

City of Rapid City, South Dakota

Waterfowl Management Plan

INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the Urban Wildlife Committee (UWC) was established to make recommendations to the Rapid City Council on various aspects of wildlife and related problems and issues for the people and environs within the city.

The UWC was setup as a continuation for management ideas, planning, processes and implementation of urban wildlife/human interactions/conflicts after the Deer Management Committee was dissolved after completing their task of developing a Deer Management Plan.

The UWC has discussed many aspects of the waterfowl problems/conflicts along the Rapid Creek corridor and at the various golf courses primarily caused by Canada geese. Two situations that continually surface during discussions are the feeding of waterfowl at Canyon Lake and Storybook Island and the number of exotic and hybrid ducks and geese at Canyon Lake.

Waterfowl, for the purpose of this Plan are defined as any wild ducks, geese and swans indigenous to North America including those similar species normally found or migrating in other countries, which may show up locally as accidentals. Exotic waterfowl for this Plan include domestic geese, ducks or swans and any hybrids of these groups or birds resulting from crossbreeding of domestics or wild birds and domestics.

INFORMATION AND PROBLEMS

Conflicts between Canada geese and humans in the urban environment have been shown to increase as goose populations have grown (Conover and Chaska 1985, cited in Smith, Craven, and Curtis 1999). Increasing concentrations of waterfowl can lead to the likelihood of diseases being spread with resulting die-offs occurring. Disease organisms originating from a single species of waterfowl can also spread to other species (Friend 1987). The following waterfowl numbers (Table 1) have been recorded at Canyon Lake as part of the annual Christmas Bird Counts from 2003-2007, Christmas Bird Count Data, presented to UWC, 2008. The data indicates a substantial increase in waterfowl numbers at Canyon Lake between 2003 and 2007. The Committee recommends that the waterfowl population needs to be reduced.

Table 1. Waterfowl Recorded at Canyon Lake, 2003-2007.

Date	Canada Geese	Mallards	Miscellaneous Ducks	Total
12/27/03	439	560	225	1224
12/19/04	850	530	274	1653
12/18/05	500	843	181	1524
12/17/06	995	451	208	1654
12/16/07	1435	1195	242	2872

Techniques Examined

Scare techniques- propane cannons, programmable sound machines, cracker shells, distress calls, mylar tape and flags could possibly be used to scare geese and ducks from areas. These methods would require time and would need to be accomplished at different locations to be effective. Costs need to be determined, as well as possible disturbance to people living close to the control area where sounds would be utilized.

Disruptive pattern- erect fences or put up netting at critical places/areas used by birds. For Canada geese, grow tall grasses or more natural tall plant species where possible along shorelines or by ponds and in key open areas frequented by geese. The geese do not use these vegetative types. Locations and costs for these control methods need to be determined.

Trained dog harassment- an effective method, but time consuming and expensive.

Repellant- for Canada geese management, spray short grass with methyl anthanilate. Birds do not like the taste and the chemical is harmless to them. This method has been used in Anchorage, AK to control Canada geese in downtown areas. Cost needs to be determined.

Reproductive Control- for waterfowl, primarily Canada geese, oil/addle/puncture eggs. This is an effective control method, but somewhat time consuming. Need to determine costs, and labor availability.

No Management option- continue to do nothing and allow the problems of excess goose feces to annoy the visiting public and create a possible health problem. Allow continued feeding of ducks which leads to excessive feces and potential unhealthy excessive concentrations and conditions for the birds, which eat these unnatural processed foods, primarily bread and cracker types. The UWC feels this is not a viable option.

The UWC recommends that the feeding of waterfowl be prohibited by the City. The UWC is aware of the possible public outcry against discontinuing this activity, but feels it is necessary as is the eventual permanent removal of exotic, hybrid and portions of the wild waterfowl from Canyon Lake. The goal of the UWC is to have only wild waterfowl at acceptable population levels using the water areas in Rapid City.

Before any active management or control methods are initiated, the Committee will:

- Place informational articles in local newspapers
- Provide brochures in dispensers at appropriate locations
- Provide information for television and radio broadcasts, and
- Attend various service club meetings to explain the City's Waterfowl Management Plan and the methods and reasons for management and control activities.

The UWC has concluded that all exotics as well as a portion of the wild waterfowl be captured and removed from Canyon Lake and areas where they may be found along Rapid Creek within the Green Belt. Efforts will be made to relocate the exotic birds to suitable areas where they cannot return to the Canyon Lake area. Wild waterfowl or exotics that cannot be relocated will be euthanized by humane methods.

Canada geese causing problems and becoming nuisance animals throughout the area or at golf courses will be harassed by regulated means, including, but not limited to herding by dogs, control of eggs found in nests and removal as necessary. These management methods will follow approved Federal and State regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The UWC recommends that:

1. The City issue regulations to prohibit the feeding of waterfowl at current waterfowl concentration areas, capture exotic, domestic and hybrid waterfowl, remove them from their use areas, so they cannot return, either by locating new areas for them to live or if necessary, euthanize the captured birds, and to control, harass and if necessary remove problem Canada geese from feeding areas and golf courses.
2. The City hire a full-time or part-time Wildlife Animal Control Officer to provide wildlife management expertise, public education, outreach activities and enforcement of wildlife ordinances within the City limits. The Ranger/Officer will have authority to issue citations to individuals found to be in violation of City wildlife ordinances. The Officer will coordinate closely with the Rapid City Regional Office of the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service in all matters dealing with fish and wildlife management and enforcement. The UWC feels it is necessary to hire and fill this position, with increased public use of the Parkway and the fact that the placement and distribution of the "Don't Feed the Waterfowl" Brochure, for the past 6 months, explaining that feeding waterfowl is not good for the welfare of these birds and should be discontinued, has failed to curtail this activity.

REFERENCES

Friend, M. (ed.). 1987. Field Guide to Wildlife Diseases. Volume I. General Field Procedures and Diseases of Migratory Birds Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Res. Publ. 167.

Smith, A. E., S. R. Craven, and P. D. Curtis. 1999. Managing Canada geese in urban environments. Jack Berryman Institute Publication 16, and Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, N.Y.