

Lethal Control of Coyotes on Sanibel Will Waste Dollars and Fail

By Georgianne Nienaber

“The Sanibel community must be vigilant in the protection and enhancement of its sanctuary characteristics.” This sentence, taken verbatim from Section 3.18 of the Sanibel City Charter, is in danger of becoming an obsolete artifact of island history, given the current climate of fear surrounding coyote/human encounters. Misinformation may result in the culling (killing) of coyotes on our sanctuary island.

The Draft City of Sanibel Coyote Management and Education Plan is based on solid science and the valuable collective recommendations of cities and municipalities from across the United States. Strategies and outcomes outlined in the plan have been duplicated hundreds of times. The most important takeaway is that culling of coyote populations consistently results in an increase in the population. Coyotes have been among the most hunted animals in the human history of North America. They have evolved to survive predation.

In 2009 I participated as a mediator in human/wildlife conflicts in Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. It was a highly emotional situation and there was no research to rely upon. It took three years, dozens of meetings, testing, trials, white papers, and much personal conflict to have science prove with baboons, as it has with coyotes, that culling is not effective.

Wasting taxpayer dollars is a powerful argument against doing additional research or embarking upon a course of action such as culling. Community stakeholders have substantial control over city resources and decisions. The courts and environmental organizations can influence these decisions, as well as ordinary citizens.

Often the loudest voices are those complaining about the coyotes on Sanibel. We have learned to live with wildlife. Coyotes are relatively new to Sanibel, but not classified as an invasive species. Proper language is essential for conflict resolution.

Having been present at the December 3, 2019 and January 7, 2020 Council meetings to discuss coyotes, I was dismayed by the use of language. Coyotes were described as “stalking,” “predatory,” “cunning,” and one council member suggested that when the coyotes ran out of rabbits for a food source, humans were next. One council member publicly and soundly ridiculed the authors of the Draft City of Sanibel Coyote Management and Education Plan. Is there not a better and civil way to approach this discussion?

The draft plan offers proven suggestions on how to deal with a coyote that approaches too close for comfort. This includes, but is not limited to: shouting, waving your hands, or carrying a noisemaker.

Dog owners, especially, have certain important responsibilities. Dogs should be on a short leash at all times. The only reported coyote attack on a dog on Sanibel involved an unleashed pet. Dogs can be viewed as aggressors or threats, even to humans. Keep your pet on a short leash. Stakeholders have moved to Sanibel with the full knowledge that they have decided to live within a wildlife sanctuary.

I am not confident that the Council will put us on a path for a win/win outcome. The Council was elected to serve the majority of stakeholders. Unless we speak loudly and with support of the founders' vision, we will become a municipality in disharmony with nature.

Please write to the Sanibel City Council in support of the 28-page Draft City of Sanibel Coyote Management and Education Plan and its authors and contributors. They include the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation, the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, the J. N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and the University of Georgia Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

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For more information or to become involved with the Committee of the Islands, contact the organization at coti@coti.org.