



The El Prado Spay/Neuter Clinic – Frequently Asked Questions

About animal welfare in Taos County...

Q. What is the El Prado Spay/Neuter Clinic and why does Taos need it?

A. The clinic is a veterinary office located in El Prado, NM dedicated to providing free spay/neuter to the cats and dogs of Taos County. The clinic is critical to animal welfare because Taos is facing an over-population crisis of unspayed cats and dogs. Even worse, most of the community's spay/neuter resources were lost in 2023.

Q. What caused the over-population crisis?

A. When COVID struck, vets' offices had to operate under restrictive protocols that slashed the number of appointments. COVID also seriously disrupted people's behavior – they stayed home, cancelled vet appointments, and put off spay/neuter. They 'hoped for the best', but ended up with the worst... the worst over-population problem that Taos has ever seen as litter after unwanted litter was born. And the litters from 2020 had litters in 2021 and then in 2022, etc.

Q. How do you know that over-population is so bad?

A. So many homeless animals were arriving at Stray Hearts in 2023 that they became overcrowded, discontinued accepting new intakes and non-renewed their sheltering contracts with the town and county. Additionally, there have been numerous social media posts about roaming packs of dogs and abandoned litters of kittens.

Q. How did Taos lose so many spay/neuter resources in 2023?

A. Stray Hearts' intakes, well over 1000 per year, were subject to spay/neuter or transfer out of the county. When their intakes were interrupted, that resource was lost. Additionally, Zimmer Feline Foundation discontinued its popular voucher program for free feline spay/neuter and Espanola Humane stopped accepting Taos County animals at their clinic.

Q. Why is spay/neuter a priority when Taos doesn't even have a shelter that accepts animals?

A. All shelters face limits: limits on physical space, limits on how many animals can be adopted into their communities and financial limits. That's why an unlimited animal population will ultimately collapse any shelter... and that's what happened here. An effective community spay/neuter program is the foundation for any successful shelter.

Q. What constitutes an effective community spay/neuter program?

A. Simply put, it must be free, locally situated, all-inclusive and consistently available. 'Pay-for-service' from commercial clinics is too costly for many who live here. Relying on distant clinics like Espanola causes too much driving and lost time. Clinics that discriminate between town, county and pueblo don't work... cats and dogs cross legal boundaries every day.

Q. But don't all the week-end spay/neuter clinics help?

A. Yes, but they are too infrequent and too limited to have significant impact on the over-population crisis. The clinics held in 2023 handled around 500 cases, but the lost spay/neuter resources this year were at least three times higher.

About the El Prado Spay/Neuter Clinic and Taos Feral Feline Friends...

Q. Who can use the El Prado clinic and when will it open?

A. All residents of Taos County, whether from town, county or pueblo, are eligible to bring their cats and dogs for free spay/neuter to the clinic. The clinic is currently under construction and is expected to open in March 2024.

Q. Does the clinic only do spay/neuter?

A. No, the clinic also provides all vet-recommended vaccinations and micro-chipping at no cost.

Q. Will the El Prado clinic replace Taos County's lost spay/neuter resources?

A. Yes. The clinic will be open four days per week for about 48 weeks each year. Each day of operation, 20 to 30 spay/neuter appointments will be scheduled. This will generate around 4000 spay/neuter surgeries per year, far more than the approximately 1500 cases per year lost.

Q. Who is Taos Feral Feline Friends?

A. Taos Feral Feline Friends (TFFF) is a federally tax-exempt charity, serving Taos County since 2004. TFFF operates a shelter for old and disabled feral cats, provides free cat food for feral cat caregivers and is the leading provider of free spay/neuter for cats in Taos County. In 2023, TFFF expanded its mission to help both dogs and cats.

Q. What is TFFF Spay/Neuter Services?

A. While spay/neuter is central to animal welfare, it cannot be effective without certain supporting services. Trap, Neuter and Return, often called 'TNR', is necessary to reach feral cat populations. Cats are trapped, transported to the clinic for spay/neuter and vaccinations and then returned to their outdoor habitats. TFFF introduced TNR to Taos County in 2005. Another element of successful spay/neuter is compliance. TFFF assists enforcement of Taos' spay/neuter ordinance by offering consistently available free spay/neuter to everyone. When "I can't afford spay/neuter!" stops being an excuse, compliance with, and enforcement of, spay/neuter laws is facilitated.

Q. Since the clinic is free, where does Taos Feral Feline Friends get the necessary funding to operate it?

A. Taos Feral Feline Friends derives most of its funding from the generous people of Taos County that are concerned about the animal crisis and are willing to invest in a long-term solution. Grants are a secondary source of funds.

Q. How much do the officers and employees of Taos Feral Feline Friends get paid?

A. TFFF is an all-volunteer charity with no payroll, no 'perks' and no employees. TFFF contracts with veterinarians to pay for spay/neuter surgeries and related services as needed.

Q. How can I help the animals of Taos County and Taos Feral Feline Friends?

A. First and foremost, please be sure that all dogs and cats under your care, including feral cats, obtain spay/neuter by the time they reach six months old. Next, please consider helping the community solve the animal crisis by making a donation to Taos Feral Feline Friends. All donations will be assigned to fund the TFFF Spay/Neuter Clinic in El Prado.

Q. Where can I find additional information about Taos Feral Feline Friends, including its financials?

A. Please visit the TFFF website for comprehensive information about the organization, its officers and programs and the most recent annual report which details its financial condition. Google 'Taos Feral' to find TFFF or visit TFFF on Facebook. You can also call Leanne Mitchell, President of TFFF, at 575-758-3519 or Donna Karr, Program Director of TFFF Spay/Neuter Services at 303-551-5413.