

Animal rights group opposes coyote cull

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INNISFIL - A Burnaby B.C. animal rights group is asking town council to call off its request to cull coyotes.

The Fur-Bearer Defenders, an "Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals", sent an e-mail to Mayor Brian Jackson and all members of municipal council after seeing an on-line Innisfil Journal article titled, "Council calling for coyote cull".

In the e-mail, executive director Lesley Fox of the Fur-Bearer Defenders tells council, "Please know lethal methods of predator control have been tried in many municipalities and areas, but have not been successful. Particularly in the case of coyotes, implementing a cull will only result in more coyotes."

Fox quotes an example from Texas where aerial shooting was employed every three months for two years. This reduced the coyote population by 50 per cent.

"Even if the population was reduced, this would allow transient coyotes to establish new territories and has also shown to increase litter size for remaining pairs," Fox says. "Within a short time, the numbers will again reach the carrying capacity for that neighbourhood and another cull would be necessary (and of course cost your taxpayers even more money)."

She adds that coyote bounties, or culls are not only "ineffective, they are also cruel, and unpopular with the general public, including potential tourists."

A number of farmers and producers in Canada and the U.S. have found other less aggressive means to deal with the problem, Fox says.

They have incorporated methods such as:

- using guardian animals such as llamas, donkeys and dogs to keep livestock safe;
- scheduling pasture use when predation pressure is low;
- grazing cattle with smaller livestock to protect sheep, goats and calves;
- making frequent and unpredictable patrols in pastures;
- free ranging only when people are present and even;
- some farmers have trained chickens to return to the coop when called.

"I really sympathize with farmers but asking for a cull borders on fear mongering. Coyotes are very reclusive and startle easily," Fox says. "They don't want to be around you either. Coyotes scare easily and very, very rarely attack humans. The problem is access to food and habitat.

Coyotes come because there is food. You have to make the source of food and access difficult."

Coun. Peter Kmet, who initiated the call to reduce the local coyote population, said he welcomes any help from the animal rights organization.

"We'd certainly be willing to work with them," Kmet said. "It's definitely a bigger problem now. Farmers are noticing the coyotes are bigger and don't scare as easily as they used to. People in the Stroud area are even losing their dogs and cats."

The town would need special permission from the Ministry of Natural Resources before a cull can be put in place. But the ministry also frowns on killing coyotes for the same reasons as the animal rights organization.

Fox says leaving pet food out on a porch or even overloading bird feeders, which can attract rodents and rabbits, can lure coyotes seeking prey. Open garbage cans and even composters can attract coyotes, too.

Secure fencing and sheds are possible solutions.

"We know the cost of fencing, or building sheds, may be an issue but we need to look at long-term solutions," Fox says. "We tend to vilify animals. Coyotes aren't the enemy – They are trying to get by the best they can."

Culling an animal population can also lead to other problems down the road.

"When you remove a population from one area it can backfire," Fox says. "It can make other animal populations explode. With culling coyotes, it could increase rabbits. In the short-term, it may look good but you'll have a big mess in a couple of years."

"Adopting non-lethal predator management strategies not only benefits wildlife, but it can benefit farmers as well because it is a great marketing tool," Fox adds. "There is a Predator Friendly program that certifies farms that use humane practices to keep livestock safe and wildlife alive to let consumers know about farms practicing wildlife stewardship."

Fox recommends that Innisfil adopt "an emergency response program to deal with specific complaints of cases of potential dangerous coyotes and then deal with those animals on a case-by-case basis, which will be more cost effective."

Members of her organization would be willing to work with the Town and area farmers on devising non-lethal solutions, Fox says.

"We're happy to help. It's an issue we see only too much across Canada."

The non-profit organization was founded in 1944.

"We know what we're talking about," Fox says. "I think the taxpayer would agree. Find a long-term solution."

She highly recommends viewing this [website](#) for ideas.

— files from Rick Vanderlinde

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