

	2024 Annual Report FREE-ROAMING CAT MANAGEMENT POLICY	Adopted: 06/15/2021
		Board Resolution No. 2021-06-172

On June 15, 2021, the East Bay Regional Park District (Park District) adopted a Board resolution that updated an existing policy to manage free-roaming cats. This updated policy strives to comply with federal and state laws and protect native, endangered species in regional parks by removing cats from sensitive habitats as humanely as possible. The hundreds of native species that exist in the Park District lands are protected by federal and state law. Over a dozen of these species such as the California Ridgway's rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse are on the endangered species list and are at significant risk of extinction. The protection of these species contributes to the biodiversity, ecological health, and unique evolutionary history of regional parks.

The updated Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy (Policy) establishes best practices to improve education, prevention, collaboration, and transparency with agency partners and the community the Park District serves. This report reviews the actions the Park District has taken in the past year to comply with the Policy and provides progress of actions taken to-date.

I. Education and Prevention

The Policy puts an emphasis on the development and implementation of an educational campaign that focuses on the impact that abandoned and free-roaming cats have on endangered wildlife and the poor outcomes these cats face outdoors. Educational components include revised signs for park, informative brochures, and updates to the Park District website. Internal education and increased coordination among EBRPD staff are designed to facilitate implementation of the Policy.



Figure 1. Revised signs for Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline.

a. Signs: Parks have installed new signs developed by the Park District Public Affairs team in coordination with local animal service agencies (see Figure 1, left) to discourage pet abandonment and provide contact information to report abandoned cats. The signs are customized to provide phone numbers of the appropriate animal service agency and Park District staff. For example, signs installed at Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline list the phone numbers for Oakland Animal Services and Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline staff.

Next steps: continue to post and maintain updated signs at all shoreline parks.

b. Brochures: Park District naturalists developed an informative brochure (Attachment A) that describes the domestication of cats, their mutual relationship with humans, and how to limit their adverse ecological impacts by keeping cats indoors

and not feeding animals in parks. A total of 150 brochures were made available to the public in 2023, with 75 at Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline, 50 each at Big Break, Hayward, Miller/Knox, and Point Pinole Regional Shorelines, and 25 at Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach's Crab Cove.

Next steps: Develop a second brochure to direct park users to animal service agencies if they need assistance rehoming a pet. This brochure will provide contact information and will be targeted towards reducing pet abandonment in parks by giving owners better, more humane options. This brochure will be developed during 2024 with plans for more targeted outreach in 2025.

c. Internal Education Program:

Interpretation and Recreation staff developed a 30-minute-long video training with support from Human Resources and Stewardship staff. It includes information on the ecological impacts of free-roaming cats, the main goals of the Policy, and case-study vignettes of how to discuss the topic with the public. The training is required for all staff with a public-facing role and includes park rangers, naturalists, park supervisors, and unit managers. 539 staff have completed the training since it was launched in 2022 and 49 staff are in progress.

Stewardship staff worked with Oakland Animal Services and Feral Change, a nonprofit partner, to provide hands on, in-person training for park staff to learn how to humanely trap and transport free-roaming cats to shelters. This training was provided to 42 Park District staff on February 28, 2024. The training is intended for staff who want to voluntarily participate in trapping efforts.

Next steps: Provide training annually or biannually for Park District staff.

d. External Education Program:

District staff provided informational brochures and examples of cat collars at the Garin Apple Festival event in September 2023 and at the Volunteer Appreciation Event in July 2024. The collars are intended to warn wildlife of the cat's presence and to reduce the cat's ability to effectively hunt wildlife. District staff are developing educational signs and brochures for distribution to the public.

Next steps: District staff will continue to work with animal shelter partner agencies on additional components of the Park District's external education program. Plans include programs, distribution of flyers to park neighbors on the benefits of keeping pet cats indoors or feeding cats inside, and other outreach efforts.

e. Website Updates: The Park District's website at <https://www.ebparks.org/natural-resources/biodiversity/biodiversity-protection> has been updated with links to the Policy and supporting materials, links to the nearest animal shelters, and contact information for assistance.

Next steps: Continue to update the Park District's website as needed.

The Park District will evaluate the successes or failures of these programs and may add, modify, or expand on these educational programs as needed. At a minimum, the education and prevention efforts will be reviewed and updated as needed by the Park District every five years (in 2027).

2. Coordination with Local Animal Services Agencies

- a. **Weekly Meetings:** EBRPD staff meets weekly with the Friends of Oakland Animal Services Community Cat Coordinator to discuss and plan trapping efforts, cooperation with Park staff, and to follow up on cats that have been trapped from the parks. These meetings also serve to establish long-term planning goals and strategize about outreach and education efforts. *Next steps: continue weekly meetings and close partnership on ongoing Policy implementation efforts.*
- b. **Biweekly Internal Meetings:** Staff from Stewardship and Park Operations meet every other week to discuss implementation of the Policy and to track and plan efforts. *Next steps: continue biweekly meetings.*
- c. **Quarterly Meetings:** The Park District has established regular communication and meetings with the directors or managers of six local animal service agencies: Berkeley Animal Care Services, Oakland Animal Services, Contra Costa County Animal Services, Hayward Animal Services, and Fremont Animal Services/Tri-City Animal Shelter, and Friends of the Alameda Animal Shelter. Park District staff have met monthly in the past year, exceeding the Policy's minimum of quarterly meetings, and have recently begun to meet bimonthly. These meetings have allowed those involved to build collaborative working relationships. *Next steps: continue bimonthly meetings as needed, eventually shift to quarterly meetings if program conditions allow.*
- d. **Cooperative Agreement:** The Park District and animal service agencies are developing a long-term cooperative agreement for free-roaming cat management. The agreement is in final review and should be signed later this year. *Next steps: finalize and sign the cooperative agreement. The agreement may be reviewed by the parties every five years, or more frequently, if needed.*

To support this coordination, the East Bay Regional Parks Foundation has generously provided \$25,000 of funding per year for three years from 2022 to 2024. A total of \$75,000 will be disbursed to Friends of Oakland Animal Services (Friends of OAS) to support the Park District's coordination efforts with local animal shelters and the Community Cat Coordinator position to directly work with the Park District in the implementation of trapping and transferring efforts for free roaming cats. The Community Cat Coordinator also serves as the point of contact for all shelters involved in the cooperative agreement and is pivotal to the functioning of the entire program.

3. Methods and Tracking for Locating Colonies and Removal

- a. **Survey:** Prioritization of program efforts has been based on an April 2022 Park District survey issued to all Park Operations offices. The survey asked respondents to comment on the prevalence of feral animals in parks (e.g. free-roaming cats, domestic geese and ducks); whether animals were impacting native species; and if feeding of these animals or wildlife was a consistent problem. Of the 22 respondents, 13 noted free-roaming cats in their parks. Stewardship staff also reach out directly to park staff on a regular basis to

inquire about cat activity. *Next steps: Periodically reissue survey to obtain current information.*

- b. In-person Visits:** EBRPD staff and the Oakland Animal Services Community Cat Coordinator have visited priority parks to meet with park staff, discuss their free-roaming cat issues and observations, to view known feeding stations, and to develop plans to manage and remove colonies. In 2024, visits have been conducted at Point Isabel Regional Shoreline, Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline, Radke Martinez Regional Shoreline Park, Big Break Regional Shoreline, and Ardenwood Historic Farm.
- c. Trail Cameras:** Plans of action have been developed in collaboration with park staff, Stewardship, and Oakland Animal Services following each in-person visit. Motion sensor trail cameras are deployed as needed and were instrumental in a large trapping effort at Big Break Regional Shoreline.
- d. Data Tracking:** The Park District maintains a shared data spreadsheet system to track cat observations and cat colony locations. These data are shared between Park District staff and animal service agency staff. *Next steps: These data on cat observations and cat colony locations will be maintained by Stewardship staff and updated by Park Operations staff as needed.*

4. Capture and Removal Methods

- a. Trapping:** Since adoption of the updated Policy in 2021, a total of 178 cats have been humanely trapped, removed from parks, and transferred to local Animal Services Agencies or directly adopted. This includes 29 cats that were transferred to Animal Services Agencies or directly adopted in the first 6 months of 2024.

The majority of the 178 cats were trapped and transferred to Animal Services Agencies from three shoreline parks: Martin Luther King, Jr., Hayward, and Big Break Regional Shorelines. Cats have also been trapped and rehomed from Black Diamond Mines Regional Preserve, Garin Regional Park, Las Trampas Regional Wilderness Park, Miller/Knox Regional Shoreline, Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline, Point Isabel Regional Shoreline, Quarry Lakes Regional Recreation Area, Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, and Wildcat Canyon Regional Park (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Trapped and transferred cats by park 2021-2024

Twenty-six of these cats were humanely trapped by United States Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service - Wildlife Services (USDA APHIS-Wildlife Services) and were safely transferred to Animal Services Agencies following capture. The remaining cats were captured by a combination of and cooperation among Animal Services Agency staff, including the Oakland Animal Services Community Cat Coordinator, Park District Operations staff, colony caregivers, and volunteers. All cats were transferred to the appropriate animal services agency or directly adopted (Table I). One cat had been lost for one year and was reunited with its owner.

Table I Number of cats accepted by each animal services agency or directly adopted.

Animal Services Agency	Cats Received in 2024	Total Cats Received Since 2021
Oakland Animal Services	1	61
Hayward Animal Services	4	50
Contra Costa Animal Services	20	28
Tri-City Animal Shelter	1	16
Direct Adoption	3	12
Feral Change	-	8
Antioch Animal Servies	-	3
Total	29	178

- b. Other Non-Lethal Capture Methods.** No alternate non-lethal capture methods, besides trapping, were used in the past year.
- c. Lethal Control.** No cats have been lethally controlled by either Park District staff or contractors since at least December 2020 when the Park District imposed a temporary moratorium on lethal control of feral cats to allow for review of the existing policy and updates that were adopted in 2021.

5. Consultation with Animal Control Specialists Regarding Infrastructure and Deterrence

The Park District has consulted with animal control specialists to identify options for improving management practices and infrastructure to reduce nuisance attractions (e.g., employing animal-proof garbage receptacles, dumpsters, etc.) or other deterrence methods where appropriate.

Completed and On-going Improvements

- Vegetation is regularly cleared from the New Marsh fence at Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline to help prevent free-roaming cats and other mesopredators from entering sensitive habitat. This work is generally performed in the Fall annually and funding has been requested for an overall upgrade of the fence. Minor fence maintenance and improvements were completed in 2023.
- All trash receptacles along the Garretson Point Trail were replaced with wildlife- and cat-proof garbage and recycling bins in 2023.
- Sixty trash receptacles throughout the Park District will be replaced with wildlife- and cat-proof garbage and recycling bins starting in 2024 with a wider phase in of animal proof trash receptacles planned.

Waste Management Practices and Equipment Evaluation

- Open dumpsters have been identified as a common food source and attractant for free-roaming cats and other wildlife (birds, racoons, skunks, etc.).
- Open dumpsters are also regulated to meet new stormwater standards that disallow discharge from uncovered stored refuse.
- Park District staff in Stewardship, Operations, and Design and Construction have initiated an effort to evaluate options for modification of dumpsters to secure and cover trash to prevent access by cats and other animals and to avoid collection of rainwater.
- Staff secured a \$10,000 Park District 30x30 grant to support installation of animal-proof trash receptacles and to fund a study to compare existing rolling-top dumpsters, an automated dumpster cover soon to be installed at Dumbarton Quarry, and other dumpster cover options for efficacy in deterring animal access, preventing water intrusion, and ease and safety of use by Park staff.

Contracting with Animal Control Specialists

- In 2022, the Board of Directors approved renewal of a three-year contract with option to extend for two more years with the USDA-APHIS-Wildlife, to protect endangered species and public safety by conducting management of overabundant predators, including gulls, coyotes, free-roaming cats, non-native foxes, and other urban wildlife throughout the Park District. All personnel were instructed to follow and implement the updated Policy. (Board Res 2022-02-40)
- The Park District has also contracted with Wildlife Innovations, Inc. to monitor nesting shorebirds and predators at Martin Luther King Jr. and Hayward Regional Shorelines. They conduct weekly avian point counts, use trail cameras to monitor mammalian predators, and record predatory behavior on nesting birds. The District receives weekly monitoring reports from the contractor.

Next steps: Continue supporting vegetation clearance and fence repairs around the New Marsh. Continue to replace open garbage cans with wildlife-proof receptacles, prioritizing shoreline parks. Maintain and enhance fencing. Continue monitoring of predators. Complete waste management evaluation studies and develop District-wide standards and practices for secure waste management.

6. Enforcement of Prohibitions on Abandonment or Feeding of Free-Roaming Cats

Most interventions have been conducted by park staff and/or animal service agency volunteers or staff. However, Park District Public Safety is trained and ready to respond when needed and has responded on occasion to assist with animal abandonment and feeding in the parks.

7. Transparency and Reporting

The August 2024 presentation to the Natural and Cultural Resources Committee provides information on actions taken since the Policy was updated in June 2021, satisfying the Policy's requirement to provide an annual report to the Board.

Conclusion

The work conducted in the three years since the adoption of the updated Policy highlights the successful implementation of the Park District's free-roaming cat program and demonstrates the Park District's commitment to the humane treatment of domestic pets as well as to the conservation of the irreplaceable biodiversity in our most vulnerable ecosystems. Internally, this work has brought together the efforts of nearly every Park District department: Stewardship has been collaborating closely with Park Operations, meeting every other week; Park Rangers and Naturalists have been very engaged in cat trapping and the tracking of cat activity; Staff in the District's Interpretation and Recreation, Human Resources, and Public Affairs departments have been at the forefront in developing both internal and external educational materials and programs; and Public Safety has been available to assist with abandonment issues. Externally, we have collaborated closely with animal shelter agencies and have consulted with state and federal agencies, other NGOs, private consultants, and researchers at local universities.

Park District staff will continuously evaluate the implementation of the Policy to adapt to changing conditions and identify new and emerging technologies and techniques for better management of

free-roaming cats. Staff are currently prioritizing a multi-disciplinary effort to improve waste management to improve the environment and reduce wildlife and cat attractants. District staff will continue to look for solutions to proactively deter people from abandoning cats in parks, to reduce the attractiveness of parks to cats, and to support regional animal shelter agencies in their work to manage free-roaming cats in Park District parks. These efforts and the ongoing collaborations among the Park District, animal shelter agencies, cat advocacy organizations, and volunteers is intended to result in better, more humane, and more effective management of free-roaming cats and increased protection of sensitive natural resources in the District's parks.