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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: August 6, 2012

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**PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
SPEARHEADS FERAL CAT TASKFORCE**

Brewster, NY - The Health Department is embarking on a program which involves the trapping, neutering, vaccinating and release of feral cats in our area. This is an attempt to address a growing health concern in the county. Feral cats do not have owners or may be strays. They account for a significant number of rabies treatments, second only to bats and more than raccoons, skunks and fox combined. The *Trap-Neuter-Return* concept is a humane and effective approach used for decades in the U.S. after being proven in Europe. Scientific studies show that this practice improves the lives of feral cats, improves their relationships with the people who live near them, and decreases the size of colonies over time. Working with volunteers from Putnam Felines, Inc., and area veterinarians, the Health Department is forming a Feral Cat Task Force with the ultimate goal of decreasing the population of feral cats in our community over time and thereby reducing the risk of rabies.

Cats not immunized against rabies can carry the virus. People who feed or care for stray or feral cats risk exposure to rabies since they can be bitten or scratched. These cats often run off afterwards and cannot be captured for observation. This makes it necessary for the person to undergo treatment for POSSIBLE rabies exposure. By decreasing the feral cat population through this program, the likelihood of any exposures will be lessened. For more information on this initiative, please contact Marianne Burdick, MPH, Public Health Protection Supervisor at 845-808-1390, ext. 43160.

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