

Persuading Municipal Officials to Go with TNR

1. Why bother?

a. Unfavorable ordinances or regulations

- Pet limit laws
- Licensing
- Bans against feeding outdoors
- Anti-roaming laws Trapping restrictions

SOLUTION: exemption for managed feral cat colonies; not striking down laws

b. Unfavorable policies & practices

- E.g., Dept. of Health regulations against creating “nuisance” or “unsanitary condition” interpreted against feral cat caretakers
- Animal control policy to trap any free-roaming cat

c. Municipal interest and involvement inevitable as TNR grows

- Public health concerns (rabies, sanitation)
- Quality of life complaints (noise, smell, property damage)
- Animal control concerns
- Municipal property rights & liability concerns
- Wildlife issues

So: be proactive; don't wait to become a target

d. Municipal support can mean:

- Security for caretakers
- Problem-solving partnership
- Funding
- Publicity
- Access to sites

2. Who do you talk to?

- a. Look for a friendly face – Mayor, Councilperson, Dept. of Health official, Animal Control officer

- b. Climb the ladder – if the Dept. of Health is unreceptive, go to their superiors (e.g. City Council)
- c. Best is to approach governing body or Mayor with the support of health or animal control officials already in hand

3. Know what you're talking about

- a. You must have more than a superficial knowledge of TNR
- b. Educate yourself on:
 - Why will TNR work where other animal control methods have failed?
 - How does TNR affect public health issues?
 - What is the truth about feral cats and wildlife?
- c. Sample TNR Policy Presentation (www.aspca.org/tnrkit)
 - The Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook, Chapter 1 (www.aspca.org/tnrkit)
 - HSUS Position Statement on TNR: www.hsus.org/feralcats

4. What will you do if you succeed? Have a plan.

- a. Prepare a proposed TNR program, including caretaker training, trap bank, spay/neuter, etc.
- b. Identify the organization, agency or volunteers that will run the program
- c. Identify funding and other resources

You don't want to persuade the town to try TNR and then not have anyone willing or able to do it!!

5. Making the Pitch - Rule #1: Don't plead for the kitties!

- a. Assume your audience is not primarily concerned about the welfare of the cats. Municipal officials care about complaints from the public, animal control, and public health – that's their job
- b. So don't base your pitch on "TNR is the most humane solution"
- c. Focus on the effectiveness of TNR in permanently reducing the number of cats and amount of nuisance behavior – *Fewer cats! Fewer complaints! That's what they want to hear.*
- d. TNR reduces population because: cats don't reproduce, monitoring system in place to protect gains, attrition over time
- e. TNR reduces nuisance behavior because: no noise from mating, much less from fighting, no smell from unaltered males spraying, less roaming, controlled feeding

6. Gather all the data you can

- a. Demonstrate there really is a feral cat crisis in your community by:
 - Intake and/or euthanasia rates at local shelters
 - Complaint calls
 - Testimonials from residents & officials familiar and unhappy with the present situation (presented in letters, petitions or at public hearings)
- b. This allows you to say: “Whatever you’re doing now, it isn’t working. Time to try something new.”

7. When they ask: “Why don’t we just get rid of them all?”

Response 1: who’s going to do it? Who’s going to pay for it?

Response 2: explain why it wouldn’t work anyway:

- vacuum effect (new cats move in)
- rapid breeding by untrapped cats
- lack of cooperation by caretakers
- insufficient animal control resources
- no long-term monitoring system

8. What if they suggest “Ban the feeding!”

Response #1: “While you’re at it, please ban rain on Sundays.”

Officials with little direct experience don’t realize the impracticality of feeding bans. Give a few examples of caretakers who’ve gone to extremes or risked their jobs to feed their cats.

Response #2: If it was that easy, there wouldn’t be millions of feral cats running around in this country (or thousands in this county or hundreds in this town).

Response #3: Explain why bans don’t work:

- Ferals are territorial and will not leave
- Cats can live weeks without food and continue to reproduce
- People will continue to abandon them and there won’t be any monitoring system in place
- Malnourished cats are more susceptible to disease and spreading parasites such as fleas, making the situation much worse.

9. Liability concerns: “What if a little girl at a playground gets bit by a TNR’ed feral cat after we authorize the program? We’ll get sued!##@!”

- a. Calmly explain that feral cats don’t attack little girls at playgrounds
- b. Government is not liable for the harm caused by private activity they reasonably permit and/or regulate (e.g., drinking alcohol) – liability sensitive municipalities should avoid any hands-on role with TNR
- c. Liability for harm caused by animals generally stems from “ownership” – no one owns ferals
- d. The cat will at least have been vaccinated against rabies, saving the expense of treatment
- e. What's the liability if the cat bites the girl anyway and there is no TNR program? (*and no rabies vaccination when there could have been one if you had allowed a program?*)

10. Public Health Concerns

a. Rabies

- Fewer cats means fewer public health risks
- Rabies vaccinated cats are better than non-vaccinated cats (“What if you can’t re-capture them to re-vaccinate?” Answer: one shot is better than none.)

b. Toxoplasmosis

- handling raw meat poses a much higher risk of transmission than cats.
- no studies show ferals place population at higher risk
- Risk is largely limited to pregnant and immune-compromised

Read the Sample TNR Policy Presentation for more in depth discussion on rabies, zoonotic diseases and rats

11. Wildlife Concerns

- a. Don’t get into an argument over whether feral cats really have a major negative impact on wildlife
- b. Bottom line: Fewer cats means less predation, whatever the amount is
- c. Sanctuaries – be willing to explore relocation or other non-lethal solutions if you’re dealing with threatened or endangered species and a relatively small number of cats

Read the Sample TNR Policy Presentation for more in depth discussion of wildlife and bird issues