

Spay/Neuter of 142 Pets in Wadsworth Shows Need in Rural Areas

Vinton Hawley commented that he sees stray dogs and cats roaming around Nixon, Wadsworth and Sutcliffe. They are three communities inside the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe's reservation where Hawley is chairman.



By Mark Robison

“We look forward to a big turnout,” Vinton Hawley said before a free spay/neuter clinic Oct. 12-13 in Wadsworth for the tribe's members. The turnout, indeed, was big. People were lined up outside the clinic's doors that first day, and it only got busier the next day.

Thirty cats and 29 dogs received spays or neuters that Saturday by the two veterinarians working that day. Because of the high demand, a third veterinarian was brought in, increasing the numbers to 35 cats and 48 dogs done on Sunday. In total, that's 142 dogs and cats – about 10 percent of pets on the reservation based on a rough estimate of the number of households and the average number of pets per home.

The effort fits with a recent trend in animal sheltering of reaching out to underserved and rural communities that lack nearby vet clinics or the ability to pay for these services. Animal shelters often apply for grants to get mobile spay/neuter vans. This allows them to go into underserved areas to reach pets whose people may not have the resources to get their pets spayed or neutered, transportation options, or the ability to take off work during typical clinic hours. While these vans play a vital role in spay/neuter efforts, the number and types of animals who they can handle is limited. For instance, larger dogs don't fit on their small surgical tables.

Taking inspiration from Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals, shelters and other organizations in recent years have begun pop-up clinics in community centers, high school gyms, fire stations, and empty warehouses. All that's needed is electricity, running water, and bathrooms for veterinary teams, organizational staff, and volunteers.

This particular spay/neuter clinic was held in the new Wadsworth Community Center. It was funded and organized by Maddie's Pet Project in Nevada, in collaboration with Nevada Humane Society and the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe. The SPCA of Northern Nevada also contributed volunteers and supplies.

A spay/neuter van loaned by Nevada Humane Society was parked outside a door leading to a kitchen area. The van was used for surgeries on cats and small dogs. In the kitchen, two volunteers washed surgical instruments, assembled surgery packs, and sterilized them in a portable autoclave.

The main, open room of the building was divided into two, with dogs coming in one side and cats the other. Tables were set up for volunteers to process paperwork, and carriers holding recovering dogs were covered with towels and arranged in corners. Cats recovered in a mobile adoption van, also borrowed from Nevada Humane Society.



On the opposite end of the building from the kitchen, in what is normally a conference room, a temporary surgical suite for medium and large dogs was created.

While all this was going, feral cats were humanely trapped Friday and Saturday nights in Wadsworth and Nixon. They were worked into the spay/neuter schedule. Unlike indoor pets who can be released to their people while still a bit wobbly from anesthesia, the feral cats stayed overnight after their surgeries because they needed to be fully alert before returning to their outdoor homes.

The popularity of this Wadsworth clinic indicates a need and desire for accessible veterinary services in rural and tribal areas within Nevada. Austin New Moon of Wadsworth was happy to learn about the event. “The stray population is a huge issue out here,” she told me. “Community members value their pets but often don’t have the means to get them fixed.”

When she had a better-paying job, her pets went to the vet regularly but now it’s harder. She brought her dog Nanuk and cat named Dog to the clinic. “People say that with males, you don’t have to worry about the puppies, but they still create puppies that are running around,” she said. “You’ve got to do your part.”

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