

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

One of GCLD Pet Pals Organization's most important objectives is achieving the 100% spaying and neutering of homeless animals in Grand County. Why is this such an important goal? What purpose does spaying and neutering serve?

The main reason to spay and neuter your pet is to help diminish the huge pet overpopulation problem. Let's consider what happens when just one female cat and one female dog do not get spayed...and there is an unneutered male cat and unneutered male dog in close proximity.

- A female cat can produce on the average three litters of kittens in a year. The average number of kittens in a litter is five.
- Given that, one female cat in theory could produce 15 kittens in a year. If just half of those 15 kittens were females, the next year those 7.5 cats and their mother would be able to produce 240 kittens. Again, supposing that half of those 240 kittens were female, in the third year they would now bring into being 1,905 kittens.
- A female dog can average two litters a year. The average number of puppies in a litter is six but can vary anywhere from one to 12, depending upon such things as the breed and age of the dog. If we take an average of six puppies in a litter, one female dog would produce 12 puppies the first year. If half of those are female, the next year, she and her six female offspring could hypothetically produce 84 puppies. Again, if half are females, in the third year, they would produce 516 puppies between them.
- Dogs and cats can have litters for many years. We've only looked three years into the future using "average" numbers. As you can see, the quantity of animals increases exponentially and soon reaches astronomically high figures!

You may well wonder what's wrong with having all these cuddly, cute baby animals around! What is wrong is the number of unwanted cats, kittens, dogs, and puppies that end up in animal shelters. While some of these animals will find homes, those that can't be placed will often have to be killed. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that there are six to eight million cats and dogs that enter shelters every year. They also estimate that three to four million of them are put to death when homes can not be found for them. The majority of these animals are killed for no other reason save for the fact that no one wanted them any more. (To read an excellent in-depth article on animal overpopulation, please go to www.firepaw.org/cao.pdf.)

The Colorado Legislature established the **Colorado Pet Overpopulation Fund** to promote and fund spaying and neutering of pets and for public education to encourage responsible pet ownership. (There is a check-off on the Colorado State Income Tax Form.) In 2005, 4,745 animals were spayed or neutered and more than 17,000 animals were spayed or neutered in the three years since the first grants were awarded. (Check out their website at www.savecoloradopets.org.)

The bottom line is, if you love animals, spay and neuter your pets.

There are many misconceptions surrounding spaying and neutering. Next month, we'll look into some of those myths. There are actually health benefits to spaying and neutering!