



The Town of Niagara-On-The-Lake

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Report: CAO-22-001

Committee Date:

Due in Council:

April 25, 2022

Report To: Lord Mayor and Council

Subject: Canid Management Plan - Coyotes

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is respectfully recommended that:

- 1.1 the Canid Management Plan attached as Appendix I be approved; and
- 1.2 By-law No. 4512-11 and By-law No. 4512B-22, the Animal Care and Control By-law, be amended to address wildlife feeding.

2. PURPOSE / PROPOSAL

The purpose of this report is to present Council with a Canid (e.g., coyote, fox) Management Plan that includes an escalation process that will become a Town document for Staff to implement as necessary. This report also proposes strengthening the language in the Animal Care and Control By-laws (Appendix III and IV) to better discourage wildlife feeding.

3. BACKGROUND

In 2021, the Town launched an online coyote sighting reporting form as a result of an influx of coyote sightings in urban areas in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The reporting tool allows Staff to map reported coyote sightings and incidents and monitor when there is an increase of submissions. In 2022, the reports of coyote(s) in Garrison Village began on March 18, 2022 and over 100 reported sightings and incidents have been submitted between then and April 11, 2022.

Staff has worked diligently to investigate concerns and reach out to experts and community partners to learn more about options when coyotes are being sighted in urban areas. Community partners that have been consulted about the situation are as follows:

- Coyote Watch Canada
- Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (MNDMNR)
- Lincoln County Humane Society (LCHS)

- Niagara Regional Police Service (NRPS)
- Trappers
- Wildlife Centres
- GTHA Municipalities with Coyote Management Plans and Strategies
- Local Area Municipalities.

When wildlife conflicts arise, a municipality and any applicable landowner must comply with the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997, S.O. 1997, c. 41 (the “Wildlife Act”). The Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (the “MNDMNR”) can assist municipalities by providing educational information or by making referrals to the appropriate agencies to manage human-wildlife encounters and conflict situations.

Relocation

In addition, the Wildlife Act prohibits the trapping and relocation of wildlife beyond 1 kilometre, their home territories, to minimize suffering and death of relocated animals and minimize the spread of transmissible diseases such as rabies.

The protection of property section of *O. Reg. 665/98 : Hunting* specifies the requirement for a person to release wildlife captured in protection of property “in close proximity to the capture site.” Close proximity is generally considered to be as close as possible to the capture site up to one kilometre away, and in similar habitat wherever possible. If released on private property, the property owner’s permission is required.

- 133.** (1) *A person who captures but does not kill live wildlife under clause 31 (1) (b) of the Act shall, not later than 24 hours after capture,*
- (a) *release the wildlife as soon as possible into the area in close proximity to the capture site unless otherwise directed by the Ministry; or*
 - (b) *deliver any wildlife that is sick, injured or immature to a wildlife custodian described in section 44 of the Act. O. Reg. 665/98, s. 133 (1).*
- (2) *A person shall not release wildlife under subsection (1) on private property without the permission of the owner. O. Reg. 665/98, s. 133 (2).*

The Protection of Property Policy Overview from the MNDNRF is attached as Appendix II to this report.

Wildlife Rehabilitation and Rescue

Wildlife Rehabilitation and Rescue organizations focus their efforts on injured or orphaned wild animals, providing veterinarian care, and then returning them to the wild. According to the MNDMNR, wildlife care and rehabilitation centres are only authorized to collect sick, orphaned or injured wildlife.

The science has not changed. Wildlife authorities and experts agree that coyotes cannot be successfully re-located or culled. In the absence of public safety issues they recommend coexistence based on fact and science.

The Town has and continues to respond to **coyote** sightings and concerns through the following efforts:

- Internal recording and mapping of reported **coyote** sightings and incident information has launched
- **Coyote** Watch Canada has been engaged to conduct community site visits and provide general information about **coyotes**, including prevention measures, behaviour analysis, and aversion conditioning (hazing) techniques
- Lincoln County Humane Society is providing patrols in affected areas. They may also attend door-to-door in hotspot areas to provide education and address escalated concerns related to **coyote** behaviour or pet attacks
- Lincoln County Humane Society and/or Niagara Regional Police Services are responding to calls in the field related to **coyote** sightings in public areas involving bold behaviour, injury, illness, or pet/human attacks
- Educational information has been and will continue to be distributed to communities (Over 800 letters were mailed out in April 2022 to residents in the affected areas)
- Information sharing with the community regarding the use of aversion conditioning (hazing) to make the environment uncomfortable to deter the **coyote** activity
- Installation of temporary caution signage in areas where sightings are reported (e.g., parks)
- Garbage lids are being installed on garbage cans, and bird feeders are being removed
- Applicable By-laws are being updated
- **Coyote** Information Sessions are being planned (A virtual information session will be held on April 27, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.)
- Communication is being distributed through social media, the Town's website, and local newspapers
- Education materials and the **coyote** sighting report form are being prominently featured on the front page of the Town's website
- Lincoln County Humane Society and **Coyote** Watch Canada have and will continue to conduct patrols in identified areas

The Town has maintained a comprehensive, balanced and science-based wildlife strategy involving stakeholders, incorporating public safety, education, environmental impacts and enforcement. This has been done in an effort to promote safe and harmonious communities for people and their pets and foster a safe coexistence with **coyotes** which has been the foundation of the Town's **Coyote** Management Plan.

4. DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Canid Management Plan

The Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Canid Management Plan seeks to minimize encounters and conflicts between canids (e.g., **coyotes** and foxes) and residents and pets. The program includes, but is not limited to:

- Community education
- Mapping, monitoring and assessing coyote activity
- Field response by community partners for undesirable coyote activity
- Wildlife feeding regulations

Because of the increased coyote-human encounters in the Niagara-on-the-Lake community, at this time, the Canid Management Plan (Appendix I) focuses primarily on coyote management. However, the Town recognizes that there are also other potential wildlife-human encounters (such as foxes) that may need to be addressed and which have been concerning in other municipalities. Therefore, the Town has proactively created a management plan that can address other canid conflicts if required. The Canid Management Plan is intended to be a dynamic document that continuously improve over time based on scientific evidence and best practices in managing human-wildlife encounters and conflicts.

Coyote sighting reports significantly increased in 2022, with over 100 submissions between March 18 and April 11, 2022. This increase can be attributed to increased activity and the increased level of awareness in the community being fostered by the Town and its community partners through pro-active education and response efforts.

The Town's Canid Management Plan (Appendix I) is based on extensive research and experience and focuses on effective coexistence with canids. The Coyote-specific Strategy included in the Canid Management Plan offers a guide of responses given an identified coyote encounter or conflict classification. This incident escalation framework guides the Town's response to reported canid interactions. Each type of interaction is outlined and categorized based on its severity, and includes the steps that will be taken in each reported case. It is also reflective of the Animal Services' current standard operating procedure for coyote activity response. Similar response tables can be found within the Humane Society of the United States' coyote management and is used by many Ontario municipalities, including Mississauga, Burlington, and Collingwood among others.

Investigations involving reported wildlife behaviour is highly subjective. Each case involves numerous factors which require appropriate investigation in order to inform Staff's response. Staff are committed to confirming the details and validity of reports prior to pursuing escalated actions.

Third-party services for advanced aversion conditioning may be pursued once a staff investigation has determined that more aggressive behaviour modification is required or where trapping / removal of the subject animal may be an ultimate outcome.

Wildlife Feeding Regulations

In order to effectively address concerns arising from conflicts with urban wildlife, the community needs to take notice of the contributing by-law violations that are resulting in these unwanted wildlife activities. Wildlife feeding is a community matter.

Greater accessibility to food attractants in residential areas can result in greater availability of natural prey items, such as mice and rats. As a result, apex species like **coyotes** could be drawn further into public parks and residential areas where it may once have been rare to see them. Less intentional wildlife feeding, such as the keeping of vegetable gardens, ill-kept birdfeeders, accessible garbage and compost containers and windfall from fruit trees may also serve as attractants for unwanted wildlife activity.

The regulation of wildlife feeding is currently provided for in the Animal Care and Control By-law No. 4512-11, as amended (the “By-law”), reads as follows:

Part V, 85: No Person shall place any food or water on any public or private property for the purpose of attracting or feeding Animals. Every Owners of an Animal shall at all times keep food for said animals inside their home.

In By-law No. 4512B-22, Schedule C, there is a \$250 fine associated with the following:

52: Placing any food or water on any public or private property for the purposes of attracting or feeding animals.

Within the current By-law language, if a resident is reported to be feeding wildlife in their own yard, the presence of food stuffs in the yard in the absence of observing the act of feeding may not be sufficient to charge and prosecute. This could result in the prohibited wildlife feeding activity continuing and Staff being unable to address the consequences of the feeding.

Staff recommend revising the language in the By-law to remove the element of intent and widen responsibility to property owners and occupiers in order to address wildlife feeding. Staff do not recommend changing the fine amount at this time, but may consider doing so in the future. Staff recommend that Part V, 85 and Schedule C, 53 (referenced above) be revised to:

“No person shall feed or permit the feeding of a wild or domestic animal or leave or permit any food or item that can be consumed for sustenance, to be left, or attractants of any type or in any form out of doors in such a manner as to attract, or be accessible by, a wild animal, feral or stray or owned domestic animal on private or public property.”

These enhancements will better equip staff to address By-law violations, particularly wildlife feeding violations, which are a significant contributor to unwanted **coyote** activity and other nuisance wildlife in the Town These measures will also demonstrate the importance that the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake places on feeding violations, problem wildlife and community safety issues.

5. Strategic Plan

Protect Distinctive Community Assets

- Preserve unique community elements
- Close gap on capital investments
- Recognize the importance of tourism in Niagara-on-the-Lake
- Other

Strengthen 2-Way Communications

- Develop education plans to inform residents
- Create a communications matrix
- Strengthen communications delivery methods
- Other

Not Applicable

6. OPTIONS

- 6.1 **Option 1:** Council approves the Canid Management Plan and amend the Animal Care and Control By-law (*As Recommended*)
- 6.2 **Option 2:** Council approves the Canid Management Plan and does not amend the Animal Care and Control By-law (*Not Recommended*)
- 6.3 **Option 3:** Council does not approve the Canid Management Plan and does not amend the Animal Care and Control By-law (*Not Recommended*)

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial impacts resulting from the recommendations in this report. In the future, there may be costs associated with other measures or printing and distributing educational materials and advertising public educational sessions. These costs could be funded from the existing operating budget.

8. COMMUNICATIONS

The Town will use a variety of communication methods to provide information about **coyotes** and other wildlife. Some of the methods already utilized for communication about **coyotes** are the Town's website and social media platforms, direct mailing of literature and educational materials to residents in the affected areas, access to an e-learning module, and installing temporary signage in affected areas. The Town has also planned a virtual public education session for April 27 at 6:00 p.m.

The Town has been leveraging paid advertisements in local newspapers to provide tips on how to deter **coyotes** from private property and what to do if residents encounter a **coyote**.

Coyote Watch Canada and the Lincoln County Humane Society have and will continue to conduct field visits and patrols in identified areas and provide verbal education to residents.

The Town will continue to provide information to property owners and tenants to make appropriate decisions about safety and managing private property and household pets.

Additionally, the Town will disseminate communications through the website and social media to inform the public about any amendments to applicable By-laws.

The methods listed above will continue to be used and will form the basis of communication plan templates that are being drafted should these issues arise in future years. Annual public communications is being planned to correspond with seasonal **coyote** behaviours that may increase the number of sightings in Town. For example:

- Mating Periods (January - February)
- Den selection & pup rearing (March - June)
- Dispersal of pack members (September - October).

9. CONCLUSION

Through the recommended Canid Management Plan and by-law enhancements, the Town continues to align with best practices in canid management in North America to reduce negative interactions between humans, pets and **coyotes**. The Town will continue to contribute to the main objectives as outlined in the Canid Management Plan.

Respectfully submitted,



**Victoria Steele
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& Communications Officer
to the Lord Mayor and CAO**



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