

CITY OF OAKLAND

AGENDA REPORT

FILED
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
OAKLAND

2008 APR 10 PM 4:28

TO: Office of the City Administrator
ATTN: Deborah A. Edgerly
FROM: Public Works Agency
DATE: April 22, 2008

RE: **A Report And Recommendations On The Establishment Of A Program Of
Canada Goose Management Techniques At Lake Merritt**

SUMMARY

In response to public complaints about goose waste at Lake Merritt, a study of the situation was made by Jones & Stokes, a local environmental consulting firm. Topics studied included Canada goose diet, migration, and breeding habits, water quality impacts, human health impacts, analysis of management techniques, and special constraints at Lake Merritt. The study was presented at a public meeting in July 2007, and public comments were received.

The complete study is available online at www.oaklandpw/measuredd.

This report summarizes actions taken to date and proposes actions for this summer's molting season. These actions include the purchase and operation of a mechanical sweeper for lawn areas, construction of a pilot goose exclusion area near the Saturn tot lot, and signage to discourage feeding of Canada geese.

FISCAL IMPACT

There are no direct fiscal impacts for the remainder of the FY 2007-08. In a separate action, Council District 2 "Paygo Funds" totaling \$22,000 were committed to purchase a John Deere Gator (motorized cart) and Naturesweep tow-behind-sweeper unit, as well as plastic fencing to exclude Canada Geese from a pilot area near the Rotary Nature Center. Staff expects delivery of the John Deere Gator and Naturesweep unit at the end of May. The Public Works Agency will provide staffing with no additional appropriation until the end of the fiscal year to operate the John Deer Gator and install the plastic fencing. The Public Works Agency will re-allocate already appropriated resources of \$20,000 for the ongoing operating expenses and \$20,000 for .50 FTE Park Attendant (part-time) for Canada Goose Management in FY 2008-09.

Item: _____
Public Works Committee
April 22, 2008

BACKGROUND

In 1870, the State designated Lake Merritt and the surrounding land as a wildlife refuge. In recent years the Canada goose population in North America has grown dramatically. At Lake Merritt, the copious amount of waste produced by the geese has generated many complaints from park users.

A study of the situation was made by Jones & Stokes, a local environmental consulting firm. Topics studied included Canada goose diet, migration, and breeding habits, water quality impacts, human health impacts, analysis of management techniques, and special constraints at Lake Merritt. The study was presented at a public meeting in July 2007, and public comments were received.

Findings of the Jones & Stokes study include:

- The year-round resident Canada geese only number about 200, and the population appears to be stable. These geese are not a big problem.
- From May through August, incoming migrants raise the goose population to a peak of nearly 2,000. These geese come to Lake Merritt during the molting season when the geese lose their flight feathers and are particularly vulnerable. Lake Merritt provides wide expanses of lawn for grazing, access to fresh drinking water, and shelter from predators. It is during this summer molting period that the goose waste problem is significant.
- Because the summer migrants do not breed at Lake Merritt, reproductive control techniques would not be effective for population control.
- Lake Merritt is an official State Wildlife Refuge. This means that goose management methods cannot involve touching or harming the geese.
- The goose waste is mainly absorbed back into the soil, so impact on the Lake's water quality is minimal.
- The goose waste contains few human pathogens, so the impact on human health is minimal.

Some people at the public meeting wanted the geese to remain absolutely untouched, some people wanted the geese eliminated, and a large majority wanted some reasonable non-lethal management techniques to be undertaken.

KEY ISSUES AND IMPACTS

Key issues include:

- Because of Lake Merritt's wildlife refuge status, only a few benign goose management techniques are available to pilot.
- The goose population problem is not associated with the 200 year-round residents, but rather is associated with the molt-migrant birds that arrive in the summertime.
- Cleaning up the goose waste, summertime fencing of goose-exclusion zones, and discouraging feeding of the geese are effective goose management methods that meet the approval of most citizens.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Proposed Canada goose management program elements include:

1. The Naturesweep unit has a gasoline powered rotary nylon brush that sweeps goose waste (and other debris) off the lawn areas and deposits the debris into a collection hopper. The waste will be emptied and disposed of as green waste. The specific areas to be swept include the turf area near Children's Fairyland; around the Lawn Bowling Greens, Bandstand and Garden Center, near the Rotary Nature Center and along Lakeshore Avenue. It is anticipated that the sweeper would be operated on a daily basis throughout the spring and summer months. The frequency with which these areas are swept will be determined by the efficiency and effectiveness of the Naturesweep unit. The Naturesweep unit has been ordered and is expected shortly.
2. A John Deere "Gator" is a gasoline powered cart that will pull the Naturesweep unit. The Gator is a cost effective machine for this task. The John Deere Gator is on order and is expected shortly.
3. Temporary plastic fencing will be installed to test a goose exclusion area near the Saturn playground. Support posts, gates, and plastic fencing would be installed by Public Works staff in the spring and removed in the fall. Since the geese lose their flight feathers in the summertime, most will be unable to cross over the 4-foot-high fencing. The turf area near the Saturn playground is a favorite children's play area and the intent is to keep this area free of feeding geese. Occasionally, City staff may have to chase stray geese out of the enclosure. If successful, more goose exclusion areas could be added to other specific lawn areas.

4. Creation of "no feeding" signs for the park. The signage would discourage the public from feeding the geese because this contributes to the amount of goose waste. The multi-lingual signs are under development and should be completed by summer.
5. Further testing will be conducted to sweep asphalt and concrete paths at Lake Merritt. The Naturesweep does not work on hard surfaces because the nylon brushes are meant to be used on turf only. There are other sweeper units that are being reviewed, but they are significantly more expensive machines.
6. Staff will document the effectiveness of this program, make adjustments as necessary, and report back in the Fall with recommendations for next year's molting season.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic: A cleaner park will be more inviting and hopefully attract more visitors to Lake Merritt, potentially benefiting the local economy.

Environmental: Reduction of goose waste in Lake Merritt is beneficial to park patrons and results in a cleaner and more attractive park setting.

Social Equity: Improving the conditions at Lake Merritt will benefit park users who visit from all parts of the City.

DISABILITY AND SENIOR CITIZEN ACCESS

Removing goose waste from pathways will help prevent slipping by people with limited mobility.

RECOMMENDATION(S) AND RATIONALE

Staff recommends that Council accept this report and recommendations to establish a program of Canada goose management techniques at Lake Merritt. This is work in progress and additional recommendations will be made in the Fall for the next budget process.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

Staff recommends that the City Council accept this report.

Respectfully submitted,



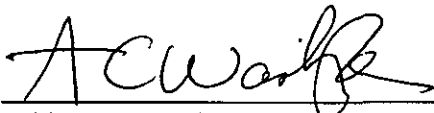
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Office of the City Administrator