

On the Positive Side: Coalition votes for community cat program

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On a positive and well-supported action with an overwhelming majority vote by a broad range of animal advocacy organizations, a community cat program initiative has been launched.

The program is often referred to as 'Trap, Neuter and Release' or 'TNR.'

The following statement was prepared for inclusion in public information:

"Members of the Council for the Coalition for Pets and People voted Aug. 13 to support an amendment to the proposed animal control ordinances that would facilitate a proposed plan to be presented for consideration to the city of Las Cruces council and to the Doña Ana County Commission for implementation of a Trap Neuter and Return program for community cats in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County.

It is understood and accepted that given current public policy, the representatives on the Council from the Animal Control agencies of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County cannot take a position on the TNR initiative, which as proposed, is contrary to the current Animal Control Ordinances."

This effort has been ongoing in discussions, deliberations, reviews and research for several years in our community and always coming back to the simple facts that the current trap and kill by the animal control departments has not resolved the problem, is costly in operation with lack of measurable success, failure of those who maintain 'illegal' community cat colonies to comply with what appears as unnecessary and severe draconian measures against community cats, and the inhumane killing of healthy community cats.

The arguments against community cat programs often rest on fear of diseases such as rabies or others transmittable to humans, undocumented guesstimates and anecdotal observations concerning numbers and impact to humans or wildlife, and clinging to gray areas attributed to state statute.

Following are excerpts that shed light on the status of some issues. From the Epidemiology & Response Division Health Data Zoonotic Disease, Rabies Health Data, "...The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Domestic animals account for less than 10% of the reported rabies cases, with cats, cattle, and dogs most often reported rabid.' New Mexico reports that 'There have been six confirmed rabid animals in New Mexico in 2013: two skunks and a bat from Eddy County, a bat from Santa Fe County, a bat from Bernalillo County, and a fox from Socorro County.'" In *Zoonotic Diseases Associated With Free-Roaming Cats*, Zoonoses Public Health 2012, Gerhold, R.W. and Jessup, D.A., the article states "...Human exposure to rabies is largely associated with free-roaming cats because of people being more likely to come in contact with cats, large free-roaming cat populations, and lack of stringent rabies vaccination programs... And TNR not only reduces the risk of transmission from domestic animals to humans, but also serves as a barrier between wildlife and humans..."

TNR improves the quality of life for existing colonies, prevents the birth of more cats, and reduces the number of cats over time.

Additionally, many groups that provide resources for TNR have calculated that the costs associated with TNR are considerably less than those associated with removal, shelter care, and euthanasia of feral cats.

With the public's support the coalition's goal is to implement a well-managed Trap, Neuter, Return program in Doña Ana County which results in the humane management of free-roaming cats. This effort is to reduce the number of free-roaming cats in the county and to reduce the number of free-roaming cats entering the shelter to be killed. Nonprofit animal organizations in Las Cruces shall provide volunteers and encourage community volunteers.

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