



WARM WHISKERS

P R O J E C T

- Barn Owners Manual -

Introduction

Welcome to the Warm Whiskers Project Barn Cat Program! This manual is designed to provide you with the information and guidance you need to ensure a successful partnership with the cats placed in your care. By participating in this program, you are offering feral and semi-feral cats a second chance at life while benefiting from their natural pest control abilities. Thank you for your compassion and commitment to these special felines.

Program Overview

The Barn Cat Program aims to provide feral and semi-feral cats with a safe, supportive environment in non-traditional homes. Whether you own a barn, warehouse, or other suitable property, your role is essential in helping these cats thrive. By providing food, water, shelter, and medical care, you ensure their well-being and contribute to reducing the population of at-risk cats in Southern Alberta.

Beyond Barns

The term "Barn Cat" is used symbolically to represent feral and semi-feral cats placed in non-traditional homes. While a majority of these cats are placed on rural farm properties, many other types of locations are equally suitable offering the cats a safe place to live while benefiting from their natural rodent control abilities:

- Warehouses
- Junkyards
- Auto repair shops
- Woodworking shops
- Wineries
- Stables
- Grain handling facilities
- Greenhouses, nurseries, or garden centers
- Churches
- Storage facilities

Responsibilities of a Barn Owner

As a barn owner in our program, you agree to:

1. **Commit to Acclimation:** Follow the acclimation process to help the cats adjust to their new environment.
2. **Provide Food and Water:** Ensure the cats have access to fresh food and water daily. Feeding the cats is crucial for their health and ensures they remain nearby.
3. **Provide Heated Shelter:** Offer a safe, secure and heated environment, such as a barn or outbuilding, that protects the cats from harsh weather and predators.
4. **Monitor Behavior/Health:** Observe the cats for any behavioral changes or concerns. Notify the Warm Whiskers Project team if you encounter any significant issues.
5. **Maintain Communication:** Stay in touch with the Warm Whiskers Project team, especially during the acclimation period and follow-up visits.

Acclimation Process

Cats require a **minimum of three weeks** to acclimate to their new barn environment to ensure their safety and long-term success. Without this critical adjustment period, releasing cats immediately into an unfamiliar setting significantly increases the likelihood they will panic and run off, as they do not recognize the property as home or know where to find food, water, or shelter. During the acclimation period, the cats are confined to a secure space where they can safely adjust to the barn's unique sounds, smells, and routines. Daily feeding is essential not only during this time but for the duration of the cats' lives, as they need consistent access to food to thrive and remain on the property. Regular visits and gentle interactions from the barn owner—if the cats allow it—help the cats learn that the barn owner is safe and a reliable source of care. This bond-building process strengthens their trust and encourages them to view the barn as a safe, permanent home, increasing the likelihood that they will stay and fulfill their role as working cats once released.

1. **Initial Setup** – Secure the cats in an escape-proof space, such as a tack room or large kennel, for 3–4 weeks with a litter box, food and water dishes, and a *haven hide* (somewhere the cat can go into and hide while you change the litter box and fill the food/water dishes daily)
2. **Daily Care** – Visit the acclimation area daily to feed the cats and clean their space. Calm, consistent interaction helps them feel safe.
3. **Release** – After 3–4 weeks, open the enclosure to allow the cats to explore their new environment. Continue feeding them daily to ensure they stay nearby.
4. **Ongoing Care** – Keep providing food, water, and shelter even after the cats have adjusted. This ensures their health and strengthens their bond to your property.

Initial Setup

When the cats arrive, it's essential to establish a safe and secure space for their acclimation to the barn environment. This initial confinement period is vital for helping the cats adapt to their new surroundings while ensuring their safety. An **escape-proof space**, such as a tack room, completely enclosed stall, or large kennel, should be prepared for this purpose. The area should be thoroughly checked to ensure there are no gaps or openings where the cats could escape.

Inside the space, provide the following essentials:

- **Litter Box:** Ensure the litter box is easily accessible and cleaned daily to encourage its use.
- **Food and Water Dishes:** These should be placed in a location that is convenient for daily replenishment and far enough from the litter box to maintain hygiene.
- **Haven Hide:** A haven hide is crucial for the cats' comfort and stress reduction. This can be a covered box, a pet carrier with a blanket inside, or another small enclosed area where the cats can retreat. This space allows them to feel secure while you attend to daily care tasks like changing the litter box or refilling food and water.

The confinement period should last for approximately three to four weeks, three weeks being the absolute minimum. During this time, the cats will begin to associate the barn as their new territory. Do not let them out prematurely, as this will cause them to wander off in search of their previous environment. ***Patience during this stage is key to a successful transition.***

Daily Food & Water

Providing daily food and water is essential when caring for barn cats. While the acclimation period requires consistency to help the cats settle in, it is equally important to continue providing daily food and water once they are living freely. Hunting rodents alone cannot meet their nutritional needs, and regular feeding ensures they stay healthy, effective at controlling rodents, and less likely to wander.

Access to clean, fresh water is also critical. Natural sources may freeze in winter or dry up in summer, so ensuring water is always available prevents dehydration and supports their overall well-being. By maintaining this daily routine, you help your barn cats thrive as valuable members of your property.

Heated Shelter Requirement for Cats in Barn Program

To ensure the well-being of the cats in our barn program, it is essential that there is a reliable heat source within the barn during colder months. While we understand that not all barns are heated, it is crucial that the barn provides a warm, safe environment for the cats by including a suitable heat source inside the space where the cats are housed. Exposure to freezing temperatures without sufficient warmth can result in serious health risks such as hypothermia, frostbite, and a weakened immune system. It is therefore vital that the barn has a heat source available, if the barn is not heated itself. This ensures the cats are protected from the harsh cold, particularly during Canadian winters.

If the barn is not equipped with a full heating system, it is required to have a localized heat source to keep the cats comfortable. This can be achieved through heated shelters or heated pads inside a shelter within the barn. These heat sources must be safe, reliable, and suitable for outdoor or barn environments.

- **Pet Igloos** – The pet igloo with is a sturdy igloo-shaped shelter that works well for cats when paired with heating pads. Its insulation helps retain warmth, making it ideal for colder weather. Adding a heating pad inside ensures a consistent heat source, while the design offers protection from the elements, creating a secure and comfortable space for the cats. These types of dog houses are often found on Facebook Marketplace.



- **Heated Pads for Shelters** – Outdoor animal heating pads are an excellent solution for ensuring the cats in the barn program stay warm during the colder months. These pads provide a reliable and safe heat source, helping to maintain a comfortable environment for the cats even when outdoor temperatures drop drastically. There are two main types of heating pads suitable for outdoor use:

1. **Pressure-Activated Heating Pads** – these pads are activated when the cat steps on them, providing warmth only when needed. This ensures energy efficiency by only running when the cats are in the shelter.



→ <https://a.co/d/fvocdoL>



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2. Timed Heating Pads:

- These pads often work by turning on and off in cycles or after a preset time. While convenient, it's important to remember that they may automatically turn off after a set period. For the cats' safety, ensure the pad is regularly monitored and turned back on as needed to prevent the cats from being left in cold conditions.



→ <https://a.co/d/fvocdoL>

- **Thermal Insulated Shelters with Heat Sources** – Thermal insulated shelters with heat sources are an effective way to keep cats warm during the winter months. These shelters combine insulation with a built-in heating element, helping to retain heat and create a comfortable, safe environment for the cats. This setup ensures that the cats stay warm even in harsh weather conditions, providing reliable protection from the cold that combine both insulation and a heating element offer a practical solution. They help retain heat and keep the cats warm during the winter months.



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The Warm Whiskers Project assumes no liability for any incidents, damages, or issues that may arise from the use of heated electrical cat houses. Barn owners are fully responsible for the selection, installation, and safe operation of any such devices. It is recommended that barn owners adhere strictly to the manufacturer's guidelines and safety instructions to ensure the well-being of both the cats and the property.

Monitor Behaviour + Health

Regularly observe the cats for any changes in their behavior, activity levels, or overall health. This includes watching for signs of illness, injury, or other concerns that may impact their well-being. As the barn owner, you are responsible for addressing any health or behavioral issues, which includes making medical decisions and covering any associated expenses.

If you notice concerns, we encourage you to consult a veterinarian to ensure the cats remain healthy and productive members of your barn. While the Warm Whiskers Project team cannot cover medical expenses, we are available to provide advice, resources, or guidance if you encounter challenges. Maintaining communication with our team is important to ensure the cats are thriving in their new environment.

Communication

It is important to maintain consistent communication with the Warm Whiskers Project team, especially during the initial acclimation period and throughout the year. The team will conduct a 1-month post-placement visit and up to 3 additional visits throughout the following 12 months to monitor the cats' progress and provide ongoing support. These visits offer valuable opportunities for the barn owner to address any questions or concerns, and for the team to assess how the cats are adjusting. If any health or behavioral issues arise, or if there is an emergency, it is crucial to notify the team so that appropriate guidance or assistance can be provided.

Cat Losses and Nature's Course

We know that nature can be harsh, and despite our best efforts, there may be times when a cat is lost due to the elements or other unavoidable circumstances. Loss is a natural part of life, and we approach these moments with understanding and care.

If a cat is lost, we will check in to make sure that the other cats in your care are still doing well. This is not a reflection of anything gone wrong, but rather a way to make sure we are supporting both you and the cats to the best of our ability. If needed, we are happy to offer a replacement cat for your barn program to help meet the needs of your environment.

Resident Cats

To ensure a smooth transition for the Warm Whiskers Barn Cats, it is essential that all resident cats at the barn be neutered or spayed prior to the placement of any new cats. If any resident cats have not yet been altered, our team is more than happy to assist with trapping them for spaying/neutering at no cost to the barn owner. However, the cost of these procedures will be the responsibility of the barn owner.

We are committed to helping barn owners find the best care and the most affordable options for these procedures, ensuring the health and well-being of all cats involved. Once the resident cats have fully recovered from their spay/neuter surgeries, we will be able to move forward with placing the Warm Whiskers Barn Cats in the barn.

This process not only ensures the success of our program but also aligns with our mission of reducing the feline population in Southern Alberta. By supporting responsible spaying and neutering practices, we are helping to prevent overpopulation, reduce the number of stray and feral cats, and improve the lives of all cats in the region.

Post-Placement Support

Warm Whiskers Project provides ongoing support to ensure the long-term success and well-being of your barn cat placement. We understand that placing a feral cat into a new environment is a significant transition, both for the cat and for the barn owner. Often, rescues and advocates have invested considerable time, effort, and resources into rehabilitating and preparing these cats for their new lives. Our goal is to ensure that this hard work results in a positive and sustainable placement, where the cats not only adjust well but also thrive in their new roles.

We believe that the support we provide after the placement is just as important as the careful process of trapping and assessing the cats before they arrive at the barn. We want to help make the transition as smooth as possible, addressing any issues that may arise early on, and ensuring the cats are properly acclimating to their new environment. By offering ongoing support, we help to foster strong relationships between the barn owners and the cats, ensuring that both parties benefit from the arrangement. Our involvement also ensures that any concerns can be addressed promptly, which ultimately helps to secure the long-term success of the placement.

1. **1-Month Post-Placement Visit** – A team member will visit to check on the cats' adjustment and address any concerns.
2. **Follow-Up Visits** – Up to three additional visits throughout the first year to monitor the cats and offer support.
3. **Consultation** – We are available to answer your questions or provide advice regarding the care and behavior of your barn cats.

Donation Based Program

We do not charge a fee for our barn cat program because our primary goal is to find safe, suitable homes for as many cats as possible. This work is a labor of love, and we are driven solely by our dedication to the cats' well-being.

While there is no cost to adopt barn cats, we gladly accept donations to help sustain our efforts. If a donation is made and a rescue provided the cats, we will split the donation with that rescue in recognition of their role. The rest of the donation helps us continue our mission, covering essentials like shelter supplies, spay/neuter efforts, and other needs that align with our mission.

Our team consists of two committed individuals and a trapper consultant. We do not profit from this work—every donation directly supports our efforts to provide these cats with the safe placements they deserve.

Contact Information

For questions or support, please contact the Warm Whiskers Project team:

Email: wwp@bhars.org

Website: <https://www.bhars.org/warm-whiskers-project>

Facebook: <https://facebook.com/warmwhiskersproject>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/warm.whiskers.project>

We are here to help and appreciate your dedication to providing a safe and loving home for these deserving cats.

Thank You!

Thank you for being part of the Warm Whiskers Project Barn Cat Program. Your compassion and care make a significant difference in the lives of these cats and the community. Together, we are creating a brighter future for the stray and feral felines of Southern Alberta.