

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

Global support is seen for cat proliferation problem

By Frank Bryce

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Quite often we find support or action outside our local arena that sheds a positive light on issues in our back yard. The most recent Humane Society of the United States Animal Sheltering's The Scoop E-News reported that the International City/ County Managers Association (ICMA) endorses the "Trap, Neuter, Return, Maintain" program and similar efforts being conducted for community cats across the nation and around the world.

This further demonstrates the support for a more humane, more cost effective and greater public safety method to address community cat issues facing cities and counties like Las Cruces and Doña Ana.

The new pamphlet "Managing Community Cats: a Guide for Municipal Leaders" is a reasonably concise publication that addresses the core issues with which our Las Cruces City Councilors have been struggling, in regard to the proposed city animal control ordinance revision.

The information has been furnished to the councilors and the city manager for their review and consideration. The information bolsters the animal control ordinance revision action taken by the Doña Ana County Commissioners back in December. A quick review of the ICMA website touts a membership of more than 9,000 city and county administrators who now overwhelmingly support TNR efforts.

The site contains additional information, such as the "Win-Win Strategies for Communities in Managing Homeless Cats" by Sharon Lawrence of Austin, Texas.

Lawrence states 12 strategies in her article, most of which have been, or are being, implemented in Doña Ana County — and will be in Las Cruces if the City Councilors adopt the animal control ordinance revision as proposed.

Strategies in a nutshell:

- Understand that homeless cats aren't exclusively (or even primarily) unsociable, sick, starving animals that would be better off dead. Nor are they animals that no human would miss or mourn.
- Reject all efforts to impose feeding bans on community residents.
- Support an aggressive Trap-Neuter-Return-Maintain program.
- Ensure that groups/individuals doing TNRM have access to free or low-cost spay/neuter and vaccination services.
- Explain to the community how to co-exist harmoniously with homeless cats.
- Do extensive outreach to owners and managers of multiple cat situations.
- Educate the public on the importance of spaying and neutering.
- Use modern technology to tackle head-on the problems of lost pets. Create a comprehensive, free regional lost and found online network.
- Microchip, microchip.
- One ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure.
- Work with neighbor governments to approach the problem from a county/township/regional perspective.
- Data, data. The importance of data is that without it, local governments don't know what they are doing isn't working or that better outcomes are possible at less cost or free.

It is our understanding that the TNR program continues to successfully develop in the county areas, but every day we receive additional contacts with city residents who are interested in participating in the effort. Those residents, however, are still relegated to operating under the radar due to the current city animal control ordinance prohibition involving TNR efforts.

The revised animal control ordinance is being implemented in the county as proposed, and it is hoped the city councilors will adopt the city TNR wording as proposed.

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

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