

Source

**TO:** City Council

**FROM:** City Manager and Staff

**DATE:** May 25, 2006

**RE: Proposed Goose Roundup**



Mike Hood



**Summary:** The Columbia Parks and Recreation Department has recently received a Mo Dept of Conservation permit to conduct a goose round-up at Stephens Lake Park, Twin Lakes, Lake of the Woods Golf Course and Cosmo Park (L.A. Nickell Golf) and is seeking City Council approval to proceed. The round-up will be contracted out to USDA Wildlife Services officials. Exact cost will be determined by the number of geese captured, but with an estimate of 50 geese at each of the four sites, the City will reimburse the USDA at a not to exceed cost of \$3,500. The adult resident geese will be taken to Springfield for processing with 50% being returned to the Central MO Food Bank. Young geese will be relocated to another location as they have not imprinted to the site and will not return. The round-up will be conducted in mid-late June and if held in conjunction with other agencies and private landowners, there will be cost savings to the City. Since the molting season ends in late June, a Council recommendation is needed on June 5.

Fiscal Impact

YES

NO **X**

Other Info.

**Discussion:** The Columbia Parks and Recreation Department (CPRD) has been actively trying to prevent the establishment of resident geese population since the construction of Twin Lakes Recreation Area in 1987. Geese control measures have been broken down to the following categories: habitat modification, exclusion (including chemical sprays) and harassment. All new park construction and some existing parks are always evaluated in terms goose management. For example, instead of planting geese favorites such as Perennial Ryegrass or Kentucky Bluegrass around lakes and golf courses the department uses a turf type fescue as geese find this grass unpalatable. Since geese prefer mowed, gentle slopes into the water, the department is mowing less, using more boulders along the shore line and installing shore line plant materials. In some areas such as Stephens Lake Park, staff has installed fences to prevent geese from walking into and out of the water. During the beach off season, staff has erected silt fences along the shoreline to discourage geese from using the beach during this period.

The harassment program began with the issuing of pyrotechnic devices to a number of employees for use through the year at Twin Lakes and the golf courses. In addition, staff has purchased a number of artificial devices such as plastic predatory bird figurines and rubber snakes. In the late 1990's, staff began treating nearby grass areas with a product derived from grape seeds that was sold as a repellent. In 2005, staff installed a "distressed goose" sound device to use at Stephens Lake Park that was intended to cause geese to fly away. Staff has received nuisance control permits from the Missouri Department of Conservation which would allow for the neutralization of goose eggs. However, staff has not found any nests leading to the conclusion that the nuisance geese are nesting in nearby properties and relocating to a park or golf course

While staff has not tracked the exact dollar amounts or labor hours involved in the goose harassment program, it is safe to say the following costs have been incurred:

- 1) In ninety days of seasonal operation of the Twin Lakes swimming beach, 180 labor hours per year are devoted to goose dropping clean-up. At a conservative cost of \$20 per hour, this totals \$3,600.
- 2) Since the mid 1990's when CPRD began using Goose Chase, the grape seed repellent chemical, a minimum of \$500 per year is spent on the product.
- 3) Six employees have been equipped with pyrotechnic launchers since the mid 1990's and engage geese whenever they are seen and the facilities are not heavily populated by park users (i.e., early mornings and evenings.). Estimated costs for these products are approximately \$300 per year.

The monitored geese control costs are not unexpected, but they highlight a potential increasing problem. Plus, it does not include costs related to newly completed parks such as Stephens Lake Park, golf courses and habitat control actions.

The Department has evaluated other goose control measures including but not limited to overhead wires, capture and relocate, swans (both real and fake), trained goose control dogs, propane cannons, air horns, lasers, toxicants, etc., but have ruled these out due to either cost, historical lack of success, or impact to the park users or nearby residents. For example, a grid of wires two feet over Stephens Lake would keep the geese out, but also make it inaccessible to fisherman and swimmers.

With the exception of nest and egg destruction, the Department has not attempted any lethal control measures. The two recommended methods are hunting or capture and euthanization. It would be difficult to allow either public or controlled hunting in the parks and golf courses where geese are problems due to the high number of park users and residents. In 2001, the Missouri Conservation Department began issuing permits with approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to remove Canada geese from sites that have made substantial control efforts. These localized populations are captured during the molting season and processed for human consumption through charitable organizations such as the Central Missouri Food Bank. Young geese that have not yet imprinted to the site are relocated to a larger conservation area.

The Department has demonstrated that significant steps have been taken in an attempt to control the goose population and therefore, has been approved for a goose round-up pending Council recommendation. The round-up will be conducted by USDA Wildlife Services staff with CPRD employees observing and providing assistance as needed.

**Suggested Council Action:** Staff is recommending that the Council authorize staff to conduct the proposed goose round-up at Stephens Lake Park, Twin Lakes Recreation Area, Lake of the Woods Golf Course and Cosmo Park (L.A. Nickell Golf Course). If Council concurs, a motion should be passed directing staff to proceed with the round-up.