

On the positive side: NMSU sets example with feral cats

By Michelle Corella For the Sun-News

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Spring is in the air! The trees and flowers are beginning to sprout new buds, as tender new shoots of grass spring forth from the earth. And, in some areas of Doña Ana County, this yearly ritual includes many litters of kittens — the offspring of free-roaming cats, some “owned” and some not.

Sadly, most of these kittens will not live to see their first birthday. They will fall victim to illness or predators, and many of them will be trapped and taken to the animal shelter, where they will, most likely, be euthanized for lack of resources (i.e., physical space, socialization, adoption, etc.).

This cycle has been recurring for years, with no apparent end in sight. There is, however, an area within Doña Ana County where kittens are a rarity: the main campus of New Mexico State University.

Since 2002, the NMSU Feral Cat Management Program (FCaMP) has actively managed the main campus feline population using a technique known as TNR, which stands for trap-neuter-release. The cats are trapped, surgically sterilized, vaccinated, microchipped and eartipped, and returned to campus where they were trapped.

A small group of volunteers, out of their own pockets, maintains feeding stations discretely located throughout main campus, so that the cats have access to food and water at all times.

When FCaMP came into existence, the main campus population was estimated at 200 to 250 cats. Historically, NMSU grounds employees were periodically tasked with trapping as many cats as possible, then taking them to the animal shelter where they were euthanized. However, despite their efforts, the population size remained relatively constant.

Since 2002, the trap-remove-kill methodology has been replaced by TNR, and FCaMP has sterilized 192 cats and has found homes for 65 cats.

Currently, the main campus population is about 100 cats, with only a handful remaining to be TNR'd. Last year, only two litters of kittens were born, and so far this year, no kittens have been born on main campus. All of this was accomplished with absolutely no expense to the university or taxpayers!

TNR is a win-win situation for everyone concerned, since it actually reduces the free-roaming cat population in a humane manner, over time. Whether a bird lover, a resident who is tired of cats using their landscaping as a litterbox, or a taxpayer who hates seeing their tax dollars spent on killing cats, the TNR philosophy ensures fewer cats in the long run. And since only sick or injured cats are euthanized, the cats are the biggest winners of all.

NOTE: Please don't use this article as an excuse to dump unwanted kitties on the NMSU campus! They will disrupt the existing campus colonies, and be forced to fight for food and shelter. Cats are territorial and will defend their “space,” which is why TNR works.

Michelle Corella is the director of the NMSU Feral Cat Management Program.