



DATE: July 18, 2022

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Stefan Chatwin, City Manager

FROM: Derek Schweigart, Parks and Recreation Director
Frank Fanara, Parks Manager

SUBJECT: CANADA GOOSE POPULATION MANAGEMENT PLAN
UPDATE – PROGRESS ON MITIGATION STRATEGIES AND
PERMITS

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council, by Minute Order, receive and accept the staff report on geese population management and provide policy direction on proposed mitigation strategies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City has received concerns about the number of Canada geese and the excrement they leave on Foster City beaches, playfields, parks, and walkways, creating a potential public health hazard and diminishing the community's ability to enjoy outdoor recreational amenities. Heavy concentrations of goose droppings contain bacteria that can degrade the water quality of the lagoon and make the City's beaches unsafe.

In November 2021, the City Council directed staff via Minute Order No. 1816 to move forward with the Foster City Canada Goose Population Management Plan (Attachment 1), which outlines strategies for population reduction and provides a guide for City staff and members of the public to address Canada goose removal if necessary. Together with the City's Lagoon Management

Plan, the City aims to improve the water quality of the lagoon while maintaining a naturally sustainable number of geese, which will reduce the risk to human health, safety, and enjoyment of the City's parks.

As part of the Canada Goose Population Management Plan, the City began the process of obtaining the necessary permits for depredation of the geese while continuing to deploy other non-lethal geese population mitigation strategies. The City was issued a permit (Form 37) from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for depredation of the geese, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) was prepared to issue permit 3-200-13 Migratory Bird Depredation, but staff delayed finalizing until a contractor was identified to provide the depredation service.

Recently, the City's applying for a depredation permit gained national attention from multiple media outlets and animal rights groups. As a result of the media coverage, the City began to see an increased volume of phone calls, emails, and sales calls regarding its goose population. The City has received numerous calls from citizens who are in opposition of depredation, which led to protests at both the Recreation Center and City Hall.

This report is an informational update on the progress to-date for the Canada Goose Population Management Plan, more specifically, on the depredation permitting process and staff research into other non-lethal geese population mitigation strategies. Staff is seeking input on these strategies as well as policy direction on the completion of the geese depredation permit process with the USFWS.

BACKGROUND

The Canada goose is an abundant goose found throughout North America. Like most geese, the Canada Goose is normally a migratory species which is often found near freshwater and lagoons. In the early 20th century, overhunting had seriously reduced the population and the species was under threat of extinction. The USDA began to promote a program to help the Canada Goose recover its population. The program was extremely successful and the population in certain areas has grown substantially. Canada geese are extremely adaptable and have found success breeding in urban environments which present few predators and abundant food sources. As a result, large flocks of geese have taken permanent residence in urban environments such as Foster City.

For years, the City has tried to maintain a sustainable number of geese as part of the City’s overall strategy to improve the water quality of the lagoon and to maintain safe and enjoyable recreational amenities. Yet, the City’s goose population continues to increase while water quality remains poor. On June 22, 2022, Heal the Bay released its Annual Beach Card and “Beach Bummers” list, and two of the state’s top ten polluted beaches identified are in Foster City (Erckenbrack Park and Marlin Park). This was similar to last year, when three Foster City beaches (Erckenbrack Park, Marlin Park, and Gull Park) were on the list. The beaches landed in the top 10 with grades of (F) based on factors such as fecal indicator bacteria which indicates a presence of a pathogen containing fecal matter in the water. Last year, the City conducted a Lagoon Monitoring Study to find the source of bacteria, and it was determined that it originated primarily from water birds (Attachment 2).

The latest goose population count for the local region (San Mateo to Redwood City) was taken in mid-June with an estimate of 1,081 geese compared to 951 geese in 2021, and 611 in 2020. City staff conducted two independent population counts in the month of June with the latest count of 379 geese in City parks, schools, and neighborhoods. Previous estimates include 323 geese in 2021 and 181 in 2020. The City has experimented with multiple management strategies in an effort to maintain an appropriate goose population with limited success, which are included in the table below.

Method	Description	Did it Work?
Dog Hazing	Dogs were used to harass and “stalk” geese making them feel less secure and threatened.	Yes. This approach was temporary and tends to make geese relocate to other properties.
Strobe Lights	Currently there are two strobe lights installed at Ryan Park in an area where Canada Goose tend to loiter.	No noticeable behavioral effects have been noticed.
Fence Barriers	Installation of fencing at various parks to keep geese from transitioning from water to land.	Yes. Fairly effective during the molting season. Fencing is expensive and detracts from the aesthetics of

		the parks.
Goose Deterrent	Liquid geese repellent that was applied to turf making it unappealing for the geese to feed on.	Yes. Results were mixed and product had low residual efficacy.
Egg Addling	Multiple methods of making Goose eggs non-viable which results in less eggs hatching during the nesting season.	Yes. Noticeable reduction can take several years due to 20-year life expectancy of geese.

In 2021 and again in June 2022, staff updated its Canada Goose Management Plan (Attachment 1) which was a condition of the USFWS in issuing a depredation permit. The plan was approved by City Council via Minute Order No. 1800 on August 16, 2021. The management plan outlined numerous methods of controlling the goose population. Depredation of the geese is one of the methods that requires permits from both the USDA and USFWS. Staff worked with the USDA and submitted all required documentation for the permit (Form 37) and was issued the permit in November 2021. Once Form 37 was issued, it allowed staff to apply for Permit 3-200-13 Migratory Bird Depredation with the USFWS which allows for the culling of up to one hundred (100) geese. All documentation has been submitted and USFWS indicated they are prepared to approve the permit, but it has not been issued per staff request. Staff wanted to ensure this was the direction City Council wanted to pursue and that the City had a contractor in place to perform the depredation to avoid having the permit expire before efforts could be completed.

While City staff were working with the USDA during the permitting process, the USDA expressed interest in performing the depredation work. However, recently the City was informed that due to their workload capacity and increased media coverage, the USDA is no longer interested in providing depredation services for the City. As an alternative, USDA referred the City to Wildlife Innovations, Inc., a biological consulting firm that specializes in wildlife and predator management to support the recovery of threatened and endangered species, promote habitat restoration/maintenance, and reduce human/wildlife conflict. Wildlife Innovations has extensive experience working with wildlife all over California and provides a multitude of services including

depredation and relocation.

City staff have been in contact with Wildlife Innovations, Inc. regarding their services as well as researching several other resources that have been provided to staff since the rise in public attention.

ANALYSIS

Soon after the City received news from the USDA that they were not interested in performing depredation services for the City, staff reached out to Wildlife Innovations, Inc. but discovered their services came at a substantially higher cost compared to the estimate that the City received from the USDA for similar services. To date, staff has not identified another company or organization that performs depredation. Meanwhile, City staff began exploring various services and products as well as meeting with wildlife groups from around the country who have offered suggestions on how to live with the geese. Many of the suggestions have already been tried with limited impact on the geese behavior. Other products and services are now being researched by staff for their effectiveness and practicality. Staff has received estimates for several products and is in the process of checking references. Should any of the products or services prove to be effective, they will be added to the mitigation methods that are currently being practiced, and/or if there is a significant investment, staff will return to City Council with a recommendation and request for budget appropriation, if necessary.

Products and Services Currently Being Researched		
Product	Type of Product/Service	Cost Appx.
Fowl Out	Radio Controlled Predator - can be used on land and water, battery powered with up to 20 minutes of run time per battery, made of carbon fiber.	\$6,000.00
Tow And Collect	Sweeper for turf areas (No local vendors direct from website only).	\$7,915.50

Bird X	Sonic Speaker-4 speaker configured in a specific manner that requires power and wiring to each speaker. Speakers will play up to six (6) different goose distress calls alerting geese to a type of danger.	\$1,779.34
Goosinator	Radio Controlled Predator- can be used on land and water	\$3,897.00
Geese Buster	2 weeks of mitigation using radio-controlled hawk. Vendor will come out and work at various parks with remote controlled hawk which geese fear as a natural predator.	\$42,795.00
Hard Shell Labs	Hazing the geese 24/7 with low frequency lasers that will irritate the geese. This is new technology that has yet to be proven. Regional effort would be most effective with this product.	Awaiting Proposal
4 paws goose control	Dog Hazing with up to 5 dogs simultaneously.	Awaiting Proposal
Flock Free	Water-based spray that treats surfaces that have an irritating effect on birds and is invisible to humans.	\$294.00 per gallon
Wildlife Innovations	Depredation - Culling of geese for slaughter. This will remove a significant portion of the population and provide a legitimate threat to the	\$86,240.00

	geese. The estimate is for one season.	
Wildlife Innovations	Relocation - Trapping the geese and relocating them to a state-approved area. Will require additional permits and landowner approval. The estimate is for one season.	\$110,880.00
Bay Area Bots	Use of an artificial intelligence robot that would patrol areas and provide 24/7 hazing of the geese. The theory is the constant hazing of the geese will not allow them to eat or sleep which will then make geese look for a more inviting area.	Pilot Program Cost Estimate \$40,000.00 per year

Based on the information staff has been able to obtain on the above products and services, staff recommends the following while further research is conducted:

1. Flock Free is a water-based chemical that makes the areas where applied less appealing to geese. Flock Free has an effective residual of 3 weeks. Flock Free is used with a dye that is invisible to humans and which the geese will associate with unappealing food source.
2. Goosinator or Fowl Out are radio-controlled devices that would allow staff to haze the geese on both land and water. Both products operate via a propeller and are battery operated and can travel over most terrain. However, this product would require a significant amount of staff time to operate the radio-controlled device.

In addition, staff is working with startup company Bay Area Bots on a pilot project that would utilize robotics and artificial intelligence (AI) technology to introduce a real nuisance and threat to the geese which over time may help to change the geese behavior and affect their grazing and travel patterns. The pilot would be conducted in Leo J. Ryan Park near the Vibe where the geese tend to be located.

If any of these strategies result in an effective deterrent, they could be implemented into the Canada Goose Management Plan as additional, non-lethal options.

Policy Question/Next Steps

Staff will continue to implement and research non-lethal strategies in addressing the geese population. Staff is seeking City Council direction on whether to continue to pursue the Migratory Bird Depredation Permit 3-200-13 that is issued by USFWS allowing for the culling or relocation of up to one hundred (100) geese. If the City Council directs staff to move forward with obtaining the permit from USFWS, staff will bring forward for City Council consideration an agreement with Wildlife Innovations, Inc. for culling or relocation services if no other vendor is identified.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with receiving and accepting this update.

CITY COUNCIL VISION, MISSION, AND VALUE/PRIORITY AREA

The Canada Goose Population Management Plan is consistent with the City Council's Vision and Mission in that it aims to maintain a naturally sustainable level of resident geese in Foster City (and regionally) to minimize the risk to human health, safety, and enjoyment in City parks, thus enhancing the quality of place for current and future generations. Foster City is committed to maintaining a standard of excellence with regards to infrastructure, including streets, lagoon, levee, and parks, which is in alignment with the "Facilities and Infrastructure" Value/Priority Area.

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 - Foster City Canada Goose Population Management Plan (June 2022)
- Attachment 2 - Foster City Lagoon Monitoring Study