

## **FERAL CAT MANAGEMENT**

Lodi Unified School District sadly has an ongoing feral cat problem. This is an unfortunate situation for our many campus communities and the cats themselves. The District (with the assistance of Yuba College) has developed a humane and responsible approach for managing this issue.

Below is an explanation of why our District environment is not an appropriate habitat for feral cats and what the ongoing process is for managing the situation:

### **“FERAL CATS AT YUBA COLLEGE”**

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#### **What are feral cats?**

Feral cats are originally domesticated cats that have become de-domesticated or wild because they were abandoned or the owner did not take steps to ensure that their cat did not breed in an uncontrolled manner. This creates colonies of elusive cats that are untrusting of humans and cannot be handled. They result from irresponsible pet owners (e.g., when unsterilized lost or abandoned housecats breed and produce feral kittens).

#### **Why are feral cats a problem?**

Feral cats and sympathetic cat feeders cause serious problems. Feral cats pose a very real threat to children and adults if the cat feels threatened or cornered. Feral cats that live on campus appear to be cute creatures and are very enticing to children. Yuba College has many programs such as Excel and on-campus childcare, which continuously brings children onto campus who should not be exposed to this hazard.

Further, the cats defecate and mark territories on campus including the children's playground, which introduces more hazards. These cats are also predators and have had a devastating impact on the native upland bird population which was once abundant on campus.

Feral housecats are very prolific, producing up to three litters of 2 to 10 kittens per year. They are fertile at 4-6 months of age, and they reproduce exponentially - one pair of breeding cats can potentially produce 420,000 offspring in just seven years!

However, life is not easy for feral housecats and, for the most part they have an extremely short lifespan (about 3 to 5 years, as opposed to 15-20+ years in captivity). Many feral housecats die at a young age due to disease, predation and starvation.

Feral cats also serve as a reservoir for a host of human and wildlife diseases and parasites, including rabies, toxoplasmosis, *Hemobartonella felis* (*Mycoplasma hemofelis*), *Yersinia pestis* (Plague), calicivirus, rhinotracheitis, panleukopenia, FIV ("feline AIDS") and feline leukemia.

The United States Public Health Service has identified five diseases of concern which can be transmitted from cats to humans. These are of special concern for people with compromised immune systems.

The list includes:

- Salmonellosis: A bacterial infection that causes diarrhea

- Bartonellosis: Also known as cat scratch disease

- Cryptosporidiosis: Causes diarrhea

- Toxoplasmosis: Spread to humans via contact with cat feces

- Campylobacteriosis: Another diarrhea causing organism

### **Feeding of cats causes a number of additional problems.**

Food left out by sympathetic cat feeders attracts other feral and domestic cats onto campus. The feeding also attracts other creatures such as raccoons, possums, skunks, insects, and rodents. The rodents (specifically rats) will collect food and stockpile it inside campus buildings.

Once the rats inhabit a building they cause numerous health problems and safety issues for the building occupants which often include our students. Unfortunately, the existing cat colonies have had no notable impact on the rat population because the rats are difficult and even dangerous targets, which the cats usually avoid.

### **How are the feral cats managed at Yuba College?**

Yuba College is extremely sensitive to the plight of these animals; however we must consider the greater impact to the health and safety of the campus community. Feral cats are humanely trapped on campus and are transferred to Yuba County Animal Care Services (YCACS). YCACS assess feral animal health and behavior while in captivity and determines the potential for adoption for each animal.

Yuba College has analyzed many different alternatives and believes that the current approach is the best way to address the campus feral cat population. If you truly care about the feral cats, please do not feed them and help them proliferate in a habitat that cannot support them.

\*Adapted from Sonoma State University Environmental Health and Safety