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November 6, 2017



Alaska Board of Game
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau AK 99811-5526

RC 016

Re: Feral cats, a menace to Alaska
Meeting of November 10 - 17, 2017
Proposals 62 and 63

Dear Board Members,

I have previously written to oppose the stupid idea, Proposal 62, which suggests that cats be allowed to be turned loose in the State of Alaska to establish feral cat colonies. This is a truly terrible idea.

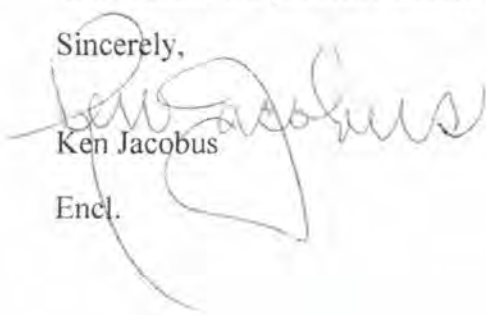
Although you probably already have these articles, I have enclosed two articles from today's Alaska Dispatch News. I agree with both these articles.

The most useful thing to do would be for the Board to authorize the hunting and trapping of cats, utilizing any and all methods and means, including poison, and having unlimited open seasons and no bag limits. A reasonable bounty should be paid, if the State can afford it. The goal should be extermination of feral cats and their colonies. Feral cats are vermin, with no redeeming value whatsoever.

I would much rather see our wild birds flying free, than lying dead in my front yard because they have been killed by disease-ridden feral cats.

Don't make the problem worse. Reject Proposal 62 and adopt proposal 63. Thank you.

Sincerely,


Ken Jacobus

Encl.

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Alaska Dispatch News

Opinions

'Alley Cat Allies' peddles a bogus line

✍ Author: Al-Hajj Frederick H. Minshall ⌚ Updated: 15 hours ago 📅 Published 17 hours ago

On July 19, 2017, "Alley Cat Allies" President Becky Robinson replied to Rick Sinnott's June 21 commentary concerning the feral cat "management program" called "trap-neuter-release." Robinson's piece was essentially a canned essay she posts in newspapers anywhere there's resistance to this worthless scheme, or where "no-kill" animal extremists pressure local governments to adopt it.

Robinson said, "It's important that Alaskans have the facts about trap-neuter-return, or TNR, process by which community cat populations are stabilized and managed."

The problem is her article is completely devoid of facts, as Sinnott rightly pointed out. I'll go Rick one further—those arguing "TNR" reduces feral cat populations are simply lying. This is so obvious Alley Cat Allies has jettisoned its former claim that "TNR reduces cat populations" for "TNR stabilizes and manages" those populations — which essentially means nothing. Despite six decades of TNR — at least three decades in the U.S. — the stray/feral cat population still increases 25 percent-33 percent annually.

The average of every ASPCA estimate I've found is 84.5 million (range 47-122 million) stray/feral cats. Add 58 million unconfined "owned" cats, of which 80 percent—46.6 million—aren't sterilized. Are ASPCA estimates reliable? Probably not — they advocate TNR, and their "estimates" tend to rise or fall depending on whether they're trying to sell TNR, or defend it from its critics.



(Pixabay)

Director of the Smithsonian Institute Migratory Bird Center Peter Marra points out reliable estimates of unconfined cat populations are as difficult to formulate as, well, herding cats. Dr. Marra is constrained by the scientific principles he espouses to present findings as accurately as his research allows. His research has shown that unconfined invasive felines torture and destroy tens of billions of native wild mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians annually.

Robinson, the ASPCA, HSUS, Best Friends Animal Society and other exploiters of abandoned animal misery are not so constrained. They prefer "alternative facts" which keep those donations rolling in.

[Related: Alaska has far too many impractical cats]

Robinson continued:

"In August, Alaska residents will have access to a proposal to exempt 'sterilized feral cats' from the list of species currently prohibited from being released into the wild. Rather than let Sinnott's fearmongering claims about TNR dictate public opinion, it's time to set the record straight about what the Alaska Board of Game will be voting on in November."

Which is precisely what Robinson won't do. Two proposals going before the Board of Game in November which advocate regulatory changes concerning invasive felines are listed under "Permits for Possessing Live Game" as Proposals 62 and 63. The former was submitted by "Mojo's Hope", Alley Cat Allies' local franchise, to legalize TNR. I submitted the latter. It advocates strengthening 5AAC.92.029—which as written prohibits maintaining domesticated animals unconfined — to specifically outlaw keeping unconfined invasive felines under the aegis of TNR or other "no-kill" programs.

Mojo's Hope already maintains illegal cat-colonies. The group's president, Shannon Basner, has alluded to this on her website, and that the colonies have operated "under the radar." She volunteers at the Anchorage animal shelter. Anchorage Animal Control Officer John Lees verbally confirmed to me last year that private individuals — including members of Mojo's Hope — maintain illegal feral cat colonies in Anchorage.

The central falsehood to Basner's proposal is that it will exempt sterilized feral cats. Who's keeping count of how many cats are being sterilized under TNR? Not the TNR charlatans!

Some years ago Best Friends Animal Society maintained online spreadsheets intended to demonstrate the "success" of TNR. Out of 100 TNR programs listed thereon, only one only one — Oregon — claimed a success rate greater than 0.4 percent. Their herculean efforts yielded an astonishing 4.9 percent. Problem is that just to "stabilize" the population—i.e. to prevent net annual increase—sterilization must at minimum be 75 percent-91 percent. When this was pointed out, Best Friends Animal Society took down their spreadsheet in embarrassment.

Considering that 1.5 million Americans' eyesight is threatened by toxoplasmosis-induced ocular lesions, 85 percent of pregnant American women are at risk of transmitting toxoplasmosis to their unborn children, and one third of low-income black American children are infected with toxocariasis—from cat- and dog-vectored parasitic roundworms which cause developmental disability and blindness — it is unconscionable for Ms. Robinson to accuse Rick Sinnott of "fear-mongering." I'll heed an Alaskan biologist's concerns over agenda-driven "humane" donation-hustlers' denials.

Robinson continued:

"The proposal that has been submitted is all about giving Alaska communities a choice."

"It's about" is a lazy, deceptive means of arguing by saying nothing substantive — apparently Ms. Robinson's specialty. Instead let's ask Alaskan mother Lauren Hamm what her "choice" would be.

She ate a medium-rare steak from a moose her husband shot in the 26th week of her pregnancy. She gave birth prematurely due to toxoplasmosis infection — the moose had browsed an area contaminated by "community" cats and its tissues were infected with *Toxoplasma gondii* oocysts. Her son Bennett was born prematurely. He remained in neonatal intensive care for three weeks.

Mrs. Hamm transmitted her infection to her unborn baby. He was born Dec. 13, 2011, with a heart rate of 200 beats per minute. His organ cavities were filled with lymphocyte-fluid, and he had lesions on his eyes and brain. He'll remain at risk for blindness, hearing-loss, epilepsy and cerebral palsy—at the very least—for life. Eighty-five percent of infants born to toxoplasmosis-infected mothers will exhibit symptoms of the disease months, or years, after birth.

I'll accept Robinson's "fear-mongering" accusation. Fear is justified. TNR-driven feral cat proliferation has infected 60 percent of Ohio's white-tailed deer. Alaska's subsistence hunters might ask how many hunters and their families are eating those deer, and if Robinson's and her ilk's importing this epidemiological nightmare to Alaska is a good idea.

Alaskans who've arrived at the rational answer to that question are urged to write to the Alaska Board of Game, opposing Proposal No. 62 and supporting Proposal No. 63. They can do so until Nov. 11, or they can register to speak before the board beginning at 8:30 a.m. on Nov. 10 for the Nov. 10-11 meeting at the Lakefront Hotel, 4800 Spenard Road in Anchorage.

Al-Hajj Frederick H. Minshall, a biologist by training, lives in Anchorage.

The views expressed here are the writer's and are not necessarily endorsed by Alaska Dispatch News, which welcomes a broad range of viewpoints. To submit a piece for consideration, email commentary@alaskadispatch.com. Send submissions shorter than 200 words to letters@alaskadispatch.com.

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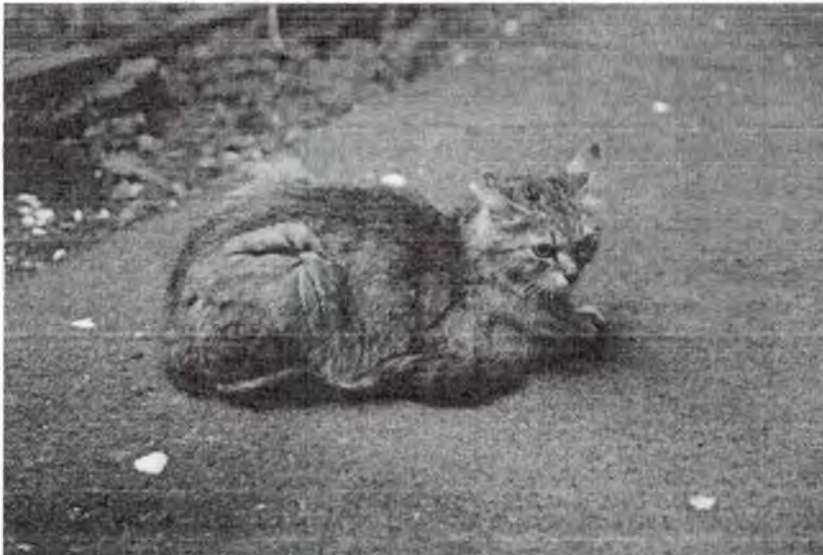
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Alaska Dispatch News

Opinions

Alaska has far too many impractical cats

✍ Author: Rick Sinnott ⌚ Updated: 17 hours ago 📅 Published 17 hours ago



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In "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats" – the poetic inspiration for the Tony Award-winning musical "Cats" – T. S. Eliot describes a cat named Mr. Mistoffelees who is "always deceiving you into believing that he's only hunting for mice."

Eliot's light verse portrays another cat as "a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity" who's called "the Hidden Paw." These feline character studies were intended to be clever and humorous.

However, there really is a dark side to cats. Over the past 40 years the number of domestic cats in the United States has tripled. Cats are now believed to be the most abundant predator in the Lower 48 states, with an estimated 96 million in homes and credible estimates of feral and stray cats ranging from 30 million to 80 million.

[Related: 'Alley Cat Allies' peddles a bogus line]

This proliferation of pets has had unforeseen consequences for wild birds.

Truth is, there are practical cats and impractical cats. Practical cats are those who only kill pests like house mice, rats and the occasional wild voles or shrews that find their way inside our homes and other buildings.

Impractical cats are feral or free-ranging animals that kill billions of wild birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians every year. Our world is inhabited by far too many impractical cats.

It is illegal to release cats into the wild in Alaska. Nevertheless, the law is not well enforced, many abandoned and free-ranging cats are fed outdoors by people, and regular feeding stations can become cat colonies.

A "rescue group for animals with special needs" is asking state and local governments to legalize the proliferation of feral cat colonies in Alaska.

Mojo's Hope has submitted a proposal to the Alaska Board of Game to drop "sterilized feral cats" from the state's list of domestic animals that cannot be released into the wild without a permit. [Read Proposal 62 here] The board begins a week-long meeting in Anchorage on Friday.

Allowing people to release cats and feed colonies of feral cats outdoors is a very bad idea.

'A fiend in feline shape'

Despite the purring assurances of Mr. Mistofjeels, cats kill a lot of wild animals.

Even when a cat merely bites or claws a bird, it often dies because bacteria on a cat's gums and teeth are lethal. Karen Munday, a specialist at a wildlife treatment center in Portland, Oregon, says "A bird is more likely to survive a gunshot than a cat bite."

Hundreds of scientific studies have documented local numbers of wild birds and mammals killed by cats. A meta-study conducted by Scott Loss, Tom Will and Peter Marra in 2013 combined the best of these studies into an estimate of the carnage wreaked by cats in the United States alone.

Merging the estimates of cat populations with a range of estimates for kill rates, the researchers concluded that cats kill 1.3 to 4 billion birds and 6.3 to 22.3 billion mammals annually. Billion. With a 'b.'

The Hidden Paw

The Municipality of Anchorage, including 700-square-mile Chugach State Park, has far more cats than all wild predators combined.

According to Anchorage Animal Control, which uses the American Veterinary Medical Association calculation tool, Anchorage has more than 73,000 pet cats. That doesn't include feral cats.

By some estimates one-fourth to one-third of North America's domestic cats are allowed to roam freely and are considered to be feral or stray cats. The Humane Society of the United States and several scientific studies have estimated a community's feral cat population at one-tenth the human population, which suggests approximately 30,000 feral cats in Anchorage.

Thus, a conservative estimate for the combined total of domestic and feral cats in Anchorage is about 103,000 cats.

Multiplying that figure with the lowest estimates for mortality rates in the national meta-study yields an estimate of 1,148,000 birds and 5,975,000 mammals killed by cats in Anchorage each year.

If this estimate seems high to you, ponder this: with as many as 103,000 cats, the estimated kill averages about 11 birds per cat annually. Some pet cats kill no birds, but it takes no stretch of the imagination to realize that many cats, particularly feral cats, kill more than one bird a month. I suspect this estimate is low.

It's the sheer number of cats that is driving the high kill estimates. This unnatural drain on wild birds is a relatively recent phenomenon. There were no house cats in the western hemisphere before 1492.

And as long as those cats are roaming around outside, they are killing birds and other wildlife. Even well fed cats hunt.

Hoarders without borders

Most TNR advocates aren't scientists. They just love cats. And they repeat the feel-good nostrums concocted by the most vocal proponents like Becky Robinson, president of Alley Cat Allies.

Alley Cat Allies claims to be an "advocate for all animals," but the organization has a laser-like focus on feral cats, while essentially ignoring their impacts on other animals and people. Not doctors without borders, but hoarders without borders.

Alley Cat Allies claims that "outdoor cats are part of our natural landscape" and "their home is the outdoors – just like squirrels, chipmunks, and birds." If cats are "natural," then dogs and rats are natural. Are we ready for feral dog colonies?

Feral rat colonies?

Hold on, feral rat colonies are already a thing.

I've found seven instances in North America where a person was harboring anywhere from 200 to 2,000 uncaged rats in their home. Last year 600 pet rats were taken from an Ontario woman's one-bedroom apartment and – here's the best part – put up for adoption by local humane societies. As it happened, homes had to be found for more than 600 rats because many were pregnant when surrendered to authorities.

Does this sound crazy to you? It's no crazier than maintaining a feral cat colony. Perhaps cat people and rat people are two sides of the same coin. Interestingly, both insist that their favored pet won't harm the environment.

Robinson and Alley Cat Allies insist that free-roaming cats are not a threat to bird populations. They come to this conclusion only by ignoring or disagreeing with every bird expert who believes otherwise, and there are a lot of them, not "a small group" as Alley Cat Allies claims. A new study technique, affixing "kitty cams" to individual cats, is revealing even more kills than previously thought.

Attempting to obfuscate the issue, TNR advocates insist that most birds are killed by human-related causes, like pollution, towers, and windows. They seldom acknowledge that cats themselves are a human-related source of mortality. When the 2015 meta-study demonstrated that cats are a greater source of bird mortality than all other human causes combined, Robinson called it "part of a continuing propaganda campaign to vilify cats."

Meanwhile, the Alley Cat Allies' propaganda campaign contributes to cat lovers' confusion. A recent survey in England found most cat owners failed to perceive or acknowledge that cats harm wildlife, and 98 percent were unwilling to keep their cats on their property. Justifications included "but other wildlife is harmful to wildlife" and "my cat chooses for herself whether to stay in or go out."

Similarly, a nationwide survey of TNR advocates found that 59 percent believe feral cats fill a natural role as predators (23 percent were "unsure") and 79 percent believe feral cats should be treated as protected wildlife.

Good sense trumps bad science

Alley Cat Allies claims that TNR "decreases the size of colonies over time," that it is "successfully practiced in hundreds of colonies," and is "grounded in science." Like climate change deniers, TNR advocates ignore the preponderance of scientific evidence, but love to cite a few flawed studies and anecdotes that they believe prove their point. Three of the most commonly cited studies were conducted in Rome, Italy, and on college campuses in Florida and Texas.

The Rome study is one of the worst I've ever seen. Relying on reports from undoubtedly biased cat owners, the researchers found more cats were neutered in 2000 (1,424) than supposedly existed (1,293). One year there were fewer reported cats (765) than registered cat colonies (965). Best of all, the authors concluded "all these efforts ... are a waste of money, time and energy."

The Texas researchers noted, "It cannot be stated definitively that the total number of cats on campus has decreased because the study was not designed to determine this." The primary author of the Florida study admitted in a subsequent scientific article that reducing the cat population on campus would have required 94 percent of the cats to be neutered, a rate never achieved.

These are hardly glowing endorsements of TNR, yet they are cited repeatedly by advocates, most of whom, I suspect, haven't read the articles.

'Monster of depravity'

If TNR can eradicate feral cat populations the proof, as T.S. Eliot might have said, is in the pudding. But, for instance, the densities of rats in Baltimore alleys prowled by feral cats is "remarkably stable," according to research conducted in 2004 which compared rat and cat estimates from a half century earlier. The researchers found that cats did not rely on rats as their predominate food, but scavenged on many of the same food resources as the rats. In other words, the cats were eating garbage.

Chicago, which has some 650 managed feral cat colonies, was named "the rattiest city in the nation" by Orkin, the pest control company, in 2013 and 2014. In 2015, the city allowed a local TNR organization to release 3,500 more feral cats. Meanwhile, the estimated rat population climbed from 33,000 in 2014 to an anticipated 50,000 rats in 2016, leading Orkin to name Chicago the rattiest city once again.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Humane Society of the U.S. estimators, Chicago is home to 660,000 pet and at least 270,000 feral cats. So the Windy City has 20 times as many cats as rats.

The real "monster of depravity" is this: every year that TNR caretakers are allowed to subsidize high densities of impractical cats by feeding them and loving them to pieces, billions more wild birds and small mammals are killed by these cats.

If Alley Cat Allies really is an "advocate for all animals" what about all those chipmunks and squirrels and birds?

About this
Author Rick Sinnott

Rick Sinnott is a former Alaska Department of Fish and Game wildlife biologist. Email him: rickjsinnott@gmail.com