

Feral Cat Control

More Municipalities Are Turning to Trap, Neuter, Return

By Michelle Lerner
Policy Specialist, Project TNR

Municipalities have feral cat populations that exist because companion cats were abandoned or lost, mated with other cats, and gave birth to litters of kittens that grew up without human contact and are thus "feral," or afraid of humans. Feral cats form colonies in areas where they have access to shelter, water and food. Municipalities become concerned about feral cat populations when residents complain of nuisance behaviors such as roaming, fighting, and caterwauling, or because of fears regarding rabies.

More than 100 municipalities in New Jersey have turned to a method of feral cat management called Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) to address these concerns. This method entails a team of people trapping all cats in an area, removing and

TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN IS A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM THAT WILL RESULT IN LOWER ANIMAL CONTROL COSTS, FEWER TO NO BIRTHS, REDUCTION OF NUISANCE COMPLAINTS BY RESIDENTS AND THE ALLEVIATION OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS.



This feral kitten was removed from a colony for adoption.

adopting out kittens and friendly adults, and neutering, vaccinating, and returning the feral adults with continued monitoring. TNR is endorsed as an acceptable or preferred method of feral cat management by the New Jersey** Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), the National Animal Control Association (NACA), the Humane Society of the United States, and the ASPCA. TNR is practiced in New Jersey towns as large as Paterson and as small as Hightstown, and in urban, suburban, rural, and beach settings. Several counties have passed resolutions or issued statements supporting TNR.

Why are many municipalities turning away from traditional methods of feral cat control? Municipalities have traditionally tried to control feral cat populations in one of three ways. None have significantly reduced or eliminated them.

Ignoring the problem clearly does not address it. The cats keep reproducing from generation to generation.

Trapping and killing the cats does not work either. Mass trappings are time and labor intensive, and animal control departments rarely have the resources necessary to trap all cats in a town. Trapping, holding, and killing cats is also extremely expensive. New Jersey municipalities pay \$7- \$16/day to hold each cat for the 7 day mandatory period. Euthanasia costs an additional \$32-\$38/cat. In total, municipalities pay \$80-\$146 per cat to trap and kill. The president of NACA stated in a recent interview that "there's no department that I'm aware of that has enough money in their budget to simply practice the old capture-and-euthanize policy." Due to the labor and expense, most municipalities trap and kill only in response to complaints. This leaves untrapped cats, that reproduce at the rate of 2-3 litters per female cat each year, quickly replacing those removed. The president of NACA refers to this as "bailing the ocean with a thimble."

Feeding bans and other prohibitive ordinances also do not work. Kind-hearted residents will go to great lengths to feed cats who look hungry, making it difficult for municipalities with limited resources to stop them. Moreover, feral cats have other unintentional sources of food, and continue to survive and reproduce.



Point Pleasant Beach Councilwoman Kristine Tooker (holding award) and members of the town's Animal Welfare Committee reading an animal welfare proclamation at their town council meeting and accepting an award from the Animal Welfare Federation of New Jersey.

Some municipalities find TNR works better Trap-Neuter-Return involves the following steps, usually implemented by a group of people:

- Monitor area to count and identify all cats.
- Trap all cats.
- Adopt out kittens and friendly adults.
- Neuter, vaccinate, and return feral adults to the place they were trapped. (A surgical procedure known as eartipping—removing the tip of the left ear—is performed during the neuter and identifies cats as neutered and vaccinated.)

- Monitor cats. Caregivers coordinate feedings in an organized, sanitary manner.

- Trap any newcomers immediately and repeat steps 3, 4 and 5.

TNR effectively reduces feral cat populations by removing kittens and friendly adults and by stopping reproduction.

TNR is substantially cheaper than holding and killing cats. Low-cost spay/neuter clinics will neuter and vaccinate ferals for \$0-\$55/cat. Local vets may agree to match these prices. Private individuals and nonprofits often pay for the surgeries, essentially

**NOTE: Since this publication, NJ DHSS has revised its position. As stated on the NJDHSS website: "The Department of Health and Senior Services does not endorse or oppose the concept of establishing properly managed cat colonies utilizing trap-neuter-return (TNR) techniques. However, if a municipality wishes to allow cat colonies, they should develop standards through ordinances for the proper and managed operation of such colonies, based on the guidelines below, that would provide accountability and oversight by the health officer and animal control officer." (<http://www.state.nj.us/health/animalwelfare/stray.shtml>)

eliminating municipal costs for managing feral cats. TNR is also more humane than killing cats and is more popular with residents.

Nelson Cruz, Director of the Englewood Health Department, sums up the benefits of TNR: "The Englewood TNR initiative has proved to be the most effective solution to reducing complaints, improving public health and safety, lowering costs, and increasing lifesaving."

Levels of formality of TNR program authorization

Ordinance: Project TNR has identified 19 New Jersey towns with TNR ordinances. The following towns' ordinances are available online via the town websites: Point Pleasant Beach, Rochelle Park, Lumberton, Shamong, Southampton, Stone Harbor, Cape May, South River, and Phillipsburg.

Resolution: At least two New Jersey towns and one county have Board of Health or council /freeholder resolutions supporting TNR.

Town Committee: At least three municipalities have formed town committees, appointed by the mayor, to

implement TNR. Pt. Pleasant Beach established the committee by ordinance, Hightstown and Gloucester City without an ordinance.

ACO practice: In at least 74 New Jersey municipalities, the town, county, or contract Animal Control Officers implement TNR themselves as the preferred method of feral cat management. A DHSS-approved TNR certification course for ACOs is now available.

Contract: Some towns in New Jersey endorse and/or regulate TNR via contract. For example, the City of Englewood's Health Department contracts with the Bergen County Animal Shelter for some of its animal control work and boarding, and the contract includes a provision for TNR.

Grants or payments: Some municipalities provide grants or payments to nonprofits or individuals to engage in TNR, without any ordinance or resolution, and require varying levels of documentation and paperwork. Some towns pay local participating vets to spay/neuter cats trapped by volunteers.

MOUs or oral agreements: A few towns have informal agreements with

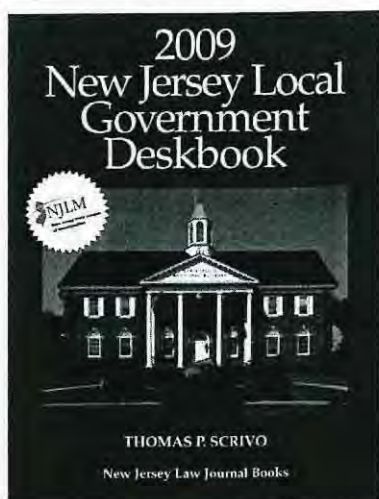
county shelters or nonprofits allowing them to set up mobile clinics on municipal property to spay/neuter ferals trapped by town residents. Other towns allow nonprofits to do the TNR without formal agreement.

Things to consider when determining how formal your municipality's TNR program authorization needs to be:

Does your municipality have ordinances that would make TNR impossible without an exemption? For example, do you have an ordinance requiring anyone who feeds cats to license them (unfeasible for feral cats due to inability to keep collars and licenses on them and the potential of fines acting as a deterrent to trapping)? Do you have an ordinance that bans feeding stray animals? If so, you may need to pass a new ordinance or amend the existing ordinance to exempt feral cat colonies managed with TNR.

If your municipality has no prohibitory ordinances and you want your ACO to try TNR and see how it works, you probably do not need an ordinance or formal authorizing document, and creating one might be unnecessarily cumbersome.

• NEW EDITION AVAILABLE! •



Annual soft cover, 700+ pages
\$149.95, NJLM Price \$129.95



THOMAS P. SCRIVO,
Editor

2009 New Jersey Local Government Deskbook

NEW JERSEY LOCAL GOVERNMENT DESKBOOK FOR ATTORNEYS AND TOWN OFFICIALS
PUBLISHED IN COOPERATION WITH THE NEW JERSEY LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES

- Open Meetings
- Public Access to Government Records
- Power of Municipal Officials
- Autonomous Departments and Agencies
- Municipal Ethics
- Procurements, Public Bidding
- Condemnation and Redevelopment
- Real Property Taxation
- Labor and Employment Law, ERISA
- Municipalities' Relationships with other Entities
- Public Utilities
- Claims Against Public Entities, Litigation
- Election Law
- Public Spending, Finance
- Structure of Municipal Governments
- Local Legislative Procedure

New Jersey Law Journal

New for 2009:

Fully revised and up-to-date,
The 2009 Edition discusses:

- Protection for employees from discrimination based on genetic testing results.
- Reasonable accommodation of an employee's sincerely held religious beliefs.
- Expanded rights of employees who have family members in the armed services.
- Paid family temporary disability leave.
- Challenges to the outcome of an election based on illegal votes.
- Whether age as a factor in determining pension status violates the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.

• To order please call Monica Curry at 973-854-2945 or order online at lawcatalog.com/locgovnjslom •

If rescue groups or town residents will be doing TNR, do you want to provide guidelines for how it should be done? If you want authorization of TNR to be conditional on following the guidelines, an ordinance or resolution might be helpful. If not, you can simply offer a guidelines document.

Amount and types of guidelines Guidelines can be important to ensuring that TNR is done correctly and ameliorates the problem it aims to address. Common guidelines are:

- Give all cats three-year rabies vaccine
- Trap for spay/neuter within particular amount of time
- Register volunteers with town, town committee, or nonprofit organization
- Provide food, water, and shelter for returned feral cats
- Give town copies of spay/neuter and rabies vaccination records
- Obtain approval of property owners
- Remove kittens and friendly adults for adoption
- Ear-tip cats
- A minority of towns require testing cats for FeLV/FIV. NOTE: Vets involved with TNR generally recommend AGAINST global testing for these diseases, as false positives are common, only 4 percent of feral cats contract these illnesses, they are not transmissible to any other species, and testing is expensive.

Funding

Municipality pays for all TNR: A number of towns entirely fund TNR:

- Through animal control budget if staff ACO implements TNR;
- Via animal control contracts with county animal control agencies, private shelters, or contract ACOs;
- By paying local vets or low-cost clinics for discounted spay/neuter surgeries on ferals trapped by residents; or
- Through grants to nonprofit groups to accomplish TNR.

Funding shared by municipality and private entity: Some municipalities give money to nonprofits to partially fund TNR, and the nonprofits then supplement town funding through grants and private donations. The arrangement can also work conversely: the City of Englewood contracts with the Bergen County Animal Shelter to provide TNR services, and an animal rescue group, START II, assists the town and county by providing veterinary services to the Englewood TNR Program.

Funding entirely paid by grants and donations: Many towns have public-private partnerships that arrange for private funds to cover all TNR costs. There are several different models:

Town committee raises private funds: Town committees with members appointed by the mayor have town accounts but no appropriated funds. The committees fund-raise through appeals, events and grants.

Nonprofit TNR group raises all funds: Nonprofits implement TNR and cover all costs, raising money via grants and donations.

Individual residents pay for spay/neuter: The municipality provides space and accommodations for a mobile low-cost spay/neuter clinic and local residents trap the cats and pay for their surgeries.

Community Involvement TNR can improve community relations, as town residents are happy to see cats managed humanely. A survey conducted by the Harris Group found 81 percent of Americans believe that leaving a stray cat outside to live out his life is more humane than killing the cat. When towns trap and kill feral cats, residents who care for the cats will still care for them, albeit underground, and sometimes interfere with animal control traps, even leading to arrest. A benefit of TNR is that residents who care about the cats can get involved productively by serving on a town committee or volunteering to trap, manage colonies, and/or raise funds.

For more information and to learn how Project TNR can assist your municipality in managing feral cats, contact Michelle Lerner at mlerner@nj-ara.org or 732-446-6808.

The goal of Project TNR is to introduce Trap-Neuter-Return to communities as the humane, effective and cost-effective method of controlling feral cat populations. Trap-Neuter-Return is a comprehensive program that will result in lower animal control costs, fewer to no births, reduction of nuisance complaints by residents and the alleviation of public health concerns. ▲

CLEAR SECURITY™

Ballistic Deterrent SYSTEMS

The Clear Choice in Architectural Security

Visit us at the **2009 NJLM Conference**
Security and Protection Never Looked So Good!

- Municipal Offices
- Courts • Police Stations
- License Bureaus

All trust Clear Security,
Each Bullet Resistant system is
designed with unique details and style

- Complete systems to accessories
- Affordable with fast turnarounds
- No sub-contractors are used
- UL Bullet Resistant Materials

Protect Your Employees Now!

Bullet Resistant Payment Center Systems, Transaction Doors & Windows
Engineered • Designed • Serviced • Installed

157 Eagle Rock Avenue Roseland, New Jersey 07068

t: 800.468.0881 e: info@clearsecuritysystems.com visit: clearsecuritysystems.com

Clear Security Systems