

Trap-Neuter-Return – Wisconsin Humane Society ordinance report and recommendation, August 2014

Ordinance background

The Wisconsin Humane Society has sponsored a city-sanctioned Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program since the passage of the supportive ordinance in March 2010. The ordinance, sponsored by Alderman Kovac, set forth a pilot program that sunsets in March 2015. This report summarizes the benefits and drawbacks of the current ordinance and includes our recommendation for next steps.

Ordinance successes

Partnership with Department of Neighborhood Services. We have appreciated the partnership of the Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS) on this program over the last four years. Communication between our two groups has been strong, and we've worked together to resolve concerns that have arisen.

Demonstrated reduction of cats in colonies. The number of cats in participating colonies decreased from 9.26 in 2010 when the program began to 7.53 at last reporting (October 31, 2013), a 19% reduction. Our database reports include information from all cats and colonies, even those who joined the program just before the reporting period ended. Because sterilization reduces colony size over time, we suspect the demonstrated reduction in colony size would be even greater if our database allowed us to isolate data from the original colonies.

Unwanted litters prevented. We estimate that if female cats in the original colonies had not be sterilized through our program, they would have produced more than 313 kittens within one year, and that their offspring would have continue to reproduce over the following years.¹

Ordinance drawbacks

Overview of ordinance requirements. The current ordinance process requires that the city notify all neighbors within a 200 foot radius that a neighbor would like to participate in our program to alter and care for feral cats in their neighborhood. In addition, participants must keep a census of cats for whom they care, report their colony information to the Wisconsin Humane Society as requested, and provide 30 days written notice if no longer able to care for the cats in their colony.

Requirements deter some responsible citizens, which may lead to more cats outdoors. The current ordinance allows program participants to feed, shelter, provide water for, and sterilize feral cats. We have found that many community members who have had just a couple of cats in their neighborhood who they would like altered are hesitant to commit to the requirements set forth by the ordinance. The current ordinance requirements create barriers that limit the number of feral cats we can alter through the program. Often, community members who are reluctant to join our program tell

¹ A 2005 study of feral cats found that females produce an average of 1.4 litters per year, with an average 3.5 live births

us that the cat or cats will simply remain in their community, reproducing and contributing to the cat overpopulation. Conversely, we've found that many perspective participants who are motivated to go through the "hoops" set forth by the ordinance are more interested in feeding and caring for the cats than they are in sterilizing them.

Wisconsin Humane Society recommendations

Allowing for the release of altered, ear-tipped cats. Based on our experience with this pilot program over the last four years, the Wisconsin Humane Society recommends that the Common Council consider an ordinance that would allow for the release of altered, ear-tipped feral cats without the requirements of the current ordinance. This would allow more cats who are already in our community to be sterilized, controlling the number of new cats born into our community.

Sample language. The change could be as simple as allowing the current TNR ordinance (78-20) to sunset and adding an exemption to the animals at large section (78-19) to allow for the release of sterilized, ear-tipped feral cats. For example, section 78-19-5 could read "Subsections 1 and 2 relating to animals at large does not apply to feral cats who are sterilized and ear-tipped."

Focus on spay/neuter. This change would shift the ordinance's allowances away from feeding and sheltering while allowing for spay/neuter, which is the real goal of the program. The change would also make spay/neuter for cats who are already outdoors in our community more accessible, helping to increase the number of feral cats sterilized in our community and community member participation in population control.

Maintaining nuisance and enforcement tools. This change would also leave all nuisance enforcement tools available to the City. If neighbors have concerns about cats in their neighborhood, whether they were altered by the Wisconsin Humane Society or not, they could trap the cats and take them to Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC). In addition, the Department of Neighborhood Services and other city agencies would retain their ability to enforce nuisance code.