



Debunking Criticism of Trap, Neuter, Return: The Real Story in New York State

S.1081 (Marchione)

A small consortium of opposition groups are providing misleading information to senators regarding S.1018, which would allow a small percentage of New York's Animal Population Control Program outside NYC to be used for the purpose of trapping, neutering, vaccinating and returning feral cats to the area from which they were trapped.

Let's set the record straight.

Please vote YES on S.1081!

CLAIM: "Numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies have concluded that TNR is not an effective method to control the population of feral cats and may actually lead to an increase in the number of cats. One long term study concluded that TNR was a "waste of money, time and energy" (E. Natoli et al. 2006)."

FACT #1: TNR works in New York State, and in many others like Texas, Illinois and Florida – There are many examples of effective TNR programs here – and that is good for both wildlife and cats alike. To name a few:

- In Buffalo (WNY), Feral Cat Focus reduced a feral cat population at Ralph Wilson Stadium by 90%.
- In Syracuse (CNY), Kitty Corner, Inc. reduced a feral cat population in Clay, NY by almost 35%.
- In New York City, there has been a 30% decline in population across the city's 2,000 feral cat colonies since TNR was implemented in each.

FACT #2: Not one of the studies referenced by opponents was conducted in New York (or even the Northeast), and in fact most were conducted in other parts of the world, where environmental, ecological and sociological variables differ markedly. Many of the same studies referenced by the opposition are actually considered *effective* TNR studies... opposition groups conveniently remove various statements from such studies from their original context to mislead the public. In the Natoli study for example, nearly 8,000 cats from 103 colonies were TNR'd from 1991-2000, producing a conspicuous (16–32%) decrease in the total number of cats starting in the third year. However, researchers mentioned that "all these efforts without an effective education of people to control the reproduction of house cats (as a prevention for abandonment) are a waste of money, time and energy." Findings from other studies are very similar.

CLAIM: This bill is an attempt to legitimize the systematic abandonment of cats in New York and to require that public funds inappropriately be committed for such purpose.

FACT #1: It is simply not possible to abandon a feral cat, because it cannot be socialized to live with humans and is not owned. These feral cats are simply captured and temporarily harbored for vaccinations, spay/neuter and recovery – procedures that cannot be performed in the field.

CLAIM: Research by scientists from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently estimated that cats are responsible for the deaths of no less than 1.4 billion birds and 6.9 billion mammals in the United States every year.

FACT #1: While the impact cats can have on wildlife is a legitimate concern, feeding bans and euthanasia are costly, ineffective, and inhumane strategies that address too few cats, target household pets and have little impact on welfare, public health and the environment.

FACT #2: No New York State-specific data exists to determine the impact feral cats have on the populations of other species, and the above estimates are grossly compromised by the fact that they do not make a distinction between feral cats and the rest of the outdoor feline population. While we encourage homeowners to keep their pets indoors, S.1018 is not designed to address the matter of owners letting their cats roam outdoors – it is intended to support humane population control for feral cats in communities that welcome it.

FACT #3: There are also no studies that demonstrate that the trap/kill approach is effective in removing feral populations... but given the unlikelihood that municipal trap/kill programs will capture an entire colony – and that unmanaged colonies will always breed to capacity tempered by range and available resources – effectiveness is not likely.

CLAIM: TNR keeps cats on the streets where they lead harsh and traumatic lives which too often lead to early deaths.

FACT #1: Ask any animal shelter in New York State about this claim. Ferals that lead “harsh, traumatic lives” are typically unfit to reproduce and flourish. Yet each spring in New York – even after record-breaking cold winters like the one we just endured – feral moms appear at shelters extremely healthy and *very* pregnant.

FACT #2: Because TNR programs target feral cats (NOT strays or abandoned house cats, which are sheltered and adoptable if trapped), these animals are already on the streets. The alleged connection to shortened lifespan is ironic, since the sole alternative “management” method once trapped – which some opponents are careful to never mention in public communications – is euthanasia. Feral cats cannot be adopted into human homes. *This “trap and kill” method is perpetually costly to local governments and does nothing to address cat overpopulation problems, since without TNR cats in these colonies will breed to capacity, which is far worse for the wildlife population.*

CLAIM: Permitting feral cats to continue to roam outdoors is a threat to public health and safety. According to scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cats are consistently the number one carrier of rabies among domestic animals and pose a “disproportionate risk for potential human exposure.” Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control used by the New York State Department of Health advises that all stray cats be removed from the community.

FACT: The primary species of concern to NYSDOH, since the 1950s, has been foxes, skunks, raccoons and bats. In rare cases bats have transmitted the disease to a feline, but there is no evidence suggesting feral cats are of much concern in this regard, despite such recommendations. In fact, Department of Health regulations do not legally require feral cats to be vaccinated against rabies – nonetheless, rabies it is something TNR practitioners take very seriously.

CLAIM: Domestic cats are also the essential host for the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis to complete its life cycle and may shed hundreds of millions of the parasite’s infectious eggs in its feces.

FACT: Toxoplasmosis is a disease caused by the *toxoplasma gondii* parasite. Causes of infection are most commonly eating undercooked meat, accidental ingestion of undercooked meat after handling and not washing hands appropriately, and contaminated drinking water. It can, however also be contracted by accidental ingestion through contact with contaminated cat feces, which is rare.

CLAIM: S.1018 would take funding away from other low income, low-cost spay/neuter programs.

FACT: Since 2010, the ASPCA has operated the NYS Animal Population Control Program (APCP) under a state contract with the Department of Agriculture and Markets to fund spay/neuter programs Upstate and on Long Island. The APCP invests, on average, about \$1 million into such programs annually. S.1018 only allows “up to 20%” to be utilized for TNR, if viable programs exist. *That’s still over \$800,000 available for low-income, low cost programs!* In addition, after four years of operating this well-promoted and well-distributed program, applications have begun to slow down and we are starting to see repeat applications. New York City’s APCP, run separately by NYC DOHMH, already funds successful TNR programs.

CLAIM: The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals vigorously opposes TNR.

FACT: While PETA opposes TNR, *they also oppose the possession of animals as pets.* So to use such an organization’s views (and those of sympathizer organizations like NYSCHA) to imply that legitimate national, statewide and local animal welfare groups oppose TNR is misleading. In fact, the leading animal welfare organizations – the groups that walk the halls of Albany daily and directly support animal protection programs in New York State like the ASPCA, NYSAPF and HSUS vehemently support TNR. These are the organizations that provide programs, services and grants funding to the animal sheltering infrastructure in New York State – not PETA.

CLAIM: These cats are a non-native species in the United States.

FACT: No one knows for sure when domestic cats arrived in North America, but evidence suggests that European settlers brought them here as early as the early 1600s. So, these animals have been here for well over 400 years. At what point do they get their Green Cards?