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BURNS LAKE – In Burns Lake, like many other communities in British Columbia, there are simply too many cats and not enough good homes to go around. While some good Samaritans provide food and shelter for these “community cats”, most of them will suffer and lead short lives due to injury, disease, starvation, and cold. And, without intervention, this cycle continues and the problems grow.

“Many people don’t realize that cats can have two litters of up to six kittens per year – and they start having them as early as six months,” says Lorie Chortyk, general manager of community relations for the BC SPCA. “A few unspayed or unneutered cats roaming in the community can lead to hundreds of cats in a very short time.”

The BC SPCA, in partnership with the Burns Lake Veterinary Clinic is hoping to put a stop to this cycle and improve the lives of several hundred cats around Burns Lake. With generous funding assistance from [PetSmart Charities® of Canada](http://www.petsmartcharities.org/about/canada.html) (<http://www.petsmartcharities.org/about/canada.html>) and on-the-ground assistance from the local Lakes Animal Friendship Society, an innovative project has rolled out this winter.

Volunteers are helping determine the numbers of cats in each colony and live trap them. The cats are then transported to the Burns Lake Veterinary Clinic where they can be health checked, spayed or neutered, dewormed and vaccinated. The cats also have about a half-centimeter of their left ear “tipped” or clipped off while the cat is getting its spay or neuter surgery. This is harmless for the cat and allows volunteers and the public to identify which cats in the colony still need to be taken in for surgery. Some of the cats will be good candidates for adoption if there are shelter spaces, foster and forever families available. Others will be returned to their colony where volunteers will make sure there is proper food and shelter to keep the cats healthy.

“The Burns Lake Veterinary Clinic and its community-supported Mother Millie Fund have always done their best to help cats in need,” says Dr. Lois Martin of the Burns Lake Veterinary Clinic. We adopt out about 100 spayed and neutered stray cats each year and provide lower-income rates for families in need of assistance. However, the large numbers of cats in community cat colonies are impossible to address with our limited resources. With the BC SPCA support we can help three times as many cats as we could on our own.”

Valerie Ingram of the Lakes Animal Friendship Society says, “We are very excited to work with the BC SPCA and the Burns Lake Veterinary Clinic on this project. It complements the work we have done with the Canadian Animal Assistance Team and Burns Lake Veterinary Clinic to help hundreds of lower-income families have their animals spayed or neutered. The BC SPCA has taken a great step forward in their approach of combining resources and partnering with local groups. We look forward to demonstrating this as a successful model for other projects and other areas of BC.”

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