

## **Broward County Parks & Natural Areas** Free-ranging/Feral Cat (*Felis catus*) Management Guidelines

The Broward County Parks and Recreation Division has become a fundamental refuge for native common, rare, threatened, and endangered wildlife due to urban development. Our parks and natural areas are so seamlessly integrated within the County's urban communities that management efforts must focus on protecting them from the movement of exotic, often invasive, species. These species are a major threat to Florida's natural heritage and must be managed to provide even the most basic level of land stewardship.

The domesticated, feral, or free-ranging cat (*Felis catus*), is a non-native exotic species in Florida. They frequently inhabit the Broward County park system. Free-ranging cats living in parks and natural areas create many management concerns including threats to public health, disease risk, and impacts to wildlife and habitat. Many agencies including the Florida Park Service (FPS), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and Miami-Dade County, acknowledge that they, too, share these conflicts, and have implemented 'no tolerance' cat removal/relocation policies within their systems.

It is the intention of this Agency to provide a set of written guidelines, herein, for staff, volunteers, and citizens to engage in health/safety and resource-based management conflicts associated with exotic feral and free-ranging cats occurring within Broward County parks and natural areas.

### **DEFINITIONS**

- **Feral Cat (*Felis catus*):** For the purpose of these guidelines a 'feral cat' refers to any cat considered feral or domestic that is free-ranging, abandoned, introduced, recruited, with or without owner but living or ranging in a Broward County park or natural area. A feral cat may or may not have been domestically owned at some point in its life period but is considered exotic wildlife and poses a threat to Broward County parks and natural area patrons, native wildlife and habitat.
- **Feral Cat Colony:** A congregation of feral cats with a common food source, often a dumpster or feeding station. Colonies tend to expand or stabilize due to a constant influx of new cats, often non-sterile, from surrounding environments.
- **Feral Cat Recruit:** An introduction of a new feral cat into a colony or park/natural area, which may or may not have been sterilized, and may or may not be an abandoned pet. May also be free-ranging from a nearby urban area.
- **Other Nuisance Species:** Other animal species (typically mammalian) that may be attracted to an area for reasons similar to that of a feral cat recruit (i.e. food source, feeding station, human trash availability, or human abandonment). May

also pose a potential public health/safety threat of disease (i.e. raccoons, opossum, etc.). May also pose a threat to native wildlife by increased predation of nests of birds, turtles, or other species.

- **Park and Natural Area:** A public property, land trust, environmentally sensitive land, wilderness area, recreation area, park facility, purchased, leased, or managed for the purpose of: public access; natural resource protection, including but not limited to, native wildlife and habitat protection/enhancement or exotic species removal; and/or passive, active, or open recreation in Broward County. In many cases natural areas are within recreation areas in Broward County and have crossover-management objectives. Also referenced herein, as part of the Broward County park system.
- **Agency:** For the purpose of this document 'Agency' is defined as Broward County Parks and Recreation Division.
- **Partner State Agency:** FPS, FWC, South Florida Water Management, or other State Agency with similar land and wildlife management goals.
- **Feral Cat Guidelines:** Refers to the implemented set of guidelines by the standing Broward County Parks and Recreation Division Director.
- **TNR Program:** A sterilization program designed to **T**rap, **N**euter, and **R**elease feral cats in an effort to reduce future expansion of feral cat populations. Trapped feral cats are sterilized and released back into the wild/urban environment.
- **TSAFE Program:** A reduction/sterilization term added for the purpose of this set of guidelines: **T**rap, **S**terilize, **A**dopt, **F**oster, or **E**uthanize. This term is used in lieu of a TNR program to discourage reintroduction or release of a removed feral cat back into a Broward County park and/or a natural area. Only Broward County Animal Care/veterinarian/wildlife officials will be allowed to determine whether a feral cat is unadoptable, diseased, or severely injured and may administer an euthanasia process.

## **MANAGEMENT CONCERNS AND CONFLICTS**

**Threat to Florida Native Wildlife and Habitat:** Cats living in an outdoor environment are well documented to have an adverse effect on native wildlife throughout the world. Cats easily prey on birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Harboring feral cats in parks and natural areas inadvertently creates an outlet for this activity. FWC has estimated that 68 million birds and 271 million small mammals are killed each year in Florida by outdoor cats, and a single cat could be responsible for as many as 100 deaths of each per year. Broward County parks and natural areas are important stopovers for migrating bird species, which rely heavily on fragments of preservation land both inland and along the coast for refugia to roost, rest, and forage during long periods of migration. Rare and/or threatened species like migratory warblers and the

least tern, as well as resident species of special concern like the burrowing owl, can be found in Broward parks and natural areas. The historic range of the federally endangered beach mouse once extended into southern Broward County (Hollywood Beach) and this species was likely listed due to development impacts and habitat loss. However recovery efforts in northeast Florida have cited the need for control of cats in supporting habitat areas. In fact many agencies acknowledge that feral/free-ranging cats are an impact issue and support removal of the animals to protect wildlife recovery efforts. While Broward County must approach and address this management conflict with sensitivity, it is a vital step to protecting our remaining native wildlife from exotic predator-related pressures and to aide species recovery initiatives.

**TNR Programs:** In recent years TNR programs have become a common practice in many Florida counties. These programs were initiated to trap feral cats to be neutered/sterilized, and then released back into a feral cat colony. In an isolated sterile population, a natural decline in any colony would be expected through natural death and attrition. In Broward County parks and natural areas, however, there is constant outside pressure from neighboring properties and urban environments that creates a constant influx of new cat recruits/introductions that stabilize or grow population numbers. Unfortunately, sustaining a feral cat population indefinitely in a park or natural area conflicts with native wildlife management goals and is not compatible park use.

**Attraction of Feeding:** Feeding stations, trash receptacles, and 'rogue' feeding at cat colonies can attract other nuisance species such as raccoons and opossums. Interactions amongst these species can lead to elevated health risks and disease transmittal. Attraction of species like raccoons can also encourage predation on bird, tortoise, and turtle nests, as well as lead to nuisance incidents beyond the park boundaries in the urban environment. Ordinances against feeding of wildlife (including cats) should be enforced and areas prone to feeding from dumpsters and other trash receptacles need to be addressed with 'varmint'-proof receptacles.

**Health Disease Risk:** Infections by parasites, bacteria, fungus, and viruses found in cats can all pose a threat to the health and safety of park patrons, to the cats themselves, and to native wildlife species. Interactions with other wildlife, like raccoons, spotted skunks, and opossums, could also increase risks of disease transmittal.

**Parasitic disease:** Toxoplasmosis, Cutaneous Larva Migrans, Toxocariasis, Cryptosporidiosis. **Bacterial disease:** Bartonellosis (cat-scratch disease, cat-scratch fever), Salmonellosis. **Fungal disease:** Fungal infections, often referred to as 'ringworm,' are caused by a group of fungal organisms called dermatophytes, the most common of these is *Microsporum canis*. **Viral disease:** Rabies.

**Aggression Risks:** Some feral animals, when approached by park patrons or leashed pets, may not interact well and could exhibit signs of aggression. In some instances, there is some risk associated with feral wildlife in a public area. Due to the wild nature of feral animals, the risk could increase if an attempt is made by a member of the public to handle a wild/feral cat.

**Eco-Tourism:** Parks and natural areas are a major source of revenue and the premiere outlet for eco-tourism in Broward County. Patrons visiting our parks and natural areas expect 'our best and nothing less,' and we do our utmost to provide the best 'Real Florida' experience when managing for eco-tourism. We strive to reduce exotic-invasive plant and animal species to promote the best of land and natural resource management practices available. We improve our natural systems and habitat, provide/protect this resource for future generations, as well as generate revenue through eco-tourism opportunities. Sustaining a feral and exotic wildlife population in a park or natural area is in direct conflict to the 'Real Florida' environment in our park system.

**Attraction of Abandonment:** When the public sees feral cats living and being fed in our parks and natural areas, the perception is that these are safe refuges to release or abandon unwanted pets or other feral wildlife. Signage is needed to enforce zero-tolerance guidelines for abandoning animals as well as for feeding animals in our parks and natural areas.

## **APPLICABLE LEGAL ENFORCEMENT**

### **Local:**

- **Broward County Code of Ordinances Part II, Chapter 25.5 – Section 6 – Nuisances**
  - **(e) Domestic Animals:** No domestic animal shall be permitted in a formal garden, nature center, park, playground, nature trail, athletic field, restroom, or other park areas as posted. Exception is made to organized park programs and educational and scientific purposes at nature center parks. The director has the authority to prohibit animals from any park area. These areas shall be designated as such.
  - **(i) Releasing of Animals:** The release of exotic animals is prohibited in county parks. The release of native wildlife must be authorized by the assistant director.
  - **(j) Feeding of Wildlife:** The feeding of wildlife in any park area is prohibited.
  
- **Broward County Code of Ordinances Part II, Chapter 4 – Animals and Fowl**
  - **Section 4-8. Permitting animal to commit a nuisance.** It shall be a violation of this section for any person who owns or harbors any animal to permit said animal to defecate upon: **(1)** The sidewalk of any public street; or **(2)** Any public park or beach.
  - **Section 4-27. Dogs or cats prohibited in parks and on beaches.** No person owning or having charge, care, custody, or control of any dog or cat shall permit or allow the dog or cat into or upon any public park or beach in the county; however, this section shall not apply to parkways, wayside parks, or other park areas in which dogs or cats are specifically authorized.
  - **Cross-reference Sections:** 4-4 through 4-11, 4-19, 4-23, 4-27, etc.

## State:

- **Florida Administrative Code, 68A-4.001.** This law prohibits the taking of any 'wildlife..., nests, eggs, young, homes, or dens,' and bans the intentional placement, allowing of placement, or offering of food or garbage that attracts raccoons or other wildlife where it will likely create, or creates, a public nuisance.
- **Florida Administrative Code, 68A-4.005:** This prohibits release or introduction into the state of any wildlife or organism that 'might reasonably be expected to transmit any disease to wildlife.'
- **Florida Statute Title XXVIII, Chapter 379.231. Regulation of non-native animals.** Release of non-native animals into the environment is prohibited unless specifically authorized by FWC. A violation of this statute is considered a Level Three violation, equal to a first-degree misdemeanor if not convicted of any other offences in the past 10 years.
- **Florida Statute Title XXVIII, Chapter 379.4015. Non-native and captive wildlife penalties.** This statute defines penalties for violations of F.S. Title XXVIII, Chapter 379.
- **Florida Statute Title XLVI, Chapter 828.12. Cruelty to animals.** The definition of 'cruelty' in this statute includes depriving an animal of sustenance or shelter, and is punishable as a first-degree misdemeanor with a sentence of up to one year in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine.
- **Florida Statute Title XLVI, Chapter 828.13. Abandonment of animals.** Abandonment of an animal is punishable as a first-degree misdemeanor with a sentence of up to one year in prison and/or a \$5,000 fine.
- **Florida Statute Title XLVI, Chapter 828.30. Rabies vaccination.** This requires that all cats four months and older receive an initial rabies vaccination and an additional vaccination 12 months later, with additional vaccinations to be provided per the USDA-approved vaccine manufacturer's directions.

## Federal:

- **Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918:** This statute prohibits the pursuit, hunting, taking, capturing, killing, possession, delivery of, transport of...any migratory bird, including the protection of nests and eggs of any such bird. A violation of this act can result in a misdemeanor conviction with a fine of up to \$15,000 and/or six months in prison.
- **Endangered Species Act 1973:** This act provides for the determination and listing of species as endangered and threatened; prohibits the unauthorized

taking, possession, sale, and transport of endangered species; provides authority to acquire land for the conservation of listed species; authorizes establishment of cooperative agreements and grants-in-aid to states to establish and maintain active programs for endangered and threatened wildlife and plants; authorizes the assessment of civil and criminal penalties for violating the act as well as the payment or rewards to anyone furnishing information leading to the arrest and conviction for any violation of the act. Public Law 100-478, enacted on October 7, 1988, (102 Statute 2306), includes the following provisions: redefines 'person' to include municipal corporations, and increases by a factor of two-and-a-half the civil and criminal penalties provided under Section 11.

### **AGENCY GOALS, STRATEGY, AND GUIDELINES**

1. Manage, preserve, and protect native wildlife/habitat in Broward County parks and natural areas from feral cats and other exotic wildlife species.
2. Protect the park patrons, neighbors, and neighboring pets from potential disease transmittal by feral cats and other exotic wildlife.
3. Provide education and outreach regarding cat adoption, responsible pet ownership, humane removal programs, threats to Florida wildlife, and habitat modeled from existing State programs and initiatives at prone areas, in kiosks and at nature centers.
4. Remove any new recruits/introductions to any park or natural area upon discovery using a TSAFE program.
5. Post and enforce laws pertaining to abandonment of pets and other animals in Broward County parks and natural areas.
6. Humanely remove any feral cat from any park or natural area in the interest of public safety upon discovery.
7. Prohibit the establishment of feral cat colonies within park and natural areas.
8. Post, prohibit, and enforce non-sanctioned ('rogue') feeding of wildlife, including feral cats, by the public and by staff within the Agency.
9. Implement varmint-proof trash receptacles at parks and natural areas in feral-prone areas to discourage attracting feral cat recruits or other nuisance species.
10. Continue to partner with non-profits, TNR advocates, research programs, federal, state, and local agencies, especially Broward County Animal Care, to reduce feral cats in Broward County parks and natural areas.

11. Continue to monitor feral cat populations, conflicts, and movements utilizing Agency partners, and encourage staff to report cat activity (i.e. feeding, repeated encroachment, etc.) to park management staff.
12. Comply with State management plan rules, regulations, and/or grant-award agreements pertaining to feral animal management where applicable on Broward County lands/parks purchased with State funds.
13. Modify or update guidelines to reflect new law and regulations, research findings, or to mimic new FPS or FWC mandates or policies regarding feral cats.
14. Add these guidelines to management plan renewals and updates.

**This set of guidelines was created modeling the FWC Policy on Feral and Free-ranging Cats, adopted by FWC on May 30, 2003, and the Miami-Dade Parks Feral and Free-ranging Cat Policy for 2011.**

### **GUIDELINES IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE**

Broward County Parks and Recreation Division will engage FWC for technical advice and support and will work with other Broward County Agencies for support and services to enforce a zero-tolerance approach allowing free-ranging/feral cats in Broward County parks and natural areas. Parks will also work with other agencies, interest groups, and the public through a comprehensive education program. Parks will follow and enforce all federal, state, and local laws regarding protection of wildlife and regulation of animals including: animal cruelty, abandonment, and no feeding of wildlife in the park system.

Broward County Parks and Recreation Division will implement removal measures upon discovering free-ranging cats in a park or natural area. Captured cats may be removed from the site by approved volunteers interested in providing adoption avenues. Cats not accepted and removed by volunteers will be released to Broward County Animal Care. Cats, once removed, may not be returned to park property. Rescue organizations will be allowed to take charge of animals through an adoption agreement. Sick and severely injured animals will be accepted by Animal Care for humane euthanasia.

Cats that are released to Animal Care will be scanned for microchips and, if found, owners will be contacted for the return of their pet. Owners of 'chipped' cats, as well as those adopting cats, will be counseled on the benefits of keeping their pet cat indoors.

**Chapter 25.5 (and all state, federal, and local laws) must be strictly enforced on all park property.**

### **EDUCATION/OUTREACH**

Broward County Parks and Recreation Division will endorse the American Bird Conservancy's 'Cats Indoors Program' as part of the educational outreach plan.

Neighbors, park patrons, and park staff dealing with existing feral cat issues will be immediately targeted for educational outreach. Nature centers, kiosks, feral-prone areas, and attractions will also have educational information and displays. All parks will have educational materials available. The Website will be updated to include the set of guidelines and educational materials.

### **Implementation Steps:**

- Engage FWC, Broward County Animal Care, and other departments/partners for assistance.
- Assign parties to trap and remove feral cats (staff, vendor, Animal Care, or rescue groups).
- Identify funds for trapping and ongoing control.
- Train park staff regarding guidelines and procedures that are to be implemented and enforced.
- Develop public information and educational strategy and materials.

### **REFERENCED DOCUMENTS**

The following documents, policy, or programs were created specifically to assist local governments and land managers in providing appropriate regulations, management, and education for issues regarding feral and free-ranging cats:

- Policy on Feral and Free-ranging Cats adopted by FWC. May 30, 2003.
- Feral Cat Issue Team, FWC. 2003. Issue Assessment: Impacts of Feral and Free-ranging Domestic Cats on Wildlife in Florida.
- FWC. 2005. Florida's Wildlife Legacy Initiative.
- Florida's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Tallahassee, Florida, USA.
- Policy on Feral and Free-ranging Cats (*Felis catus*) in Miami-Dade Parks 2011.
- American Bird Conservancy.

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