

Free Roaming Cat (FRC) Subcommittee Meeting Notes

Prepared by: Suzanne Roy

January 8, 2014

Members in attendance: Dewana Anderson (chair), Aviva Scully, Suzanne Roy, Warren Porter.

Members Absent: Judy Miller

Staff in attendance: Bob Marotto, Animal Services Director

UNC Kenan-Flagler Fellows in attendance: Eleanor Nave and Maria Grimshaw

Public in Attendance: 5 members of the public attended all or part of the meeting.

1. Agenda approval

Agenda amended to include research update from Fellows then approved unanimously.

2. Review and approval of December 11, 2013, task force summary

Approved unanimously.

3. Public comments for items not on the agenda

None

4. Research Update from Fellows

Eleanor Nave reported on her conversations with Jennifer Federico, DVM, director of Wake County Animal Center and with Drs. Carl Williams and Marilyn Haskel, public health veterinarians with the NC Division of Public Health.

Highlights of conversation with Dr. Frederico:

- Is very committed to TNR and believes that the county can't euthanize its way out of cat overpopulation.
- Willing to connect with everyone involved in issue in Orange County and answer questions.
- Wake County has its own colony of Trap Neuter Release (TNR) cats that lives outside the Animal Center (shelter). The colony is a great resource for educating the public and standard setting.
- Under the Wake County ordinance, feral cat caregivers register with the TNR Wake, a consortium of partner organizations and volunteers that manage the hotline and maintain the database. The hotline is routed through the Wake

County SPCA but is answered by TNR Wake's Kim Parker, who receives about one call a day.

- They don't microchip cats, just ear tip them (clip one of their ear tips). There is no individual identification for cats.
- Feral cats that are not registered within the TNR program are not covered under the ordinance.
- The ordinance does not define caretakers as "owners" and therefore, there is no requirement for repeat vaccinations. There are no repercussions for colony caregivers in the event of bites or injuries, however this has not been tested legally.
- Wake County gives TNR Wake autonomy when running the data base and dealing with the caretakers.
- Community outreach is done through the partner organizations. Wake County Animal Control Officers do pass out brochures that direct people to call TNR Wake for feral cat issues.
- They have had no bites or rabies concerns.
- Received a \$38,000 grant from Petsmart Charities for the program.
- Challenges – the County ordinance only covers 8 of 12 municipalities – not Raleigh, the biggest metropolitan area. They also had a lot of opposition to the ordinance by the Audubon Society.

Highlights of Conversation with Drs. Williams and Haskel:

- Not supporters of TNR. Refer to it "trap, neuter, re-abandon"
- Believe everything must be data driven and do not know if TNR works.
- Concerned about rabies and other disease transmission: cat-to-cat, cat to wildlife, cat to human.
- If someone gets bitten, who is responsible?
- Believe microchips and individual identification of cats are essential.
- Believe that for the welfare of the cats that sometimes the humane thing to do is euthanize.
- Revaccination is a big issue.
- Suggested contacts: Dr. Jessup (studies looking at welfare of cats); Aimee Wall, UNC School of Government, Maria Palomar, DVM, new Wildlife Resource Commission veterinarian.
- Need to know if TNR is effective and if there is a cost benefit. Need to know what animals are out there, what the population is.

Maria Grimshaw reported on research outside NC:

- 300 communities in US have pro TNR statutes
- Spartanburg, SC TNR program is operated by the county. They set an annual goal of TNRing a certain number of cats.

- Asheville has a TNR program run by non-profit.
- Ann Arbor, MI does targeted TNR – looking at areas known to have feral cats.
- Colorado Springs has a community cat manager.
- Dayton OH has a community cat program.
- Eugene, OR has received a Petsmart Charities grant to have a community cat program.
- San Francisco – the SPCA offers free spay neuter services for feral cats.
- Many other examples out there. (Manhattan cat project, Hawaii, Arizona, Florida - AWAKE)
- TNR is clearly a trend. More and more communities doing it.
- Programs either operated by the government or a hybrid community/government partnership.

Maria will continue to do research and bring back the best models for ordinances and program types from each category (private, public/private, public). Also may talk to public health personnel in jurisdictions with TNR to see how they address public health concerns.

Discussion regarding rabies ensued. Bob Marotto noted the following:

- Bites from cat colony-like situations are “not unknown.”
- There were 18 cases of rabies in cats in NC in 2012
- Free roaming cats are more at risk of rabies due to lower rates of inoculation and more contact with wildlife, the primary carriers of rabies.

5. “Cat Stats” from Orange County Animal Services (Bob Marotto, Animal Services Director)

- Statistics show that cats contribute disproportionately to shelter inventory and costs.
- Intakes across the board have gone down, including cats.
- Factors in declining intake of cats include:
 - Community spay neuter fund and outreach activities
 - Discontinued practice of trapping cats for people in 2010. Presently AC will provide people with a trap, but the people must trap and bring the cat in the trap to Animal Control. This has reduced the number of feral cats being trapped and brought to the shelter significantly.
- Euthanasia rate has declined from 6 out of 10 cats euthanized in 2008 to 1 out of 3 cats euthanized in 2013. If you take feral cats out of the statistics, the changes are even more significant.
- Trend re: euthanasia and intakes has reversed. Today many more cats are being released alive than being euthanized.
- Two factors responsible for trend:

- Reduced intakes through spay/neuter
- Increased adoptions through outreach.

Other Cat Stats:

- 1 out of 4 cats that enter the shelter are owner surrenders. Suggests a need for a complete approach to the problem of overpopulation – must examine the different components of the cat population that come to the shelter.
- RTO (Return to Owner) is very low for cats. Yearly average of 57 RTOs for cats vs. 396 RTOs for dogs. RTO for cats in Orange County is about 5% - high for the national average of 1-2% Suggests need for better identification plus strengthening the bonds between people and cats.
- Transfers to Partner Placement Organizations – Average of 109 per year for 2007-2012. Many fewer cats than dogs are placed with partner organizations. Reflects different standing of cats vs. dogs within the community.
- 13% of incoming cats are feral. This means 87% of the cat population coming into shelter will not be directly affected by TNR. But there may be indirect effects by reducing feral kittens coming into system.
- OCAS is working on compiling data on incoming litters of kittens and where they are coming from, using GPS mapping.
- Need to look at different parts of the cat community: feral vs. owner surrendered vs. stray.

5. Free Roaming Cats, Feral Cats, Community Cats: Task Force Terminology

Task Force members proposed the following definitions for key terms:

- Indoor/outdoor cats – owned animals.
- Free-roaming cats - outdoor cats who have no owner or are loosely affiliated with an owner or owners. Sociable, non-family member, outdoor cats.
- Feral cats – unseen or seen only fleetingly. Not socialized – afraid of humans. A domestic species living in a wild state.

Definitions are somewhat fluid, i.e. feral cats can have litters that become free roamers depending on human contact, handling, etc.

Interested in free-roaming cats in general.

Bob Marotto - When we talk about outdoor cats, we must address nuisance issues – birds, sand boxes, etc. Calling them “community cats” minimizes nuisance issues because it assumes they are wanted by the whole community.

This discussion raised many questions:

Defining a colony of cats with a caretaker – is there a number to qualify as a colony?

Caretaker defined as owner?

Exempt caretakers from rabies requirements?

Bob Marotto – Very difficult to deviate from rabies requirements. Rabies is public health issue vs. other vaccinations and testing, which are animal welfare issues.

DeWana Anderson - Allowing people to ignore state rabies law is not a good starting point.

Many models out there. Colorado Springs has a community cat program. Managers sign a contract and check in every month. They get access to the services of the humane society in exchange for signing the contract. It is positive incentive based.

Bob Marotto – if we come up with a framework for TNR, it's for ferals, not the free-roaming portion of the population. What is solution for that?

Dewana Anderson- Feral designation will allow access to services based on social need, not financial need.

Bob Marotto- people who manage feral colonies are different than people who care for free-roaming cats.

Community spay neuter fund focuses on owned animals. County currently does not extend these funds to un-owned animals. To address this, the task force/ASAB should put together a rationale that will perhaps ultimately be ratified by the BOCC for extending services to free roaming cats or semi-feral/feral cats. Could do now if OCAS has the rationale and ok.

Dewana Anderson noted that marketing studies have showed success with getting support for TNR when focus is on the welfare of the cats, not saving birds by reducing the cat population.

6. Progress report for 1/22/14 ASAB meeting

Warren Porter to deliver.

7. Task force charge

Chair will circulate a draft for comments on email; to be discussed at next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Information items reviewed at meeting:

a. "North Carolina Rabies Cases, 2013," North Carolina Health Bulletin, December 1, 2013 Vol. 1, Issue 2

8. Final reflections and information discussion

Accompany Documents

1. Unapproved summary for December 11, 2013, ASAB FRC Task Force

2. Orange County Animal Services "Cat Stats:" 2008-2012

3. North Carolina Rabies Cases, 2013," North Carolina Health Bulletin, December 1, 2013 Vol. 1, Issue 2

4. Draft Charge for ASAB Free Roaming Cat Task Force