

Montclair Environmental Commission

January 20, 2020

Dear Mayor Jackson and Councilmembers,

We were asked to send you a formal statement regarding geese management following a meeting with Councilors Baskerville and Schlager, Parks Advisory Board, Friends of Edgemont and of Yantacaw parks.

Overview

As the town is now stepping back to look at geese management, we believe this is a critical moment for you to lead the Town to do the right thing, with support from various groups and residents ready to help.

We are a town who values non-violence and respect. We should embrace the same values with our wildlife. In the case of geese management, we have identified areas where we can act in a least cruel way, starting with prohibiting killing, while still eliminating feces which is the main source of complaints.

Each year we attract geese to our parks, as they are ideal feeding, living and visiting spots for geese. Then, we invest time and money trying to eliminate them. Instead, we should focus on longer term solutions that make the parks less attractive to geese in the first place, while avoiding cruelty towards those that do visit. *"The best way to solve conflicts with Canada geese is with a multi-pronged plan that humanely reduces the goose population and changes the habitat so it is less attractive to geese."* (Humane Society)

To align with the above, we urge you to take action in the following ways:

1. Formally prohibit the rounding up and gassing/electrocuting of geese and their goslings. This practice is strongly opposed by every humane organization and many Montclair residents. Yet it occurred in Montclair 2007 and 2017.
2. Greenlight habitat/landscape modification as a long-term solution.
3. Ensure the current Town practice of egg addling is used as a last resort, after least cruel practices are implemented, and adheres to humane protocols (oiling and floating eggs) to lessen cruelty.
4. Authorize decision making & supervision to include different perspectives; with transparent process.

Moreover, let's keep discovering innovative approaches as they become available. As an example, we discovered an inexpensive, effective feces clean-up service, "Doody Calls". This service alone directly addresses the core complaint. And, the Away with Geese blinking lights that were piloted this year, while not perfect in their first year, had an 80% success rate in deterring nesting geese.

In the short term, we urge the town to take immediate action given impending nesting season. Failure to act quickly could negatively impact the recommended action steps, cost more, and quite likely cause unnecessary harm and trauma to the geese and upset residents. See * below with specific actions recommendations.

Details

1. Formally prohibit the rounding up and killing of geese and their goslings by electrocution or gassing, which is opposed by every humane organization and many Montclair residents

"It is not ethical to kill wild birds merely because their mess bothers us or we find them a nuisance and it's not necessary to kill geese to resolve conflicts." Humane Society

The concern with killings and inhumane protocols has been circulating around Montclair since 2007. In 2013, the Township made casual statements that killing was not under consideration, yet by 2017 twenty-one geese and goslings were rounded up and electrocuted. Casual statements are not enough. Residents, horrified by these killings, deserve statements with teeth in them. We urge you to put this matter to bed for good.

As the Humane Society explains “lethal roundups are ineffective and unacceptable, and there are better ways to control the goose population.” Not to mention it is expensive, costing thousands. While it is legal, a permit is required. And, even in that USDA permit application, towns are asked if they implemented long term solutions like habitat modification first. We have not fulfilled that requirement.

We propose the following resolution:

- a. Rounding up/killing of geese and born goslings is prohibited in Montclair moving forward.
- b. Egg Addling must follow Humane Society protocols and only used after efforts to deter geese, using least cruel methods such as habitat modification, humane dog hazing, and visual deterrents, have been implemented in earnest.

This commitment on your part would also assuage Animal Protection League of NJ, from feeling the need to collect signatures from hundreds of residents.

2. Greenlight habitat/landscape modification as a long-term solution.

Landscape modification is the number one deterrence tool recommended by the Humane Society, PETA, Animal Protection League NJ and others. Beautiful vegetative barriers can be built around the ponds. Geese need easy access between land and water to feel safe. These buffers can also serve as stormwater run-off filters.

The reasons for resistance to this approach in the past have been minor and should not prevent us from taking this important step. Litter will be minor, paths can be created to allow for recreation at the ponds, vegetation heights can adhere to visibility guidelines.

We believe Yantacaw is a perfect place to begin this process given already expressed interest and the smaller size of the pond. At our meeting, a member of the Yantacaw Conservancy exclaimed “I would love that around the pond!”. There are many non-profits and landscape architects who can help us to get started. *We can provide resources and help organize volunteers.*

Until vegetative habitat/landscape modification happens at Edgemont, a temporary fence installed in the months of February and March can help deter geese from nesting. In April, this fence can be taken down for spring activities.

In addition, a tool that was implemented last spring in Edgemont Park, the Away with Geese blinking predator lights, is a form of habitat modification. 80% of the geese left the area after the lights were installed. Other towns like Edgewater had 100% success after installing these lights. We believe they will continue to be a deterrent and encourage the town to install 2 on the Edgemont School flat roof. A nest is built there every year.

3. Ensure the current Town practice of egg addling is used as a last resort, after least cruel practices are implemented, and adheres to humane protocols to lessen cruelty.

Egg addling: (egg destruction) should follow protocols established by Humane Society and PETA and be phased out once habitat modification shows success. Addling is considered cruel by many as it causes distress for parents and leaves them sitting for weeks on their eggs that never develop. That

is why the Animal Protection League of NJ objects to addling and other humane organizations recommend strict protocols.

We request that addling in Montclair be a last resort method for population management, and that Addlers adhere to humane protocols of oiling versus piercing eggs (piercing can lead to deformities), and that they float eggs in a bucket to determine an embryo's age and if it can be addled humanely. This will require switching vendors or requiring humane protocols from existing vendor. We are concerned that the current vendor used in Montclair, Goose Technologies, uses inhumane addling practices. He uses piercing which has been determined to be inhumane by the US Humane Society: "Incorrect or incomplete piercing and shaking can leave the embryo alive but deformed. Therefore, these addling methods are not recommended." We should find a vendor who will respect a more humane approach. We recommend switching to Geese Chasers who is also used for dog hazing in Montclair. They will oil and float eggs if requested. Being in the park, dog hazing each day, will also enable them to spot nests early.

Humane dog hazing: ensure the dogs live with owners and not in pens/kennels. Moreover, ensure hazing only takes place in months when geese CAN fly: Sept – middle of March. (Records show that in the past dogs were used when geese were raising young or could not fly.)

4. Authorize decision making & supervision to include different perspectives; with transparent process.

As the Environmental Commission was brought into advising on geese management this year, we see how important it is to have diverse viewpoints at the table. In the past, advise and decisions were made by a very few including an outside vendor who profits from implementing less humane practices. Using your authority, we request that you make explicit MEC's equal involvement in planning along with other relevant groups and residents, and minimize authority of outside vendors in decisions. It is important this be clarified to facilitate productive collaboration moving forward.

Given impending nesting season, we urge the Town to implement the following, quickly*:

- Edgemont: prevent 3 nesting geese from building in same 3 spots as last year -- Add 2 Away with Geese roof units on flat roof of Edgemont school (placement map available) and cover the ground with plastic mesh (to prevent digging) on circle island and under willow tree. (Photos available).
- As in past years, implement dog chasing with Geese Chasers (Geese Chasers is the current vendor uses humane practices) on a regular and consistent basis in February and March. (again in fall if needed).
- Yantacaw: install 2 lights in the pond. Placement map available. (install by end of February).
- Edgemont: Add temporary fencing (form of habitat modification, until vegetative is installed) around the pond in February and March only to deter nesting.
- Contract with Doody Calls clean-up service for certain months if needed.

Recommended actions post nesting this spring:

- If nests still found, use egg addling as a last resort. However, find a vendor/approach that follows humane protocols (end of March). [We suggest using Geese Chasers for both egg addling and dog chasing for humane reasons].
- Start habitat modification in Yantacaw park/pond [resources and grants available to support].

Resources:

- Humane Goose Control, PETA <https://www.mediapeta.com/peta/pdf/humane-goose-control-pdf.pdf>
- Goose Guide <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/canada-goose-guide.pdf>

FAQs

Are goose droppings a health hazard to humans or water bodies?

- PETA: people often want to remove geese from an area because of the misconception that geese or their droppings are a health hazard. No study, however, links Canada geese to any infectious disease that is transmittable to humans or domestic animals. Additionally, geese do not significantly increase the levels of harmful bacteria in ponds and reservoirs.
- Dr. Timothy Ford, Professor at Harvard School of Public Health stated: “Numbers of Cryptosporidium oocysts associated with Canada geese and waterfowl in general are likely to be minimal, unimportant relative to the potential for oocysts shed from other forms of wildlife and humans. In my mind, there is no possibility that the Canada goose will ever be a major route of infection. To suggest otherwise is utterly ludicrous and you can quote me.”
- Dr. Milton Friend, former Director, Wildlife Research Center Water Fowl Disease US Fish and Wildlife Service: “...we do not have a human health situation, not in the urban goose, not in the wild goose, not in the captive geese that we have also worked with. We do have a lot of diseases out there that can affect people. Most of them come from different places and do not come from Canada goose and I’ll leave you with that. “
- David S. Adam, Coordinator of Health Projects, Vector Control, Infections and Zoonotic Disease Program for State of NJ Dept of Health wrote Canada geese have been wrongly blamed for beach closings: “A number of beach closings including several in NJ have been attributed to this cause (high fecal coliform counts attributed to Canada geese). However, research on this subject (including surveillance conducted in NJ) has usually found very low levels of pathogenic bacteria such as salmonella sp. In feces of waterfowl not exposed to human sewage effluent.” Another false alarm.
- Impacts on the Montclair ponds and waterways would have to be studied scientifically to determine health impacts from geese feces. Otherwise, concerns are false alarms.

Is killing geese effective?

- As PETA (largest animal rights organization) says: “Killing or relocating resident geese only provides a short reprieve—if the site is not altered, more geese will move in. The solution lies in addressing the cause of the problem rather than the symptoms: Areas attractive to Canada geese must be modified to reduce feeding and nesting opportunities, restrict access to open bodies of water, and lessen the birds’ sense of security.”

What does the USDA say about killing or addling eggs?

- To addle eggs or kill geese a permit is required. The USDA depredation permit application states “this permit is not considered a long-term solution for most situations. What long-term measures do you plan to take to eliminate or significantly reduce the continued need for killing or removal of birds, or destroying eggs/nests?”. The permit also asks towns for a detailed description of the specific bird damage or injury experiencing and the cost before looking at addling or gassing. Montclair has not implemented long-term measures.

Were there more geese in the park than there were last years? Are there too many?

- There are 2 populations of geese, requiring different strategies for deterrence: Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer. To manage expectations, know that the current fall/winter pond-hopping and migrating geese are similar in number each year. In Edgemont, these numbers can vary daily from 20 to 40+ to 50+. We tracked the same numbers last fall/winter as well.

In the long term, habitat/landscape modification should make the space less attractive to them more permanently. In the short term, dogs can be brought in to chase them away, temporarily. And, Doody Calls can come and clean the feces if needed.

There were about 10 more Spring/Summer geese in Edgemont park this year (hardly any in Yantacaw). Since we were pilot testing a new tool this year, the Town halted using dog chasing and egg addling. That way we could learn more about the effectiveness of the Away with Geese lights. Most of those geese were goslings and will still be too young to reproduce this year. So they will not build nests and lay eggs.

Adding back dog hazing in Feb/March will help prevent nesting this season. Deterring them from last year's nesting spots will help as well. Suggested actions are listed above. If nests are still found, egg addling should be used as a last resort, using only humane society protocols. And Doody Calls can be made available for any left-over feces cleaning.