

Spay-neuter plan addresses a long-standing problem

The stray and unwanted animals roaming our streets has been much like the weather: everyone complains about it but no one has been able to do anything about it.

Until now.

The plan being advanced by the Randolph County Animal Shelter to provide a means of low-cost spaying and neutering of pets provides hope that the tide of homeless dogs and cats can be slowed if not halted entirely.

In addition to reducing the number of unwanted cats and dogs, spaying and neutering have numerous health benefits for the animals. In dogs it can mean an additional lifespan of from 1 to 3 years. In cats it's even greater, providing an additional 3 to 5 years of life.

According to spayusa.org, altered animals have a very low to no risk of mammary gland tumors or cancer, prostate cancer, perianal tumors, pyometria, and uterine, ovarian and testicular cancers. The fact that sterilization reduces the animal's urge to roam also reduces the chance of injury or early death.

Benefits to the community of increased spaying and neutering are evident as well. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association stray animals can become a public nuisance, soiling parks and streets, ruining shrubbery, frightening children and elderly people, creating noise and other disturbances, causing automobile accidents, and sometimes even killing livestock or other pets. And as a potential carrier of rabies and other less serious diseases, they can be a public health hazard.

With an estimated 1.2 million cats and 2.1 million dogs in the U.S. that have not been spayed or neutered, each potentially creating thousands of offspring over their lifetime, many more animals are available for adoption than there are homes for them. Nearly 4 million dogs and cats have to be euthanized in U.S. animal shelters each year. The biggest factor in reducing this number is spaying and neutering.

As with any new program, the low-cost spay and neuter program being planned to assist low-income Roanoke residents will have its challenges. Grant funds are not unlimited, so local donations for this program can make a big impact.

How successful this program can become will depend not just on how well funded it is but on how many people avail themselves of it.