

On the Positive Side

SNAP plays key role in reducing overpopulation

By Joy Miller For the Sun-News

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One of the most familiar and visible animal welfare organizations in Las Cruces is the Spay/Neuter Action Program (SNAP). It occupies a central place in the coalition against pet overpopulation.

Doña Ana County (population 210,000) euthanizes over 11,000 dogs and cats a year, more than 70 percent of all animals received at the shelter. In comparison, Manhattan, N.Y. (population 1.6 million) euthanizes fewer than 3,000 per year. This dramatic disparity illustrates the scope of the pet overpopulation problem we face in Doña Ana County.

SNAP is a 501c3 non-profit organization benefiting companion animals in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. SNAP's exclusive mission is to reduce pet overpopulation and the resulting, unnecessary deaths of healthy, adoptable animals that are relinquished to our animal shelter.

SNAP facilitates affordable "birth control" for pets, subsidizing the cost of spay/neuter surgeries for pets coming from qualifying, low-income households. The SNAP program is modeled on successful means-tested programs from throughout the United States that have demonstrated that targeted spay/neuter assistance programs dramatically reverse the trend of pet overpopulation. Statistical models indicate that, for our population size, we would need to sterilize a minimum of 450 animals per month. SNAP currently averages 300 sterilizations a month.

Our goal is 450 sterilizations per month. In order to reach this goal, SNAP needs (1) increased veterinary capacity (more vets doing more surgeries); (2) increased funding for education, outreach, publicity and spay/neuter services; and (3) broadened community participation in the spay/neuter effort.

Never has there been a more important moment to call for broadened community participation and awareness. At present, multiple animal welfare groups in Doña Ana County have come together over the past five years to coordinate services to further benefit the welfare of animals. However, change at bureaucratic levels has not only slowed but has reversed direction on many accounts.

Two examples regarding spay/neuter are (1) a proposal to change chaining ordinances to an "OK" to full-time life on chains for dogs, and (2) a thumbs-up to pets having as many as five litters per year. Beyond the cruelty of these ordinances, they assure that the pet overpopulation in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County will be a permanent, continually escalating crisis.

On behalf of SNAP and all animal advocates who support spay/neuter, I urge all who love animals to make our city and county's pet overpopulation a topic of conversation everywhere. Make a special effort to let your government representatives know that you expect to see ongoing advancement in animal welfare, just as you expect improvements in all aspects of life in our community.

Pet overpopulation is truly a daily crisis in Dona Ana County. Thirty dogs, cats puppies, and kittens will unnecessarily die today, tomorrow and every day until our community steps up in a united front to say no more.

Joy Miller has been an advocate for animals in Las Cruces since she moved to the area in 1997. She has served as a volunteer for Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary, the Animal Services Center (shelter), and SNAP Spay and Neuter Action Program.