

Conducting a Cats Indoors Campaign in Your Community

CATS INDOORS

Convincing cat owners, decision makers, and the general public to keep all cats indoors or under direct control when outdoors is a major undertaking. However, with the right tools and a strong coalition, much can be accomplished.

Groups and individuals across America are conducting *Cats Indoors* campaigns in their communities and states. This guide highlights a few initiatives, and offers tips on how to conduct a campaign in your area. More resources, including a brochure, fact sheets, posters, and print and radio Public Service Announcements (PSAs), are available at www.abcbirds.org/cats.

Action: Find local partners, develop and distribute campaign materials in your area.

State-wide Campaigns: The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Nongame Wildlife Program have conducted state-wide *Cats Indoors* campaigns. Part-time coordinators distributed thousands of brochures and posters to veterinarians, humane societies, animal control agencies, wildlife rehabilitators, and nature centers throughout their respective states. The Florida campaign also produced the brochure, *Impacts of Feral and Free-Ranging Domestic Cats on Wildlife in Florida* at http://myfwc.com/media/1348634/feral_cats.pdf.

Minnesota issued a state-wide press release and produced and distributed their own radio PSA to 260 radio stations. Both agencies have web pages on cats, and a link to ABC's *Cats Indoors* webpage.

Action: Encourage your state wildlife agency to adopt the campaign, distribute materials, publish articles in publications, create web pages on the issue, and link to ABC's *Cats Indoors* webpage.



County Park Campaigns: Populations of stray and feral cats can be a problem in parks and other natural areas where irresponsible people abandon their pets. If the cats are not immediately removed, the cat population can quickly explode, as happened in Greynolds Park in Miami-Dade County, Florida. To deal with a growing problem, the County Board of Commissioners strengthened the laws against abandoning and feeding animals, and authorized staff to humanely remove nuisance animals.

People who fed cats in the parks for years strongly objected. ABC, Tropical Audubon Society and others formed the Natural Areas Coalition of South Florida to support the new laws. The County sponsored an education campaign called "Be a Park Pal" to make people aware of the new laws. Cats have been humanely trapped and removed from Greynolds Park.

Action: If stray and feral cats are a problem in your local parks, ask park staff and commissioners to pass and enforce ordinances that prohibit feeding and abandoning animals, and to enforce anti-litter laws. Volunteer to trap the cats and take them to a shelter. Educate the public with letters to the editor on the cruelty of abandoning pets and the need to remove cats from the park.

National Park Campaigns: Stray and feral cats were killing endangered Piping Plovers, Least Terns, Black Skimmers, and other shorebirds that nest on the beaches of Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The National Park Service hired a biologist to humanely trap the cats and take them to a local shelter. In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, they also hired a coordinator to conduct a *Cats Indoors* campaign for residents and tourists. Education materials were developed highlighting local information on cats and birds. These materials were distributed with campaign brochures and posters to veterinarians, animal shelters, and public officials in communities along the shoreline. Staff visited area schools, and published articles on the issue.

Action: If cats are a problem in a National Park, Wildlife Refuge, or National Forest near you, encourage the managing officials to conduct a similar campaign, and publicly support their efforts.

Local Ordinance Campaigns: Complaints about cats getting into garbage and spraying prompted a campaign supporter in Viroqua, Wisconsin to lobby her city council for a cat restraint law. She made copies of *Cats Indoors* materials from ABC's web site and gave them to every council member. She also circulated a petition for signature. The public safety committee drafted the legislation, which was approved by the council.

Action: If there is a cat overpopulation problem in your community, ask your city or county commissioners to pass cat control ordinances. For more information, see the fact sheet: *Get the Facts About Cat Law* at www.abcbirds.org/cats.

COALITIONS: The Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of its Parts

Whether you are working at the local or state level, establishing a *Cats Indoors* coalition may be your first and most important step. Partnerships enable work to be shared and give your campaign more clout. Give your coalition a name to show backing, stability, and continuity. Identify, inform, and ask for the involvement of groups and individuals with a natural interest in the campaign, such as conservation groups, bird and garden clubs, veterinarians, humane societies, animal control agencies, wildlife rehabilitators, nature centers, and wildlife agencies. College students and faculty members, especially those in wildlife resources or environmental studies, may provide an excellent source for leaders and volunteers.

If you are addressing the problem of people feeding stray cats, these groups may help or may be your primary opposition. You may be able to agree to disagree on the issue of feral cats, but work together on the issue of cat owners keeping their cats indoors, spayed or neutered, and never abandoned.

Develop Your Case - The Very First Step

Presenting solid and compelling data is the first step in altering entrenched beliefs and behaviors. ABC's *Cats Indoors* educational materials will support your effort. However, addressing this issue at local and state levels also requires information specific to your situation. The following are some suggestions:

1. Identify the natural attributes of your community or state, such as resident and migratory birds species, or threatened or endangered animals vulnerable to cat predation. Define specific problems in parks or beach areas and document incidents of cat predation on wildlife. Many parks have an inventory of wildlife occurring there. Factor the economics of birding in your community or state into your local case for support. See www.blm.gov/wildlife/pifplans.htm for information about priority bird populations and habitats.

2. Review cat overpopulation and related problems in your area. Become familiar with existing laws and regulations affecting cats and wildlife and how well they are working. Find out how many cats enter local shelter(s) each year, are strays, are reclaimed by owners, are adopted or euthanized, and how many nuisance calls are generated about cats.
3. Build a catalogue of local stories, problems and case studies that support your position.

Campaign Components

Issue campaigns usually have four components:

1. Campaign Agenda

Campaign plans have to be realistic and reflect the resources activists can muster and their overall capacity to conduct local campaigns. Objectives may include elements of any of the previously mentioned campaigns. Keep in mind that you may need to respond to an initiative from another source, e.g. an animal control agency proposal to regulate roaming cats. Whether appearing before a local parks authority or testifying before the state legislature, knowledge of how the process works is vital. Coalition partners and grassroots manuals such as those listed below can be very helpful. Information from organizations that have experience in working with the decision-making body also can be very useful.

2. Communications

Media to create public support is crucial. If a coalition partner cannot supply this essential expertise, grassroots organizing manuals, including those referenced in this fact sheet, can provide good guidance. Media can include major news stories, opinion pieces, radio or TV interviews, articles in group newsletters, or letters to the editor of local papers. A sample letter to the editor is available on ABC's web site, as well as print and radio PSAs at www.abcbirds.org/cats.

3. Mobilizing the Grassroots

Decision-makers can be swayed by the number of people they hear from and who those people are. In addition to core support from coalition members, visits to individual decision makers, and testifying at hearings, it may be useful to organize letter-writing campaigns, phone call blitzes, and rallies.

4. Fund-raising

Many effective grassroots campaigns are run on very small budgets. Seek out in-kind and cash contributions and fund-raising help from organizational partners. Many grassroots organizing manuals offer excellent suggestions for small fund-raising activities, and fund-raising events can also help build awareness of the issue.

Sources of Information for Organizing

These resources can be found in libraries, book stores, the Internet, or from the organizations listed.

Bobo, K., J. Kendall, S. Max. 1991. *Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990s*. Seven Locks Press, Cabin John, MD 271 pp.

Shaw, R. 2001. *The Activist's Handbook: A Primer*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA.

Also visit the following web sites: The Virtual Activist: www.netaction.org/training