

Feeding of Wildlife

Recommendation

That the November 13, 2020, Citizen Services report CR_7849, be received for information.

Previous Council/Committee Action

At the December 10, 2019, City Council meeting, the following motion was passed:

That Administration provide a report to Committee with details about complaints received regarding inappropriate feeding of wildlife and provide options to regulate nuisance conditions that may arise from inappropriate feeding or other behaviors involving wildlife.

Executive Summary

Each year, Administration receives numerous complaints and inquiries from Edmontonians about wildlife. Feeding or attracting wildlife can be a healthy outlet for citizens; however, a portion of complaints stem from citizens interacting with wildlife in a way that can result in safety concerns or damage to property. Attracting wildlife unintentionally can promote coyote habituation and large congregations of birds in urban areas, resulting in wildlife conflicts.

Wildlife conflicts highlight the need to generate safe, and socially acceptable wildlife management solutions that are designed to mitigate or reduce unfavorable interactions, avoid unsanitary or destructive property conditions, and guide positive behaviours and appropriate feeding practices.

After conducting a jurisdictional scan, Administration proposes that the majority of citizens' concerns would be resolved through minor amendments to the *Animal Control and Licensing Bylaw* or the *Community Standards Bylaw*.

Report

Each year, Administration receives around 4,000 inquiries and complaints about wildlife with the majority being related to coyotes. Of the complaints about wildlife in general, a small proportion are about feeding wildlife. Citizens that register complaints report the potential for significant health risk, property damage, associated rodent control costs, an increase in bird noise, and an ongoing inability to enjoy their own

property. Inappropriate feeding of wildlife in an urban setting can lead to a number of unintended consequences including habituation, impacts on local ecosystems, creation of public and private nuisance property conditions, and an increased likelihood of unsafe citizen and pet interactions with wildlife.

Coyote Habituation

Edmonton's river valley system, urban expansion, and available food sources lead to regular coyote interactions and result in an increase in calls to Administration. Most public concerns are about coyotes and can include aggressive behaviour towards pets, proximity to children, entering populated areas and denning on or near residential property. Concerns also include limited effectiveness of scare and aversion tactics or neighbours feeding coyotes.

Naturally, coyotes will avoid human contact by either running away from them or restricting their activities to nocturnal hours. In some circumstances, often in urban and suburban environments, coyotes may lose their innate fear of humans. When this occurs, a state of habituation happens and coyotes can become more brazen, leading to an increase in the number of interactions with humans and companion pets. Habituation may result from intentional feeding or food attractants left outside such as pet food, unsecured garbage, fallen fruit, open composting bins, and/or repeated exposure to humans without negative reinforcement.

Wild Birds and Geese

Bird feeders that are managed properly do not create significant nuisance or unsanitary conditions. However, feeders that are neglected can create conditions leading to odours and unsightly or unsanitary property conditions. Administration investigates common complaints including feeders overflowing with birdseed spilling onto the ground below, buckets of birdseed dumped openly on public or private lands, and bread that is left to rot. These food sources can attract large groups of geese and other birds, as well as rodents and scavengers such as coyotes.

Jurisdictional Scan

Administration conducted a jurisdictional scan of 15 municipalities to determine how others manage the feeding of wildlife (Attachment 1). Much of the legislation focuses on restricting or removing attractants such as ripened fruit, prohibiting the creation of nuisance conditions, and prohibiting or requiring a permit to directly feed wildlife. There are also a number of provisions dealing with seed spillage, clean up requirements or bird feeder removal provisions in cases where attractants cause a detriment to the surrounding area. Potential fines can range from \$250 to \$100,000.

Current State

Bylaw 14600 - Community Standards Bylaw addresses nuisance conditions and littering. Sections within the bylaw do not explicitly capture the intentional feeding of wildlife or the full range of nuisance conditions created by feeding wildlife.

Administration identified several potential amendments that City Council could make that would address instances of persons causing nuisance conditions on either private or public property.

Potential Amendments

Administration identified several potential amendments to the *Animal Control and Licensing Bylaw* or the *Community Standards Bylaw* that City Council could make that would address instances of persons causing nuisance conditions on either private or public property. In addition, consideration could be given to include public safety risks, health risks, or negligent acts leading to nuisance wildlife activity. Amendments could include options for recourse to deal with chronic offenders who are creating nuisance conditions by feeding or attracting wildlife, or whose actions create a nuisance on land (Attachment 2).

The following are potential amendments for consideration:

- Option 1: Bylaw: Ban feeding any wildlife on public property.
Policy: Enforce feeding wildlife on public property that leads to public safety risk, health risk or nuisance condition.
- Option 2: Bylaw: Ban feeding any wildlife on private property that leads to public safety risk, health risk or nuisance condition.
- Option 3: Bylaw: Ban feeding coyotes.
- Option 4: Bylaw: Create an offence for using/placing/allowing other wildlife attractants such as improperly managed compost and fallen fruit, et cetera that lead to public safety risk, health risk or nuisance conditions.
- Option 5: Combine previous Options 1 through 4 in a manner to include both behavioural offences and property related offences.

The proposed amendments are meant to address extreme situations where human interaction leads to cases where the feeding of wildlife contributes to unsafe, unsanitary or nuisance property conditions. It is not meant to interfere or dissuade the use or practice of bird feeders in general.

The proposed options would allow Administration to better deal with nuisance conditions associated with wildlife and human behaviour. Changes in legislation would also support responding to calls for service, modifying behaviour, and educating citizens in hopes of reducing the nuisance conditions caused by overfeeding and wildlife habituation.

Next Steps

If directed by City Council, Administration would return to Committee with the requested amendments to the bylaw for approval. Administration is also currently developing a Problem Wildlife Integrated Pest Management Action Plan to document the decision-making framework commitments in Policy C501A Integrated Pest Management. This plan addresses issues relating to coexistence, sustainability,

problem wildlife and encounters with citizens. Specific strategies addressing present-day issues with coyotes and geese will be included in this work.

Budget/Financial Implications

Administration anticipates that associated costs with increased education and awareness campaigns, or enforcement efforts can be covered within existing budgets. Although violation tickets have fines attached, revenues are expected to be insignificant and are not the purpose of this amendment.

Corporate Outcomes and Performance Management

Corporate Outcome: Edmonton is a Safe City			
Outcome	Measure	Result	Target
Pursue operational excellence	Average ratio of the number of Wildlife (Bylaw) complaints compared to overall complaint volume	2018/2019: 6.78 percent	Reduction of Wildlife complaints per total volume
Understand citizen and City needs	Average ratio of coyotes sightings/aggressive coyotes/general coyote complaints received per 1000 citizens	2018/2019: 2.02	Reduction of sightings/complaints per 1000 citizens

Attachments

1. Jurisdictional Scan of Feeding Wildlife Bylaws
2. Potential Bylaw Amendments

Others Reviewing this Report

- C. Owen, Deputy City Manager, Communications and Engagement
- M. Persson, Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, Financial and Corporate Services
- B. Andriachuk, City Solicitor