



Florida Veterinary Medical Association

7207 Monetary Drive
Orlando, Florida 32809-5738

(407) 851-3862 ♦ Fax (407) 240-3710 ♦ Toll Free (800) 992-3862

FVMA 2014 Position Statement on Free Roaming Cats

The Florida Veterinary Medical Association (FVMA) promotes animal health, public health and responsible pet ownership through support of the veterinary medical profession in Florida. The FVMA embraces the concept of the human-animal bond and seeks to provide guidance for the welfare and care of all animals in Florida: domestic, livestock, captive wildlife and free-ranging native species. In fulfilling this mission, the FVMA seeks to address issues related to the management of free-roaming, abandoned, and feral cats in Florida.

The FVMA encourages and supports efforts to eliminate the problem of free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats. It is believed that millions of these cats exist in Florida. Unfortunately, most of these cats will suffer premature mortality from disease, starvation or trauma. The magnitude of their suffering is a tragedy of epidemic proportions. Free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats are a significant factor in the deaths of hundreds of millions of birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.³ Free roaming cats also pose a significant zoonotic disease risk to the general public, especially children.^{1, 4, 5}

According to the Florida Department of Health, domestic cats maintained indoors, without the risk of contact with wildlife and environmental threats, pose little to no risk of disease transmission to people.¹ On the other hand, free-roaming, feral and abandoned domestic cats are a persistent threat to our communities because these cats do not receive appropriate preventive veterinary medical care. Additionally, free-roaming/feral cats present a risk to native Florida wildlife, including the Florida Panther.^{4,6,7}

The FVMA supports the use of properly designed and appropriately maintained enclosures for the management of feral cat colonies. Such a management strategy mitigates the risk to the public at large, to the sensitive Florida ecological system, and allows for improved welfare of the cats.

The FVMA encourages public education that reduces abandonment of domestic cats and eliminates public feeding of free-roaming feral cats in compliance with existing statutes.²

References cited:

1. Florida Dept of Health. Rabies Prevention and Control Guide. 2014. Tallahassee, FL.
2. Florida Administrative Code. Rule 68A-4.001 (3).
3. From the American Veterinary Medical Association's position statement on Free-roaming
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5. Nutter, Dubey, Levine, Breitwchwerdt, Ford, Stoskopf, *JAVMA* Vol 225, No 9, 2004
6. Brown MA, Cunningham MW, Roca AL, Troyer JL, Johnson WE, O'Brien SJ. Genetic characterization of feline leukemia virus from Florida panthers. *Emerg Infect Dis.* 2008 Feb;14(2):252-9.
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