



News Release

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Parks and Recreation Launches Pilot Geese Control Program

This April and May, the Columbia Parks & Recreation Department will pilot a two-month program using an environmentally-safe method to attempt to reduce the number of geese in Stephens Lake Park. The first step of the process includes herding- but never touching or attacking- the geese with a highly-trained border collie. Kathy Love, a skilled trainer, will lead her border collie, Dulce, in driving the geese away from the park's lawns and water bodies throughout the months of April and May.

"The border collie pilot project is an innovative and humane effort to manage the growing geese population in our parks," said Park Services Manager Mike Griggs. "Congregating geese can cause a number of problems. Damage to landscaping can be significant and expensive to repair or replace, while large amounts of feces can render swimming areas, parks, golf courses, lawns, docks, and trails unfit for human use. The numbers of Canada Geese at Stephens Lake Park has increased to the point that it is becoming a health and safety issue. To protect the health and safety of the public, we need to find humane and effective ways to deter the Canada geese population."

Large flocks of resident Canada Geese leave excessive goose droppings, resulting in large areas of landscape that are unavailable for public use and recreation. In Stephens Lake Park, geese continually overgraze the grass around the lake and its surrounding landscapes. The high nitrogen content in goose droppings can alter water chemistry and produce algae that rob the water of oxygen, killing fish and other wildlife. Geese are particularly aggressive during breeding and nesting season. Their behavior can cause problems when geese attack and nip at park users.

Bred to herd sheep, collies have a natural instinct to round up flocks of geese. By patrolling various areas of the park, the geese will be encouraged to abandon the lawns and water. In conjunction with the border collies, public education is crucial. Feeding geese only encourages them to linger in public areas. Other measures that the department uses to combat resident geese population include habitat modification such as planting a natural vegetation barrier around the shoreline; erecting fencing around the island and shaded portions of the shoreline; using rock and boulder barriers; removing any nesting areas; and using chemical repellants that make the grass inedible for geese only. The department also uses harassment methods such as noise making and visual devices.

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Herding dogs, public education and habitat modification are methods of Canada goose management that are approved by the Humane Society, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Missouri Department of Conservation. Parks and Recreation has a long history of working with these agencies on controlling geese and other wildlife in the parks. The idea about using a border collie for geese control came about from a 2006 meeting with the St. Louis Chapter of Geese Peace (314-567-2081). Unfortunately, the availability of a local border collie did not appear until recently.

At the end of the pilot program, Parks and Recreation staff will determine its effectiveness in moving the geese and interacting with the public before extending the project.