogs per 1000 residents, while across the bay in St. Petersburg where TNR has been widely practiced, the rate is only 13.7.

Proof that TNR effectively reduces feral populations in the long term also comes from the academic community. Dr. Levy conducted an eleven year TNR project at her campus at the University of Florida, Gainesville. The program resulted in a 66% decline in the feral population over the course of the study. Dr. Levy concluded that, "A comprehensive long-term program of neutering followed by adoption or return to the resident colony can result in reduction of free-roaming cat populations in urban areas."

In Washington State, “This past year alone, Miller and 55 to 75 other mostly female volunteers trapped more than 6,000 feral cats from Snohomish to Buckley to Tacoma. Their efforts, along with help from the nonprofit Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project in Seattle and other organizations, have contributed to a reduction in the number of feral cats killed in the county's Bellevue and Kent animal shelters each year, from 13,765 in 1990 to 5,437 in 2004, according to statistics provided on the county's Animal Services Department Web site, http://www.metro kc.gov/pets."

In New Britain, Connecticut the government has developed a partnership with the Animal Alliance Welfare League. “The trap, neuter and release program, referred to as TNR, is in part a coordinated effort between the city and AAWL. The city has set aside money to pay for neutering of the first 60 cats AAWL takes to a Hartford veterinary center, which gives the city a discount for their services. "This is the pilot program," said Karalus. "We are the first city to get money for helping take care of the cat population with the spaying and neutering, and we’ve had a number of other cities contact us to find out how we’re going about it. We have $3,000 to start with, but we’ve been told that more will be made available as the program moves forward." Karalus credits not only the city but Sen. Donald DeFronzo and his department for their efforts in making the funds available. Jimmy Russo, animal control officer for the city in New Britain’s police department, went with Karalus last week to try to trap some of the cats that need to be neutered. Bills

50 Ibid.
for the service that are paid for by the city will be submitted through Russo at the police department rather than through AAWL. "This is a great partnership," said Russo. "Linda knows where the colonies of cats are located and can set the traps, which makes my job a lot easier." The city’s investment is a big first step, because the feral or abandoned cat population is one many cities would rather avoid, because the numbers are so high, and because many shelters, including that in New Britain, don’t take cats. According to Karalus, a breeding cat along with her kittens can produce over 12,000 cats in a five-year period. The birth cycle runs from April through September, which means babies born in September face getting through the winter, when food supplies can be limited and when temperatures make outdoor survival all the more difficult.53

Cost Savings

TNR provides substantial cost savings to government animal control in two ways. First, there is the volunteer manpower generated to get the cats fixed and stop them from reproducing. Even now, without a formal program in Milwaukee, as outlined later in this paper, there are countless hours of volunteer labor being brought to bear on getting the feral cat situation under control, none of which has cost Milwaukee County taxpayers a cent. Given the magnitude of the problem, volunteers and the cost savings they represent are crucial to move beyond the current state of affairs. Substantial cost savings are also realized when TNR is implemented on a large enough scale to realize lower euthanasia rates in municipal shelters. In San Diego, during the period of 1992 through 1994, the average cost of interning and then euthanizing a cat was $121. The 40% drop in euthanasia over those two years from the privately funded county-wide TNR program saved the county approximately $796,000.54

Costs to obtain, house and euthanize animals for the past five fiscal years at MADACC are in sharp contrast to the progress and cost savings demonstrated in communities with successful TNR programs. Studies have found there is a significant cost savings even when the municipality itself funds TNR efforts and does not rely on private organizations to bear the costs. Like the program listed above in New Britain, Connecticut, Orange County, Florida, implemented a TNR program for two and a half years from 1995 through 1998. Previously, when they received a feral cat complaint, they sent out an officer to trap the cat, held the animal for the mandatory waiting period and then euthanized. This cost $105 per cat. By contrast, having volunteers trap the cats and then


providing spay/neuter and vaccination services cost the county $56 per cat, a savings of $109,172 over the length of the study (2228 cats).  

Reduced Nuisance Behavior and Fewer Complaints  
Neutering cats resolves most quality of life issues. The noxious odor associated with the spraying of unaltered males is caused by testosterone in the urine. Once the cat is fixed, this is no longer a problem. The cessation of reproductive activity also brings an end to mating behavior and the noise associated with it – both the yowling of females in heat and the fighting among male cats. In addition, neutered feral colonies tend to roam much less and so become much less visible.

According to Dr. Slater’s research, “Managed colonies of feral cats can be part of the solution to nuisance complaints.” Dr. Slater cites one animal control agency in Florida that found complaints in a six-square block area dropped by half after implementation of a TNR program. In the city of Cape May, New Jersey, complaints to animal control about cats dropped by 50 percent after four years of sanctioned TNR. After funding and running its own TNR program, the Animal Services Department of Orange County, Florida, also reported decreased complaints about cats.

Caretaker Cooperation  
No effective animal control policy for feral cats can be implemented on a large scale without the cooperation of the people who feed and watch over the cats on a daily basis. Trapping cats is generally accomplished by baiting humane box traps that close behind a cat when he enters to eat the bait. If food is not withheld the day prior to trapping, many cats will not enter the traps. Caretaker cooperation in withholding food is essential. Caretakers also possess unique knowledge regarding the cats, including their numbers, habits and whereabouts. As a result, a caretaker can either greatly assist or effectively thwart animal control efforts.

A survey of cat caretakers who presented cats for sterilization in a TNR program revealed that they are intensely bonded to the cats they feed and will not participate in animal control programs that threaten their felines’ welfare. At the same time, caretakers are easily recruited to perform much of the labor involved in getting the cats controlled through sterilization, representing, as mentioned, a substantial cost savings compared to traditional animal control programs using paid staff. Thus, TNR is an effective tool for enlisting public support to solve a difficult community problem while at the same time

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56 Slater, p. 39.
57 Ibid.
58 Id.
59 Levy, p. 381.
mitigating public anger resulting from either the “trap-and-kill” or “do nothing” methodologies.

Additional Benefits to Trap-Neuter-Return

Reduction in Wildlife Predation

Much of the controversy about TNR can be traced to concerns that feral cats are responsible for a disproportionate amount of predation on birds and other forms of small wildlife. The American Bird Conservancy, sponsor of the “Cats Indoors!” campaign, claims feral cats, “are efficient predators estimated to kill hundreds of millions of native birds representing 20-30% of the prey of free-roaming cats, and countless small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians each year….”62 The argument goes that by returning feral cats to their territory, TNR encourages this predation to continue and so should be outlawed for the protection of wildlife.63

The American Bird Conservancy’s position suffers from two key defects. First, no reliable studies support the predation levels being claimed and none identify feral cats as a contributing factor to the decline of any bird or wildlife species. Second, TNR does not encourage but actually discourages predation – in the long run, by reducing the feral cat population in a given area, it reduces whatever level of predation already existed.

Available research does not support the conclusion that feral cats have a species level impact on bird or wildlife populations. Studies that claim feral cats are responsible for substantial numbers of bird deaths over wide geographical areas, like a state or an entire country, are based on insufficient data and highly questionable extrapolations, and have been repeatedly discredited.64 One example is the oft-cited study of predation by cats conducted in a village in the English countryside.65 The researchers counted the number of prey brought home by 77 cats. Based on this one small sample, they projected a total of 70 million prey by Britain’s entire free-roaming cat population, with birds accounting for 30 to 50 percent of the catch.66 Extrapolating from one non-randomly selected village to the whole of Great Britain lacks all scientific

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64 “Many studies indicate that claims about wildlife mortality due to cat predation are overblown, not based on data or scientific study, or are extrapolated to dissimilar populations or environments.” The Animal Policy Report, p. 1, Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine, March 2000.
66 Ibid.
validity. Yet this and similar small-scale studies have been repeatedly subjected to extrapolation and have been sensationalized.

Dr. Gary J. Patronek, DVM, Ph.D., commented on the use of unreliable extrapolations to quantify cat predation as follows:

If the real objection to managed colonies is that it is unethical to put cats in a situation where they could potentially kill any wild creature, then the ethical issue should be debated on its own merits without burdening the discussion with highly speculative numerical estimates for either wildlife mortality or cat predation. Whittling down guesses or extrapolations from limited observations by a factor of 10 or even 100 does not make these estimates any more credible, and the fact that they are the best available data is not sufficient to justify their use when the consequences may be extermination for cats.

The use of small-scale, non-random studies by the American Bird Conservancy and other organizations to make the case that feral cats are killing hundreds of millions of birds annually in the United States and negatively impacting entire species amounts to no more than sheer propaganda. “In mainland ecosystems, no published data have shown that cats have a detrimental impact on wildlife populations of particular species.”

The American Bird Conservancy’s claim that birds make up 20 to 30 percent of a free-roaming cat’s diet is also based on misinterpretation of several studies. The assertion is “misleading, inflammatory, self-serving, and undeserving of the repetition it has received in the media.” To the contrary, reputable studies have repeatedly demonstrated that birds are a relatively small percentage of a feral cat’s diet, which relies much more on ground mammals when they’re available.

Further pointing to the complexity of the issue is a recent study by Britain’s Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The study was designed to determine the causes of the decline of Britain’s most common garden birds. It was found that cats and magpies preyed on robins, chaffinches, collared doves and wood pigeons, but these bird species were actually rising in number. This study, as well as others, demonstrates that

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67 Slater, p. 34; see also Elliot, J., "The Accused," The Sonoma County Independent (March 3-16, 1994) [criticizing extrapolations made by Churcher and Lawton], article excerpted at: www.stanford.edu/group/CATNET/articles/understd_pred.html;  
68 Slater, p. 34.  
70 Ibid.  
72 Berkeley, p. 137.  
predation alone does not necessarily have a negative impact on the total prey population.\textsuperscript{75}

Factors that have been reliably demonstrated to significantly contribute to the decline of bird and wildlife species include, foremost, habitat destruction, then also pollution, competition from other bird species, and predators such as raccoons and opossum.\textsuperscript{76} Effectively exonerating cats is an exhaustive study of the causes of migratory bird decline in the United States published in the spring of 2003 by David I. King of the USDA Forest Service Northeastern Research Station and John H. Rappole, a research scientist with the Smithsonian Conservation and Research Center.\textsuperscript{77} The study was commissioned by the Defenders of Wildlife,\textsuperscript{78} a prominent national organization whose mission is the protection of native wild animals and plants in their natural environments.

The researchers, after reviewing annual bird census data and 36 earlier studies, reached three important conclusions: (1) the migrant bird populations have declined in numerous species, (2) the most threatened group of species are long distance migrants, and (3) the most important threat to migrants is the destruction of breeding, stopover and, especially, winter tropical habitat.\textsuperscript{79} Specifically, they identified 106 different types of migrant birds and listed the proposed or documented causes for the decline of each. Loss of habitat was by far the cause listed most often. Other causes included human disturbance of breeding sites, pesticides, poisons, and hunting. “Cats” was not listed once.\textsuperscript{80} At least one wildlife author has concluded this study indicates that, “[W]indows, cats, West Nile virus, wind turbines — all those specific causes of death that are apparent in people's backyards -- are not, at present, having any known effect on the population size of any continental bird species.”\textsuperscript{81}

Further support for the position that feral cats do not have a significant impact on bird species comes from the most recent issue of Audubon, the magazine published by the National Audubon Society. The Sept./Oct. issue contains a report entitled, "State of the


\textsuperscript{76} Slater, p. 34.


\textsuperscript{78} www.defenders.org/wildlife/new/birds.html.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Id. (contained in appendix 3 of the King & Rappole report).

Birds 2004." According to the magazine, "Audubon's science team has pooled the best data available since Silent Spring to report on [the nation's birds’] overall health."

The report opens with an article by Greg Butcher, Audubon's director of bird conservation. He writes that, "Threats to avian life in the United States are many, but the most serious is the outright loss of habitat due to expanding agriculture, the clear-cutting of forests, the draining of wetlands, and sprawl." Mr. Butcher also states that, "...birds here face other perils, as well. Climate change, air and water pollution, pesticides, and collisions with buildings, towers, and wind turbines also take a toll."

Notably, Mr. Butcher does not cite cats as posing a risk to bird species. The only specific mention of cats in the entire State of the Birds 2004 report is in an article entitled "What You Can Do," in which the common sense advice of keeping pet cats indoors is given.

The National Audubon Society's conclusions are consistent with all available research that is regarded as reliable and credible and which concludes feral cats do not have a species-wide impact on any birds or wildlife. The Audubon's director of bird conservation would not fail to mention feral cats as a risk to bird species if he agreed with the American Bird Conservancy's claim that these cats are killing hundreds of millions of birds annually. The Audubon report points to the limited scope of the predation issue involving select, isolated sanctuaries and wildlife habitat and not the vast majority of cities, towns and rural settings where feral cats live.

**TNR reduces rather than encourages predation**

Rather than encouraging predation, TNR can actually aid in the protection of wildlife and bird interests. It must be kept in mind that before any TNR work is done at a given site, the cats are already there, preying upon other species to whatever extent they do. If the cats are then neutered, returned and monitored by a caretaker, reproduction ceases and the population goes down over time, with the fewer cats leading to less predation.

The American Bird Conservancy argues wildlife would be best protected if the first step of trapping is taken, but not the second of return. Euthanasia, they believe, is a more acceptable solution. This amounts to no more than advocacy of the trap-and-kill method and suffers from all its flaws – the vacuum effect of cats migrating into newly vacant habitat to take advantage of food sources, the over breeding of any cats

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83 Ibid.
in the colony left behind, the lack of adequate animal control resources, and the opposition of caretakers to trapping efforts.

What many bird and wildlife advocates fail to come to grips with is the impossibility of quickly ridding the environment of feral cats in order to protect other species – it simply cannot be done. The only known way to eliminate feral cat colonies, as has been accomplished in Newburyport, is gradually through the TNR process. In Newburyport, where 300 feral cats resided twelve years ago, there are now 17. Plainly, whatever predation existed in 1992 is far lower now. The return of the neutered ferals was not an encouragement for more predation – it was part of the method for permanently lowering the cats’ numbers.

Ironically, and sadly, groups like the American Bird Conservancy are actually harming their own interests by opposing the only known method of feral cat control with any reasonable chance of success. By advocating what amounts to either “trap-and-kill” or “trap-and-remove” instead of TNR, they help perpetuate the failed methods of the past – the methods which have led to a national overpopulation of feral cats in the tens of millions. To protect the birds, new approaches and open minds are needed.

It’s also important in considering the predation issue to draw a distinction between two very different situations that the current debate tends to muddle together. It’s one thing if the particular site in question serves as a unique and critical habitat for wildlife, especially endangered species or migrating birds possibly vulnerable to a cat attack because of factors like their ground-nesting behavior. In those situations, humane alternatives to TNR such as relocation must be considered. It’s another thing if the geographical area in question is an entire city or town. Simply because TNR might not be appropriate in a bird sanctuary doesn’t mean it should be rejected for Milwaukee County.

Public Health
From the perspective of public health, feral cats and TNR touch upon three major issues: (1) rabies, (2) other zoonotic diseases, and (3) rat abatement. An examination of these issues demonstrates that on balance, the public health benefits of maintaining neutered, rabies-vaccinated feral cats in their environment through TNR far outweigh any possible public health threats.

Bites
Feral cats are terrified of people and will always try to avoid contact with them. If you try to catch one, he or she will vocalize, hiss, bite and scratch in an attempt to get free, just as any animal that has never had contact with people. It would not be advisable to stick your hand in the cage of a trapped, terrified animal.

A concern that municipalities often have about feral cats is who is responsible if someone were to get hurt by a feral cat. Liability is usually assessed based upon negligence. Implementing or permitting a feral cat program to reduce the feral population and resolve nuisance complaints is a reasonable government strategy, not negligent conduct. Liability is often assessed through ownership and no one “owns” a feral cat.
Although every precaution should be made to educate the community about the cats and their behavior, if someone should be bitten, at least a cat that was part of a TNR program would have been vaccinated against rabies, saving the enormous expense of having to provide post-rabies exposure treatment. Specifically, cats in a managed colony can be eartipped for quick visual identification. They also obtain a microchip implant; a permanent identification, helpful in tracking their treatments and vaccinations.

Risks also exist for communities that opt not to participate in proactive programs to control the population of feral cats. If someone were to be bitten, they may be able to pursue legal action because no program was in place to address the existing crisis of free roaming cats. At the very least, cats in a managed program would be far more likely to have been vaccinated.

The end result is that fewer cats provide less liability exposure for communities and homeowners. Enough documentation exists to verify that communities that engage in proactive programs like TNR do reduce the feral population.

_Rabies_

In Wisconsin, the vectors most likely to carry rabies are bats and skunks. In 2001, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), wild animals accounted for 93% of reported cases of rabies in the United States. Among wild animals, the leading species were raccoons (37.2% of all animal cases in 2001), followed by skunks (30.7%), bats (17.2%), foxes (5.9%) and other wild animals, including rodents (0.7%). Only 6.8% of reported rabies cases were domestic animals. The total number of cases attributed to cats in 2001 was 270. Since 1975, there have been no reported cases of a cat transmitting rabies to a human in this country. Three large-scale exposures of humans to rabid or potentially rabid cats were reported from 1990 through 1996. The risk that feral cats, who tend to be shy by nature and fearful of people, could transmit rabies to humans while at large is thus minimal judging by past experience.

The risk does exist to a greater degree in regions where rabies is prevalent among the local raccoon population. Raccoons often inhabit the same territory as feral cats. Most

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86 Levy, p. 379.
87 Slater, p. 32.
88 Ibid.
raccoon rabies occurs in the northeast/mid-Atlantic region (69.1% in 2001). Most cat rabies occurs (214 of the 270 reported cases in 2001) in states where the raccoon-variant of rabies is present. In 1999, it was discovered that, “Nearly all [rabid domestic] animals (229 cats and 78 dogs) were infected via spillover with the predicted terrestrial variant of the rabies virus, i.e., the variant maintained by and circulated in the dominant terrestrial reservoir species in the geographic location where the infection occurred.” Consequently, “…feral cats may form an interface between wildlife reservoirs and humans.”

**TNR can remove much of the opportunity for rabies to be transmitted from raccoons to feral cats and then to humans by having the cats vaccinated against the virus at the time of neutering.** Vaccination of a large percentage of the feral cats in a given location may then create a barrier species for transmission of the virus from raccoons to humans: “By keeping a critical mass (usually 80 percent) of feral cats vaccinated against rabies in managed colonies, a herd immunity effect may be produced, potentially providing a barrier between wildlife and humans and preventing one of the major public health threats caused by feral cats.”

Using TNR to rabies-vaccinate the feral population also makes sense when the lack of suitable alternatives to remove the public health threat is considered. As discussed earlier, eradication of the feral population is not feasible. Trapping and removing a portion of the population results only in turnover, not diminishing numbers, and leaves the feral cat population unvaccinated and susceptible to rabies infection from raccoons. Doing nothing also leaves the ferals unvaccinated and fails to lessen the risk of rabies transmission from wildlife to cats to humans. A managed colony approach, where the cats are vaccinated, monitored on a regular basis and gradually diminish in number, is far more effective in removing the rabies threat.

Supporting the view that vaccinating the feral population can create a barrier against rabies for humans is past experience with domestic dogs. “[A]nimal control and vaccination programs begun in the 1940’s have practically eliminated domestic dogs as reservoirs of rabies in the United States.” While feral cats may not be a reservoir for rabies to the same magnitude that domestic dogs once were, widespread implementation of TNR could eliminate even the possibility of that happening. This is a matter of great significance as, “A single incident involving a case of rabies in a companion species can result in large expenditures in dollars and public health efforts to ensure that human disease does not occur.”

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90 Ibid.
91 Id.
92 Levy, p. 385.
93 Slater, p. 32.
95 Ibid.
The hands-on practice of TNR entails close interaction between feral cats and humans during the initial phase of trapping and neutering, potentially creating opportunities for bites and rabies transmission. Access to TNR services should, as a result, be conditioned upon training in safe handling techniques.

**Other zoonotic diseases**

A common misconception is that feral cats pose a health hazard through risk of transmission of other zoonotic diseases, besides rabies. Available evidence indicates this is not true. For example, the 8000 acre campus of Stanford University is home to one of the oldest TNR programs in the country. The university-approved, but privately funded and operated program began operation in 1989. Subsequently, when a graduate student complained that the cats presented a health risk, campus administration took up the issue. The Environmental Health & Safety Department of the University, in consultation with the Santa Clara County Health Department, “determined that there is a general consensus that feral cats pose little health and safety risk to individuals on campus.” The Stanford TNR program continues to the present date, claiming reduction of the feral population from a total of 1500 cats at inception to 200 currently.

A transmissible disease often associated with cats is toxoplasmosis which is caused by a common parasite (toxoplasma) probably already found in more than 60 million people in the United States. Very few people display symptoms, but infection can be serious in pregnant women and those with compromised immune systems. The parasite can be transmitted through the accidental ingestion of contaminated cat feces, but infection is more commonly the result of eating or handling raw meat, or gardening. A study conducted in Norway found that living in a neighborhood with cats is not by itself a risk factor for contracting toxoplasmosis.

Plague can be transmitted by feral cats who catch the disease from infected fleas, but this concern appears to be geographically limited to the southwestern United States. In

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96 “Zoonotic disease” refers to animal diseases that can be transmitted to humans.
97 http://www.stanford.edu/group/CATNET/about.html
98 Correspondence from Carole Miller, co-founder of Stanford Cat Network, April 29, 2002.
100 http://www.stanford.edu/group/CATNET/about.html
101 www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/cats.htm
102 Ibid.
103 Id.
105 Slater, p. 33.
these regions, flea control and care in handling feral cats with symptoms of pneumonia is recommended.\textsuperscript{106}

“Cat scratch fever,” caused by the bartonella bacteria, is relatively common, although it is not clear the risk factor is any higher with the feral cat population as compared to the domestic cat.\textsuperscript{107} Given ferals’ wariness towards humans and their tendency to keep a distance, presumably the risk factor is lower for them.

According to the World Health Organization on February 28, 2006, "There is no present evidence that domestic cats play a role in the transmission cycle of H5N1 viruses. To date, no human case has been linked to exposure to a diseased cat." In addition, the Cornell Feline Health Center issued the following statement on March 3, 2006, "Can cats catch the bird flu? These reports, along with recent studies, say "yes." Might it also be possible for cats to get the flu from us--or for humans to get the flu from cats? The short answer is 'no.'"

\textit{Rat abatement}

The usefulness of feral cats in controlling rat populations is well documented. Roger Tabor, in his studies of London street cats, noted that one particularly adept tabby female was recorded as having caught 12,480 rats over a six year span (an average of 5 to 6 per day.).\textsuperscript{108} Farmers and stable owners have long employed feral cats for rodent control.\textsuperscript{109} Thomas Gecewicz, while serving as Director of Health for the city of Fall River, Massachusetts, found that a TNR’ed colony of feral cats at a local landfill resulted in a cost savings for rodent control.\textsuperscript{110} In Pennsylvania’s Longwood Gardens, feral cats “are part of the integrated pest management control program to protect certain plant life from damage by small rodents."\textsuperscript{111} One researcher, Paul Leyhausen, suggests that in urban environments where food sources such as garbage and rats cannot be permanently removed, “the feral cat population serves a very useful purpose and should rather be encouraged than fought.”\textsuperscript{112} Some researchers believe the Black Death during the Middle Ages in Europe was exacerbated when the disease was blamed on witches and their feline companions, causing cats to be exterminated and thereby reducing a significant control on the transmission of the disease from flea-infested rats.\textsuperscript{113}

Concern is often raised about feral cat caretakers leaving food outside that would attract rodents. However, caretakers need to be able to monitor, trap and maintain the colony of cats. They would not be able to do this if they free-feed cats. Food and water is put outside during specific daylight hours. If the cats do not come to eat or drink, it is taken inside until the following day when it is placed outside for the same short duration of time. Thus, TNR keeps the area clean and allows the cats to remain in the environment

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Id.; www.cdc.gov/healthypets/animals/cats.htm
\textsuperscript{108} Tabor, pp. 112-113.
\textsuperscript{109} Slater, pp. 38-39.
\textsuperscript{110} Correspondence, Thomas Gecewicz, July 16, 2004.
\textsuperscript{111} Slater, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{112} Berkeley, p. 122.
and continue to provide no-cost rat control, while at the same time stemming future population growth and curbing nuisance behavior such as noise and odor.

Public and Private Endorsements of TNR

Trap, neuter and return programs are receiving growing support from public health officials, academics, animal control officers and animal welfare organizations. Including Thomas Gecewicz, who in addition to his service in Fall River also served as the Director of Public Health in Bridgeport, Connecticut from 2000 through 2004, writes: “I can unequivocally state that I, as a public health official, do openly endorse any and all trap, spay, and neuter programs as a public health benefit and cost savings to any community to which it is offered.” Dr. Jonathan Weisbuch, M.D., the Chief Medical Officer for Maricopa County, states, “The effectiveness of TNR has been demonstrated by the Maricopa County Animal Care and Control Agency in resolving a complex problem of feral cats overpopulating the streets and alleys of 24 of the most populated cities and towns in Arizona. The program has reduced the number of strays, diminished the number of kittens and resulted in a managed community of felines that no longer stimulate the number of community complaints that were common prior to our initiating the program.” Ron Cash, Director of Health for Atlantic City, New Jersey, has also found TNR to be a useful public health tool: “We serve a population of approximately 35 million people who visit this community every year. I need to operate a safe city for the tourists of Atlantic City. When we went shopping for a solution to the feral cat concerns in our community, we found TNR. TNR works.”

Dr. Slater concludes, “In communities where basic services are already available, support for feral cat caretakers (including education) and evaluation of options besides ‘wait and see’ or trap and euthanize should be seriously considered as long-term investments.” Likewise, Dr. Levy states, “TNR has emerged as one viable alternative for nonlethal cat control capable of reducing cat populations over the long term.” Dr. James Ross, DVM, a Distinguished Professor at Tufts University, concurs: “My experience with feral cat control using the trap, neuter, release (TNR) method in the British Virgin Islands has been very positive. It is a humane way to control the feral cat population. I endorse it in most of the ecosystems I’ve experienced…. I trust you will find it as useful as I and others have.”

114 Correspondence, Thomas Gecewicz, July 16, 2004. Mr. Gecewicz also served as Director of Health in Braintree, Mass., from 1977 through 1990, and as Executive Health Officer in Braintree from 1996 through 1999.
117 Slater, p. 76.
118 Levy, p. 387.
119 Correspondence, James Ross, July 16, 2004.
In Dallas, Texas, Kent Robertson, manager of Dallas Animal Services, fully endorses TNR and works with local feral cat groups to implement the method: “TNR is much better than killing cats! I hate doing that, but I didn’t know what else to do.” In Seattle, Don Jordan, executive director of the Seattle Animal Shelter, has also turned his animal control agency towards TNR. “Based on the studies out there, we have to take a more active role in helping to manage feral cats. Communities must recognize that there is value in getting populations fixed and stable. This problem is not going to go away unless we all become involved.”

The ASPCA, a powerful force for animal welfare and one of the nation’s oldest and most respected animal organizations, promoted TNR in a cover story for the Fall 2003 edition of its magazine, Animal Watch and runs its own thriving TNR program in New York City.

**Existing TNR programs in Milwaukee**
The Wisconsin Humane Society receives regular inquiries from community members interested in non-lethal methods to reduce the population of feral cats. Growing knowledge of the success of national TNR programs has prompted citizens to ask the Wisconsin Humane Society for assistance with spay neuter surgeries for feral cats under their supervision. From October 2001 to October 2005, WHS provided free veterinary care/spay or neuter surgery for 656 cats through the program; 453 cats or 69% of the cats come from colonies within the city of Milwaukee; 18% of the cats admitted were adoption candidates and were not released. Cats with life threatening or communicable illnesses were also not released.

Because the TNR program is not legal in Milwaukee, the Wisconsin Humane Society does not trap or release any animals. However, citizens eager to resolve cat overpopulation refuse to have the cats euthanized. That was the case with Victor & Maureen who contacted WHS for assistance about the cats living outside of Victor’s mother’s home in Oak Creek. They began trapping in November 2004 and brought 14 cats that they captured to WHS for surgery, testing and vaccinations. Although several of the cats consistently return, they are not seeing all of the kittens as they had in the past. Victor’s mother is no longer unhappy about the large number of cats on her property and they are all very appreciative of the program.

Several of the volunteer based groups that list cats available for adoption in the Milwaukee area via the internet provide services to stray cats, including TNR services. Many of the individuals use spay neuter services available through the Wisconsin Humane Society; otherwise they could not afford to obtain medical services for the cats. Those groups often work to socialize cats, provide resources for caregivers and help to find homes for those that are or have recently become socialized.

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120 *Alley Cat Action*, Summer 2004, p. 5.
121 Id. at p. 6.
123 See www.aspca.org/tnr
In addition to spay neuter services, WHS has met with citizens interested in promoting non-lethal population control for feral cats. Many citizens involved in caring for cats want Milwaukee to adopt a progressive ordinance to help reduce the feral cat population for their own quality of life and to improve their neighborhood.

MADACC’s Recommendation to Control Feral Cat Populations
On October 14, 2005, MADACC approved the following statement:

MADACC believes that there is a cat overpopulation problem and is recommending that our community investigate all of the options for reducing the number of feral cats. They believe that the key component in resolving this issue is that any and all programs be in compliance with state and local ordinances. If cats are going to be trapped and returned to the wild, MADACC recommends that in addition to spaying the females, male cats receive a vasectomy. The rationale to substitute the neuter/castration surgery of male cats with a vasectomy is being recommended for two specific reasons; it would allow the males to better protect their territory and mate with females who would then not seek other partners and, if they did, the male cats would kill the kittens, thus controlling the growth of the colony. If community members have questions about this recommendation, they can call Len Selkurt, Executive Director of MADACC for clarification at MADACC, 414-649-8640.

WHS Recommendations to Control Feral Cats in Milwaukee
Because of the magnitude of the feral cat population in Milwaukee and the need to contain costs and provide humane, reliable solutions, the Wisconsin Humane Society believes that neutering male cats, in contrast to the recommendation above from MADACC, would be the most effective.

The cost to perform a vasectomy is twice that of a neuter surgery and since there is no conclusive research on the benefits of performing a vasectomy on released cats, their program would be experimental. WHS veterinarians are not in favor of performing vasectomies on male cats for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- **Hormonal levels remain constant after a vasectomy, instead of decreasing after neuter surgery; those hormone levels drive behavior like fighting, spraying, mating and loud vocalizations that result in citizen complaints**
- **Fighting increases the risk of spreading fatal diseases, such as FIV**
- **A vasectomy is more expensive, time consuming and a more invasive surgery**
- **Health benefits of spay/neuter surgery do not exist after vasectomy**
• Spaying and neutering conclusively eliminates unwanted births
• Relying upon adult male cats to kill kittens for population control is inhumane
• Also, a vasectomy makes it more difficult to tell if a cat has been altered by visual inspection

Specific TNR Activities for Milwaukee
On behalf of thousands of constituents who would like to contain tax payer costs and reduce the population of feral cats, the Wisconsin Humane Society would like to provide assistance to realize the benefits of a community-wide Trap-Neuter-Return policy for Milwaukee.

WHS has had several meetings with government officials, but to date, no agreements have been made to promote legislative changes or to adopt proactive practices to reduce cat overpopulation in Milwaukee. A critical component to decrease costs and the population of feral cats in Milwaukee is municipal support in the form of enabling legislation for TNR. Model legislation is attached in Addendum A.

In addition, the Wisconsin Humane Society is willing to provide leadership for a community-wide TNR program in the following ways:

• Recommend/facilitate collaborative opportunities for the key stakeholders
• Develop a public education campaign
• Recruit and train caretaker groups
• Maintain equipment, including a trap bank
• Provide spay neuter surgeries for feral cats
• Enlist the support of local veterinarians to assist feral cats
• Provide monitoring tools for caregivers
• Assist in the reporting about the impact of the TNR program
• Maintain a foster network for feral convalescent care and socialization
• Place socialized feral cats in good homes, whenever possible
• Respond to citizen concerns about feral cats
• Seek charitable support to maintain program viability

Assessing Municipal Fees to Caregivers
A per cat fee paid for by the feral cat colony caregiver to generate revenue for the City has been recommended. WHS discussed that option with several current caregivers. They were opposed to a fee assessment because they feel that they are responsible people who would never allow their own cats to roam. Their neighbors have chosen to do so and they are paying for that irresponsibility by making sacrifices to care for the colony, pay for the food and to conscientiously trap the cats and take care of the daily clean-up. Many of the people have limited incomes and even a small fee could pose a hardship. They feel they are providing a humane public service to enhance their community and charging them a fee is a penalty for doing good works. According to Table B, above, operating costs at animal control continue to rise. Based upon the savings that caregivers are providing to the City in free labor to care for and trap cats for surgery to contain taxpayer costs, a fee on caregivers is perceived by many to be excessive.

31
Conclusion
A feral and stray cat overpopulation crisis exists in Milwaukee resulting in shelter overcrowding, quality of life complaints, burden on tax payers and high euthanasia rates. The methods of the past – a mixture of trap-and-kill and doing nothing – have resulted in increasing government costs and citizen dissatisfaction. Even if the resources were available for animal control to attempt a wholesale removal of the cats, the effort would fail due to feral population dynamics and public opposition. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) has been proven to reduce the feral cat population and although it is not a quick fix, it holds out the possibility of turning the crisis around, stemming the flood of homeless cats into shelters, lowering costs and resolving complaints.

TNR permanently reduces the number of feral and free roaming cats, it works where all other methods have failed and over time, it can improve public health and safety, quality of life, decrease taxpayer costs and concerns about bird predation. Dozens of successful communities have implemented this effective strategy with the active support of both the government and private citizens.

The Wisconsin Humane Society, in partnership with caring community members is willing to work with community leaders and government officials to help reduce the population of feral cats. Citizens interested in volunteering, providing support or advocating for feral cats can contact the Wisconsin Humane Society at 414-ANIMALS or e-mail at feralcats@wihumane.org.
Addendum A

Model Ordinance to Reduce Feral Cat Populations

It is unlawful for any person to intentionally provide food, water, or other forms of sustenance to a feral cat or feral cat colony unless the person has furnished a signed statement to the Wisconsin Humane Society agreeing to comply with the following conditions:

a. Annual registration with the Wisconsin Humane Society as caring for feral cats;

b. Assure responsibility and arrangements for feeding and shelter for the cat or cat colony regularly throughout the year, including weekends, holidays and vacations of the person registered according to guidelines that insure public health and safety;

c. Regular and frequent trapping of cats over the age of eight (8) weeks to have them spayed or neutered;

d. Arrange to provide veterinary care for those cats that display medical problems;

e. Identify all trapped cats by tipping their ears; and

f. Arrange to have all trapped cats vaccinated for rabies, in addition to any other vaccination or immunization imposed by the State.
Addendum B

MARICOPA COUNTY
Operation FELIX
(Feral Education & Love Instead of X-termination)

Resolution
To designate Operation FELIX as the officially approved means to solving feral cat related problems in Maricopa County.

Whereas, there are millions of feral cats now living in the United States and tens of thousands in Maricopa County as a result of natural increase and continued influx of abandoned and stray un-sterilized domestic cats;

Whereas, this population has been created and perpetuated by human failure to control the breeding of domestic household cats;

Whereas, this population has been largely ignored in most communities in the United States;

Whereas, scientific evidence and experience in the United States and other countries has shown that the non-lethal trap-neuter-return method, accompanied by on-going feral cat colony management, is a humane and effective means for controlling and reducing the feral cat population while providing for the welfare of feral cats;

Whereas, caring individuals and groups all across the country and Maricopa County are already effectively applying non-lethal management to control feral cat populations;

Whereas, the County of Maricopa embraces the sanctity of all life and the importance of preserving and protecting life wherever possible;

Be it therefore resolved, that the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors does hereby endorse non-lethal trap-neuter-return, when accompanied by ongoing feral cat management, as the most effective, humane method of controlling feral cat populations in Maricopa County and in so doing better provides for the welfare of these animals while better serving our communities' public health and safety concerns.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunto set our hands this 15th day of September, 2002.

MARICOPA COUNTY
By: [Signature]
Chairman

ATTEST:
By: [Signature]
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
Addendum C

National Position Statements

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)  The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) is pleased to endorse the 2004 American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) Position Statement on Free-Roaming Abandoned and Feral Cats. “AAHA is very supportive of the comprehensive approach taken by AAFP to address the serious and widespread problem of free-roaming abandoned and feral cats,” says Dennis Feinberg, DVM, AAHA president. “The veterinary profession can play an important role in preventing abandonment and in providing education to clients about responsible cat ownership and feral cat issues.”

The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) has a comprehensive Position Statement on Free-Roaming Abandoned and Feral Cats.124 The AAFP supports appropriately managed cat colonies. Humane alternatives to the destruction of healthy cats for animal control purposes should be actively pursued by veterinary, humane, and wildlife organizations. Such alternatives include increased sterilization and humane education and, the goal of colony management should be the eventual reduction of the colony through attrition; managed colonies are an interim solution to the problem of free-roaming abandoned and feral cats.

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Policy Statement
“The ASPCA supports Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the most humane and effective strategy for managing the feral cat population…..”125

Humane Society of the United States  The HSUS believes that TNR, with ongoing management by dedicated caretakers, currently provides the most effective long-term method for decreasing the numbers of feral cats. In addition, for pet cats lucky enough to have a responsible home, we advocate keeping those cats indoors or safely confined. It's critical that cats be spayed and neutered before they have the opportunity to produce even one litter and that people not abandon their cats.

Cat Fanciers’ Association (CFA) Guidance Statement on Feral Cats: “CFA advocates the humane treatment of all cats including those who are unowned and considered to be feral. We support the concept of managed colonies of unowned/feral cats on public or private property as a viable means to protect these cats and stabilize their populations.

Petfinder (from “TNR: The Humane Alternative” in Petfinder’s online library)
“Whatever the total number of ferals in the United States actually is, bringing that number under control is a daunting task. TNR is the one program to date that offers a solution without sacrificing healthy cats and the humanity of those who care for them.”

124 For entire AAFP Position Statement on Free-Roaming Abandoned and Feral Cats, see http://www.aafponline.org/resources/statements/feral_cats.htm.

125 See Addendum C for full ASPCA Statement on Trap-Neuter-Return.
Addendum D

ASPCA STATEMENT ON TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN

The ASPCA supports Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) as the most humane and effective strategy for managing the feral cat population. The ASPCA Cares program, launched in 2001, operates mobile spay/neuter vans that serve pet owners, shelters and rescuers in New York City’s five boroughs. In 2003, over 1,600 feral cats were spayed/neutered as part of the ASPCA Cares TNR initiatives. In addition to providing free surgeries for feral cats, ASPCA Cares ensures that all cats are vaccinated against rabies at the time of surgery, and ear-tipped to clearly identify their status as sterile, healthy cats. The program also maintains a bank of humane traps, which are loaned to rescuers at no charge. Hundreds of local feral cat caretakers have been trained to practice TNR in feral cat workshops taught by Neighborhood Cats Inc. at the ASPCA headquarters. In addition, ASPCA Cares has augmented this training with on-going workshops in feral kitten socialization to help rescuers socialize and re-home the offspring of feral cats. This facilitates the reduction in size of feral colonies.

TNR is an integral part of the ASPCA’s long-term strategy to end the euthanasia of adoptable animals in New York City. It is our goal to increase the number of cats spayed/neutered via our mobile clinics by the end of 2004 and to continue promotion of TNR with hands-on assistance. This will include on-going participation in large-scale collaborative projects such as the successful spay/neuter of 250 cats living at the city’s correctional facility on Rikers Island in 2002, among others.

August 12, 2004
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