

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS**

**Seventy-Eighth Session
March 16, 2015**

The Committee on Government Affairs was called to order by Chairman John Ellison at 9:06 a.m. on Monday, March 16, 2015, in Room 4100 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4404B of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website: www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/78th2015. In addition, copies of the audio or video of the meeting may be purchased, for personal use only, through the Legislative Counsel Bureau's Publications Office (email: publications@lcb.state.nv.us; telephone: 775-684-6835).

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblyman John Ellison, Chairman
Assemblyman John Moore, Vice Chairman
Assemblyman Richard Carrillo
Assemblywoman Victoria A. Dooling
Assemblyman Edgar Flores
Assemblywoman Amber Joiner
Assemblyman Harvey J. Munford
Assemblywoman Dina Neal
Assemblywoman Shelly M. Shelton
Assemblyman Stephen H. Silberkraus
Assemblywoman Ellen B. Spiegel
Assemblyman Lynn D. Stewart
Assemblyman Glenn E. Trowbridge
Assemblywoman Melissa Woodbury

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

None



GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

Assemblyman James Ohrenschall, Assembly District No. 12

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jered McDonald, Committee Policy Analyst
Eileen O'Grady, Committee Counsel
Erin Barlow, Committee Secretary
Cheryl Williams, Committee Assistant

OTHERS PRESENT:

Kevin Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, Nevada Humane Society
Keith Williams, Central Sponsor, Clark County Feral Cat Colony
Jason Allswang, Chief of Code Enforcement, Department
of Administrative Services, Clark County
Beverlee McGrath, representing the American Society for the Prevention
of Cruelty to Animals, Best Friends Animal Society, Nevada
Humane Society, Northern Nevada Society for the Prevention of
Cruelty to Animals, Tahoe Humane Society and Society for the
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Nevada Political Action for
Animals, Paw Political Action Group, Pet Network of Lake Tahoe,
Wylie Animal Rescue, Fallon Animal Welfare Group, Hidden Valley
Horse Rescue, the Las Vegas Compassion Charity for Animals,
Nevada Humane Society-Carson City
Caron Tayloe, representing League of Humane Voters
Margaret Flint, representing Canine Rehabilitation Center and Sanctuary,
and Nevadans for Responsible Wildlife Management
Elaine Carrick, Private Citizen, Reno, Nevada
Karen Layne, President, Las Vegas Valley Humane Society
John Hiatt, Conservation Chair, Red Rock Audubon Society of Las Vegas
John Sullivan, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada
Dennis Wilson, D.V.M., representing Nevada Veterinary Medical
Association
Mel Belding, Private Citizen, Reno, Nevada
Kyle Davis, representing Nevada Conservation League, and Coalition for
Nevada's Wildlife
Joel Blakeslee, representing Southern Nevada Coalition for Wildlife

Karen Boeger, Private Citizen, Washoe Valley, Nevada

Steve Nelson, Private Citizen, Fallon, Nevada

Jack Robb, Deputy Director, Nevada Department of Wildlife

Peregrine Wolff, D.V.M., Wildlife Veterinarian, Nevada Department
of Wildlife

Chairman Ellison:

[Roll was called. Committee rules and protocol were explained.] We have one bill for today.

Assembly Bill 261: Authorizes local governments to establish programs for the managed care of feral cat colonies. (BDR 20-1002)

Assemblyman James Ohrenschall, Assembly District No. 12:

I represent parts of Henderson and unincorporated Clark County. I believe Assembly Bill 261 is a bill which has a lot of noble goals. It would enable local governments throughout the state to adopt a program for feral cats that has proven very successful back in my home county, and as I understand it, up here in Washoe County. That program is Trap, Neuter, Release (TNR), or Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Release (TNVR). The program is an attempt to deal with the feral cat population.

What A.B. 261 does is enable local governments to adopt this program. It does not force any local government to try this out, unless there are two willing partners: a municipality and an animal welfare or relief organization who are both willing to undertake this. The statistics, which you will hear in testimony from Clark County, were jaw-dropping in the reduced number of cats that had to be euthanized. I believe it was 10,000 fewer in Clark County from the inception of the program, to last year. Similarly, I believe there has been great success in Washoe County as well. I do have some very knowledgeable witnesses here and in Clark County that I would like to have participate in the presentation.

I believe that a program like this is far better than the status quo. Cats have two to three litters a year. The status quo is not solving anything. There is not enough manpower to go out and try to trap all these animals and relocate them. Is this the ideal solution? Of course not. The ideal solution would be to find a loving family for each cat that is adoptable, and try to get them neutered, vaccinated, and housed with a family. But unfortunately, we are not going to accomplish that with this Legislature. I think A.B. 261 goes a long way toward trying to help these creatures and trying to control the population.

Chairman Ellison:

I see there is no fiscal note here. Is this something that is going to be adopted on a voluntary basis? How is this going to be paid for?

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

It depends. The way we wrote this bill was to leave it up to each county. I think we have good models in Clark and Washoe Counties, but how a county would set this up, if it wanted to, would depend on the county. I think it can be set up in terms of a public-private partnership with an animal welfare organization so that there will not be a big burden to the taxpayer. There would be a partner that wants to help these animals and get them neutered and vaccinated and then return them to where they came from. I do not see a big fiscal burden on the taxpayer. One thing I neglected to mention in my opening is that the bill also addresses the issue of abandonment. It clarifies that if someone is returning the animal after it has been spayed/neutered and vaccinated, there is no danger that they would be charged with abandoning the animal.

Chairman Ellison:

For the record, how much does it cost to take care of one of these animals?

Kevin Ryan, Chief Executive Officer, Nevada Humane Society:

It costs us around \$35 or \$40 per cat, if everything is hunky-dory, medically speaking. In Washoe County, the TNR program has been entirely funded by the Nevada Humane Society. Not only does this not cost taxpayers' dollars, it is actually a subsidy to the taxpayers, because ultimately something has to be done with the cats that are trapped and brought in to our partners at Washoe County Regional Animal Services. Whether they participate in TNR or trap and kill, according to a study, the national average is \$250 to trap and kill a cat. On a national average, it is \$200 to TNR a cat. It is not only less expensive, it is the only effective way of managing cat populations. As a private nonprofit in Washoe County, we absorb the cost of this program.

When speaking about TNR, you will hear lots of testimony today of people agreeing and disagreeing with me, but ultimately, the only scientifically efficacy-based approach to manage free-roaming cats is TNR. In this country, we have tried to trap and kill our way out of the problem for 100 years, and it simply does not work. Due to evolution, cats can reproduce faster than we can trap them. They can have up to three litters per year of four to six kittens on average. That is twelve to eighteen kittens each year, per cat. This becomes an exponentially increasing and compounding problem. If we TNR, not only do we reduce that ability to reproduce, but we also reduce behaviors as well as protect public health. All of the cats that come into Washoe County and

subsequently into the Nevada Humane Society are given the standard cat combination vaccine, as well as the rabies vaccine, and are altered and ear-tipped. When these cats leave, they are vaccinated against disease. Cats in the general public, including people's private free-roaming cats, may not have that. This is not only about being humane or protecting taxpayer dollars, it is also about protecting public health. I think that is a really important point.

Speaking of efficacy, there is no other option for managing these populations. The concept is to manage these colonies down to extinction. The goal of TNR is to have no more free-roaming cats. The only way to do that is TNR, because much like coyotes, there is a vacuum effect. If we take a cat out, other cats will fill the space. The only way to manage this population is TNR. There could be arguments made that cats should not be in our environment, that they are an invasive species. I am not a wildlife biologist, but the simple fact is that the toothpaste is out of the tube. Maybe they should have never been introduced, but they are there. The only way to reduce their population is TNR. It is also the only way that is tolerable to the citizenry and the voters. Harris Interactive did a national survey, and 80 percent of respondents believe that feral cat populations should be controlled with TNR, and that it is inhumane to trap a cat to kill it.

Not only that, but there is no test to determine if a cat is feral. Thirty percent of the cats that Nevada Humane Society takes over from Washoe County that are classified as feral are ultimately not actually feral. That is not incompetence; it is just very difficult to determine. Cats do not react the same way dogs do. If we do not encourage TNR or at least make it possible for counties, it could result in the accidental euthanizing of domesticated cats, which is something that is not tolerable to any of us. This is a local solution to a local problem. In no way does it dictate what county governments can do. It simply empowers them to come up with their own solution with their partners. To me, this is a synthesis for private and public partnerships. I think it is important to know that with TNR, a cat is vaccinated. A sick cat is not returned to the population. They will either be treated or humanely euthanized if they are not viable. Whether you love cats or hate cats, TNR is the solution. We all want fewer free-roaming cats and to protect public health.

We want to protect taxpayer dollars and not ask them to fund the euthanasia of cats in an ineffective program. Instead, a private organization in Washoe County would fund that transition. The Nevada Humane Society has over 100,000 active supporters. It strongly supports this bill. We have adopted 70,000 animals since 2007. In 2006, we were taking in over 8,000 cats in Washoe County. Now we are taking in fewer than 6,000 cats. This is a direct result of TNR programs and the physical manifestation of the

reductions that TNR can create. I strongly urge you to allow counties to make this decision for themselves, so we can reduce these populations, save taxpayer dollars, and save lives.

Chairman Ellison:

After you trap the cats and take them in, is there any way to mark them? These cats might be gathered up five or six times, and they could have been altered. How do you address that issue?

Kevin Ryan:

All TNR cats are ear-tipped, which means there is a notch taken out of their ear, and there is a visual manifestation that this cat has been altered. If the cat is in a trap and the cat has been ear-tipped, which this bill discusses, that cat will not be taken in. We just release the cat and know we have done a good job. That is what we want to see. We want to see colonies in which all the cats are ear-tipped, so we know this population is going to reduce, we are holding off the vacuum effect, and then we can move on to the next section of free-roaming cats.

Assemblyman Carrillo:

Currently, there are different groups in Clark County that do this type of thing. Why are we going through the process of making it controlled by the county? Regarding the releases—if an animal control officer thinks that someone is abandoning an animal, is that person covered as well?

Kevin Ryan:

The reason this bill is important to the Nevada Humane Society and the residents of northern Nevada is that this is a program that has gone on for between 13 to 16 years in Washoe County, but there was an opinion solicited from the Washoe County District Attorney's office which said that the *Nevada Revised Statutes* (NRS) defined that action as abandonment. We do not think that is abandonment. Most other counties do not think it is either. So this bill makes it clear that the state is neither sanctioning TNR nor making it illegal. It is simply saying the counties are empowered to make their own decisions based upon their community's needs and laws.

I can tell you that when the Nevada Humane Society does it, we make it very public. We wear our bright blue jackets with blue shirts when we release a cat back into the community. We paper the community with postcards explaining why these cats are returned. From the poster, everyone understands that if they have a concern, they can call the Nevada Humane Society, as well as an explanation of the program and why those cats have been returned. If they are not a giant fan of cats, it gives them a phone number to call, and we will

provide them with deterrents so that those cats will stay out of their yard. We have a variety of deterrents. We do create a situation in which we try to make everyone as happy as humanly possible.

Assemblyman Carrillo:

So if an individual caught a feral cat and took it in for TNR, and then released it, this bill would prevent them from being charged with abandonment?

Kevin Ryan:

Yes. In fact this bill would actually protect them. It changes the law to say that this action is not defined as abandonment. Currently, my next door neighbor, who is a little old lady who loves cats, participates in TNR because she does not want to see abandoned cats. Her participation could be interpreted by the state as abandonment. The county can pass a law, but this is clarifying that according to the state of Nevada, TNR is not abandonment. It is protecting those folks.

Assemblywoman Spiegel:

I have two cats; one was born a feral cat, and I adopted him as a kitten. The other had been abandoned. When I went to have her microchipped, it turned out that she already had a chip. I do not think anyone had ever checked it. So when cats are trapped and brought in, are they checked for microchips first, and is there an attempt made for them to be reunited if their owners exist?

Kevin Ryan:

I can only speak for Washoe County, but our partners at Washoe County Regional Animal Services do scan every animal in the truck, per policy. If they are picking up an animal, if an animal is brought in to them or transferred over to Nevada Humane Society, the animal is scanned. In Washoe County, we work very hard to make sure we are microchipping. You hit a very important point in that not every free-roaming cat is a feral cat. There are actually neural pathway differences between a feral cat and a domestic cat. We want to make sure that if there is an owner, we return the animal.

Washoe County Regional Animal Services and Nevada Humane Society officers here in Carson City work really hard to return animals. But the sad reality is that only 3 to 6 percent of cats that are owned are reclaimed at an animal facility. Most cats are just given up. We know that when most cats run away, they are less than a block from their houses. These programs are designed to not only protect public health and reduce free-roaming cat populations, but to also make sure that we are not abducting someone's cat that is just hanging out under the deck.

Assemblywoman Dooling:

When you talk about releasing the cats, do you just put them back out where they were?

Kevin Ryan:

We use the word return because we are putting them back where they came from, and only when they are thriving. We would never put back a cat that is sick, injured, or does not seem to be well-nourished. The number of cats that come in under that category are an extremely small percentage. But if that is the case, we adopt them through our barn cat program. Most animal welfare organizations have a barn cat program. In this case, the cat will not be an affectionate cat that sits on your lap as you read the newspaper, but they can patrol your barn for rodents and pests. We do not just release them under any circumstance.

Most of the feral cat colonies have colony caretakers, which means that the cats are being fed, watered, and monitored. We have a program called the Cat Action Team, which works with colony caretakers should they need food, by providing our pet food assistance. They work with folks who do not like cats and provide them with deterrents, as well as helping to monitor. In some mobile home communities, there are a number of colonies that are not managed. The Nevada Humane Society helps manage those populations by making sure that any cats who show up are TNRed as well as making sure they are healthy, in order to manage that colony down to extinction. There are a variety of models. It is one of those problems that takes a village. This is the only program that works with those communities to reduce and eliminate those populations.

Assemblywoman Dooling:

How do you trap them?

Kevin Ryan:

There are humane traps. We work in areas where we put up posters before and after. On the postcards, we say we know there have been cats in the community and had complaints. We know there are certain areas where there are a lot of cats, but it is mostly complaint-driven. People call in and tell us there are a bunch of cats. So we will ask for information and try to find out who is feeding the cats, because they are usually being fed by a caretaker. We will communicate with them and say, we are going to trap Tuesday morning, so do not feed them until we get there. We will put out humane traps with food that shut once the cat walks in. The cats are brought in, altered, vaccinated, ear-tipped, and returned to the community. We work with those caretakers to make sure this is accomplished.

With this back and forth, there is sometimes distrust in the communities because they are afraid the cats are never going to come back. So we make sure they understand and work with those communities whether they be subdivisions, mobile home communities, or businesses, to make sure everyone is on board. We give everyone the resources to be successful in the program.

Assemblywoman Dooling:

I happen to own a feral cat that came from Heaven Can Wait Animal Sanctuary. How does a private agency like Heaven Can Wait get a feral cat?

Kevin Ryan:

In Washoe County, there are three ways a feral cat can come into the system. It could come through Washoe County Regional Animal Services, where an officer has taken in a cat. That is not the typical intake, unless it was in danger, because there is no law against free-roaming cats in the state of Nevada or in Washoe County. In that case, the cat would have to be trespassing, or in danger.

It could also be the case that someone trapped it and brought it in as a stray, which Washoe County would accept. In Washoe County, the period is five days, and in Las Vegas I think it might be three days until the cat is transferred to the Nevada Humane Society. At that point, we would conduct TNR or introduce it to the barn cat program, or if it is not a feral cat, we can put it up for adoption after it goes through all the necessary steps. In Washoe County, it is also possible that if you have feral cats and claim them as your own, you can bring them in to our TNR program, where we cover the cost for everything. You bring in the cat, we vaccinate, alter, ear-tip, and return it to you so that you can return it to your community. We lend traps and try to make it as easy as possible for people to do the right thing. [Also provided a letter ([Exhibit C](#)).]

Keith Williams, Central Sponsor, Clark County Feral Cat Colony:

My position is a volunteer position both in Clark County and in Las Vegas. As the central sponsor under Clark County Ordinance 10.06 and Las Vegas City Code 7.22, I have been heavily involved with the implementation of TNR programs and closely monitored their progress in these jurisdictions. The approach has been to augment the existing system for managing the cats rather than to replace it. Citizens' desire to trap and remove nuisance cats continues to be supported by animal control departments. Those who prefer to do TNR are supported by the nonprofit animal welfare groups. [Mr. Williams continued to read from ([Exhibit D](#)).] Please allow us to do the right thing for the animals and the citizens of Nevada.

Assemblyman Stewart:

I understand that a cat colony is removed eventually through this TNR technique. Can you tell me approximately how long it takes to eliminate a colony?

Keith Williams:

The mortality rate for these cats is estimated to be about 25 percent a year. In a fair-sized colony, we will normally see a population reduction of as much as 50 percent the first year, and then a continual decline over time. That is a hard question to answer, because occasionally a new cat will move in. Some of these cats live a short life, some live quite a long life, but I certainly have gotten enough calls from colony caretakers reporting that all of their cats are gone, and the colony essentially no longer exists. Within 10 years, if the TNR is done correctly and enthusiastically, there should be virtually no cats at that site.

Jason Allswang, Chief of Code Enforcement, Department of Administrative Services, Clark County:

We work very closely with Keith Williams and C5, which is the organization that sponsors all of our colonies. We also work closely with Heaven Can Wait, the Las Vegas Humane Society, and other groups on our feral cat program. We have a very successful program in southern Nevada. Clark County and the City of Las Vegas both participate. We believe, under our current statutory authority, that we do have the right to regulate free-roaming animals, and as such we developed this program. We do support the bill as presented. We do have just a few concerns that we would like to see addressed to make sure we can continue to do business as usual and perhaps step up our operations in the future to ensure that fewer cats are euthanized.

Our proposal has been submitted to you ([Exhibit E](#)). We appreciate that on page 2, line 13, you give us the authority to establish a program for the managed care of feral cat colonies. That helps us solidify the fact that we are doing the right thing. Our concern is with the definitions that are listed below that on page 2, lines 15 through 28, and also on the next page in definitions for a city government, lines 16 to 29. Our concern with having the definitions in state statute is firstly that those definitions are different than the definitions we currently use in southern Nevada. This will result in a code change for us. It may also result in changes to our program. We have not been able to fully analyze what changes may be needed, but with our program being very successful, we want to do as little as possible to risk changes to the program unless it will result in fewer cats being euthanized. We ask that the definitions be removed from statute, and that would leave the authority with cities and counties to determine what program works best for them, and to continue operating as usual, at least for us in Clark County.

I would also like to point out that the definition of feral cat in the proposal states that the cat has no apparent identification. It is not often, but we do come across animals that have been abandoned by previous owners that are microchipped, but the animal has been living with a colony for so long that they have become more feral in nature, and they are not socialized enough to be adopted out. Our code would conflict with that, if any chipped animal would be returned to its owner or evaluated for adoption and not returned to a colony. Removing the definition would allow that animal to go back to the colony it came from. With those changes, we are very happy to support the bill.

Assemblywoman Neal:

In your strikeout, you struck the definition of a feral cat. Is there something that limits your flexibility when it defines feral as "unsocialized to humans, unmanageable or otherwise demonstrates characteristics associated with wild or undomesticated animals"? Is there a broader definition that fits your needs? What kind of encounters do you run into where the animal is unsocialized to humans?

Jason Allswang:

With our current program, every animal that is trapped is brought in either to be altered and vaccinated at one of our partner organizations, or it goes to the shelter to be evaluated for behavior. Our definition of feral cat is much broader and general, in that it is an animal that appears wild and unsociable. It may have ownership identification on it. I will read you our definition: "a cat born in the wild or abandoned and is not socialized or appropriate as a companion for humans." The concern from the county is that by putting definitions in state statute, the statute may preempt us from continuing with abandoned animals as being feral, and may result in more animals being euthanized as a nuisance animal versus going to a colony.

Beverlee McGrath, representing the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Best Friends Animal Society, Nevada Humane Society, Northern Nevada Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Tahoe Humane Society and Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Nevada Political Action for Animals, Paw Political Action Group, Pet Network of Lake Tahoe, Wylie Animal Rescue, Fallon Animal Welfare Group, Hidden Valley Horse Rescue, the Las Vegas Compassion Charity for Animals, Nevada Humane Society-Carson City:

Here are a couple of numbers. The Humane Society of the United States states that there are 2.7 million cats and dogs euthanized in shelters every year. We think that number is too high, and we think that anything that can be done to lower that number is to the benefit of our society as a whole, and certainly the animals. I would like to clarify that A.B. 261 is not a mandate. It merely

allows for counties and cities to adopt a TNR program. There is nothing to prevent a county or city from continuing with a trap and kill policy or to include a TNR program.

I would like to thank Assemblyman Carrillo for bringing up the point that currently in the NRS, TNR is classified as abandonment if someone takes an animal to a location and drops the animal. For the purposes of protecting caregivers, we would like to see this bill passed. The cost for pickup, transport, housing, euthanizing, and disposal has already been brought to your attention. The costs of the TNR program are completely covered by nonprofits. We feel the TNR programs protect public health as well as any domesticated cats that might come into contact with feral cats. These cats are vaccinated for rabies, and they have the cat combination vaccination before they are turned loose. Diseased cats are never released. We see this as a real benefit to humans because the cats are not currently vaccinated for rabies or with the combination vaccine. TNR reduces the number of feral cats because the cats cannot reproduce and eventually the colonies are eliminated.

I would like to clarify that the colonies are fed by caregivers, so there is less threat to the bird and rodent population. We believe this is a key component of the bill because we understand there is some opposition concerning bird populations. When animals are fed regularly, they are not going to seek rodents and birds. Because of the continued contact with caregivers, these animals are becoming socialized and therefore adoptable, and will ultimately be taken off the street and put into homes because they can be handled. That is another advantage. I think you have been shown that Washoe and Clark Counties, the two major counties in Nevada who are supportive of this bill and have these programs in place, have TNR programs that are successful. But I would also like you to consider that the TNR programs are more humane. We do not have to be trapping and killing cats. [Also provided supplemental information ([Exhibit F](#)).]

Chairman Ellison:

Cats are predatory hunters, no matter what they are fed. They will still hunt birds and other things, is that correct?

Kevin Ryan:

Cats are actually compensatory predators, which means they will most likely take ill or injured animals. They are scientifically compensatory, but in vernacular terms, they are lazy predators. They will eat what is most available, though it certainly depends. I had a neighbor cat growing up who ate a lot of rabbits. But in the end, as a species, they are compensatory predators.

The prey they take is more likely to die as a result of illness or injury. Cats are not the most effective hunters in the world.

Caron Tayloe, representing League of Humane Voters:

We are in support of this bill, and you have our letter of support ([Exhibit G](#)). We like this bill because it allows for individual and unique counties to make their own decisions. TNR is scientifically sound and humane.

Margaret Flint, representing Canine Rehabilitation Center and Sanctuary, and Nevadans for Responsible Wildlife Management:

I will make this short and sweet: we are 'paw'-sitively in support of this bill.

Elaine Carrick, Private Citizen, Reno, Nevada:

I am currently a volunteer at the Nevada Humane Society, and I do a variety of volunteer jobs there. Sometimes I am there during the trap and neuter program. When people bring in the traps with the feral cats in them, everyone seems to be very enthusiastic about the program, and it does seem to be lowering the feral cat populations out in different areas.

Chairman Ellison:

Is anybody else in favor of the bill? [There was no one.] We will move on to neutral.

Karen Layne, President, Las Vegas Valley Humane Society:

We are in support of this bill, but per the requirements of the Assembly, I do have some concerns regarding language, so I am signed in as neutral. Some of that has been previously discussed, but let me say that the Las Vegas Valley Humane Society has been conducting a TNR program in Clark County since 1991. We have been very involved in this issue, and we are one of the groups that now works with Clark County. Our feral cat program probably runs us about \$50,000 a year, including all the costs outside of the subsidized costs that are provided to us through our Clark County branch of Heaven Can Wait Animal Society. We are paying about \$30 at Heaven Can Wait for the cost of altering, but there are other costs that we have associated with the program in terms of trapping. One of the points I would also like to make is that we have provided funding for groups outside Las Vegas. We are currently assisting programs in Pahrump. We pay for about 30 spay and neuter procedures at Heaven Can Wait per month. We are working right 'meow' with a program in Tonopah to do the same thing. We also work with a veterinarian in Elko whom we provide costs for.

We think these programs are critically important and help reduce the feral cat overpopulation problem. We are a rescue organization, and we used to spend

a lot of our time going out on kitten calls, probably eight months of the year. Those numbers have been substantially reduced because of this program. I think it is critically important that everyone understand that as a humane society, we are committed to the cost of this program. We think that in the long run, it is the best thing to do.

The two issues that I have concerns with are the wording on page 2, line 27 of the bill and on page 3 line 28. It says "release feral cats that have been sterilized and vaccinated for rabies," and that should be clarified to say they should be released to their original location. This program does not recommend relocation of any cats; we are not in favor of that. We want to make sure people understand that they go back to where they came from. The other issue that I have concerns with is the fact that this is done through live, humane box traps and not through any kind of leg or body-gripping trap. Those are the two concerns of mine.

Assemblyman Carrillo:

Are you aware of cats currently being caught in any way other than the humane method for the purpose of TNR?

Karen Layne:

There is a member of the Nevada Trappers Association here, John Sullivan, who can also speak to that issue. But in the Nevada Wildlife Commission meetings, we looked at data. Remember that leg-hold trapping is very indiscriminate. What you will see in that data, under non-targeted information, is that cats are trapped in leg-hold traps. Sometimes they are released alive, sometimes they are dead. So there is trapping of cats as a non-targeted animal.

Assemblyman Carrillo:

I just wanted to understand what the case was. I was under the impression that these animals were caught in a cage where there is food to lure them in, and not in any other form.

Chairman Ellison:

Those in opposition, please come forward. Are you trying to tell me that this is not a 'purr-fect' bill?

John Hiatt, Conservation Chair, Red Rock Audubon Society of Las Vegas:

I am somewhat neutral on this bill, but my concern is the impact of feral cats on bird and small animal populations. I personally know people who care for feral cat colonies, and they have been doing it for years, but those colonies never seem to disappear. They have just as many cats now as they did 10 years ago. I would like to believe the proponents, that all these colonies will disappear in

a measureable length of time, but it does not seem to happen. That is my concern.

Another concern is that when a property owner deals with animal control to try and get rid of a feral cat, if the feral cat is just neutered and brought right back to the same place, the homeowner is not protected, and their problem is not solved. This bill does nothing to address that issue. There is some work we need to do to solve the feral cat problem. I am not sure this bill provides much in the way of answers.

Chairman Ellison:

Are there any questions? [There were none.]

John Sullivan, Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada:

I belong to several wildlife conservation groups, but I am here representing myself today. I am opposed to the establishment of feral cat colonies primarily because of the impact on wildlife. What is that impact? The Wildlife Society has studied this issue intensely and estimates that the conservative impact in the United States is 8.3 billion birds and mammals killed by feral cats, and could be as high as 24 billion per year. When I first read these numbers, I thought there was a mistake and they meant millions per year, but in fact it is billions. That is an immense number. As an advocate for all animals, I do not see how we can choose one species to support at such an enormous expense to so many other animals and species.

There is no study I am aware of regarding the impact state by state, so I broke it down a couple different ways such as our state population versus other states, or dividing the total by 50. I used four different methods. The impact of feral cats in Nevada on wildlife is 69 million per year, but could be as high as 488 million per year. According to the Wildlife Society on this issue, feral and free-roaming domestic cats are an exotic species to North America. Exotic species are recognized as one of the most widespread and serious threats to the integrity of native wildlife populations and natural ecosystems. Perhaps no issue has captured more of the challenges for contemporary wildlife management than the impacts of feral or free-ranging domestic cats on native wildlife. The policy of the Wildlife Society regarding feral and free-roaming domestic cats is to support and encourage the humane elimination of feral cat populations, including colonies, through adoption into indoor-only homes of eligible cats, and the humane euthanasia of unadoptable cats. As an advocate for wildlife, I agree with this policy.

Chairman Ellison:

Are there any questions? [There were none.] We will come back to Carson City.

Dennis Wilson, D.V.M., representing Nevada Veterinary Medical Association:

The Nevada Veterinary Medical Association promotes animal health, public health, and responsible pet ownership. As such, we have significant concerns with the establishment and promotion of feral cat colonies. We will talk about animal health first. Many of these cats suffer from premature mortality from injuries and diseases. I see these in my practice. I run the Animal Emergency Center in Reno. We see feral cats and abandoned cats hit by cars, mauled by dogs, with gunshot wounds, and so on. There is no reason to subject these creatures to this kind of situation. Living in the wild is a very rough existence. They are without shelter, proper nutrition, protection from injury, or even the most minimal veterinary care. The lifespan of feral and abandoned cats is documented to be from one quarter to one sixth of the lifespan of cats kept in homes or in confined, safe areas. I want to make this clear. Trap, neuter, vaccinate, and release (TNVR) is really re-abandonment. We, as veterinarians, cannot support re-abandoning these animals. You will hear today that wildlife deaths associated with free-roaming cats are significant.

The next thing is public health. Cats are carriers of many potential diseases that can affect people. Toxoplasmosis is the first one to talk about. Toxoplasmosis is a parasitic organism that lives in the intestine of cats. Cats are the only known primary source of this disease. Toxoplasmosis causes significant disease to pregnant women and their unborn fetuses. It also has been implicated in neurological diseases, including behavioral, neurodegenerative, and dementia conditions in people. Please remember that cats are the source of this. Feral cats are the most common rabid domestic animal. Exposure to rabid cats leads to more post-exposure prophylactic treatment of humans than exposure to any other species. Inoculating a cat against rabies does not reduce the incidence of post-exposure prophylaxis, or the associated public health risks and costs. I want to make a point about what we heard about the immunization of these feral cats. That is wonderful for those that are caught. Many of the cats in these colonies cannot be caught. One immunization does not provide complete immunity. As you might know with your own pets, a series of immunizations is required in a timely fashion. To assume that one immunization is protective is a fallacy. Cats carry other parasitic, fungal, and bacterial diseases that are potentially transmissible to humans.

I want to tell you about one other item that is the perfect storm waiting to happen here in Washoe County. There are managed feral cat populations along the Truckee River. Bats are the number one rabies-positive animal in this state.

There is a summer roosting place for the Mexican free-tailed bat along the McCarran Bridge by the university's farm in Reno, where thousands and thousands of Mexican free-tailed bats spend their summer in very close proximity to this feral cat population. It will only take one instance of a feral cat catching a rabid bat, becoming infected and biting a person or heaven forbid, a child, and then there will be huge issues. That is something that could be prevented should these feral cat colonies be managed appropriately. For program management, trap, neuter, vaccinate, and removal is the answer.

I emphasize the adoption of adoptable cats to responsible homes. I own one, she is delightful. An emphasis on the properly designed and managed enclosures for the management of feral cat colonies should be considered. That would protect the cats, wildlife, and the public from the potential issues of these colonies. Education is of utmost importance. Responsible pet ownership needs to be truly worked with to keep cats indoors. It is unlawful to abandon cats, and managed feral cat colonies result in harm to the cats, public health issues, and wildlife issues. I have documentation for all of these statements I have made today, scientific papers and decades' worth of work that I can provide.

Assemblywoman Spiegel:

The piece that I do not understand is how the defeat of this bill would address your concerns. As I see it, this is enabling language that would allow for the management of the feral cat colonies, which would include giving rabies shots. If the bill is defeated, and the groups that are doing this now either have obstacles to managing the feral cat colonies or are then banned from it, the feral cat colonies would still exist and would not be sterilized, vaccinated, or treated for rabies.

Dennis Wilson:

Our issue is the rerelease of these cats. That is the number one issue. To answer your question, yes, of course these colonies will continue to exist. Our position is that we do not want it legislated that rereleasing these cats is appropriate.

Assemblywoman Neal:

I have learned a lot in this hearing. If your issue is rerelease, what is the solution? I know you said cat ownership and finding homes, but are there enough homes for the cats to go to? What is the middle ground between rerelease and finding a place for them to be? You cited a lot of things. You said we could run into a situation where the cat eats a bat, then gets rabies that could infect children and other people. It seems like there are these wide chasms of things that can occur here. What is the middle ground between the

bill that is presented and what you perceive to be the right thing, knowing that there are not enough places for cats to go?

Dennis Wilson:

Sadly, at this point, there is no easy answer to this situation. I am not going to pretend that there is. Certainly adoption is key. If possible, there should be appropriate enclosures maintained. I realize the cost on that must be significant to protect these cats, the public, and wildlife. But that would be wonderful. Some of these cats will end up being euthanized. That is correct. That is not something that we would place at the top of the list. But by definition, euthanasia is a humane death. If it comes to protecting human lives or protecting animal lives from something that we know we can prevent, then sadly that might have to be the third option.

Assemblywoman Neal:

Clark County Animal Control said they wanted flexibility in the definition of "unsocialized," and several other things. My understanding is that if you put a standard out there of what type of cat is not manageable, then what definition and standard should we apply for the euthanasia of a cat? How unmanageable, wild, and unsociable should they be to fit the standard of euthanasia? Clark County wants flexibility; this bill wants a standard and definition of what is and what is not a feral cat. You are a veterinarian. What should the definition be? Which kind of cat should be euthanized?

Dennis Wilson:

My feeling is that definitions along those lines should not be legislated because there are so many different areas. My hope would be that through the different entities and humane groups, they could work with these cats and try to get some at least socialized to a certain degree and then find them homes or appropriate locations. It is looking through rose-colored glasses to assume that every cat is going to fit that. My suggestion is that kind of definition not be legislated.

Chairman Ellison:

I had a real problem this last year with feral cats. A woman across the street from me started feeding the cats, and the next thing I knew, she had 20 or more. I kept calling animal control. These cats were coming over and spraying my house. I spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars trying to figure out ways to keep these cats away. Finally, it got to the point where either animal control showed up to do something or I would. Finally, they caught these cats. There were ranchers who would take them and put them in barns out of town; they wanted these cats. But animal control would rather catch them and dispose of them. I finally got half of them out to a ranch, but the problem was that the

animal control people said they would rather deal with an aggressive dog than a feral cat because they are so mean. Is there a way to keep them away from your house if they did release cats in the same neighborhood? They are still going to have the same problem with not being wanted.

Believe me, my wife is a cat person. She has a cat that she gives two shots a day to because it is diabetic. She spends hundreds of dollars on her animals. But the issue was that all these feral cats were spraying our house, and I went all the way to Idaho to buy cayenne pepper because someone said that if you put that around the place, the cats will not spray. But that did not work too well, either.

Dennis Wilson:

You have touched on some of the ideas we heard earlier in testimony, and maybe humane groups have other ideas as well. One thing I did not touch on is public nuisance. It is a major issue as well with feral cat colonies. The situation is that we are not in support of those cats being caught, immunized, altered, ear-tipped, and then rereleased right in your backyard or neighborhood. That is simply not appropriate. Removing them is the key. If you can relocate them, sometimes you are relocating the same issue. But if there were appropriate areas to put those cats where they would be safe and where wildlife and the public would also be safe, that is what we are in favor of.

Mel Belding, Private Citizen, Reno, Nevada:

I was asked to read a letter before I start my testimony. It was written to Larry Johnson from Jeffrey Paddock. "The following details the result of a cat bite." [Mr. Belding continued to read from ([Exhibit H](#)).] As for myself, I am here for wildlife and those 33 species of birds that have been exterminated by feral cats. One only has to google "feral cats" to see most of the testimony you have heard here today from opponents.

I heard some very alarming problems with this program, one being that most of these feral cat colonies are managed by a caretaker. Why do we not have all of them managed by a caretaker? I am here for wildlife, who do not have a voice in this. The program in Las Vegas has been here for 25 years. You would think that with a 25 percent mortality rate in the colony that these animals would not be in the abundance that they are. We heard testimony that there were 8,000 brought in some years ago and 6,000 now. What happens to those kittens that are brought in by the public? Where are they going to end up? A cat has two or three litters a year, someone does not want them, they end up in the pound. Now we are going to vaccinate those kittens and dump them on the river system. I am for the cat colonies on private property. As a wildlife advocate, I cannot condone putting feral cats on public property. I was told

that the cost of euthanization is more than vaccination. I have a whole page of things that I could say. I am for cat colonies on private property, but I am not for them on public grounds. I oppose the bill as written.

Assemblyman Carrillo:

I have a friend who was bitten by his own domestic cat, and he had the same experience as described in the letter, where his pinky finger swelled up the same way, and he had to go through the whole process that you explained. I have always heard that cats have dirty mouths. My concern is in specifying a feral cat versus a domestic cat. I am not saying that your story does not hold water, but we have to keep in mind that cats on the whole have dirty mouths, and infection is definitely possible. I wanted to differentiate that it is not only a feral cat that will give you a disease, it could be a domestic cat too. The cat my friend owned for nine years ended up infecting him. When it ended up being an infection, he went to the doctor and ended up going to the emergency room for it. I wanted to clarify for the Committee that it is not only feral cats that could get you in that situation, domestic cats could also.

Mel Belding:

I would like to address that. A week ago, I received a cornea transplant. Within three days, I had a very bad infection in that eye. The surgeons believe it was from stagnant water, but it turned out that it came from some plaque that had been in my bloodstream. I am still in danger of losing that eye. But I believe that under proper care by veterinarians, we can control a lot of disease from domesticated cats that live in a home. I know feral cats are not getting the same care and love that an owned cat does.

Kyle Davis, representing Nevada Conservation League, and Coalition for Nevada's Wildlife:

We are opposed to the bill as written here today. Frankly, we just do not believe it is good public policy to be encouraging the release of feral cats back onto public lands and areas where they can harm wildlife. I think the one thing I would point out that was brought up in the proponent's testimony was if cats are fed, they will hunt less. There are plenty of studies that show cats are essentially highly skilled predators, and even when fed daily, they continue to hunt wildlife. We see that from the data you were given by previous speakers and from experience as well. Even when you do feed cats, feral or domestic, it continues to be the case that they continue to hunt. That has a significant impact on native ecosystems.

The main reason we oppose the bill today is that we think the survival of species, and the health and integrity of entire ecosystems, needs a state presence, especially when you are dealing with feral animals who were

previously domesticated. Cats are not native; they are an exotic species to North America. They are recognized as one of the most widespread and serious threats to the integrity of native wildlife populations and natural ecosystems. There is no doubt that we have a significant public problem when it comes to feral cats in our communities. The bill you are faced with today would essentially make the practice of TNVR legal. It is the release of these animals that we have concerns with. Yes, if this bill does not pass, we still have a problem with feral cats. This is a problem that we need to deal with. I do not think we should be taking the step of having this public policy in place simply because we may have some groups that are advocates and willing to put some funding behind it. We need to look at what is the best state public policy overall. I do not think it is the best public policy to be releasing exotic animals back into our native ecosystems and letting them cause widespread damage to wildlife, which is well-documented by numerous studies.

Chairman Ellison:

What about nuisance? It has only been brought up once. If the cats are released into the areas they already were a problem in, do you have any recommendations on how to control that nuisance? When there are 20 cats spraying your house, that is a problem.

Kyle Davis:

I agree with you, this is a problem. I think where we are at in looking at this issue is the point of rerelease. Should they be released back into the same area, or into a separate area? Our position would be that rereleasing into the same area is an irresponsible thing to do because of the problems that occur like the problem you were bringing up, as well as impacts on wildlife that we have identified. I generally agree with what Mr. Wilson was saying, that we have to look at different options once we trap. In some cases, maybe the cat can be adopted out, maybe we can come up with a type of colony that is enclosed so it does not have impacts on wildlife. But in some cases, probably the most appropriate method is euthanasia, because that is going to be the way we can deal with the situation and still maintain animal control operations. There are a number of different options we are faced with after trapping these animals, but I think it is an irresponsible position to be releasing them back into the ecosystem.

Assemblyman Moore:

I have several cats myself that were feral cats. They have been some of the best cats I have ever owned. I would never support euthanasia as an alternative that you have put forward. Do you have a more viable alternative?

Kyle Davis:

Ideally, we could find solutions. Obviously, the last resort solution would be euthanasia, adoptions and enclosed cat colonies being the two preferred solutions. It is a difficult situation to be faced with when we have an overpopulation of feral cats. But our feeling is that when you rerelease feral cats, you are choosing what animal you want to sacrifice. The facts are clear that feral cats are a significant predator on native wildlife. That is our main concern. The answers are certainly not easy, but I think we have to weigh all these things when we make a public policy decision.

Assemblywoman Dooling:

Could you accept that this bill would be a step while we are trying to find some alternate ways to deal with this, just for the sake of the vaccinations and altering? As I said before, I have a cat who was previously feral, and it did take a while for it to become comfortable in the home. So I understand that problem. But I am also against the euthanasia part of it too. My perfect world would be to find a solution to this so we would have a wonderful, happy world with cats, and they would not be subject to the wild and killing our wildlife. Would any of the bill's opponents think that this would be a step toward helping the situation while we are looking for alternatives?

Kyle Davis:

The very short answer is no. I do not think that taking the step as a state to release feral cats after they have been trapped is an appropriate public policy. I certainly want to figure out a way to try and solve this problem, but I do not think this is an appropriate public policy.

Assemblyman Trowbridge:

I do not think anyone believes that the approach to vaccinate and alter is a bad thing. The issue is the relocation, rerelease, or re-abandonment of the cats. It sounds like the solution to that is, beyond education and finding meaningful homes, to set up some kind of shelter which would ultimately fall on the taxpayers, nonprofits, or volunteer groups, which is extremely expensive.

My read on A.B. 261 is that it is enabling legislation that would allow counties to put in policies, county-by-county, for what they think is best for their areas, be it making feral cats into barn cats, house cats, and so on. Different approaches for different areas are appropriate. I cannot see throwing out the good for lack of a perfect bill. Without some kind of fiscal impact to identify who will pay for the facilities to accommodate nonadoptable cats, we are throwing out a good bill that encourages the counties to establish their own policies. If you can come up with who will pay for the shelters, count me in on it, but do not ask me to pay for it.

Assemblywoman Spiegel:

We received a proposed amendment [page 2, [\(Exhibit I\)](#)] from the Department of Wildlife from Dr. Peregrine Wolff, but I do not know if you saw it. What this proposed amendment asks the bill to do is prohibit feral cat colonies and the release of feral cats "near or in any conservation area, state, or federal land, including National Park Service, National Forest, and United States Bureau of Land Management, wetlands, or any other lands managed for wildlife" [page 4, [\(Exhibit I\)](#)], and I was wondering if you would be able to comment on that proposed amendment, which seems like it would address some of your concerns, perhaps not all, but some?

Kyle Davis:

I have not seen that amendment, so I would be interested in looking at that. It does speak to some of the concerns that we have. There are probably other concerns that are not specifically related to conservation of wildlife that would still exist. I would be interested in taking a look at it.

Joel Blakeslee, representing Southern Nevada Coalition for Wildlife:

To speak to Assemblyman Trowbridge's concerns: I think if you look at page 2, line 27, that is one of our main concerns of this bill, along with section 3, subsection 3, paragraph (c). Both of those include releasing, and I think that is 100 percent of our concerns. We can talk all day on the rest of this, about experiences like my daughter had. She was attending a barbecue along the river in a county park with a bunch of other young mothers. When they fired up the barbecues, out came the cats by the dozens. Her friends all gathered their kids up to keep them away from these cats. It is a public safety issue. If you have a bunch of little kids wanting to pet the cats, that is a problem. That is just one example.

Our concern as a wildlife agency is giving an enhanced status to a non-native species over an endemic species. The toxoplasmosis that Dr. Wilson talked about cannot be vaccinated against. It is a parasitic organism that infects waterways. I was just reading a study on how it kills mink and muskrats. Those are the two species it discussed, but since mink and skunk are in the same family, I assume those and other animals could be at risk. This is something that is not just transmitted by scratches and bites, which is also a big concern, but it is transmitted in our waterways. Another item to bring up is the genesis of this bill. I attended the Washoe County hearing on this, and the County Attorney said that the way things are done right now, it is illegal and violates the animal abandonment laws. They deferred it and said, Let the Legislature handle it. Speaking of laws, if you release any wildlife species into the environment like this, you would be violating state and federal laws. You cannot bring an animal from another country and release it into the wild, or

you go to jail. So there are concerns about bringing in non-native predators of all kinds, not only mammals, but birds, fish, and plants. About 60 percent of noxious weeds have been introduced like this.

I do not believe that society would tolerate these colonies if they knew about them. They would not tolerate feral dog or horse colonies. I would say we should change the wording from rerelease to re-abandon, because that is what this is. If there are shelters made, I am fine with that, just do not release them onto public lands and into the wild because it affects the wild animals that belong here.

Assemblyman Moore:

Do you own pets?

Joel Blakeslee:

No, I do not. My ex-wife did, and the lady who rents my guest house has five dogs, five horses, 50 chickens, and on my property there are a lot of animals. But I travel quite a bit, and I do not own any pets.

Assemblyman Moore:

Do you have any other alternative solutions?

Joel Blakeslee:

Create some colonies that are enclosed. But do not release them into the wild. That is my concern.

Chairman Ellison:

In Maui in Hawaii, up toward the Seven Sacred Pools, there is a park by the Black Sand Beach, and I have never seen anything like the thousands of cats everywhere there in my life. It was amazing to see that they were allowed to get that far out of control. If you feed them, they will keep on breeding, even if you try to remove as many as you can. I think if you feed them, they will come. That is a problem that I saw.

Joel Blakeslee:

The same situation exists on the Truckee River.

[Assemblyman Moore assumed the Chair.]

Karen Boeger, Private Citizen, Washoe Valley, Nevada:

I am on the boards of three different conservation organizations, but I am speaking for myself today. I want to preface my remarks by saying to Assemblywoman Dooling—I am all about making a long and healthy life for cats.

I am a 70-year-old cat lover myself, who has always had them in my life up until the past two years, and being from a rural background, also had barn cats. That said, I think Assemblyman Trowbridge really summed up what seems to be the opinion of what most of us opposed here: the rerelease of these animals into public or private land in an unconfined situation.

I want to emphasize something that seems to be forgotten. These animals will suffer an inhumane death in some way or another, whether or not they are altered, fed, or so on. Even though they are altered and fed, they will still degrade wildlife to some extent. The issue is the cats not being confined on public land. I would like to address how to solve that problem without it costing all of us for what is primarily peoples' irresponsibility, not entirely, but to some degree. I think one thing Dr. Wilson brought up is that we need a vigorous education campaign. I know there is quite a bit of education out there, but maybe we could do more about informing people of the responsibility to alter their cats, and the negative impacts of letting them roam, or dumping a cat. If it is an outside cat, keep it in a confined area and bring it in at night, because that is the time of most wildlife degradation.

Being a retired schoolteacher, I think this education should be extended to schoolchildren, and the younger the better. I remember as a kid in the 1950s, when the Litter Bug campaign was underway. We all bugged our parents whenever we saw them toss something out their car window. I think that is what made that anti-litter campaign effective. We should get to the kids early. It is a problem-solving skill, which is always good for kids to have in school anyway. Also, are there sufficient spay/neuter clinics in locations of highest need, at a reduced fee, or for free? Maybe some of these cats get dumped because the family has not been able to afford to alter them, and they have litters on their hands. That is another approach.

Another thing is to ask ourselves some questions. Why is it that people seem more responsible with their dogs than their cats? Would requiring licensing cats help get owners' attention or increase their responsibility? It is a thought, and maybe we could brainstorm. In summation, I still remain with the opinion that no matter how well-intentioned or seemingly positive this step might be, I think it is ultimately inhumane to both cats and wildlife and at best is only a temporary solution to a problem that does not address root causes. [Also provided letters ([Exhibit J](#)).]

Vice Chairman Moore:

Any questions? [There were none.]

Steve Nelson, Private Citizen, Fallon, Nevada:

On the way in from Fallon today, I stopped on a road in Dayton. There was a sign that said there is a \$1,000 fine for dumping cats or dogs. About a quarter mile down the road, there is a sign saying it is illegal to harass or feed the horses. My main concern is who will be responsible if a kid or someone gets bitten by one of these animals that the county or humane society maintains? Who will pay the bill? The other thing is that this bill would make it legal for me to dump any cat I want to.

Vice Chairman Moore:

Any questions? [There were none.]

Jack Robb, Deputy Director, Nevada Department of Wildlife:

As was spoken about earlier, there was some proposed language [page 2, ([Exhibit I](#))] sent in by the Department of Wildlife. One of our biggest concerns in these feral cat colonies is the location of the colony. We have concerns with any feral cat colony, wherever they exist, and their impact on native wildlife. In the past, we have seen that some of these colonies are developed in areas that have specific significance to waterfowl or songbirds. They sometimes are located in high-quality habitats, and the cats have an impact on our native species. We do oppose the language as submitted today. We do have an amendment that we would like to see in the bill if it does go forward, but we do want you to know that we do oppose it in its entirety due to the impact on wildlife.

Peregrine Wolff, D.V.M., Wildlife Veterinarian, Nevada Department of Wildlife:

We are opposed to having these cats released back into the wild. I think many of the points we were going to bring up were already brought up. We do want to point out that it has been well-documented that well-fed cats do kill wildlife. If you have not seen it, there is a study from the University of Georgia called KittyCam, where they collared both owned urban cats allowed outdoors and cats in feral cat colonies with little cameras, and there is footage of cats killing native bird species. They documented that 42 percent of the cats that they were watching that were owned and fed were killing wildlife. Those are well-fed cats that are hunting. To give an idea of the impact, we know that conservative estimates are that between 1 and 4 billion wild birds are killed every year by feral cats, and up to 22 billion small mammals. Not just barn mice, but a lot of native mice and other species are killed every year. Something that made an impact on me was looking at one of the wildlife rehab centers in a county in California, where 30 percent of the birds that were presented during the summer period were there because of cat damage. That was just during one summer of one year, in one county in California.

Vice Chairman Moore:

With regard to birds and small rodents being killed, is that not a natural thing for a cat to do?

Peregrine Wolff:

Yes, cats are a predatory species, and that is a hard-wired instinct for them.

Vice Chairman Moore:

So it would not matter if they are feral or fed or my own pets, if I were to let them outdoors?

Peregrine Wolff:

That is correct. Fed or unfed, and with feral cats, in fed colonies, they are still going to be hunting.

Vice Chairman Moore:

Do you have a solution to this bill?

Peregrine Wolff:

Obviously from the previous concerns on both sides, this is a very difficult issue, and as a veterinarian, I look at the welfare side of the free-roaming cats that are out, and it is a tough life for them. Obviously, we would like every cat inside, and owned, which is probably an impossibility. I think that looking at situations where there are contained feral cat colonies and many of the nonprofit programs would be beneficial. I am not sure why there could not be some sort of managed cat colony in an indoor or contained setting that might be appropriate. I think you have a lot of work to do with people on both sides of the issue to make sure we can get feral cats off the landscape.

[Assemblyman Ellison reassumed the Chair.]

Chairman Ellison:

Are there any questions? [There were none.] Is there anybody else in opposition to the bill? [There was no one.] Assemblyman Ohrenschall, would you like to make a closing statement?

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

I will pass it to Mr. Ryan from the Nevada Humane Society to address some of the points.

Kevin Ryan:

I think, in summation, that all this bill does is authorize counties to make their own decisions. All we are doing is empowering local governments to create

local solutions to local problems, that is it. There is no mandate if the communities feel this is not right for them. They are under no obligation to do anything. As had been pointed out a number of times, this is the only solution being presented. There is no other viable solution to managing feral or free-roaming cat populations.

First, the idea of enclosing them: I just did a quick Google search, and according to National Geographic, there are 70 million feral cats in the United States. I would need one heck of a building to house those cats indoors. It is not a reasonable possibility. We have a very beautiful facility in Washoe County that is very large. If you look at the number of cats coming in to that facility, it is a little under 6,000 a year and that is compounding, there is no building that is large enough to offer enclosed colonies. It is not a reasonable solution. Second, we heard about adoption. Nevada Humane Society is about as an effective adoption agency as there is in the country, and that is backed up by data. We have adopted 70,000 animals since 2007 in a community of 420,000 people. Per capita, the adoption rate is about 21 dogs and cats per 1,000 people adopted every year. As far as we have been able to study, that is the highest per capita adoption rate in the country.

I cannot get all feral cats adopted by folks. That is not a reasonable solution, as well as not a humane solution. A feral cat is terrified of people, and what could possibly be worse than being put in a house where it is trapped with people? It does not mean that sometimes feral cats do not become socialized, that has been pointed out. But that is on a case-by-case basis. We adopt any out that we possibly can. But the data is pretty clear: past 12 weeks of age, the chances of socialization reduces exponentially. The adoption and housing are not reasonable solutions; they are not solutions at all.

TNR will reduce cat populations. Chairman Ellison pointed out that he had a cat problem. I do not believe that there is a TNR program in his community. Those 20 cats, if left unaltered, could become 40, 60 cats, and so on. This is a way to reduce those populations, and in Washoe County, we are happy to provide deterrents. There are a number of deterrents, and I know it sounded like Chairman Ellison exhausted them. TNR also reduces some of those behaviors, such as howling, marking, spraying. Spaying and neutering reduces those behaviors, which is why it is not only effective community cat management, it is also why so many people in their homes get their animals altered. Hopefully it is about reducing the cat population, but it is also about reducing behaviors.

We are not establishing colonies. This bill does not establish anything. It is simply dealing with the problem that is already out of hand. We are not placing colonies anywhere or establishing them. We are using TNR to hopefully reduce

those populations. This is about dealing with a problem that already exists. As mentioned, this is the only solution that has been presented today. When we look at the humaneness, there is a study that was released in 2006 from 1996 to 2004, and over 103,000 cats that came through TNR programs were studied. Less than 1 percent were ill, injured, or victims of trauma. We believe that cats belong in a home, but these cats are not eligible for adoption. The theory that they are living terrible lives in the public is not the case, at least scientifically speaking.

Most of the cats that are released with TNR, both in Washoe County and in Clark County, are being released in urban areas. They are not being released in wildlife areas. They may exist in those areas, but the vast majority in Washoe County are returned into urban areas. Not that there is not hunting going on, but we are trying to reduce the population as much as possible. There is no other alternative. The National Veterinary Medical Association takes no position on TNR. They merely say that community cats are a problem, and there is no solution. The only solution I can offer you today is TNR. I would remind you again that all this bill is doing is enabling your communities to make decisions for themselves. To me, this is empowering our communities to make their own choices. This is how we can reduce the population. Whether you love cats, or hate them, there is one solution: to trap, neuter, and return.

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

There were lots of examples brought up about nuisance animals, and animals that might have bitten someone. Nothing in this bill prevents a local government from having a policy to deal with nuisance animals, and to call animal control and have that animal taken away if there is a nuisance. This bill would only allow local governments to establish a program to use TNVR.

Chairman Ellison:

Are you going to start feeding these feral cats? Once you drop them off, the cats will be fed?

Kevin Ryan:

Most of these cats are coming from managed colonies, which means that there is a person who stepped up and said they would reduce the population. Many of them are fed by that caretaker, which happens anyway. The number of people that are feeding these cats is a large number. When that happens, that is how we are able to reduce those populations because they do have a caretaker who can ensure each cat in that colony has been altered. By feeding them, the caretaker is managing that population. The cats are less likely to roam, so they will stay in that area they are in.

Chairman Ellison:

That is the only problem I have with that, because feeding them is just drawing more in at that point. I think if you feed them, they will come.

Kevin Ryan:

There is a scientific phenomenon called the vacuum effect. Once a colony is established, typically more cats can come, but they are much less likely to join an existing colony because the colony is territorial. Just like if you have a cat in your home, they may have their own space, and they will not love it if another cat jumps in. By maintaining these colonies, they should not be growing; the data shows that the population will contract. That does not mean a cat will not be added from time to time, but in general, the colony should shrink and will be managed down to extinction.

Assemblyman Moore:

It is not every day that we have folks that consider our animals as valuable as I know you and I do. To me, they are as important as any member of my family.

Assemblyman Ohrenschall:

I am lucky to be working with people who care a lot about animals, and I think everyone who testified, whether they were in favor, opposed, or neutral, cares about animals and wildlife. I think this bill strikes a good balance in terms of not mandating anything. It would require a willing public-private partnership between local government and an animal welfare organization that want to implement this program. It will be implemented where appropriate. If a county or city feels that trap and kill is the method they want to use, we are not forcing them to stop.

[([Exhibit K](#)), ([Exhibit L](#)), ([Exhibit M](#)) and ([Exhibit N](#)) were presented but not discussed and are included as exhibits for the meeting.]

Chairman Ellison:

I appreciate what you are trying to do, but I think we need to tweak it. At least you are trying to do something. Are there any other questions? [There were none.] We will close the hearing on A.B. 261. Public comment? [There was none.] Meeting adjourned [at 11:04 a.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Erin Barlow
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblyman John Ellison, Chairman

DATE: _____

<u>EXHIBITS</u>			
Committee Name: <u>Committee on Government Affairs</u>			
Date: <u>March 16, 2015</u>		Time of Meeting: <u>9:06 a.m.</u>	
Bill	Exhibit	Witness / Agency	Description
	A		Agenda
	B		Attendance Roster
A.B. 261	C	Kevin Ryan / Nevada Humane Society	Letter
A.B. 261	D	Keith Williams / Clark County Feral Cat Colony	Testimony
A.B. 261	E	Jason Allswang / Clark County Department of Administrative Services	Proposed Amendments
A.B. 261	F	Beverlee McGrath / American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Best Friends Animal Society	Supplemental Information
A.B. 261	G	Caron Tayloe / League of Humane Voters	Letter in Support from Trish Swain
A.B. 261	H	Mel Belding / Private Citizen	Letter from Jeffrey Paddock
A.B. 261	I	Dr. Peregrine Wolff / Nevada Department of Wildlife	Testimony and Proposed Amendments
A.B. 261	J	Karen Boeger / Private Citizen, Washoe Valley, Nevada	Letter
A.B. 261	K	Karen Layne / Board of Wildlife Commissioners	Resolution
A.B. 261	L	Jane Feldman / Private Citizen, Las Vegas, Nevada	Email
A.B. 261	M	Tina Nappe / Private Citizen, Reno, Nevada	Letter
A.B. 261	N	Colonel John Reed / Private Citizen, Reno, Nevada	Letter