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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Feral Cat Task Force Counts Successes; Bats Remain Biggest Rabies Concern

Brewster, NY—Since the Feral Cat Task Force was launched last summer, 70 cats have been captured, neutered and vaccinated against rabies, the results of continuing collaboration between Putnam Felines and the Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH). Fifty-seven of the cats were released back into their previous habitats and the remaining 13 were adopted after being examined and found to be domesticated. The task force began last August because of growing concern over possible human contact with feral cats infected with rabies, a deadly virus which attacks the nervous system.

“The success of the Feral Cat Task Force and its trap-neuter-release program lies not only in the fact that we have neutered nearly seven dozen cats,” explains Allen Beals, MD, Putnam County’s Commissioner of Health, “but also that we have been able to increase general awareness of rabies in the county and the role that cats play in transmission.”

While feral cats account for a significant number of required rabies treatments in New York State, the number-one reason for treatments in Putnam County remains bats. As the weather warms, bats return to the local area and are more active and likely to get into homes. A bat found in the home should be captured since this is the only way to avoid unnecessary treatment. A video on how to capture a bat is available on New York State Department of Health’s website at:

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/zoonoses/rabies/>

With the warm weather people also spend more time outdoors and contact with wildlife increases. Raccoons, skunks and foxes can also carry the rabies virus, which is found in the saliva and nervous tissue of an infected animal. Exchange can occur through an animal bite, or if saliva or nervous tissue comes in contact with an open wound, or an individual's eyes, nose or mouth. In addition to feral cats and wildlife, dogs and ferrets can also get rabies if not vaccinated. (The next PCDOH rabies vaccination clinic for Putnam pets is in July. Check the PCDOH website for announcements prior to the event.)

To educate children about the risk of rabies, teach them to:

- Avoid wild animals, including new litters of baby animals in spring. (*Everyone* should resist the urge to touch or pet a wild animal or unfamiliar pet.)
- Tell an adult about any contact with a wild animal or unfamiliar pet.
- Never touch a bat. If a bat is found indoors, call the Health Department.

All animal bites and/or contact with wild animals should be reported promptly to the Department of Health at 845-808-1390. After hours or on weekends/holidays report the incident by calling the Environmental Health Hotline at 845-808-1390 and press "3." A Health Department representative will promptly return your call. The Health Department will test any possibly rabid animal after an incident involving contact with a human or pet. If a family pet encounters a wild animal, avoid immediate handling, or use rubber gloves and call the Health Department.

The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the county's nearly 100,000 residents through prevention of illness and injury. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.