

New Group Works to Help Feral Cat Population

Wisconsin-based Worthy Paws traps, neuters and vaccinates cats, then sends them back into the wild.

In response to a proposal last year that would have allowed the shooting of stray cats, a new group in Wisconsin is hoping to help control the feline population by trapping the animals and neutering them.

Volunteers with the Columbia County-based nonprofit organization Worthy Paws, which was launched in March, uses box traps and food to entice the animals, then the cats are vaccinated and spayed or neutered.

Some are then placed into foster or permanent homes, while those more accustomed to the outdoors are released, but fed daily by volunteers, according to Worthy Paws President Heidi Shields.

Shields said Worthy Paws has placed about 30 cats into permanent or foster homes throughout Columbia County so far.

The impetus for the group came last year when legislation was proposed in Wisconsin to classify wild, free-roaming cats as an unprotected species, allowing hunters to kill them at will, because they're considered by some to be an invasive species that kills songbirds and other wildlife.

Although no legislation was ever implemented partially due to an outcry from cat lovers it motivated many of those same feline advocates to look for humane solutions to the feral cat problem.

This spring, Worthy Paws is holding rummage sales and other events as part of its fundraising drive. On April 29, the group and a local veterinarian will hold a neuter/spay day at the Columbus Countryside Veterinary Clinic.

People can bring in tame or feral cats for the procedures and vaccinations. Worthy Paws requests a \$20 donation for the services.

One rummage sale is scheduled for 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 26-29 in the town of Pardeeville. A second rummage sale is scheduled for June 2-4 in Portage. Posted: April 25, 2006, 5:00 a.m. EST