

PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY’S POLICY FOR COMMUNITY CATS

Pittsylvania County, Virginia (“County”), is faced with high numbers of feral (*i.e.*, wild) cats, also known as community cats. This is in no small part due to irresponsible owners over the years. After reviewing the issue and best practices put in place in other localities to humanely tackle this challenge, the County has determined that Trap, Neuter and Return (“TNR”) is the best course of action.

The Pittsylvania Pet Center (“Pet Center”) and Pittsylvania County Animal Control (“Animal Control”) will no longer pick up, or receive wild/feral community cats, unless they show signs of being sick or injured in accordance with Virginia Code. Citizens will instead be advised that just removing the cats causes a vacuum effect allowing more cats to move in. The County will instead, with the assistance of the SPCA of Pittsylvania County (“SPCA”) and some other experienced trappers, direct them to take these wild animals to local clinics which the County will coordinate with for spay/neuter and vaccinations. These cats will be ear tipped and can be released back where they came from. The TNR’s cost will be covered by Grant funding as long as funds are available. The County will continue to seek out additional funding to address these needs. A significant number of localities across the United States, including Arlington and Alexandria, Virginia, have embraced TNR and seen dramatic decreases in the numbers of wild cats, decreased numbers of sick cats, and a significant decrease in the numbers of unwanted litters entering their animal shelters.

The objective of this Program is to humanely trap, spay or neuter, vaccinate, test, and ear tip each of these community cats and return them to their original habitat or colony. Historically, thousands of these cats were caught and euthanized. This approach has proven ineffective and costly, as the problem has continued to grow.

The Pet Center will coordinate assistance as needed by the SPCA and experienced citizens willing to help trap feral, or community cats. The County will also have some traps available for citizens to check out. The County can also offer food that has been donated to assist citizens managing colonies upon request. By all of us working together, the County is confident that TNR will over time will reduce the numbers of wild cats, transmission of illness and disease, and decrease the numbers of unwanted cats/kittens received by the Pet Center for care.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CAT?

Community cats are cats who live outdoors with no specific owner. These cats can be friendly towards humans, or they can be feral (*i.e.*, unsocialized and avoidant of humans), or they may fall somewhere on the spectrum between friendly and feral. Some community cats have a caregiver

who watches out for them, but others may survive and thrive without direct human intervention. For all free-roaming community cats, their home is the outdoors, within the community.

CAN I BRING COMMUNITY CATS TO THE PITTSYLVANIA PET CENTER?

No. The Pet Center does not accept healthy free-roaming community (*i.e.*, feral) cats, and there are no laws against free-roaming cats in the County. The rate of return-to-owner for stray cats is only around ten percent (10%), and owned-pet cats are thirteen (13) times more likely to find their way home on their own versus being brought to a pet shelter. Additionally, some free-roaming community cats do not have one (1) specific home they return to but are rather cared for and part of a colony. If the Pet Center took in healthy free-roaming community cats, many cats would be at risk of euthanasia for lack of space or because they are not suited to life as an indoor pet cat. If a cat is sick, injured, declawed, or microchipped, the Pet Center will accept him/her. If you see a sick or injured cat outdoors, please contact Animal Control at (434) 432-7937.

Community cats are often feral (*i.e.*, not socialized to humans) and are not suited to life around humans as an indoor pet cat. Community cats are often fearful and avoidant of humans and are not likely to ever be socialized enough to become a lap cat or to even be happy living indoors. For truly feral cats who are brought to shelters, the only outcome is euthanasia, which is why the County does not accept community cats at the Pet Center. In fact, feral cats should not be brought to any shelter or rescue. Instead, the County offers resources to help community members participate in the County's TNR Program, which is the most humane and effective approach to managing community cat populations.

WHAT IS TNR?

Based on facts that have emerged from the many localities that have embraced TNR, it is the most effective and humane approach to community cats. Specifically, colony caregivers and volunteers humanely trap community cats and bring them to a veterinary clinic, where they are spayed or neutered, vaccinated against rabies and distemper, ear tipped, and given a basic checkup. After an approximately twenty-four (24)-hour recovery period, the cats are returned to the exact location where they were initially trapped and released there. The cats can live out their lives in their outdoor home but won't be adding to the community cat population. Sterilized community cats will no longer display those often-annoying behaviors associated with mating, such as yowling, fighting, spraying, and of course, producing kittens. Cats who go through a TNR Program live healthier individual lives, and the community receives the added benefits of having these community cats vaccinated against rabies.

HOW CAN I TELL IF A CAT HAS BEEN THROUGH A TNR PROGRAM?

If you see a community cat missing part of his/her left ear, that means the cat has been through a TNR Program. This is called an ear tip, and it is the universal signal that a cat has been spayed or neutered and vaccinated against rabies and distemper. Community cats who have been through a TNR Program are ear tipped while they are under anesthesia for surgery, so if you see an ear tipped cat, that means someone is looking out for that cat!

CAN'T COMMUNITY CATS JUST BE REMOVED OR RELOCATED?

No! Community cats live in an area because the resources (*i.e.*, food, water, and shelter) are there to support them. These resources may be provided by humans, or not. Rounding up the cats and

bringing them to shelters, rescues, or sanctuaries, does not solve the problem. Also, community cats will likely just be euthanized if they enter a shelter because they are not suited for life as an indoor pet cat. Relocation is also not a viable option. It is time-consuming and difficult, there is no guarantee that the cats will remain in the new location, and new locations for cats are very difficult to find. Removal or relocation efforts for community cats are not feasible.

WHAT ABOUT NEONATE KITTENS FOUND (UNDER 4 WEEKS OF AGE)?

Mother cats will often leave their kittens for hours in search of food. Watch from a distance or leave and come back to see if the cat mother is returning. If the neonates are being cared for by their cat mother, you have two (2) choices:

1. Leave them alone until the kittens are done nursing, then bring the kittens to the Pet Center.
2. Catch the mother and kittens together and bring them to the Pet Center.

Neonates brought to the Pet Center without their mother have a poor survival rate. The County will do everything it can for them, but neonates have the best chance for survival with their mother when possible.

HOW DOES TNR BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY AND THE PET CENTER?

Because community cats are not suited to life as an indoor pet cat, the only outcome for these cats who are brought to the Pet Center is typically euthanasia. Euthanizing an otherwise healthy cat for simply living outdoors is not the compassionate thing to do, nor is it effective in the long run. The most humane and effective approach for community cats is TNR, because it stabilizes community cat populations which over time decline naturally. Sterilizing community cats reduces the nuisance behaviors (*i.e.*, spraying, yowling, and fighting) associated with mating, which makes cats better neighbors. TNR also saves taxpayer dollars by reducing the number of kittens who are brought to the Pet Center in need of socialization, basic supplies and care, medical care, and adoptive homes. This policy will ultimately reduce the numbers of cats coming into the Pet Center and better enable the County to focus on social cats in its care and finding their forever homes.

WHAT IF I NEED HELP?

The Pet Center's Community Cat Program is predominately funded by individual donor and Grants. As long as funding exists, the County will offer spay/neuter vouchers to assist citizens. Individuals can sign out traps after some basic training on humane trapping practices from the Pet Center. The SPCA, and a few dedicated community cat advocates, are willing to assist citizens as needed and the Pet Center will be happy to coordinate assistance as needed.