TNR Pilot Program in Burke County Shows Promising Results in Just 6 Months

In a groundbreaking effort to address the longstanding issue of outdoor cat overpopulation, Burke County has seen significant progress with the implementation of its Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) Pilot Program. Historically, the county relied on trapping and removing cats from problem areas, yet data over two decades revealed a persistent rise in cat intake at animal services, indicating the problem was far from resolved.

Conducting a comprehensive gap analysis assessment, Animal Services identified feral cats as the most vulnerable population, often facing euthanasia due to a lack of spay/neuter resources. Recognizing the urgent need for a more humane approach, the TNR pilot program was launched. Thanks to generous donations secured by the Animal Services Foundation, Inc., the program allocates eight spots weekly for the sterilization of outdoor cats, focusing on areas with high volumes of complaints.

TNR, deemed the most humane and effective method for managing feral and stray cat populations, involves trapping cats, transporting them to a spay/neuter clinic for surgery, vaccinating them for rabies, and ear tipping for identification. After recovery, the cats are returned to their original territories, where caretakers provide ongoing care. Kittens and friendly adults are placed for adoption when possible, addressing the cycle of overpopulation.

“TNR is undeniably the industry's gold standard for managing outdoor cat populations. With felines being notorious for their prolific breeding, implementing Trap-Neuter-Return is not just a smart choice but an essential one to curb their numbers humanely and effectively. By implementing TNR, we not only break the cycle of endless breeding but also provide a compassionate pathway for managing feral and stray cat populations effectively. I am immensely proud of the dedication and efforts of our Animal Services team in championing this humane solution,” stated Brian Epley, County Manager.
Since its inception, the TNR program has yielded remarkable results. Ninety-two cats have been sterilized, vaccinated, and returned to their outdoor habitats. This initiative has led to 136 less cats entering the shelter and a decrease of 267 cats being euthanized. In the 6-month comparison 309 cats were euthanized at Animal Services compared to only 42 since implementation. All but one were due to medical reasons underscoring the program's effectiveness in sparing feral cats from unnecessary euthanasia.

Jeff Brittain, Chairman of the Burke County Board of Commissioners, emphasized that "the Trap-Neuter-Return program reflects our commitment to finding compassionate solutions to complex animal welfare challenges. By working together and embracing innovative approaches, we're not just reducing cat overpopulation, but fostering a more humane community for all."

Trap-neuter-return offers a common-sense, cost-effective solution to managing unowned cat populations, preventing further births without resorting to mass removal and euthanasia. While controversies persist, the success of the TNR pilot program underscores its efficacy in achieving the shared goal of reducing outdoor cat populations.

Kay Draughn, President of Animal Services Foundation Inc., expressed gratitude for the collaborative efforts that have propelled the TNR program forward: "Thanks to our dedicated Board of Directors, the innovative efforts of the Animal Services team, and the financial support from our community partners, real progress has been made in controlling the population of outdoor feral cats while ensuring their welfare. As we commemorate this milestone, we pause to remember Alice Kopacki, whose legacy for caring for community cat colonies continues to inspire us. Furthermore, we extend our celebration to Emily Elder, our steadfast community cat partner, whose ongoing advocacy merits recognition. Together, we're making a real impact on the lives of these vulnerable animals, and that's something we can all take pride in."

As a donation-funded program, contributions to the Animal Services Foundation, Inc. are crucial to sustaining this vital initiative. Donations, which are tax-deductible, can be made by check payable to ASFI or Animal Services Foundation, Inc. (P.O. Box 52, Morganton, NC 28680), or securely through PayPal at https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=ADFX7V6AQKUN4 .