

Policy on Feral and Free-Ranging Cats
Adopted by the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
May 30, 2003

The domestic cat (*Felis catus*) is not native to Florida, but feral and free-ranging cats occur throughout the state and number several million. Cats prey upon both common and rare species of native wildlife in Florida, including species listed as threatened or endangered by state and federal governments. Although the cumulative impact of cats upon native wildlife in Florida remains uncertain relative to other impacts, predation by cats is common and can be especially detrimental to wildlife populations that are small or restricted in their distribution.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is mandated by the Florida Constitution to conserve and protect populations of native wildlife, and the FWC has authority to curtail adverse impacts that nonnative animals cause to native species. *Therefore, it is the policy of the FWC to protect native wildlife from predation, disease, and other impacts presented by feral and free-ranging cats.*

The FWC recognizes that local governments have the responsibility to regulate domesticated species, including cats, but the actions of local governments must not adversely impact native wildlife. Thus, the FWC will strive to minimize or eliminate the impacts of cats where they pose a significant threat to local wildlife populations, but will otherwise leave control of nuisance or feral cats and issues of local public safety and welfare to local governments.

Implementation

Implementing this broad policy will require a variety of FWC resources as well as cooperative efforts between FWC and other public agencies and private groups. Because of the extent of the domestic cat problem, protection of listed species and public lands are considered the highest priority. Several strategies may be followed and listed below are some that should be particularly useful in protecting native wildlife from feral or free-ranging cats. FWC staff should consider these and other potential strategies and recommend implementation measures, as appropriate.

Recommended strategies:

- (1) develop and implement a comprehensive education program to increase public awareness of the impacts that feral and free-ranging cats present to wildlife, identify ways for cat owners to minimize impacts, and inform cat owners of laws prohibiting the release or abandonment of cats to the wild
- (2) eliminate the threat cats pose to the viability of local populations of wildlife, particularly species listed as Endangered, Threatened, or of Special Concern
- (3) prohibit the release, feeding, or protection of cats on lands managed by the FWC, and strongly oppose programs and policies that allow the release, feeding, or protection of cats on public lands that support wildlife habitat
- (4) provide technical advice, policy support, and partnerships to land management agencies in order to prevent the release, feeding, or protection of cats on public lands that support wildlife habitat
- (5) oppose creation and support elimination of Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) colonies and similar managed cat colonies wherever they potentially and significantly impact local wildlife populations
- (6) evaluate the need for new rules to minimize the impact of cats on native wildlife