

Feral Cats Saved in Florida

Jacksonville uses a trap-neuter-return program to control feral populations.

Posted: Nov. 24, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

Feral Freedom in Jacksonville, Fla., is a trap-neuter-return program the city developed with animal-welfare groups. Jacksonville, Fla., has been working with Best Friends Animal Society, First Coast No More Homeless Pets and the Jacksonville Humane Society to control feral cat populations. The program, called Feral Freedom, is a trap-neuter-return program, in which it sterilizes all cats brought in by the city's animal control professionals, then releases them back to the neighborhoods where they were found.

The cats also receive vaccinations, microchips, treatment for fleas and an ear tip for future identification. The program is a first for the city, but one that is working, according to all parties involved.

"Whether it is through innovative programs like Feral Freedom or other efforts to bolster adoptions through strategic partnerships such as the one with the Jacksonville Humane Society, we are always looking for ways to increase the number of live releases from our shelter," said Ebenezer Gujjalapudi, director of Jacksonville's Environmental and Compliance Dept. "I believe this new program is another step in the right direction toward accomplishing that goal."

Rick DuCharme, founder of First Coast NMHP, said the program will save close to 4,000 cats this year. "It will bring us all together and teach us all how to work together better," he added.

Best Friends Animal Society has pledged to support Feral Freedom throughout 2009. "Our goal is to create a paradigm shift in the way society relates to community cats," said Paul Berry, Best Friends' chief executive officer. "These cats are not nuisances to be destroyed. They are part of the fabric of our communities. The Feral Freedom program is a home run for Jacksonville and, as a model program, could change the way that community cats are treated throughout the country."