

PROPOSAL 146

5 AAC 92.029. Permit for possessing live game.

Exempt sterilized cats from the list of species prohibited from being released into the wild as follows:

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Exempt sterilized cats from the list of species prohibited from being released into the wild.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Feral cats are impacting communities across the state, and there is broad agreement it's in both their and our best interest to reduce their numbers. They can be disease vectors and predate on local wildlife; their presence can also be distressing for people, all of which is evidenced by this issue having come before the Board of Game several times before. I'm submitting a proposal in support of TNR (Trap-Neuter-Release) practices yet again because of Juneau's growing feral cat problem and my own first-hand experience.

The board permitting the release only of sterilized cats back to the wild would not increase feral cat numbers. It might reduce them. I can say plainly that allowing TNR in Juneau might have helped prevent the establishment of a feral cat colony in my neighborhood, and it certainly would not have made it worse. I have worked with animal control, the local humane society, and at least two vets in town attempting to reduce or limit a nearby cat colony, so I'm familiar with how the prohibition on releasing feral cats directly translates to inaction and a growing problem.

In 2022, the board expressed reluctance to allow the release of strays, citing their quality of life. However, trap-and-euthanize is already allowed, and is not sufficiently addressing the problem on its own. It is also broadly unpalatable to the public, which is always going to limit its efficacy. An open season on cats as deleterious wildlife, another proposal the board has seen before, is not practicable for similar reasons of palatability as well as its numerous undesirable side effects, like hunting pets for sport. In Juneau, there is will and enthusiasm here to see if we can solve this problem humanely, balancing reducing numbers with outright killing.

TNR may not be appropriate for all communities, but allowing this choice to be implemented locally would allow communities to create right-sized solutions for their particular situations. In Juneau, for example, when the shelter is overfull with kittens, stray cats simply go unsterilized (as they can be neither housed nor released). Allowing the release of sterilized cats would allow a spectrum of action, from motivated individuals helping neuter colonies in their neighborhood to a full TNR program.

This is currently illegal, which I clarify because in 2022, the board heard that anyone can trap and neuter stray cats. This is not true; because releasing stray cats is illegal, those who are able to sterilize them cannot and do not do so. More, agencies such as animal control in Juneau undertake enforcement, prohibiting access to traps and veterinary services and threatening trooper action on individuals. This is counter to everyone's goals in reducing feral cat numbers.

The board has heard requests from individuals and the municipality of Anchorage to have this tool made legal. We hear and understand department objections, which previously have been that

vaccine boosters cannot be guaranteed, and that high rates of sterilization may be required for TNR to be deeply effective. I also understand the board's reluctance to allow the trapping of an animal if it is to be released back to a life of suffering. Neither of these does anything to reduce feral cat numbers or their suffering. However, TNR is a tool Alaskans have repeatedly asked the board to permit us to try. There is less harm in allowing individual communities to attempt to fund and find their own solutions with this tool than continuing a blanket prohibition that clearly isn't effective enough.

I would support any amendment to regulation that permits implementation of humane TNR practices with whatever surgical language the board feels appropriate to both protect our wildlife and support reduction of feral cats in Alaska. Thank you for your time & service.

Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local fish and game advisory committee? I have worked with neighbors, community members, the humane society, and vets in trying to find a solution for feral cat colony in my neighborhood. The proposal is mine, though many referenced in the regulation and weren't familiar with how to change it.

PROPOSED BY: J. Rintala

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