

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Date: September 13, 2001
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TO: Vancouver City Council
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

FROM: General Manager Board of Parks and Recreation
General Manager of Community Services

SUBJECT: Coexisting with Coyotes in the Urban Environment

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. That Council and the Park Board:

Endorse a collaborative strategy in dealing with coyotes in the urban environment "Coexisting with Coyotes", which includes public education and awareness programs, monitoring of coyote activities and responding to incidents involving aggressive animals.

Discourage wildlife feeding, including coyotes, through public information and the increased enforcement of existing City and Park Board Bylaws.

B. That Council,

- *approve \$16,000 to the Co-existing with Coyotes Strategy for the following:-*
- *\$8,000 to expand the "Public Information Hot Line" from 3 days to 7 days per week*
- *\$8,000 for the salary costs for a Park Board Wildlife Ranger to provide immediate community response where incidents of coyote aggression have been reported. Source to be the Contingency Reserve.*

C. That the Park Board:

Approve \$17,000 from the Corporate Sponsorship Fund for the increased production and distribution of brochures and education materials by the Stanley Park Ecology Society

BACKGROUND

Recent incidents of coyote attacks on small children in the Lower Mainland have increased the level of public concern and raised the expectation for an improved response to similar incidents. City and park staff, along with provincial wildlife authorities, met in mid July to discuss the recent problems, review the present programs and make recommendations.

The complexity of and difficulty in dealing with the coyote in the urban environment is often misunderstood.

Facts about Coyotes, their habits and habitat :

- The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is one of the most adaptable, intelligent small predators in the world.
- They usually weigh between 11 and 16 kg. (25-35 pounds), but often appear to be larger in size.
- Breeding takes place in January and February. Young are born in April and May. By early summer the young are out with the parents learning to hunt.
- Their social structure is changeable. They will live in small packs, family units or, where circumstances require, they will carry on as solitary animals.
- They occupy varied habitats in the urban environment but they prefer parks with wooded areas for shelter, golf courses, cemeteries and other open areas such as vacant lots.
- Their natural diet is quite varied and includes rodents (especially rats), fruits, vegetables and the carcasses of dead animals. In the city their diet will also include easier to acquire food sources including compost piles, human food and garbage. Pets, especially cats, are easy prey for coyotes.
- The coyote population in Vancouver is estimated at between 200 – 250 animals. The total for the Fraser Valley is estimated at 2,000 to 3,000.
- Coyotes have been tracked in Stanley Park since 1988 when they were first observed. They are able to travel great distances in a short period of time. In rural areas they have been known to travel up to 100 km per day.

Coyote Aggressive Behaviour

In urban areas, coyotes are increasingly losing their natural distrust and fear of humans. Wildlife experts maintain that this habituation process mainly occurs because of human feeding, both intentional and unintentional. Individual animals become increasingly bold in the presence of humans. They learn very quickly and pass this information along to their offspring. It is a growing problem in urban coyote populations throughout North America. In cases where there is

a threat to human safety the provincial wildlife authorities will investigate. Where possible the animal will be located and destroyed.

Coyote Control Measures and Techniques

Animal control personnel agree that the coyote is one of the most difficult animals to deal with in populated areas. They are intelligent, wary and are able to move rapidly to avoid capture. Live trapping has proven to be extremely difficult. Even habituated coyotes show a strong aversion to entering live traps. For these reasons widespread campaigns in other cities to live trap coyotes have met with very limited success. Locally, unsuccessful attempts have been made by Ministry staff. Translocation is not an acceptable solution for many reasons including natural population disruption, disease transmission and the fact that most regions have similar problems with coyotes.

Coyotes cannot be apprehended consistently with tranquilizer rifles. The darts are large and their use is cumbersome, making it difficult to deal with a small, fast moving animal. The coyotes physical stature also makes this technique very challenging. They are small and thin, which limits the successful delivery of tranquilizer into the animal's body. Further, tranquilizers usually take between ten and twenty minutes to act. There are also risks associated with animals that are darted (e.g. the potential for traffic incidents) and risks posed by tranquilizers to the general public. For these reasons the practice is contrary to provincial wildlife policy. Conservation officers will not tranquilize free ranging animals which can move great distances before the drug takes effect.

Other lethal methods such as snares, kill traps and poisons pose significant liabilities when attempted in an area with a dense population of people and pets.

The most effective but controversial method for removal of coyotes is to shoot them. Even this is difficult as coyotes learn very quickly to identify people and situations to avoid. For this reason the only people that remove problem coyotes are highly experienced and trained wildlife control personnel.

Media stories this summer have focused attention on proposals for the culling or translocation of coyotes. Research, however, has shown that a large scale removal (cull) of coyotes is not an effective or reasonable strategy for the following reasons:

1. Records of coyote incidents demonstrate convincingly that most coyote problems are related to individual problem animals, not entire populations. The removal of individuals usually resolves the problem.

2. Biological information shows that coyote populations are resilient. Where numbers decline coyotes often increase their birth rate as compensation.
3. There are significant liability issues for people and pets in heavily populated urban areas.
4. Attempted culls in other cities have been expensive, have met with limited success and the benefits of reduced populations have only lasted for short periods of time. In Glendale California the impacts were only noted for a six twelve month period, after which the coyote population rebounded to previous levels.

A review of coyote policies and practices for several west coast cities was recently conducted by a member of the provincial wildlife conservation team. The findings confirm that other major cities also deal with coyote problems and that culling options are not employed.

VANCOUVER'S CURRENT STRATEGY - COEXISTING WITH COYOTES

In April 2000, a meeting was held with several agencies to develop a cooperative strategy for local coyote management in response to an increasing number of incidents involving coyote interactions with humans in Vancouver. The lead agencies were the Vancouver Park Board, the (then) Ministry of the Environment, Lands and Parks, and the Stanley Park Ecology Society. Other groups included in meetings were the GVRD, SPCA and other local wildlife groups. Public information meetings hosted by representatives of the three lead organizations were held in June, 2000. The strategy developed at that time recognized the need for short term responses for coyote problems and a long term strategy that would provide for a safer environment with fewer human/animal conflicts. It includes the following:

1. RESPONSE TO HUMAN SAFETY ISSUES:

The elimination of coyotes is a costly and potentially dangerous process and the removal of all coyotes is not a realistic option. The Ministry of Air, Land and Water Protection staff will respond when an individual aggressive animal poses a hazard to human safety.

2. COORDINATED RESPONSE:

A 24 hour Ministry telephone line is available for the public to report incidents involving dangerous wildlife. The public also reports sightings and incidents to other agencies including the Park Board, the Stanley Park Ecology Society, the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board and the Vancouver Police. Any report of a serious nature received by any of these organizations is immediately forwarded to the Ministry for action.

3. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS:

The long term approach with the greatest value is public education and increased public awareness. The Coexisting With Coyotes Program, developed by the Stanley Park Ecology Society, is endorsed and financially supported by the agencies. The program creates understanding and empowers residents to deal with coyotes. It includes a Coyote information hotline (604) 681-WILD, information brochures, and staff led education sessions at schools and community centres.

The principal sponsors for the program have included the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, and the Vancouver Park Board. Endorsement and sponsorship funds have also been provided by the Vancouver Foundation and the Vancouver School Board.

OUR EXPERIENCE IN 2001

Coyote activity increased in the early summer with a few potentially serious incidents occurring in Vancouver. In response to these events the Vancouver Park Board arranged further meetings with provincial officials and representatives of City departments including Law, Permits and Licenses, Risk Management, Animal Control and the Vancouver Police Department

The current strategy was reviewed in the context of this summer's increase in aggressive animal and human interactions. Several areas of increased service were developed to deal with the rising public concerns. This report highlights three areas – extending the Coyote Information Hotline Hours, enhancing the focus on education and awareness, and putting Park Board Wildlife staff into the community when concerns and sightings were on the increase.

The Coexisting With Coyotes Hotline hours have been increased to seven days a week to ensure that the public has access to both information and a place to report problems at times when interactions with coyotes are most likely. Park Board Wildlife staff met with Ecology Society staff to review any problem areas and to provide effective community response as needed.

Park Board Wildlife staff have attended incident locations where coyotes have attacked pets. They have provided information and advice, distributed pamphlets, evaluated the neighbourhood, and investigated for aggressive coyotes. They have also created a kit which includes background information and a range of practical deterrents for dealing with coyotes in the communities.

Park Board staff have distributed information at local community centers, veterinary hospitals, libraries and related businesses. Park Board Wildlife staff site visits also provided direct information for the provincial wildlife authorities should their involvement be necessary. From

July 27th to August 27th five neighbourhoods were visited to investigate reports of aggressive coyote behaviour.

These resources have been provided on a short term basis in direct response to public concerns, re-allocating staff resources within the Park Board. However, ongoing financial support is required to maintain an immediate community response.

ENHANCED STRATEGIES THAT REQUIRE SUPPORT

The strategic and coordinated approach to the very complex coyote issue is continuing but enhancements to this approach are recommended. These enhancements anticipate problems and deal more directly with incidents if they should occur. They increase response at the times of year when young coyotes are first active and when the chances of human interaction are greatest. This strategic approach also targets the need for education and enforcement of the City and the Park Board Bylaws prohibiting the feeding of wildlife. The Park Board, the Ministry and the City of Vancouver all play a role in supporting this collaborative strategy.

The following additional resources are proposed to respond to the public's expectations.

Expansion of the Public Education and Awareness Program

Increased communication with the public through brochures and signage will permit a greater understanding of the problem and solutions throughout the City. The present program managed by the Stanley Park Ecology Society has provided more than 900 information packages containing posters, brochures, encounter and deterrent tips and advice. Almost 10,000 brochures have been distributed. The additional funding request of \$10,000 will permit an additional 75,000 brochures to be printed and strategic signs to be placed in areas of high incidents of coyote sightings.

To date more than 2,700 people have been reached through public events and presentations to Elementary School PAC meetings. Funding of \$7,000 is proposed for the continuation of the education program at the higher level of support from October 31, 2001 until the end of the year. This funding will ensure:

- Continued instruction of school aged children from Kindergarten through grade six. The objective is to have the coyote awareness program put through all Vancouver schools by next year. The added funding will allow for up to 3,000 additional students to receive the training.
- Expanded training programs for adults that want to become trainers themselves. The next phase will involve representatives at community centres who will receive instruction and serve as resource people for the neighbourhoods they serve. This will provide firsthand

assistance to residents when a coyote situation occurs.

- Developing and facilitating a community coyote safety program. The objective is to structure a comprehensive program in which residents become more directly involved in coyote management in their neighbourhoods in order to reduce conflicts.

The total cost of \$17,000 for the expansion of the public education and awareness program is recommended to be provided from the Park Board's Corporate Sponsorship Program whose mandate is to enhance parks and recreation services.

Hotline – Expanded Hours:

The "Coexisting With Coyotes Program" includes a hotline for coyote information which was staffed 3 days/week through the Stanley Park Ecology Society. This proposal will continue the expanded service of 7 days/week, introduced in August, for the balance of the season. The hotline will be staffed at priority times when sightings or interaction with the public are most likely to occur.

The hotline will serve as a single source for information, with all wildlife agencies directing inquiries within Vancouver to this source. The hotline will be linked with the Provincial Ministry offices to ensure efficient delivery of information to conservation staff. Callers will be referred to the Ministry in the event of a serious situation.

The cost for the expanded hours of service is \$8,000, and is proposed to be funded by the City of Vancouver as a contribution to the Coexisting With Coyotes strategy.

Park Board Wildlife Ranger Position -Direct Response for Coyote Incidents in Vancouver

Recent incidents involving aggressive coyotes have alarmed residents of several neighbourhoods. The provincial conservation officers have limited resources for immediate response and will only respond to emergencies where human safety is compromised.

Commencing in August 2001, a Park Board Wildlife Ranger was hired to provide a more direct response. Working with the Hotline staff the Ranger is a trained Park Board employee who acts as an intermediary when problem coyotes enter Vancouver neighbourhoods. The role of the Ranger is to alert the community, provide information and support, and investigate incidents of aggression. The Ranger is also in close contact with Provincial Wildlife personnel to alert them to incidents of aggressive coyote behaviour. The program has proved to be a success as it provides personal support for the residents that are often unsure about coyotes. Many residents are grateful for the interpersonal contact the program provides, as well as the practical

information and educational kits that deal with coyotes.

The cost for this service in 2001 will be \$8,000, proposed to be funded by the City of Vancouver as a contribution to the overall program designed to minimize public risk and concern.

By-law Enforcement

It is widely accepted that public feeding is the main reason that coyotes lose their fear of humans and become a safety risk. The City's Health By-law and the Parks Control By-law include provisions which have the effect of prohibiting the feeding of coyotes (and other wildlife). Provided that enforcement personnel can identify violators and gather evidence to establish by-law violations, charges can be laid against people who contribute to coyote problems by feeding them. The by-laws are currently enforced by Permits & Licenses and Health Board staff and the Police.

While by-laws are one tool to deal with the problem of coyotes, by-law enforcement will only directly impact a very limited number of people. On the other hand, it is anticipated that the "no feeding" message that will be part of the public education and awareness programs already referred to in this report will have a much broader impact.

BUDGET PROPOSAL

A cost sharing proposal is being recommended to continue the cooperation demonstrated through the Coexistence with Coyote strategy which includes the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Park Board. Total cost for the enhanced program is \$33,000; \$16,000 to come from City of Vancouver and \$17,000 to come from the Vancouver Park Board Corporate Sponsorship Fund.

The Ministry (\$17,500) and the Vancouver Park Board (\$10,000) have previously financially supported the Coexistence with Coyote Program. Other contributors include the Vancouver Foundation and the Vancouver School Board.

Although the success of the program will be evaluated and a report will be brought back to Council and the Park Board, it is anticipated that a request for ongoing program funding will be required. If the enhanced program is recommended at that time, the support for the Education Program, printed materials and a Park Board Wildlife Ranger resource will require ongoing funding of \$60,000 - \$75,000 annually.

CONCLUSIONS

While most human / coyote interactions are benign there are still opportunities for harm to humans or animals. Most urban coyotes do not pose a threat; however, those that display aggressive behaviour against humans will be removed. The "Coexistence with Coyotes" strategy has been developed by the principal agencies working in the wildlife field in Vancouver.

The strategy recognizes both the short term need to deal with problem wildlife and the longer term program of assisting residents of the City to understand the issues and find the solutions to co-existence with the coyote.

Our strategies were expanded in three areas this summer – extended Hotline hours, enhanced public education and awareness and the use of a Park Board Wildlife Ranger. These provided the concerned public with the opportunities to learn more about how to deal with coyotes in the urban setting. The program also established a resource person to meet in a community where aggressive actions were noted and provide direct solutions to reduce their risk of problem with coyotes.

The continuation of these expanded services is being recommended on a cost shared basis between the various agencies that are collaborating on wildlife issues in Vancouver.

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General Mgr./Dept. Head:

Report dated: _____

Author: _____

Date:

Phone: _____

Concurring Departments:

This report has been prepared in consultation with the departments listed to the right, and they concur with its contents

Patsy Scheer,
Law Department

Ken Bayne,
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Richard Taki,
Vancouver Richmond
Health Board
