

Influx of cats tests shelter's new 'no-kill' effort

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The never-ending stream of cats turned in to the Lane County animal shelter has overwhelmed a new effort to find them all homes, an official said Friday.

But opinions diverge over whether the shelter must kill its cats to make room for new ones.

Lane County Animal Regulation Authority currently has no room for cats and starting Tuesday, adoptable shelter cats may be killed to make room for new ones, program manager Mike Wellington said.

That's the reality for shelter cats and dogs year-round, because the facility can't keep up with the rate at which lost or abandoned animals are turned in. The shelter takes 15 to 20 adoptable cats weekly, and has room for 30 to 60 depending on their age and size.

The current dilemma is especially vexing, Wellington said, because the shelter just started a program to try to reduce the number of cats that must be put down.

In October, LCARA started spending \$100-plus per cat to license, spay or neuter and vaccinate them - even provide them with a collar and carrier. That way, a cat buyer can visit, pay that amount, and leave with a furry new friend without waiting five or more days for that work, Wellington said.

But the public hasn't caught on yet. And the new program can actually reduce shelter capacity because the cats are kept longer in an effort to find them homes, Wellington said.

To make matters worse, a rash of cat illnesses at the Oregon Humane Society has left LCARA unable to transfer cats there through early December or longer, Wellington said.

To make room, Wellington said he has two options, neither of them appealing: Kill cats for which LCARA already has spent \$100-plus each to make them immediately adoptable, or kill the cats that are brought in, after the three-day period during which an owner might reclaim a cat.

"It's frustrating, but it also takes time for the community to realize what is being offered now," Wellington said. "To support the 'low-kill' or 'no-kill' philosophy, they need to be involved, they need to come out, they need to adopt."

But animal advocate Susan McDonald said LCARA also needs to go the extra mile, by allowing willing cat lovers to foster the surplus animals until they find homes. "Right now, we have experienced foster people who are ready to take the surplus," said McDonald, 54, of Eugene. Wellington "needs to be flexible," she said.

Wellington said he's not a big fan of foster-home situations, which he called the "warehousing" of animals. The county could be liable if a foster parent is injured by a cat, or property is damaged, and LCARA doesn't have the staff to keep track of these temporary placements, he added.

Still, Wellington said cat foster homes could be a short-term solution, and one he would take up with county legal staff in coming weeks.

He also offered these tips while the shelter deals with a glut of cats:

- If you need to give up your cat or a stray that you've kept for at least three months, call Greenhill Humane Society at 689-1503 to make an appointment; expect a six-week wait and a fee of \$35 to \$100, based on your income.
- If you find a sick, injured or neglected cat, or one in danger, bring it to Lane County Animal Regulation Authority, 3970 W. First Ave., Eugene (there is a \$20 fee).
- If you find a cat not in danger and apparently being cared for, leave it alone.
- If you've lost your cat, visit LCARA, check its Web site at www.lanecounty.org/animals or call 682-3646.

KEEP YOUR `PROBLEM' PET

Advocates say education is all owners need to correct bad pet behaviors that can end with giving up the animal. Try these Web sites:

- bestfriends.org/theanimals/petcare/
- www.peteducation.com/