

The Maui Wildfire: An In-depth Look at Community Cats and Disaster Response

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

All times listed are Eastern Time.

1pm-6:15pm

1:00 PM - 1:10 PM (10 mins)

Welcome and speaker introductions - Stacy LeBaron

1:10 PM – 1:25 PM (15 mins)

Session 1- An Overview - Dr. Kate Hurley, Dr. Lisa Labrecque

- Global perspective - saving community cats after a disaster [Kate]
- Description of the fire & damage, unique qualities of Lahaina, local community cat culture - Lisa
- Flow chart - the disaster response - Lisa

1:25 PM – 2:25 PM (1 hr)

Field Work - Bryan Kortis

- The situation in the beginning (locked out for 3 weeks, ASAR initial response led to an overwhelmed shelter)
- Shelter-in-place plus trapping-to-capacity program implemented as an alternative approach to trapping and removing as quickly as possible.
- Feeding stations and feeders (routes and schedules)
- Cameras & surveillance
- Communication tools
- Navigating constantly changing conditions
- Trapping with low shelter capacity (high-need cats)
- Trapping with higher shelter capacity (targeting zones)
- Catching the very last (and toughest) cats

2:25 PM – 2:40 PM (15 mins)

Break

2:40 PM - 3:10PM (30 mins)

First stop - medical check & initial assessment - Dr. Lisa Labrecque, Nikki Russell

- Setup/converting s/n clinic to a burn ward
- Protocol
- Treatment
- Record-keeping, photos (for reunification)
- Initial behavioral assessment (ongoing until final placement)

3:10 PM – 4:10 PM (1 hr)

Pathways & housing - Dr. Kate Hurley, Dr. Denae Wagner

- Description of cats (mostly community cats, friendly did not mean indoor experience, feral did not mean there was not an attached caregiver/owner)
- Pathway plan/scoring system overview
- Feral – indoor/outdoor group housing (the haies)
- Friendly – shelter housing (cat ohana - ways to expand?)
- Unknown – evaluation center/group housing (the annex)

Focuses on the housing of the cats and pathway planning developed by the Maui Humane Society team in consultation with faculty from the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program. The cats displaced by the Lahaina fire spanned a spectrum from friendly pet cats to feral community cats and every gradation of socialization and ownership/caregiver relationship in between. Housing solutions had to be rapidly developed, using readily available materials, that met the needs of cats across that spectrum. Group housing (both indoor and outdoor) and individual housing was built that allowed the shelter and response teams to care for cats with greater staff safety and efficiency for people, and less stress and lower disease risk for cats, compared to traditional pop-up crates often used for temporary housing. With hundreds of cats needing to be removed from the fire zone, straightforward assessment criteria and pathways were simultaneously developed to guide placement into different housing types and ensure a positive pathway forward so removal from the fire zone of remaining cats could continue.

4:10 PM – 4:25 PM (15 mins)

Break - Cat Trivia

4:25 PM - 4:50 PM (25 mins)

Reunification - Nikki Russell

- Reunification could not be reliant on physical location (cats were not all viewable at a central location - this was not realistic)
- Key takeaways:
 - o Leading organization needs to take control immediately and be able to share a single database with all other groups
 - o Use a dedicated system for disaster response that enables:
 - Photos needed of face and body and distinguishing features
 - Database also needs to be able to document non-photo features
 - Examples - location found, extra toes...?
 - If using in-house shelter software, ensure fire cats are searchable separately
 - o Need adequate, dedicated staffing of this aspect of operations
 - o Life would have been much better if microchips had been up to date

4:50 PM - 5:15 PM (25 mins)

Outcomes/Placement - Dr. Lisa Labrecque, Nikki Russell

- Identified pets & community cats – reunification (issues with owner housing, employment, relocation)
- What did you do for people who identified their cat but had a barrier to reunification - support them in some ways, otherwise surrender for placement

- Friendly – adoption (local, national)
- Feral – sanctuary, catio (working cats/barn cats possible though not pursued here)
- Sanctuary cats - with time, many came around and moved on to adoption - if you can find a place for cats to chill and take pressure off the immediate response, many of these cats can adapt to pet life

5:15 PM - 5:35 PM (20 mins)

Logistics (Lessons Learned) - Dr. Lisa Labrecque, Nikki Russell

- Dedicated project manager, extra staff
- Fundraising tips & pitfalls
- Managing in-kind donations

5:35 PM - 5:40 PM (5 mins)

Break

5:40 PM – 6:10 PM (30 mins)

Panel Discussion, Q&A- Lisa, Nikki, Kate, Denae, Bryan, Stacy (moderator)

6:10 PM - 6:15 PM (5 mins)

Close