



CITY OF RAPID CITY

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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To: Mayor Hanks and City Council Members

From: Jim Good, Chairman
Urban Wildlife Committee

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Subject: Proposed Ordinance to Ban the Feeding of Ducks and Geese within the City Limits

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The Urban Wildlife Committee was created by the City Council in January, 2007 to make recommendations on various aspects of wildlife and related problems and issues for the people and environs within the city. The Committee includes a representative of the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, the City Council, a biologist, a member of the Urban Forestry Board, a local hunter, a master gardener, a Parks Division employee, a member of the State Game, Fish & Parks Dept, and an at-large member.

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From the beginning UWC members wrestled with the issues created by the large population of geese and ducks in the city, and researched all manner of proposed solutions. When questions were raised, the Committee researched what other communities and management agencies were doing, and why. Professionals who are charged with management of wildlife throughout the country were consulted on what solutions proved to be successful, which did not, and why. The different environments and geese numbers were also taken into account. All questions and issues were thoroughly researched before any solutions were developed.

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As a result of the research, and based on community need, a Waterfowl Management Plan was drafted and submitted to the City Council for consideration. On April 6, 2009 the City Council approved the Plan for the City of Rapid City. This Plan outlines recommended methods to reduce the total number of waterfowl that stay in the Canyon Lake Park, Meadowbrook Golf Course and Storybook Island areas throughout the year.

The Plan was developed, in part, as a result of the numerous complaints from the public about property damage, unsightliness, fecal droppings and public health and safety issues. The Plan also details the following three strategies to maintain an acceptable population level of waterfowl in Rapid City:

Population Stabilization

A population stabilization program is necessary for successful long-term Canada geese nuisance abatement. This step will bring the number of waterfowl to an acceptable level and allow the City to maintain that level in conjunction with other strategies detailed in the Plan. Data will be collected to assist the City in determining an acceptable population level for waterfowl in this area. Staff will review the numbers each year and make a determination on the number that should be removed.

- Population stabilization will slow or reverse the growth in waterfowl populations
- Population stabilization will reduce the loyalty of adult geese to a specific site for future nesting and molting, and
- Population stabilization will break the biological necessity for adult geese to stay in Rapid City through molting season (late July)

Site Aversion/Nuisance Abatement

The site aversion program will reduce the number of geese during the spring, summer and fall months, leading to the establishment of a long-term maintenance program that will sustain geese nuisance free facilities in the years to come.

Because of the open water at Canyon Lake and grass areas in the City's park system and golf courses, there will always be ducks and geese in these locations. It is the objective of this Plan to reduce the flock to a manageable number that will allow staff to maintain the park and golf courses for the enjoyment of our citizens and visitors.

Public Education

The Waterfowl Management Plan includes the following public education components:

General Public: The Rapid City Parks and Recreation Department and the SD Game, Fish & Parks Office will host public events at city facilities as well as make presentations and provide displays at events throughout the City to inform the general public of the Waterfowl Management Plan. Public Service Announcements and press releases will be developed and distributed and other media coverage arranged as necessary. When the GF&P Outdoor Education Center opens in 2011, this issue will be a main topic of education for students and the general public as they visit the Center.

A brochure was developed and distributed throughout the park system dealing with issues created by feeding the ducks and geese in Canyon Lake Park and urging the public not to feed waterfowl. Letters were also sent to various child care organizations

with similar information. It is anticipated that signs will be posted urging the public not to feed the ducks and geese. Information was also obtained from other municipalities who provide artificial food to the public for the purpose of feeding ducks. Providing artificial food and any type of feeders will increase the work load for parks division staff. The Urban Wildlife Committee recommends no feeding of waterfowl so these birds can feed on existing natural foods in and around the lake. Providing an artificial food source does not address the issue of the large numbers of waterfowl congregating in small areas and the damage that is done to the surrounding public and private properties. The same problem exists with allowing the public to feed in the designated duck feeding areas or at certain times of the year. The waterfowl congregate in these areas and as a result create property damage and maintenance issues on surrounding properties (Meadowbrook Golf Course and Blessed Sacrament Church). Providing a food source in whatever form encourages the waterfowl to stay in the Canyon Lake area rather than migrate as they should.

Schools: The Parks and Recreation Department and the SD Game Fish & Parks Department will develop instructional materials for students and make them available to local schools. The message will be that we should enjoy these birds in the wild and do what we can to keep them wild. Feeding ducks and geese in the parks makes them dependent on humans, they stop eating the foods that keep them healthy, and they fly less. Wild ducks and geese migrate in the spring to places where they can find their natural food and safe nesting sites. Feeding them at Canyon Lake Park and Storybook Island keeps them in the city year-round and this causes problems for the birds as well as people and property. Allowing the public to feed waterfowl promotes the idea that we are “helping” them when the opposite is true. Wildlife, when left alone to forage for themselves, will make much better food choices.

Feeding Geese: Feeding of geese causes them to congregate in areas resulting in a concentration of fecal droppings, overgrazing of grass areas and increases the possibility of disease transfer between birds. Also, geese can become aggressive as they fight for food or defend their nest.

If the ban on feeding ducks and geese is approved, information should be provided to the community through local media outlets and community newsletters informing the public that feeding of waterfowl is prohibited within the City of Rapid City.

The Urban Wildlife Committee has discussed all options and issues related to feeding waterfowl. Although this is a time-honored tradition in Rapid City, especially at Canyon Lake, the number of waterfowl living in these areas year-round is increasing and causing damage to the park as well as surrounding properties. Representatives from the SD Game, Fish & Parks Department have indicated that the State will not authorize permits to reduce the number of waterfowl unless the City has taken steps to prohibit the public from feeding them. This is similar to the deer herd management program that the City has been working with for many years.

There have also been discussions about the water quality in Canyon Lake and the impact the large number of waterfowl might have on this water source. Canyon Lake is one of the City's sources for potable water for the community and it should be protected.

Recommendation

It is the recommendation of the Urban Wildlife Committee that the City Council implement a no feeding ordinance for waterfowl within the City limits.