



WAIF TNR Program

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a feral cat?

Feral cat is a term that has been used to describe a homeless cat that is undomesticated. We consider “feral” to describe a particular behavior a cat expresses when it is not used to people or feels frightened. It is virtually impossible to differentiate whether a frightened cat was born without human contact, formerly had human contact and became un-socialized from living on its own or if it is simply frightened. For our purposes we choose to call these cats free-roaming and use the term “feral” to describe a behavior a free roaming cat may convey [Source: *Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

Where do free-roaming cats come from?

The source of free-roaming cats is endless. Free-roaming cats can come from shelters, pet stores, rescuers, hoarders, newspaper ads, etc. All free roaming cats are the descendants of unaltered tame cats somewhere in their ancestry line [Source: *Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*]. Feral and free-roaming cats, also called community cats, have existed along people for 10,000 years [Source: *Alley Cat Allies*].

Can feral cats be adopted?

Feral cats are not socialized to humans and are typically wary of us. Therefore, they are not adoptable and not accepted into a shelter environment. Even no-kill shelters can't place unsocialized cats in homes. However, as members of the domestic cat species (just like pet cats), they are protected under state anti-cruelty laws [Source: *Alley Cat Allies*].

Can feral kittens be adopted?

Kittens can be adopted into homes but they must be socialized at an early age. There is a crucial window, and if they are not handled in time, they will remain feral and therefore unadoptable [Source: *Alley Cat Allies*].

How can I help with feral cats?

You can help by participating in WAIF's Trap-Neuter-Return program called “CATsNIP”. This program is designed to humanely reduce the feral and free-roaming cat population on Whidbey Island.

What is trap-neuter-return?

Trap/neuter/return is a humane, non-lethal alternative to the trap-and-kill method of controlling cat populations. Trap/neuter/return (TNR) is a management technique in which homeless, free-roaming (community) cats are humanely trapped, evaluated and sterilized by a licensed veterinarian, vaccinated against rabies, and then returned to their original habitat [Source: *Best Friends*].

What is the primary benefit of TNR?

In the long term, TNR lowers the numbers of cats in the community more effectively than trap-and-kill. Good Samaritans in neighborhoods all across the country provide food, water and shelter for community cats, and TNR provides a non-lethal, humane way to effectively manage these community cat populations. In some programs, friendly cats or young kittens are pulled from the colonies and sent to foster facilities for socialization and, eventually, placement into forever homes. Stopping the breeding and removing some cats for adoption is

more effective than the traditional trap-and-kill method in lowering the numbers of cats in a community long-term [Source: *Best Friends*].

What are the other benefits of TNR?

The benefits include:

- TNR reduces shelter admissions and operating costs. Also, fewer community cats in shelters increases shelter adoption rates, as more cage space opens up for adoptable cats.
- These programs create safer communities and promote public health by reducing the number of unvaccinated cats.
- TNR programs improve the lives of free-roaming cats. When males are neutered, they are no longer compelled to maintain a large territory or fight over mates, and females are no longer forced to endure the physical and mental demands of giving birth and fending for their young.
- Sterilizing community cats reduces or even eliminates the behaviors that can lead to nuisance complaints.

[Source: *Best Friends*]

Why not use lethal options?

Not only is this approach inhumane and cruel, it does not work. Given the current problem of large populations of feral and free-roaming cats, it's evident that killing as a lethal form of population control is ineffective. By contrast, TNR puts an end to this perpetual cycle of killing and ends the cycle of reproducing by sterilizing cats through TNR [Source: *Best Friends*]. Cats choose to live in areas for two reasons: there is a food source (intended or not) and shelter. When cats are removed from a location, new cats move in or survivors breed to capacity, which creates a vacuum effect [Source: *Alley Cat Allies*].

What is the “vacuum effect”?

Scientific evidence indicates that removing feral cat populations only opens up the habitat to an influx of new cats, either from neighboring territories or born from survivors. Each time cats are removed, the population will rebound through a natural phenomenon known as the “vacuum effect,” drawing the community into a costly, endless cycle of trapping and killing.

Well-documented among biologists, the vacuum effect describes what happens when even a portion of an animal population is permanently removed from its home range. Sooner or later, the empty habitat attracts other members of the species from neighboring areas, who move in to take advantage of the same resources that attracted the first group (like shelter and food). Killing or removing the original population does nothing to eliminate these resources; it only creates a “vacuum” that will inevitably draw in other animals living nearby.

A habitat will support a population of a certain size. No matter how many animals are removed, if the resources remain, the population will eventually recover. Any cats remaining after a catch and kill effort will produce more kittens and at a higher survival rate, filling the habitat to capacity. As one study found, “populations greatly reduced by culling are likely to rebound quickly.”⁵ Over time, the number of cats in an area where a feral cat colony has been killed or relocated will simply recover and return to its original size [Source: *Alley Cat Allies*].

Are there tools to help keep feral cats out of designated areas?

There are many non-lethal cat deterrents available on the market today. View [this video](#), produced by Best Friends to learn of options available to you [Source: *Best Friends*].

Why are feeding bans ineffective?

Hungry cats can continue to reproduce, which further undermines the intent of most feeding prohibitions. Equally important, feeding bans jeopardize the ongoing sterilization and vaccination services provided by caregivers who diligently maintain and monitor cat colonies in the community. It is also important to note that once feeding by humans is prohibited, hungry cats are forced to compete with wildlife over available, natural food sources [Source: *Best Friends*].

Why do we ear tip cats?

Ear tipping identifies feral and free-roaming cats that have been sterilized. Ear tipping is completely safe and it is performed under general anesthetic. Ear tipping provides immediate visual identification showing which cats have been trapped and altered, and identifies newcomers who have not. Once a cat is trapped, the caretaker should look for an ear tip. If the cat has an ear tip it should be released immediately [Source: *Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

How do I trap a cat?

Cats can be trapped using a humane trap. The trap has a door on one end, which can be lifted up and set in place with a small catch. The door is connected to a flat metal trip plate on the bottom of the trap. The trip plate is set far enough back in the trap so that the animal's tail won't get caught in the door when it slams shut. A small amount of aromatic food is placed in the back of the trap, past the trip plate. With kittens and very small cats, it is important to set the food all the way at the far end of the trap so the kitten or cat will be forced to put its full body weight on the trip plate, thus setting it off. The door will spring shut behind the cat as soon as a paw hits the trip plate [Source: *Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

What can I do to make the cat more comfortable while in the trap?

Before trapping the cat, you can line the bottom of the trap with newspaper so that the cat is not walking on an exposed metal cage floor. As soon as you have trapped the cat, you should cover the trap with the towel. This often has a calming effect on the animal [Source: *Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

Do people bond with their free-roaming cats?

Absolutely! People bond with the cats and the cats bond with their caretaker. Many of the cats that are cared for by a caretaker know their feeding schedule and will wait at a designated area for their caretaker to bring them food and water. Others may recognize the sound of their caretaker's car and wait until they hear the familiar sound before appearing from their safe hiding spots. Free-roaming cats tend to bond with their caretakers and may even allow them to get within a few feet of them. Otherwise, they are fairly reclusive [Source: *Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

How do I make an appointment for spay/neuter surgery?

You can make a reservation by calling our front desk at (360) 678-8900 ext. 1100.

What if I can't trap my cat and miss my appointment?

Unfortunately, not everybody is able to catch their cats reserved for surgery. If this occurs, please contact our front desk at (360) 678-8900 ext. 1100 and leave a message as early as possible that you will not be bringing in your cat(s). This may allow another cat that doesn't have a reservation to use your reserved spot.

Can a pregnant cat be spayed?

Yes. The closer she is to giving birth the more closely she should be monitored after surgery and should not be released back into her environment until the end of the day following her surgery. The repeated cycle of giving birth can be much more difficult on a female cat than being altered while pregnant [*Source: Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

Is it safe to spay a lactating (nursing) cat?

Yes. The surgery will not affect her milk production. Nursing moms should be released back to their environment the day following surgery [*Source: Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Project*].

Can I bring a tame cat to WAIF's CATsNIP clinic for spay/neuter surgery?

WAIF's CATsNIP program is designed to alter only the feral and free-roaming cat population of Whidbey Island. At this time, we do not offer spay/neuter services for tame cats. If we find a cat to be microchipped, surgery will not be performed. Attempts will be made to contact the chip registrant to inform them how the cat was transported and how best to retrieve the cat.

Do you offer more than spay/neuter?

Free-roaming cats arriving at our clinic for spay/neuter surgery also receive a basic health exam, rabies vaccination and ear tip. At this time we are not able to offer additional veterinary care.

How old does a cat have to be in order to alter them?

Kittens need to be healthy and weigh at least 2 lbs which is approx 9 weeks old.