



MEMORANDUM

TO: Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Bert Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager

DATE: June 23, 2015

SUBJECT: Update on Resolution 20141120-088

On November 20, 2014, Council approved resolution 2011120-088 which directed the City Manager to adopt the coyote conflict management strategy recommended by the Animal Advisory Commission and the City Council Public Health and Human Services Committee. The resolution and policy are attached to this memo.

The City Manager was also directed to provide a progress report to the Public Health and Human Services Committee on or before May 31, 2015 regarding coyote management efforts, including availability and distribution of educational materials about minimizing coyote attractants and hazing methods, the methods in use for trapping, the number of traps set, and the number of animals caught, as well as periodic 6-month reviews of the program.

With the new Council Committee structure moving forward in March, staff has not brought the item up for a briefing to the Health and Human Services Committee and would like to report the following information as a means to fulfill the directive sent forth in the resolution. Since the adoption of the policy, staff from Parks and Recreation and Austin Water Utility have conducted the following efforts with regards to the coyote management plan:

- Parks and Recreation – The Park Ranger division has written newsletters focusing on coyotes and posted information regarding safe coyote-human interactions on the National Wildlife Federation listserv. The division does not keep any documentation in regards to permits issued for animal control. The division utilizes the Travis County contract with Texas Wildlife Service to gather coyote complaint information received through 311; analyze the data to determine the level of interaction with humans; determine when the interaction warrants removal; and ask the Director for permission to remove. Per the agreement, the division is responsible for public education and safety, which includes hazing as a means for behavior modification. Texas Wildlife Service will be responsible for formulating the quarterly reports, educating citizens about coyote behaviors, facilitating the trapping of animals, and maintaining records of removals.
- Austin Water Utility – The Water Utility Wildland Conservation Division does not issue formal permits. The department has an internal informal process to authorize access. In the last 15 years there have only been two requests from Texas Wildlife Services to remove coyotes from Balcones Canyonlands Preserve lands. In each case, Texas Wildlife Services was requested to

provide documentation that they had identified and were targeting specific problem coyotes or groups of coyotes. Because there have only had two requests in 15 years, staff did not see a business need to formalize this process. Wildland Conservation Division staff have developed coyote education that is posted online and sent to neighbors of preservation lands. With the adoption of the new policy, such information has also been sent to the River Place Home Owners Association, Long Canyon Home Owners Association, and Jester Estates Home Owners Association for publication in their newsletters. It was also sent to the City of Austin Wildland email list which is over 2,000 people, and to any individuals who contacted staff with questions about coyotes.

- The Water Utility Wildland Conservation Division culled white tailed deer in the past on Water Quality Protection Land but suspended this activity once populations reached target levels. Feral hog culling is ongoing. The Wildland Conservation Division now maintains deer population levels through habitat manipulation that minimizes desirable habitat for white tailed deer. These actions on Water Quality Protection Land are consistent with their council adopted land management plans and results are reported in the Water Quality Protection Land Annual Report.
- On the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve lands, staff also lethally culls white tailed deer and feral hogs. For both actions, this is consistent with the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan habitat conservation plan and Council adopted Balcones Canyonlands Preserve Land Management Plans. Balcones Canyonlands Preserve does report these results for deer and hogs in written reports to the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan Coordinating Committee, the Citizens Advisory Committee, and in the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan Annual Report.
- Animal Services Office – The Austin Animal Center worked with the Animal Advisory Commission and updated the department’s website to reflect the new Coyote Management policy. The website link will be referenced on the Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Water websites. The website information also includes the policy response guide and additional coyote informational sources from Humane Society of the United States, USDA and Texas Agrilife Extension Office. The information can be found at the following link: <http://austintexas.gov/department/coyotes-central-texas>

Should you want to discuss staff’s work in greater detail, we will work to place a briefing on an upcoming agenda of the Health and Human Services Committee. If there are any other questions, please feel free to let me know.

Cc: Mayor and City Council
Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Robert Goode, Assistant City Manager
Tawny Hammond, Chief Animal Services Officer
Sara Hensley, Director, Parks and Recreation
Greg Meszaros, Director, Austin Water Utility
Animal Advisory Commission

RESOLUTION NO.

WHEREAS, as the City of Austin expands further into rural areas there is more encroachment upon wildlife habitats; and

WHEREAS, interactions with coyotes have become more frequent in recent years, even in central-city neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, the City and its citizens have an interest in strategies and planning for animal welfare programs community-wide; and

WHEREAS, in 2009, the City became the largest city in the United States and the first in Texas to be certified as a community wildlife habitat, and in 2010 the City Council voted for a plan to make Austin a no-kill city; and

WHEREAS, City Code section 3-2-4 bans all persons from knowingly shooting, killing or hunting a wild animal or using a steel-jawed spring trap or any other type of trap that could injure a trapped animal or person, with exceptions made only for City employees acting within their duties and those issued a permit by the Parks and Recreation or Watershed Protection Departments; and

WHEREAS, in February 2014, the Animal Advisory Commission (AAC) provided recommendations related to coyote conflict management; and

WHEREAS, the AAC recommendation stated that education and ‘hazing’ methods (proven methods of re-training coyotes to avoid human contact) are less expensive, and they are proven methods to help alleviate the potential dangers that may result from coyote/human interactions; and

WHEREAS, on March 18, 2014, the City Council Public Health and Human Services (PHHS) Committee voted to adopt the recommendations and

stated that lethal responses will be considered only in the event of an incident or an attack on a human; and

WHEREAS, on October 8, 2014, the AAC provided additional recommendations, which included banning the use of leg-hold traps, neck snares and chemical control for trapping coyotes and only allowing for live-release box traps followed by euthanasia at the Austin Animal Center; and

WHEREAS, the additional AAC recommendations further defined an incident as a coyote entering a yard and injuring or killing a pet or a coyote biting or injuring a pet on a leash, and defined an attack as a coyote biting or injuring a person without provocation; and

WHEREAS, on October 21, 2014, the PHHS Committee voted to adopt the updated recommendations banning leg-hold traps, neck snares and chemical control and only allowing for live-release box traps followed by euthanasia, as well as the definitions of incident and attack; and

WHEREAS, to address public safety concerns the PHHS Committee coyote policy was further adapted to remove the limitations on trapping and lethal methods, give staff the ability and responsibility to investigate and analyze coyote incidents to assure that the City is addressing threats to public safety, assign City staff sole responsibility for making the determination to remove a coyote, adopt a coyote response guide, and allow for lethal action only in the event of an incident or attack, as defined in the guide; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is currently a party to an interlocal agreement with Travis County under which the City provides general animal services in the County outside of the City's corporate limits and the City receives wildlife management services, including coyote management, from the U.S.

Department of Agriculture, Texas Cooperative Extension – Wildlife Services (“Wildlife Services”) through the County’s agreement with Wildlife Services;

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to adopt the coyote management policy (Attachment A) and coyote response guide (Attachment B) regarding coyote management, utilizing education and hazing methods as primary methods and utilizing lethal responses only in the event of an incident or attack, followed by an immediate hazing education program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to professionally assess an area to determine how hazing can be used and hazing initiated, in the event that coyotes are seen in and around school playgrounds and areas where children congregate; coyotes are approaching, following or chasing humans; or coyotes are acting aggressively towards humans.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to provide a progress report to the Public Health and Human Services Committee on or before May 31, 2015 regarding coyote management efforts, including availability and distribution of educational materials about minimizing coyote attractants and hazing methods, the methods in use for trapping, the number of traps set, and the number of animals caught, as well as periodic 6-month reviews of the program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to develop appropriate procedures to engage and manage the City's relationship with Travis County and Wildlife Services to ensure public safety and the humane treatment of animals.

ADOPTED: _____, 2014 **ATTEST:** _____
Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk

Attachment A

City Of Austin Coyote Conflict Management Policy

The City of Austin recognizes that neighborhoods have encroached upon wildlife habitats, resulting in human/coyote interaction; however, the City also believes that the community as a whole benefits from the presence of wildlife. The City recognizes that a healthy ecosystem balances predators and prey.

The City and its citizens have an interest in strategies and planning for animal welfare programs community wide. Section 3-2-4 of the city charter prohibits the shooting, killing or trapping of wildlife without a permit issued by the city or by a City employee acting within their assigned duties. In March 2009, the City became the largest city in the United States and the first in Texas to be certified as a community wildlife habitat by the National Wildlife Federation. In March 2011, the City became the largest no-kill city in the United States. In 2013 the City adopted a no-kill policy for the management of white-tailed deer. Therefore, the City of Austin will practice an attitude of tolerance for and co-existence with coyotes, with an emphasis on education, awareness and humane, non-lethal conflict management.

Coyotes are naturally reclusive animals that tend to avoid human contact. Food availability will tempt these intelligent, adaptable animals to test the boundaries of human interaction. Habituated urban coyotes can appear to lose all fear of humans and may appear threatening to some. These habituated coyotes may pose a danger to small pets; especially free roaming or unsupervised cats and dogs. Breeding pairs may present a danger to perceived rivals such as larger dogs. Fortunately, coyotes can be conditioned to avoid people through coyote “hazing.”

Hazing is an inexpensive and proven method of re-training coyotes to avoid human contact. This method of coyote avoidance conditioning is a more effective and humane method of managing coyote behavior than leg-hold traps, snares or chemical control. Therefore, the City will institute a public education and coyote hazing policy. A city policy of public education and coyote hazing will minimize the need for the City to remove coyotes.

Reported coyote behavior, including observations, sightings, encounters, and attacks will be investigated and evaluated by Assigned City staff using the Coyote Response guide included with this policy. Assigned City staff shall include Park Rangers, preserve managers, or staff specifically designated by the City Manager. Assigned City staff may consult with appropriate wildlife professionals to aid with their evaluation.

Evaluation of coyote based threats to public safety will begin with analysis of reports using the Coyote Response Guide. However, lethal responses (coyote removal) shall be considered only after Assigned City Staff determines that the preponderance of evidence from evaluation of coyote behavior reports, field investigations, consultations with appropriate wildlife professionals, and any other documentable evidence identifies a specific animal or group of animals that pose the threat. Furthermore, there shall be no determination of a threat to public safety unless an incident or attack, as defined in the Coyote Response Guide, has occurred and is

part of the record supporting the determination. No coyote shall be removed unless Assigned City Staff determines that a threat to public safety exists that cannot be resolved without removal of individual identified coyotes or groups of coyotes. Lethal control efforts shall focus on the identified offending coyote(s), rather than the coyote population at large. Austin Parks and Recreation Department and Austin Water Utility will maintain ultimate authority to use staff, Texas Wildlife Services, or other qualified professionals on city land under their jurisdiction. Texas Wildlife Services may exercise its authority on privately held property within city limits.

Attachment B

**Coyote Behavior, Behavior Classification and Recommended Response Guide
(Coyote Response Guide)
Coyote Working Group**

Coyote Action	Classification	Response
Coyote heard	Observation	Distribute educational materials and information on normal coyote behavior
Coyote seen moving in area	Sighting	Distribute educational materials and information on normal coyote behavior
Coyote seen resting in area	Sighting	In areas seen, educate people on normal behavior, how to haze to encourage animal to leave
Coyote entering a yard without pets	Sighting	Educate on coyote attractants, hazing information. Offer to perform a yard audit.
Coyotes seen in and around children's play areas, school grounds and parks	Sighting	Identify and gather information on specific animal involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet management. Offer yard/neighborhood audit.
Coyote following or approaching a person and pet	Sighting Encounter	Educate on hazing techniques, what to do tips and pet management
Coyote entering a yard with pets	Encounter	Educate on coyote attractants, hazing information, pet management. Offer to perform a yard audit.
Coyote following or approaching a person without a pet	Encounter	Educate on hazing techniques, what-to-do tips and pet management
Coyote entering yard with people and pets, no injury occurring	Encounter	Gather information on specific animals involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet management. Offer yard or neighborhood audit.
Coyote aggressive, lunging, nipping without contact	Incident	Identify and gather information on specific animals involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet management. Offer yard/neighborhood audit. Evaluate whether a threat to public safety might exist. Take action only as provided by City Coyote Policy
Coyote entering yard and injuring or killing pet	Incident	Identify and gather information on specific animal involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet management and offer to perform a yard or neighborhood audit. Evaluate whether a threat to public safety might exist. Take action only as provided by City Coyote Policy
Coyote biting or injuring pet on leash	Incident	Identify and gather information on specific animal involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet management and offer to perform a yard or neighborhood audit. Evaluate whether a threat to public safety might exist. Take action only as provided by City Coyote Policy

<p>Coyote biting or injuring person without provocation</p>	<p>Attack</p>	<p>Identify and gather information on specific animal involved, report circumstances, educate on coyote attractants, hazing, pet management and offer to perform a yard or neighborhood audit. Evaluate whether a threat to public safety might exist. Take action only as provided by City Coyote Policy</p>
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