



Frequently Asked Questions About TNR

What is trap/neuter/return?

Trap/neuter/return is a humane, non-lethal alternative to the trap-and-kill method of controlling cat populations.

Trap/neuter/return (TNR) is a management technique in which homeless, free-roaming (community) cats are humanely trapped, evaluated and sterilized by a licensed veterinarian, vaccinated against rabies, and then returned to their original habitat.

What is the primary benefit of TNR?

In the long term, TNR lowers the numbers of cats in the community more effectively than trap-and-kill.

Good Samaritans in neighborhoods all across the country provide food, water and shelter for community cats, and TNR provides a non-lethal, humane way to effectively manage these community cat populations. In some programs, friendly cats or young kittens are pulled from the colonies and sent to foster facilities for socialization and, eventually, placement into forever homes. Stopping the breeding and removing some cats for adoption is more effective than the traditional trap-and-kill method in lowering the numbers of cats in a community long-term.

What are the other benefits of TNR?

The benefits to both cats and communities are numerous.

The benefits include:

- TNR reduces shelter admissions and operating costs. Also, fewer community cats in shelters increases shelter adoption rates, as more cage space opens up for adoptable cats.
- These programs create safer communities and promote public health by reducing the number of unvaccinated cats.
- TNR programs improve the lives of free-roaming cats. When males are neutered, they are no longer compelled to maintain a large territory or fight over mates, and females are no longer forced to endure the physical and mental demands of giving birth and fending for their young.
- Sterilizing community cats reduces or even eliminates the behaviors that can lead to nuisance complaints.

Another beneficial component of TNR is the positive impact these programs have on animal control officers and shelter workers. Job satisfaction among these workers increases tremendously when the work does not involve the unnecessary killing of healthy animals for the purpose of convenience. This increased job satisfaction results in less employee turnover and an overall improved public image of the shelter. The reduction in killing and animal admissions also provides

more time for staff and volunteers to care for the animals in the shelter and give personal attention to potential adopters.

Equally important, TNR programs allow animal control facilities to take advantage of numerous resources typically unavailable to shelters that employ traditional trap-and-kill policies. Understandably, people are rarely inclined to volunteer for programs that fail to make them feel good about themselves. Through the implementation of TNR, volunteers know they are making a difference in the lives of the animals, and the community is benefiting from their charitable efforts. Volunteers can help trap cats and also assist animal control in locating other cats in need of TNR services. Commonly referred to as caregivers, these volunteers may also feed and monitor the health of colony cats once they are returned to their original location.

Frequent monitoring is an invaluable component of successful TNR programs because caregivers can easily identify new cats who join the colony, so that they, too, can be sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped. Another component of a well-managed TNR program is the collection of critical data that can be used when seeking grant funding to expand current TNR programs.

To learn about the positive impact of TNR in San Antonio, Texas, please see this [video](#) produced by Best Friends.

Why is TNR preferable to lethal control?

TNR is a practical solution to the failed trap-and-kill policy.

Lethal control has been used by animal control agencies for decades, but given the current problem of large populations of free-roaming cats, it is obvious that killing as a form of population control does not work. In addition, killing homeless animals as a means of population control is publicly unpalatable. By contrast, TNR puts an end to this perpetual cycle of killing and makes it possible to maintain a colony at a relatively stable number of sterilized cats unable to multiply.

To hear what animal welfare leaders around the country are saying about TNR, please see this [video](#) produced by Best Friends.

Why does the trap-and-kill method fail to curtail free-roaming cat populations?

Populations rebound to previous levels following trap-and-kill.

Every habitat has a carrying capacity, the maximum population size of a given species that can be sustained in a particular area. This carrying capacity is determined by the availability of food sources, water, shelter and other environmental necessities. When a portion of the sustainable population is removed (e.g., by trapping and killing them) and the availability of resources is unaltered, the remaining animals respond through increased birthing and higher survivability rates.

Because of this biological certainty, trapping and removing cats from a given area does little more than ensure that the cat population will rebound to its original level, necessitating additional trapping and killing. While lethal control may rid an area of cats temporarily, it is not an effective long-term solution because new cats will quickly fill the vacated area and breed, resulting in a perpetual cycle of killing.

How does TNR compare to the traditional trap-and-kill method in terms of costs?

Trapping and killing homeless animals is not only unpalatable to the public, it's a costly and ineffective method of population control.

TNR programs are being adopted by towns and municipalities across the nation out of necessity and good common sense. This shift is being seen on many municipal levels as animal services' budgets continue to be slashed and the need for better tools to handle animal control issues has become increasingly evident. As Mark Kumpf, 2010 president of the National Animal Control Association, [told](#) Animal Sheltering in 2008, "The cost for picking up and simply euthanizing and disposing of animals is horrendous, in both the philosophical and the economic sense."

The cost savings associated with TNR are location-specific and accurate estimates involve taking into account numerous variables. The immediate savings that many communities experience are a result of tapping into volunteer support and other resources (e.g., private donations) that come from implementing a humane method of managing community cats. Cost savings fluctuate based on the type of TNR program implemented, the extent of animal control involvement, the volunteer base available, and the community's overall support of TNR. The point, however, is that over time, through attrition and sterilization efforts, fewer cats will be breeding and contributing to the population growth. And fewer animals to contend with inevitably means a decrease in the demand on taxpayer dollars.

Until a TNR program begins, it is difficult to calculate accurately how much money will be saved, either directly or indirectly. A successful TNR program can improve the public image of a town, which may add to economic development. Employee satisfaction within the shelter and animal control facilities is also a huge asset and contributes to a positive image of the community. The hometown pride and enthusiasm generated from supporting a non-lethal, practical and effective solution to a community concern must be factored into the equation, even if the resulting cost savings are difficult to calculate.

Do cats pose a risk to public health?

Humans contracting a disease from a cat is quite unlikely.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [website](#), people are not likely "to get sick from touching or owning a cat." Because free-roaming cats tend to avoid human contact, the likelihood of disease transmission is quite remote. The CDC also provides simple health tips to minimize potential exposure, such as washing hands with soap and water after touching feces or after being scratched or bitten. The agency also recommends that cats be vaccinated against rabies, which is a key component of most TNR programs.

Rabies and toxoplasmosis are two diseases often raised during discussions about free-roaming cats. It's important that both of these serious human health threats be put into proper perspective. According to the [CDC website](#), rabies in cats is extremely rare. In fact, since 1960, only two cases of human rabies in the U.S. have been attributed to cats. And approximately 92 percent of rabid animals [reported to the CDC](#) during 2010 were wildlife. The possibility of humans contracting toxoplasmosis from cats is also quite small, as the [CDC](#) explains: "People are probably more likely to get toxoplasmosis from gardening or eating raw meat."

How serious a threat are cats to bird populations?

TNR means fewer cats, which means fewer threats to birds. Other factors pose more serious threats to bird populations.

Undeniably, the largest threat to birds is loss or degradation of habitat resulting from human development and agriculture. In fact, in a 2013 [National Geographic article](#), Ken Rosenberg, director of conservation science at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, says that “the top three threats to birds overall are habitat loss, habitat loss, and habitat loss.”

This perspective was shared in the same article by Gary Langham, chief scientist of the National Audubon Society, who stressed that “loss of habitat is the number one problem” as riparian habitat and wetlands continue to be removed or converted for human use. Other significant hazards to bird populations, recognized by experts worldwide, include chemical toxins and direct exploitation from hunting or capturing birds for pets.

Although no studies support the misleading claims that cats are destroying songbird populations, there’s no disputing that cats do, in fact, kill birds. The point that must be emphasized is that fewer cats mean less predation. That being the case, TNR should not be condemned because of potential threats to wildlife, but rather embraced so that free-roaming populations can be curtailed as efficiently as possible to minimize potential predatory behavior.

Are there any tools to help keep community cats out of designated areas?

Non-lethal deterrents for cats are effective and readily accessible.

There are numerous cat deterrents available on the market today, several of which are discussed in [this video](#) produced by Best Friends.

What about the dangers faced by free-roaming cats?

Free-roaming cats can live long, healthy lives.

According to a [study](#) conducted by Dr. Julie Levy at the University of Central Florida, the majority of cats (83 percent) in the 11 cat colonies studied were present on the campus for more than six years. It’s quite likely that many of the observed cats far exceeded that life span, since approximately one-half of the free-roaming cats first observed in the study were already adults, so their true ages were unknown. Furthermore, according to Dr. Levy, the body weights of these free-roaming cats, when compared with pet cats in previous studies, exhibited “no significant differences.” Neutering these cats resulted in an increase in body weight and healthy overall body condition.

Other studies reported similar findings. For instance, from 1993 to 2004, seven TNR organizations throughout the nation [collected data](#) on 103,643 free-roaming cats examined in spay/neuter clinics. Less than 1 percent of these animals needed to be euthanized because of debilitating conditions, trauma or infectious diseases. The one program that tested for FeLV and FIV reported an overall infection rate of 5.2 percent, which is similar to previous studies that reported results for both pet and feral cats.

Why are feeding bans ineffective?

It's bad public policy to criminalize kindness.

Feeding bans are notoriously ineffective primarily because they are impossible to enforce. Also, human nature rarely allows someone to sit idly by while an animal suffers. When a hungry animal appears, compassion prevails. Consequently, people will not adhere to an ordinance discouraging the feeding of animals in need.

Hungry cats can continue to reproduce, which further undermines the intent of most feeding prohibitions. Equally important, feeding bans jeopardize the ongoing sterilization and vaccination services provided by caregivers who diligently maintain and monitor cat colonies in the community. It is also important to note that once feeding by humans is prohibited, hungry cats are forced to compete with wildlife over available, natural food sources.

Does TNR encourage the abandonment of cats?

Cats will be abandoned with or without TNR.

In fact, cats have been abandoned for as long as people have had pet cats, which is why TNR is necessary today. These periodic abandonments, however, will not derail the overall success of a TNR program because cat colonies can absorb the occasional newcomer yet still show a significant population reduction when the majority of the animals are sterilized. Indeed, the monitoring that is an integral part of most TNR programs ensures that new arrivals are sterilized, vaccinated and, when appropriate, adopted into loving homes.

In addition, maintaining a local TNR colony is likely not the determining factor behind whether someone abandons a pet or not. Surely there are a variety of other issues that factor into this irresponsible behavior. However, efforts should be made to place feeding stations in out-of-the-way locations to minimize the likelihood of desperate people illegally abandoning their pet cats. Other strategies should also be employed to further reduce potential abandonment, such as posting signs about abandonment ordinances at high-profile cat colonies.

What provisions of a local ordinance are most harmful to community cats and TNR caregivers?

Legal protection is needed for both free-roaming cats and the individuals who provide this invaluable community service.

Many towns, dissatisfied with the inefficiency of trap-and-kill programs, are turning to TNR as a humane alternative for dealing with free-roaming cat populations. Unfortunately, current laws often conflict with this well-intentioned plan. For instance, broad definitions of "owner" may include anyone who feeds an animal for even a short period of time, inadvertently targeting community cat caregivers. If legally construed as an "owner," a caregiver who manages a large colony may find himself or herself in violation of restrictive pet limits and cost-prohibitive cat licensing requirements. Of equal concern, caregivers who are deemed owners may be in violation of running-at-large provisions, despite the fact that the cats were at-large when the caregiver first began caring for them.

Poorly crafted ordinances may create other legal obstacles to caregivers who actively participate in

TNR programs. This is especially true in communities where animal control interprets the return of a sterilized cat to his/her original place of capture as “abandonment.” To alleviate the negative legal consequences, towns that implement progressive TNR programs should revise current ordinances so that community cats, and the generous caregivers who support these homeless animals, are exempted from these burdensome provisions.

Some provisions included in an ordinance intended to protect the overall well-being of cats may also be problematic and inadvertently lead to the death of healthy animals. For instance, language that requires testing for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) is a serious concern in situations in which any positive result mandates that the animal be killed. These types of policies are horribly misguided, because not only is it possible for FIV-positive cats to live long, happy and healthy lives, but cats who have been vaccinated for FIV will likely test positive and ultimately face a death sentence despite the fact that the animal may be perfectly healthy and incapable of contracting that disease. It’s also important to note that testing of any kind comes with a margin of error and false positives are not unusual.

What are the advantages of adopting a TNR ordinance?

An ordinance grants credibility to any TNR program.

When crafted properly, a TNR ordinance establishes reasonable standards and defines duties for those individuals instrumental in implementing a community cat program. This type of legislation grants credibility to TNR, promotes community involvement, and encourages community cat caregiver cooperation.

Equally important, well-crafted legislation will insulate community cats from licensing requirements, feeding bans, pet limits or other punitive laws that often impede the progress of sterilization efforts and public health protection. In addition, adopting a TNR ordinance can make grant funding more available, since this legal assurance speaks volumes about the level of community support and involvement.

What about liability to the towns or municipalities that implement a TNR program?

There could be liability for towns or municipalities that DON’T implement TNR programs.

Many free-roaming cats are unsocialized and tend to avoid people whenever possible. This lack of human contact minimizes the likelihood of liability or negligence that may result from human exposure. Also, in most TNR programs, community cats are vaccinated against rabies, greatly reducing the likelihood of a person being severely injured.

Liability should not be an issue for towns or municipalities that implement TNR programs for the purpose of reducing cat populations, protecting public health through vaccination efforts, or resolving nuisance complaints. These are all state interests worthy of government involvement.

However, there could be liability for towns or municipalities that don’t implement TNR programs. What happens if a town fails to adopt a TNR program, and a person is bitten by an unvaccinated, free-roaming cat? Could the town’s failure to act through its dismissal of a program that provides vaccinations to free-roaming cats be deemed negligence, and thus make the town liable because it rejected TNR?

What happens if you trap an owned pet cat?

All free-roaming cats should be treated equally.

The success of any community cat program is contingent on sterilizing the majority, if not all, free-roaming cats in the vicinity. Therefore, after careful consideration of a municipality's priorities, elected officials may want to consider adopting an ordinance that stipulates that any unsterilized, owned cat who roams off his or her property or frequents a community cat colony shall be physically evaluated, sterilized, vaccinated, ear-tipped, and returned to the area where trapped so the cat can be reunited with the owner.

What model state legislation already exists?

The Utah Community Cat Act empowers towns and municipalities to implement humane and cost-effective policies to control free-roaming cat populations.

Utah's Community Cat Act, adopted in 2011, is a significant piece of legislation that allows towns and municipalities to implement humane and effective policies to control free-roaming cat populations. The act defines a community cat as "a feral or free-roaming cat that is without visibly discernable or microchip owner identification of any kind, and has been sterilized, vaccinated, and ear-tipped." This act provides legal protection to caregivers by stipulating that they do not have "custody" of the animals. Consequently, returning cats to their original habitat following sterilization cannot be construed as abandonment.

This legislation also exempts community cats from licensing requirements and feeding bans, providing yet another level of legal protection to the good Samaritans who care for them. Equally important, cats who are eligible for a community cat program are exempt from a shelter's mandatory five-day holding period, a significant cost savings for municipalities and taxpayers alike. This provision is also invaluable to the health of free-roaming cats, who customarily endure a great deal of unnecessary stress while housed in shelter environments.

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