



**Rethinking the Cat**

## **Persuading Municipal Officials to Go With TNR**

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# Your presenter



## **Bryan Kortis** (with Pemberly)

### Currently:

- PetSmart Charities Program Manager
- Attorney (NY State)

### Previously:

- Co-founder & Executive Director of Neighborhood Cats

# 3 step structure of a pro-TNR presentation

1. Identify government's interests in free-roaming cats – what are the problems that should concern them?
2. Discuss alternatives besides TNR for trying to solve these problems and why they don't work
3. Introduce TNR, what it is, why it works and examples of success



# Municipal interests: shelters & animal control

- Cat intake & euthanasia at open admission shelters
- Complaint calls
- Staff resources (trapping, shelter care) & other costs
- Opportunity costs (foregone programs)
- Public relations / adoptions



# Municipal interests: public health

- Rabies
- Other zoonotic diseases & parasites
- Quality of life complaints
  - odor
  - noise
  - property damage
  - unsanitary conditions
- Investigation costs



# Municipal interests: wildlife

- Predation
- Competition
- Potentially devastating impact on rare species vulnerable to cat attacks



Alabama beach mouse



Piping plover

# Municipal interests: animal welfare

- High kitten mortality
- Short life span for adults who are unmanaged (no TNR)
- Environmental dangers (cars, cruelty, disease, fighting, climate)



***This interest is the weakest from a government point of view!***

# Step 1 is important because...

By acknowledging the problems instead of trying to ignore or minimize them, you:

- Establish credibility
- Demonstrate free-roaming cat overpopulation is a serious issue that government should pay attention to
- ***Allows you to move the discussion to the real issue for municipal officials*** - what is the best way to reduce the cats' numbers & any negative impacts?



## Step 2: Alternatives to TNR

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- Trap & remove (usually for euthanasia)
- Feeding ban
- Laws (e.g., licensing, at-large, pet limits)
- Do nothing
- Magic wand to make them all disappear

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***The point you're making is: Nothing else works!***

# Doing nothing doesn't work because:

- You're doing nothing!
- Cats will remain at the carrying capacity of the environment (which can increase if more food & shelter is provided)
- Does not address the government's interests in animal control, public health, wildlife predation and animal welfare



# Trap & remove/ euthanize doesn't work because:

- Too many cats, too few animal control officers
- Caretaker resistance / lack of public support
- Vacuum effect (new cats arrive to take advantage of vacated food & shelter)
- Ongoing abandonment + lack of monitoring
- Synergy of these factors



## **“Why don’t we just get rid of them all?”**

- “Who’s going to do it and who’s going to pay for it?”
- “After decades of trying to remove them, this country/county/town has an exploding free-roaming cat population. Time to try something new?”

# Feeding bans don't work because:

- Unenforceable and caretakers will feed anyway
- Cats don't pack up and move away – they remain, find new food sources if necessary & continue to reproduce
- Goal of starving the cats to death is inhumane



**“Ban anyone from feeding them and we won’t have a cat problem.”**

- “While you’re at it, can you ban rain on Sundays?”
- “Name one town or city where a feeding ban succeeded in eliminating the cats.”
- “You can’t outlaw compassion.”



# Laws regulating cats don't work because:

- Licensing, running-at-large bans and pet limits are largely intended to regulate owned cats, not community cats
- “Caretakers” do not consider themselves “owners”
- Enforcement issues arise when colony caretakers either accidentally or intentionally are covered by laws
- All effective enforcement can accomplish is deterring caretakers, not stopping unowned cats from existing or reproducing

**“Let’s pass a law requiring all cats to be confined.”**

- “Who’s going to break the bad news to the homeless cats that they’re not allowed to roam free any more?”
- “Who’s going to catch the offenders and who’s going to pay for enforcement?”



## Step 3: Why TNR?

### **TNR lowers the number of cats because:**

- Spay/neutered cats can't reproduce & attrition means fewer cats over time
- A monitoring system (caretakers) can maintain progress
- Many TNR groups remove adoptable cats at the outset

### **TNR helps protect against disease by:**

- Vaccinating against rabies (once is better than never!)
- Spay/neutered and cared-for cats are healthier cats

## Step 3: Why TNR? (cont'd)

### **TNR reduces nuisance behavior because:**

- Noise from mating is eliminated
- Odor from unneutered male cats spraying is eliminated
- Sterilized cats roam less and become less visible

### **TNR reduces wildlife predation because:**

- Fewer cats means less predation



# Other advantages to TNR

- Caretaker cooperation & monitoring
- Volunteer labor is plentiful because it's life-affirming
- New funding and other resources contributed by the public (individuals & nonprofits)
- Aligned with public opinion
- **And besides, nothing else works!**

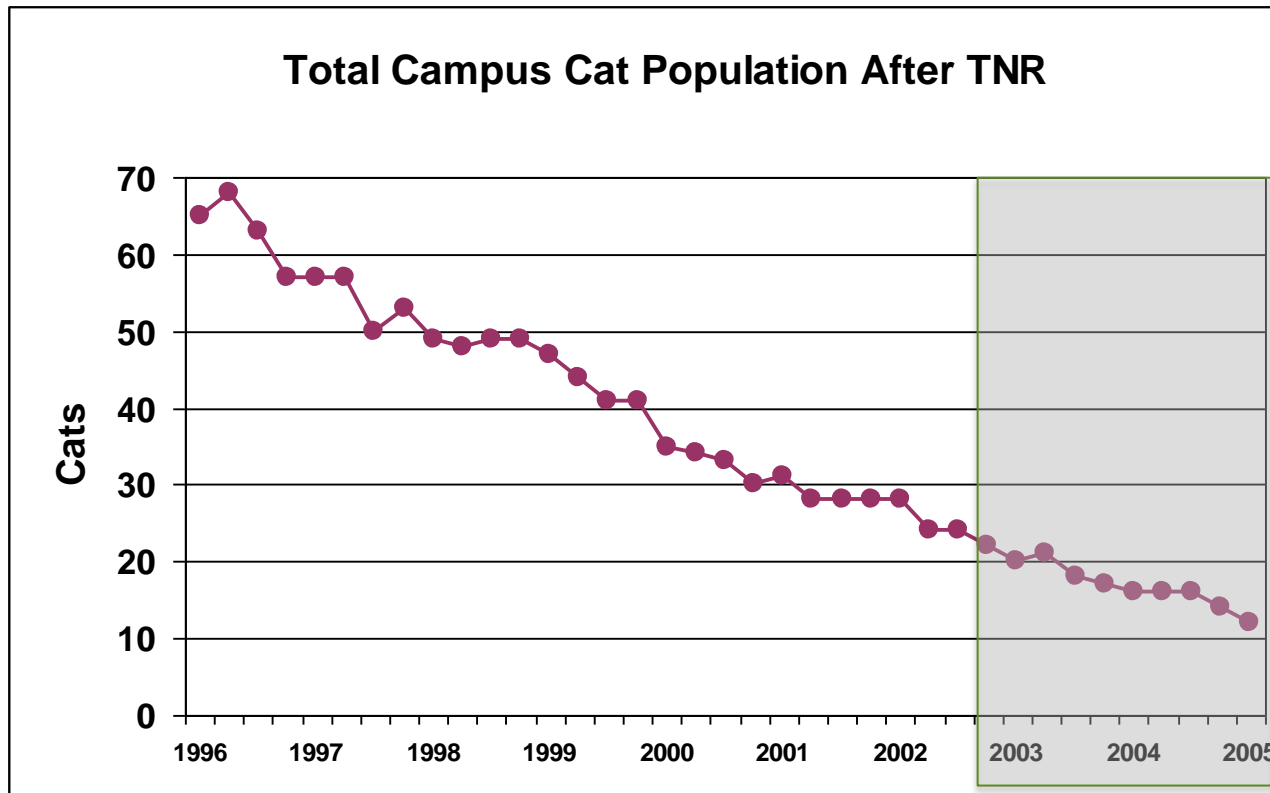


# Municipal level examples of TNR success



- **Newburyport, MA** 1<sup>st</sup> community-wide TNR program in U.S. – 300 free-roaming cats along the riverfront in 1991, zero today
- **Albuquerque, NM** (Targeting + RTF) – after 3 years of intensive community TNR, intake to the municipal shelter is down 39% and euthanasia down 85%
- **Sanders County, MT** – after two years of TNR in its five towns, complaint calls to the only shelter in the county – Thompson River Animal Care Shelter - dropped 84% (from 1,032 in 2009 to 166 in 2011).

# Academic examples of TNR success



Levy, J.K., *Evaluation of the effect of a long-term trap-neuter-return and adoption program on a free-roaming cat population* (2003) *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, Vol. 222, 42-46.

# Academic examples of TNR success (cont'd)

Stoskopf, M., Nutter, F., *Analyzing approaches to feral cat management – one size does not fit all (2004)* Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association, Vol. 225, 1361-1364.

- Studied colonies in rural county in North Carolina
- 6 colonies 100% sterilized
- 3 control colonies 100% unsterilized
- All colonies:
  - Food and water daily
  - Adequate shelter
  - Vaccinated for rabies and common diseases
  - Treated annually for worms



# Stoskopf study - results

After two years:

- Sterilized colonies decreased average of 36%  
(range = 30% to 89%)
- Control colonies increased average of 47%  
(actual = 31%, 127% and 283%)



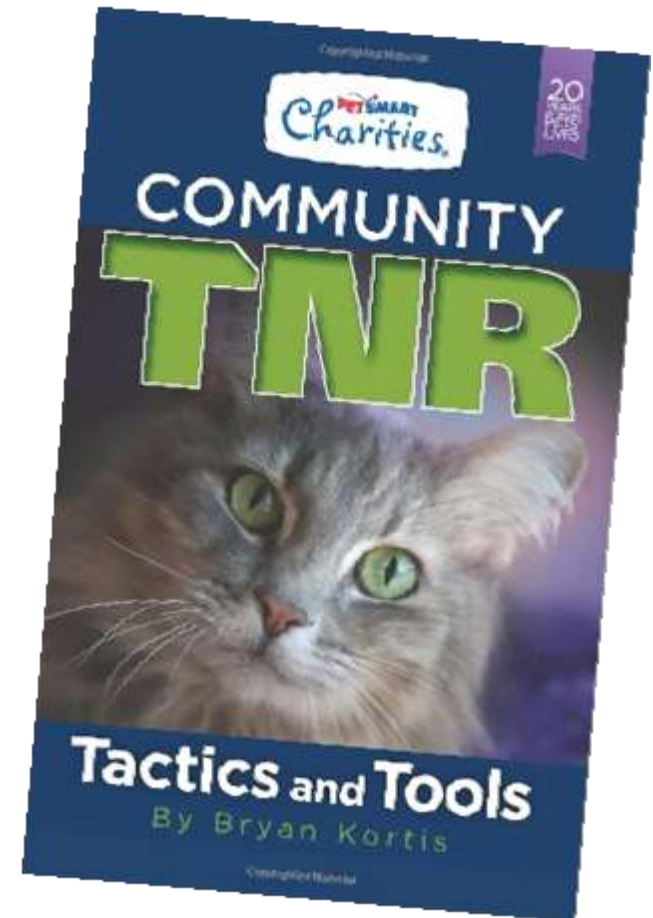
Levy, J.K., *Effect of high-impact targeted trap-neuter-return and adoption of community cats on cat intake to a shelter* (2014) *The Veterinary Journal*, Vol. 201, pp. 269-274.

- 2,366 cats in one Alachua County zip code were spayed or neutered over two years (= 54% of estimated community cat population)
- S/n rate per capita for cats 5 times higher in target area than rest of county
- Intake to county shelter from target zip down 66% during study period
- Intake down 12% in rest of county

## More examples of success

- **Print version:** [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)  
*search Amazon for: "Kortis"*
- **Pdf file** (free download):  
[www.petsmartcharities.org/sites/default/files/CommunityTNR.zip](http://www.petsmartcharities.org/sites/default/files/CommunityTNR.zip)

*search Google for:  
"PetSmart Charities Community TNR"*



**Detailed case studies at end of chapters 4, 5 & 6**

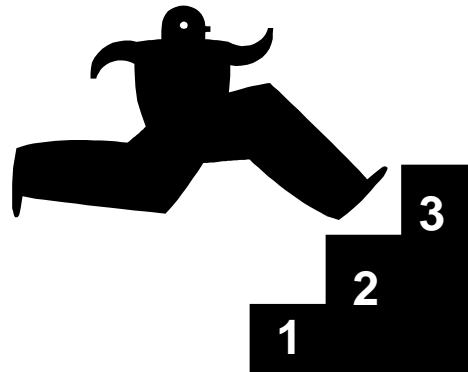
# Local examples of TNR success

- Do some research – any groups in your area performing TNR (shelters, TNR , rescue, shelters, animal control)?
- Will they share their data re: impact?
- Government is conservative by nature, not wanting to be experimental or first to try something
- Municipal officials relate best to local results

***Any ideas?***

# Avoid your opponents' trap!

After Step 1 (problems) has been presented, move quickly to Steps 2 (alternatives to TNR) and 3 (TNR)



The issue **IS NOT** whether free-roaming cats can have negative impacts.

The issue **IS** how can we lower their numbers and reduce whatever negative impacts there are.

# More time in the red – you lose!

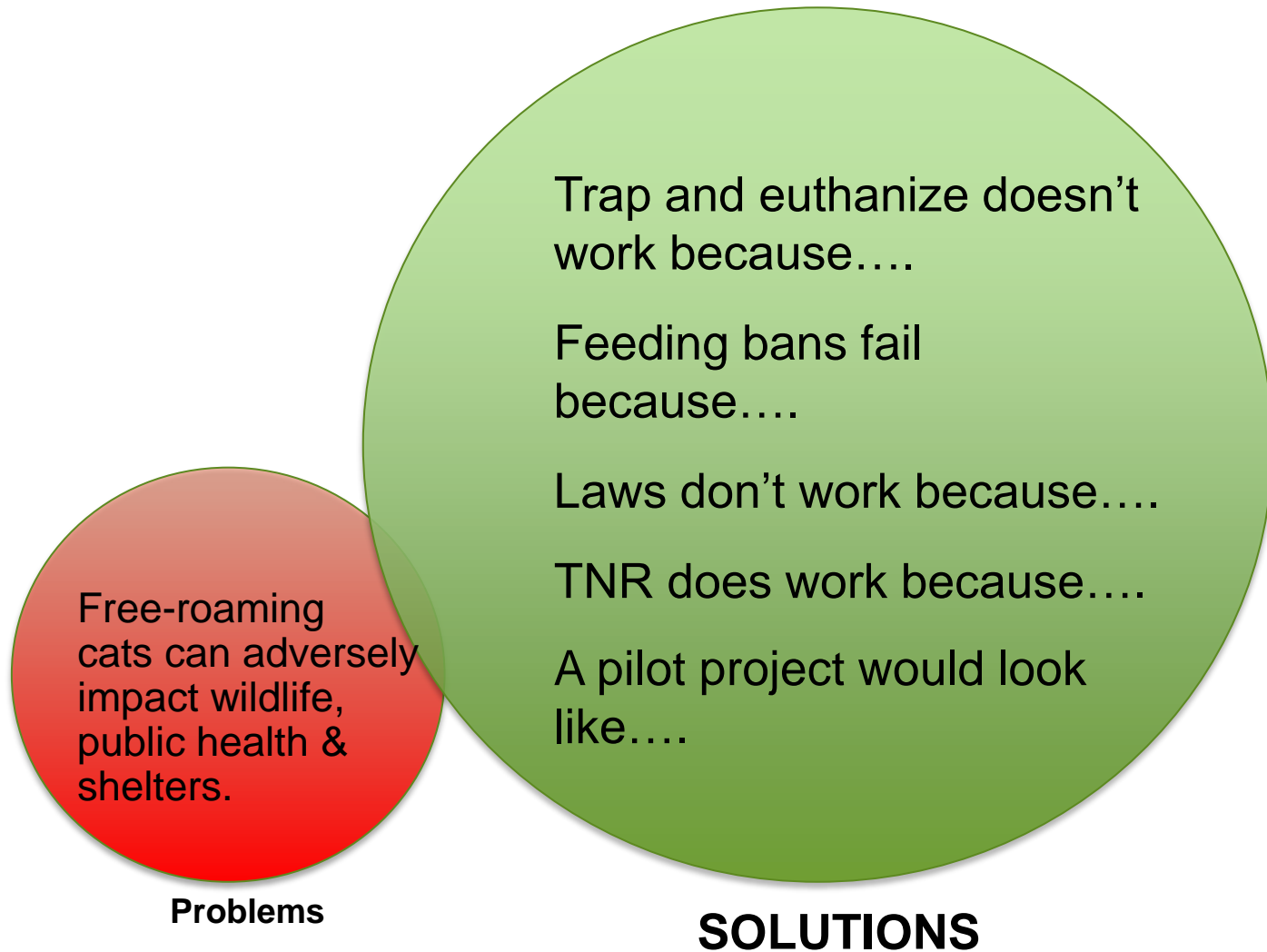
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- Cats kill birds!
  - Cats are not a native species
  - Cats spread rabies and other diseases
  - Shelters are overrun
  - People poison, shoot, mutilate cats
  - My backyard smells awful
  - Digging up the garden
  - Tons of complaints

How do we fix  
the problems?

**Solutions**

**PROBLEMS**

# More time in the green – that's how you win



# The anti-TNR argument is really....

**... an emotional appeal designed to create fear and prejudice against free-roaming cats and, by association, TNR.**

- 99% of your opponents' argument will be devoted to detailed descriptions of the problems, not proposing a solution
- The goal is to persuade the decision maker that TNR is somehow the cause of the problems, despite this being illogical
- Disturbing graphic images are often shown (cats with birds in their mouths, injured small animals, acts of cruelty)





# Pivoting from problems to solutions

**“The Wildlife Society says feral cats in the U.S. kill billions of birds and small mammals every year.”**

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“The issue isn’t how many wildlife are being killed, but how can we reduce that amount, whatever the real number is. Fewer free-roaming cats mean less predation. TNR is the only method known that realistically can accomplish this.”

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“Not allowing TNR isn’t going to reduce the risk of rabies exposures from free-roaming cats. Vaccinating them and reducing their numbers as part of a TNR program will.”

# Pivoting from problems to solutions

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“Everyone here is against cruelty, but right now the cats that may become victims are already out there. What we need to discuss is how can we have fewer of them and better manage their care. That’s what TNR is all about.”

# Data: “What you’re doing now isn’t working”



- Cat intake – constant or rising
- Complaint calls – constant or rising
- Costs to the municipality – how much per cat removed/euthanized multiplied by number of cats annually
  - may include trapping (animal control time), care at the shelter (shelter staff time), food/litter during holding period, euthanasia procedure, disposal of body
  - If animal control/sheltering is contracted out, may be a set cost per cat

# Show TNR has broad, mainstream support



## Position statements:

- The Humane Society of the United States  
[www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral\\_cats/facts/TNR\\_statement.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/feral_cats/facts/TNR_statement.html)
- ASPCA  
[www.asPCA.org/about-us/policy-positions/feral-cat-management.aspx](http://www.asPCA.org/about-us/policy-positions/feral-cat-management.aspx)

## TNR-enabling legislation:

- See [www.neighborhoodcats.org/RESOURCES\\_ORDINANCES](http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/RESOURCES_ORDINANCES)



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## TNR can save tax dollars by:

- Mobilizing volunteers to provide free labor (trapping, transport, etc.) for animal control
- Attracting resources from nonprofits and private individuals to pay for surgeries and other aspects of the process
- Lower intake/complaints

## Funding is available to government agencies from PetSmart Charities:

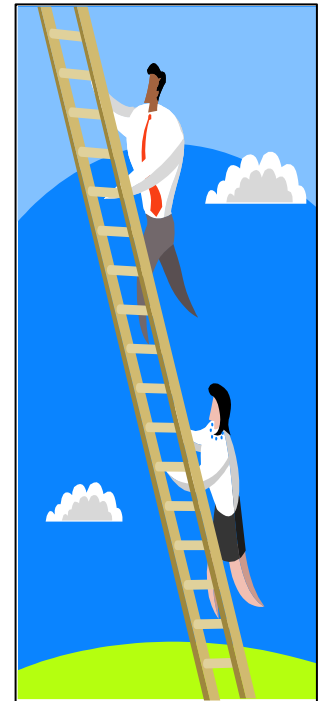
- Up to \$100,000/yr. available for Free-roaming Cat Spay/Neuter grants ([www.petsmartcharities.org/pro](http://www.petsmartcharities.org/pro))



# Who do you make the case to?

## “Climb the ladder”

- Level 1 - the agency or person most directly responsible for handling free-roaming cat issues (animal control, health department, police, sheriff). Speak to them first.
- Level 2 – the office of the top executive of your jurisdiction (mayor, city manager, county executive). If you gain the support of level 1, bring them with you to level 2; if you don't gain their support, bring counter-arguments
- Level 3 – work your way up to the governing body (city or town council, county commission).
- Look for and recruit any friendly faces along the way.



- Safe, noncommittal approach
- Propose it if, after you've made your case, there is still hesitancy
- Structure the pilot properly!!
  - Involve your most reliable trappers and caretakers
  - Don't attempt a particularly difficult project, but one that will be relatively routine
  - Keep good data (for preparing a report)
  - Build in a direct, active role for government (e.g., transporting the cats, holding them overnight , using their veterinarian).

# Have a plan for when you succeed

- Present a proposal for a complete TNR program, including caretaker training, trap bank, spay/neuter, etc.
- Identify the organization, agency or volunteers that will administer the program
- Identify funding and other resources

**Don't persuade the municipality to try TNR and then not have anyone willing or able to do it!!**

# Don't plead for the kitties!

- Avoid emotional pleas on behalf of the cats – remember the job of government officials is about public welfare, not animal welfare
- Present as a “cat population control expert” NOT a “cat lover”
- Dress professionally (to the standard of your audience)
- Leave the sweater with the paw prints at home!

**YES**



**NO**



- ***Managing Community Cats: A Guide for Municipal Leaders***  
by The Humane Society of the United States  
[www.animalsheltering.org](http://www.animalsheltering.org)
- ***“Trap-Neuter-Return: Fixing Feral Cat Overpopulation”***  
by The Humane Society of the United States (video, 16 min.)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTCTuJRkvng](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTCTuJRkvng)
- ***“What is Trap-Neuter-Return?”*** (Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook 2d ed, Chapter 2)  
by Neighborhood Cats  
[www.neighborhoodcats.org/RESOURCES\\_BOOKS\\_AND\\_VIDEOS](http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/RESOURCES_BOOKS_AND_VIDEOS)