The following are summary minutes for the meeting of the City of Las Cruces - Animal Care Task Force for June 26, 2020 at 2:30 p.m. The meeting took place via ZOOM with attendees logged onto their personal computers or smartphone.

Members Present:
David Dollahon, Assistant City Manager for Operations
Yvonne Flores, City Councilor Dist. 6
Gino Jimenez, City ACO Supervisor
Clint Thacker, ASCMV Executive Director
Gina Roberts, Dona Ana County ACO Case Manager
Geri Wheelis, Boarding Director for Calista Animal Hospital
Athena Huckaby, Colony Manager
Jean Gilbert, Human Society of Southern NM
Jackye Meinecke, Coalition for Pets and People

Others Present:
Michel Meunier, Action Programs for Animals
Dr. Gary Roemer, NMSU Wildlife Professor
Robert Cabello, Sr. Assistant City Attorney
Marcy Scott, Citizen

Call to order – 2:30 p.m.

David Dollahon: Alright, so I'm gonna call this meeting to order and I'll share the screen with my agenda. We don't have minutes and we are recording. If you don't want to appear on the video you can stop sharing your video, that's fine. It just takes up extra bandwidth.

Michel and Dr. Roemer both handed out items. Today is a discussion only so we're gonna get information from Michel and then also further information from Dr. Roemer and we can have a dialogue with each of them. We're pretty good about maintaining our time. So, we'd like to be out of here by four o'clock, so it's 2:30 to 4 if we end early we end early if we don't go to four o'clock. I do want to talk about some other discussion items, that's next meetings and potential next steps. So, with that, Michel I'm going to stop sharing my video again and I'm going to turn it over to you. I can open your attachments if you need to, that I emailed to everyone just a few minutes ago. I did that earlier first and then I did with Dr. Roemer as well. And you should have them in your email box, but I can open them and share them if you need me to.

Michel Meunier: No, I don't need you to share them. I just wanted them for additional information for everyone, you know, separately.

I can't figure out how to get my camera to work, but I'm Michel Meunier the director of Action Programs for Animals. For people that don't know who we are, we're an animal welfare nonprofit in Las Cruces, we run the pet food bank and we rescue animals from mostly from the shelter. So, we rescue a lot of cats and kittens. We're greatly affected by the way our
community and our animal control leaders handle cats in our community. So, what we recommend, and what we've been promoting for now going on 10 years, is trap, neuter, return, community cat programming to better handle our community cat and overpopulation issues that still trouble us today. As it is, as in the shelter, we’re at the front lines with the cats that are taken to the shelter. Not all cats belong there. No matter how much a lot of us would like there not to be free roaming cats there will always be them. And if you have been with us for all these years we've been trying to work toward no kill.

You will see that we haven’t dropped the number of cats coming into the shelter and a big part of that is because I don't think we are addressing the issue the best way we could which is working with people on mitigating community cats or helping people when they're having issues with community cats versus just hauling them into the shelter and killing them. When you do that the issue is you're not reducing the population. The benefits of TNR are many. It's a non-lethal approach and alternative to the trap and kill we've been doing here for decades. It helps reduce taxpayer dollars once you start reducing the cats coming into the shelter. It helps reduce all the calls that animal control gets for nuisances.

What we're doing now we're taking cats out of an area and they just repopulate. It's not helping. When you fix them and leave them in place they are safer, they don't practice a lot of the bad behaviors that cats do when they're unfixed and it helps protect the public health as well.

When it comes to even wildlife, because I know people, wildlife advocates, and I'm an advocate for all animals actually I’m a vegetarian. I don't just like cats and dogs. Bird populations are also protected by TNR, because you’re reducing the number of cats. It's going to take a lot of years. I'm not going to lie that it's an overnight fix but it's definitely a better alternative to what we're doing right now.

Our group rescues more than 300 cats and kittens from the shelter every year and it's been like that now for seven years and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight not as long as we're doing things opposite of what's recommended by all the big animal welfare groups in the United States. Myself and Clint can talk about how best friends animal society and their community cat program is helping us. They give us grants, they provide trainings, they provide a lot of resources to communities and municipalities willing to work with them on properly handling the community cat issues.

I understand the different perspectives. I understand the wildlife perspective. I understand Animal Control needing to respond to people complaining. One of the things that groups like ours can do is work with people in the community on what the specific issue is on their property with free roaming cats. If there are a lot of free roaming cats in an area it's because someone is providing food or shelter for them. They wouldn't be there otherwise. So this approach actually works with people to find out who are the people caring for these cats causing the problem. How can we use deterrence and other methods to keep cats away from the property of people that don't want them there? Also, how can we place cats that truly need to be removed from an area. Let's say there's really an area they really should not be there. Then there's alternatives like barn cat programs and shop cat programs. I will say, we've been placing a lot of barn and shop cats in the last three years. Before that people here didn't understand what those programs were or how they worked towards their advantage. There are some municipalities that even use community cats in their properties for rodent and vermin control. So, there's always alternatives. If you just work with people instead of working against them and working against nature.
So, trap and kill really works against nature. That's why you'll see if you look at the shelter statistics, we're not doing much to lower the populations doing what we're doing now, especially in the City of Las Cruces.

I sent you all of the current resources from best friends animal society about TNR talking points and other information for you to read and evaluate and I do wish you would do so. I wish Animal Control leadership here would also work with best friends because they're willing to work with municipalities as well. That's all I have for now.

David Dollahon: Thanks, Michelle.

Does anybody have any questions? We may have to revisit this because the handouts came out so late today. We may need to give people opportunity to read and digest and have you back at the next meeting.

Athena Huckaby: I was just gonna say thank you very much, Michel for the handouts. I definitely am a TNR advocate as well as a wildlife advocate.

I think that one of the problems that we have, though in this task force is like reconciling those positions and making them come together. Marcy and I for example, have had a lot of conversations about how at the end of the day, we both agree with things like trying to find more money for people to build enclosed cat spaces, right, because ideally we don't want cats necessarily roaming in the community, you know, and that there are ways to reconcile the position. So, the only thing that I would point out is that, you know, just as I feel like the Audubon Society is slanted toward a certain view I also think best friends is slanted toward a certain view and I'd love to see some, like, you know, in the middle sort of materials that reconcile these two positions and talk about how we can have a TNR program that also has the least impact on wildlife possible if that makes sense.

Michel Meunier: I think it's unrealistic to think that all people who care for community cats are going to build enclosures. I certainly think that....

Athena Huckaby: I think that's unrealistic too, but I think that allowing for money for that is something that we've talked about.

Michel Meunier: Definitely, but I'm saying I think a lot of people who do care for community cats wouldn't mind that. There's things like cat fencing. There's a lot of good deterrents, someone would have to go help people place deterrents because a lot of times they don't place them right. There's motion sensor sprinklers. There's things you can put on top of fences that have spikes, you know, so cats don't jump into yards where they're unwanted. I would say for the cat people and the public health people you have to look at TNR in that we're not saying we love all these free roaming cats out there bothering people we don't either, because we have to deal with the other end of it. We have to deal with all the sick cats and kittens coming into the shelter and we work our you know what off every year saving 350 animals. It's not easy. It's hard to place them locally, because we do have overpopulation of cats here. So we have to transport a lot of them out of the area where they're not as overpopulated. But the reason these areas are not as overpopulated is because they are practicing TNR and it's not just best friends. All of the national agencies support this kind of community cat programming, you're talking about even the national Animal Control Association supports it. So it's not just best friends. Let me just, you know,
put that in there because we start reducing those populations, you have a colony of fixed
set.... Let's say, I don't feed outdoor cats personally, but let's say I have 30 outdoor cats in
my area and I fix them all, they maintain that colony and they don't allow others and they
stop procreating so you have less and less cats over the years, look at somewhere like
Jacksonville. Lowering the number of cats means you’re lowering the number of birds that
are going to be killed by cats. So that's where I think the bird advocates have to just face
reality. And I don’t mean to be rude, but you have to face reality that cats are not going
away. And this is not working. How can we help the cats and the birds? This is the only
proven way. If there is another way....

**Athena Huckaby:** That I mean so again...

**David Dollahon:** Wait, wait, wait, wait. I'm gonna insist that you not talk over one another.
There's also raise your hand on the button on the screen. So I will run a very tight ship, y'all.
So that's just being respectful for one another and it helps with meeting transcription. So,
Michel, if you could finish up and then Athena, I will come to you next, I promise.

**Michel Meunier:** Yes, I forgot what my, my last point was going to be, I guess my last point
was going to be if there comes another way to take care of this issue that is more humane
for all we would support it too. I actually support what's more humane for everyone involved.
The human beings involved with killing these cats at the shelter that has a detrimental effect
on them. The cats themselves and the birds, as I said, I am an advocate of all animals, not
just birds and not just cats. I’ve been a vegetarian for 30 plus years because of that. So I do
care deeply about all of this. Just wanted to let you know we go with what is working
nationwide, and this is the only thing working elsewhere nationwide. I'm not saying it's
without its problems, but it's a better alternative. I'll just leave it at that. Thank you.

**David Dollahon:** Athena.

**Athena Huckaby:** Yeah, and thank you for that, you know, Michel, just one more, you
know, I've been a TNR advocate for many years. I've run TNR programs of my own. I
started doing it in Phoenix, back when I was 19 years old. I’m 42, so yeah, I definitely you
know, again, I want to, you know, I'm not trying to make you defensive or, you know,
indicate to you that I don't agree.

What I'm trying to say is that one of the things that we've had a challenge with on the
committee is that the TNR advocates, take the position that TNR is proven and works and
the wildlife advocates, take the position that it is unproven and does not work, which I think
is about what Dr. Roemer is about to talk to us about right. So, I previewed his website, you
know, the very first thing it says on the bottom right, you know, cat advocates are wrong
TNR doesn't work. Here are a lot of articles showing why it doesn't work. So, there's peer
reviewed studies that show that it works, and that it doesn't work, right, and so I think that
we've kind of come to understand, or at least I'd like everybody to sort of remember that the
results on TNR are mixed and then it depends on how we apply it in our community, you
know, as to whether it's going to work. And so the point that I was making was just that
middle of the road sources are really what I would like to see as opposed to, you know,
things that are.....because I feel like both sides are not really talking to each other. They're
just saying this doesn't work and the other side says it doesn't work. And then there's no
conversation. So again, just, you know, Marcy and I have had a lot of productive
conversations, despite our being on opposite sides of the fence and I just wanted to you
know, point out that I think that that's possible. That's all. Because I think Dr. Roemer is
about to probably give us a wonderful presentation about all of the ways that TNR doesn't work.

**David Dollahon:** I don't know, I'm not going to speak for Dr. Roemer, but I'm going to say, I don't think Dr Roemer is going to go that hard line because he talked to me about tools, but I'm gonna jump to Councilor Flores, and then Marcy you're next.

**Councilor Flores:** I thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Dollahon and thank you for running the ship. I very much appreciate what you've said, Michel. I love wildlife. I love animals and, you know, spend money to all sorts of organizations and we are here for the purpose of this task force is to have everybody submit their points of view, discuss them and we are here, we, we will have to come to a middle ground. Is everybody going to be happy? No, it's almost like a bargaining collaboration here you know, everybody's going to go away winning something, everybody's going to go away losing something. So, if we enter this in that spirit and it sounds like Ms. Meunier so far has presented good evidence and I hope to see the documents that she sent over to presumably David Dollahon and we'll be able to review them and but based on what Ms. Meunier said, she said that a lot of animal shelters and organizations throughout the United States have adopted this measure of TNR and there is...I don't think she'd be saying that there's been a reduction in the cat population as a result of that practice if it didn't exist. Why would she lie or why would anybody want to challenge that and is it going to be perfect? No. And I think that the Audubon Society definitely has a say in the stake.

But again, we're here as a group from the community to make that decision for our community. And I don't think we have to be adversarial and I don't think we have to in any way minimize what anyone is saying. Thank you, Mr. Dollahon.

**Marcy Scott:** I just wanted to jump on what Athena said, I hope we are not going to go backwards here. We are starting to recognize that there's some push and pull, and I think there is a middle ground that is appropriate for Las Cruces.

If you go to either extreme we're not going to get anywhere. There are going to be situations where it is not appropriate to have cats at all as we started to work out the mapping, and I appreciate the city, whoever that was that put together those maps, David. That was that's wonderful because that's very instructive and I think there are places where enclosures if we can get some funding make a lot of sense for both protecting public health, but also protecting birds and what I think a lot of the cat advocates don't fully appreciate is how special a place that Las Cruces is for wildlife. It is incredibly diverse. We are in a very, very special place for migratory birds in particular being this narrow ribbon of green through the desert, that is highly trafficked by thousands of birds every year. And yes, they are very vulnerable to cats. A lot of that paper information about TNR does not fully appreciate the damages that cats can do to migratory birds. Yes, I, I understand that the best friends has a lot of good information about the TNR program, but I think we need to take the opinions about the damages to wildlife with a grain of salt because I don't think they fully apply to our situation here in Las Cruces.

The Council did recently put out a proclamation about protecting migratory birds and not adopting policies that put them in jeopardy and I'll be happy to enclose or attach a copy of that because I finally got ahold of it but just a non thinking widespread TNR program would not be applicable or be a good idea with Las Cruces. I think what Athena is saying about trying to find the right situations for different areas of the community makes a lot more
sense. And I think we have made a lot of progress towards coming in the middle to see that
some things are going to work in some places, other things are not so advisable. So thank
you, Michelle. And thank you David for letting me talk and I'll, I'll shut up now. Okay.

Councilor Flores: Thank you for what you said Ms. Scott and I'm sure that what you're
saying you believe in what you're saying, but I need to see the data. I need to see, and
perhaps Ms. Meunier too can provide the data, that shows how migratory birds have been
affected by or continue to be affected by TNR practices. She mentioned Jacksonville being
very, being successful. I think I would have to see that data. I really would encourage
everyone to just sit back and look at everything that is going to be beneficial for everyone
concerned and I don't think we have to again minimize anything anyone else was saying.
But Ms. Scott, do you have that data and I know, I don't know if that, I don't know, I
remember somebody at a meeting a long time ago, presenting on birds, but I can't... She's
not, she hasn't been at the meetings lately, but it is...

Marcy Scott: I have been to several meetings and I'd be happy to put together a
bibliography of some of the most recent studies on in general. But, as I have said at a
couple other meetings before....

Yvonne Flores: Excuse me Ms. Scott I wasn't done and you have to raise your hand to be
recognized by the facilitator. I don't mean to be rude, but I'm not done.

Marcy Scott: I thought you were asking me, I'm sorry.

Yvonne Flores: No. No, I was just putting a, well um, it would, and it isn't so much
bibliographies and... But to have a, you know, show us the data, you know show us what we
need to do here because I don't know if everybody who attends the task force would have
the time to go through a bibliography list. And frankly, I just don't have that time. I think that
a lot of us have been working at by just data driven information, the data has to be shown
on a chart, it has to be, there has to be a scientific correlation between what you're
proposing and what the end result is so and so that's what I'm asking. And yes, you have
been at meetings and thank you so much and I'm glad that you're advocating for birds, but
we do have to look at the, you know, the greater good here.

David Dollahon: Michel, you're next. And then I want to get to Dr. Roemer who is, I don't
know if he's on vacation yet or he's working on getting on vacation for a three week
motorcycle ride so, I hope he's going someplace cool.

Michel Meunier: Okay, I just wanted to address Ms. Scott that I for one am not one of those
that diminishes or...there, there are some people who care for cats. I will... I've talked to
these people on the phone. They don't care anything about how the cats are nuisance to
anyone else or anything that the cats do. Cats are not perfect creatures. They can be feral
and wild, they can range from being very feral to very friendly. So, I do not diminish the fact
that wildlife is affected that neighbors are affected.

We try to talk to people. I have been called the B word multiple times when people coming
in and I'm telling them, do not feed cats if you're not going to be responsible for them, if
you're not going to fix them. If you're not going to do the right thing. You're not helping them
or the community by doing that. So I will say I do see all the sides, um, but what concerns
me about the wildlife side sometimes you talked about the cat side being on the one
extreme and not caring about the wildlife. For the wildlife advocates, I would ask then what
is the alternative because the catch and kill is not working and hasn't worked for decades. So, if it's not TNR then what is it? That's just, you know, I'm always open to new ideas. Just wanted to say that. Thank you.

**Gary Roemer:** Okay, so first I'm not against TNR. Okay. However, I think when you look at from the first principles of population dynamics, that trying to control cat populations through reproductive means only doesn't work unless you're in a relatively closed population that doesn't have emigration and immigration and unless you can sterilize a very large portion of the cat population. David, can I share my screen?

**David Dollahon:** Sure.

**Gary Roemer:** Okay. So, um, let me start with this. So this is an analysis that basically shows the level of either survival reduction or fecundity reduction. So reproduction reduction that would have to occur to drive population growth rate below one. Okay, so when population growth rate lambda, this value is equal to one, it means there's no change in population size. So from an analysis that we did you can see here that if you sterilize 75% of females that you still have a population that's growing by 8% per year. If you increase the mortality. Now I'm gonna take this a step back. I'm saying mortality from the standpoint of a population but let's look at it this way, removing animals from the population, rather than mortality. If you increase the amount of removal you have you can get to the level where you remove 50% of the animals and you can have a reduction in population size. So from first principles of population dynamics just sterilizing animals doesn't work unless you can sterilize a very large percentage of the population and that's often impossible to do with a wild or feral cat population because you're never going to catch enough animals to sterilize that many.

So there's been discussions that TNR programs work and I want to give me an example of one. So this is a feral cat program that was an operation for 23 years in Florida, Key Largo, mind you and it worked, but (inaudible) eleven cats returned back to the original location and 1419 cats removed via adoption, transfer to the adoption center, euthanasia, died in care or outcome of dead on arrival. So regardless of how you remove the animals from a population perspective when you remove a large portion of the animals, you're going to result in a population decline.

You have to remove a lot in order for that to occur, but keeping that in mind, let's do a little thought experiment. Let's say you've got 100 female cats out there and 50 of them you sterilize and 50 of them are still capable of breeding. So you're only able to sterilize half the population and typically a wild cat is going to have a litter size from two to five and they'll also, I have to look back at their survival rates for the kittens, but let's just say that those 50 cats can produce one cat. Okay, so you have 100 cats you sterilized 50 you now have 50 cats and now they produce one cat. How many cats do we have after a year?

David Dollahon: 150.

**Gary Roemer:** Great. So now let's say you do the same thing, but instead of sterilizing those 50 cats, you remove them from the population, however that is, through adoption through whatever. Now you have 50 cats leftover and they produce a kitten. How many cats do you have?

**David Dollahon:** 100.
Gary Roemer: So that’s my general point you know that when you do TNR yes you leave those cats back into the environment, right, but that doesn’t necessarily cause a reduction in population size unless you can sterilize a large percentage of the cat population.

So then there were some thought, you know, like maybe, or maybe there wasn’t any about (inaudible) the number of cats in the US population back in 2010 and you can see we’re getting up around 80 or 90 million cats that we know of in the United States, right. And I might add, it’s very hard to estimate abundances so you have to take these estimates with a grain of salt but nonetheless, there’s a lot of cats in the United States. And so then, finally, what I’d like to, to end with, in a sense, and we can go back and forth and have various discussions about you know what we could do to cat populations. And again, I’m not against TNR because if you can sterilize a high proportion of the population and if you can adopt a lot of animals, it can work. Okay.

But recently, there was a paper that came out on the decline of the North American avifauna. And just to show you these numbers here. In the past, 1970 – 2010, we have lost 3 billion birds. That’s an estimate of the abundance of birds that is declined across the United States in this 40 to 50 year period. Okay, and most bird groups have declined, only a few bird groups have actually increased or stabilized in abundance over this timeframe.

Cats are not the only factor, of course habitat destruction, pesticides, over harvest a lot of factors are contributing to the declines in bird populations but invasive species like cats are a major impact to bird populations. So what can we do? My advocacy is that you leave all the tools you have on the table. If euthanasia is needed at times then you use it. You know that’s removing animals from the population. The idea that you should never kill a cat is something that I don’t think is a very good policy. Again I advocate TNR programs if they can be implemented in a place where a large proportion of animals can be sterilized and a large proportion of animals can be adopted. But I don’t think you should adopt a blanket policy that you’ll never kill a cat and you know my reasoning is because whether you sterilize a cat or not, that cat still has an opportunity to kill wildlife and it will. I had a house cat and I lived on the fifth floor of an apartment in Los Angeles and my house cat was completely never went outside and I had a little balcony that was like five feet by two feet or five feet by three feet wide. And one day I came home and there were mourning dove wings in my apartment because a mourning dove landed on my balcony and my house cat killed a mourning dove and when we brought her here she passed away here. We kept her inside but a couple times she got out. I rescued a rockman from her mouth and I rescued a hummingbird from her mouth, she killed two small rodents, and she killed some lizards and she got out very, very infrequently. It was like one of those things where oops Hannah’s got loose again let’s go look for her. So fed cats kill wildlife. So all I’m advocating for is that you don’t adopt the policy where euthanasia is completely thrown off the table because I think it’s a tool that you still have to have in your toolbox.

Jackye Meinecke: Okay, so most people are well aware that I’m a strong advocate for cats and TNR. So I’m not even gonna go over all of that. I do like what Mr Roemer had to say about keeping all our tools and I can’t think of any TNR advocates in this community that say to kill no cats or to remove euthanasia for from the table 100%. I’ve never even said that and we know that, you know, I try to save everything I can. So even I would not say that because euthanasia does have its place but I don’t want it to be our only choice. So we’re kind of on the same point. He doesn’t want it to be our only choice. I don’t want it to be our only choice either. So I like his list of tools. Certainly they are ones that are promoted by the
other TNR organizations as well. The whole idea of our original group, what was it, a
coalition of pets and people, that goes back a ways, but for those of us who are from back a
ways, that particular group was no kill on the understanding that at least 10% or more would
still end up being killed because of other reasons. Too feral or too sick or too old or various
different things, sick and old would be the main ones. Although right now it's mostly about
being feral.

So I don't think anyone in our community actively says, we don't want any euthanasia of any
cats of any kind. That has just never happened in this community since I've been here. So
just to get that on the table and let people know that that's not a standard TNR stance that
we won't kill any cat at any time for any reason.

Yvonne Flores: Thank you, Dr. Roemer for your presentation. I noticed that some of those
dates the graphs were about 10 years old and so I don't know how current your graph
information was. And the other question I have is the environmental factors that affect birds.
I know that studies have been done decades upon decades. I mean, I remember Congress
passing like a multi million or billion dollar act I was in law school and we read about it and
we thought they care about migratory birds and we're starving you know law students, you
know, fighting to get grants and scholarships. So, and that was like 1000 years ago but
what...because that was when the EPA, I guess it was in the 70s shortly after President
Nixon passed the Wildlife Protection Act or whatever it was. Yeah, something like that. Um,
so did the studies that you reviewed indicate whether those deaths, the graphs that you
have the most recent studies that you reviewed indicate whether the death of the birds were
caused by you know the percentages of how many cats cause of death and what the
environmental factors because back then. I mean, we're talking about what 50 years ago
there was a there was a big concern about environmental factors and now that we know all
about climate change and everything the detriment it's had on our environment and our...do
you have a breakdown of that, the impact?

Gary Roemer: This particular published paper only goes to 2010. So, but if you look at this,
so this would be considered a type of regression and so it's a correlation between the
number of house cats relative to time and you can see that there's a very positive trajectory.
So I would imagine that this is continuing and there are other estimates of the number of
house cats made by other papers, and I can dig those out for you that show that you know
house cats are probably well over 100 million house cats in United States, and these are the
ones that you can count.

So you asked for, you know, is there data on this. It's very difficult to count the number of
individuals that are in, say, a wild population. Now, you can't just go out and find everybody,
let's say in a in a parcel of land because you'll never be able to detect all animals that are
there to 100%.

Yvonne Flores: My question, Dr. Roemer, I think it seems like I wasn't clear, so forgive me.

Gary Roemer: Yeah, your other question had to do with the data on what is the contribution
of bird losses that might be attributable to house cats, per se.

Yvonne Flores: What is the data as compared to the environment.

Gary Roemer: Well, again, you're asking for some times (inaudible) that I can't answer
because that's a very difficult thing to do. And so what people end up doing is they might
study a lot of, you know, prey items that are brought back to a to a household. So this would
be someone who has an indoor, outdoor housecat. And that person might record the
number of prey items over a certain amount of time. And then they would take that
information and they would scale it up and say, okay, well, if these 100 cats brought in this
many prey items how many is 100 million cats going to kill?

So it's very difficult to come up with that kind of data, but that's the way people do it. And
there's several studies that have been done in different communities to show that cats take
birds they take small mammals, they take lizards and etc. These are indoor/outdoor house
cats. They're not feral cats. So understanding what feral cats do typically, you have to track
the animals get scat samples and then do an assessment of their food habits in order to
figure out what they might be foraging on and then try to scale that up. In the other study
that I showed, which was this one, this is an assessment basically of utilizing breeding birds
survey data that has been recorded across the United States for about 50 years and just
showing that there's been a decline in the numbers of birds over that period of time at
roughly an estimate of 3 billion individuals. Now of those 3 billion birds can we say how
many were (inaudible) to cats? No. All we can say at this point is given these data is that
there's 3 billion fewer birds now than were in the past and that those factors that are
contributing to those declines are anthropogenic usually, they're all related to human issues,
and they're varied and a lot has to do with habitat loss, pesticide, over harvest and invasive
species of which feral cats will be considered an invasive species.

So if you (inaudible) information on feral cat impacts on the bird populations, then you'd
have to go maybe more directly to places like the American Bird Conservancy or the
Audubon, which are basically going to be similar to the humane organizations that
(inaudible) programs. These are bird conservation organizations and they're going to
present you the same sorts of information, but perhaps from a different viewpoint.

The scientific evidence is out there that cats definitely impact wildlife. There's no question
about it. I can provide you with a lot of resources that show feral cat impact, not only in
continental United States, for example, islands, where they've been introduced by accident
and have wreaked havoc on endangered species because islands typically have a lot of
endemic species that are found nowhere else in the world. Breeding seabirds in that
removal of cats from those islands has resulted in conservation successes, bringing back
organisms that were close to the brink of extinction. But now you're in a situation, we're not
in an island, we're in a big community, we have a city, we have outlying areas that we may
consider more wild. So there's an urban wild interface. And there's no way you're going to
be able to implement a complete TNR program that's going to control all of those cats. It's
impossible to trap that many animals and to sterilize that many animals to reduce population
size. You're not going to be able to do it ever.

TNR programs will work in a very limited number of situations where perhaps there's a lack
of immigration and emigration of cats into a population. And where you can sterilize a large
proportion of them and or adopt or remove a large proportion of them. But when you think
about using TNR to control feral cat populations it's not going to work. There's a lot of
evidence out there and if you look at it from a population dynamics perspective, the first
principles of population dynamics, it's not going to work either. So, some of the information
that you're asking for is just not estimates that you guys can make.
Yvonne Flores: I see. So no one can look at any data that shows that cats are dying because of the environment or the percentage of cats who are dying that are dying is attributable to the environment?

Gary Roemer: Well, I'm not sure what you mean.

Yvonne Flores: I'm talking about. I'm talking about climate change issues, you know, we have all this junk out in the air. The environment is basically a trash can and I'm not talking about plastic bags, I'm talking about the air quality and migration (inaudible) that have been going on for a long time.

Gary Roemer: There obviously are changes to our environment that are wrought by humans that can affect all life you know ourselves included, but what percentage of that causes mortality in cats, I would have no idea how to even estimate that. The only thing that you can do really is you can mark cats or radio collar cats and then look at their survival rates and estimate their survival rates and that would be like a local type of project or you could also estimate their fecundities so you could map their population dynamics. But just like anything that we pool in wildlife population dynamics you know, you're basically sampling a population and you have uncertainty around all of your estimates and so there's no way to really say, yeah, these 100 million cats kill 1 billion birds a year. It might be 1 billion birds a year plus or minus 500 million. It's really hard to estimate but from studies that have been conducted, it's pretty clear that cats have an impact on wildlife and that TNR is useful under certain circumstances but that it's not the end all panacea for cat control.

Yvonne Flores: Thank you, Dr. Roemer. Thank you so much.

Athena Huckaby: Dr. Roemer, thank you very much. I thought your presentation was well rounded and presented the evidence and thank you for the papers. I really appreciate being able to, you know, read Peer Review studies right from journals. So thank you.

Michel Meunier: So I just wanted to ask, or just discuss a few things that came up, as I hear other people talking, um, I will say that a lot of the animal welfare national groups are in support of TNR. Which one of those groups have actual stats? I think the best case might be Best Friends. I was on a conference call with them earlier today about the granted funds they gave us to help cats this year here and they said they had 2019 data and statistics or something so I'm mass emailing them and asking them to send any and all actual data, they actually have and I will forward that to you all when I get it. So, your national groups that support it are the Humane Society United States, ASPCA, NACA, all of the large groups support this method, and I won't say it's perfect, but I don't think anything is. You talk about, Mr. Roemer, talked about some of these islands that have eradicated cats and how it has helped bird populations, but from some of the things I've read too and I would like to ask you, is it true that in some of these areas there's a horrible increase also in vermin, so you have to think of everything that's affected by having cats around and not having cats around. Maybe the goal is not to eradicate all cats but just to greatly reduce them so it helps everyone involved, including us the rescuers. Thank you.

Gary Roemer: Okay, so this is a paper that reviews feral cat eradication on islands and so I can send that off to you all but again this is a situation where cats were eradicated because they were causing declines and/or pushing certain species toward extinction. So there would be no reason to try and simply reduce the population size because that'd be something you'd have to continue to do for the long haul in order to make sure that there are...
too few predators on the islands to potentially impact these native species. So feral cat
eradication, for example in this one, successful eradication programs were trapping,
hunting, often with dogs. So I've been involved in certain types of eradication programs on
islands where we use trapping and then euthanasia or we use weapons or in some cases
other groups have used Jack Russell Terriers to hunt down cats and eliminate them and
basically the whole idea is to get rid of the cats and you have to get rid of the cats in this
situation because they're causing the extinction of endemic species of birds that are found
nowhere else in the world and from my perspective that's more important than, you know,
the hundred million cats or more that we have just in the United States. So obviously, I'm a
wildlife biologist right I value wildlife more than I value our commensals. I have two dogs. I
love my dogs. We never want to see them hurt.

The information that you presented about, you know, the support for TNR programs comes
from animal welfare organizations. These are organizations that care about pets and that's
great, I care about pets, you know, but the problem is that many of these people who are
involved in animal welfare do not understand population dynamics and they do not
understand how difficult it is to implement things that can reduce populations. Wildlife
biologists have been doing this for quite some time now and all I'm suggesting is that I'm not
against TNR programs. I think they can work in certain cases. Especially again where you
don't have emigration and immigration into a particular colony. I think that if you, you know,
can sterilize a very large portion of the population then they can reduce cat numbers.

But as far as that being a method to control feral cats in and around Dona Ana County,
again, I think you're coming from your heart and you're not coming from your mind because
we cannot do that. It isn't going to work.

If you want, you know, give me a bunch of money and I'll go out there and study feral cats
and I'll try to give you an estimate of how many feral cats are running around out in Las
Cruces, and we'll do a survey of how many cats there are and what's their reproductive rate
and what's their survival rate and then I'll do a population dynamics model. We can go that
route, if you want, to this local population. But again, it can work under certain situations, but
it's not going to work under all situations. So that's all I'm advocating

Athena Huckaby: Thank you again for that, Dr. Roemer, I just wanted to point out, I think,
similar to what Jackie said, you know, just to keep things clear that in this task force I don't
think any of us, you know, certainly we're not saying that we want to eliminate the things
that we're doing now. I think we need to keep in mind that currently animal control is
complaint driven. So, it's not as if animal control in Las Cruces is out there taking the
initiative to reduce cat populations, right, that's not happening at all. You guys do great
work. I just mean that like somebody has to call and complain about cats right and then
Animal Control responds and usually they drop off traps and the person traps the cats
themselves. So we're talking about adding TNR onto what we're already doing. We're not
talking about using it to replace anything. So I think that the conversation, you know, as you
said earlier needs to be, you, Dr. Roemer, said, you know, we want to add this as a tool to
the toolbox within our ordinance in a way that we can use it most effectively and also, you
know, continue to explore options to control the cat population in Las Cruces. So, you know
I guess just to, I think that what gets lost sometimes when we have these conversations is
that TNR, yes, maybe only works in certain areas but we're not saying we want to eliminate
what Las Cruces is doing now and replace it with only TNR right. So, you know, just to make
that point.
I would love to give you a bunch of money and do a study actually. I think that's a really good idea because I don't think that we have...you know, Councilor Flores is asking for data and we don't have local data on the...we have local data on intakes for the shelter, which we can sort of extrapolate to think about cat populations but not really, right. And so to have local data about our population of cats. Where are they located. What is their reproductive rate. Is what we're doing now doing anything at all or is our cat population just continuing to grow year over year. Why is Michel Meunier's organization, you know, rescuing 350 cats a year with private money right that she's applying for through grants and all of the rest of this stuff. How can we slow that down. I think the first step is to do a study. Absolutely.

Clint Thacker: Thank you very much. First of all, I want, Athena just pretty much said everything I wanted to say, so I won't go into that. But secondly, I think this is a great opportunity to do a study. If you think about it, the things that we're doing of implanting a microchip on feral cats, we can track them with that when they come in again. Animal Control officers can scan the cat. They can put the information in the shelter love we can grab that information out, put it into a map like they're doing now. I mean, we have the basis of a good study program that would be beneficial to see what's all coming in. However, for that to happen, we would, we would have to be actively trapping cats. We can't rely just on the animal control officers bringing it in on a complaint basis. If we were to do a TNR we would have to do that anyways, even if we weren't doing a study program or not, we would have to actually have people trapping cats, bring them in, in large scales. I also appreciated Michel's presentation as well. Great information on both sides, and I, I really do believe we can walk down the middle aisle here and use all of this as tools.

Gary Roemer: There are ways to estimate abundance of cats, if that's something that you really are interested in doing, that does not necessarily require trapping them, but it does require being able to identify individuals and this can be done using remote cameras. So if we were to look in the urban wildlife interface and have remote cameras out there and attracting cats to these remote cameras and as long as we could identify individuals because of unique spot patterns or something like that we can use that information to get estimates of abundance of cats in feral environments. If you were, you know, I haven't seen any data from the shelters so I don't know what you guys have. But of course, you could use animals that are registered as estimates of the number of cats that might be owned, you know, which is different than unowned to cats. And we could do what's been done in the past is questionnaires where people send information to cat owners and they asked them, you know, would you help us. We're trying to find a way to minimize cat impacts on wildlife, but yet you know we still care about cats. Can you tell us something about how many animals, your cats bring home on a weekly basis. And so therefore you can get a measure of the impact that cats might be having on wildlife.

So it all depends on what your guys's goals are and how you would end up designing a study to address those goals or objectives. I'd be willing to work with you on certain things. But, you know, to be honest with you at the outset, I don't really know what your goals are. I mean, you know, is it to minimize the number of complaints, is it to actually try to control cat populations, both the ones that are owned and the ones that are unowned. You know, and for the former I would basically say well you know you need an education program to try and teach people to sterilize their cats, so that they don't create more cats. I mean, I think that's probably one of the most effective things that we can do. Or are you interested in their impacts to wildlife or are you interested in comparing methodologies that would help to reduce populations and whether or not those populations are urban or exurban or wild
(inaudible) type populations. So there's a lot of different things you know objectives that you could have. And to be honest with you, I don't know what your objectives really are.

I think that's why when I had a meeting earlier with David, my only issue was, it sounded like people were pushing for this idea that no cat should be killed. And again, if that's not the case that's great, and I don't think you should just remove that as a tool and it sounds to me like you know you're all willing to try to find a middle ground to reduce the cat population at least the unowned cats and to minimize the impacts on wildlife, as well as to minimize your impacts and your shelter, because I'm sure it's costing you guys a lot of money.

Michel Meunier: Just quickly, I want to tell Dr. Roemer and everyone thank you very much for this meeting. I think we always need to have these dialogues. I do come to this from, of course, the heart of course I love animals, what Dr. Roemer described on that island made me cringe, what they were doing, but you know my dog eating little birds in my yard last week also made me cringe. But, you know, nature is what it is. I did want to clarify, we talked about no kill, no kill advocates in our group, it doesn't mean no euthanasia. There's always times when it's in the best interest of animals to be euthanized. Like cat populations when ferals are brought into the shelter, they should be tested. You shouldn't be releasing any cats with feline leukemia, FIP, you know, back out into the environment. So I just, you know, I think we can all come together and figure this out. I believe animal control and city and the county probably have a lot of places that they know of that they get constant complaints from that if they would work with us and help us try and help some of these people willing to do something else besides trap the cats we're willing to help, we're always here. Thank you.

David Dollahon: Thanks, Michelle. I'm going to share my screen real quick. This was the draft ordinance where we were discussing last meeting and I am going to offer this and this is your homework, but I'm going to offer some housekeeping items. First of all, July 31 will be our next meeting. That's the last Friday of the month, and we will probably still be doing it via zoom. I did share a map with everyone. And that's part of your homework as is part of the ordinance. I think everyone is taking it from the perspective of our willingness to try new things. And we've put questions out there. The map is related on item “C” on the screen now where they may be, where they're prohibited from releasing community cats. So you need to look at that and if you have questions about the map, let me know. We could change these standards because it's really about where we're releasing community cats.

The other item is on items “D” and “E” and I want you to focus on that. The question under “E” as part of your homework is what else are available besides multiple releases and at what point do they become a nuisance beyond the initial ear tipping and what other items we could look at as far as a nuisance cat does ultimately get euthanized at the end. And then the other issue, this is the real question and will be part of our discussion next month, was with registration. So rather than registering the caregiver here's a thought, what if we register the cat either with their caregiver or through a nonprofit or to ASCMV or some other organization that would assume responsibility. So it's not necessarily about the individual person, but more so about the individual cat that we create. So I had that thought today. So that is your homework, and if you want. I will send an email on that on Monday to the group with those questions and just a thought process so we can direct the discussion next month.

Athena Huckaby: I have a clarifying question on what exactly you would like us to do for Section “E”. Are you looking for other brainstorming ideas of things besides euthanasia, that could be done with the cats?
David Dollahon: Yes, as well. Thank you for that question. All right, it is 3:45 I'm going to stop sharing my screen. And is there any other questions for the group? Our next meeting is Friday, July 31 at 2:30 and it will probably most definitely be zoom. We're adjourned folks.

Adjourn – 3:45 p.m.

______________________________

Chair

Approved: _____________________