

Name of City Council Member
Address

Date

Dear Council Member (insert last name),

I am writing this letter to address our town's current homeless cat population and to offer some helpful suggestions to the council in humanely managing the situation. As you are probably aware, there are several methods of controlling cat populations; however, only one method provides not only a humane solution, but also an effective and less costly solution. The method I am referring to is Trap-Neuter-Return or TNR.

The preferred nonlethal method of controlling feral or stray cats is by implementing a Trap-Neuter-Return program. In practicing TNR, cats are caught in humane traps, spayed/neutered, vaccinated, and returned to the site. Kittens/cats who are friendly or can be socialized are placed into an adoption program to find permanent homes. Cat rescue organizations, such as Alley Cat Rescue, have over 40 years of experience working with feral cats, which has taught us that TNR immediately reduces colony sizes, because all kittens and tame cats are removed. Feral cats, who cannot be adopted, are returned to the site, where supervised, long-term care is ensured by dedicated volunteers.

The benefits of TNR are numerous. TNR stabilizes populations at manageable levels, by stopping the reproductive cycle. Over time, the natural cycle of attrition will maintain the stable numbers and any new cats to the colony will be sterilized. Sterilization eliminates common complaints associated with mating behaviors, such as fighting, yowling, and spraying.

TNR is also more effective and less costly than repeated eradication attempts. Complete eradication attempts fail and in some cases are counterproductive because they cause a "vacuum effect." Biologist Roger Tabor explains that removing cats all together will allow for more cats to quickly fill in the vacant space. However, "if a colony is neutered and returned to its area it will continue to hold the location and keep other cats out by its presence." In addition, in numerous cases when feral cats are removed from an area, the rodent populations explode, causing further problems. Lastly, TNR is humane to the animals and fosters compassion within the community.

Also, cats who have been trapped and evaluated by a veterinarian are healthier and are less likely to transmit diseases (to other cats and to humans). Females who have been spayed are less susceptible to uterine, ovarian, or mammary cancer, and males who are neutered are less likely to get testicular tumors or have prostate problems. In addition, cats who are "fixed" tend to be less aggressive (fight less, which decreases disease transmission) and wander less (they will keep other cats from joining the colony and it makes managing them easier). Lastly, a rabies vaccine is administered; which provides a buffer zone between wildlife and humans, and decreases the risk of the public coming in contact with an unvaccinated cat.

The traditional catch-and-kill method has been proven not to work, as I explained above, and another outdated approach to the problem is to pass ordinances prohibiting people from feeding community cats. Such regulations will only heighten the problem rather than help. The logic behind such bans is that

if there is no food available, the cats will go away. This is not true. "Starving out" cats will only make the situation worse for the community and for the cats. Plus, it will put those individuals willing to take care of and give homes to community cats under fire, when all they are trying to do is help the animals. Instead of blaming the feeders and criminalizing their actions, we should encourage their acts of compassion by assisting them with the resources and information available to care for and sterilize the animals. After all, it is not their fault the cats are homeless; they are just trying to be upstanding citizens, by taking it upon themselves to help the animals.

Simply prohibiting individuals from feeding community cats will not solve the problem. Where there is a large number of people living (food source), there will be cats. And if individuals continue to not spay/neuter their pets, allowing them to reproduce, there will be more stray/feral animals. Ultimately, we all need to work together, if we are to control the pet overpopulation. The current trend of scapegoating cats is very dangerous, for it fosters cruelty to animals, and the time spent placing blame is only time wasted. Plus, nonlethal methods for controlling their populations exist and should be advocated by all who are trying to instill a more compassionate ethic towards the earth and all its inhabitants.

Should you need further information on TNR and feral cats, please visit Alley Cat Rescue's website at www.SaveACat.org. ACR has published a feral cat handbook to shed some light on the facts and myths surrounding feral cats; if you should need assistance in your decision-making process and to help you in organizing and managing TNR programs, please let ACR know and they will send you a copy. ACR can be reached at acr@saveacat.org or by calling 301-277-5595. Thank you for your time and compassion for our feline friends!

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Your Name Printed

Your Contact Information