

SPAYING AND NEUTERING CAN ACCOMPLISH SOME THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT REALIZE.

I was delighted when Haws was able to open their spay/neuter clinic. The shelter director, Lynn Olenik, and her staff have a wonderful long-range vision for this aspect of their shelter. Obviously, they know they are reducing cat and dog overpopulation numbers by preventing litters of kittens and puppies. What I see as a humane officer are some of the other, unsung benefits. The SNIP (Spay/ Neuter Initiative Program) provides spay/neuter procedures for animals adopted from Haws, as well as animals belonging to breed placement groups. There are also some arrangements for low-income pet owners to also benefit from SNIP services.

Funds have been made available to focus specifically on **Barn cat and outside cat program** programming through the Haws shelter. They allow owners, who can legally keep and provide for feral and barn cat colonies, the opportunity to have these animals neutered at little or no cost. As a humane officer, I am very familiar with these colonies of cats. They commonly form around working farms. Before SNIP, I used to see very sickly colonies with all different age cats. The kittens arrive with little immunity. They suffered from upper respiratory diseases, parasites, and wound infections. None of the cats are fixed, so wounds from fighting over females or from protecting kittens are prevalent. The farm owners are not inclined to do anything with the cats beyond putting out some dry cat food. A few cats were nice to have around as mousers, but as the numbers grew, the farmers felt population control was out of their hands. You feed a mother cat, and she will thank you by producing litter after litter of kittens. Before long, the kittens that survive are having kittens of their own. The established cats run off some of the youngsters and any stray cat that shows up. It is not an easy life!

Research in Trap Neuter Release has shown that in a colony in which most cats are spayed or neutered, the level of injuries, disease and death are dramatically reduced. Neutering stabilizes colonies. It stabilizes the numbers and reduces disease outbreaks. It helps reduce intense fighting to mere body language and posturing. By removing the reproductive hormones, a stable pecking order emerges. The cats rarely fight because they learn their place in this stable group. Farmers go from overwhelmed with kittens to enjoying a healthier, stable population of cats.

There are some down sides to any cat colony, even with neutered animals. Colonies are not generally a good fit in residential neighborhoods. Cats will use gardens, mulched areas and play sand boxes as toilets. They will hunt and kill songbirds, and other small wildlife. If cornered, they are likely to bite in an effort to avoid capture. For these reasons, rural settings are a much more appropriate place for outdoor cat colonies.

I am not a big advocate of having pets live outside, but if a colony of cats already exists, having them spayed and neutered leads to a much safer and healthier life for them.