

## LICENSING IN NORTH CAROLINA

Licensing is a failed system and there are many reasons why licensing has an overall negative effect. Dog licensing nationwide is not obeyed by a majority of citizens. The poor and those on fixed incomes simply do not license their pets. If punitive licensing is enacted they avoid authority. They are afraid to make use of any services that will expose them to law enforcement. They do not visit veterinarians, participate in shot clinics, use low-cost spay/neuter programs, or seek health assistance for injured or suffering pets. They do not redeem pets that end up in shelters and often abandon pets rather than take them to shelters and face possible fines. When confronted by officials that require payments for fees and fines, owners forsake ownership.

Mandatory dog and cat sterilization is a goal which cannot be enforced by existing or affordable legal mechanisms. The problem is that mandatory dog and cat sterilization relies upon licensing for enforcement. Nationally, studies of licensing compliance show that only 15% to 25% of dogs and a negligible percentage of cats are licensed. Only a few US jurisdictions can demonstrate licensing compliance of as high as 40%. (1)

North Carolina is no exception. While local government has the authority to require pet owners to pay an annual license tax, few have managed to generate significant income. Some jurisdictions have concluded, however, that the administrative burden of collecting such tax outweighs the potential benefits. (2)

- Charlotte-Mecklenburg has a license compliance rate of about 19%; Mecklenburg estimates that there are 400,000 animals in the County and they collect about 75,000 tags despite rigorous enforcement, a \$4.5M budget, and contracting with Pet Data since 2005
- In a 2006 news article Durham County Commissioners stated an approximate 45-50% license compliance rate (with door to door canvassing/enforcement). Durham County animal control administrator Cindy Bailey is quoted as saying, "My problem is that the good, responsible citizens pay, and they're typically not the citizens we have problems with." Using pet ownership estimates for dogs and cats, Durham County should have approximately 37,800 dogs and 33,000 cats requiring licenses. However, only 41,600 bills were mailed from the tax department in 2012 and it is not clear how many were paid.
- Town of Matthews estimates only 19-20% of their residents obtain licenses (3)
- The Henderson County Board of Health Planning for Animal Services said in their 2002 report: In the short run (and perhaps indefinitely), this provision would require a significant net cost to the county, over and above license revenue. Local governments in North Carolina which have enacted such a license contacted by Animal Control staff have found that the costs of its enforcement far exceed its revenue.
- Forsyth County enacted differential licensing several years ago and still licenses only about 30 percent of dogs and 11 percent of cats. (*updated 6/2013*)
- With a compliance rate at approximately 3%, Burke County decided in January 2010 to repeal their differential licensing requirement as it was not cost effective to maintain or enforce.

1. Numbers test conventional wisdom on "pet overpopulation". Merritt Clifton. Animal People, December 2006
2. Animal Control by Aimee Wall – July 2007. County and Municipal Government in North Carolina, Article 35.
3. Town of Matthews - Board of Commissioners Meeting April 23, 2007 <http://www.matthewsnc.com/html/bocminutes.html>