

WDA Public Awareness Committee  
RESOLUTION ON FERAL CATS IN THE UNITED STATES

July 29, 2004

Domestic cats (*Felis domesticus*) have long been associated with humans and have been purpose bred to develop a large number of specific breeds. Many of the estimated 70 million pet cats in the United States are indoor/outdoor or entirely outdoor. In addition, many cats are completely free roaming or feral. Feral or free-roaming cats are common and constitute a non-native, detrimental predator of native wildlife. They are also highly adaptable and have very high reproductive capabilities. The number of feral or free-roaming cats in the United States is estimated to be greater than 10 million. Studies on feral cats indicate that the quality of life of feral and free-roaming cats is lower than for indoor cats as evidenced by shorter life span and a higher likelihood of dying from trauma, predation and/or disease.

While the impact of domestic and feral cats on wildlife is difficult to determine, numerous reports, in both scientific and lay literature, document that the impact is negative primarily due to predation, competition with native species, and disease transmission to native wildlife species. The feeding of pet and feral cats does not prevent the killing of wildlife. In addition, feral and free-ranging cats may serve as reservoirs of disease for native wildlife and the public.

Feral cat colonies have become common on both private and public lands. Most aggregations of cats are maintained by routine provision of food, but not all such groups are managed as cat colonies. Management of feral cat colonies varies in intensity and purpose, but most management efforts in feral cat colonies involve trapping, neutering and release (TNR) or TNR with vaccination (TVNR) of some portion of the cats in the colony. Most feral cat colonies are not managed with the goal of elimination of the colony. The effectiveness of management actions depends on the objective of the management, but without clear measurable goals, effectiveness of management cannot be assessed.

In general, the effectiveness of management strategies for controlling the numbers of cats in colonies is poor and often offset by immigration and abandonment of pet cats, although reproduction can be controlled in colonies that are intensively trapped for neutering of all adult cats. In addition, there are no standard guidelines for the effective management of feral cat colonies, although the American Veterinary Medical Association has a policy statement that outlines minimal requirements for feral cat colonies. Cost of management programs must also be considered.

Management actions that seek to maintain or increase feral cat colonies are not acceptable to wildlife management agencies. Actions that result in direct lethal control are generally not acceptable to feral cat advocates and the individuals and groups that maintain the colonies. Methods that seek to control cat numbers by curtailing immigration, reproduction and the addition of cats that are released by the public are needed. In addition, education of the general public, feral cat advocates and wildlife management agencies must be a significant part of any control action.

Because of the negative impact that cats have on wildlife due to predation, spread of disease to native wildlife species, and public health issues, the control and management of feral cat colonies is an area of concern to the Wildlife Disease Association. This resolution is offered in support of efforts by governmental agencies and public or private organizations, including The Wildlife Society, The American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians and others, to regulate and control or eliminate feral cat colonies in a humane manner.

WHEREAS: Feral cats are present worldwide and are considered an exotic or non-native species in all habitats in which they occur,

WHEREAS: Humans introduced domestic cats to North America and humans are responsible for the control and removal of cats that prey on wildlife,

WHEREAS: Feral cat colonies are frequently established and maintained in parks, on public land, in wildlife refuges and in or adjacent to significant wildlife habitats,

WHEREAS: Feral cats can have a significant negative effect on native wildlife in local areas through predation, competition and disease transmission,

WHEREAS: The maintenance of feral cat colonies does not eliminate the colony or the detrimental effects of feral cats to wildlife.

WHEREAS: There is currently no highly effective method for management of feral cats that results in control or elimination of feral cat colonies,

WHEREAS: Wildlife management and land management agencies are charged with the management, conservation and preservation of native flora and fauna and the habitats in which they exist,

BE IT RESOLVED: That the Wildlife Disease Association supports action by wildlife management and land management agencies, public health agencies and public and private organizations to ban or eliminate feral cat colonies.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Wildlife Disease Association cooperate with The Wildlife Society, the American Veterinary Medical Association and other interested organizations and groups to draft reasonable and effective guidelines for the management of feral and free-ranging cats to ensure that the impact to wildlife is minimized or eliminated.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Wildlife Disease Association support and encourage responsible pet ownership including spaying and neutering, and encouraging cat owners to keep pet cats indoors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Wildlife Disease Association cooperate and support research on intervention strategies on feral cat colonies to document the effects of management actions on cat population levels and minimizing the impact of feral cats on wildlife and public health.