



On the Positive Side: Community cat management handbook available for download

By Frank Bryce

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In the words of "A-Team" leader Hannibal Smith (George Peppard), "I love it when a plan comes together!"

As a result of the recent revision to the Doña Ana County Animal Control Ordinance, the community cat management effort is beginning to take shape.

This management effort between cooperating local government agencies, nonprofit organizations and residents is most often referred to as "Trap, Neuter and Return" or TNR.

With the lead taken by the Doña Ana County Commissioners, the Coalition for Pets and People and its partnering animal advocacy groups — through a dedicated group called the Community Cat Management Team — is assembling resources and recruiting community cat colony caretakers.

Helping the cats means trapping, spaying and neutering, vaccinating, eartipping and micro-chipping existing cat colony individuals and, when returned to their colony area, insuring supervision, care and monitoring by their caretakers. Caretakers will maintain a record of colony members, including a physical description, microchip number, medical history and assessment of adoptability. This program addresses the concerns and issues associated with cat colonies that exist throughout Doña Ana County now while preventing unwanted litters of kittens and reducing the number of healthy cats being killed through the ineffective animal control trap and kill program.

In a very positive step, the second edition of a publication by Neighborhood Cats Inc., "Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook: The Guide to Trap-Neuter- Return for the Feral Cat Caretaker," is being acquired for review and use by the administrators, supervisors and volunteer participants in Doña Ana County. In the foreword, the publication sets the following dramatic and positive tone: "In 2006, The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's most influential animal welfare organization, officially endorsed Trap-Neuter-Return, affirming the power of TNR to impact lives for the better. Other national animal welfare groups are also now solidly in support of TNR, including ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Society, Maddie's Fund and PetSmart Charities. In 2011, as numerous other municipalities have done, the New York City Council made TNR its official policy for managing freeroaming cats.

"Today, the discussion has shifted from whether TNR should be practiced to how it can be spread most widely and effectively," it states.

The 162-page handbook covers just about every imaginable aspect of community cat management, gently refutes the myths and misguided fears often argued by those less informed and provides an effective and humane approach to resolving community cat issues. While it is not a romance story or spell-binding mystery tale, this manual carries the reader down the path to saving lives, reducing animal control costs and creating a more compassionate environment for all our residents — human, cat or wildlife. A copy of the manual is available for review and download at no cost at neighborhoodcats.org.

It was a big step for our county commissioners to provide the avenue to pursue this program and they deserve a huge expression of gratitude for their compassion and far-sightedness. As the opportunity arises to assist this effort, please join us with contributions of your time and donations.

Frank Bryce is president of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico. Interested guest authors can contact HSSNM at 575-523-8020.