

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

HSUS Position Statement: Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)

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The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) believes that feral cat overpopulation is a community-generated problem and that every community has a responsibility to work toward a solution. The HSUS is concerned about feral cat populations, the welfare of individual cats, and the welfare of wild animals.

Feral cats are unsocialized cats who may be one or more generations removed from a home environment and may live in a group, or colony, of similar cats. These cats and their offspring are victims of abandonment, accidental loss, and failure by owners to sterilize their pets.

The HSUS advocates community-based Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs with on-going responsible management as the most viable, long-term approach available at this time to reduce feral cat populations. Responsible management of existing feral cat colonies should include: humane trapping, sterilization, rabies vaccination, and treatment for illness or injury; removal of kittens and friendly adults for possible placement in homes; euthanasia of animals whose suffering cannot be alleviated; ear-tipping and returning ferals to the same location where they were trapped provided they would not face imminent risks; and providing lifelong care consisting of adequate food, water, and shelter as well as regular monitoring of the colony for sickness, injury, and the arrival of new animals. The goal of any feral cat management program should be to maximize quality of life for the cats and to eliminate the existing colony over time through attrition.

For a TNR program to be successful, cooperation among many members of the community is essential. No one person or agency should be expected to devote all the resources needed or shoulder the responsibility alone. Instead, organizations and individuals can offer their services to achieve a comprehensive goal, while still working within the scope of their mission and capability. A single program, such as subsidized sterilization, is an excellent step forward, but cannot effect change without other supportive pieces in place, such as public education and outreach, adoption resources, dedicated colony caretakers, and cooperation among the various interest groups. A working coalition, in which each member respects the others' contributions and limitations, and where there is productive and open communication, is a formula for success. While The HSUS strongly recommends that each community works toward the goal of non-lethal management, we realize that euthanasia may be considered as an interim solution where TNR cannot be implemented.

Inherent in all decisions about whether to maintain a particular colony is the potential negative impact on local wildlife. The HSUS values the lives of individual wild animals, no matter their species status. The goal of any TNR program should be to lessen the impact on wildlife by reducing the number of feral cats and eventually eliminating their presence from the environment. The location of colonies is an extremely important issue, and reinforces the need for a community-based approach to ensure that colonies are managed so that impacts on wildlife are minimized.

The HSUS recognizes that there are real challenges to reducing the numbers of feral cats currently living on the streets of this country, and this statement is meant to encourage all members of the community – citizens, veterinarians, animal shelters, wildlife advocates, policy makers, public health departments, businesses – to work together toward a goal of non-lethal approaches to feral cat management. Resources are available on our website at www.hsus.org/feralcats.

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