

# Feral Cat Fact Sheet

1. **Feral Cat Solutions: Solving the problem of unwanted pets in Latah County.**

2. **Why should we care about feral cats?**

3. **Public Health Risks--What you can catch from a cat:**

a. **Bacterial Infections**

*Cat-scratch disease, also called bartonellosis.*

25,000 people in the United States are diagnosed annually.

Cat-scratch disease can occur when a person is bitten or scratched by an infected cat or they are bitten by fleas who have been in contact with infected cats.

Symptoms include: a bump or blister at the bite or scratch site, swollen lymph nodes, fatigue, headaches, fever, sore throat, loss of appetite, and weight loss.

Healthy adults generally recover after several months, with no lasting effects. People with compromised immune systems may suffer more severe, even fatal, consequences.

*Salmonellosis.*

Cats carry and pass salmonella bacteria in their stool. Salmonella bacteria are more commonly harbored by cats that feed on wild birds and rodents, as is common in a feral population. This infection causes diarrhea, fever, and stomach pain. Some people require medical attention when the infection attacks other organs.

b. **Parasitic Infections**

*Fleas and Tapeworms*

Fleas serve as vectors for cat-scratch and other zoonotic diseases. Flea-infested cats may become infected with tapeworms from fleas ingested while grooming.

Children can also become infected with tapeworms by inadvertently ingesting fleas living in the lawn.

*Roundworms and Hookworms.*

Children are particularly at risk due to their higher likelihood of contact with contaminated soil. Visceral larva migrans, is a serious disease that affects the eyes and other organs, results from inadvertent consumption of roundworm eggs (e.g. when soiled fingers are placed in the mouth). Cutaneous larva migrans, is an itchy skin disease, is caused by contact with hookworm-contaminated soil.

c. **Fungal Infections**

*Ringworm*

This is a skin infection caused by a group of fungi.

Infected cats most often come from environments housing large numbers of animals.

Infected cats continuously drop fungal spores from their skin and fur; these spores, which remain capable of causing infection for many months, are difficult to eradicate.

In humans, ringworm often appears as a round, red, itchy lesion with a ring of scale around the edge. Children are particularly at risk of infection.

d. **Protozoal Infections**

*Cryptosporidiosis and giardiasis*

These are the most common infections, causing severe diarrhea. They are spread by coming into contact with contaminated soil or water. To prevent the spread of infection, boil or filter any surface water used for drinking.

*Toxoplasmosis*

Cats can become infected by eating infected rodents or birds, and can be infected by coming into contact with the feces of another infected cat. Infected cats shed the parasite in their feces. The parasite can persist in the environment for many months and continue to contaminate soil, water, gardens, sandboxes, or any place where an infected cat has defecated.

People commonly become infected by inadvertently consuming contaminated soil from unwashed or undercooked vegetables from their gardens. Children often become infected after playing in sandboxes or soil contaminated with feline fecal matter.

A review published in *Trends in Parasitology* details the substantial public health threat the parasite poses in the United States. 250,000 - 1.25 MILLION people are infected with Ocular Toxoplasmosis annually and 4,000 – 6,000 Kids develop Congenital Toxoplasmosis annually.

e. **Viral Infections**

*Rabies*

Cats are highly susceptible to rabies, which attacks the central nervous system and rabies is almost always fatal. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 16% of people in the United States who undergo rabies treatment were exposed to the deadly virus from cats. Immediate medical treatment is advised for anyone bitten or scratched by a stray or feral animal.

f. **Other Concerns**

Feral animals spread these diseases and many more that are not transmittable to humans among housecats residing in the area, causing costly epidemics to run through the area's pet populations.

**4. Feral Cat Solutions available to Latah County Residents.**

**5. Spay and Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Spay and Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) provides funding for pet owners to spay or neuter up to three animals per year using a coupon which enables them to receive the services at a discount.

Palouse Animal Wellness and Surgery (PAWS) charges \$395.41 for a spay and \$315.76 for neuters.

Using this program, PAWS said the cost to spay the cats would drop to \$98.00 per animal, still a significant sum.

Tammy Faulkner, of Affordable Veterinary Care, only charges \$101.00 to spay a cat, and using the coupons, the spay could be free. (She spays animals from Whitman County for free when

using their feral cat funds.) Unfortunately, the rules listed on the SNAP application specifically state that low cost clinics cannot be used.

#### **6. Spay and Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP)**

- Takes up to one month to receive a decision.
- Coupons are only valid for one month.
- Cannot be used for low-cost clinics.
- Residents must certify that they are the pet owner.
- Must be able to guarantee that the animal is under 2 years of age.
- Not designed for TNR Programs.

#### **7. Humane Society of the Palouse (HSOP)**

Animal Surrender Fee of \$35 only applies to tame animals who were pets.

If a person cannot care for a pet, they are unlikely to pay \$35 for the shelter to take it. Instead the animal will be dumped, thereby increasing the stray population in the county.

HSOP refuses to take feral animals stating that they do not have the facilities to house them. Further, they added they do not have the funds to cover emergency room visits for staff who need treated for puncture wounds or stitches after being bitten or scratched by ferals.

HSOP recommends Latah County residents engage in a program of Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR.) They required a deposit of \$100 for the use of a live trap. They will not provide traps for people who wish to euthanize ferals, rather than having them spayed or neutered, then returned. No funds are available to spay or neuter ferals.

#### **8. Why Trap, Neuter, and Return Programs do not Work**

#### **9. Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) Programs**

Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR) programs capture feral cats, have them spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and then returned to where they were found.

Most research states that TNR Programs are unsuccessful and costly, often the most expensive option available.

**Loyd, Kerrie Ann T; Journal of Ecology and Society, 15(4): 10 (2010).**

“This paper demonstrates the ineffectiveness of TVNR, and shows that contrary to advocates claim, TVNR is the most expensive alternative that currently exists for management of feral cats.”

**Longcore, Travis; Conservation Biology, Volume 23, No. 4, 887–894. 2009.**

“Mathematical models of feral cat populations indicate that 71–94% of a population must be neutered for the population to decline, assuming there is no immigration (Andersen et al. 2004; Foley et al. 2005). This level of neutering and exclusion of additional cats has not been consistently documented in practice.”

Many people who want to be rid of stray and feral animals on their property and in their neighborhood very often do not want to return the animal to their property after being altered and vaccinated.

**Arcee, D.; Journal of Mammology 91(2):482–489, 2010**

“The influx of subsidized cats to natural habitats, combined with their high vagility and low trappability, makes TNR an unlikely solution for controlling feral cats on a large, rugged island like Catalina and, more generally, in other locations where human populations abut ecologically sensitive areas.”

Vaccination effectiveness expires overtime, which means, to protect the neighborhood from public health threats to humans and other pets, the animal would need to be recaptured for boosters annually. Many studies site the extreme difficulty of recapturing feral cats.

**Hughes, Kathy L; Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science 5(1), 15–28 (2002).**

“Ideally, a population estimate, using the mark-recapture method, would have been performed prior to the program’s implementation...Given this limitation and the potential difficulty in recapturing cats, and because the program’s goal was to neuter as many cats as possible, an initial population estimate was not performed. It cannot be stated definitively that the total number of cats on campus has decreased.”

Feral cats are territorial, frequently pushing companion animals and housecats out of their territory and away from their families, further increasing the population of strays.

## **10. Finding Other Solutions For Feral Cats.**

### **11. The Deadly Consequences of ‘No-Kill’ Policies**

Unwanted, abandoned, neglected, and stray animals pour into the animal shelters every day—far outnumbering the good homes available to take them in.

Many groups striving to go “no-kill” use limited resources to provide temporary care; ship cats across the country (even though every state struggles with the same crisis); close their doors to the neediest animals—those who are in danger of abuse or are injured, sick, elderly, or aggressive; and they even attack open-admission shelters who euthanize animals.

When shelters give in to pressure to go “no-kill” before they have established sufficient spaying and neutering services, the results are often far worse for animals than a peaceful death through euthanasia.

## Consequences of 'No-Kill' Policies

- a. **Animals spend months or years in cages.**
- b. **Animals are handed over to abusers and hoarders.**

Homeless animals are often found later, caged in hoarders' basements, garages, sheds, and barns. Every day, headlines appear about raids on self-described "rescuers," where animals—both sick and dead—were removed. When one hoarding facility masquerading as a "rescue" in San Jose, California, caught fire, nearly 100 cats burned to death inside carriers, unable to flee while the plastic melted down on top of them.
- c. **Animals are turned away at the shelter door don't magically vanish.**

"No-kill" shelters are usually at capacity, so they stop taking in animals, including those in emergency or abusive situations.
- d. **Animals die in pain.**

Instead of a peaceful death in a caring person's arms, animals die slowly and in agony on the streets, in backyards, under sheds, on chains, and at the hands of abusive people. In San Antonio, Texas—which is striving to be a "no-kill" city—the bodies of nearly 16,000 dogs and nearly 12,000 cats were scraped off the streets and properties in just one year. One animal control officer termed it "euthanasia by proxy."
- e. **Animals are cast out and keep on reproducing.**

Shelters inadvertently promote animal abandonment by requiring surrender fees. Abandoned animals will eventually go on to reproduce, resulting in even more homeless animals.

### 12. **Euthanasia: The Compassionate Option**

Turning unwanted animals loose to roam the streets is not a humane option. They may starve, freeze, get hit by a car, die of disease, or be tormented and possibly killed by cruel juveniles.

Because of the high number of unwanted companion animals and the lack of good homes, sometimes the most humane thing that a shelter worker can do is give an animal a peaceful release from a world in which cats are often considered "surplus" and unwanted.

**PETA, the American Veterinary Medical Association, and the Humane Society of the United States** concur that an intravenous injection of sodium pentobarbital administered by a trained professional is the kindest, most compassionate method of euthanizing animals.

Until dog and cat overpopulation is brought under control through spaying and neutering, we must prevent the suffering of unwanted animals in the most responsible and humane way possible. Euthanasia, performed properly, is often the most compassionate option.

### 13. **One Shelter's Success Story.**

### 14. **Kill Shelter Success**

- a. Five years ago, a government run shelter in Richmond, VA was killing nearly 1/3 of the animals that came to the shelter.

- b. Christie Chipps Peters, the director of Richmond's Animal Care And Control department began a campaign of being open and honest about the very real need to euthanize unwanted animals in the community.
  - i. "Since we are the only open admission shelter in the city of Richmond, that means that we take care of every single animal that is in need. So if our officers are out and we have to seize 40 dogs, we need to make 40 cages at the shelter available. And previously, that would just mean that 40 animals would lose their lives. Now, we would put a post on Facebook and say, "We've taken 40 animals, we need to find 40 of our dogs that are in house, foster homes."
- c. The euthanasia rate dropped by 40% in just the first year of their program.
- d. Today, the shelter is boasting record high adoptions.

Immediately extend the hours the shelter is open. For working families, being open from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. does not accommodate animals leaving alive.

Put in place a structured program to try and help people keep their animals rather than dropping them at the shelter.

**They got pushback for being so open about euthanizing animals.**

People messaged back, "I'm sorry to see that there is even one animal euthanized."

To those people Christie Chipps Peters offers these tidbits:

"And while we do understand that, it's not the reality of the job that we do."

"When an animal has harmed other people or harmed or killed other pets, they need to be put-down. Those animals cannot be put back into the community for safety concerns."

"And, for animals that are sick, injured, or badly abused, the kindest thing that we can do is to perform euthanasia."

"It has completely transformed our operations. And I'm hopeful that others will jump on the bandwagon. You know, in the past, animal control agencies and open-admission agencies have sort of put a cloak over the unpleasant side of our jobs and while that is, unfortunately, a very real part of our job, the reality is if you're able to share your story and tell the truth and allow the public to see completely your operations and how you're doing things and ask for help, the response has been incredible."

**15. Looking at Latah County's Budget and Limitations.**

**16. Costs and Alternatives**

Latah County provides HSOP with \$20,000 of funding annually.

This money is ill spent since the HSOP is either unable or unwilling to serve the residents of the county who are encountering problems with feral and stray animals.

Edward Davies, Operations Manager at the Montgomery County, PA, SPCA (Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) has estimated that it cost \$411, on average, to house an animal for a year. This mean that given the counties budget, they could afford to house 48 animals in the shelter annually.

Alternatively, by adopting a Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Return Program, the county's \$20,000 could accommodate an additional two animals; spaying/neutering 50 feral cats annually.

Affordable Veterinary Care only charges \$50 to euthanize a cat, so that same \$20,000 could euthanize 400 animals, permanently removing them from the population, saving them from a painful, unwanted existence, protecting public health, ensuring the continued safety of our companion animals, causing a substantial decrease in the number of stray and feral animals in the county.

## 17. Conclusion

Given the county's limited resources and the magnitude of the stray and feral population in the county, the only reasonable solution is to allow euthanasia to be used as a viable alternative.

## 18. References

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19. Thank you.