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FERAL CATS Groups, individuals 'trap, neuter and return'

Feline problem not isolated

'Everyone has the problem. It's whether they're addressing it or not,' a Platte mayor says.

By ANDY HYLAND
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A visit to a feral cat colony near didn't seem to faze a feline who yawned at the attention. The photo was taken in April 2006. Feral cats can become a problem when they reproduce unchecked. Several organizations in Platte County participate in a trap, neuter and return program.



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Many feral cats are fed, but authorities would like to see them spayed or neutered, then released to keep the cat population from mushrooming.

A Platte County program simmering on the back burner may be brought to a boil by an unlikely source: Feral cats.

Non-domesticated cats have become a topic in discussions about the need for a new public animal shelter to serve the county.

Riverside is among the cities that could benefit from such a shelter. It was the first community in the county to establish a trap, neuter and return program for feral cats, said Mayor Kathy Rose. According to Rose, the program has been successful.

Such programs attempt to curb feral cat population by limiting opportunities to reproduce.

"It's a very popular program," she said. "We're very happy with the results."

Two targeted trapping areas have netted about 120 cats that have been spayed or neutered and returned to their feeding colonies, she said.

"Everybody has the problem," Rose said. "It's whether they're addressing it or not."

She said Riverside has devoted \$150,000 for a new county animal shelter in its budget, and Rose said she will bring up the issue at an upcoming mayors' council meeting.

The shelter was an idea pushed by her mother, former Riverside Mayor Betty Burch, Rose said.

Platte City recently earmarked \$2,500 for a local group devoted to the trap, neuter and return program. The Platte City group, Kitty Cat Connection, had been operating entirely at its own expense, said Linda Burgess, the group's treasurer.

She said Platte City's feral cat population has increased because of unwanted cats being discarded. She said a high rental population is one source of a growing feral cat population. When a tenant moves out, Burgess said, domesticated cats are sometimes set free. In other cases, she said, the cost of keeping a cat can become prohibitive.

Kitty Cat Connection, a tax-exempt, non-profit organization, hosts weekly cat adoptions in Platte City. They're held on Saturday at Main Street Pet Resort and Day Spa, 123 Main St.

Feral cats are in the spotlight in smaller communities, too.

In Houston Lake, Alderman Nick Jackalone said the city has devoted anywhere from \$1,000 to \$1,200 — a small percentage of its annual budget — to help fund trap, neuter and return efforts.

Since the program began, nine cats have either been spayed or neutered, and been vaccinated, Jackalone said. Friends and associates call Jackalone "the cat man" because of his involvement in the program.

Although nine isn't a significant number, if left to reproduce, feral cats living near the intersection of Interstates 635 and 29 "would have cats going everywhere," he said.

Leslie Page, president of the Friends of Parkville Animal Shelter, said she hoped any new county shelter would include a clinic for spaying and neutering.

Page said unsprayed and non-neutered animals were the single biggest factor in pet overpopulation. She said she would favor stricter punishments — such as higher license fees — for animals that aren't spayed or neutered.

Several other trap, neuter and return programs operate in Platte County now, she said. Several individuals work privately, without the aid of community organizations or funding. Friends of Parkville Animal Shelter receives requests to spay and neuter animals on a daily basis.

Platte County Presiding Commissioner Betty Knight said the county has not yet taken up the idea of a new animal shelter.

"I know that the mayors are serious about this," Knight said. "We'll just have to wait and see how much they put in."

She said the county is likely to wait until the mayors make a proposal before examining the issue further.

Platte County currently handles animal control through a dedicated officer with the sheriff's department, Knight said.

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