

Rapid City, South Dakota
Waterfowl Management Plan
March 25, 2009

A. General Overview of Waterfowl Management Plan

The waterfowl management plan outlines methods to reduce the total number of waterfowl (wild and domestic) that occur in Rapid City. The plan also details three strategies to help maintain an acceptable population level of waterfowl in Rapid City. The strategies are:

- A population stabilization program that reduces the population growth of resident and domestic geese as well as geese loyalty to the area;
- A nuisance abatement/site aversion program that resolves nuisance issues at target sites in each community; and
- Public education explaining that feeding both domestic and wild waterfowl does not help, and in fact, harms them.

Objective: To begin a humane resolution to waterfowl issues in Rapid City and to establish a framework for city wide implementation in 2009.

Scope: The waterfowl management plan will implement a Waterfowl Reduction Program as well as three maintenance strategies of Population Stabilization, Site Aversion and Public Education as follows:

- The Waterfowl Reduction Program will cover areas where waterfowl occur in the City of Rapid City.
- The Population Stabilization Program will cover areas where waterfowl occur in the City of Rapid City.
- The Site Aversion program will include areas where waterfowl occur in the City of Rapid City.
- The Public Education program will encompass all of the City of Rapid City.

Organizations: The waterfowl management plan will be implemented by three partner organizations:

- The City of Rapid City Department of Parks and Recreation
- South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks, and
- Citizen volunteers

Responsibilities:

Waterfowl Reduction (March – July)

- City of Rapid City obtains permit from US Fish and Wildlife Service (Permit needs to be submitted by early January)
- City of Rapid City and SD Game, Fish & Parks will conduct capture, euthanization and donation of waterfowl.

Population Stabilization (Late March – Early May)

- City of Rapid City obtains permit from US Fish and Wildlife Service (Permit needs to be submitted by early January)
- City of Rapid City and SD Game, Fish & Parks will recruit volunteers; prepare final report and provide training for egg addling.

Site Aversion (year-round)

- City of Rapid City identifies one staff member, obtains dogs and other necessary items.

Public Education (year-round)

- All partners will provide volunteers or staff for on-site distribution of educational literature.
- City of Rapid City and SD Game, Fish & Parks will conduct public meetings.
- City of Rapid City will provide signage.

Time Line and Schedule:

January

- City of Rapid City and all partners commit to program
- Permit Application submitted to US Fish & Wildlife Service by mid January
- Partner planning and organization meeting

February - March

- Community meeting detailing waterfowl management plan.
- Develop information articles and press releases about the egg addling program.
- All partners will participate in signing up golf courses and home owner's associations as managers/owners of property where geese may be nesting
- The City of Rapid City will present public information meeting
- Identify sites for the site aversion program

- Game, Fish & Parks will coordinate egg addling training

March – July

- Rapid City Egg Addling Program
- Waterfowl Reduction
- SD Game, Fish & Parks will coordinate waterfowl trapping and euthanization.

May – June

- Site Aversion

August – October

- Post Molt Site Aversion

September – November

- Landscape/Habitat Modifications

B. Current Domestic and Wild Waterfowl Populations in the City of Rapid City

I. Waterfowl Reduction

Overview. A waterfowl reduction program is necessary to bring the total numbers of waterfowl (wild and domestic) down to an acceptable level and to maintain that level in conjunction with the other strategies detailed below. Reduction will start in the spring before the waterfowl hatch their young and continue as needed through the summer during the molt. The City of Rapid City with assistance from SD Game, Fish and Parks and volunteers will conduct the capture, euthanization and donation of waterfowl.

Waterfowl Reduction Program: Waterfowl reduction is accomplished by capturing waterfowl with traps and then transporting them for euthanization and donation to local charities and/or needy families. This operation will begin in late March and go through July. It requires a federal permit which will be obtained by the City of Rapid City.

II. Population Stabilization

Overview: A population stabilization program is a necessary ingredient of successful long-term Canada geese nuisance abatement. Beginning in February geese stop moving in flocks and start to pair with their mate. They will locate a nesting site in the vicinity of their birth or where they had nested the previous year. Geese that are three years and older, will nest. The younger geese will pair up, but will not build a nest. Geese should be allowed to nest (unless the nest is located in an inappropriate site) so the nests can be easily located. Harassing or chasing nesting geese during the nesting season is counter productive since the geese will simply hide the nests or relocate them nearby. Allowing geese to nest on known sites will aid in the long-term population stabilization. Once the geese are unsuccessful in the nesting (due to the addling program) they will have no need to remain in the area. This is enhanced by the site aversion program that begins in mid May.

This program will begin in late March. GFP will facilitate training for egg addling to ensure a safe and professional program.

Canada goose Population Stabilization: Population stabilization is accomplished by locating Canada geese nests and using a portable drill to drill into the eggs in the nests. This operation begins in late March and continues until early May. It requires a federal permit which will be obtained by the City of Rapid City. Population stabilization is an integral part of the geese management program for three significant reasons:

1. Population Stabilization slows or reverses the growth in resident geese population. We estimate that for every treated nest, 52 fewer geese will be in the area after an eight-year period.
2. Population Stabilization reduces the loyalty of adult geese to a specific site for future nesting and molting. When geese have a failed nesting season some of these geese may fly north in a “molt migration” thus reducing the number of geese in the nesting area and surrounding regions for the summer and fall seasons.
3. Population Stabilization breaks the biological necessity for adult geese to stay in Rapid City through molting season (late July). Because geese tend to be more of a nuisance in spring and summer, and because this is the time when goslings are born and are tended to by parent geese, the lack of goslings means the parent geese can be flushed from the area. Otherwise they will remain in the area until at least mid August when their goslings are first able to fly.

Community Participation: The Population Stabilization program should cover as large an area as possible. In particular, it is important to enlist the support of property owners in the area to participate in the egg addling program. The City of Rapid City and the SD Game Fish & Parks Office will assist in recruiting property owners for the Population Stabilization program. One significant helpful factor in a long-term program is that geese are exceptionally loyal to a nest site. Therefore, once the team has identified the nest sites in year one, tracking sites in subsequent years will be significantly easier.

III. Site Aversion/Nuisance Abatement Program

Objectives:

- ▶ Be geese nuisance free during the spring, summer and fall months for all participating sites, after beginning the nuisance abatement program;
- ▶ Be well on the way to establishing a long-term maintenance program that will sustain geese nuisance free facilities in the years to come.

Geese Flushing:

The table below shows the period when geese flushing using a trained dog may be conducted. During these periods the geese will be reconditioned to view identified areas as an unsafe, undesirable habitat for them.

| | Start | Date | End | Date |
|--------|---|----------------------------|--|------------------|
| Spring | After mating and nesting season ends | Early May | When geese molt (lose wing feathers and are unable to fly) | Mid to late June |
| Summer | When geese are again able to fly after the molt | Late July/ Early August | Anytime prior to mating and nesting season begins | Late January |

Each period begins with a 2-day intensive harassment of geese. This initial period will be followed by a reduced effort for 2 weeks and then a long-term maintenance program. A Canada geese exclusion zone should be established for sites included in the program. The goal is for all geese that can fly to be out of the exclusion zone by the end of the first or second day.

Harassment of geese will be accomplished using trained dogs. The dogs will be on a lead or under the voice control of a handler. At times the dogs will be let off leash to flush geese. Here is how it works.

Geese need water for safety. Geese on land are vulnerable to predators. Water is their safe haven, their sanctuary. When there is grass near the water body, they feed on grass knowing that they can run or fly to the safety of the water body to escape a land predator. Although a dog is not really a predator, it still looks and acts like a predator to the geese. When the geese fly to their safe haven, a water body, the dog pursuit continues with the aid of a remote controlled boat operated by the appropriate staff.

Geese can out swim any land predator including dogs. It is suggested that the dog always wears a flotation jacket to improve its endurance in the water and courage to swim in deep water and far from land. Also, the flotation jacket identifies the dog as a working dog rather than an unauthorized dog harassing geese. The geese also recognize the jacket from the air.

During the intensive phase, the geese will first move to one side of the lake or onto another area of the park. Eventually the geese give up, learn that the park is not a safe sanctuary and find another place to stay.

Long Term Program: Geese will land at each program site from time to time but will quickly leave when the dog arrives. We should notice several consecutive weeks when there will be no geese. Then one goose in the flock will get the courage to return to the area leading a few others to follow it. Depending on the numbers that arrive we will let

them stay or reintroduce the dog, assisted by a boat. The geese will leave the lake quickly, within 30 minutes at most. Using this method and managing the frequency of dog visits you can control the number of geese at the program site.

IV. Public Education

- a. General Public: The City will host public events at city facilities as a partnership or on an individual basis as well as make presentations and provide displays at other events throughout the City to inform the general public of the waterfowl management plan. A Public Service Announcement will be developed, press releases will be distributed, and other media coverage will be arranged as necessary.
- b. Schools: Develop instructional materials for students in grades three and four and make them available to all Rapid City schools serving those grades. 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 do less flying. 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 and for people.
- c. Feeding Geese: Feeding of geese causes them to congregate in areas resulting in a concentration of fecal droppings, overgrazing on grass and increases the possibility of transfer of disease between birds. Also, geese can become aggressive as they fight for food.

We recommend providing information to the community through local newspapers or in community newsletters informing the public that feeding of waterfowl is prohibited within the City of Rapid City.

V. Alternate Relocation Plan

Careful planning is required to minimize stress and reduce the potential of capture myopathy. Capture myopathy is a complex degenerative disease of skeletal muscle associated with increased muscular exertion and over stimulation of the nervous system as a result of the capture, restraint, and transportation of wildlife. Capture myopathy causes wildlife to be more susceptible to predation. The following suggestions may help reduce the occurrence of capture myopathy:

- The City of Rapid City will coordinate capture and transport of selected domestic waterfowl. SD Game, Fish & Parks will assist with capture process. All partners will participate in oversight of capture and will assist adopters with transport arrangements.
- Relocation sites should be identified and prepared prior to initiating capture.

- Capture should be overseen by personnel experienced in handling and restraining waterfowl, and conducted using humane methods.
- Sufficient transport crates (to prevent overcrowding) and transport vehicles must be available prior to capture.
- Capture should be conducted when climates will not contribute to over heating.
- Captured waterfowl should be monitored to identify stress-related health issues.
- Transportation to the relocation site should occur within a few hours of capture. Normal wildlife transport protocols should be observed.

Criteria for selection of relocation sites:

- Potential relocation sites will receive an informational list which outlines the requirements necessary to “adopt” waterfowl. Prescreening of application will be required.
- The relocation sites should provide domestic waterfowl with a comparable environment including access to a water body, protection from predators, etc. The relocation sites should be conducive to long term survival. Relocation sites may not include locations where the waterfowl will be intended for food or breeding.
- Parties responsible for ensuring a source of supplemental feeding and ongoing health monitoring should be identified.
- The relocation sites should be evaluated regarding potential impact on existing waterfowl and neighboring community.
- The relocation sites should be provided with information on implementing long-term humane management of waterfowl populations
- If approved relocation sites are not available, waterfowl may be euthanized in a humane manner as recommended by the SD Department of Game, Fish & Parks. The meat will be distributed to organizations that serve the needy population in the community.

a. Alternate Plan. If relocation is not feasible, a long-term management plan for managing existing waterfowl populations in Rapid City must be implemented.

Long-term management should be executed in combination with the city-wide waterfowl management plan for population reduction, site aversion, population stabilization and public education. The long-term management should incorporate the following items:

- Existing waterfowl will be reconditioned to seek out new roosting locations in an effort to deter congregating near parking lots, walkways, picnic areas and public access ramps.

- Conditioning will include establishing a location furthest from high traffic where feeding can occur. The optimal goal would be to gradually eliminate feeding sites.
- Existing members of the public will be recruited to provide supplemental feedings during the transition period as well as at the new feeding locations.
- Park staff will begin luring waterfowl to new locations through bait feeding in early spring.
- To aid monitoring in the overall health of the waterfowl located in Rapid City, identification of sick or injured domestic waterfowl will be reported to the SD Department of Game Fish & Parks.

b. Feeding Regimen

To facilitate conditioning of waterfowl to gradual acceptance of designated feeding sites, supplemental feeding may be provided. Feeding station(s) will be set up at areas to be determined by park officials. Temporary feeding stations may be set up to allow gradual movement of birds to desired permanent feeding station. Controlled supplemental feeding will be done at feeding stations only. No other feeding of waterfowl will be allowed.

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

We recommend providing information to the community through local newspapers or in community newsletters informing the public that feeding of gees and ducks is prohibited within the City of Rapid City.

VI. FUTURE DOMESTIC WATERFOWL POPULATIONS

The Waterfowl Management Plan is meant to be comprehensive and applicable to future domestic waterfowl populations in the City, in addition to current populations. The plan will be monitored on a regular basis by the partnership for its effectiveness at keeping population levels stable and manageable, and changes or modifications will be made by the partnership as necessary. In addition, this plan can serve as a template for other city parks or communities with similar waterfowl issues that wish to implement a humane management plan.