

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the positive side

Commentary: Managing cat colonies hard

By Mike Hainer/For the Sun-News

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Cats have now outpaced dogs as the No. 1 choice for pets in the U.S. Female cats have up to 29 litters in 10 years. Those cats are also having litters at the same time. The number of cats resulting is astronomical. Cats can live as pets in our homes, but are also very successful in forming breeding colonies wherever food sources like trash cans and dumpsters exist. Animal control services are not able to trap entire cat colonies in our neighborhoods even if they had the manpower, funds or determination to do so. Without effective cat management programs, our neighborhoods can become overrun with stray and feral cats while both the euthanasia rates and the costs to taxpayers skyrocket. This is not just theory. This is the case in Doña Ana County and in many communities across southern New Mexico, where mild winter temperatures allow cat colonies to exist outdoors all year long.

Many of us are aware of the Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release programs that have proven successful in cat colony management. On the positive side, the National Animal Control Association has formally adopted a Community Cat Management Policy that supports the use of TNVR programs managed by community volunteers.

NACA President Mark Kumpf recently said, "what (NACA is) saying is that the old standard isn't good enough anymore. You need to be able to be flexible with your community animal management strategies for both cats and dogs. And if you continue to follow the old philosophy, eventually everybody else is going to pass you by. Progressive communities are seeing that being flexible in their strategy allows for economic savings. The cost for picking up and simply euthanizing and disposing of animals is horrendous, in both the philosophical and economic sense."

City and county budgets must be reduced during our economic downturn. Community cat management programs are successful in reducing the number of cats going into public animal shelters for euthanasia. County ordinances are being revised in areas of the U.S. to allow stewardship of cat colonies by community volunteers using a blend of public tax dollars and animal welfare agency dollars to pay for TNVR services to control reproduction, to improve cat health, and to stop the unending drain of taxpayer dollars on "catch and kill" systems that just do not work. Perhaps, we are ready to demonstrate these successful methods to address the severe cat overpopulation in our local communities.

In the meantime, protect your cat. Always use a collar with identification. Have your cat vaccinated and micro-chipped for identification. Know that our communities do trap cats that are outdoors. Know that the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley is overrun with intake of cats each week. Know that these animals must be rapidly killed to create space for more cats unless identification is available to return them to their owners.

Visit the Web sites of NACA and the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico at www.nacanet.org and www.hssnm.org.

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