

Free roaming cat task force draft charge

Statistics from OCAS show that in 2012 animal services handled 1,468 cats in our facility. Free roaming cats were a significant source of these Orange County cats and constituted a large percentage of these animals. Free roaming cats could be the loose, friendly cat in your neighborhood that may associate with one or more families or a feral cat or colony of feral cats. When these cats enter into a sheltering system, there's very little hope of them being placed. Julie Levy, DVM PhD published in 2004 (Humane Strategies for controlling feral cat populations JAVMA< Vol 225, No 9, Nov 1, 2004)) that there are 50 million free roaming cats in the US and an additional 73 million cats that are owned. Of these 123 million cats, 2% of the free roaming cats are sterilized and sadly only 85% of the owned population is sterilized allowing an annual kitten population growth of 147 million from free roaming cats and 33 million from the owned unsterilized felines. How many of these are in Orange County, it's basically impossible to say, but we can say that there is no shortage of cats and kittens entering the shelter system each year.

In 2012, we passed a strategic plan to manage pet overpopulation with the goal of decreasing euthanasia to less than 32% of intake and at the same time we stopped the long time practice of trap and kill method of control. Current data shows that we are at our goal, but we don't feel like we've truly accomplished our goals until we have a way to decrease these numbers further.

We have cultured a society that cares deeply for our pets welfare for the welfare of our community and for the welfare of wildlife species, so we need an holistic approach to managing this cat population that includes;

1. Better health for the free roaming cat; spay/neuter programs will decrease litters of kittens and decrease fights and cat to cat disease transmission of viral disease and parasites allowing longer healthier lives for these cats.
2. Better health for our community members by decreasing zoonotic disease transmission potential with rabies vaccine, less fecal transmission of intestinal parasites and protozoan parasites. CDC lists 5 diseases spread in poorer populations of US citizens but thought to be hugely under reported and under recognized, toxoplasma, toxocara, tritrichomonas, Chagas and neurocystercyrosis.
3. Wildlife that may be threatened by free roaming cats will have the opportunity to expand.
4. Animal services will decrease overall short and long term costs by handling fewer cats, by following fewer nuisance calls, and by euthanizing fewer cats.

We can accomplish these goals when we work together as a community to;

1. **Educate our citizens** about appropriate reproductive strategies and vaccines (rabies) and their overall benefits for the pet focusing on school children (thus parents) about feline pet responsibility. This may be through OCAS or public/private partnership.
2. **Identify pets** with permanent identification that will allow easier tracking of pet/owner relationships (2012 data showed that of the 1468 cats presented to OCAS only 3% or 44 cats were reclaimed by their original owners) to decrease the overall time each pet

is held in the shelter environment and make it easier to identify vaccinated, neutered, cared for pets. Identification could be a collar with name tag or Rabies tag or microchip.

3. **Identify Partnering Care Groups** to locate and work with groups or free roaming or feral cats and to spay/neuter, identify and vaccinate these animals. The value of these partnerships can't be expressed enough. Without proper management, watchfulness and responsibility for these free roaming cats we (OCAS) will not be able to keep up with the status of these animals. Make this a reward based program.
4. **Put in place internal and external requirements to make TNR acceptable** to a cross section of the community and professionals. The internal ones may be those identified by Drs. Williams and Haskell (state public health veterinarians) in their discussion in the Epi-Newsletter. The external ones need to be identified and tracking instigated, but the management of these external requirements will likely be the responsibility of the TNR partner as many of these animals are located on private properties. *Both internal and external parameters need to be monitored with data collection available to the county commissioners and citizens to measure outcome and give merit to the program.*
5. **Identify and help support low cost options** for families that qualify for DHHS assistance to insure all animals have a chance to have a healthy long life.