



2nd DISTRICT RESPONSE TO ROSSMOOR COYOTE CONCERNS

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Due to a temperate summer, coyote sightings throughout Orange County have been unusually high. The increased sightings, coupled with coyote attacks on small pets, have led to public safety concerns in communities throughout the County.

Within the Second District, the community of Rossmoor has become especially concerned about the coyote population in and surrounding the neighborhood. Community members have formed the Rossmoor Predator Management Team (RPMT) in response to recent coyote sightings and attacks on pets. RPMT has requested that the County take several actions to bolster community safety:

1. Improve or replace fencing surrounding the flood control channels that go through the neighborhood;
2. Install coyote rollers on these fences;
3. Create a public education campaign;
4. Trap and euthanize the coyotes. **Note:** by state law, it is illegal to relocate wildlife; therefore, any trapping policy invariably includes euthanization.

OC Public Works (OCPW) and OC Animal Care (OCAC) are working with the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to address the concerns of the Rossmoor community. In response, the County has taken the following actions:

1. OCPW has agreed to repair the fencing, place concrete mow strips to eliminate burrowing, and install fence latches to eliminate slack at the gates along the flood control channels at major street intersections.
2. OCAC and the DFG have worked together to implement an educational campaign throughout the community. OCAC is also in the process of using coyote database information to construct sighting maps for use in monitoring coyote movement.
3. The 2nd District office has urged Caltrans to inspect its property along the I-405 and I-605 freeways to determine if there is overgrown foliage in that area that could be an attractant for coyote dens. Caltrans commenced brush removal in that area on September 1, 2010. More extensive foliage removal and tree pruning will occur starting in October to prepare for the West County Connectors project.

4. The 2nd District has met with representatives from the Rossmoor Community Services District to explore the feasibility of authorizing certain increases in its latent powers, up to and including contracting for animal care services in that community. However, based on figures from the 2008 Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis for the Rossmoor incorporation effort, this action could be cost prohibitive because the County General Fund currently subsidizes animal care services in Rossmoor and implementation would likely take several months to implement.

By state law, wildlife is considered the responsibility of the DFG and the County has encouraged residents to utilize DFG's public education program. However, due to state budgetary constraints, DFG cannot provide further services unless there is an immediate public safety threat.

Currently, County policy, in accordance with State Law, does not allow for OCAC to trap and euthanize coyotes. This policy is consistent with common industry practice; the cities of Los Angeles and Long Beach have similar regulations. Existing policies state that OCAC will respond to calls regarding injured wildlife, nuisance wildlife (through public education), and wildlife that presents an *immediate* threat to the health and safety of humans, domestic animals, or property; however, OCAC will only trap if there are reports of aggression toward humans. The instance of an immediate threat does not mean there is a *likelihood* that a human or animal will be attacked, but there has to exist exigent elements such as proximity to a coyote (hearing coyotes in the area is not an exigent circumstance, but seeing one in a resident's backyard that seems to be taking up residence, in the process of attacking a pet or stalking an individual and his pet as they walk is regarded as exigent). In an exigent circumstance, OCAC's response does not include trapping, but rather an attempt to make the animal leave. OCAC is not an "emergency response" authority, meaning it does not have the authority to disregard traffic laws nor are its vehicles equipped with sirens. Emergencies should always be reported to 911.

The County does not have a duty to provide coyote eradication services, nor does the County have the unilateral authority to initiate these types of services. That authority lies with the State of California, primarily through the Department of Agriculture, in collaboration with the DFG. OCAC, however, may seek approval from the DFG in order to trap and euthanize a coyote should it pose an immediate threat to the public's health and safety, as it did with the coyote in Huntington Beach's Central Park in 2009. In that instance, a coyote was being fed regularly by patrons of the park and eventually became a public safety threat – routinely stalking and growling at park visitors. Domestic animals are not afforded the same degree of protection as members of the general public. Therefore, a *general* threat to pets does not rise to the level of a public health emergency that necessitates intervention by OCAC.

Changing the County's current policy has implications for the entire County: not only would a trapping policy place an unfunded financial burden on OCAC, but the County's

cities and unincorporated communities also lack consensus on the County's role in wildlife management.

Although tax dollars fund animal control services, those funds do not cover *every* service that the agency could engage in. If the County were to change its trapping policy, OCAC's 17 contract cities and the County, representing the unincorporated areas, may have to agree on additional service fees. OCAC believes that levying additional fees would not be supported by its contract cities—especially those cities with little or no coyote issues. For example, OCAC has indicated that numerous cities have been seeking contract cost reduction measures for animal care services. Moreover, communities within the central and southern region of the County, primarily in the 3rd and 5th Districts, have encountered coyote problems for many years and residents within these areas are still divided on the appropriate action that the County or cities should take toward coyote proliferations. Without consensus or a funding source, changing the current policy, which requires Board approval, would be lengthy and uncertain at best.

A primary reason for the lack of consensus is that trapping programs have not proven to be successful. A study by the Humane Society states that by killing unwary coyotes, humans leave behind the animals most wary, and also the most adaptive to survive and reproduce. This can further thwart attempts to control coyote proliferation. The Humane Society's Chicago study concluded that there are two principle rules for people and coyotes in the current environment: available space will be filled, and, therefore, removing coyotes is only a temporary measure. For example, the city of Los Alamitos just completed its third trapping program since 2007, but only six coyotes have been caught: two in 2007, one in 2008, and three in 2010.

Some Orange County cities have decided to implement individual trapping programs for their respective cities, such as Los Alamitos (served by the city of Long Beach) and Yorba Linda (served by OCAC). Similarly, the County would allow and support the Rossmoor community to trap and eradicate coyotes within its neighborhood should the residents choose such action and provide the necessary funding.

Consequently, the County believes that if consensus exists, city/community level action is the most appropriate avenue for trapping. Not only are there no County ordinances that prohibit cities, homeowner associations, or citizen groups from contracting for private trapping services, but also local power allows communities to deal with the coyote issues in a manner suitable to their specific area.

In response to the community's desire to implement a trapping program, Orange County Community Resources will work with the community to manage a trapping contract; thereby reducing the community's overhead cost if the community can provide the trapping service fees.