



Bold action for birds
across the Americas

April 9, 2026

Dear Senator:

On behalf of American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and our numerous members throughout Maryland, I am writing to urge your opposition to SB 750 / HB 912. ABC strongly supports the management of feral cats, but strategies that trap, neuter, and *release* (TNR) those cats to roam outdoors are ineffective, sacrifice wildlife, threaten public health, and undermine individual property rights.

HB 912 and SB 750 are companion bills intended to legalize TNR in Maryland. These bills would exempt TNR programs from prohibitions against animal abandonment (Maryland Criminal Law §10-612) and create new language under Maryland Local Government Law that restricts regulations on TNR, exempts a "community cat caregiver" from ownership of a "community cat," authorizes release of an impounded cat to a "community cat caregiver" without proof of ownership, and requires animal shelters to participate in TNR.

TNR Fails to Reduce Feral Cat Populations

Numerous peer-reviewed scientific studies have concluded that TNR is not an effective method to reduce feral cat populations. Rather than slowly disappearing, reputable studies have identified that colonies of cats persist, and the number of cats may actually increase.^{i,ii,iii}

TNR may be worse than doing nothing.ⁱⁱⁱ TNR programs fail because not enough individuals can be spayed/neutered to impact the population, cats lose their innate territoriality, and new cats arrive as a result of pet dumping and attraction to provided food. The results of an evaluation of two long-term TNR programs in California and Florida led a team of researchers to conclude that "no plausible combination of [conditions] would likely allow for TNR to succeed in reducing population size."^{iv}

TNR Sacrifices Wildlife

Feral cats are a non-native species that impose considerable ecological damage and have contributed to the extinction of 63 species.^{xix} The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists cats among the world's worst invasive species globally, and the U.S. Department of Interior's State of the Birds 2025 Report recognized outdoor cats as the number one source of direct, human-caused mortality for birds.^{xx,xxi}

Every year in the United States, outdoor cats kill approximately 2.4 billion birds and 12.3 billion mammals.^{xxii} Feeding cats does not eliminate this instinctive hunting behavior.^{xxiii} Instead, the abnormally high concentrations of these predators, resulting from feeding

feral cat colonies, can lead to “hyperpredation.”^{xxiv} Even when cats are not directly killing wildlife, their mere presence has been shown to result in a reduction in the feeding of nesting birds by one-third and an increased likelihood of nest failure by an order of magnitude.^{xxv}

Not only are these wildlife species public trust resources, many are also protected by a variety of state and federal laws including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Endangered Species Act. To support a program that intentionally releases non-native predators into an environment with known endangered species is a potentially severe legal liability.

TNR Undermines Rights of Property Owners

Colonies of feral cats are often established on private property with varying degrees of documented permission from the property owner. Even when permission is granted, adjacent property owners may not be as quick to welcome large groups of roaming cats.

Land managers also have responsibility for feral cats maintained on public lands. In 2016, American Bird Conservancy sued New York State Parks to remove feral cat colonies from Jones Beach State Park to protect the federally threatened Piping Plover. A 2018 settlement required the Park to humanely trap and relocate the cats.

Feral cats do not understand property boundaries and too often present risks and cause damage (e.g., defecating in gardens or children’s sandboxes, scratching vehicles, threatening pets). State endorsement of TNR will only make it harder for private property owners to resolve grievances when, through no fault of their own, innocent property owners have the misfortune of living near a TNR cat colony.

TNR and Feral Cat Colonies Threaten Public Health

According to scientists from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cats are consistently the number one carrier of rabies among domestic animals and pose a “disproportionate risk for potential human exposure.”^{vi} This heightened risk is due to the greater likelihood of human-cat interactions and the total prevalence of rabid cats. Between 2001 and 2022, the CDC documented that cats accounted for 86% of all rabid domestic animals in Maryland, far surpassing risks from dogs.^{vii}

Even when TNR programs include an initial rabies vaccination, which lasts only one year, cats almost never receive the follow-up vaccinations necessary to protect the cat and the public^{ix,x} For these reasons, the Compendium of Animal Rabies Prevention and Control used by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and State fact sheets and brochures consistently advise that all stray cats be removed from the community.^{xi,xii,xiii}

Cats also spread the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, which causes toxoplasmosis. This parasite is excreted by cats into the environment through feces, contaminating soil and waterways. In people toxoplasmosis has been linked to neuro-degenerative diseases such as schizophrenia and can cause miscarriages, birth defects, memory loss, blindness, and death.^{xv,xvi,xix}


TNR programs facilitate the spread of this infectious parasite, and such conditions can lead to epidemics of toxoplasmosis in North America.^{xvii} All of these reasons and more have led the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians to conclude that roaming feral cats and TNR are detrimental to public and environmental health.^{xviii}

In Conclusion

The presence of feral cats in Maryland is a tragic problem, but TNR will only perpetuate that problem. Embracing TNR programs would unequivocally fail to effectively control feral cat populations and would threaten public health, wildlife conservation, and the property rights of individuals. Due to the many negative consequences of feral cats on the landscape and the overwhelming scientific literature that shows the failures of TNR, ABC respectfully requests that you oppose SB 750 / HB 912.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Steve Holmer
Vice President of Policy
American Bird Conservancy

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