



DATE: September 19, 2022

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Stefan Chatwin, City Manager
Derek Schweigart, Parks and Recreation Director

SUBJECT: CANADA GOOSE POPULATION MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council, by Minute Order, receive and accept an update on staff's research relating to Canada Goose population management and provide direction on mitigation efforts and further development of the City's Canada Goose Population Management Plan to identify both non-lethal and lethal strategies, including depredation, for population management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the City Council regular meeting on July 18, 2022, City Council provided direction to City staff to pursue obtaining the Migratory Bird Depredation Permit 3-200-13 allowing for the culling of up to 100 geese. The following week the City was issued a Migratory Bird Depredation Permit from United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS). Over the past several weeks, City staff has continued to research non-lethal methods for controlling the Canada Goose population and has participated in several meetings with various stakeholder groups and vendors to discuss strategies which may help to modify Canada Goose behavior and be potentially included in the City's Goose Population Management Plan ("Plan").

Shortly after receiving the depredation permit from USFWS, City staff consulted with potential vendors and wildlife agencies and determined that

performing depredation at this time would be more difficult and potentially less effective as the geese in Foster City were no longer in their molt period. Given the circumstances and additional time afforded, staff is recommending that the City seek revisions to the Plan via a consultant to identify specific non-lethal and lethal strategies for population management, recognizing the complex problem will require a comprehensive solution. The goal would be to complete the revisions to the Plan in the earliest possible timeframe so that it could be implemented before next year's molt season. The actions being requested of City Council today are to receive and accept the report, as well as to provide direction for City staff to move forward with a Request for Proposals for a consultant to assist the City in said revisions to the Plan.

BACKGROUND

At the regular Council meeting on November 1, 2021, City Council directed via Minute Order No. 1816, that staff move forward with the Canada Goose Population Management Plan (Attachment 1), which outlines both non-lethal and lethal strategies for population reduction and provides a guide for City staff and members of the public to address the Canada Goose removal if necessary. At the time, the City had already been issued WS Form 37 from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and began the application process to obtain a 3-200-13: Migratory Bird – Depredation Permit issued by United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) on November 17, 2021.

After working with the USFWS and submitting all required documentation including a mitigation plan and documented history of non-lethal methods the City took in managing the Canada Goose population, USFWS verbally approved the permit.

On July 18, 2022, by way of Minute Order No. 1863, City Council provided direction to staff to obtain 3-200-13: Migratory Bird – Depredation Permit. USFWS issued the permit upon request on July 25, 2022. The permit was valid upon issuance with an expiration date of July 31, 2023. The permit authorizes the lethal take of up to 100 adult Canada Geese. As part of the permit requirements, the City must continue to use other non-lethal methods to control the population.

Since July 18, 2022, staff has continued to research and investigate non-lethal methods to control the goose population. Staff has participated in numerous meetings with various vendors, agencies, and wildlife groups. The

list below is not fully inclusive of all the meetings but rather some examples that took place over several weeks:

Date	Group	Meeting Summary
7/28/2022	California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)	Emails and phone calls had been exchanged discussing the possibility of relocating geese in lieu of depredation. USFWS would allow relocating in most circumstances, but that directly conflicts with (CDFW) policy about relocating geese within the state. USFWS followed up with CDFW and confirmed relocating within the state is not allowed nor advised at this time due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (EA H5N1) which has been confirmed in many areas across the country.
7/28/2022	Baybots	Artificial Intelligence (AI) Pilot Program: Baybots conducted a four (4) day pilot program at the southern end of Leo J. Ryan Park to study geese behavior and further develop their AI for autonomous hazing of Geese. Success of the pilot was based on fecal load in a specified area of the park. Although the fecal load was minimal, the geese had already molted and begun to fly, which resulted in far fewer geese at the park overall.
8/4/2022	Baybots	Baybots introduced a more sophisticated robot named "Spot" manufactured by Boston Dynamic to haze geese and demonstrate the robot's capabilities. Spot was not autonomous but can be fully autonomous with proper mapping and software.
8/4/2022	Animal Protection League of New Jersey (APLNJ)	Staff had a virtual meeting with (APLNJ) to discuss habitat modification in City parks that would be a natural deterrent and make the parks less appealing to the Canada Goose.
8/18/2022	Jackie Speier's Office and United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS)	Staff, City Councilmember Sullivan, and the City's Goose consultant Chris Rudnicki met with representatives of Jackie Speier's office and USFWS. Topics of discussion were permitting process, Canada Goose population data, relocating, avian bird flu and depredation as a method to control population.
8/19/2022	Wildlife Innovations	Staff met virtually with Wildlife Innovation biologists to discuss the Canada Goose issues in the City. During this meeting, Wildlife Innovations revealed a plan which would involve aggressive hazing of geese using multiple methods simultaneously on both land and water, access to Bair Island for egg and nest destruction. Wildlife Innovations also discussed strategy and the best time to remove geese.

8/19/2022	Lori Morton-Feazell of San Mateo County Health	Staff scheduled a virtual meeting with Lori where she provided the City with multiple management plans and alternatives to lethal action. Relocation was discussed and she provided a contact and some links to other non-lethal strategies, such as Swans.
8/30/2022	Wildlife Innovations	Staff had a follow-up meeting with Wildlife Innovations to get more detail on previous discussions involving hazing, nesting and depredation services that could be provided.

ANALYSIS

The City received a copy of the depredation permit from the USFWS on July 25, 2022 and it is valid until July 31, 2023. Immediately following the issuance, staff consulted with vendors and wildlife agencies and determined that the ideal window for performing depredation would be in the spring during the geese molting season. Currently, the molting season is over, and the geese have already begun to fly. Any effort to trap the geese would be difficult and less effective, requiring greater resources and time to perform.

Staff is recommending that the City consider depredation in the Spring 2023. The City's depredation permit will still be valid for the next season's molt. This will provide staff ample time to explore fully the various non-lethal strategies including various forms of geese hazing, habitat modification and other strategies which will help to increase the effectiveness of the City's efforts to control the local geese population and negative impacts. While consulting with the biologists from Wildlife Innovations, Inc., a biological consulting firm that specializes in wildlife management, City staff discovered that while the City tried several hazing and mitigation strategies with the geese, no single strategy was effective in isolation. An effective plan would be one that incorporates many various strategies simultaneously and consistently over an extended period to have the greatest impact on the geese behavior. As staff has learned over the years, geese adapt quickly and without a perceived or real threat to them, they will continue to persist.

In the meantime, staff is recommending the City pursue further development of a robust Plan that considers both non-lethal and lethal strategies including depredation recognizing the complex problem will require a comprehensive solution. The scope of the Plan may consist of but not be limited to the following:

- Canada Goose biology and regulations surrounding the management of this wildlife species

- Regulatory agencies and their roles in managing the geese population
- Environmental review as required
- Benefits as well as specific conflicts that exist with geese in Foster City parks and public spaces
- Park site descriptions and observational surveys of the geese population, transect and other anecdotal data collected
- Development of plan objectives for Canada Goose control and management
- Specific Canada Goose Management plan of action for Foster City including habitat management, non-lethal techniques, and capture and removal of the geese
- Plan monitoring and adaptation with a cost benefit analysis component

To develop a Plan of this scope, staff recommends the City engage a consultant with experience working with public agencies, who understands environmental regulatory permitting and related services, and has the ability to consult on geese and their habitats. More importantly, the consultant will be able to help the City develop a robust and effective plan that is specific to Foster City. The goal would be to complete this Plan in the earliest possible timeframe so that it could be implemented before next year's molt season.

POLICY QUESTION/NEXT STEPS

Aside from receiving and accepting the report, City staff is seeking City Council direction on mitigation efforts and further development of a comprehensive Canada Goose Population Management Plan which will include both non-lethal and lethal strategies including depredation.

Pursuant to the City's Purchasing Policy, the City Manager will issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to pursue an agreement with a consultant with the necessary experience and qualifications to assist the City in the revisions to the Plan. The revisions being sought would thoroughly analyze the effectiveness and appropriateness of the various strategies as well as account for all necessary and regulatory considerations including appropriate permitting. City staff will return to City Council for approval of an agreement as well as a request for funding to perform such work. City Council will also have the opportunity to approve the revised Plan once completed and authorize for City staff to move forward with its implementation. Implementation of the Plan may include approval of vendor agreements and funding for both non-lethal and lethal methods up to and including depredation.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact with receiving and accepting this update, nor is there a direct fiscal impact with the issuance of a RFP aside from staff time associated with acceptance, review, and evaluation of the proposals. A request for appropriation of funds would be brought to City Council for approval upon award of an agreement, based on actual costs of the services.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

This item is not subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq. and the CEQA Guidelines (14 Cal. Code Regs. §§ 15000 et. seq.), including without limitation, Public Resources Code section 21065 and California Code of Regulations 15378 as this is not a “project” that may cause a direct, or reasonably foreseeable indirect, physical change in the environment. Even if deemed a “project,” it would be exempt under the “common sense” exception (14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15061(b)(3)) or the Information Collection categorical exemption (14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15306) because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that this item, which seeks direction from City Council on the Plan, would have a significant effect on the environment.

CITY COUNCIL VISION, MISSION, AND VALUE/PRIORITY AREA

The Canada Geese Population Mitigation 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, 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, lagoons, and parks, which is in alignment with the "Facilities and Infrastructure" Value/Priority Area.

Attachment:

- Attachment 1 - Canada Goose Population Management Plan