

Cat Overpopulation in the North Okanagan

A Presentation to the Regional District of the North Okanagan

Vernon & District Animal Care Society

Box 1564

Vernon BC

V1T 8C2

November 8, 2005

About the Vernon & District Animal Care Society

The Vernon & District Animal Care Society was incorporated in April 2002. We are an all volunteer, registered charity with more than 100 dedicated members. Our goal is to reduce the staggering number of homeless animals in the North Okanagan by enabling low income families and individuals to be responsible pet owners.

We have two assistance programs. Our spay/neuter program enables low income families and individuals to alter their pets for a minimum contribution of \$25 per cat or \$50 per dog. Our emergency vet care program helps provide care for sick or injured pets from needy families.

During our brief existence we have spayed or neutered more than 700 cats and dogs. In fact, during 2004, we invested \$28,785 in spay/neuter assistance and a further \$19,234 on emergency vet care for abandoned and needy animals. In addition, we fostered 216 cats and kittens, 150 of whom – spayed or neutered, vaccinated and tattooed – were placed in loving homes.

All our programs are funded through donations and local fundraising events organized by our members and supporters. We work very hard and we are providing an important service to the North Okanagan.

Why We Are Making This Presentation Today

Since April 2004, Hazel Turchinetz, our foster coordinator, has been sheltering homeless cats and kittens which the Vernon SPCA has been unable to accommodate because of overcrowding at their facility. On several occasions recently, Hazel's neighbour has complained to City Bylaw officers that there is an odour from the large number of cats she is fostering. Previously, Hazel has been inspected by an environmental officer from Interior Health and by three BC SPCA representatives from Kelowna. Both agencies were responding to unfounded complaints. In the case of Interior Health the complaint focused on a possible threat to Hazel's husband's health. The BC SPCA team appeared to have been told that Hazel was a cat hoarder. [defined as an individual who harbours more cats than he/she can manage to care for properly. The cats live in filthy conditions and do not receive veterinary care.] Both agencies found that the complaints were groundless. Please find attached a list of veterinarians who provide care for our shelter cats. Both Dr. Conover of Creekside Animal Clinic and Dr. Schenk of Sunridge Veterinary Clinic have viewed our shelter. Dr. Schenk and Dr. Lemiski of Vernon Veterinary Clinic have volunteered to inspect us periodically.

The most recent complaints about odour have prompted the City of Vernon to ask us to find another facility. Our society, however, does not have the money to pay rent or even utility bills. We are only able to function now because of Hazel's generosity and hard work and our nonstop fundraising events. We are no longer admitting abandoned cats but we still have over 80 cats and kittens needing to be housed and cared for. Can you help us in any way?

The Current Cat Overpopulation Crisis

The problem of cat overpopulation is too big for our small volunteer society to be able to solve all on our own. It's a problem that needs to be dealt with by the community as a whole. Just look at the figures. For every human born, 15 dogs and 45 cats are also born. **It's easy to see that there are not and never will be homes for most of these animals.** Every year, hundreds of cats are surrendered to the SPCA and to our society. Those are the lucky ones. Many hundreds more are abandoned to fend for themselves when their owners move. Others are dropped off in the woods or across town in a strange neighbourhood. Many more are dumped at the landfill with the rest of the household garbage. Every single day, we receive at least one phone call about an animal desperately in need of our help. [Please see the attached sheet listing the calls received just during the 24 hour period from Sunday, October 16 to Monday, October 17, 2005.]

We cannot turn our backs on this situation and wait for it to go away. Abandoned cats don't die immediately. They reproduce. Typically, a female will give birth to at least two litters of more than four kittens per year. The gestation period is only two months and that same female can be impregnated while still nursing her first litter, which, in turn, will be sexually mature at 6 months and two months later giving birth to their own kittens.

Starving, homeless cats cause problems for animal lovers and animal haters alike by breaking into garbage, decimating bird populations, fighting with owned cats and spreading disease. It's in all of our interests to address this problem immediately before it becomes any worse.

Animal shelters are very expensive operations. Without concerted efforts at population control it is impossible to build a shelter big enough to house all local homeless cats.

Population control through mass euthanasia of homeless cats is an expensive, unpopular and short-sighted solution to the problem. With unspayed owned cats producing litters there will always be a supply of free kittens available for the irresponsible people who typically dump their felines when they reach sexual maturity and replace them with another "free to a good home" kitten. In no time at all the population of homeless cats will be replaced.

Spaying and neutering is the only solution but it is financially impossible for many low income families. [Please see attached sheet with prices.] It is in the community's interest to provide financial help when needed.

Cat Overpopulation Coalition

By spaying and neutering over 700 animals – mostly cats – and by adopting out only spayed and neutered felines our small society has made a large step towards containing the overpopulation problem. With your help we can make major strides. We would like to make the following proposals for your consideration.

- 1] That the Regional District of the North Okanagan, the City of Vernon, area veterinarians and VDACS form a committee – Cat Overpopulation Coalition – to find a community solution to the problem of unaltered felines.

- 2] That the Regional District of the North Okanagan, the City of Vernon, area veterinarians and VDACS sponsor a spay/neuter blitz in January and February. A fundraising campaign in December would advertise the upcoming subsidized program. Animal lovers would be solicited for donations to VDACS, veterinarians would provide a 25% discount and the City and the Regional District would either match individual donations with a grant to the program or with a lump sum of \$4,000.

- 3] That the Regional District of the North Okanagan consider allowing VDACS to sell 2006 dog licences. VDACS, like your dog control contractor, would retain half of all proceeds from dog licences sold by its volunteers and would remit the remaining half of the proceeds to the Regional District. Such an arrangement will:
 - a] boost revenue for the Regional District because many dog owners will be far more interested in purchasing licences when they are aware that half the cost of the licence will be dedicated to spay/neuter assistance.
 - b] permanently and humanely reduce the cat overpopulation problem in the North Okanagan.
 - c] raise public awareness about the importance of spaying and neutering.
 - d] be a hugely popular move from a public relations standpoint.

On October 24, VDACS made a similar proposal, [proposals 1 and 2 only], to the City of Vernon. We hope that both bodies will recognize the seriousness of the situation and agree to participate both in a Cat Overpopulation Coalition Committee and in a spay/neuter blitz to reduce the overwhelming number of kittens who will be born in the April to November 2006 “kitten season”.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposals.

Heather Pettit, President
Vernon & District Animal Care Society