

City of Wheaton

Coyote Policy





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Introduction

The Coyote Policy will provide a strategic plan and actions that will increase City residents' knowledge and understanding of how coyotes behave and how such behavior can be managed with human safety as a priority.

The focus of the policy is to change and adapt behavior of the coyotes to different forms of human interaction. The Coyote Policy for the City of Wheaton understands its number one concern is public safety. Given that concern, however, the City of Wheaton recognizes the environmental benefit to maintain and encourage natural wildlife populations, including coyotes, and will make every effort to maintain the natural ecosystems. The City's Coyote Policy will provide guidelines as to the best known responses to live compatibly with coyotes.

The City's Coyote Policy is rooted in the most current understanding of coyote be-

havior and management. It was important in the development of the policy to review the latest urban coyote studies and literature. Fortunately, within the last 10 years, much has been learned about coyote behavior and management, although there is still work to be done. A significant portion of the policy provides a summary of the latest coyote studies and literature, which provide the foundation for specific courses of action outlined in the policy.

The understanding of coyote behavior and management is evolving as wildlife experts continue to study the coyote in the suburban environment.



Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Doug Herr, Painet Inc.

The City's policy will need to be flexible and reevaluated as necessary as new information and techniques become available.

This document will provide a summary of coyote biology/behavior, define nuisance coyote behavior, summarize existing Illinois law affecting coyote management, examine education/public information tools, emphasize the need for a coyote/human interaction monitoring and data collection program, and detail coyote management responses that may be necessary given specific coyote/human interaction and conflicts.

Coyote Biology/Behavior

The coyote is a member of the dog family that includes wolves and foxes. Coyotes are grayish-brown with reddish tinges behind the ears and around the face, and they often resemble a German shepherd or collie. Their eyes are strikingly yellow with dark pupils. Adults weigh between 25 and 35 pounds, although their heavy coats make them appear larger.

Habitat

Coyotes have adapted to and now exist in virtually every type of habitat from artic to tropic. They live in deserts, swamps, tundra and grasslands, brush, dense forests, below sea level to high mountain ranges and at all intermediate altitudes. In more recent decades, coyotes have become more numerous in many suburban environments where an ample food supply is available. Some of the highest population densities on record occur in suburban areas.

Where food is abundant, territories for coyotes are smaller than where food is scarce. Coyote territories can be greater than 15 square miles in arid areas where food is scarce to less than 1 square mile in the suburbs.



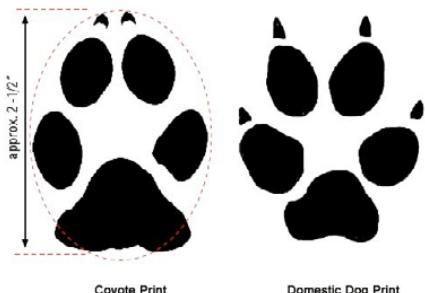
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Bob Gress

Food Habits

Coyote diets are diverse and adaptable, varying according to local or seasonal availability of food sources. Rodents or rabbits are a major portion of their diet when available; however, at times coyotes will rely on insects such as grasshoppers, fruits, berries, songbirds and carrion. In some areas, coyotes feed on human refuse at dump sites and compost bins and will take pets. Coyotes are opportunistic and generally take prey that is the easiest to secure.

General Biology, Reproduction and Behavior

Coyotes are most active at night and during early morning hours, especially where human activity occurs and during hot summer weather. Coyotes largely avoid humans, which has led to this shifting to nocturnal activity (Gehrt 2007). Coyotes usually breed in February and March, producing litters about nine weeks later in April and May. The average litter size is



Some of the highest coyote population densities on record occur in suburban areas.

five to seven pups. Coyote dens are found in steep banks, rock crevices and underbrush, as well as in open areas. Both adult male and female colonies hunt and bring food to the young for several weeks. Coyotes commonly hunt as singles or pairs, and they hunt in the same area regularly if food is readily available.

In urban and suburban areas, coyotes have adapted to residential neighborhoods, parks and open spaces. Coyotes thrive in such areas because food, water and shelter are abundant. Coyotes living in these environments may come to associate humans with food and protection. Once within a suburban area, coyotes prey on abundant rabbits, rodents, birds, house cats and small dogs that live in residential habitats. They will also feed on household garbage, pet food, and seeds and fruits of many garden or landscape plants.

Food abundance regulates coyote numbers by influencing popula-

Habituated animals are potentially much more dangerous than non-habituated wild animals.

tion density (Timm 2004). Where resources are plentiful, coyotes' territories are significantly smaller than where resources are scarce. In a food-abundant environment such as a sheep ranch, the home range of a coyote is 1.2 to 2.9 square miles, while suburban coyotes in southern California have documented home ranges of .25 to .56 square miles suggesting suburban environments are very rich in resources, leading to higher densities (Timm 2004).

Habituation Toward Humans & Feeding

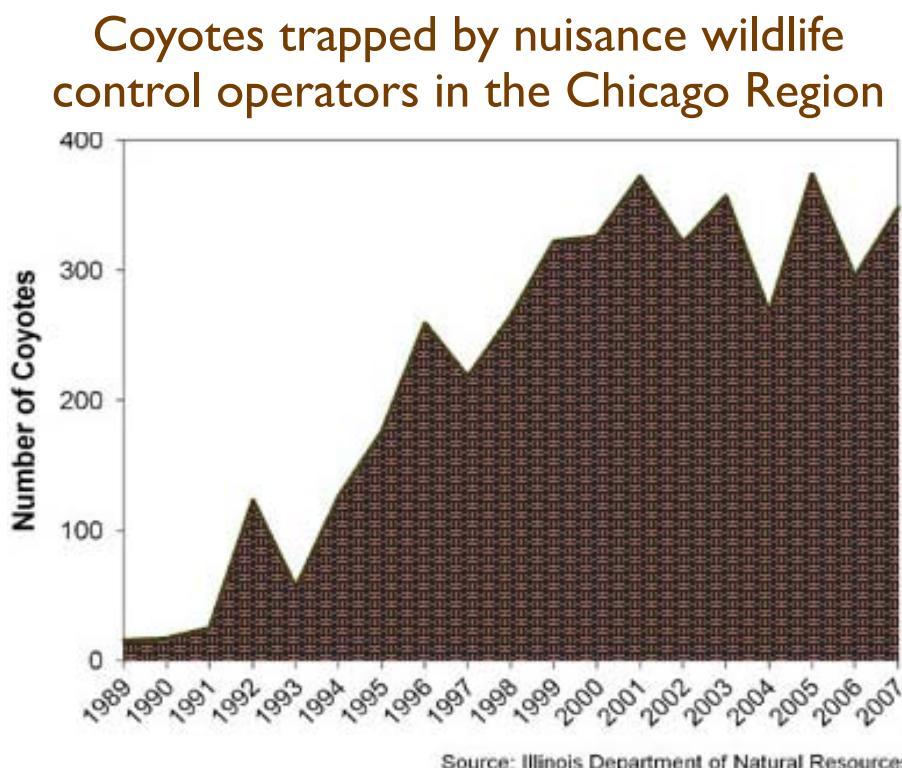
The habituation of coyotes to-

ward humans is a phenomenon that is generally recognized. Habituation begins when animals tolerate humans at a distance and progress in some instances to taming, which is conditioning an animal through positive reinforcement such as food. Habituated animals can and do become troublesome and dangerous (Gehrt 2007).

Habituation of wildlife has recently been described as an animals' decreased responsiveness to humans due to repeated contact. It has been noted that this phenomenon has ushered in a host of new wildlife management challenges. Habituated animals, those that have developed a psychological patience with our presence, are potentially much more dangerous than non-habituated wild animals because habituation is a state of unconsummated interest on the part of the animal expressing itself as tolerant of and even an attraction to humans (Schmidt 2007).

Intentional feeding of coyotes is likely the principal cause of coyotes losing their fear of humans, resulting in their approaching humans at close distances where the risks of negative interaction is highly likely (Timm 2004). Humans also unintentionally provide food to wildlife and often provide opportunities for coyotes to obtain human food items either from careless storage of food, intentional feeding, or from garbage containers that are not animal-proof or are full and overflowing.

Well-meaning individuals must come to understand that intentional feeding of coyotes dooms them to subsequent lethal control – “a fed coyote is a dead coyote.” Those in the wildlife management circles believe managing the wildlife is the easy part; it’s humans that are difficult.

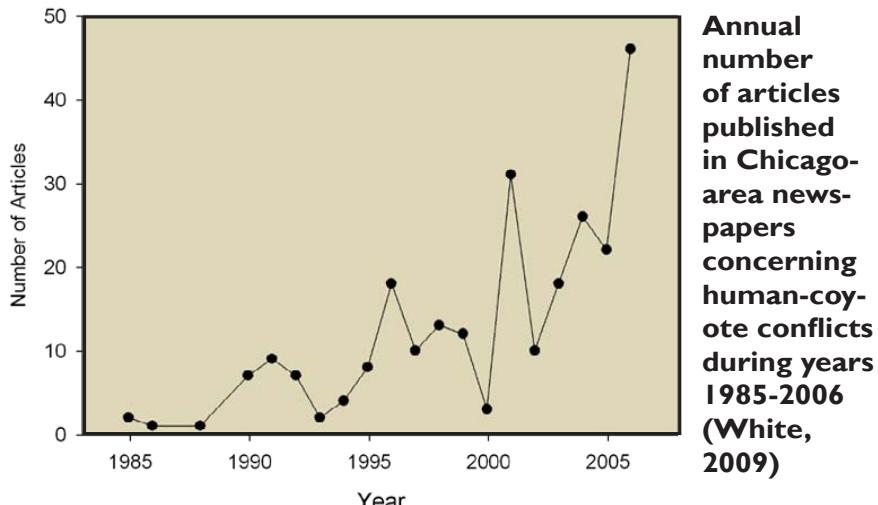


Conflict Between Coyotes & Humans

Coyote conflicts range from sightings of an occasional coyote without additional incidents to pet killings to the most extreme cases of coyotes attacking people. Coyotes will attack and sometimes kill pets. Most metropolitan areas in the Midwest have reported an increase in the number of attacks on pets.

In the Cook County Coyote Study, researchers were surprised by so many coyotes living near people, yet relatively few conflicts had been reported. Of those radio-collared coyotes, various sex and age classes became nuisances, and in nearly all cases, either disease or feeding by residents was involved. Researchers identified seven radio-collared coyotes that generated complaints from the public. One of the coyotes was known to possibly attack domestic animals and was also the only suspected alpha male. (Territorial coyotes consist of an alpha pair – the monogamously breeding male and female – other adult coyotes called betas that do not breed, and pups. Together al-

Coyote Conflict Media Coverage



phas and betas make up packs that most often include between three and six coyotes.) Four of the seven coyotes were in poor health at the time of conflicts, including three afflicted with mange (they were not known to create a conflict before mange infections). In all cases, these four coyotes were observed near houses during the day, which they apparently used for food or shelter. One of the four was monitored for nearly four years without incident, until she developed a severe mange infection (Gehrt 2009).

The Cook County Study noted that very few coyotes had become “nuisances” in Cook County, providing further evidence of a coyote’s general pattern to avoid humans.

Mange

Mange is a disease caused by a mite that causes a coyote in the advanced stages of the disease to look very sickly and even “threatening.” In severe cases, mange will result in hair loss and wounds from scratching. Mange does not pose a threat to humans. Mange does not appear to have the same affect on the coyote as rabies (rabies is very rare for a coyote). With mange, coyotes are lethargic with no indication of viciousness (Ballantyne 2007). The City of Wheaton has received numerous calls of a sickly looking coyote sighting. These calls support the notion that the issue with mangy coyotes appears to be one of visibility, not aggressiveness. Additionally, it has been documented that mange can have a significant impact on coyote populations, reducing survival and potential densities. Home range however is not affected by mange (Chronert 2007).



Cook County Coyote Project

This coyote shows signs of mange, a disease caused by a mite that in severe cases causes hair loss and wounds from scratching.

Unruly Coyotes?

It is possible that there are certain changes in human behavior that have contributed to the rise of “bad” coyotes in suburban areas. Human modifications to the residential environment create an inviting, resource-rich habitat for coyotes entering into more urban areas (Schmidt 2007).

We have encouraged a living environment that incorporates open space, wildlife corridors, parks, greenbelts and other habitat features that attract and support wildlife. In Wheaton, we have thousands of acres to our immediate south and west of protected forest preserves, a prairie path, creeks and train tracks (offering “transportation corridors” for wildlife) that bisect our community, three very large golf courses, and a large natural marsh area. There is no doubt we have tolerated wildlife’s presence in closer proximity to us and arguably encouraged wildlife’s presence.

A certain segment of the populace believes that any conflict between coyotes and people is solely the fault of people, while another segment believes the coyote is at fault. Thus one portion of the neighborhood wants to manage and rid the community of nuisance coyotes, while another portion feeds and protects them.

There is much evidence to sug-



Cook County Coyote Project

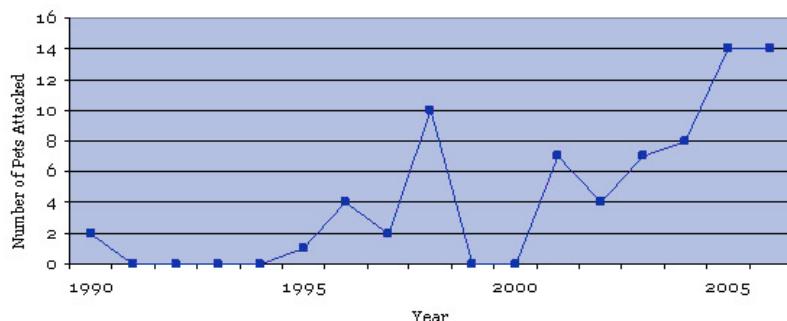
gest problem behaviors of coyotes will follow intentional feeding. Much of the literature discusses coyote attacks on humans as a result of intentional or unintentional feeding of coyotes as a contributing factor to the human attacks. A survey of National Parks researchers found that in parks with aggressive coyotes, intentional feeding of coyotes by tourists was more commonplace than in those parks that did not report aggressive coyotes (Schmidt 2007).

A coyote walking down a

street in broad daylight, ignoring the presence of humans, exhibits very different behavior from a coyote that lives in the wild. Habituation of wildlife has been described as an animals’ decreased responsiveness to humans due to repeated contact (Geist 2007). Wildlife experts note habituated animals are potentially much more dangerous than non-habituated or wild animals (Geist 2007).

It is clear to most expert observers that coyotes have adapted well to certain suburban habitats, successfully denning and rearing pups in suburban neighborhoods in the presence of people, pets and traffic. They essentially have become “at home” in suburban areas and do not associate humans as enemies. Behavior control professionals believe most coyotes wise up when pursued with traps, guns and aircraft. There is however a recognition that behavior of coyotes in

Coyote Attacks on Pets in the Chicago Area



suburban areas can change in a predictable manner over time (Schmidt 2007).

Factors Leading to Conflicts

The important factors leading to coyote/human conflicts include (Schmidt 2007):

1. An attractive, resource-rich suburban environment that provides sources of food, shelter and water to attract coyotes
2. Human acceptance or indifference to coyote presence
3. Lack of understanding of coyote ecology and behavior, particularly when coyote habituation progresses to aggressive behavior toward humans
4. Intentional feeding
5. Cessation of predator management programs to selectively remove problem coyotes



Cook County Coyote Project

Stages of Troublesome Coyote Behavior

Baker and Timm first outlined the stages of increasing troublesome coyote behavior in a 1998 article, “Management of Conflicts Between Urban Coyotes and Humans in Southern California.” These behavioral stages in their usual order of occurrence are as follows:

1. An increase in observing coyotes on streets and in yards at night
2. An increase in coyotes approaching adults and/or taking pets at night
3. Early morning and late afternoon daylight observance of coyotes on streets and in parks and yards
4. Daylight observance of coyotes chasing or taking pets
5. Coyotes attacking and taking pets on leash or in close proximity to owners; coyotes chasing joggers, bicyclists and other adults
6. Coyotes seen in and around children’s play areas, school grounds and parks in midday
7. Coyotes acting aggressively toward adults during midday

This progression of behaviors has been adopted by many for evaluating complaints and establishing management actions. **Most entities consider taking some of action to remove problem coyotes or otherwise reduce the risk of human safety once stages 4 and 5 are reached.**

Relevant Illinois Laws

In Illinois, coyotes are protected as a furbearer. Coyotes in urban areas that become problems may be removed if a Nuisance Wildlife Permit is issued by an Illinois Department of Natural Resources District Wildlife Biologist.

Section 14-100 of the Wheaton City Code prohibits any person to hunt or trap animals within the City of Wheaton without proper authorization from the City. Section 14-102 of the Wheaton City Code prohibits the feeding of coyotes.

In rural areas, a hunting or trapping license is needed to harvest a coyote. In rural areas, there is

no limit to the number of coyotes an individual with a hunting or trapping license may take. Coyotes may be hunted year round except during firearm deer season, when only licensed deer hunters may take coyotes. Coyotes may be trapped

from November through January. Illinois Department of Natural Resources biologists monitor the number of coyotes in Illinois to ensure that hunting and trapping do not negatively impact the population.

Wheaton City Code prohibits any person to hunt or trap animals without proper authorization from the City and prohibits the feeding of coyotes.



Monitoring/Data Collection

Coyote monitoring and data collection are critical components to implementing an effective coyote management action plan. One of the important tools of a monitoring program is input from both residents and employees. The purpose of monitoring coyotes' interactions with humans is to document where coyotes are frequently seen, how many coyotes are within an area, and possible identification of dangerous coyotes. Gathering specific data on incidents will allow the City to focus specific components of its management action plan with a more defined effort to prevent possible negative coyote/human interactions.

A standard Coyote Incident Form should be made available to residents and employees to allow for a consistent reporting mechanism and data collection point for coyote incidents. Contact information including date, time, name, address and phone number of the individual submitting the report shall be



Cook County Coyote Project

included, as well as specific information about the coyote incident. The incidents should be defined as an observation, sighting, encounter, actual incident (a conflict between human and coyote where the coyote exhibited behavior creating an unsafe situation) and actual attack. Reports of attacks should include information concerning both the coyote and victim. In addition to contact information details should include: age and sex of victim, the activity of the victim prior to the attack, the activity of the coyote prior to the attack, description of the confrontation, the action of that victim or bystander(s) took to ward

off the offending coyote, injuries sustained, and whether a domestic pet was involved in the incident. Efforts should be made to determine if feeding (accidental or intentional) was occurring near the site prior to the attack. If the offending coyote is captured and euthanized, a rabies test should be done and a necropsy performed to determine health and diet (White 2009).

From the incident forms, an Incident Map should be developed. The Incident Map will allow for quick identification of areas of the City where incidents are high and may require implementation of a component(s) of the management plan. The Incident Map should also allow for better understanding of coyote habitat as it interfaces with the City urban areas. The Incident Map should include features that allow zooming in on specific areas viewed by incident type, time and locations; the ability to generate notification lists in identified areas should also be available.

Education/Public Information

A critical element of a coyote management plan is the education and awareness of residents.

When coyotes are initially encountered, many people regard them as interesting and inviting wildlife. Through research of coyote behavior, we can now predict that when coyotes settle in a neighborhood and find abundant food sources, they become increasingly bold and possibly aggressive toward humans. Once coyotes have begun acting boldly or aggressively around humans, it is unlikely that any attempts at hazing can be applied with sufficient consistency or intensity to reverse the coyote's habituation (Timm et al 2007). Communities need to recognize that once coyote habituation progresses to a certain point, remedial action may be required (Schmidt 2007).

A critical element of a coyote management plan is the education and awareness of residents. The education of the public is an important tool for the coexistence of residents and coyotes in a safe environment. An educational campaign should focus on how residents can coexist with coyotes successfully. Examples of educational outreach include: brochures,



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informational postcards mailed to specific neighborhoods with a high level of coyote sightings and incidents, detailed information and appropriate links made available on a website, development of various public service announcements to run on public access channels, educational conflict signs posted in appropriate parks and open spaces

and at those locations experiencing high sightings of coyotes, and incorporating coyote education in area schools.

Hazing

Over the years, coyotes have had more contact with humans because of habitat encroachment and food supply. This has led to

more coyote/human conflicts and abnormal behavior of the coyote.

One of the solutions to this problem is to reinstall the coyotes' fear of humans again by adopting a hazing program. A hazing program will encourage harassing actions without the use of weapons or bodily harm to the coyote.

The following are some examples of hazing/adverse conditioning methods that have been found effective:

1. Human behavior – yelling, clapping or moving arms and act threatening towards coyotes; however, be safe and never corner a coyote or approach one with a young coyote nearby.

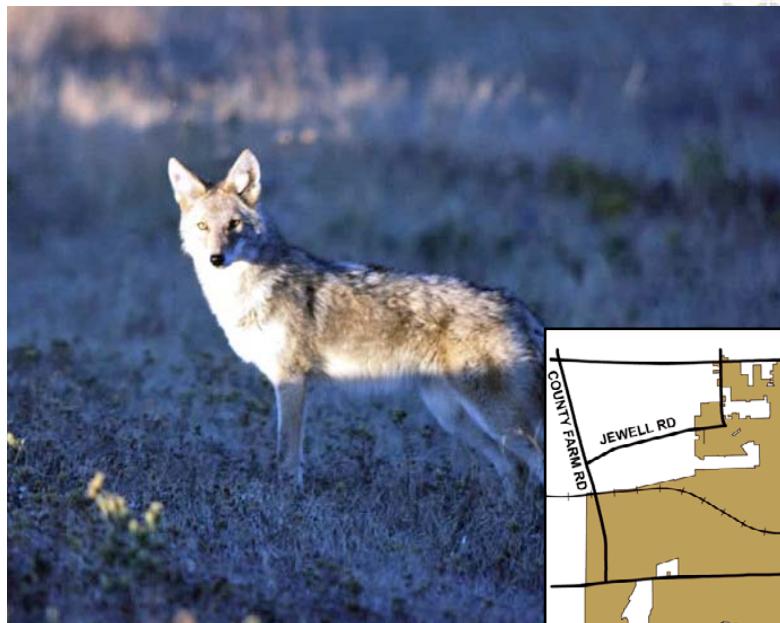
2. Sound devices – using a device that makes a loud popping sound, air horns, banging pans, whistles or other noise makers.

3. Motion activated devices – spotlights, strobe lights, motion activated water sprinklers. These devices tend to be most effective when sound is also incorporated.

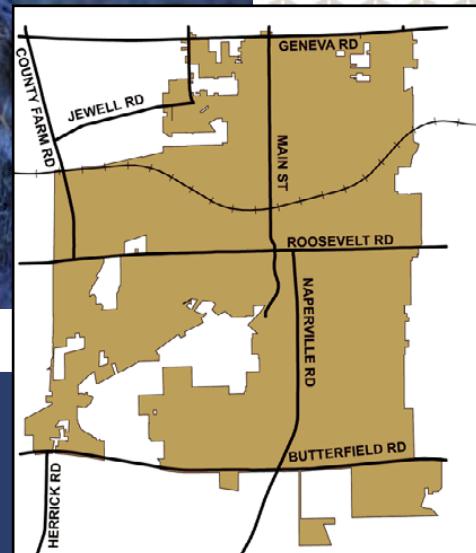
4. Projectiles – throwing objects such as rocks or golf balls in the vicinity of the coyote.

Another technique would employ more aggressive hazing, which would be carried out by trained personnel; e.g., the Police Department personnel or a group of citizens volunteering to conduct aggressive hazing.

The aggressive hazing will be used in a specific area in response to more egregious incidents and/or attacks using hazing tools such as copper balls, paint balls or bear spray.



National Park Service



Plan for Hazing

The plan for hazing should:

1. Identify geographical areas where coyotes have become habituated.
2. Contact property owners within geographic area to provide public information regarding anti-feeding and hazing.
3. Identify volunteer groups and individuals that will assist with distribution of information.
4. Schedule volunteers and staff to go to identified areas, observe the coyote sightings and demonstrate hazing techniques to residents, school officials, etc.
5. Maintain a regular schedule of hazing activities for a specific period of time to achieve the desired change in behavior of the coyotes.
6. Continue to monitor incident tracking and reporting effect of hazing efforts.

Response to Coyote/Human Interaction



National Park Service, Jim Peaco

As coyotes continue to adapt to the suburban environment and their populations continue to expand and increase, attacks on humans can be expected to occur and to increase (Timm 2007). To reverse this trend, residents must attempt to correct coyote behavior problems before they rise to a safety risk. If appropriate preventative actions are taken before coyotes establish feeding patterns in neighborhoods, further problems can be avoided. This requires aggressive use of hazing, as well as correcting environmental factors that have attracted coyotes into the neighborhood (especially intentional and unintentional feeding). Once attacks on pets have become frequent or public area food sources have been used by coyotes for extended periods of time, full

If appropriate preventative actions are taken before coyotes establish feeding patterns in neighborhoods, further problems can be avoided.

control techniques will likely be required to prevent continued attacks on pets or possible attacks on humans.

Of all the full control techniques used to date, trapping has had the greatest observed effect of reinstalling a fear of humans into the local coyote population (Baker 1998). Where 2-5 coyotes are trapped in a problem locality, the remain-

ing coyotes will often disperse, although this partially depends on the size of the area and the number of coyote family units in residence and the existing level of wariness in the animals. At locations where leg hold traps have been used successfully, coyote problems typically have not reoccurred for at least two years and usually longer (Timm 2004).

City Coyote Management Plan

In response to signs indicating an increase in threats from coyotes, the following sequence of actions by the City is suggested (these suggested reactions are taken from Urban Coyote Ecology and Management, the Cook County Coyote Project):



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	Condition	Response
1)	Coyotes are occasionally seen at night, more rarely during dusk and dawn. Occasional howling.	Education, prohibit/limit feeding of wildlife, use negative stimuli for coyotes such as shouting, chasing, throwing objects
2)	Coyotes are occasionally seen during the day, frequently seen at night, an occasional house cat disappears.	Education, posting signage, prohibit/limit feeding of wildlife, free-ranging pets are at risk, use negative stimuli for coyotes such as shouting, chasing, throwing objects, consider aggressive hazing.
3)	Coyotes are frequently seen during the day, appearing in yards on an increasing basis, but they flee when approached by people. Pets in yards are attacked.	Education, posting signage, prohibit/limit feeding of wildlife, hire trapper to track coyotes leading to feeders, supervise pets, consider removal program, use negative stimuli for coyotes, aggressive hazing.
4)	Coyotes taking pets from yards, approaching people without fear, acting aggressive, growling and barking when subject to a negative stimuli, following children.	Initiate removal program in conjunction with education, posting signage, prohibit/limit feeding of wildlife, hire trapper to track coyotes leading to feeders, supervise pets, use negative stimuli for coyotes, aggressive hazing.

Action Items

- Develop educational brochures and cable programming conveying general coyote behavior and hazing techniques
- Develop quick reference post cards on hazing and anti feeding
- Post anti-feeding and hazing signs near open space and parks
- Have available anti-feeding and hazing signage for placement in areas experiencing high number of incidents
- Identify and organize volunteers (subcommittee of Environmental Improvement Commission) that are available to provide hazing education and possibly conduct aggressive hazing
- Develop incident tracking system obtaining minimally the information listed on Appendix A
- Create centralized data base utilizing GIS technologies to convey incident activity to the public
- Identify removal options
- Complete coyote information web site enhancements
- Aggressively enforce anti feeding ordinance, and seek out and prosecute feeders
- Develop aggressive hazing program
- Develop contract for tracking and trapping services
- Obtain training for appropriate city personnel
- Charge city staff position with Coyote Management Plan oversight
- Continually monitor and modify, if necessary, Management Plan based upon most current understanding of coyote behavior and management

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• Town of Parker Coyote Management Plan, *Town of Parker, Idaho*.

• Jefferson County Coyote Management Plan (And Guidelines for Bear and Mountain Lion Issues), *Jefferson County, Colorado*.

• Cherry Hills Village Coyote Management Plan, *Cherry Hills Village, Colorado*.

• Castle Pines North Coyote Management Plan, *Castle Pines North, Colorado*.

Appendix A

Date	Date of incident
Time	Start time of incident
Number	Number of coyotes seen
Duration	Duration of incident in minutes
Location	Park, Forest Preserve, Vacant Land, Commercial Property, Residential Property, Street, Right of Way, Other (PROVIDE NEAREST ADDRESS OR CROSS STREET)
Play Area	Yes/No Is this an area where children under the age of ____ frequently play?
Child Present	Yes/No Was a child under the age of ____ present?
Adult Weight	Yes/No Was an adult weighing less than ____ pounds present?
Pet Present	Yes/No Was a pet present?
Type	Type of encounter: Distant Sighting, Trapped Animal, Close Approach without Threatening Behavior, Close Approach with Threatening Behavior, Attack on Pet, Attack on Child Under ____ , Attack on Adult
Threat	Vocalization, Baring Teeth, Stalking, Chasing
Attack	Single Bite, Repeated Bites, Clawing, Dragged Away an Item, Dragged Away a Pet, Dragged Away a Child
Persistence	After initial bite or clawing, the coyote: immediately ran away, continued the attack
Appearance	Healthy, Injured, Foaming at the Mouth
Behavior	???
Retreat	Where did the coyote go after the incident? Unknown, Park, Forest Preserve, Vacant Land, Commercial Property, Residential Property, Street, Right of Way, Other (PROVIDE NEAREST ADDRESS OR CROSS STREET)
Den	Known or suspected location of the coyote's den? Unknown, Park, Forest Preserve, Vacant Land, Commercial Property, Residential Property, Street, Right of Way, Other (PROVIDE NEAREST ADDRESS OR CROSS STREET)
Outcome	Outcome of the incident: Coyote Walked Away, Coyote Ran Away, Human Walked Away, Human Ran Away, Pet Walked Away, Pet Ran Away, Coyote Killed, Coyote Injured, Pet Killed, Pet Injured, Human Killed, Human Injured
Pet Size	Large, Medium, Small
Pet Type	Dog, Cat, Other

Appendix A (Continued)

Pet Leash	Was the pet on a leash?
Pet Proximity	Was the pet within ____ feet of a human?
Play Area	Yes/No Is this an area where children under the age of ____ frequently play?
Game	Yes/No Is this an area where rodents or other small animals are frequently seen?
Pets	Yes/No Is this an area where pets are frequently left unattended (on or off leash)?
Garbage	Yes/No Is this an area where garbage accumulates?
Compost	Yes/No Is there a compost pile in the area?
Pet Food	Yes/No Is this an area where pets are fed?
Game Food	Yes/No Is this an area where wild animals are fed?
Plants	Yes/No Edible plants are present, e.g. fruits or seeds.
Irrigation	Yes/No Is this an area that is regularly irrigated, manually or automatically?
Temperature	?
Weather	?
Other	Comments
Human Approach	Yes/No Did any humans approach the coyote?
Human Run	Yes/No Did any humans run away from the coyote?
Pet Approach	Yes/No Did any pets approach the coyote?
Pet Run	Yes/No Did any pets run away from the coyote?
Sleeping	Yes/No Were any sleeping humans or pets present at the beginning of the incident?
Hazing Move	Yes/No Did any humans make threatening movements towards the coyote?
Hazing Water	Yes/No Did any humans spray the coyote with water?
Hazing Throw	Yes/No Did any humans throw objects at the coyote, e.g. rocks or sticks?
Hazing Noise	Yes/No Did any humans make loud noises in an attempt to scare away the coyote?
Hazing Crowd	Yes/No Did several humans join together to scare away the coyote?