
Herding Cats

BC SPCA Cat Overpopulation Strategy

BCSPCA
SPEAKING FOR ANIMALS

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

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Herding Cats: BC SPCA Cat Overpopulation Strategy

OUR MISSION: To protect and enhance the quality of life for domestic, farm and wild animals in British Columbia.

1.0 Vision

The vision of the BC SPCA is for every cat born in B.C. to have a home and be part of a family, where guardians value the cats and are educated on how to care for them. We want to see an end to the unnecessary suffering of thousands of cats each year in British Columbia.

2.0 Problem Definition

In order to address the homeless pet problem in BC, the BC SPCA conducted a review of branch and community statistics to assess the current state of pet overpopulation in B.C. This research confirmed that homeless and unwanted cats are the greatest source of animal intake at B.C. animal shelters. Within our own shelters, the provincial Live Release Rate for cats is lower than for dogs (72% for cats compared to 89% for dogs in 2011; 76% for cats compared to 90% for dogs in 2012.)

1° Problem: Unidentified Stray Adult Cats

- 2012 intake of cats greatly outnumbered that of all other companion animals (accounting for 60% of all animals, in comparison to 36% for dogs and 4% for other animals).
- More than 4,000 stray adult cats (the largest category) are admitted annually.
- The owner redemption rate for stray adult cats (10%) was alarmingly lower than for stray adult dogs (46%), suggesting very few cats bear any form of identification.
- Unredeemed stray adult cats remain in shelters for 8 times as long (62 days, on average) as those redeemed by their owners (8 days).

2° Problem: Unwanted Kittens

- More than 7,051 kittens are admitted annually (46% of overall cat intake) with over 3,500 of those labeled as stray – likely an indicator of unmitigated breeding among strays, feral cats and owned cats that are permitted to roam at large.

3.0 Predisposing Factors

The main causes of cat overpopulation in B.C. are thought by the Society to be:

- **Attitudes**
 - Lack of status: cats are not valued as much as dogs
 - Lack of education about the necessity of spay/neuter to limit overpopulation
 - Lack of education about the suffering of outdoor cats
- **Behaviours**
 - Abandonment of intact cats (may be precipitated by a lack of access to shelter services due to shelters being full or not accepting cats)
 - Failure to spay or neuter (often as a result of lack of access to affordable spay/neuter, procrastination leading to accidental litters, etc)
 - Failure to apply permanent identification

4.0 Cat Overpopulation Objective, Strategies and Tactics

Objective/Outcomes:

2014-2018 Strategic Plan Draft Outcomes

Live Release Rates (LRR): To increase the provincial LRR of cats in BC SPCA shelters from 81% in 2013 to 90% in 2019, with no region of the province or individual shelter falling below 85%, while also ensuring that the number of cats adopted from our shelters remains at or above 2012 cat adoption numbers. Progress will be determined by the production of an annual report detailing progress towards implementation of the goal.

Return to owner rates (RTO): To increase the return to owner rate for cats in BC SPCA shelters from the provincial average of 8% in 2013 (national average 4%) to 12% by 2019, with no region or shelter falling below 10%. Progress will be determined by the production of an annual report detailing progress towards implementation of the goal. Calculation for RTO will be $\text{total \#RTO} / \text{total stray intake} \times 100 = \%$

Cat sterilization rates: To increase the total number of community cat sterilizations (i.e. not shelter based sterilizations) that occur as a direct result of BC SPCA involvement (grants, spay/neuter clinic etc) from 8,000 in 2012 to 12,000 by 2019. Progress will be determined by the production of an annual report detailing progress towards implementation of the goal.

Total “unwanted” cat numbers: While recognizing subjectivity in the number, the BC SPCA will measure the total number of cats in communities by calculating: total cat intake into BC SPCA facilities + cat intake in other facilities (animal control+rescue)+ cats rehomed by owners.

Community involvement: To increase the number of positive community outcomes (education, advocacy, bylaw change). Measured by evidence of one positive community outcome per branch by 2019. Progress will be determined by the production of an annual report detailing progress towards implementation of the goal.

Wildlife predation: Total number of injured wildlife admitted to wildlife centres across BC as a result of reported cat attacks.

Strategies:

In order to meet these outcomes and achieve our vision, we will implement a targeted two-tiered approach using the following strategies:

1. **Develop and execute a communications and education strategy that creates a cultural shift in attitudes towards cats in B.C., including the importance of sterilization and permanent identification.**
2. **Maintain existing and develop new services to prevent cat overpopulation in B.C.**

Strategy 1: Messaging that creates a cultural shift in attitudes towards cats in B.C., including the need to sterilize them and ensure they bear permanent identification.

Sub Strategies:

A. Province-wide communications strategy

Tactics:

- Targeted outreach to communities where discounted/free spay/neuter or pet ID programs exist
 - Promotion: Posters, flyers, door hangers, door-knocking
 - Publicity: radio, newspaper, etc
- Use existing media opportunities (interviews, news releases, social media) to promote the value of cats
- Develop and implement a broad messaging strategy for rural areas to address abandonment; attitudes towards cats as an outdoor, independent animal
- Develop and implement a broad messaging strategy for urban and rural areas to address attitudes towards spay/neuter as something that should happen after 6 months of age
- Update BC SPCA position statements to reflect current issues
 - Pet Overpopulation Position Statement
 - Cat Welfare Position Statement (background on cat registration)
- Utilize community council members to participate in community education initiatives

B. Youth education strategy

- Youth education in communities serviced by our branches
 - Summer camps/PD Days
 - Curriculum unit outreach
 - Kids Club / Bark! Magazine
- Youth education in remote (First Nations, rural) communities to change attitudes towards disposability and care of animals

C. Local and provincial advocacy

Tactics:

- Update model bylaw to reflect necessity of bylaws addressing cats
- Promote updated model bylaw to all municipalities; work with critical municipalities to incorporate updates
- Collaborate with First Nations communities who wish to find a solution to pet overpopulation issues; Provide advice and feedback on community policies
- Utilize community council members to participate in bylaw initiatives
- Investigate possibility of incorporating mandatory permanent identification into provincial legislation

Strategy 2: Maintain existing and develop new services to prevent cat overpopulation in B.C.

Sub Strategies:

A. Increase Spay/Neuter through Assistance Programs

Tactics:

- Interventions in areas where cats are at the highest risk of suffering
 - Increase partnerships with other organizations working in remote communities by offering BC SPCA spay/neuter funding where there are cat colonies or an increased risk of injury and death due to the level of care provided by the community
 - Pursue PetSmart Charities of Canada Free-Roaming Cat grants where there are a large number of cat colonies and available infrastructure to complete a project
 - Assist hoarders known by the Cruelty Investigations Department in sterilizing cats on a reactive basis
 - Conduct and increase opportunities for feral cat spay/neuter at BC SPCA veterinary facilities
- Interventions in areas where cats are the most prolific
 - Establish and maintain community spay/neuter programs at the six BC SPCA branches with the greatest pet overpopulation problems
 - Develop relationship with veterinarians to achieve a) lower pricing for low-income citizens and b) understanding of the necessity of providing some spay/neuter services at no-cost to the client
 - Veterinary newsletter
 - Outreach to CVBC, SBCV
 - Manage and promote the spay/pack loan program

B. Maintain and Increase Spay/Neuter through BC SPCA Clinics and Shelters

- Continue to spay and neuter 100% of cats that are adopted out by our branches
- Pursue opportunities to standardize services and rates for cat spay/neuter from veterinarians across the province
- Investigate and pursue opportunities to expand existing services at our clinics and hospital
- Investigate and pursue opportunities for additional spay/neuter clinics and mobile spay/neuter services

C. Increase Pet Identification

Tactics:

- Ensure 100% of cats leaving the BC SPCA has a form of permanent identification
- Ensure 100% of cats spayed/neutered through BC SPCA community and small grant programs receive permanent identification
- Investigate opportunities to improve compliance with pet identification through outreach programming in British Columbia to dramatically increase the number of stray/lost animals returned to their guardians

D. Increase Access to Adequate Rehoming Services (shelters, foster homes, or reputable online rehoming)

Tactics:

- Provide sheltering services to limit abandonment
- Maintain Capacity for Care to increase flow-through capacity
- Plan for new facilities where current facility structure limits flow-through or animal health
- Improve capacity for transfers
- Improve capacity for foster programs
- Promote adoptions to increase value of cats and increase available number of homes
- Establish additional satellite adoption centres to broaden our adoption reach into the community
- Liaise with other shelters/rescues across the province to assess living conditions (according to the ASV) and promote 100% pre-adoption spay/neuter

E. Develop systems that will allow for measuring success and increasing service delivery

Tactics:

- Adopt a surrender waitlist system managed through ShelterBuddy
- Adopt SOPs around calculating LRR and RTO rate
- Adopt SOP around assigning Asilomar Accord status at intake and exit
- Develop instructional guide and SOP for branches or outside organizations conducting TNR initiatives that the BC SPCA is involved in
- Conduct presentations and provide training for branch managers and staff to increase knowledge and participation in the strategic plan initiatives

5.0 Tactical Plans

See:

Strat Plan Initiative 1 2 Action Plan - Pet Overpopulation

Strat Plan Initiative 1 6 Action Plan - Pet ID

Communication Strategy (to be developed by December 2014)