

Return-to-Field: How Shelters Save Community Cats



NEIGHBORHOODCATS



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Operations Coordinator, MSPCA
Boston Adoption Center



Same Team with Sterling
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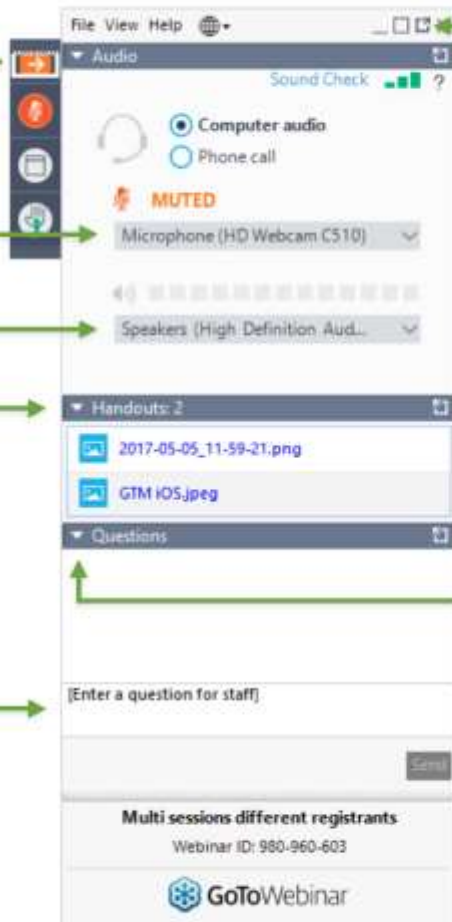
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Susan Richmond
Executive Director
Neighborhood Cats



Bryan Kortis
National Programs Director
Neighborhood Cats

Community TNR webinar series

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Return-to-Field Handbook

Return-to-Field Handbook

Published by HSUS

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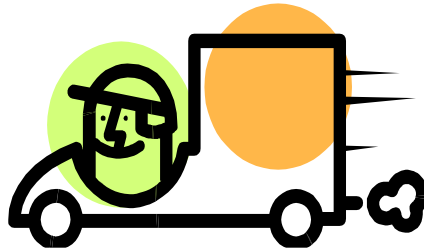
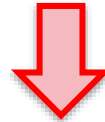
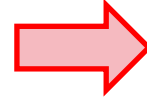
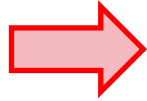
Community cat

Free-roaming, unowned

Socialization can range from friendly to feral

Often part of a colony (one or more community cats who share a common food source and territory)

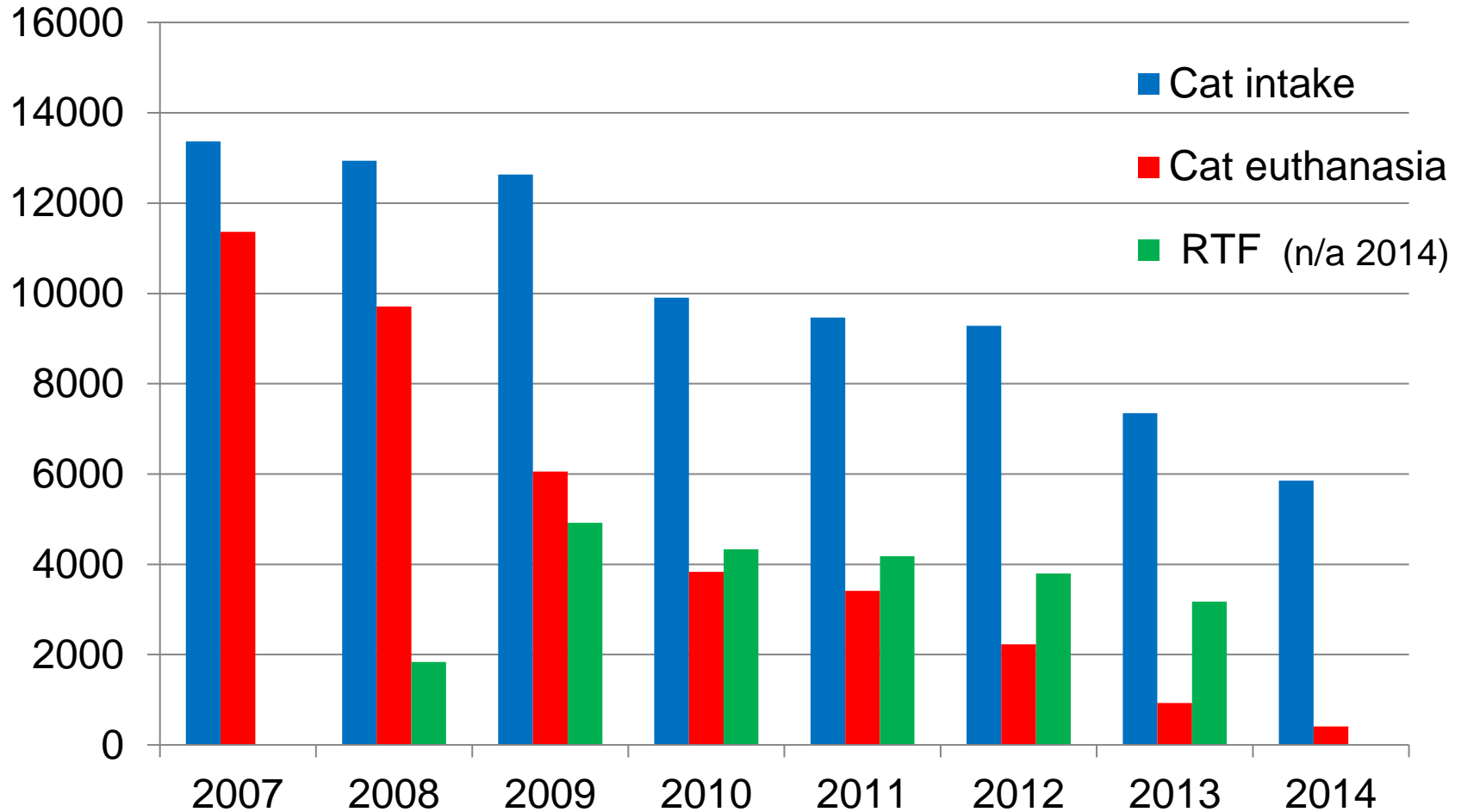
What is Return-to-field?



Origins of RTF

- 2008: First Coast No More Homeless Pets meets with Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services
- Asks to return to their colonies any eartipped cats turned into the shelter
- Director of JACPS offers to let them s/n and return all impounded community cats

Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services



RTF benefits

- Lower euthanasia
- Freed-up resources
- Healthier shelter environment (less crowding)
- Public support (fundraising, adoptions)
- Culture change – inside and outside shelter
- Avoid euthanasia of roaming pets



Why stop euthanizing?

No improvement in:

- Intake & euthanasia rates
- Complaint calls
- Wildlife predation
- Number of community cats

Costs of relying on euthanasia:

- High stress
- High turnover
- Poor public relations; less support
- Lower adoptions



Why does lethal control fail?

- Too many cats, too few animal control resources
- Caretaker resistance
- Vacuum effect
- Failure to capture all colony members

The vacuum effect



Problem?



The grocery store is not an island



Adam & Eve show up



Vacuum is filled



Won't everyone freak out?!



2007 national survey

commissioned by Alley Cat Allies

Question: If you saw a stray cat in your community and could only choose between two courses of action—leaving the cat where it is outside or having the cat caught and then put down—which would you consider to be the more humane option for the cat?

- a) Leave the cat where it is
- b) Have the cat put down
- c) Don't know/refused to answer

2007 national survey

commissioned by Alley Cat Allies

Question: If you saw a stray cat in your community and could only choose between two courses of action—leaving the cat where it is outside or having the cat caught and then put down—which would you consider to be the more humane option for the cat?

- a) Leave the cat where it is **81%**
- b) Have the cat put down **14%**
- c) Don't know/refused to answer **5%**

2014 national survey

commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society

Question: What is your preference among these 3 options for managing community cats?

- a) Sterilize and vaccinate healthy stray cats, and return them to where they were captured (sometimes called trap-neuter-return)
- b) Impoundment by shelter staff, followed by lethal injection for any cats not adopted
- c) Do nothing/leave stray cats alone to fend for themselves

2014 national survey

commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society

Question: What is your preference among these 3 options for managing community cats?

- a) Sterilize and vaccinate healthy stray cats, and return them to where they were captured (sometimes called trap-neuter-return) **68%**
- b) Impoundment by shelter staff, followed by lethal injection for any cats not adopted **24%**
- c) Do nothing/leave stray cats alone to fend for themselves **8%**

2008 survey of Ohio adults*

- 43% of participants saw free-roaming cats in their neighborhoods on a daily or weekly basis
- 26% had fed free-roaming cats during the prior year
- Only 23% who fed free-roaming cats ever brought one to a veterinarian for any type of treatment



* Lord, L., *Attitudes toward and perceptions of free-roaming cats among individuals living in Ohio* (2008) *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, Vol. 232, 1160-1167.

Return-to-field is aligned with the majority who favor live outcomes and are willing to leave community cats in the environment

Euthanasia is aligned with the minority who complain about the cats and want them removed





Fear: People will harm the cats.

Fact: No program yet is known to have had an increase in abuse.

Fear: People will complain to local officials.

Fact: Some will. Policymakers must have your back.

Fear: Cat owners won't get a chance to reclaim their pets.

Fact: National reclaim average for cats is 2%. Likely better chance of going home if returned.



CAT TRIVIA!



RTF Flow

Intake / Info gathering

Talking RTF with finders

Assessing eligibility

Housing

Surgery

Return

Post-return



Intake/info gathering



- Location of origin (finder's address vs. trapping location; using Google Maps)
- Cat's history (recent arrival or long-known? illness? behavior?)
- Cat's circumstances (feeder? other cats in area? construction?)
- Reason for bringing in
- Finder's attitude (hostile or friendly? to what degree?)

A photograph of three people in a room that appears to be a shelter or a storage area. On the left, a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue and yellow patterned short-sleeved shirt and khaki pants, is holding a small object in his hands. In the center, a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a bright blue t-shirt and a long blue and white patterned skirt, stands with her hands clasped. On the right, a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark grey patterned top and khaki pants, is gesturing with her hands as if speaking. The background features metal cages, a yellow bin with a 'CAUTION' label, and a window with blinds. A white container with a label is visible in the bottom right corner.

Talking RTF with finders

- Discuss RTF or not?
- Using surrender forms
- Diverting to TNR
- Complaint mitigation – deterrents to cats

Assessing eligibility: who decides

- Admissions
- Specially assigned staff (Community Cat Coordinator)
- Team approach



Assessing eligibility: the cat

- Health
- Disability
- Age
- Temperament
- Behavior (in field)





Assessing eligibility: location of origin

- Risk from physical conditions, inc. any pending changes
- Risk from finder or others
- Risk to wildlife
- Likelihood cat is owned
- Presence of caretakers or neighbors awaiting cat's return

Friendly cats & kittens

To consider:

- Shelter's capacity for care
- Cat's history, community ties
- Recommended: an individual assessment of what is the best available outcome for that cat



Housing

- Separate from general cat population (and dogs, if possible)
- Warm, dry & secure
- Convenient to on-campus clinic and/or pickup/dropoff



Tip Ear

J/M

Housing: equipment

- Traps on tables or racks
- Cages with feral cat dens
- Length of stray hold?

Arizona: stray hold waived for RTF:

“Any impounded cat that is eligible for a sterilization program and that will be returned to the vicinity where the cat was originally captured may be exempted from the mandatory holding period required by this subsection. For the purposes of this subsection, "eligible" means a cat that is living outdoors, lacks discernible identification, is of sound health and possesses its claws.”

Arizona Revised Statutes, sec. 11-1013(c)





Caring for cats in traps

- Traps: 30" length, sliding rear door
- Trap dividers
- Sheets
- Video: www.neighborhoodcats.org
(How to TNR > Trapping > Caring for cats in traps)



Keeping track



maui
humane
society

Return to Field
Animal Number: A37762918
Age: 2 year(s)
Sex: Female
Altered: Yes
Black / Orange Tortoiseshell



Intake Date: 2/7/2018

Return to Field Location: 0000 W Kulahe Road,
HAIKU

Intake Evaluation Data:

FVRCP given: Yes No

Identification:

Microchip Tattoo Types None

S/N: Yes No Unknown

BCS (1-9): _____

Surgery Date:

FVRCP given: Yes No

Ivermectin given: Yes No

Convenia given: Yes No

Ear tip: Done

Tattoo: Done

Approximate Weight:

Is the cat:

Pregnant Lactating In Heat

Pyometra Cryptorchid

Type of Surgery:

Flank Midline

Medical/Surgical Notes:

Microchip

- ☐ Approved for release
- ☐ Released
- ☐ Surgery entered
- ☐ Outcome entered



Surgery

- Timeliness – the faster the cat cycles through, the more benefit to the shelter
- Standard: s/n, eartip, rabies vax
- Optional: FVRCP, parasite meds, dental, injuries/illness
- Recovery time = 24 hrs (overnight)



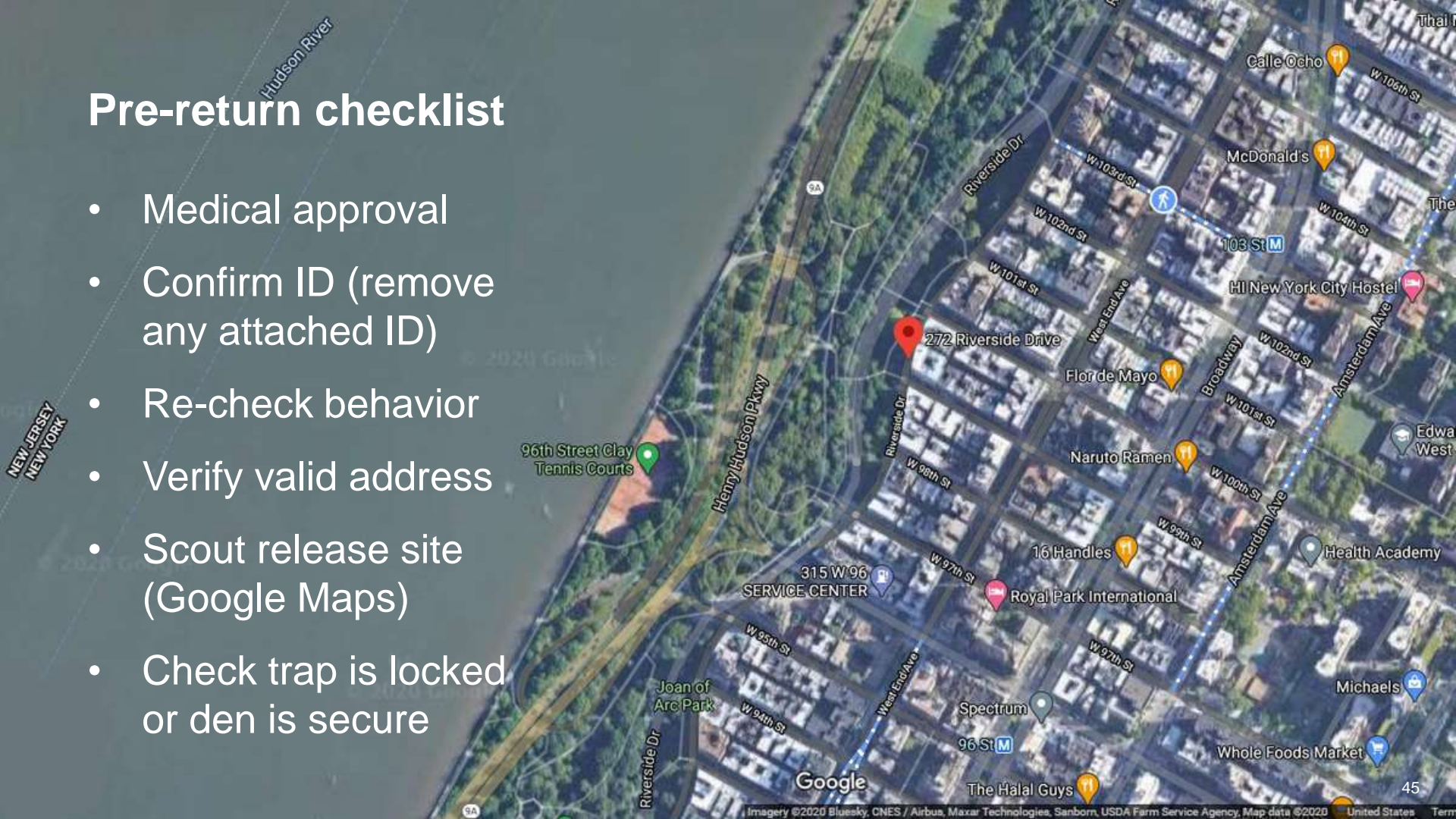
Returns: who does them?

- Staff
- ACOs
- Volunteers
- Partner group



Pre-return checklist

- Medical approval
- Confirm ID (remove any attached ID)
- Re-check behavior
- Verify valid address
- Scout release site (Google Maps)
- Check trap is locked or den is secure



Return considerations

- How discrete?
- Weather
- Day or night?
- Proximity to location found
- Caretaker contacted/present?



Return considerations (cont'd)

- Public vs. private property
- Kittens (caretaker contacted?)
- Dealing with confrontation



Combining RTF & TNR (where there's one....)



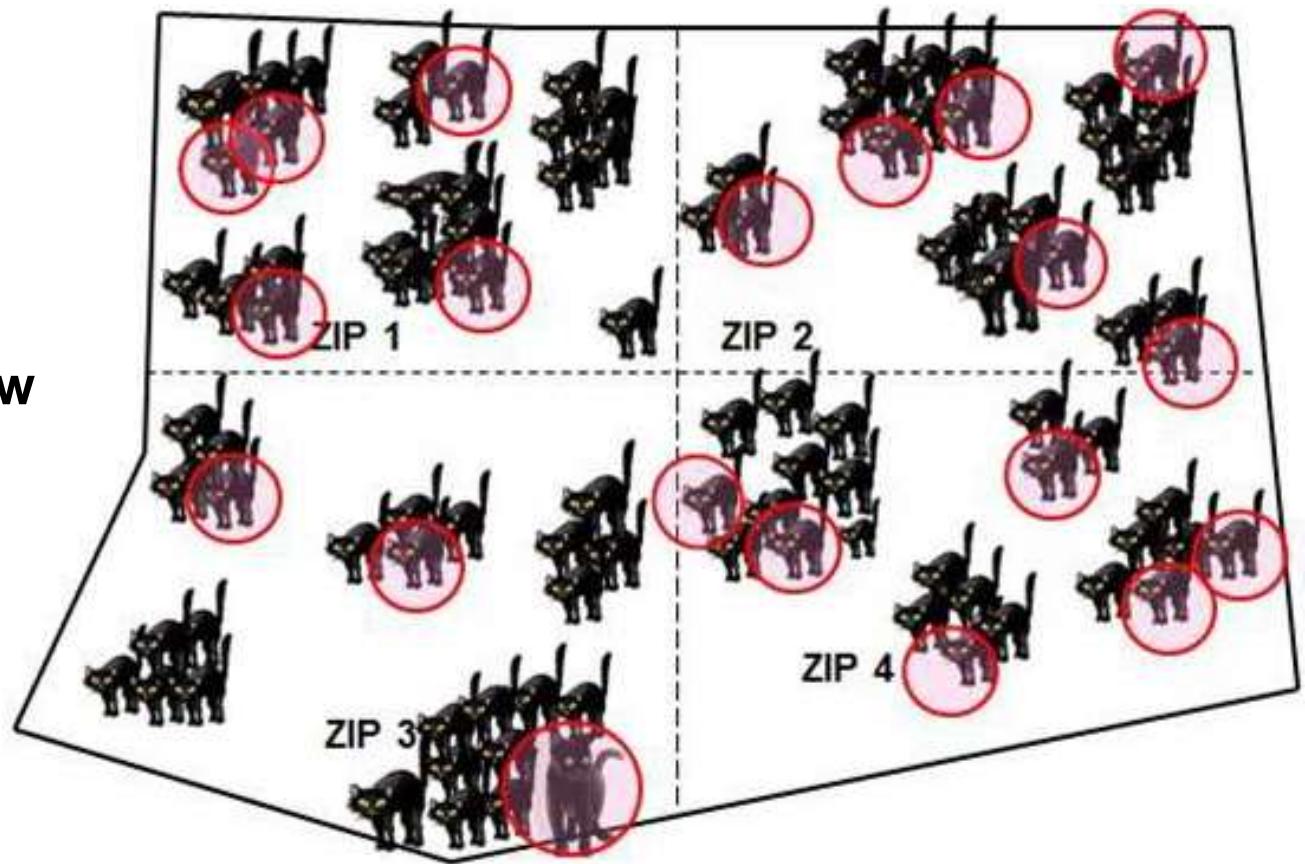
RTF - only cat in
the neighborhood



RTF - 10 cat backyard colony



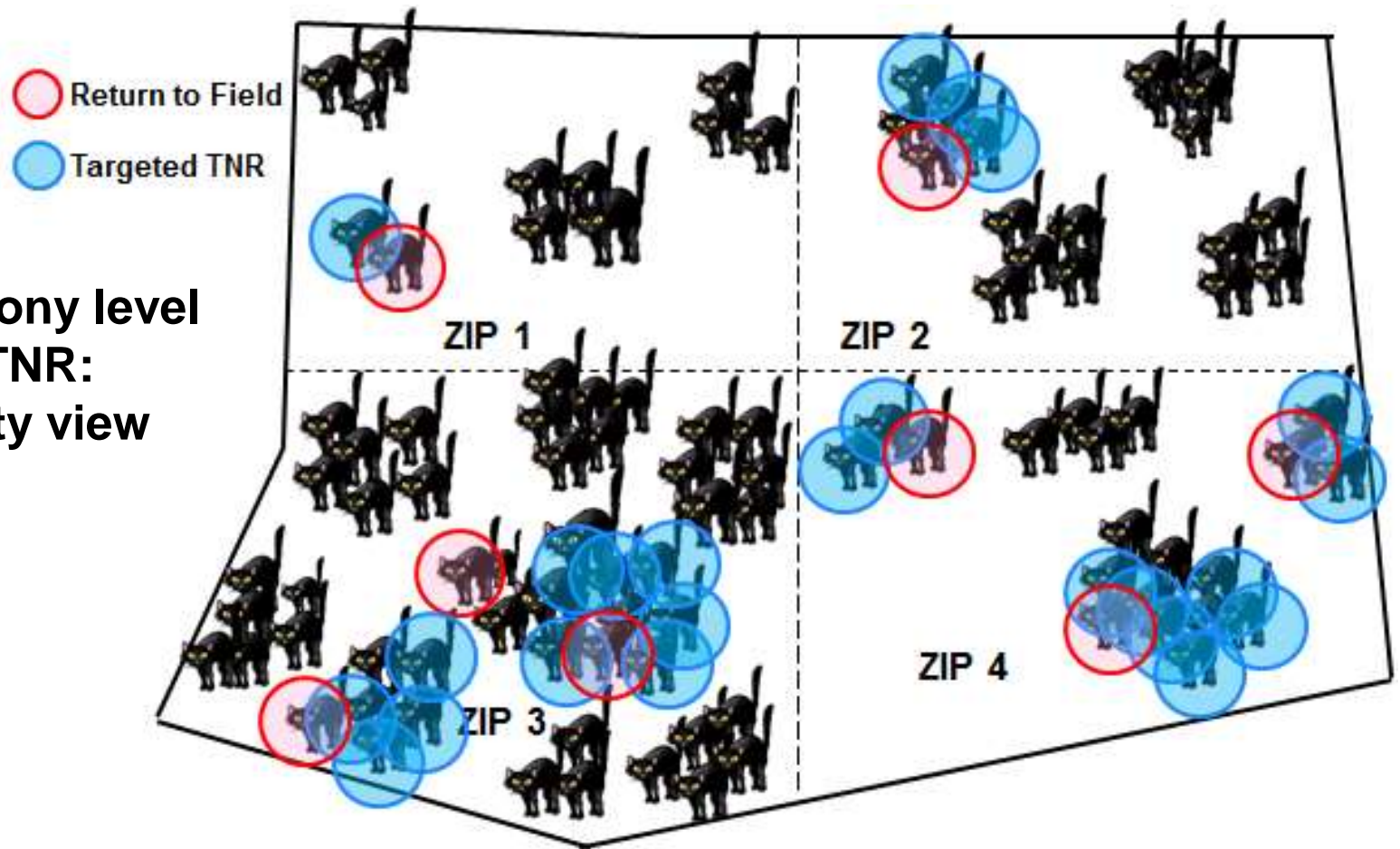
**RTF alone –
community view**



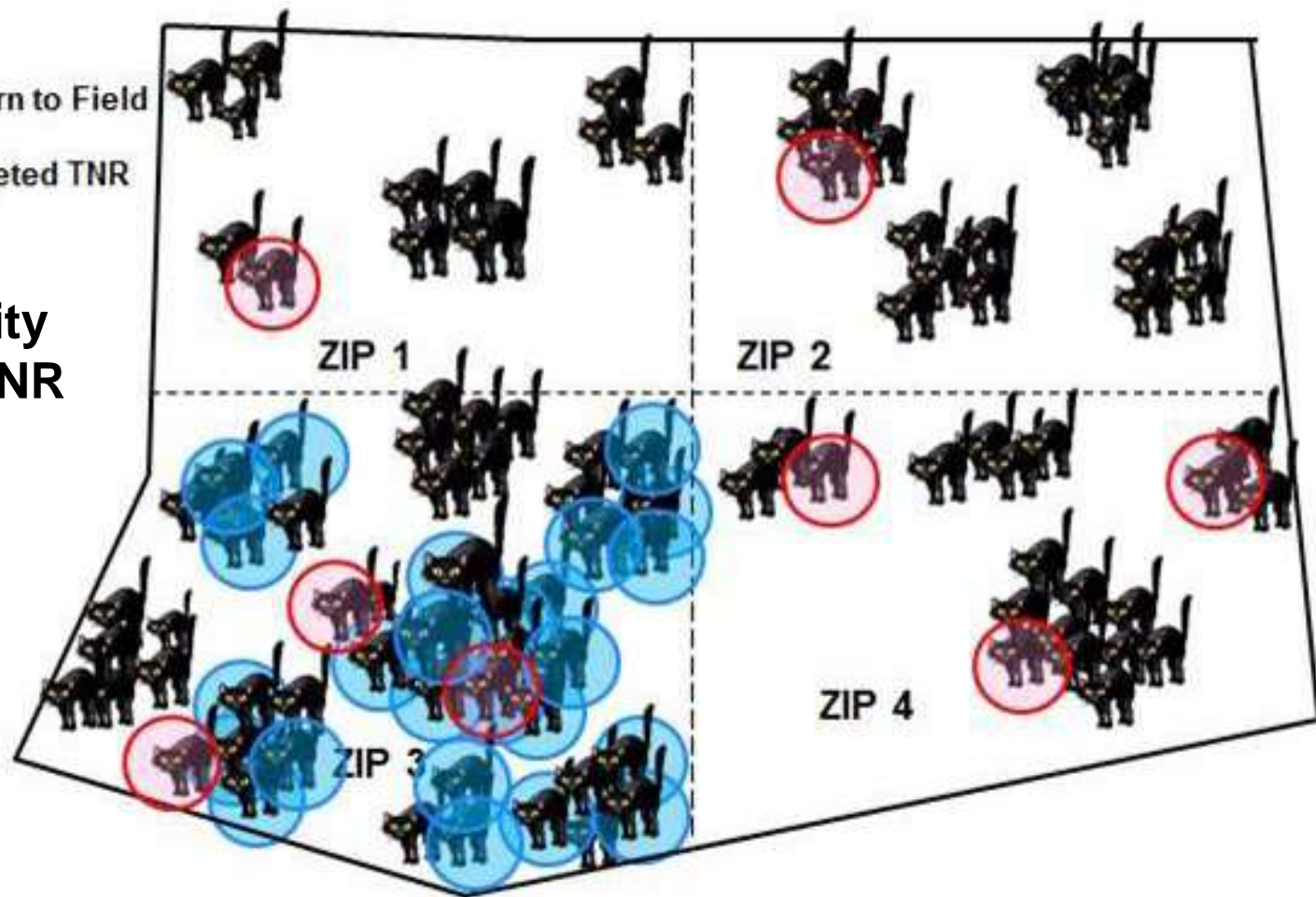
RTF + colony level targeted TNR









**RTF + colony level
targeted TNR:
community view**



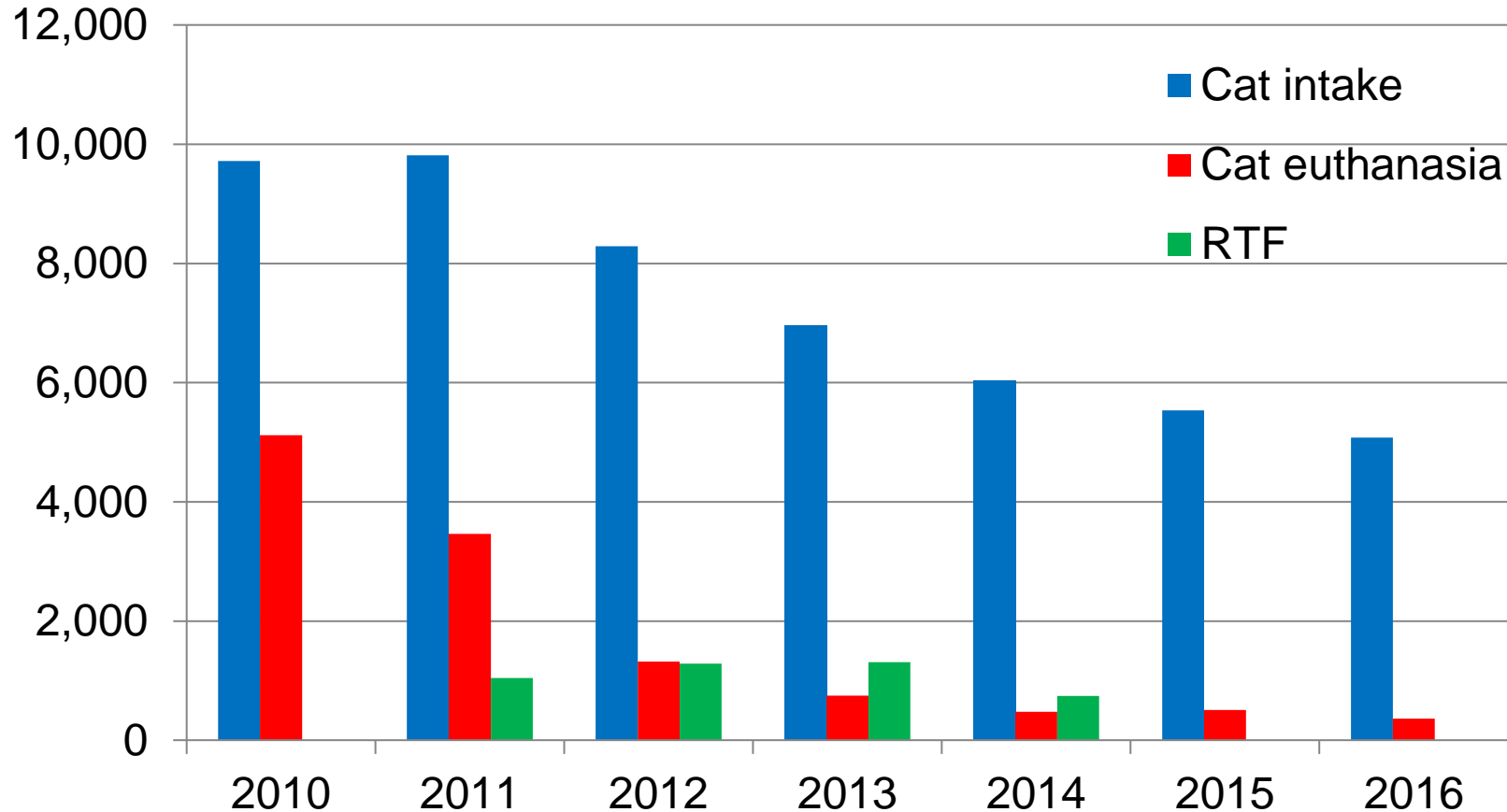
RTF + community level targeted TNR



Shelter Metric	Six-CCP Median Change						
Feline Intake	-32%	-38%	-1%	-14%	-33%	-31%	-45%
Kitten* Intake	-40%	-44%	+12%	-39%	-40%	-43%	-26%
Feline Euthanasia	-83%	-84%	-82%	-59%	-67%	-91%	-85%
Kitten* Euthanasia	-87%	-90%	-86%	-64%	-79%	-95%	-87%

Spehar DD and Wolf PJ (2019) *Integrated Return-To-Field and Targeted Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return Programs Result in Reductions of Feline Intake and Euthanasia at Six Municipal Animal Shelters*, Front. Vet. Sci. 6:77. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2019.00077

Albuquerque Animal Welfare Department





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Neighborhood Cats TNR Certification Workshop –

Saturday, Oct 7, 2023

2 – 4:30pm ET

\$10.00

Are you ready to be part of the solution for feral and stray cats in your neighborhood? Learn what TNR is, why it works, and how to get started. Our expert instructors will teach you the best practices for Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and colony management. Plus, you'll receive a certificate of completion after you attend.

1

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