

# Khaliela Wright

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Latah Commissioner's Office  
PO Box 8068  
522 S Adams St.  
Moscow, ID 83843

Dear Mr. Richard Walser, Mr. Tom Lamar, and Mr. Dave McGraw:

I have recently become aware of a problem with feral cats in the county. I made this discovery when one showed up in my backyard last summer. I didn't do anything at the time, because I assumed that she belonged to someone and was simply a neighbor cat expanding her territory after my nineteen year old neutered tom passed away. Then she had a litter.

I watched with baited breath as the kittens played in the yard and harassed the quail. But, the owners I thought she had, never found homes for the kittens. Eventually, I realized that she was a stray. I called the Humane Society of the Palouse (HSOP) last fall—they refused to take the animals stating that they did not take feral cats and would not take kittens unless they were still young enough to be gentled. By this time it was far too late for that, the kittens were 4 months old.

Winters can be harsh on the Palouse and the coyotes cunning. I assumed that if I didn't feed them, they would succumb to coyotes, the elements, or find a more hospitable neighborhood. None of those things happened. The original cat has had another litter, last year's kittens have had kittens, and fearsome toms patrol the neighborhood. Something needs to be done.

I called the HSOP and had to put down a \$200 deposit for two live traps, they would take the kittens, but not the adults. The reading I've done regarding trap, neuter, and release (TNR) programs say that if you trap and release a feral cat you'll never be able to trap it again because they quickly learn to avoid the traps. This means that I can't set the traps until I have someplace to send the toms and queens. To release the mama cats would mean that they would roam the neighborhood for years teaching litter after litter to avoid the traps.

Many places advocate spaying feral animals before releasing them. Palouse Animal Wellness and Surgery (PAWS) charges \$395.41 to spay a cat. That is a ridiculous sum to pay for an unwanted animal. The HSOP refereed me to the Spay and Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP), which 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 lower cost. 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

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

Nevertheless, I filled out the application and attempted to submit it. The HSOP said I should deliver it directly to Animal Clinic in Moscow because some of their veterinarians are SNAP board members and a decision might be made faster than the one month return time stated on the application. They refused to accept the application, stating that it must be mailed. By the time I get a decision, I expect that the kittens will be too old for the HSOP to take, thus further exasperating the situation.

While talking with Dave McGraw earlier this week, I learned that the county provides HSOP with \$20,000 of funding annually. I think 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. Further, I learned that pet owners who find they are no longer able to care for their pet are charged a \$35 surrender fee by HSOP. 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.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has stated that feral cats pose a public health risk. The CDC estimates that 16% of people in the United States who undergo rabies treatment were exposed to the deadly virus from cats. Zoonotic diseases, such as ring worm and cat scratch disease (an infection with bartonella bacteria) also pose a human health threat. In addition, some cats carry a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*, which is shed in their feces. This parasite is transmitted to humans who encounter cat feces while gardening or engaging in yardwork. A review published in *Trends in Parasitology* details the substantial a public health threat the parasite poses in the United States. Feral animals also spread diseases among housecats residing in the area, causing costly epidemics to run through the area's pet populations.

If the county is truly serious about reducing the number of unwanted animals, and serving the residents of the county, it is time to consider another solution. I called the North Palouse Veterinary Clinic and learned that it would cost \$56 to euthanize a feral cat. Affordable Veterinary Care only charges \$50. At the going rates, the county's \$20,000 could spay and release 50 feral cats annually. That same \$20,000 could euthanize 400 animals, permanently removing them from the population. Euthanasia seems to be the obvious solution.

I would be happy to offer my assistance and work with the county to come up with a euthanasia program that will reduce the population of feral and stray animals roaming the county.

Respectfully,

Khaliela Wright