

Taking a Broader View of Cats in the Community

NACA feral cat policy moves toward management



NACA president Mark Kumpf says the organization's updated cat management policy addresses the needs of today's animal care agencies and officers. SUZANNE COLEMAN/MONTGOMERY COUNTY ANIMAL RESOURCE CENTER

When it comes to cat management, the National Animal Control Association (NACA) believes the times are a-changin'.

A 2002 NACA policy statement, under the heading "Feral Cats," stated that animal control officers "should be empowered to remove all feral and unwanted cats from the community."

But NACA president Mark Kumpf, who also serves as director of the Montgomery County Animal Resource Center in Ohio, says communities are seeking alternatives to traditional trapping. With that in mind, the NACA board of directors voted Feb. 11 to revise its policy toward feral cats.

The new policy, labeled "Community Cat Management," calls for ACOs to be "empowered to manage all feral, stray and owned cats within the community." Management may include law enforcement, education, public/private partnerships for cat care and control, spay/neuter programs, and regulated cat caretaker programs.

Below, Kumpf tells *Animal Sheltering* associate editor James Hettinger why NACA broadened its policy.

AS: What were the key changes to the policy?

Mark Kumpf: It was originally titled our "feral cat policy." And basically the association realized that feral cats are just one portion of the cat situation. So what we've done is we've addressed it more as a community response, and with that we've taken into consideration that the traditional methods that many communities use—that simply ended up with capture and euthanize—are not necessarily the ones that communities are looking for today. ...

The 2002 policy said ACOs should be empowered to remove all feral and unwanted cats from the community. The new policy says ACOs should be empowered to manage all feral, stray, and owned cats, and so on. What's the significance of that?

... It's recognizing that in some cases, certain jurisdictions and communities are more interested in maintaining a stable cat population than they are in simply bailing the ocean with a thimble. ...

Basically this policy is designed to show that animal care and control officers and those agencies are part of a community management strategy. We're looking

to come up with alternatives that, first of all, don't break the budget. As we've seen before, there's no department that I'm aware of that has enough money in their budget to simply practice the old capture-and-euthanize policy; nature just keeps having more kittens. And [the old policy] doesn't necessarily accomplish the goals that people are looking for. This [revised policy] gives agencies [that] are looking for more guidance the opportunity to explore some of those alternatives. ...

We also stress in here that they actually need to have the tools. Cats in many areas are still considered second-class animal citizens—they're not afforded the same protection that dogs are, and there's no funding mechanism that helps deal with cats. There are some states where dog license fees support only dog control programs, and there's no money available for managing cats. So that kind of leaves the burden on the nonprofit sector and donations to handle what is essentially a community issue. ...

In several places it would be fair to say you've broadened the policy. It now says you're trying to protect all cats, where the earlier one said just owned cats should be protected.

It's supposed to enable officers to manage feral, stray, and owned cats—and each of those is a unique member of the cat community. ...

We've always focused on strategies that get pets home, and this is another one of those strategies that offers us a number of options. We're advocating not just the traditional collar and tag, but microchipping as well as other means to identify these cats, so that people recognize that this cat has a place in the community. ...

One other thing that agencies have found is that everybody in the community knows where there's a great place to dump their cats. You know, "Oh, somebody's there, they take care of them, we see food out there, this is cat nirvana. We'll just go let 'em loose." The prob-

lem is it turns out to be behind a restaurant, [which] then runs afoul of the local health district, and animal control's left with the unfortunate task of having to go remove the cats. If you were working with a community strategy, you'd have some other options available, including relocation, rehabilitation. ...

The previous policy was really aimed at cleanup, and this is designed to be more community-minded. We're not saying that communities have to adopt these; it's just simply a recommendation. And it gives them an alternative. Before, some agencies were simply holding the policy up and going, "This is proof [of] why we should do this, because this is the leading national animal control agency, and their policy is [to] capture and potentially euthanize." And that's not the direction the communities are going. That's not the direction that NACA's going. So we've amended our policy to address that. ...

So you think this has the potential to have some real positive, on-the-ground impact?

Absolutely. And it gives agencies the opportunity to explore and potentially try some of these strategies. Whereas before, you find a lot of municipalities simply look at the agency next door and go, "Well, if it's good enough for them, it's good enough for us." What we're saying is the old standard isn't good enough any more. You need to be able to be flexible with your community animal management strategies for both cats and dogs. And if you continue to follow the old philosophy, eventually everybody else is going to pass you by. Progressive communities are seeing that being flexible in their strategy allows for economic savings. The cost for picking up and simply euthanizing and disposing animals is horrendous, in both the philosophical and the economic sense. So giving someone the alternative, and telling them it's OK to think outside the litter box, it's an opportunity for those agencies to be able to sell that program to their administration and work on it. ...

Our goal is to reduce needless euthanasia. This is aimed at being part of that overall strategy. AS

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