

AWAKE!

Feral/Stray Cat Management Plan

For Hillsborough County, Florida

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ABSTRACT

This feral cat management plan is based on recommendations and best practices developed during the Hillsborough County, Florida Task Force which addressed lowering the euthanasia rate at the County Animal Services Shelter. It is fully supported by the Hillsborough County, Florida Veterinary Medical Society and the Hillsborough Animal Health Foundation.

Executive Summary

Cat overpopulation issues in Hillsborough County are significant, and a response must be formulated which provides for the concerns of all stakeholders. Hillsborough County has always led the nation in animal control best practices, and the issue of cat overpopulation should be no different. A Hillsborough County Public / Private partnership can lead the nation in demonstrating what true animal welfare constitutes; while concurrently preserving the primary functions of county animal control. Any feral cat program must have as its singular purpose the reduction of the population of outdoor cats, and that is a long term effort that will only be accomplished thru education and the changing of human behavior. This proposal is presented in response to the problem of feral and stray cats in Hillsborough County.

The mission is simply stated – to provide for the public health, which must remain the primary focus of Animal Control. This is the fundamental reason the department exists. At the same time, the mission must include safe sanctuary to feral cats while educating the community of the importance of responsible pet ownership. Currently, hundreds (and perhaps thousands) of people are providing care (to some extent) for feral and stray cats around our county. Additionally, the county and other non-governmental organizations are spending substantial sums of monies providing free and low cost veterinary and other services to those caretakers. By pulling these pieces together, this partnership can efficiently provide care and shelter for a significant number of community cats that would otherwise be euthanized. The long-term solution is a change in human behavior; AWAKE! is the right method to change the human behavior while providing the short-term solutions which emphasizes a rational approach to cat management. We note the “sanctuary” aspect of the AWAKE! plan is a temporary part of the strategic educational plan to affect those behavioral changes.

A sanctuary program is the penultimate intersection of responsible pet ownership and animal welfare.

Most importantly, this program will be a model for animal control that emphasizes the fundamental requirements of Responsible Pet Ownership: shelter, water, food, basic medical care, and a safe environment that protects both the animal and public health. It is impossible to expect the community at large to understand the importance of Responsible Pet

Ownership if the county animal control response to cat overpopulation is to simply dump them outside. This is true regardless of whether the cat has been sterilized and vaccinated or not. This partnership resolves that issue as the community will be able to see value in every animal life and the importance placed on those lives by the animal loving community of Hillsborough County. Together, this plan is possible!

Essential to this plan is the AWAKE! strategy of TENVAC. This strategy, representing the process of Trap, Evaluate, Neuter (spay), Vaccinate, Adopt, & Contain, is designed to place as many cats as possible into other programs and homes, while providing an alternative to those animals unable to be adopted for whatever reason. It is expected a true public-private partnership can adopt and foster a substantial number of cats entering Animal Services. According to data developed by no kill proponents there are far more people seeking pets that can be encouraged to adopt; and according to that same data there are far

less animals being euthanized. Additionally, Animal Services data suggest 10-15% of cats entering the shelter will have to be euthanized for medical reasons. Assuming all of this data is correct, very few cats should require containment; and as such any sanctuary options will be a 'last resort' primarily for animals that are difficult to adopt for other reasons.

To conclude, this plan is about Responsible Pet Ownership! We simply cannot expect Hillsborough County residents to substantially change their perception of pets and pet responsibilities while we endorse a program in which cats are left behind dumpsters and on city streets. There is no question cat advocates are correct when they state part of the problem is cat owners who dump their owned cat out with managed colonies – but that won't change as long as cat owners perceive the dumping to be ok. Thirty years ago, communities did not understand fecal contamination and consequently poop stations were unheard of. Today, everyone knows to pick up pet droppings. We must change the community mindset about the value of cats, or this problem will never be resolved. The AWAKE! sanctuary program is the penultimate intersection of responsible pet ownership and animal welfare, and will stand as testament to the importance of pet ownership and humane animal care. It is the only solution that addresses the issues of all stakeholders without compromising the most important concerns of each party involved.

NOTE: This report is not intended to be a fully developed business or operational plan. Should the task force and BOCC recommend proceeding with this proposal a fully developed plan will need to be created. However, this report does represent the fundamental requirements of a well-managed feral cat program that follows best practices. Those “best practices” were fully discussed during the Animal Euthanasia Task Force that just concluded its deliberations for the County. All aspects of this plan were evaluated in conjunction with all task force recommendations; and has been carefully considered by a significant number of veterinarians in the local community. Consequently, AWAKE! is fully endorsed by the local veterinary community of Hillsborough County, Florida.



Other Similar Undertakings

Overview of other facilities

Contrary to some who seem to believe the notion of cats indoors or contained outdoors is pure fantasy, the reality is many informed organizations and individuals provide cat sanctuary facilities around the country. While Best Friends in Utah is the best known example, there are many others that are easily found by a search of the web. Additionally, tens of thousands of cat owners are already doing back yard “sanctuaries”, more typically called “catios” in which individual property owners take the easy steps required to ensure cats remain safe in their outdoor enclosures. A Google search shows myriad options for creating safe, outdoor areas for cats to enjoy without forfeiting the principles of responsible pet ownership.



As the photographs show, there are many ways to provide outdoor access for cats without sacrificing the safety that containment offers. In urban apartments, suburban back yards, and rural farmsteads pet owners are embracing the benefits of cat enclosures and the basics are not complicated. This proposal represents nothing more than an expansion of best practices currently being utilized by cat owners and cat



colony managers around the country. Conversations with representatives from the Purrfect Fence Company (listed below) establish that thousands of fence kits have been sold and installed in the United States by Purrfect Fence Company; and they are one of several fencing companies for cat containment. This program emphasizing cats indoors or contained can be implemented throughout the county utilizing the energy and enthusiasm exhibited by colony caregivers around the county. Working in partnership with the county, local veterinarians, and other NGO’s will allow thousands of cats to have a home.



Links to some of the many sanctuaries in the US:

<http://www.bestfriends.org>

<http://forgottenfelinesct.org/html/about.php>

<http://thegoodshepherdcatsanctuary.com/home>

<http://www.tabbysplace.org/index.html>

[Links to cat fencing readily available in the marketplace:](#)

<http://www.purrfectfence.com/products.asp>

<http://www.catfencein.com/>

<http://www.kittyfence.com/>



Operational Overview

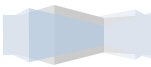
Organizational structure

This opportunity is best approached by a public and private partnership utilizing every available resource to minimize cost and maximize quality of care and scope of the sanctuary network. We believe this program can be implemented using existing resources, donations, sponsorships, limited cash infusions, volunteers, and bare minimum paid staffing. Organizational structure could begin at the county level with an AS employee (hereafter called Sanctuary Director or SD) assigned to sanctuary operations (which would include non-fenced managed colonies as described below) who would hold overall responsibility for this program. In the alternative, a non-governmental organization (hereafter NGO) could undertake the program with county support. Almost certainly the SD would need paid staffing of one veterinarian and two full time veterinary technicians to fully implement this plan. The balance of all labor would be provided by NGO's and volunteer care-givers - the real power in this plan turns on the recognition and utilization of so much that is already being done on behalf of feral cats.

Operations

AWAKE! cat sanctuaries are designed to deal with Animal Services intake cats, and Hillsborough County managed cat colonies only. These sanctuaries would not be available to outside counties or agencies seeking space for feral or stray cats. For existing outdoor cat colonies unable to meet the managed cat colony standard described below, sanctuary space would be used to provide homes for those cats unable to be adopted or otherwise placed. Existing managed colonies would need to be evaluated on a per case basis by the SD consistent with the standards below, and the emphasis would be placed on removing colonies of feral and stray cats near schools, hospitals, human food sources, and nursing homes. These high risk colonies, along with shelter intake cats, are what AWAKE! Cat Sanctuaries are designed to help.

As cats enter the shelter, TENVAC (Trap, Evaluate, Neuter, Vaccinate, Adopt, Contain) would be applied to each cat. Part of the evaluation process would include testing for FeLK and FIV, and cats testing positive would be isolated from other cats and contained. The decision to euthanize or to treat and contain would be up to the veterinarian on staff based on the quality of life for the individual cat and the available space in an adoption program and the sanctuaries. Feline Leukemia cats would most likely be euthanized initially due to the difficulty in managing these cases long-term and the grave prognosis of most cases. In the absence of a "FIV positive program" the cats testing positive for FIV may also be euthanized initially based on space available, along with any other cats in which the veterinarian determines it to be medically necessary. As the program becomes more successful, we hope to be able to save more of these positive cats as space opens in the sanctuaries and adoption programs. Of course, all the cats in this program that are adopted



or placed in a sanctuary will also be sterilized, vaccinated for Rabies, FVRCP & FeLK, as well as micro-chipped.

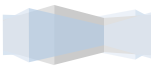
To gain full support from all stakeholders including the veterinary community of Hillsborough County, it will be essential for cat sanctuary programs to run concurrent with efforts which support the long term reduction in the feral cat population. Those initiatives would include an ordinance banning outdoor feeding of feral and stray cats, an ordinance requiring micro-chipping of all pets, and a coordinated marketing campaign educating the community about the need to treat cats the same as dogs (proper feces disposal, inside/contained/leashed, etc).

There is NO consensus in the local veterinary community on what standard would need to exist if the county were to consider allowing managed, uncontained outdoor colonies of feral and stray cats. The simple reality of known science clashes too severely with public health standards, wildlife considerations, and the welfare of the feral cats. However, in the context of moving toward a future in which cats are valued as highly as our dogs and treated the same, we offer the following considerations for existing colonies that have registered caregivers. These considerations are in no way intended to be guidelines for future cat colonies – under this plan new colonies would NOT be allowed once registration of existing colonies is complete. These limitations would be strictly enforced and the colonies closely monitored for compliance.

The singular motivation of any managed feral cat program must be to **quickly** and humanely reduce feral and stray cat populations.

Uncontained, managed care colony requirements include:

1. All cats must test negative for FIV and Feline leukemia.
2. All cats must be sterilized.
3. All cats must be vaccinated for Rabies as required by F.S. 828.30, and be kept current as required by F.S. 828.30.
4. All cats must be micro-chipped and registered to an owner or rescue.
5. All cats must be treated annually for internal parasites that pose a zoonotic risk to humans, domestic animals and wildlife.
6. Feral cat colonies sanctioned by the County cannot be maintained within 8000 feet of schools, human food sources (groceries, restaurants, etc), daycare centers or hospitals; nor maintained within 8000 feet of public parklands or environmentally sensitive areas.
7. Thorough monitoring of managed colonies is absolutely vital. No new cats can be allowed to migrate into existing colonies, and colonies must be aggressively cared for to ensure full compliance with all measures. Any kittens and newcomers shall be immediately removed and adopted/fostered/contained. Consistent monitoring will allow progress evaluations and ensure the cats are in good condition and safe.
8. All feeding must be completed while the caregiver is present, and then ALL food removed, along with all visible fecal matter and food remains.
9. All managed colonies shall be appropriately licensed, new colony establishment is strictly forbidden, and the managed colony program shall be phased out over a 5 year period of time.
10. All managed colonies shall have the permission of all adjacent land owners, and any property owners within 1000 feet of the colony location.



Capital requirements Overview

A large, multiple colony sanctuary would require the following essential investments:

Land – to be donated by the county (optimum would be two 2-5 acre tracts, one in the north part of the county and one in south county). Electricity would likely not be required, but fresh water and easy access would be vital. While land would be donated, it is expected that well water would be required, at an estimated cost per well of \$5,000. Access roading is difficult to price as it will be contingent on distance and other existing roadways. However, a budget of \$50,000 per facility should be assumed for single lane access.

Buildings – shelters would be built by volunteers using materials donated and/or purchased. Estimated “worst case” cost per shelter is 5K. As an example, the picture here is a 12x8 garden shed available in kit form. The cost for this particular kit is \$2599.95. This kit can be bought online and the link is found [here](#). Any type of shelter used would require modifications including an outdoor enclosure and fecal sand box areas, but this is an illustration of how readily shelters can be obtained. Plans and other sources are available online which offer countless building solutions. There are many options; and for a charitable purpose such as feral cats, it is expected that the costs will be substantially lower for each shelter than the \$5K estimate utilized in this proposal due to sponsorships and other donated materials and/or labor.



Fencing – Fencing costs will vary based on the acreage being contained. Purrfect Fence has already committed to helping with costs, and will provide wholesale costs for this project. Other options might also be available to reduce the cost for fencing. However, a safe estimate for fencing a 2-5 acre compound would be \$25,000 using 8’ chain link with Purrfect Cat fencing along the top.



A Single Residence Sanctuary would require the following:

Land – provided by homeowner

Building – variable based on existing accommodations at residence. Buildings as shown above could be utilized depending on space and other considerations.

Fencing – variable based on whether existing fence is present. Making an existing fence cat resistant would vary based on length of fence, but for a typical size backyard would be less than \$1,000 for the cat resistant portion of the fencing.



Capital Requirements Summary

Based on estimates, a 2-5 acre compound with 30 outdoor shelters housing between 10-25 cats each would cost \$230,000. This number could be substantially reduced through the use of volunteers and wholesale costing, and with county donated land it is expected that the true cost of the sanctuary would be less than \$200,000. At a max capacity of 750 cats, this is a capital cost of \$266/cat if no reduction in expenses can be achieved through free and low cost supplies and labor.

Using estimates which assume a fence is already present, a backyard sanctuary should cost less than \$2,000 for space that would accommodate between 3-10 cats. At a max capacity of 10 cats, this is a capital cost of \$200/cat again assuming no reduction in expense based on free or low cost.

It should be noted that capital requirements are also expected to outlast the life span of the cats first contained; thus as the sanctuary is used by new arrivals the per-cat capital expense will drop further. Additionally, sponsorships and other fundraising efforts can be utilized to offset costs. As an example, businesses can sponsor a cat house at the sanctuary and have the building named for their company. Good advertising for the company...and good for the cats. With aggressive marketing efforts, company sponsorships could potentially fund the entirety of the project with county costs limited to the donation of the land.

Sponsorships can help – imagine the “Raymond James Cat House” or the “TECO Place” as an example!

Operational Costs Overview

It is expected that some expense associated with full time employees will be required. While much of the necessary oversight and basic care management can be done by certified veterinary technicians, a veterinary doctor will be needed to both oversee and provide medical care for the sanctuary cats. This employee cost, including benefits, is estimated at \$120,000/year. Additionally, pest control will be an annual expense that must be considered and is estimated to be less than \$10,000/year.

NOTE: All costs can be substantially mitigated by using volunteer resources, fundraising, and the efforts of NGO's.

Feeding, litter box sand, and basic ongoing medical care is expected to cost less than \$200/year for each cat. Currently, care givers are feeding and providing care for thousands of cats in the community, and it is expected that this network of care givers would be active in providing volunteer hours, and fundraising, to help provide ongoing expenses for our community cats.

Bottom line – to provide care for thousands of cats in backyard and larger county operated sanctuaries will not be cheap, but Responsible Pet Ownership is not cheap. It is expected that the cost per cat in sanctuary space will be \$200/year including all operational costs. However, volunteer efforts, private fundraising, and sponsorships are just some of the ways costs for the sanctuary program might be offset. As already noted in respect to the shelter capital expenses, sponsorship for operational costs can be sought. For example, pest control could be provided free or at reduced cost in return for marketing and signage for the business showing that company as the “exclusive provider of services” to our feral cats.



Conclusion

We cannot claim to be concerned with animal welfare while dumping cats onto our streets to fend mostly alone. We also cannot expect our residents to understand the need to be responsible pet owners while the people responsible for enforcing pet ordinances are violating those very same requirements for feral cats. By establishing the TENVAC process and working aggressively to adopt and foster cats, we can minimize the numbers of cats requiring sanctuary space. At the same time, the sanctuary stands as clear evidence to the community that cats matter and are valued, that cats do not belong outside uncontained, and that this community will not tolerate cats being treated inhumanely and being forced to live a life of abandonment on the street.

It is impossible to expect county residents to understand the importance of Responsible Pet Ownership if the animal control policy for feral cats is to simply dump them outside!

It is vital that Hillsborough County avoid the option of simply re-abandoning cats as a policy for dealing with overpopulation and the desire to avoid euthanasia. In addition to no evidence showing Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) success in large land mass areas, the evidence is clear that feral cats pose public health and wildlife predation issues too substantial to ignore. Consequently, creating sanctuary space and focusing on adoption and foster programs for cats is the only other alternative. More importantly, it is essential to successfully changing Hillsborough County residents' attitude on pets and pet abandonment. Nothing less

takes into consideration all the issues which feral cats present.

Together, we can do this!

