



Free-Ranging Cat Management Plan

San Juan National Historic Site (the park) is a well-preserved complex of Spanish colonial masonry military fortifications in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The Paseo del Morro National Recreational Trail (Paseo) follows the western coast of the island along the base of the historic fortification walls from the Paseo de la Princesa to Castillo San Felipe del Morro. The paved walking path was built in 1999 and designated as a national recreation trail in 2001. Shortly after the construction of the Paseo, a population of free-ranging domestic cats (*Felis catus*) colonized the area. The park is now starting a planning process to address cats at the park.

You're Invited!

We invite you to participate in the planning process by submitting your ideas to help inform the development of this management plan. We would like to hear your thoughts on the presence of the cats at the park, the proposed action and preliminary alternatives, potential issues with park resources, and any other ideas you feel are relevant and important for this planning process. Once we have received and considered your comments, we will move to the next phase, which will include refining the alternatives and analyzing the potential effects to the environment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable legal requirements. We hope that you will join us in this important discussion. There are many ways to be involved, including attending an in-person public meeting and submitting electronic or written comments.

OPEN HOUSE MEETINGS

Please join us for an in-person, open house meeting to learn about the proposed Free-Ranging Cat Management Plan.

Location:

San Juan National Historic Site
Visitor Center
501 Calle Norzagaray
San Juan, PR 00901

See page 6 for additional meeting location information.

Meeting #1

Wednesday, November 2, 2022
6:30 to 8:30 pm

Meeting #2

Thursday, November 3, 2022
6:30 to 8:30 pm

Please note, we are holding two meetings to accommodate people's schedules. The same information will be presented at both meetings. Participants will have an opportunity to speak with NPS staff and ask questions at the individual information stations during the open house meetings.

Purpose of and Need for the Plan

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this plan is to address free-ranging cat populations within San Juan National Historic Site to improve visitor experience and the safety of its visitors and employees and protect the cultural and natural resources within its boundaries in accordance with existing authorities for invasive species.

Need for the Plan

This plan is needed to bring the park into compliance with existing authorities for invasive species. This plan is also needed to reduce human health and safety concerns, improve visitor experience, alleviate nuisance issues, and reduce impacts to cultural resources and native wildlife species associated with free-ranging cats.

Preliminary Alternatives

No Action

The no-action alternative would continue the management of free-ranging cats with the intent to reduce and ultimately eliminate their presence, and the presence of the feeding stations, inside the park. The National Park Service would allow Save a Gato to continue the following actions:

- Maintain feeding stations for the cats along the Paseo and work with the National Park Service to reduce the feeding stations
- Trap, spay/neuter, tag (ear-tip) cats once altered
- Remove untagged cats from the park
- Conduct quarterly population surveys
- Retain access to the Paseo for the actions above

Proposed Action

The proposed action would be a phased approach to management of free-ranging cats.

Phase 1: Cat Removal. The National Park Service would contract a professional organization or agency (removal agency) to remove cats from the park. The following strategies could be used:

- Live trapping
- Denning
- Repellents
- Habitat modification
- Exclusion devices

The removal agency would use best professional judgment to manage the humane capture and removal of the cats.

Phase 2: Feeding Station Removal. The feeding stations would be removed immediately after trapping efforts are completed.

Phase 3: Monitoring. The National Park Service would monitor for cats to ensure the effectiveness and long-term success of the removal program.

What is TNR?

- TNR programs are designed to stop reproduction, thus reducing the size of cat colonies.
- Free-ranging cats are trapped, examined by a veterinarian, altered (spayed or neutered), and often vaccinated. While under sedation, the tip of one of the cat's ears is surgically clipped to make altered cats easy to identify in the field.
- Free-ranging kittens and social free-ranging cats may be put up for adoption. Cats for which adopters cannot be found or those that are not suitable for adoption are returned to the location where they were trapped and are typically fed by volunteers. Cats that are in poor health may be humanely euthanized.
- TNR programs can diminish behaviors, such as mating and fighting, and reduce odors from spraying or marking cats.

Agreement with Save a Gato

- In 2005, the park's Superintendent and Save a Gato, a local non-profit organization, signed a Memorandum of Understanding stating that Save a Gato would feed, survey, trap, and remove free-ranging cats with the goal of removing all cats from the park.
- At that time, the population was estimated to be 120 cats, and five feeding stations were approved along the Paseo.
- Currently, there are seven feeding stations along the Paseo.



Current Cat Population

- The cat population has grown since the initial agreement with Save a Gato was initiated in 2005.
- The National Park Service conducted a camera trap survey at the park in 2021 to determine the current size of the population. This survey identified at least 200 individual cats at the park, including kittens and pregnant or recently pregnant females.
- The size of the colony, even with the TNR program, has not been reduced and the most recent survey found that the cat population has increased.

Why Is TNR Not Working at the Park?

- TNR only works in a closed system, and an exceptionally high rate of individuals within a population needs to be sterilized for TNR to be successful.
- New cats come into the colony from other populations. Though some cats may stay within one population, it is typical for free-ranging cats to travel among populations.
- Cats may also be abandoned in areas where volunteers feed them, expecting the cats to be safe.
- In a population that is not isolated, such as the one at the park, TNR is not as effective.

Cultural Landscapes

- The park is required to preserve, protect, and interpret its cultural resources. The free-ranging cats and feeding stations are not consistent with the cultural landscape.
- Encounters between visitors and cats and the smell of urine and feces are also inconsistent with the cultural landscape.



Health and Safety

- Free-ranging cats can carry a number of diseases that can be transmitted to humans and wildlife, such as toxoplasmosis, rabies, bartonellosis, plague, and flea-borne typhus.
- Cats can become infected with parasites, such as roundworm and hookworm, that can be passed to humans through accidental ingestion of contaminated soil or feces. Cat urine and feces are concentrated around the feeding stations.
- Visitors that approach free-ranging cats at the park could also be bitten or scratched.
- Feeding stations located within the park attract rats. Cat surveys at feeding stations have shown rats feeding alongside cats.



Visitor Experience

- The park receives over one million visitors annually, and visitor opinions about the presence of cats vary.
- Many visitors complain about seeing the cats and the feeding stations and the smell associated with them, while others enjoy seeing the cats when visiting.
- Cats and their waste are a concern for groups requesting permits for use of the Paseo.



Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

- Cats have an enormous impact on wildlife worldwide, especially birds, contributing to species extinctions. They are indiscriminate in what they kill, and they are often surplus killers, not always eating what they kill.
- The impacts of free-ranging cats on wildlife are well documented and are likely occurring at the park.



Non-native Species - Cats

- Free-ranging cats face welfare concerns. Despite being fed, the cats at the park do not have an easy life, and there have been reports of cats with injuries.
- Free-ranging cats live much shorter lives than owned cats.
- For those cats that may be suitable for adoption, there are often not enough adopters or shelter space to house the cats safely.



How to Comment

You can provide input in several ways:

Submit comments electronically at:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/PaseoCatPlan>

Submit written comments by mail or hand-deliver to:

SAJU Superintendent
Attn: Paseo Cats
501 Calle Norzagaray
San Juan, PR 00901

Please submit your comments by November 22, 2022.

Comments will not be accepted in any other way than those specified above. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

Please note that your entire comment, including your personal information, may be made publicly available at any time. You can request that we withhold your personal identifying information from public view, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.



Open House Meeting Location



Muñoz Rivera Avenue behind the Old Casino and before the intersection with Calle Norzagaray



*Visitor Center Building
Castillo San Cristóbal*

NEPA Process

Fall 2022

We are here

Public Scoping

Interested parties are invited to attend the public meetings, review the scoping materials, and provide comments at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/PaseoCatPlan>.

Fall 2022

Public Scoping Comment Analysis

The National Park Service will analyze comments received during the public comment period, revise the alternatives as needed, and develop the environmental assessment.

Winter 2023

Public Review of the Environmental Assessment

Interested parties will be invited to attend the public meetings, review the environmental assessment, and provide comments at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/PaseoCatPlan>.

Winter/Spring 2023

Environmental Assessment Comment Analysis

The National Park Service will analyze the comments received during the review of the environmental assessment and determine the selected action for this management plan.

Spring 2023

Issues the Finding of No Significant Impact

The National Park Service anticipates a finding of no significant impact, which will identify the selected action for implementation.

