

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

COMMENTARY: Treat the root causes of animal overpopulation

By Mike Hainer For the Sun-News

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Recently, the small annual funding for the Spay Neuter Action Program by the city of Las Cruces has been widely discussed. By apparent City Council consensus, SNAP was excluded from competing for the city's community funding for the fiscal year beginning July 1. SNAP was directed to apply for funding for next fiscal year at the recently created, but not yet active Animal Services Board. This new board meets for the first time on Feb. 5, and does not have a method for accepting proposals. The folks in charge apparently closed one door before they successfully opened the other. That means spay and neuter services for outlying areas of our county will suffer and the number of animals flowing into our severely overcrowded shelter will not be reduced.

The director of the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley intends to offer affordable spay-and-neuter services in the near future at our community animal shelter. This is a very positive step forward. At the same time, the director stated in the front-page story of the Las Cruces Sun-News on Dec. 22 that there will be no funds available for SNAP next year to help increase spay-and-neuter services throughout our county.

How often are the available choices portrayed as "your way" or "my way" with no alternative. The real problem is that we have taken in approximately 17,000 animals into the ASCMV in 2008 and killed approximately 13,000 of them at great cost, just because of the severe pet overpopulation problem in the county. The budget for ASCMV from your tax dollars was essentially doubled for the upcoming year. It is simply too costly to continue to only catch and kill all the homeless pets or loose animals. Increased spay and neuter by SNAP and the ASCMV treats the real cause of the problem.

On the positive side, there are hundreds of citizens and taxpayers who understand that both SNAP and ASCMV must alter as many pets as possible in our community, as fast as we can, for the least cost, and for as many years as we can. Otherwise the number of animals arriving at ASCMV will continue to increase each year, the number of animals killed due to pet overpopulation will increase each year, and our community will continue to experience the horrific social and economic costs.

SNAP has recently been operating the sheriff's vehicle as a surgical suite in the county. Sixty percent of the animals who find their way to the shelter are from the county. Let your county commissioner or city councilor know if you want your tax dollars spent treating the root problem through increased spay and neuter services from both SNAP and ASCMV. Otherwise be prepared for the costs of catching and killing to increase each year. Make your views known on these issues at the Feb. 2 City Council meeting and the Feb. 5 meeting of the Animal Services Board. Visit snapnewmexico.org for their van schedule and qualifying information, or call (575) 524-9265.

Mike Hainer is president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.