

WILDLIFE COMMITTEE

December 20, 2024

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

- Continued discussion of outdoor cats and discussion of homework assignment:
<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/faq-outdoor-cats-and-their-effects-on-birds/>
- Next meeting date: January 17, 2025, 1:00 p.m.

NOTES

Attendees:

Joy O'Keefe
Scott Meister
Michael Eichholz
Liza Lehrer
Katie Baughman

The Committee Meeting was opened with a welcome from Joy and an introduction of Katie Baughman, a new Committee member, Wildlife Research Coordinator for the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Joy gave a quick review and background on the committee and what the committee has been working on. The current focus is outdoor cats and determining how best to present the situation and recommended actions.

Joy reviewed the homework assignments from last meeting.

Comments and thoughts from the committee members:

Scott has done some investigating but doesn't have anything to report. There is a lot of information out there on the impacts of feral cats and there is a need to put it together in a format that can be presented to the public.

Liza – Reported on Ashley Gramza's work out of Colorado. She has surveyed people's views on the impacts of outdoor cats. People appear to be more concerned about the disease risks for cats and this may be a better message to communicate to the public. Is there less concern about the impact of cats on wildlife. How are they any different than any other natural predator?

Discussion turned to whether IDNR would be willing to conduct a survey to understand where education would be necessary? Understand what people already know. Perhaps an IDNR survey could build on the survey that Liza found? How would the Committee recommend IDNR conduct a statewide survey? Perhaps the Committee could recommend actions they would want IDNR to take.

Recommendations:

- Determine the state of public knowledge
- Establish a baseline of understanding
- Recommend behavior changes.
- The more an issue is brought up in conversations the more likely people are to take actions.
- There appears to be a level of legislation that is pro-outdoor cat.
- Should the committee do a presentation to IDNR on the issues and recommendations?

The Committee walked through the outdoor cat proposal to complete different sections and some were assigned sections to complete: The proposal can be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UCRawHk4CuuhdU6JMYpdw9GDcGVRW13i/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=111926354097808985220&rtpof=true&sd=true>

Additionally, literature and webpage resources can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1KHDyx7WH7m_DtoJ1s6QCU7vO30bQpITX

Other questions the Committee discussed:

- Who does the push? The Council or the Committee? The Committee would recommend the Council push this with IDNR.
- Should the Committee write the recommendations section for the council to push IDNR to do a survey and an outreach effort.
- How would a survey be funded? Perhaps state wildlife grants through Heritage?
- Emphasize the economic impact of cats? Outdoor cats is less of an agriculture issue and there for less of an issue for IDNR to focus on.
- Perhaps emphasize the impact on birds – species of concern list - when writing the environmental impact section.
- Is there any mortality data for species of concern for IL. Perhaps for other states.
- Perhaps Illinois issues could be inferred based on other research. Mike is not aware of anything that is species specific.

Things to investigate:

- History – what is the difference between domestic cats that are let outside, barn cats, and feral cats that are outside all the time.
- Illinois distribution - publications? Population of barn cats? Dick Warner – publications
- Horn, 2013 – Chicago area publication
- Basic biology of cats
- Environmental impacts

Summarizing the damage potential

Climate host interaction – cats have lots of places to hide. Etc. humans, broad distribution already.

Presumably they are in every county. Where there are people there are cats.

Reproductive potential – may want to break up indoor cats let outside versus cats that live outside. Indoor cats are more likely to be spayed and neutered. Barn cats less likely?

Economic impact – vector for toxoplasmosis, rabies, (rabies rates in cats in NY is high) Is this more of a health issue? Can cause disease in people and potential deaths

Environmental impact – T&E species, lower biodiversity, etc. Impact they have on sensitive species, increasing conservation efforts for T & E species.

Diseases may be transmissible to livestock, etc.

Perhaps include in the proposal a T&E species lists for birds – DNR has a list on their website. List the T&E species and then likely to impact . . .

Uncertainty:

Don't know the population size

Don't know the differences in the three types of cats.

Are there public concerns or attitudes and willingness to change?

Can an educational campaign evoke change since there is little willingness to ID cats as invasive species?

Lethal management is not an option.

Adoption is not an option.

Behavior change is needed to create a small shift resulting in solutions.

Things to consider:

Does the state have any strategy in place for public spaces?

IDNR manages populations of feral cats on land owned by DNR.

Could a buffer be recommended?

Cook county is supposed to require registration of feral cat populations. How to enforce?

Other recommendations:

The Committee recommends the Council to recommend DNR to fund – statewide survey and, based on the survey results, a statewide educational campaign.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Joy will put the proposal on Google and assign people to sections and compile literature in a common folder.

As Committee members put in papers add some notes about the papers.

Mike will look into cat biology, life history, different types of cats.

Scott will look into cat distributions in Illinois.

Joy will look into disease issues.

Liza will look into environmental impacts – number of herps, birds, etc.

Katie will look at the IDNR list of T&E species, add it to the proposal document and organize by taxa (common names).

If you don't see your name on here let Joy know and she can give you something for you to do.

Mike reported on the Illinois Invasive Species Council meeting:

The Nutria proposal has been approved to be sent on to IDNR

The Council encouraged the Committee to move forward to expanding communication about the issues of outdoor cats. The Committee would need to address this issue directly with IDNR.

Joy will contact an individual from IDNR who might be able to help get a survey out.

Joy reminded people that there is an invasive species symposium – Feb. 15th.

2025 Illinois Invasive Species Symposium Call for Abstracts

We are happy to announce that the 10th annual Illinois Invasive Species Symposium will be held on May 28, 2025, at the Champaign County Extension Auditorium in Champaign, IL. This event will provide an opportunity to learn about projects and programs underway to address all taxa of invasive species impacting Illinois' natural lands and native species.

We are now accepting abstract submissions for presentations.

Presentations should be on invasive species projects, research, or programs in Illinois. We are accepting submissions of presentations on all taxa of invasive species. Presentations will be 20-30 minutes in length. This is a well-attended event, with 96 registrants in 2024.

Please feel free to forward this to colleagues and partners who may be interested.

Please submit abstracts [HERE](#) by February 15. Presenters will be notified by March 1.

The next Committee meeting is January 17th 1:00.