

**Orange County  
Animal Services Advisory Board  
Free Roaming Cat Task Force  
Cat Caretakers & Free-Roaming Cats Listening Session  
Wednesday, April 9, 2014  
Meeting Summary  
Prepared by Suzanne Roy**

**Task Force Members Present:** DeWana Anderson, DVM (Chair), Warren Porter, Aviva Scully, Judy Miller, Suzanne Roy

**Orange County Animal Services (OCAS) Staff Present:** Bob Marotto

**Public in Attendance:** 11 members of the public were present including representatives from Independent Animal Rescue; Dr. Wendy Royce, formerly of the Pet Overpopulation Patrol mobile spay neuter clinic; Sarah Reichman, Orange County Leader for the Humane Society of the United States; and a number of individuals who are caretakers of free roaming cat colonies.

**I. Introduction:**

After task force introductions and explanation of the meeting topic by Dr. Anderson, Mr. Marotto began the listening session with a recap of the situation with cats at OCAS. He explained that kitten season is upon us and that kitten season drives shelter operations:

- Last year 161 litters of kittens came into OCAS with 625 individual kittens.
- Shelter population of cats looks like a bell curve. It's driven by seasonal reproduction of felines.
- Average hold time for kittens at OCAS is 21 days vs. 11 days for puppies
- Average hold time for cats is 27 days vs. 16 days for dogs.
- It takes longer to place cats than dogs given the larger number of cats coming in to the shelter. Put another way, cats must be held longer for a successful outcome than dogs. (annual 20,000 board days for dogs vs. 35,000 board days for cats.
- Intakes and euthanasia rates down significantly since 2008 at least in part due to subsidized and targeted spay neuter.
- Cat intakes fell from 2,150 in 2008 to 1,400 in 2011. (Drop in intake began *prior to* OCAS' decision to end practice of Animal Control Officers (ACOs) trapping cats. )
- Euthanasia rate for cats fell from 50 per 100 in 2008 to current rate of 25 per 100 – cut in half in five years.
- Work of caretakers and targeted spay neuter has made a difference.

**II. Listening Session:**

Numerous caretakers shared their experiences dealing with feral cats in a variety of settings and discussed the issues and challenges they face in caring for feral cat colonies.

Major issues/challenges that were discussed:

- **LEGAL STATUS OF FERAL CATS (CARETAKERS, PROPERTY OWNER CONSENT)**
  - **Ownership** - Who owns the cats? The caretaker? The property owner? IAR or another group that does the spay neuter?
  - **Rabies Requirements** - Who is responsible for revaccinating cats? Will caretakers be fined for failing to re-vaccinate a cat they can't catch?
  - **Liability** - Who is liable for damage or injury caused by the cats?
  - **Trespass** – Property owner consent and need to convince property owners of the benefits of TNR/managing feral cat colonies.
  - **Rights** - What rights does a caretaker have to protect the cats against development or property owners who want to get rid of them?

**ACTION ITEM:** *Secure an objective legal analysis of the current county ordinance as it pertains to feral cats and caretakers. Presently there are a lot of misconceptions out there, and it would be useful to have clarification.*

- **COST OF FOOD**
  - One caretaker reported that since closure of a non-profit food bank, she pays \$240 per month to feed 3-4 dozen cats. Difficult to do on a fixed income.
- **AVAILABILITY OF SPAY NEUTER SERVICES**
  - Increase awareness of availability of subsidized s/n services.
  - Bring s/n services to trailer parks/apartment complexes where there are free roaming cat issues
  - Address people who fall outside current income requirements for subsidized s/n services.

**ACTION ITEM:** *Consider changing income requirement to address a population of people whose cats are not being subsidized because they're falling outside the criteria we now have. Would need at least implicit support from the Board of County Commissioners for change to current criteria.*

- **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**
  - Educate about managing cat colonies – removing colonies will lead to more cats coming in; stable colonies are healthy, vaccinated, etc.
  - Communicate to property owners that we are providing a service that will help them.

- Address public health concerns: Decreasing any public health risks (real or perceived) by decreasing the population over time, improving health (vaccinations, nutrition, etc.).
- Convince property owners/associations to require that only sterilized pets will be allowed in rental units, condominiums, developments, etc.

**ACTION ITEM:** *Explore creation of a framework for registering/training caretakers that could legitimize them and facilitate collaboration with property owners.* If involved in an official public/private partnership program, property owners may be more likely to cooperate.

### III. Summary

Based on conversation, the following issues must be addressed.

- Definition – What is TNR and why is it being done?
- Legalities
  - Ownership
  - Trespass
  - Rabies
- Licensing/training of caretakers
- Tracking of cats
  - Identification of cats: tattoo or microchip?
  - Who would be registrant of identified cats? County? Non-profit? Caretaker?
  - Database – who maintains? Private partners or OCAS? Could use \$20 Fix as a model – non-profit maintains records, but county has access to them at any time.
- Testing for disease
  - Cost-prohibitive?
  - Only when funding available?
  - Some tests not reliable – high false positives in leukemia tests
  - How would testing affect public support for program?
- Returning Cats:
  - Only to maintained colonies or just returned to location they were trapped from?

- IAR position: If a healthy cat comes into program, no problem returning it to area it was trapped from. If emaciated cat, can't return.
- Funding:
  - Creating a program and having a public/private partnership could open numerous funding/donation opportunities
- Community Education
- Affordable & accessible spay neuter services