

Feral Cats: Consequences for Humans and Wildlife

The presence of feral domestic cats (*Felis catus*) creates negative consequences for humans and wildlife. Only by removing these cats from the landscape, rather than maintaining them in feral cat colonies, can communities create a healthier and safer environment for all.

Public Health

- Public health scientists, public health agencies, and professional organizations such as the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians recognize that maintaining cats outdoors is bad for human health.
- Domestic cats are consistently the #1 carrier of rabies among domestic animals and are disproportionately more likely to expose people to rabies than wildlife. Thanks to the post-exposure prophylaxis, most people do not acquire rabies, but exposure is dangerous and costly (estimated at \$3,500 per exposure event).
- Members of the cat family (Felidae) are the only definitive hosts for the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which causes toxoplasmosis. Up to 74% of all cats will host this parasite during their lifetime and excrete hundreds of millions of infectious eggs into the environment through their feces. When a person accidentally ingests or inhales *Toxoplasma gondii*, they may experience blindness, miscarriage, a child born with developmental problems, memory loss, or death. There is also evidence to suggest a link between infection with the parasite and schizophrenia.

Wildlife

- Cats have contributed to the extinction of 33 species and are a non-native, invasive species in North America that cause severe ecological disruption and degradation. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature lists cats among the world's worst invasive species globally.
- Cats are the #1 source of direct, human-caused mortality for birds and mammals, killing 2.4 billion birds and 12.3 billion mammals annually in the contiguous United States.
- Even when cats do not directly kill wildlife, their presence in the environment leads to indirect mortality (e.g., reduced feeding of young birds, spread of *Toxoplasma gondii* to wildlife).

Trap, Neuter, Release: Bad Policy

- TNR programs have consistently failed to reduce feral cat populations.
- These programs facilitate the spread of diseases and maintain cats in unsafe conditions.
- Feeding feral cats, often associated with TNR programs, does not reduce predation on wildlife.