

Written by Sharon Kivisto

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FRIDAY HARBOR, WA--San Juan Island National Historical Park and two partner organizations will soon move to reduce the feral cat population at American Camp through a trap-neuter/spay-release program scheduled to begin in March, announced park Superintendent Lee Taylor.

The Trap Neuter and Return (TNR) program, operated in concert with the Animal Protect Society of San Juan Island and the Ray of Hope Animal Sanctuary, will begin February 19 at American Camp, Taylor said. The traps will be set at dusk at feeding points established by the park over a 10-day period in areas known to be frequented by the feral cats. They will be checked each dawn.

Entrapped animals will be taken to the animal shelter where they will be examined, spayed or neutered vaccinated and, if inappropriate for adoption, returned to the park. The also will be tested for feline aids and leukemia as a safeguard to domestic cats in the area.

Tens of millions of feral and stray cats are annually reported in rural and urban communities throughout the United States. They have been a constant presence in the park, especially at American Camp, from its founding in 1966. They are most often abandoned pets that manage to survive and breed. It is unlawful to introduce any animal in a national park, Taylor said.

Feral cats cannot be adopted because they have been raised in the wild and have survived by avoiding humans. Stray cats will welcome contact even if timid at first. Feral cats live from three to five years and eat mostly rodents, but will also take ground nesting birds. Through periodic monitoring and employing the TNR protocols, the park hopes to permanently reduce the number of these cats at American and English camps.

“Our ultimate objective is to reduce the feral cat population to zero throughout the park in a humane manner,” Taylor said. “This approach is experimental and may take several years.”

The Whale Museum, through Ray of Hope, trapped and altered 27 cats, according to Jessica Ray, co-founder of Ray of Hope. Ten socialized cats were adopted, while among the remaining 17 several with feline aids had to be euthanized. The balance were vaccinated and released. As

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of this writing Ray of Hope reports that only four or five have been spotted in the vicinity of the museum.

Neutered or spayed feral cats are readily identified by ear tipping, a procedure that involves removing about a quarter inch off the tip of the cat's ear while the cat is anesthetized during the TNR process. This helps distinguish between ferals and strays and avoids unnecessary surgery, confinement, or euthanasia.

The park will utilize "Have A Heart" traps that weigh about 17 pounds apiece. Ray of Hope is providing the traps while the Animal Shelter through a grant will pick up the funding for sheltering, surgeries and vaccinations.

"The best way, obviously, to treat with this problem is not to abandon a pet in the park," Taylor said. "If this humane approach doesn't work, then we may have to consider other options."