



Travis County Commissioners Court Agenda Request

Meeting Date: November 4, 2014
Prepared By/Phone Number: David Salazar
Office of the Travis County Judge
512-854-9555

Elected/Appointed Official/Dept. Head: Samuel T. Biscoe
Travis County Judge

Commissioners Court Sponsor:

AGENDA LANGUAGE:

CONSIDER AND TAKE APPROPRIATE ACTION ON REQUEST TO SEND LETTER TO AUSTIN CITY COUNCIL REGARDING PROPOSED MODIFICATION TO DANGEROUS WILDLIFE MITIGATION POLICY.

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY OF REQUEST AND ATTACHMENTS:

Please see attached.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

FISCAL IMPACT AND SOURCE OF FUNDING:

REQUIRED AUTHORIZATIONS:

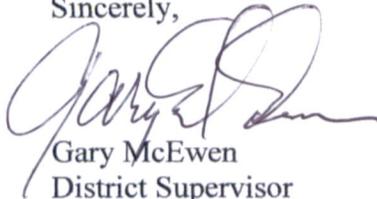
Ms. Abigail Smith
Chief Animal Services Officer
Austin Animal Services
7201 Levander Loop
Austin, Texas 78702

October 31, 2014

Dear Ms. Smith:

This letter is in response to the Draft Coyote Policy that will go before city council on November 6, 2014. The Texas Wildlife Services Program currently has an agreement with the City of Austin and Travis County to conduct a comprehensive coyote management program in Austin and Travis County. The coyote management program began in 2005 when Travis County and the City of Austin provided funding for a coyote management biologist assigned to the Travis County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office. Wildlife Services personnel met with city and county officials to develop a plan for managing conflicts between people and coyotes in Travis County. The plan, based on urban coyote behavioral research, was developed with input from citizens, elected officials, law enforcement, wildlife professionals and other interested parties in Travis County and included nonlethal and lethal control options, with an emphasis on nonlethal control. The lethal control methods currently employed to manage aggressive coyotes in this program meet U.S. and International standards for humanness and are essential to resolving human/coyote conflicts in some circumstances. Wildlife Services personnel assigned to Travis County are wildlife biologists knowledgeable of coyote behavior and trained in the humane and selective use of these methods. These methods are also practical and very effective when used by Wildlife Services personnel. The City of Austin Draft Coyote Policy excludes the use of foothold traps and snares to capture select coyotes in the City of Austin. The proposed policy allows for the use of only cage traps to capture select coyotes. Cage traps are not an effective or practical option for removing coyotes. Subsequently, the limitations that will be placed on the current coyote management program by the Draft Coyote Policy will likely result in elevated levels of aggression and concerns/threats to public safety associated with human/coyote conflicts and will not allow for an effective coyote management program in the City of Austin.

Sincerely,



Gary McEwen
District Supervisor
Texas Wildlife Services Program
P.O. Box 604
Bryan, Texas 77806
979/845-6201

College Station District Office

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DRAFT

Travis County Commissioners Court

SAMUEL T. BISCOE
County Judge

RON DAVIS
Commissioner, Pct. 1

BRUCE TODD
Commissioner, Pct. 2

GERALD DAUGHERTY
Commissioner, Pct. 3



MARGARET J. GÓMEZ
Commissioner, Pct. 4

Travis County Administration Building, 700 Lavaca St., Commissioners Courtroom, 1st Floor, Austin, Tx 78701

November 4, 2014

The Honorable Lee Leffingwell
The Honorable Chris Riley
The Honorable Mike Martinez
The Honorable Kathie Tovo
The Honorable Laura Morrison
The Honorable Bill Spelman
The Honorable Sheryl Cole

RE: City of Austin Coyote Policy

Dear Members of the Austin City Council:

Travis County and the City of Austin's current Dangerous Wildlife Mitigation Policy was implemented in response to an increase in aggressive behavior of urban coyotes and escalated concerns from our citizens. Working together, we established an Interlocal Agreement that addresses the need for a comprehensive wildlife damage management program to control the problem. The Commissioners Court first approved an Interlocal Cooperation Agreement for Wildlife Damage Management with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service – Wildlife Services in FY'05.

The contract pays for a full-time wildlife biologist to respond to complaints about damage caused by wildlife and to remedy the problem by public education, wildlife behavior modification and, if necessary, removal. The goals of the program are to reduce threats to property, health and safety caused by wildlife--primarily coyotes.

The existing program has proven to be effective in limiting serious conflicts between coyotes and the public for the last ten years and, in our view, should remain in place as a matter of public safety. The need for dangerous wildlife mitigation remains critical as Austin continues to grow and infringe on the coyote's habitat. The passage of the proposed Coyote Policy will endanger our residents and their pets and leave the City of Austin with no reasonable response to aggressive coyote behavior, even after a person or pet is attacked.

As stated above, we believe that the proposed Coyote Policy (sponsored by Councilmembers Riley and Martinez) on the November 6, 2014 City Council Agenda, if passed, will pose a significant public safety risk to the citizens of Austin. We bring to your attention the following points:

- This policy only permits response to aggressive coyote behavior after a person is attacked and bitten or injured and after a pet is injured or killed. The City's existing program allows for an investigation by Texas Wildlife Services' (TWS) wildlife biologists to determine the level of the threat and appropriate course of action before a person or a pet gets hurt.
- The proposed policy only permits one method of capture in the event of an attack on a person or pet. Wildlife biologists must have discretion to use the appropriate and most effective method of capture given the specific environment in which they are working. The "live release box traps" proposed in this policy are not among TWS approved methods of capture as they have proven to be ineffective and do not address the public safety risk, especially once an attack has already occurred. TWS uses the same methods of capture as research biologists use.
- TWS will not respond to citizen's request for assistance within the City limits if this policy is adopted. This will leave the City without any practical remedy for dangerous wildlife issues, further endangering community members experiencing aggressive coyote behavior in their neighborhoods. Park Rangers, Animal Control Officers and Police Officers are not trained biologists or certified wildlife handlers, and we simply do not possess the expertise or resources to provide the services that TWS does today.

I appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns and firm belief that the proposed policy should not be adopted.

Respectfully submitted,

SAMUEL T. BISCOE
Travis County Judge

RON DAVIS
Commissioner, Pct. 1

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Commissioner, Pct. 2

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Commissioner, Pct. 3

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