

Animal Services Advisory Board
Free Roaming Cat Task Force
6:45 to 8:30 p.m., March 26, 2014
Meeting Summary
Prepared by Suzanne Roy

1. Agenda approved unanimously.
2. Public comments for items not on the agenda
Approximately eight members of the public were present but no public comments were offered.
3. Review of summary for March 4 listening session (Community Partners)
Revised summary distributed at meeting. Summary approved with corrections to be made by Mr. Marotto.
4. Community Approaches to Free Roaming Cats, Maria Grimshaw, Steven Pray and Eleanor Nave, UNC Kenan-Flagler MBA Non-Profit Fellow

The fellows have conducted several months of research into the Free Roaming Cat issue and model programs for addressing the issue both within North Carolina and in other states. Their presentation is summarized below.

A. Eleanor Nave

Cat overpopulation is a big problem nationally. Approximately 5-7 million cats enter U.S. shelters each year; 70% of these cats are euthanized. The national average for cats entering shelters and Returned to Owners (RT)) is less than 2%.

Trap/Neuter/Release (TNR) has become state of the art for addressing this issue. It is more cost-effective than addressing the problem through euthanasia -- \$50-60 per cat for TNR; \$100 per cat for euthanasia.

U.C. Berkley research has established that TNR reduces the number of cat litters and euthanasia rates in communities.

Wake County, North Carolina

Structure: Public/Private partnership.

Funding: Private

County partners with non-profit organizations to implement this program.

Ordinance passed to facilitate TNR.

TNRWake is an all-volunteer effort. Responsibilities include registration of cat caretakers and colonies, trapping cats, staffing the hotline, locating space for sterilization surgeries. Registration is done through TNRWake.org.

Program's emphasis is on ensuring that spay/neuter of free roaming cats is conducted responsibly and humanely.

Serious tracking of bite incidents – 0 bites reported since program began.

Works as follows: County receives a complaint about cats. TNR Wake investigates to determine if there is a caretaker. Cats are humanely trapped, sterilized, vaccinated and returned to the same location from which they were trapped.

Partner organizations are solely responsible for funding the program. Individual donations account for 70% of funding.

TNR Wake is not 501 C3, but all participating organizations are.

Petsmart Charities is a big supporter of the program. Gave a \$50,000 grant to Safe Haven to spay/neuter cats for the program.

Robust community outreach and strong support from Wake County Animal Services.

- Have a colony of feral cats outside the Wake County shelter. Serves as an educational tool and model.
- Animal Control Officers carry brochures to educate the public about TNR.

Results:

- Cat intake and euthanasia numbers were down for 2012-2013 following implementation of the program.

Challenges:

- Coverage – Raleigh is not included in the ordinance.
- Permanent Identification – cats are not microchipped or tattooed. Problems with identifying which cats go with which colonies. Identifying cats in the event of bites or revaccination requirements is problematic.
- Capacity – Operation Catnip lost access to facilities for performing sterilization surgeries; now uses Safe Haven. This has reduced number of spay/neuters by approximately 50%.

Strengths:

- Community awareness and support – community support has a significant impact on TNR programs.

Future –

- Animal Services and several partners applied for new Petsmart grant
- Animal Services seeking approval to conduct s/n at their facility.
- Safe Haven and Operation Catnip plan to expand capacity for s/n.

B: Steven Pray

Looked at two different models in Florida. Miami Dade and Feral Freedom

One program actively seeks out cats for s/n. The other responds to complaints and then conducts s/n.

Goal is to reduce euthanasia rate.

Feral Freedom has created a step-by-step Program Guide. Very important resource.

Regarding ordinances:

1. Look at current ordinance - is TNR illegal?
2. Submit ordinance change if necessary

Miami Dade - Trap, Neuter, Giveback program.

Structure: Government program

Funding: Public

County launched a no-kill initiative and now have a 90% live release rate. Attained quickly in just a few years. Working with the public was easier than they thought. Their steps:

1. Got support from animal welfare organizations.
2. Launched pilot program
3. When program proved its worth, convincing the public to support it was easier
4. Complaints decreased after 2 years.
5. Public supported a humane solution.

Feral Freedom (Jacksonville, FL)

Structure: Public/private partnership.

Funding: Public (local government) and Private (grants)

Public voted to pay \$20 extra in taxes for the program; grants secured to fund initial costs, including equipment.

Complaint driven. When people complain, they are given a trap. Animal Control picks up cat

and puts door hangers around the neighborhood where the cat was picked up.
Cost per cat for TNR \$50
Saving \$50 per cat by not holding and euthanizing them.

Cost Benefit: Feral Fiscal Impact Calculator or Fiscal Impact TNR Calculator
Helps determine number of cats and cost differentials

Steven presented charts that show a direct correlation between increased s/n and decreased euthanasia rates. The trend flipped completely after 10 years.

Impact on wildlife – not many complaints – no data.

Both Florida programs had support for colony caretakers –training and certification.

C. Maria Grimshaw

Spartanburg, South Carolina
(Population 45,000)

Structure: Government program. Run under the police department through Animal Control.
Contract with a local spay/neuter clinic (bid it out).
Funding: Private

2 Animal Control Officers
10 volunteers trained to help track cats and bring them in.

Identified cats by looking at data from 2 years of nuisance calls as well as identifying known cat colonies.

Cats are s/n, given rabies, distemper, tattooed and released. Do not test for disease.

Process:

1. Showed research on TNR to City Council – got them onboard.
2. Publicized the program on FB, local news.
3. Applied for a grant from Petsmart. Received \$30,000 to s/n \$750 cats.
4. Ran a trial program in 2013. Incredibly successful.
5. Now in process of passing an ordinance.

Currently applying for another Petsmart grant.

Did not use taxpayer funds, as Animal Control Officers were already dealing with nuisance calls.

Use Petpoint to track data.

Results:

- Reduced intake annually by 400 cats per year.
- Reduced shelter expenses
- Nuisance calls down 75%

Impact on wildlife – placed cameras in cat colonies – No clear impact. Met with Audubon first, they were on board and there have been no complaints.

Charleston, SC

(Population 350,000)

Structure: Public/Private partnership. Operated through Charleston Animal Society.

Funding: Private (ASPCA sponsored program for first two years. Then continued through other private funding)

Ordinance passed.

20 Animal Control Officers

Euthanasia was not working. Framed program as an animal control issue.

How it works:

- Cats are trapped, s/n, vaccinate for rabies microchip and returned to 300-foot radius of where cats were trapped.
- Microchipped to either caretaker or Charleston AS.
- Don't test but will give cats medical treatment if donations are available.
- Data tracked in Petpoint database.

Started with City of Charleston, then expanded to town of Mt. Pleasant, then to the overall County.

Public support strong after ordinance passed.

Flyers distributed in English and Spanish.

Financial details:

ASPCA \$50,000

Pestmart charities – more targeted areas

Results:

- Saved \$50,000 over two years through TNR.
- Live release rate went from 17% in 2007 to 66% 2011.
- Strong public support - opposition from a few with no data
- Success measured through overall intake and juvenile intake
- Impact on wildlife – not measured – they don't believe there are significant impacts to wildlife.

D. Key Takeaways From Fellows Research

- TNR extremely effective
- Public support has been positive. Must get public onboard before launching program.
- Partnership with local non-profits critical.

Steps:

1. Community support
2. Develop an ordinance for OC
3. Partner with NGOs
4. Apply for funding
5. Create educational and outreach materials.

E. Q&A

Is TNR alone sufficient?

Nuisance behaviors addressed by TNR. Education programs necessary to change people's relationship to cats – strengthen the bond, reduce abandonment.

Bob Marotto– TNR works for cleaning up the mess we have already made. But we must stop the problem from continuing to happen by changing the relationship people have with cats. This is clear in veterinary association recommendations. Veterinarians have an important role to play.

Is ordinance change necessary?

Some communities like Spartanburg got a grant and started without an ordinance change. Did 750 cats in first year.

Florida – checked ordinance to make sure it's not against the ordinance. Got program together to start doing it. Then got ordinance change based on experience and need.

Partnership with non-profits?

Key in all programs. Fundamental is the partnership between public entity and non-profit coalition or traditional humane society.

Responsibilities under programs (volunteers vs. Animal Control) vary by community

How address trust issue between caregivers and government entity? How address privacy issues vs. public records laws?

Wake County – TNR Wake –

Animal Services director must establish relationship.

In Wake – data kept by TNR Wake, not county.

Spartanburg – police chief met with caretakers for six months.

Charleston – once ordinance passed – people started calling.

No requirement for colonies to be registered.

Bob – AnimalKind keeps private information on s/n under the non-profit, but county has right to review the records at any time Can use that model.

Petpoint database – gov't and groups share.

Spartanburg – Animal Control maintains records.

Key elements for OC to look at?

1. Data maintained by county or non-profit
2. Registration of caretakers
3. Cats returned to area where trapped without regard to whether there is a caretakers?
4. Rabies has not been an issue. There is CDC research showing that rabies vaccine lasted 7 years.
5. Reduced intakes and euthanasia made the programs a success.
6. Zoonotic disease risk - Feral cat pop had higher exposure but not disease.
7. Geographical restrictions?
 - a. Variation – caretakers must have permission of property owner.
 - b. Ordinance change – currently cats off property of owners or keepers are nuisance. Change that if part of a cared for colony? Community cat?
8. Complaint-driven system. Must keep data. Complaints went down in all communities after TNR began.

F. Final Thoughts

TNR is the current solution that is being implemented across the nation to address cat overpopulation.

5. Upcoming Listening Session

- a. Cat Caretakers & Free Roaming Cats, April 9, 2014
- b. General Public & Free Roaming Cats, May 7, 2014
- c. What about conservation groups and wildlife? May 23, 2014

6. Informal Thoughts and Reflections

Suggestion made by task force member Judy Miller that we be tracking key issues from each of our meetings and summarizing so that by the end, we know what are the main points we need to address in crafting a recommendation for the ASAB. It will be valuable to go back to the charge, and what we think we can answer, what we don't have answers to.

Put some time into this at next meeting.

7. Information Items

a. Approved Task Force Charge

(<http://orangecountync.gov/animalservices/documents/FRCTaskForceChargeMarch3.pdf>)

Power Point presented by Fellows available online.