

# Fire Cat Trapping Protocol

## Locating and trapping cats displaced from the wildfires will be a long process

While our natural reaction is to move very quickly to reunite displaced cats with their families, we have to understand that cats that are still out there are most likely no longer in immediate danger... cats are resilient and resourceful. With so many sources of food and places for them to hunker down, we have a responsibility to use caution when trapping cats so we can make sure that we are:

- Not trapping cats that are owned and NOT displaced
- Obtaining permission to set a trap on private property
- Making sure the proper training on how and when to set a trap is reviewed *before* trapping

## Questions to ask before trapping a cat

- Has the cat been visually identified by the owner? If this is the case, go ahead and trap.
- Has the cat been spotted more than once? How long has the cat been around? Ask neighbors if they think this cat was around before the fires. If all answers lead you to believe this is a displaced cat, go ahead and trap.
- Is the cat skittish, nervous or disoriented? If so, these are indications this cat is new to the area and may be displaced. Or, is it calm, tail up, moving slowly. If this is the case, the cat may belong where it is so get more info before proceeding. In either case, ask neighbors for more info.
- Do you have permission to trap on the property you are trapping? Never trap without permission.
- Do you have a plan for the cat after it is trapped?. (See holding procedures)

## Where to look when out trapping

Look up address where the cat has been spotted on Google Earth and the Press Democrat fire interactive map. These are great tools for determining where the cats might be hunkering down.

Press Democrat Map:

<http://www.pressdemocrat.com/multimedia/7523136-181/sonoma-county-fire-damage>

Google Earth:

<https://www.google.com/earth/>

The fire map will show the burned-out dwellings and green areas still standing. These are good hiding areas for displaced cats.

Google Earth will show you the creeks in the area that cats always use as super highways and places to live and/or seek shelter.

Look under anything that is tight, safe and compact. Storm drains and culverts are another hiding place for traumatized cats.

### **Preparation for Trapping**

If possible, get the cats used to being fed at the same place and time of day. You might try leaving the trap unset during routine feeding so that the animal will get used to seeing and smelling it in the area. Don't feed the cats the day/night before you are going to trap so the cats will be hungry. Be sure to notify others who may feed the cats not to leave food out either.

Plan to trap in the evening or very early in the morning when there is little to no human activity. It is inhumane to keep a cat in a trap for days so make sure you have time to bring the cat to its owner or to either Forgotten Felines or the Sonoma Humane Society the morning after you trap.

Prepare the area where you will be holding the cat in the trap before your trap. A garage or other sheltered, warm, protected area is best. Lay down a thick layer of newspaper so the cat has some insulation from the ground or concrete.

Prepare the vehicle you will use to transport the cat as well. A plastic tarp with something absorbent on top of it or puppy pad is good to put underneath the trapped cat to protect your car.

Remember that if you trap an animal and release it for some reason, it just makes it that much more difficult to trap the cat a second time. They learn very quickly to avoid the trap if they've already experienced being caught.

If there are young kittens involved, they need to be eating on their own before being separated from their mothers. They should not be removed from the mother before 4-5 weeks of age. If you are trapping a lactating female, **wait** until you have located the kittens and the kittens are old enough to be without their mother. OR, remove the kittens first and then trap mom afterwards. It is much easier to trap mom if you have the kittens first. If you are unsure whether a cat is lactating, call Forgotten Felines BEFORE you trap.

## Setting the Trap

To be successful, we recommend that you feed the cats out of the UNSET trap at least 3 days prior to the trap date. Twist tie the door open so that it will not go off and let them get used to this new contraption where their food is normally found.

The best time to trap is when they usually come for food! Don't trap in the rain or the heat of the day without adequate protection for the trap. **Never EVER** leave the trap unattended.

Procedure:

1. Fold 1 sheet of newspaper lengthwise and place on floor of trap
2. Place small mound of tuna or other fragrant yummy food like Kentucky Fried Chicken at back of the trap. You need to place the food all the way in back so the cat must walk over the trip plate.
3. If you have a "backdoor trap", make certain the back door is properly locked so kitty cannot escape from the trap.
4. Set trap door. Place small trail of food from outside of door to just inside the trap to lure them in if necessary
5. Don't feed anywhere nearby other than in the trap.

## Waiting for Success

**Never leave trap unattended!** Leaving a trap unattended is very dangerous for anything that ends up inside the trap. If you aren't there to monitor, wildlife can enter the trap, a neighbor's cat can enter the trap or worse yet, someone can easily pick up the animal, cause it harm, release it or steal the trap itself. Wait quietly in an area where you can still see or hear the trap without disturbing the cats. You can often hear the trap trip. As soon as the intended cat is trapped, completely cover the trap with a dark cover and remove the trap from the area. When you get the captured cat to a quiet area lift the cover and check for signs that you have the correct animal and not a cat that has not been displaced. Cover the cat back up as soon as you've done your inspection. Uncovered, a cat may panic and hurt itself thrashing around in the trap.

There is always the chance that you will catch a wild animal attracted to the food or an unintended cat. Simply release the animal quietly.

## **Holding Procedures**

After you have finished trapping, you will probably have to hold the cat overnight until you can take it to the owner, Forgotten Felines or Sonoma Humane Society, unless you have made previous arrangements.

Keep cats covered and check periodically. The cat may be hungry so you can drop dry food through the top of the trap. Do not open trap to feed. They will probably be very quiet as long as they are covered. Don't stick fingers in the trap or allow children or pets near the traps. These are potentially scared animals that will scratch and bite if given the opportunity. ALL animal bites are serious. If you are bitten, seek medical attention and do NOT release the cat. It must be quarantined for ten days. Forgotten Felines can often help in these circumstances or contact the Sonoma Humane Society.

If the cat is injured, take the cat to an emergency vet.

## **Helpful Hints**

- Bring a flashlight with you if trapping at night. It will come in handy for checking traps from a distance and might help you avoid a twisted ankle.
- Binoculars can be super helpful during daylight hours.
- Some kittens can be caught without a trap but are still too wild to be handled easily. Use a thick towel to pick up the kitten to help protect you from scratching and biting. This also helps prevent the kitten from squirming away from you. Always have a carrier or trap handy to place them in.

**You can watch our trapping videos for more information at:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF06lhxhvPk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9vwxdlSKIE>

**Any Questions?. Need to borrow a trap?**

Call Forgotten Felines of Sonoma County at 707.576.7999