



## THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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8 June 2007

The Wildlife Society appreciates the opportunity to submit the following testimony for the record of the June 6, 2007 hearing on B17-089: The Animal Protection Amendment Act of 2007. The Wildlife Society, founded in 1937, is an international non-profit association dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. The Society's membership includes over 7,500 professionals and students with expertise in all aspects of wildlife conservation and management.

The Wildlife Society commends the Council for addressing animal welfare in such a comprehensive manner. However, we are concerned about one specific provision relating to control of feral and free-ranging cats in the District. Specifically, we are concerned about the proposed changes to Section 3 of the Animal Control Act of 1979 (D.C. Official Code §8-1802):

“The Animal Welfare and Control Agency shall not euthanize feral cats as a means of addressing overpopulation but shall, instead, work with animal welfare organizations to utilize effective trap, spay/neuter, and return (TNR) practices. TNR practices involve an authorized individual trapping all cats at a given location, referred to as a cat colony; taking them to a veterinarian for spaying or neutering and appropriate vaccinations; retaining the cats until they adequately recover from the surgery; and returning the cats to their original location/colony. If a kitten is trapped and is young enough to be tamed, all efforts shall be made to adopt the kitten. All colonies shall have an authorized individual monitoring and feeding the cats.”

While we certainly support humane treatment of individual animals, the survival of species and the health and integrity of entire ecosystems must take precedence. Feral and free-ranging domestic cats are exotic species to North America, and are recognized as one of the most widespread and serious threats to the integrity of native wildlife populations and natural ecosystems. Indeed, 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 are often fed by humans, they can reach population levels that may create areas of abnormally high predation rates on wildlife. Even if conservative estimates of prey taken are considered, 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.

Feral and free-ranging cats also impact both wildlife and human populations by acting as disease reservoirs. Feral and free-ranging cats can carry feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus, as well as toxoplasmosis, a significant concern as a health hazard to humans. Because of the potential for disease transmission to humans, pets, and wildlife, feral

and free-ranging cat populations should be controlled and reduced, not encouraged through TNR and managed colonies.

Life outdoors is also dangerous for individual cats. Feral and free-ranging 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.

The Wildlife Society strongly encourages the humane elimination of feral cat colonies and supports the passage and enforcement of local and state ordinances prohibiting the public feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild. We oppose the passage of any local or state ordinances that legalize the maintenance of "managed" (trap/neuter/release) free-ranging cat colonies. For additional information on The Wildlife Society's position, please refer to the attached position statement on Feral and Free Ranging Domestic Cats.

Because of the damage feral and free-ranging cats can do to the ecosystem, the unnaturally high numbers of feral cats that managed colonies create, and the failure of TNR to adequately control feral cat populations or to ensure the cats' welfare, we encourage you to remove this section from the Animal Protection Amendment Act of 2007. Neither the District of Columbia's wildlife, its citizens, nor the city's feral cats would be well served by this amendment.

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](mailto:laura@wildlife.org), 301-897-9770 x.308).

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Hutchins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Hutchins, Ph.D.  
Executive Director/CEO, The Wildlife Society



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## Final TWS Position Statement

### Feral and Free-Ranging Domestic Cats

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. Exotic species present special challenges for wildlife managers because their negative impacts are poorly understood by the general public, many exotic species have become such an accepted component of the environment that many people regard them as "natural," some exotic species have advocacy groups that promote their continued presence, and few policies and laws deal directly with their control. Perhaps no issue has captured more of the challenges for contemporary wildlife management than the impacts of feral or free-ranging human companion or domestic animals. The domestic cat is the companion animal that recently has attracted the most attention for its impact on wildlife species.

Domestic cats originated from an ancestral wild species, the European and African wild cat (*Felis silvestris*). The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is now considered a separate species. The estimated numbers of pet cats in urban and rural regions of the United States have grown from 30 million in 1970 to nearly 65 million in 2000. Reliable estimates of the present total cat population are not available. Nationwide, approximately 30% of households have cats. In rural areas, approximately 60% of households have cats.

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. When the wildlife prey is a threatened or endangered species, the result may be extirpation or extinction. Effects of cat predation are most pronounced in island settings (both actual islands and islands of habitat), where prey populations are already low or stressed by other factors, or in natural areas where cat colonies are established. Competition with native predators, disease implications for wildlife populations, and pet owners' attitudes toward wildlife and wildlife management also are important issues.

Extensive popular debate over absolute numbers or types of prey taken is not productive. The number of cats is undeniably large. Even if conservative estimates of prey taken are considered, 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.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to feral and free-ranging domestic cats is to:

1. Strongly support and encourage the humane elimination of feral cat colonies.

2. Support the passage and enforcement of local and state ordinances prohibiting the public feeding of feral cats, especially on public lands, and release of unwanted pet or feral cats into the wild.
3. Strongly support educational programs and materials that call for all pet cats to be kept indoors, in outdoor enclosures, or on a leash.
4. Support programs to educate and encourage pet owners to neuter or spay their cats, and encourage all pet adoption programs to require potential owners to spay or neuter their pet.
5. Support the development and dissemination of sound, helpful information on what individual cat owners can do to minimize predation by free-ranging cats.
6. Pledge to work with the conservation and animal welfare communities to educate the public about the negative impact of free-ranging and feral cats on native wildlife, including birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and endangered species.
7. Support educational efforts to encourage the agricultural community to keep farm-cat numbers at low, manageable levels and use alternative, environmentally safe rodent control methods.
8. Encourage researchers to develop better information on the impacts of feral and free-ranging cats on native wildlife populations.
9. Recognize that cats as pets have a long association with humans, and that responsible cat owners are to be encouraged to continue caring for the animals under their control.
10. Oppose the passage of any local or state ordinances that legalize the maintenance of "managed" (trap/neuter/release) free-ranging cat colonies.

Approved by Council March 2006. Expires March 2011.