



**Animal Control Department**  
Clyde "C.B." Strain, Director  
Cosy Balok, Animal Protection Supervisor

**MEMORANDUM**

Date: April 7, 2021

To: City Council

From: Cosy Balok, Animal Protection Supervisor

Subject: Feral Cat Problem in Gallup and McKinley County

**Discussion:**

Over the past year we have noticed a large increase in the amount of calls from our residents concerning stray cats in their neighborhoods. This problem is affecting all areas of our community. The following factors have contributed to this problem:

**Lack of space and understanding from residents**

We only have 16 cages to accommodate feral cats in our facility. Once we do get them spayed or neutered through the Humane Society, they are released as barn cats or they go back to the original neighborhood so they are no longer reproducing, however this takes time.

There are some neighborhoods that have so many cats that only some could be returned. There are some people that do not want them returned at all. We do our best to not euthanize the cats whereas we do not want to go back to being a kill shelter. However, if cats are so feral that they try to attack us, we do euthanize them. There are so many people requesting traps, but we can only take so many per week because of space and the surgery schedule. This is the reason we tell people one cat a week to spread it around for all the neighborhoods, which is not received well by the public.

**Cost of keeping cats**

This is a huge expense for the Humane Society, which costs them about \$95 per cat to spay/neuter, vaccinate, and house until placed. This fee is not figured into to their contract with the City. We foresee the Humane Society not being able to keep up with the excessive amount of cats and eventually running out of funds.

**Shortage of certified veterinarians**

There is little to no availability of appointments due to the shortage of certified veterinarians. The two veterinarians (one Humane Society employee and Clinton Balok) currently do spaying and neutering three times a week, which is not enough.

### **Shelter shut down for 3 months due to COVID-19**

During that time we only responded to emergencies such as, injured and aggressive animals, animals hit by vehicles, and dog bites. For three months we did not take in any strays whereas there was no trapping, spaying and neutering. Although our facility was closed for a few months in 2020, we trapped 139 cats. So far in 2021 we have already trapped 50 cats.

### **Navajo Nation shelter shut down**

The Navajo Nation's shelter shut down has contributed to our problem because residents are dumping animals in Gallup due to the Navajo Nation refusing to respond to any of their calls.

We feel that if the community was more aware of the situation they would be more understanding. Animal Control receives several upset residents because of the limit on our services; however we are doing the best we can. We need the public to understand it's a problem in almost every neighborhood including Gamerco, Yahtahey, Williams Acre, Jamestown, Continental Divide, and Thoreau. The public can help by monitoring traps and accepting the fact that cats will be put back in their neighborhoods. Feral cats are safe to return once spayed/neutered and vaccinated. We want to remain a no-kill shelter. This is a community problem that will take a joint effort between the City, County and the residents to resolve. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain the feral cat problem we are having in the City of Gallup and McKinley County.

Please see the attached article from the National Animal Care & Control Association (NACA) with recommendations on how to address our feral cat problem. The article explains how the trap, neuter, and release (TNR) program is the best solution. These are national recommendations that are the most cost effective. Also see the attached support letter from a Gallup resident and the PowerPoint presentation with pictures.

One last issue I wanted to bring up was concerning our Animal Protection Officer's response to after-hours and weekend calls. I received a complaint that we were not responding to after-hour or weekend calls, which is not true. There was a period of time in 2020 when our budget was low for overtime and we were told we had to cut back on this. I told Metro Dispatch we could only take dire emergencies as we had little money for overtime. This is not the case now. This might be why there has been some confusion with Metro. I have recently spoken to them about some of the dispatchers telling callers that we don't do after hours. We are in full swing now.