

THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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Mayor and Commissioners, City of Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

The Wildlife Society is writing today to encourage you to oppose amendments to the Code of Ordinances of Athens-Clarke County that would authorize the establishment of registered feral cat colonies. A vote concerning the amendments will take place at a public meeting held 2 March 2010. We are concerned about the effects of establishing trap/neuter/release as the accepted method of feral cat control because of the serious harm it poses to native wildlife.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association of over 9,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Our mission is to represent and serve wildlife professionals—the scientists, technicians, and practitioners actively working to study, manage, and conserve native and desired non-native wildlife and their habitats worldwide.

The Wildlife Society strongly encourages the humane elimination of feral cat colonies and supports ordinances prohibiting the feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and the release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild. We oppose ordinances that legalize the maintenance of “managed” (trap/neuter/release or ‘TNR’) free-ranging cat colonies. You can find more information about The Wildlife Society’s views on Feral and Free-Ranging Domestic Cats in the attached position statement.

Feral and free-ranging domestic cats are exotic species to North America. Exotic species are recognized as one of the most widespread and serious threats to the integrity of native wildlife populations and natural ecosystems. The impact of domestic cats on wildlife is difficult to quantify. However, a growing body of literature strongly suggests that domestic cats are a significant factor in the mortality of small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Because free-ranging cats often receive food from humans, they can reach population levels that may create areas of abnormally high predation rates on wildlife. Even conservative estimates suggest that the number of prey animals killed is immense. Feeding cats does not deter them from killing wildlife for they do not always eat what they kill. Humans introduced cats to North America, and humans must be responsible for the control and removal of cats that prey on wildlife.

Life outdoors is also dangerous for individual cats. Free-ranging and feral cats are at risk for early death or serious injury due to diseases, cars, poisons, and predators such as dogs and coyotes. Outdoor cats typically live less than five years, whereas cats kept exclusively indoors can live to be 17 years or older. TNR programs that return cats to the streets subject them to these many hazards, failing to safeguard the animals’ welfare after release.

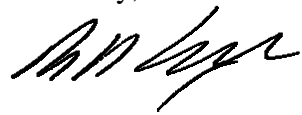
A recent study in *Conservation Biology* (see attached) looked at common claims regarding TNR, such as the idea that feral cats do not contribute to the decline of native species and are not

significant vectors or reservoirs of disease. A review of relevant literature revealed that these claims are untrue. The authors also noted that these programs usually do not receive the level of environmental analysis normally due to projects with potentially adverse environmental impacts.

Feral cats can be damaging to ecosystems, especially in unnaturally high numbers created by human-managed colonies. TNR fails to adequately control feral cat populations and compromises their welfare by subjecting them to potentially hazardous conditions outdoors. We strongly encourage you to oppose the establishment of a TNR program in Athens-Clarke County.

Thank you for considering the views of wildlife professionals. If you need any additional information or have any questions, please contact Laura Bies (laura@wildlife.org, 301-897-9770 x.308).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Leopold", written in a cursive style.

Bruce Leopold
President