

# IPM Tactics for Managing Feral Cats

Pest Press

September 2012

Feral cats can be more than just a nuisance. Cat feces and cat scratches or bites can result in bacterial infections or illness.<sup>5</sup> Rabies, ringworm, tapeworms and toxoplasmosis can be transmitted from cats to humans. Cats can also kill birds and small mammals. A University of Georgia study led by Kerrie Anne Loyd, a doctoral candidate at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry, found that 30% of roaming house cats kill prey—two per week on average.<sup>6</sup> When they move on, feral cats often leave fleas behind.

Domestic cats are classified as indoor, limited-range, free-range or feral. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), feral cats are born outside and are never socialized in the first 24 weeks of their lives.

## Habitat Modification

Habitat modification involves changing the landscape to reduce the availability of food, water and shelter available to feral cats inhabiting an area.<sup>3</sup> If cats are removed from an area without eliminating these necessities, they are likely to return.

*"A colony of feral cats on a school campus should not be tolerated, from the human health perspective alone. The school board and administration needs to be solidly behind this."*

*- Lynn Braband, NYS Community IPM Program of Cornell University*

- Fix leaky pipes and downspouts that can lead to pooling water.
- Secure dumpster and garbage can lids. Place trash in enclosed areas to exclude cats.
- Remove bird feeders or place them at least ten feet from anything cats can hide under.
- Educate staff about not providing food and water for feral cats. Consider prohibiting staff from feeding wildlife including feral cats.
- Ensure students know these cats are not pets, and can be aggressive and carry diseases.

## Exclusion

Remove lumber, unused equipment and debris that might provide shelter. Seal holes in buildings. Use fencing or netting to keep cats from getting under buildings. Use one-quarter-inch mesh screen to block vents and other entry points into structures. "Rat walls," L-shaped mesh screens partially buried to discourage digging, can be attached to foundations or decks.<sup>7</sup> Install well-fitted skirts around portable classrooms. Cat spikes can be used on ledges to discourage perching. Perimeter fencing should be six feet tall with a rounded overhang to prevent climbing.



## Trapping

Only experienced professionals should trap cats. If you choose to move feral cats, work with a shelter or local rescue organization. Releasing cats elsewhere may be illegal, and cats can return or become trap shy, making it more difficult to catch them again. Cage-type traps can include a single or double door and should be at least 30 inches long. Ensure that traps have a wide handle guard to protect the handler during transport. Set enough traps to catch every cat in the immediate area. Place traps out of sight in locations where cats feel safe. Consider pre-baiting traps with the doors wired open for a few days to acclimate cats. Dry cat food, tuna, mackerel and sardines in oil make good baits. Trappers should be aware that skunks often enter cat traps.

## Fertility Control

The Humane Society of the United States advocates Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), in which feral cats are trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated against rabies and returned to their original territory.<sup>2</sup> Costs to neuter and vaccinate can be upwards of \$100; some organizations reduce fees for feral cats. Models estimate that more than 70 percent of a feral cat population must be spayed or neutered before the population will decline.<sup>3</sup> TNR programs are not desirable for school grounds. Feral cats pose a health risk and should not live there.<sup>5</sup> TNR does not address disease and predation.

## Repellents and Chemicals

US EPA has registered several products for repelling house cats but they have not been proven effective against feral cats. Most are applied on the ground and emit an odor. Repellents are designed for use on a micro level, such as around a small garden, making their use on a school campus impractical.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, some locations may be so attractive to cats that they will disregard repellents. Special care should be taken when applying any chemicals around

sensitive school environments. There are no toxicants or poisons labeled for use on cats, making their use illegal.

## Frightening Devices

Most frightening devices have been ineffective at consistently keeping cats away.<sup>3</sup> One option is motion-activated sprinklers, which spray cats when they walk in front of a sensor. Of course, these can only be deployed in areas free of student and staff traffic.

## Euthanasia

Feral cat euthanasia is an emotionally charged, highly debated issue. AVMA accepts several methods of euthanasia for feral cats. Euthanasia should always be performed by a veterinarian or other trained professional.<sup>1</sup> Schools should work with their pest management provider, local humane society or animal control agency to determine the best course of action.

## IPM Plans for Feral Cats

The Armed Forces Pest Management Board created an IPM policy for stray animals on military installations, which can be modified for use in schools.<sup>4</sup> Schools can also include a section in their IPM plan on feral cats.

Pest Press Produced By: Jodi Schmitz and Dr. Thomas Green, IPM Institute of North America, Inc. Special thanks to the National School IPM Steering Committee for reviewing this document. For more information about the School IPM 2015 initiative, visit [www.schoolipm2015.com](http://www.schoolipm2015.com).

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