

Pets: Neutered cats behave better, too

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counties. The program has another income-based tier that offers the surgery at \$33 for males and \$49 for females.

Spay and Save is subsidized entirely through grant money from PetSmart Charities and contributions from the Oregon Humane Society and Multnomah County Animal Shelter, which uses licensing fees to fund the program.

The goal is to get 10,000 spays and neuters through Spay and Save each year for the next five years. Coalition members hope that ultimately this will reduce shelter intake by 30 percent in five years, dramatically reducing euthanasia.

Far more cats end up in shelters than dogs each year, and though local agencies make every effort to save them, there are simply more cats than space to keep them, so more end up euthanized. In 2009, the six ASAP shelter members took in 15,198 dogs and 24,771 cats. Of those, 9,906 cats and 2,781 dogs were euthanized.

Thanks in part to ASAP, the cat euthanasia rate has decreased.



The goal of low-cost spay and neuter programs, like the one run by the Feral Cat Coalition, which brought in this cat to be neutered, is to reduce the number of cats that wind up in shelters.

BENJAMIN BRINK
THE OREGONIAN

In 2006, 12,984 cats were euthanized in area shelters, compared with the 9,906 in 2009, according to the Asilomar Accords, a standardized reporting effort developed to compare shelter data. That's a 24 percent drop. But for those who work in the shelters, it's just a drop in the bucket.

One reason for the cat overpopulation is that "we have an entirely different value system for cats than we do for dogs," says Sharon Harmon, executive director of the Oregon Humane Society. "It's an animal control issue across the country."

People are much more likely to try to help an abandoned dog than a cat, for various reasons.

Cats are also, as Harmon says, "highly successful reproductive machines." They can get preg-

nant while nursing and can have three litters a year with up to eight kittens per litter. Plus, cats don't enter menopause; they'll go into heat for a lifetime, says Kathy Covey, public relations manager for the Cat Adoption Team.

Still another reason is that only about 20 percent of people adopt pet cats from a shelter, which usually performs the surgery, says Karen Kraus, executive director of the Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon.

The majority of people get their cats from neighbors or friends, or they adopt a stray.

"If they're not spayed or neutered, they're breeding," Kraus says.

Spaying and neutering can also eliminate some annoying

cat behaviors, such as yowling, fighting or spraying. "I'm surprised how many people can keep unneutered cats in their home," Kraus says.

More fixed felines can even improve a community's health. Fewer free-roaming cats will kill songbirds and use your garden as a litter box, and shelters can take in more animals.

"It's unconscionable to say it's OK to kill them because there's just too many," Harmon says. "How did that get to be accepted?"

She hopes Spay and Save will soon save not just money, but also lives.

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Low-cost spay and neuter options

Feral Cat Coalition of Oregon: feralcats.com; 503-797-2606. The coalition provides traps and offers spay/neuter services for feral and stray cats only (no pets). Services are donation-based; suggested donation is \$30.

Spay and Save: asapmetro.org; 503-802-6755. Spaying and neutering surgeries for \$10 at participating locations. The program is available for low-income cat owners receiving government assistance and living in Clark, Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties.

Oregon Spay/Neuter Fund: oregonspayneuter.org; 503-286-2411. Download a coupon for \$33 for male cats and \$49 for female cats; dog surgeries available, but costs vary by weight. No income requirements or geographic guidelines.

Tom & Mom Cat Special: animalaidpdx.org; 503-389-0228. From Feb. 14 through March 17, regional animal rescue and welfare groups and participating veterinary clinics are offering \$10 neuter and \$20 spay surgeries for cats from economically stressed Portland-area residents.