

Save Lives with Feral Freedom

A guide to the Feral Freedom program



Best Friends
ANIMAL SOCIETY®

Save Lives with Feral Freedom

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Save Lives with Feral Freedom

One of the keys to bringing about a time of No More Homeless Pets® is reducing the number of cats currently dying in shelters nationwide. In most communities, at least 50 percent of the animals entering shelters are felines and on average only three out of every 10 cats leave alive. Sadly, in many shelters, only one in 10 cats survive.

But there is a proven way to save those cats' lives. This step-by-step guide describes how the City of Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) and First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) worked together to make it happen, and how you can do it, too.

Written by First Coast No More Homeless Pets director and founder Rick DuCharme with assistance from Best Friends Animal Society, this guide provides an inside look at the Feral Freedom program, which has dramatically reduced the number of cats dying in the Jacksonville, Florida, city shelter. It describes how the program began and evolved, and helps you assess whether Feral Freedom is a good fit for your community, along with providing step-by-step guidelines for planning and implementing your own program. There's also detailed information about the Jacksonville program and an appendix with documentation that your community can use. It is our hope that Feral Freedom will become a model for other successful lifesaving efforts around the country.

At its roots, Feral Freedom is a trap/neuter/return (TNR) program for "community cats" — free-roaming feral, stray and lost cats who live outside and don't belong to anybody. As detailed in this guide, reducing the number of cats killed in shelters requires a community-wide effort and commitment. But the results are well worth it: It saves your community money, and it saves the lives of thousands of cats, bringing us all one step closer to achieving a time of No More Homeless Pets.

The Beginning of Feral Freedom

When First Coast No More Homeless Pets was founded in 2002, about 70 percent of the 33,000 dogs and cats entering Jacksonville's shelters perished. At the time, many people thought that our mission of decreasing and eventually eliminating the need to euthanize animals simply because they had no homes was an impossible dream.

During our first year, we introduced SpayJax, a high-volume pet sterilization program targeting low-income people with pets. Within months, the city shelter experienced a decrease in admissions. Additional targeted spay/neuter programs followed, with the highest volume focusing on feral or community cats. Also in 2002, Jacksonville Animal Care & Control (as it was then called) and the Jacksonville Humane Society began performing sterilization before adoption instead of adopting out pets with spay/neuter vouchers.



Thanks in large part to these measures, over the next six years, shelter admissions dropped 30 percent and shelter deaths decreased by nearly 50 percent. Although this was certainly great progress, one continuing frustration remained: Despite spaying or neutering several thousand cats each year, a significant number of unaltered feral/community cats were still entering the city shelter and being euthanized. Shelter admissions of pet cats and kittens and dogs and puppies had decreased dramatically, but feral/community cats were continuing to drain the city's resources and those of other local animal welfare organizations.

In 2008, Ebenezer Gujjarlapudi, Jacksonville's director of environmental and compliance, was appointed interim chief of Animal Care & Protective Services. An engineer by trade without animal welfare experience, he researched all aspects of animal shelters, including the impact of feral cats. The Feral Freedom program came about as a result of his ability to think "outside of the box" and seek practical solutions. His unique perspective on the problem, untainted by past involvement, led to the development of an effective solution to the issue of free-roaming cats in Jacksonville.

Under his leadership, a new policy was introduced: Feral and community cats would no longer be killed in the city shelter. Instead, all feral cats coming into the shelter would be turned over to FCNMHP or other animal welfare organizations. These organizations would sterilize, vaccinate, microchip, ear tip and return the cats to their territories. This new policy would save around 3,300 cats deemed "feral" each year. In the past, these cats would have been housed for the mandatory holding period and then euthanized, all at substantial taxpayer expense. But on August 1, 2008, the first feral cats were transferred from the City of Jacksonville to FCNMHP. Cats who previously would have been killed in the shelter were instead returned to their territories alive, but were no longer able to reproduce.

Quickly, a problem arose, which was immediately addressed. At first, cats deemed "feral" because they were aggressive or frightened in the traps were allowed to be transferred to the Feral Freedom program and live, while "friendly" cats from the same neighborhood, living outdoors under the same circumstances, were euthanized simply because they did not "act feral." To remedy this inequity, guidelines for cats admitted to the program were changed. If they had been living outside with no specific home and doing well on their own, friendly "community cats" were also transferred to the Feral Freedom program. This natural progression addressing the needs of all outdoor cats expanded the program's volume to around 4,500 community cats each year. This change quickly

and effectively reduced the number of cats dying in the shelter by 50 percent!

Also during the first year, microchipping, which had failed to provide much usable data, was discontinued, allowing that expense to be reallocated toward helping more cats. In addition, a rule that animal control could choose not to transfer cats who were captured more than three times was dropped. Under the new policy, if an animal control officer in the field came across an ear-tipped cat in a trap, the cat would be released.

Step One: Understand How Feral Freedom Works

Before determining if Feral Freedom is a good fit for your community, you'll need a basic understanding of how it works. The steps outlined below provide an overview of the tasks involved in running the program. A more detailed description of how the program works is provided later in this guide. (See Step Three: Work in Partnership.)

Simple steps to Feral Freedom:

1. Residents rent traps from Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) to trap "nuisance" cats.
2. Trapped cats are brought to the JACPS shelter by residents or picked up from residents and transported by the animal control officer. Basic information about each cat is obtained to assist in determining the cat's final disposition and in returning community cats to their territories.
3. Each cat is put through the regular admissions process and admitted to the shelter. At that time, the cat is evaluated for the Feral Freedom program based on the information gathered and inspection of the cat.
4. Cats destined for the Feral Freedom program are sent to an isolation room and remain in their traps. Information about each cat, including the location where the cat was trapped, is written on the cage card that is attached to the trap.
5. Cats are transported twice a day to FCNMHP. Cats never remain at the JACPS shelter for longer than four hours.
6. Cats are sterilized, vaccinated for rabies and FVRCP, treated for fleas and ear mites if needed, and ear-tipped.
7. Cats are kept overnight and given a meal both that evening and the next morning before being returned to their territories.
8. Door hangers explaining the program are left at the homes surrounding the area where the cats are released.

Step Two: Do Community Assessment and Planning

What are the goals of the program?

As part of the planning process, each community needs to decide on its own goals for the program. In Jacksonville, the short-term goals were to dramatically decrease shelter deaths by returning outdoor community cats to their territories and to decrease shelter admissions and shelter costs by sterilizing community cats. The long-term goal is to decrease and ultimately eliminate cats living outdoors on their own, in the most effective, inexpensive and humane way possible.

Sterilization, vaccination and minor medical treatment make outdoor cats healthier and safer, but unable to produce unwanted litters. In addition, the chance of these cats becoming nuisances is greatly reduced once they've been sterilized and vaccinated. By implementing a Feral Freedom program, your animal control department can also reduce its costs, along with the number of cat-related complaint calls it receives.

If these goals are consistent with your community's goals, Feral Freedom is a proven, effective, and humane program you may want to implement. But to be successful, the program requires sufficient support from both the community and local government administration. The questions and information below, based on Jacksonville's experience, will help you determine if Feral Freedom is the right match for your community.

How many cats would qualify for the program?

To determine the resources required for the program, you first need to estimate the number of cats expected to qualify for Feral Freedom each year. Don't assume that the number of cats being euthanized in the shelter as "feral" is the same as the number of cats who will qualify for the program.

Out of 13,365 cats entering Jacksonville's city shelter in 2007, around 3,300 were deemed feral and euthanized for that reason. Because it was quickly realized that cats who were deemed feral weren't the only ones who could qualify for the program, the term "community cats" was embraced. Feral Freedom was expanded to include all free-roaming cats who had been living outside and doing well on their own, whether they were feral or friendly. During the first two years of the Feral Freedom program, FCNMHP worked with approximately 4,500 cats annually.

The only cats considered ineligible for the Feral Freedom program are those who are surrendered by a family, indoor cats, declawed cats, those too unhealthy to return to the streets, and kittens too young to fend for themselves.

Residents bringing one or more cats to JACPS are asked several questions about each cat. This information is used to determine the cat's final disposition: eligibility for the Feral Freedom program, adoption or euthanasia. The city's intake staff do not volunteer information about the Feral Freedom program unless they are directly questioned about what will happen to the cat. This policy curtails complaints and unproductive discussions at admissions. The city also provides the service of picking up and transporting cats from residents who have trapped them. When picking up cats from residents, field officers obtain the required information and follow the same policy as intake staff at the shelter.

Which groups will participate?

One of the first steps in planning a Feral Freedom program is to take an inventory of the animal welfare organizations in your area, including any existing trap/neuter/return (TNR) groups, and to determine how these groups can work together. Who is going to be the lead agency for this program? What additional assistance is needed from other groups? Are there existing groups that are willing and able to provide that assistance? Which groups might be able to grow their organizations to assist in a large project?

Ideally, the government-run and -funded animal control agency should take the lead in a Feral Freedom program. Since most large municipal shelters have their own spay/neuter facilities in-house, they are well positioned to provide the most efficient implementation of the program. In addition, animal control agencies typically have transport vehicles and staff for the pickup and return of trapped cats.

It's important to contact interested animal welfare groups and address their concerns before the program begins. All animal welfare groups share the goal of reducing the number of animals dying in the shelters, and this program is definitely a big step in that direction. Because of the minimal number of feline adoptions and rescues from Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS), often the shelter staff have to decide whether a cat should enter the Feral Freedom program or be euthanized. Sadly, there are usually no other options. When explained in those clear terms, it is very difficult for any serious animal welfare group to disapprove of the program.



After agreeing to undertake the Feral Freedom program, FCNMHP contacted other major groups and were fortunate to find a willing partner: The Jacksonville Humane Society helped launch the program by transporting cats from the JACPS shelter to FCNMHP's clinic during the first year of the program.

What resources are available and needed?

Transport. As mentioned above, trapped cats are brought to the city shelter by residents or field officers who pick them up from residents. Cats transferred to the Feral Freedom program are transported from the shelter to the FCNMHP clinic twice a day, once at noon and again just before the shelter closes for the day, after all officers are in from the field. This ensures that no cats are left at the shelter overnight, minimizing the risk of disease transmission. The day following surgery, the cats are returned to the trapping location and released.

This process requires that drivers are on the road seven days a week; surgery is performed six days a week; and cats are housed at the clinic every day. Ideally, cats do not remain in traps more than three days. If longer-term housing is required, the cats are transferred to cages using feral dens.

FCNMHP's fleet of vans comprises three cargo vans equipped with rear cargo area climate control, non-

skid bed liners in the cargo area, and a safety divider between the driver and cargo areas. The fleet is also used for transporting other animals to the spay/neuter clinic. One van is dedicated to the program and staff have access to two other vans as needed for releasing large numbers of cats.

Staffing. It is difficult to judge the number of staff who will be needed to efficiently run a Feral Freedom program, but it is important to estimate and plan for adequate staffing. The Jacksonville program currently budgets about 60 hours per week of staff time for the program. The majority of that time is focused on transporting and caring for cats. Since JACPS admits cats six days a week and the clinic does surgeries six days a week, Feral Freedom staff must work seven days a week, caring for and releasing cats.

In the beginning, much of the program director's time was required to mediate complaints from residents about cats being returned to their territories. After two years, complaints are rare and less than 20 percent of the program director's time is now spent on ensuring that Feral Freedom runs smoothly.

When FCNMHP first agreed to take on the Feral Freedom program, the organization had only four employees. Before launching the program, three staff members were added. It was definitely worth the investment, since the program saves the lives of thousands of cats each year, and is far more effective than mass euthanasia.

Surgery capacity. One of the biggest challenges of running a Feral Freedom program is having the available surgery capacity required to alter cats when they are admitted. In Jacksonville, about 20 cats are typically transferred to the clinic daily, but the number varies. To avoid keeping cats in traps for extended periods, the program needs to have an available daily surgery capacity of between 20 and 50 cats.

Surgery capacity is defined as the resources needed to perform surgery, even if the surgery does not take place. Given that staff and overhead expenditures far exceed the cost of surgical supplies, maintaining the required surgery capacity when it is not always needed is an enormous drain on resources and a significant challenge for the program. These expenses can be mitigated by performing feral cat surgeries at the end of the day and holding some cats overnight in large cages if necessary. This allows FCNMHP to frequently operate the clinic at full capacity, while still sterilizing Feral Freedom cats in a timely manner. If an unusually high number of animals come in for surgery, the

clinic also has the ability to call in relief veterinarians or ask some of the staff surgeons to work extra hours to increase capacity.

Funding. FCNMHP's portion of the program costs about \$50 per cat, including transport from the shelter, surgery and care, and transport back to the cat's territory. This figure does not include startup costs, which cost FCNMHP approximately \$42,700. (See the budget in the appendix.) At the same time, JACPS saves \$50 per cat by no longer having to care for the animals for the mandatory five-day holding period and not spending funds to euthanize and dispose of the cats. The City of Jacksonville continues to pay for the loan of traps, transport to the shelter and intake costs. Since these costs were already the city's responsibility, Feral Freedom required no additional government funding. In fact, by strategically re-allocating some of its resources, the city could theoretically support the entire program.

A collaborative, humane effort involving several groups allows the work to be shared and may attract additional resources such as private foundation and volunteer support. Dedicated long-term funding is vital to ensure sustainability for a Feral Freedom program. And sustainability is a key factor in securing grant funding.

Although no funding was given initially by the city to support the program, FCNMHP and the Jacksonville animal welfare community could not pass up the opportunity to save all of the feral/community cats entering the city shelter. Fortunately, Best Friends Animal Society provided a generous three-year grant to help fund the program, along with the expertise and support of Best Friends' knowledgeable staff.

As a result, in 2010, the City of Jacksonville, recognizing the effectiveness of the program, enacted an ordinance that provides a solid source of funding for the future, mainly through licensing revenue.

What local ordinances need to be considered, if any?

Each community should assess its current animal-related laws to determine if they need to be updated to be consistent with the Feral Freedom program. The Jacksonville ordinances pertaining to leash laws and "pets at large" conflicted with a program focused on TNR. It wasn't until almost two years after the launch of the program that caring for feral and community cats was formally legalized and specifically recognized in the city code.

Of course, every location is different and ordinance revisions or adoption of a pilot TNR project may be required before implementing a Feral Freedom program in your community. Decisions about whether or not a new ordinance is needed often rest with the local head of the animal control agency.

The new Jacksonville city ordinance includes these definitions of "community cat" and "feral cat":

Community Cat means any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area that is known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats shall be distinguished from other cats by being sterilized and ear tipped; they are exempt from licensing requirements.

Feral means a wild animal that exists in an untamed state or that has returned to an untamed state generally not socialized to human contact and is no longer considered domesticated. Feral animals shall include, but not be limited to cats, dogs and hogs.

The new ordinances also allow for the care of these animals either in managed colonies or individually in communities. All Jacksonville community/feral cat ordinances are included in the appendix.

What about gauging public support?

Concerns about potential opposition need to be considered when launching a Feral Freedom program. To avoid attracting negative attention or complaints, we decided to quietly establish the program and prove it was successful before actively seeking publicity.

The support of three of Jacksonville's major animal welfare groups was a key factor in positively shaping public opinion and the attitudes of policymakers toward the Feral Freedom program. The city's Animal Care & Protective Services, the Jacksonville Humane Society and FCNMHP were all solidly behind the program and provided a coordinated response to the media and others researching the feral cat issue.

Like most places, Jacksonville had dealt with issues surrounding community cats over the years, consisting mainly of conflicts between the former animal control department and colony caregivers. These situations were quickly remedied when the agency adopted the new community cat policy. In the first two years of the Feral Freedom program, there were fewer than two dozen serious complaints about the program from Jacksonville residents. In each of these cases, the city administration stood behind the program and the concerns quickly dissipated.

A year after launching Feral Freedom, when it had been proven successful in saving lives as well as city resources, the *Florida Times-Union* ran a front-page story about the program. The article generated many positive comments, and only a few negative ones.

What other feral cat programs are available?

Before forming a coalition to establish a Feral Freedom program, survey existing feral cat resources in your community. To maximize its impact on saving lives at the shelter, the Jacksonville program targeted only those cats entering the shelter system. It is important to have alternative TNR resources available for residents caring for feral cat colonies. The Feral Freedom program didn't have the resources to offer free TNR services to anyone. The program is intended to address population control and management of "nuisance" cats who are already living in the community.

Will other local TNR groups support a Feral Freedom program? Are any of them able to participate in the program? Organizations that are already working with feral cats are uniquely suited to support this program and should be tapped for support as much as possible.

How can this program be sustainable?

Obviously, long-term sustainability of the program is essential. To begin a program like this and then to have to discontinue it would be a real tragedy. Finding the seed money to initiate a Feral Freedom program is an important first step, but most funders now require a sustainability plan before distributing grant money, especially for large new programs. To assure sustainability, commitments of resources and services from the government-funded animal control agency, non-profit animal welfare groups, and/or private funders must be secured in advance.



Step Three: Work in Partnership

This section provides a more detailed look at how First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) and Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) work together to save thousands of cats each year. If you're planning to implement a Feral Freedom program in your community, then it will be very helpful to have a deeper understanding of each group's roles and responsibilities, as well as additional details about how the program works.

At the shelter

During the shelter intake process, information about each cat, including the location where the cat was trapped, is obtained and written on the cat's cage card. Cats destined for Feral Freedom are segregated from all other shelter cats as soon as possible after admission to minimize the risk of disease transmission. Feral Freedom cats are also moved out of the shelter to FCNMHP as quickly as possible.

Once cats are selected for the program, they are left in the traps they arrived in or put in traps and placed in a segregated room at JACPS for pickup. A copy of each cat's cage card must be attached to the trap. The cage card includes any known information about the cat and, most important, where the cat was trapped, so he/she can be returned to his/her territory. Without this information, the cat will be disqualified from the program. If no cage card is attached to the trap, transport staff must obtain the required information before taking the cat. (Since the shelter staff are well trained, this is rarely necessary.)

Of course, if your animal control agency operates as both a shelter and the spay/neuter clinic, cats can be transferred to the segregation area immediately with no need for transport to a separate facility.

Transferring cats

Cats are picked up at the shelter for transport to FCNMHP twice daily, at noon and right before closing at 4:30 p.m. This ensures that no Feral Freedom cats stay at the shelter for more than a few hours and never overnight. It also maximizes the savings for JACPS by freeing them from having to care for the animals, and delivers the cats to FCNMHP quickly, so surgery can be performed and the cats can be returned to their territories as soon as possible. Cats picked up from JACPS in the morning are usually operated on that afternoon, and returned to their territories the next day.

FCNMHP is lucky enough to have the flexibility to respond to demand as needed. Since the flow of cats from the public is unpredictable, it is difficult to schedule staff who both transport cats from JACPS to the clinic for surgery and also return cats to their territories after they have recovered. The workload of the transport staff not only depends upon the volume of cats entering the program, but also on the number of cats having surgery. If the clinic gets behind in surgery, the flow of cats for return may be disrupted.

Surgery

At its spay/neuter clinic, FCNMHP annually handles over 5,000 feral cats brought in by the public in addition to approximately 4,500 Feral Freedom cats. When the Feral Freedom program began, the clinic had only 800 square feet of space. It has since moved into a larger facility, but staff have found that the size of the clinic isn't as important as the capacity. Many cats can be handled in a relatively small space when needed.

Ideally, the clinic that will be performing surgery for your program will also have some experience with handling feral cats; if not, handling techniques can be easily learned. As always, handling animals is much easier when the proper equipment is available. FCNMHP uses feral cat traps, feral dens, isolation forks and cat squeeze holders. Other equipment that may be helpful in specific situations are transport cages and large housing cages.

Ideally, cats should have surgery within 24 hours of entering JACPS. Cats who stay longer require additional care and cleanup, which consumes additional resources. Extended stays also increase the cat's stress level and should be avoided whenever possible. Every evening that cats spend at FCNMHP, they receive a meal of canned cat food mixed with water in an attempt to keep them hydrated. The cats also receive a meal the morning they are returned to their territories.

For longer stays: moving cats from traps to dens

As previously mentioned, cats kept longer than 72 hours are transferred from traps to suitable cages for the duration of their stay. The goal is to get cats into surgery and back to their territories within 48 hours of arrival from JACPS, counting the day of pickup and the day of release. So, for example, cats picked up on Tuesday would have surgery on Wednesday and be returned to their territories on Thursday.

When a cat needs to be transferred from a trap to a larger cage with a litter box, feral dens from Animal

Care & Equipment Services (www.animal-care.com) are used. A feral den is lined up with the trap and the cat is transferred from trap to den. The entire den is then placed into a larger cage in a cage bank. Once the cage door is securely shut, it is easy to reach in with an extension and lift the trap door on the feral den, allowing the cat to exit into the cage.

Although most of the cats remain in the dens while staff are present, many of them will exit the den to use the litter box or to stretch a little when staff are out of the room. When it is time to transfer the cat back to the trap for surgery or return, the trap door is lowered while the cat is in the trap and the cat can then be transferred or transported.

Volume of cats

It is important to keep in mind that with this type of program, the volume of cats presented for surgery will vary. Some days, no cats or only a few are received from animal control; other days, the program receives as many as 60 cats or more. With scheduling software, surgery is planned for 10 Feral Freedom cats each day, knowing in advance that this projection is seldom accurate. The Feral Freedom cats round out the clinic's schedule and fill in for no-shows and late cancellations of surgeries for animals brought in by the public.

The clinic can quickly become the choking point for the program if it becomes overwhelmed with a large number of cats. Surgeries for owned pets and feral cats brought in by the public are scheduled each day in addition to surgeries for Feral Freedom cats. If everyone shows up for surgery (instead of the projected 20 percent no-show rate), if more walk-in feral cat surgeries are required than expected, and/or if the Feral Freedom volume is higher than normal, surgery can get backed up pretty quickly. Fortunately, the clinic staff can call in relief veterinarians as extra surgeons or ask some of the staff surgeons to work extra hours to handle the increased volume.

If the clinic plans on an average of 20 cats entering the program each day that animal control is open, then it needs to have the ability to easily house 60 cats on a regular basis and the flexibility to handle many more on a temporary basis whenever there is a flood of eligible cats to animal control or if the surgery schedule gets backed up. For this reason, the clinic has extra-wide hallways and some storage space that can be turned into a temporary cat holding space.

Returning cats

Each morning the transport driver starts off by feeding the cats who will be released that day. While the cats

are hopefully enjoying their meal, the driver maps out the route. Using Internet mapping services and their knowledge of the city, the drivers map out the most efficient routes for returning the cats to their territories.

When returning cats to their territories, the drivers put door hangers on the houses surrounding the release site. The hangers inform residents about the program and advise them that ear-tipped cats have already been through the program and there is no need to trap them. The door hanger includes information about living with community cats. (A sample door hanger is included in the appendix.)

The transport crews are also responsible for cleaning and sterilizing traps used for transport and release. They keep JACPS well-stocked with traps for transferring community cats, whether they arrive at the shelter in traps or not. Care of Feral Freedom cats and cleanup in the clinic is mostly handled by the transport staff, with some backup from the clinic kennel staff.

Both JACPS and FCNMHP maintain stocks of traps and some intermingling takes place, but every effort is made to keep the traps separate. Using different brands of traps is helpful. This challenge could easily be solved by establishing a joint stock of traps that could be used by both participating organizations.

Public relations

As mentioned earlier, it's important to have an official policy that all involved agree upon and use when responding to public or media inquiries. This policy must hold up under pressure and be appropriate for discussing the program with people on either side of the issue. Jacksonville's policy is that trapping and killing cats year after year had no impact on reducing the number of cats in the community. This new, more effective method of handling feral and community cats was introduced and it is now the city's policy.

Relocation of the cats is not a realistic option in most cases. It is difficult to get them to stay in a new, unfamiliar location without effort and resources, which are generally not available. The biggest argument against relocation is simply the fact that nobody really needs or wants more feral cats. Relocation is simply moving a problem from one area to another. The goal of the program is to completely eliminate the problem of cats living outside on their own and not to just move the problem from one location to another.

Although the city's current policy is to trap and return community cats, residents don't have to simply tolerate unwanted cats. Callers who complain about

nuisance cats on their property are educated in ways to humanely discourage cats from living where they are not wanted. At the start of the program, Feral Freedom stocked up on motion sensor sprinklers and offered handouts about other products to keep cats off property, but most people expressed little interest.

After the first year, there were very few complaints from citizens. The complaints that are received are often about specific cats in a yard rather than concerns about the overall program. It is essential to always make sure callers understand that there are really only two options for outdoor cats: either trap/neuter/return or trap and kill. Relocation or adoption are not viable options.

Frequently, complaints turn out to be related to domestic disputes, in which one member of the family is feeding the neighborhood cats and another member does not want the cats around. If someone isn't already feeding the cats, it is recommended that an alternative food source be provided or that whatever is attracting the cats be removed from the property.

This policy is consistent with the way the city handles complaints about raccoons or squirrels. The city does not remove these animals from residents' property, and outdoor cats will not simply be removed either. Assistance is offered in trapping the cats and sterilizing them in an effort to decrease and eventually eliminate outdoor cats. The program also offers advice on how to exclude cats from residents' property. For example, callers are counseled to use a hose or glass of water to scare off the cats. Only humane alternatives are offered, not the trapping and killing of cats.



Step Four: Visit Jacksonville to See Feral Freedom in Action

Although reading about the program provides great insight, seeing Feral Freedom in action is the best way to truly understand how it works. To help other communities implement similar programs, First Coast No More Homeless Pets and the Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services welcome visits from key personnel. If you can cover travel-related expenses, FCNMHP staff will arrange for a tour of their facility and the JACPS shelter, and arrange meetings with the program manager, shelter intake staff and others involved in Feral Freedom. You'll also have the opportunity to ride with the staff who transport and release cats. During your visit, you'll meet, talk with and learn from people who are saving more than 4,500 cats a year!

Please coordinate your plans with FCNMHP well in advance, so that arrangements can be made to make your visit as productive as possible. At least a two-day visit is recommended. For more information or to schedule a visit, contact info@fcnmp.org.

Reporting back what you saw and learned will help ensure that everyone involved is on the same page when the Feral Freedom program begins. Some confusion and resistance is expected whenever an important change in public policy is introduced. Open communication among all involved will help minimize these issues.



Step Five: Meet with All Groups Involved to Set Final Policy Guidelines

Before launching a Feral Freedom program, all participating groups need to agree on policy guidelines — how the program will work in your community. The questions below provide a framework for some of the important decisions that must be addressed. Additional information based on our experience in Jacksonville is also provided with the hope that it will be helpful to other communities.

What services will be provided?

When the Jacksonville program was launched, it initially provided more services for cats than it does today. Originally, each cat received spay/neuter surgery, rabies and FVRCP vaccinations, flea and ear mite treatment, and microchipping. The program no longer microchips the cats and now only provides flea and ear mite treatment if needed. Thanks to the support of a generous donor, the program has been able to continue providing FVRCP vaccinations to all cats.

Who does what?

It's important to define what duties each participating organization will be responsible for and to make sure that everyone understands and agrees. For example, here is how the responsibilities for loaning out traps and taking in cats from city residents are handled in Jacksonville: Since the Feral Freedom program targets cats that residents consider a nuisance, cats can only enter the program through animal control (JACPS). Even before Feral Freedom began, JACPS rented traps to residents who wanted to capture nuisance cats on their property. Residents can rent a trap by completing a form and leaving a deposit. When the trap is returned, the resident gets the deposit back. The deposit is equal to the cost of the trap, so if the trap is not returned, the transaction becomes a sale (the resident keeps the trap and the city keeps the deposit).

What information is required at intake?

It is vital to obtain information about each cat to determine whether the cat will qualify for the Feral Freedom program. Suggested questions: Is this an owned pet? What address is the cat coming from? Has the cat been seen in the neighborhood before? Is someone in the neighborhood feeding this cat and/or others? Did the neighbors move away and leave the cat behind? If so, when did they move and how has the cat been surviving since then?

What should people dropping off cats be told?

As previously mentioned, it is not advisable to volunteer information about the program, unless someone dropping off a cat specifically asks, "What will happen to the cat?" During the first several months of the program, animal control officers and intake desk staff told people dropping off nuisance cats that the cats would be sterilized and returned. This resulted in many heated discussions and complaints from citizens. So, JACPS decided to take cats in and gather the needed information without getting into the specifics about what would happen next. This policy has resulted in far fewer complaints and less stress for the staff involved.

It is ironic that a policy once used to hide the truth of euthanasia (don't ask, don't tell) is now being used to avoid discussions of lifesaving programs. Even now, shelters seldom tell people what is going to happen to the animals they are relinquishing to the shelter, and most people don't want to know the animal's fate. The same policy can and should apply to a Feral Freedom program.

Which cats are eligible for the program?

Each community needs to determine which cats will be accepted into Feral Freedom and who will decide if incoming cats qualify for the program.

It is essential to obtain information from each person dropping off a cat to determine if the cat qualifies for the Feral Freedom program. The Jacksonville program guidelines evolved to include those cats who had been living outdoors and seemed to be doing well, whether they appeared to be feral or friendly upon intake. Initially, any cat who arrived at the shelter in a trap was accepted into the program. But it soon became clear that many cats who would otherwise qualify for Feral Freedom were brought to animal control in carriers, boxes or even in people's arms. Since it was unfair to exclude those community cats just because they didn't arrive in traps, the program was quickly expanded to include them.

When Feral Freedom was launched, rigid guidelines were set for cats who would qualify for the program. This was done with the expectation that the animal control staff might exclude eligible cats from the program simply because they were resistant to a new way of doing things. Although this may have been the case very early on, the staff quickly learned that given the choice between ensuring a cat who might be eligible was selected for the program or euthanizing that same cat, it was better to choose to let the cat live.

This may very well be the essence of the program: Should a cat be given a chance at life or face a certain death to save the cat from an unknown fate that some people suppose to be worse than death? With that said, it is vital for the integrity of the program, and in the best interest of the cats, that cats unable to live on their own after being returned to their territories not be selected for the program.

Infrequently, cats admitted to the Feral Freedom program cannot be returned to their territories. Cats who will not do well living outdoors on their own, which includes cats who are declawed, blind or too young to fend for themselves, should not be returned. If your organization does not handle adoptions, you will want to have strong relationships with one that does. In Jacksonville, Feral Freedom partners with Lucky Cat Adoptions, Inc., a nonprofit group that finds homes for Feral Freedom "dropouts" and other cats. A few other local cat rescue groups also take some of these cats.

What medical issues prevent cats from being returned?

Again, each community must set its own policy for how they will handle community cats with medical issues and which conditions they have the resources to treat. FCNMHP is fortunate to have some limited space to house community cats who need to recover from treatable medical conditions or procedures in addition to spay/neuter surgery. Cats with conditions such as abscesses, eye problems or tail amputations sometimes require extra time and care to recover. If responsible caregivers are available, these cats can often be returned to their territories after healing. If space is not available, local rescue groups may be an option for cats requiring special care.

What are the benefits of forming partnerships?

Working in partnership to create a Feral Freedom program has obvious benefits. Funders prefer to support coalitions working together to reduce the number of pets who die in shelters. Solutions can be found more quickly when different groups work together toward a common goal. Partnerships also help establish the long-term relationships required to make real progress toward the day when there will be No More Homeless Pets. The three large animal welfare groups in Jacksonville have met regularly since 2000 to discuss issues. These strong relationships have been invaluable in working together on Feral Freedom and other potentially controversial projects.

It's vital to select suitable partners. All partners must

have the ability to hold up their end of the program and be committed to making it sustainable. Good partners work together to ensure the program runs smoothly. For example, if an unusually high volume of cats comes in, JACPS notifies FCNMHP so that extra transports can be assigned. And if a large number of cats are being picked up, animal control officers contact the clinic while they are still in the field to give advance notice and preparation time.

Although the ideal situation is for the local animal control agency to handle most, if not all, aspects of this program, financial constraints often limit a government agency's ability to enhance its services. If this is the case, local nonprofit animal welfare organizations need to assume responsibility for saving the lives of community cats. In Jacksonville, private funding was used to launch the program, with the hope that a steady funding source would be designated once the program was proven successful.

Step Six: Take Action to Implement Feral Freedom in Your Community

Now that you've learned all about Feral Freedom and have assessed your community's ability to implement and support a similar program, what are the next steps? If you are the local animal control agency responsible for cats entering the shelter and are willing to handle all of the responsibilities from transport to surgery, then most of the preparation and implementation will be internal. If you are a nonprofit TNR group or humane organization, then you will need to work with the animal control agency and other animal welfare groups to ensure sufficient surgery capacity and the smooth operation of the program.

Implementing a Feral Freedom program usually requires collaboration to best use each group's available resources. It is best to work together on the community assessment and jointly plan your program. Before launching Feral Freedom, it's essential that each partner's role and responsibilities be clearly defined, and that all parties agree on goals, policies, budget and funding sources.

Here is a step-by-step guide for implementing a Feral Freedom program in your community:

Meet with all groups involved. Go to each of the groups whose support and/or participation will be

required to make the program a success. The open-intake animal control facility that admits feral/nuisance cats must be a participant because that organization takes in the greatest number of cats from the public.

You'll need to work together to make final decisions about each group's role: Who will provide surgeries? Who will provide transport? Expertise in TNR is helpful, but keep in mind that traditional TNR often emphasizes colony management and works closely with cat caregivers. Feral Freedom releases cats back to the location where they were trapped, without identifying a caregiver, but with the presumption that the cats will continue to do well in that setting. Although these two approaches differ, partnering with other TNR groups to achieve the goal of a long-lasting decrease in the outdoor cat population is very beneficial. These groups can identify cat caregivers, help them fix the remainder of the cats in their colonies, and assist with other colony management issues.

Set project goals. Decide what outcomes you want from this program. Do you hope to dramatically decrease the number of cats dying in the shelter, decrease cat-related complaint calls to animal control, and/or decrease overcrowding in the shelter? The Jacksonville program's initial goal was to fix and return feral cats to their territories, resulting in all of the above outcomes. It quickly became clear that "feral" was not a broad enough term for the cats being trapped and brought to the shelter. "Community cats" soon became the term used to describe all free-roaming outdoor cats — feral or friendly — who were eligible to be accepted into the Feral Freedom program.

Approximately half of the animals entering the Jacksonville shelter are cats, and generally about half of all cats who enter the shelter are eligible for the Feral Freedom program. So, by implementing the Feral Freedom program, it was possible immediately to decrease shelter deaths by 25 percent and reduce the number of cats euthanized by 50 percent!

Assess and use existing resources. The main components of the Feral Freedom program include cat acquisition, transport, sterilization and medical treatment, and public and media relations. Many of these activities are already taking place in your community. The cats this program targets — those whose behavior has become a nuisance — are probably already being trapped and turned over to animal control. There may be an existing spay/neuter clinic with excess capacity or the ability to add capacity. Or there may be organizations with transport vans or other equipment that could be used for the Feral Freedom program. To

achieve your program goals in a cost-effective way, you'll need to assess and use existing resources as much as possible.

There will probably be resources that are not available in your community or may only be available for a short time. If that is the case, you will need to determine how to obtain these required resources, what they will cost, and how to fund them.

Determine needed funding and sources. Feral Freedom saves money. In fact, a 2010 study commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society shows that millions of dollars could be saved if communities across the country implemented TNR programs instead of trapping and killing community cats. (To learn more and figure out how much your community could save, go to the Fiscal Impact of TNR Calculator on Best Friends' website at felines.bestfriends.org.)

As mentioned before, what's most efficient is for the animal control agency to take ownership of the entire program. The savings realized through a decrease in shelter admissions and euthanasia can be used to offset any additional program costs. There will also be lower cat transportation costs. Dedicating animal control's savings toward a Feral Freedom program is vital to the sustainability of the program. The Feral Freedom program does not create any revenue for the operators, so it must be wholly subsidized. As covered earlier in this guide, if your community's government-funded animal control agency is not willing initially to fund the program, you'll need to seek out sources of private funding to launch and support Feral Freedom.

In Jacksonville, 4,500 cats were saved during each of the first two years, at a cost of \$49.23 for each life saved. The total annual budget for the Feral Freedom program was \$221,450, including transport of the cats from the JACPS shelter to FCNMHP, surgery and other medical expenses, and return of the cats to their territories. The budget did not include any of JACPS' expenses since those impound costs were already being incurred. By preventing 4,500 cats a year from being euthanized, the Feral Freedom program saved JACPS \$175,000 annually. These savings resulted from no longer having to hold cats for the mandatory five-day period, a reduction in the amount of drugs and staff resources spent on euthanasia, and reduced body disposal fees.

Be prepared. Before launching Feral Freedom in your community, you'll want to make sure that all staff members involved are trained and have the necessary equipment and forms needed to make the program

successful. It's important that they know what information to obtain from residents turning in community cats, as well as how to answer any questions or complaints. As part of the training process, it may be helpful to mentally and physically do several dry runs of the first day to ensure that everyone is well prepared.

Step Seven: Measure Success

Saving money is always good, but the best measurement of Feral Freedom's success is the number of lives saved. In addition to saving the lives of community cats admitted to shelters, Feral Freedom reduces the number of felines who enter shelters and the number of kittens born in the community cat population. And, when half or more of the community cats entering shelters go into the Feral Freedom program, the remaining cats have a much better chance of being adopted or taken out of the shelter by local rescue groups.

We hope that your community will decide to implement the Feral Freedom program and give community cats entering your shelter the chance to live. Thank you for all you do to help animals and for bringing us closer to a time of No More Homeless Pets!



Appendix

Jacksonville Community/Feral Cat Ordinances

At one time, language inserted into the city ordinances stated that if the city had a feral cat program, those cats would be exempt from other ordinances that might prohibit them. This simple sentence allowed feral cat programs to go unhindered for a period of time and this was what allowed the Feral Freedom program to get started legally. In 2010 the city was working on a complete overhaul of all the animal ordinances, including parts that pertained to feral/community cats. Changes included definitions of key words pertaining to community cats, related new ordinances and a sustainable source of funding. Other communities are welcome to model their definitions and ordinances on the ones detailed below.

Community cat means any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area that is known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats shall be distinguished from other cats by being sterilized and ear-tipped; they are exempt from licensing requirements.

Feral means a wild animal that exists in an untamed state or that has returned to an untamed state generally not socialized to human contact and is no longer considered domesticated. Feral animals shall include, but not be limited to cats, dogs and hogs.

Harbor means the act of caring for and keeping an animal or the act of providing a premise or residence to which the animal returns for food, shelter or care for a period of at least ten (10) days, or at the point where the caregiver is providing the primary source of sustenance for the animal; whichever time is shorter. If the City establishes a program for the maintenance of feral or community cats, those persons maintaining those cats will be regulated in accordance with such program.

Stray means any animal that is found to be at-large, whether lost by its owner or otherwise, or that is on the common areas of apartments, condominiums, trailer parks or other multi-residential premises, and that does not have an identification tag and for which there is no identifiable owner; however, if the City establishes a program for the maintenance of feral cats, feral cats may be treated as other than stray.

Community Cat Management Initiatives

The City of Jacksonville recognizes the need for innovation in addressing the issues presented by feral, free-roaming and other community cats. To that end it recognizes that there are community caregivers of cats, and acknowledges that properly managed community cats may be part of the solution to the continuing euthanasia of cats; and establishes the following requirements:

1. All managed community cat colonies/groups must be maintained on private property of the caregiver, or with permission on the private property of another landowner (including city, state, and federal public property).
2. A free community cat caregiver certification program may be developed to educate people about community cats, the importance of a veterinary provider relationship to best address community cat needs, disease and care, good practices, and maintenance. The educational program shall be developed by community veterinarians, community cat caregivers, JACPS and citizens through an ad hoc advisory committee that will be disbanded upon recommendation to the Chief of JACPS. The Chief of JACPS may remove any member at any time for any reason within his/her discretion. Periodically, ad hoc committees will be convened to review, revise and update the program as needed.
3. All cats that are part of community cat management programs must be sterilized, vaccinated against the threat of rabies, and ear-tipped (preferably on the left ear) for easy identification; if these requirements are met, the community cat is exempted from licensing.
4. If a person is providing care for the community cats, he or she is required to provide certain necessities on a regular/ongoing basis, including, but not limited to, proper nutrition and medical care as needed. If medical care is unavailable or too expensive, the caregiver must not allow the cat to suffer.

- i. Food must be provided in the proper quantity for the number of cats being managed and is to be supplied no less than once per day (twice is preferred). Food must be maintained in proper feeding containers.
- ii. Water, if supplied, must be clean, potable and free from debris and algae.
- iii. If shelter is provided, it shall be unobtrusive, safe, and of the proper size for the cat(s).

In 2010 the City of Jacksonville included in the ordinances the revamping of a former spay/neuter trust fund with the wording below. We expect that this trust fund will provide funding for both the Feral Freedom and SpayJax programs into the future.

Spay and Neuter Trust Fund

There is created the Spay and Neuter Trust Fund, a permanent trust fund of the City, into which shall be deposited monthly monies derived from the fees generated by license fees. The first eight dollars (\$8) shall go into the general fund to cover costs of licensing program and outsourced fees as applicable; the next two dollars (\$2) from each license shall be deposited in the Animal Care and Protective Services Veterinary Services Trust Fund, Section 111.455; the remaining monies, beginning with the eleventh dollar collected per license, shall be deposited in the Spay and Neuter Trust Fund.

There shall also be deposited into the Spay and Neuter Trust Fund all funds forfeited under Section 462.309, fines collected for failure to confine a female dog or cat in heat under Section 462.307 with any other monies which may be from time to time appropriated to this trust fund by the Council, or monies, gifts, or donations donated by non-governmental sources. The monies deposited in this trust fund are to be appropriated by Council and shall be utilized and expended, solely for the administrative costs of running the licensing program, education/promotion of sterilization and programs created and established in Section 462.703.

Monies deposited in this trust fund shall be available for expenditure notwithstanding fiscal years and shall not lapse at the end of any fiscal year. Expenditures from this trust shall not exceed actual revenues received at any time. The Director of Finance is authorized and directed to make disbursements from this trust fund upon the written request of the Director of Environmental and Compliance, or his designee, with respect to expenditures permitted by Section 462. Furthermore, the Director of Finance shall be responsible for maintaining all required accounting records, making the proper disbursements, and providing any required financial information, including notifying the Director of Environmental and Compliance, or his designee, of the exhaustion of appropriated funds available for expenditure in this trust fund.

The Animal Care and Protective Services Division shall give to the Health, Welfare and Human Services Committee an annual report as to the disposition of the monies of this trust fund.

Importance of a Comprehensive Set of Sterilization Programs

Some individual spay/neuter programs can be effective at decreasing shelter admissions and deaths; the Feral Freedom program is certainly a great example of this. For any spay/neuter program to have the maximum impact on shelter populations, though, it must be part of a comprehensive set of neutering programs. This is what we have strived to create in Jacksonville. Listed here are the types of spay/neuter programs that we offer:

- Neuter before adoption: no pet leaves the shelter unaltered
- Low-income targeted programs, which require documentation of income
- Feral Freedom program: every neuter is a life saved
- Trap/neuter/return programs at low cost to the general public
- Low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter for the general public
- Targeted programs for problem populations

Cost/Benefit Analysis

As mentioned in this guide, a 2010 study commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society shows that millions of dollars in taxpayer costs could be saved if communities adopted Feral Freedom–type TNR programs instead of trapping and killing community cats. Learn more about the study by reading this article on Best Friends’ website: “New Research Exposes High Taxpayer Cost for ‘Eradicating’ Free-Roaming Cats.” You can find the article here:

network.bestfriends.org/golocal/maine/14688/news.aspx

To figure out how much your community can save by implementing TNR programs, go to felines.bestfriends.org to access the Fiscal Impact of TNR Calculator. In addition to quickly calculating the savings associated with trap/neuter/return programs for community cats in your city, county or state, it also provides local and general TNR talking points.

Sample Feral Freedom Budget

This budget assumes annual overall feline admissions at 6,000 cats with half of them qualifying for a Feral Freedom–type program. It plans for 3,000 cats per year coming through the program, or an average of 57 cats weekly or nine daily.

EXPENSES	COST
Transport van, new	\$25,000
Van modifications	3,000
Trap supply (200 @ \$65 per trap)	13,000
Feral dens (20 @ \$85 per den)	1,700
Total startup costs	\$42,700
Staff (60 hours per week @ \$9 per hour)	\$28,080
Payroll taxes, workers’ compensation	2,000
Gas, maintenance	850
Food, cleaning supplies	8,000
Auto insurance	1,560
30 traps (shrinkage)	1,400
Forms, brochures, printing	1,950
Surgeries (3,000 @ \$45 per surgery)	135,000
Total annual operating costs (approx.):	\$178,840

Additional Resources

Best Friends Animal Society: www.bestfriends.org

Best Friends’ website provides information, networking opportunities and continuing education. It includes lots of information on spay/neuter, community/feral cat programs and access to experts in all fields of animal welfare. On its cat initiatives page (felines.bestfriends.org), there’s a link to the Fiscal Impact of TNR Calculator, which lets you figure out how much your community can save by implementing a Feral Freedom–type TNR program. You can also find information about grant opportunities on the No More Homeless Pets Network page (nmhpnetwork.bestfriends.org).

Maddie's Fund: www.maddiesfund.org

This website provides information about grant opportunities, an advertising campaign promoting pet adoption from shelters, and many other resources for animal shelters.

SpayUSA: www.SpayUSA.org

All things spay and neuter can be found on this website, including extensive information on the SpayJax program and other targeted spay/neuter programs. The site also has a lot of information on feral cats and their care.

Alley Cat Allies: www.AlleyCat.org

This website offers comprehensive information on every aspect of feral cat programs, including advocacy, colony care, ordinances, public opinion, veterinary care and ongoing updates on what's happening in the feral cat world.

Neighborhood Cats: www.neighborhoodcats.org

This website is another great resource dedicated to topics related to trap/neuter/return. Perhaps most notable is the page that shows all ordinances that impact feral cats state-by-state.

Tru-Catch Traps: www.trucatchtraps.com

This website sells the traps used in the Jacksonville Feral Freedom program: model 30LTD, a trap for cats, skunks and rabbits. Feral Freedom also uses the divider forks (for isolating a cat into one end of the trap to administer injections) sold on the website.

Animal Care Equipment and Services: www.animal-care.com

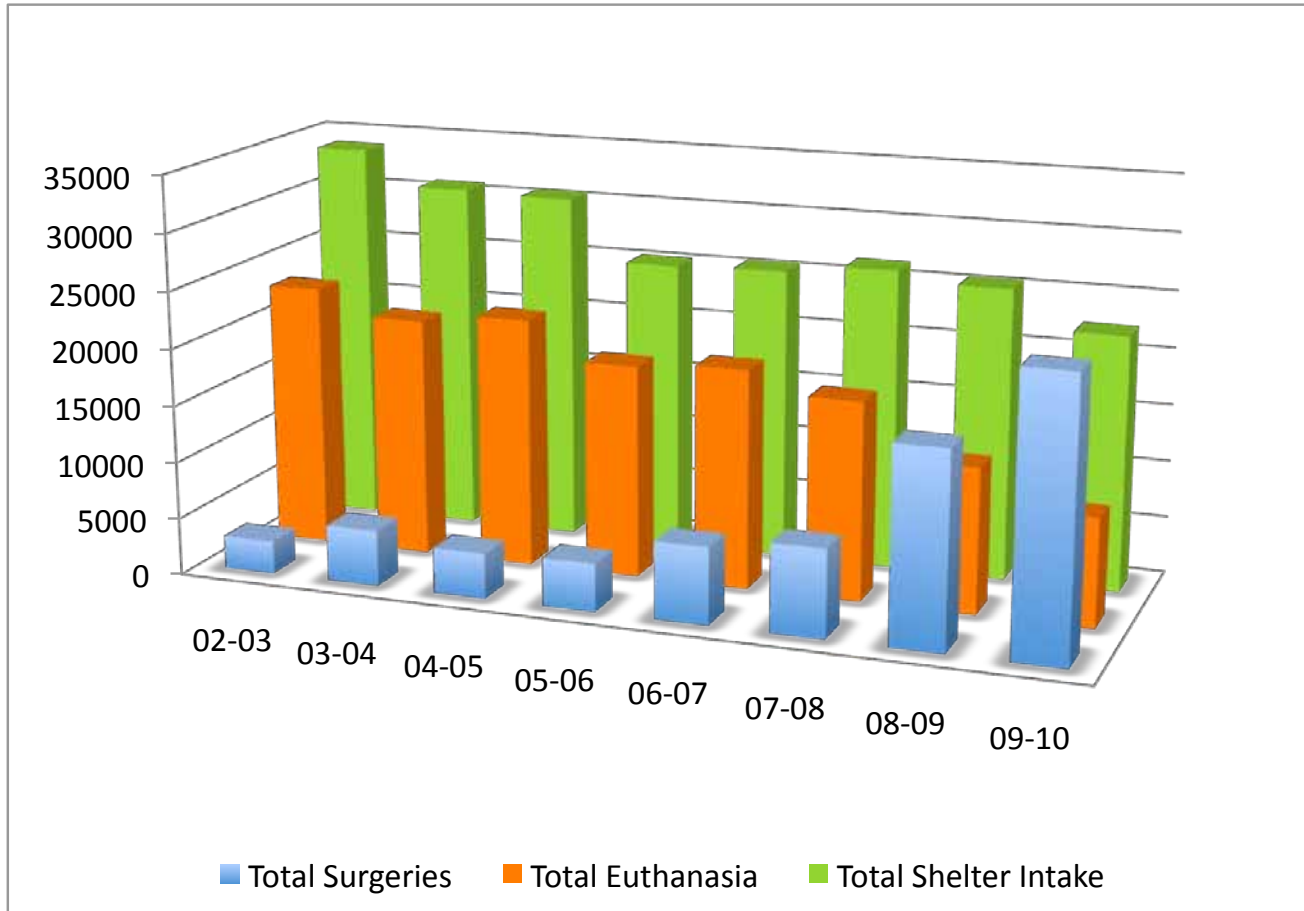
This website sells feral dens, nets, tongs, gloves and other equipment you might find helpful in handling feral cats. (Remember, the best way to handle feral cats is to not handle them at all until they are sound asleep.)

A&R Warehouse Equipment, Inc.: arwarehouseequipment.com

This company sells the custom shelving that FCNMHP uses to house large numbers of cats in traps.

The graph and chart below show how increasing the volume of spay/neuter surgeries affects admissions and euthanasia statistics

(Shelter data combines data for JACPS and Jacksonville Humane Society shelters)



	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10
Total Surgeries	2,910	4,937	4,000	4,232	6,775	7,744	17,062	24,111
Total Euthanasia	23,104	21,004	21,886	18,690	19,242	17,430	12,744	9,500
Total Shelter Intake	33,847	30,862	30,658	25,355	25,616	26,443	25,603	22,359

Sample Feral Freedom Door Hanger

(Distributed in neighborhoods where cats have just been returned)



TRAP / NEUTER / RETURN

Jacksonville's new approach to
FERAL CAT
 POPULATION CONTROL
FERAL FREEDOM

904-425-0005 | www.fcnmhp.org

What is A Feral Cat?

The City of Jacksonville has a new approach to controlling the feral cat population - **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)**. This program will directly affect the number of stray, outdoor and feral cats on our streets and help Jacksonville get its outdoor cat population under control.

What is TNR? (Trap-Neuter-Return)

Outdoor cats are humanely trapped and brought to Animal Care & Control. Instead of being euthanized, these cats are turned over to FCNMHP for sterilization, vaccination, microchipping and left ear tipping. The left ear tip is the universal symbol of a sterilized feral cat (if trapped again, it could simply be released because you would know that it has already been fixed). Once recovered from their vet care, the cats are returned to their home territory to continue living out their lives. Relocation doesn't work, removal of cats from an area opens up the territory for new cats to move in (this is known as the vacuum effect).

Trap-Neuter-Return is the most effective solution to controlling the feral cat population.

- It costs less taxpayer dollars to sterilize than to kill feral cats
- The population will be controlled with no new litters
- Population will decrease as feral cats live shorter life spans than inside cats
- The cats are vaccinated against disease
- Annoying behaviors like howling, fighting and marking territory will stop or decrease dramatically
- It's humane

Visit www.fcnmhp.org for more information on feral cats and tips for a better life for you and the cats in your neighborhood. Call us today to learn more about the low cost spay/neuter surgeries and pet wellness services that we provide.

NEED HELP?
 CALL OUR HOTLINE
904-425-0005

6817 Norwood Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32208

Sample "Tips for Living with Feral Cats" Brochure

(Educational brochure that can be distributed to the public)

Working Together To Solve This Problem

It's easy to coexist with neighborhood feral cats. If you are willing to take a few small steps you can not only help these cats become good neighbors, you can help drastically reduce the feral cat population problem.

Visit www.fcnmhp.org for more info on feral cats and tips for shelter life for you and the cats in your neighborhood.

NEED HELP?
 CALL OUR HOTLINE FOR ASSISTANCE
904-425-0005


Your support helps us continue these vital programs.

MAIL YOUR DONATION:
 6817 Norwood Avenue
 Jacksonville, FL 32208
 Checks Payable to FCNMHP

DONATE ONLINE OR BY PHONE:
www.fcnmhp.org
 or call 904-425-0005

SPONSOR A TILE:
 In memory of or in honor of your loved ones, order online at www.fcnmhp.org

FCNMHP Spay/Neuter Clinic and Wellness Clinic is located in the Joseph A. Strasser Animal Health & Welfare Building.
 We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization making your donation 100% tax deductible!



TIPS FOR LIVING WITH FERAL CATS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Working towards a day when there are truly no more homeless pets!

904-425-0005 | www.fcnmhp.org

What is A Feral Cat?

A feral cat is unsocialized and avoids human contact. Pet cats who are forced to fend for themselves because they have been abandoned or lost, and kittens who are not socialized at an early age, can become feral. If outdoor "pet" cats are unsterilized, more feral litters are born and the cycle continues.

Feral cats are unadoptable. These cats cannot be simply relocated, they have a territory and removing cats does not end the problem. Catch and kill is also not effective as a long term solution. More cats will take the place of removed cats. In order to control feral cat populations, Trap-Neuter-Return is the only real solution on population control. Cats are humanely trapped, taken to a veterinarian for spay/neuter surgery and vaccinations, and returned to their territory.

SPRAY NEUTER HOTLINE
904-425-0005
www.fcnmhp.org

LIVING WITH FERAL CATS

Not everyone enjoys living with cats in their yards. However, these simple tips will help you coexist with your neighborhood cats. There are simple solutions to any problems feral cats may be causing you or your property.

PROBLEM- Cats are digging in my garden.
Reason: It is a cats natural instinct to dig and deposit in soil to loose soil, mulch or sand.
Easy Solutions:
 • Scatter fresh orange or lemon peels, spray with citrus fragrance, or add coffee grounds or paper tobacco as natural deterrents that will not harm your garden.
 • Plastic carpet runners, chicken wire, or lattice type patterns are also deterrents.
 • Add rocks to your garden bed.
 • Pet stores have mats or sprays that are safe for cats and gardens.

PROBLEM- Cats are sleeping under my porch, shed, etc.
Reason: They are looking for dry warm shelter.
Easy Solutions:
 • Block open areas with lattice or chicken wire, be sure to search for anyone hiding first.
 • Provide a shelter like a small doghouse hidden away.

PROBLEM- Cats are getting into my trash.
Reason: Cats are scavengers and are looking for food.
Easy Solutions:
 • Place a tight lid on your trash can.
 • You or your neighbors can feed the cats. Cats that are not hungry will not scavenge. Feed during daylight hours at a consistent time in an out of the way place.

PROBLEM- Cats are climbing on my car.
Reason: Cats like to perch on high ground.
Easy Solutions:
 • Putting cat shelter and food in a secluded place discourages them from climbing on your car.
 • Put an appropriate cover on your car to put an immediate end to complaints.

PROBLEM- I smell cat urine.
Reason: Tom cats spray to mark their territory.
Easy Solutions:
 • Neutered cats have less urge to mark and it also makes urine less pungent.
PROBLEM- Feeding cats attracts insects and odors.
Reason: Food is left out too long or at inappropriate times.
Easy Solutions:
 • Keep the cat feeding area neat to avoid insects.
 • Feed cats at a designated time during daylight hours. Only provide enough food to last in one sitting. Remaining food should be taken in before twilight.

PROBLEM- Cats are yowling, fighting, and having litters.
Reason: Yowling and fighting are mating behaviors. Cats that have not been sterilized will breed prolifically.
Easy Solutions:
 • Spaying and neutering cats will reduce the sex drive hormones causing these behaviors.
 • Male cats will stop competing.
 • No more litters.
 • Typically within 3 weeks the hormones have left the cats system and behaviors usually stop entirely.

Community Evaluation Form

1. Name of lead organization:
2. Organization contact phone:
3. Organization contact email:
4. What geographic area do you intend to cover with your program (county, city, etc.)?
5. How many open-intake animal shelters are in this geographic area?
6. List all the open-intake shelters, with addresses and contact information:
7. What is the overall intake of these shelters?
8. What is the overall cat intake of these shelters?
9. How many cats deemed "feral" are entering the shelters each year?
10. How many adoption-guarantee shelters are there in your area?
11. List all the adoption-guarantee shelters, with addresses and contact information:
12. What is the overall intake of these shelters?
13. What is the overall cat intake of these shelters?
14. Do these shelters accept feral cats? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If yes, what do they do with them?
15. What is the policy of shelters that accept feral cats on the outcome of those cats? Are ear-tipped cats returned to caregivers?
16. Do any of the open or limited intake shelters offer spay/neuter services? TNR programs? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
17. Are there organized TNR groups in this area? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO What services do they offer? What resources are available?
18. What local ordinances are relevant to TNR and community cats? Will they have to be changed? Are there policies at animal control that will have to be changed?

Trap Loan Agreement

Initials	By my initials/signature below and my receipt of the traps listed below, I acknowledge the following:
	1. Traps are the property of First Coast No More Homeless Pets and will be returned to the pickup location no later than the date shown below. I acknowledge that if I fail to return the traps on time and in good condition, I will lose rental privileges in the future.
	2. The value of each trap is \$100. I will be depositing \$100 for the use of the trap. I will be responsible for the full value of the trap, plus any costs of collection and attorney's fees necessary to secure its return or replacement. I agree that the traps I am receiving today are in good working order. I understand that if the traps are not returned in similar condition, I will forfeit my \$100 deposit for each trap not returned in good working order.
	3. I understand that any animal, even sweet tame cats, can be dangerous when trapped and I agree NOT to open any trap, stick hands or fingers inside a trap or handle any trapped animal unless specifically instructed. I release First Coast No More Homeless Pets and its staff, volunteers and facilities from any liability for any injuries or damages that I may incur or cause while trapping, confining, transporting, or releasing these cats.
	4. I will NOT use the trap to capture any owned cat, or for any other unlawful act, and will only use it for the purpose of spay/neuter procedures or other necessary medical treatment of a FERAL cat. Under no circumstances shall this trap be used to capture a healthy animal for destruction or surrender to animal control agencies. I will indemnify First Coast No More Homeless Pets and its staff, volunteers, and facilities from any liability based on my use of the trap.
	5. I agree to ensure that spayed/neutered cats will receive food, water, and necessary care following surgery and will be humanely returned to the same location where it was trapped. I acknowledge the possibility that once released, some cats may not return.
	6. I understand that traps are only loaned for a period of 2 weeks. If I need more time, the loan period may be extended by another 2 weeks if no one is currently on the waiting list. If there is a waiting list, I will return the traps by my original due date and my name can be added to the waiting list.
	7. I understand that I can only borrow 2 traps at a time.
	8. I agree to return the traps listed below in clean condition. I will clean the traps with a 20:1 solution of water: bleach to sterilize and remove any debris or garbage from inside the trap before returning it.

CHECKOUT DATE:	RETURN DUE DATE (<i>2 weeks from checkout date</i>):
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DEPOSIT DUE		
Total number of traps: _____	Deposit due: \$ _____	Trap numbers: _____
Check number: _____	Visa/MC number: _____	Exp. date: _____
Received by FCNMHP staff member: _____		

DEPOSIT RETURNED	
Date: _____	Returned by: _____
Trap numbers: _____	

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: Home () Work () Cell ()

Signature: _____ Date: _____

By signing this agreement, you agree to all the above conditions. You also authorize us to deposit your check or charge your credit card if the traps are not returned by their due date and/or in good condition.