

# A Critter Proposal

SOME THOUGHTS ON EUGENE'S PROPOSED WILDLIFE FEEDING BAN

**O**n June 11, Eugene critters don't get to be present or place bets at the City Council wildlife lottery — but there will be Harris Hall winners and losers all the same.

If the City Council's law (ordinance) emerges intact from this 7:30 pm public hearing, neighborhood feeding will still be allowed for squirrels, ducks, nutria, opossum, foxes, elk and porcupines. But feeding will be prohibited for raccoons, wild turkeys, deer, coyote, bear, wolves and cougar.

Councilors Betty Taylor and Emily Semple, who wanted instead more attention to the rat issue, voted no. But the council majority passed the draft ordinance, tired of seeing pet-peeve critters mess with flowers or poop on sidewalks. Wild turkeys were a special target of council ire in this regard, this despite the turkeys gobbling up seeds, nuts, berries, and insects that would otherwise increase rat population.

The council also saw no need to ban feeding of wild horses.

Eugene's wild horses are admittedly somewhat reclusive. Neither my neighbors nor I have even spotted one. But they will become even less of a problem with Eugene's proposed wildlife feeding ban. The town's wolves and cougars would be then put to work if they want to eat. And they wouldn't be getting leftovers from Burrito Brigade — that would be illegal. Neighborhood dogs and to some degree cats can be kept inside for a while. When any residual horses are gone, the wolves and cougars will surely become hungry enough to migrate to Springfield or Cottage Grove, where feeding them is still allowed.

The smaller "looser" species, the more often sighted species, each in its own way gives our city an unkempt image. Also some residents are frightened when they see birds bigger than a wrecking ball, or see furry things jumping out or baring teeth from under a large maple leaf or pine cone.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) recognizes this. So the ODFW representative at the first City Council work session stalked around discussion of a later phase to the wildlife remediation agenda.

If and when the council passes a feeding ban, and after it takes effect, the target species could be shot. An exemption to Eugene's ban on gunfire in the city limits could be applied. Or if hungry enough the remaining populations could be trapped and transported. Well-fed critters are too leery of traps, say the trappers. Once transported out of city limits, out of earshot, they could be killed by bullet.

Let me again rephrase the above.

Wildlife wardens I remember don't like to use unscientific words like "shot" or "killed." They prefer the expression "culled."

A little random professional culling, however, might not be good enough in Eugene. Not if un-culled individuals go out and find their own food despite the feeding ban. The raccoons and turkeys might then just continue roosting in trees above private property houses. The deer might just continue devouring hostas while squatting in public parks. Worst of all, before witnesses of any age, animals might continue enacting relations that would end in reproducing even more unwanted wildlife.

The wildlife final-solution team can deal with all these issues. The steps would be easy enough to execute throughout the city, but hard to spin in terms of a press release. Terms like liquidate, eradicate, and extinguish are clear, but unappetizing. Clear, but like calling a Big Mac a dead-cow sandwich.

So someone, perhaps a scientist, but anyway someone with a good head for genteel wildlife eulogization, looked thoughtfully out the car window. Maybe during a leisurely drive up the McKenzie. A future renewable forest was spotted there, visually missing above ground but certainly not "eradicated." Yes, a certain sanitation had recently occurred. A tabula rasa. A stand no longer standing, a butch haircut but one recognized properly by a forester as what it indeed is: a "clear cut."

Likewise specific patches of Eugene critters, sure to grow back later, could be if need be "clear culled."

Speculation? Probably. For now only the feeding ban, the withholding of sunflower seeds, apples, cat kibble and such from listed animals is up for consideration June 11.

How would such a limited feeding ban ordinance work? I don't know exactly. Eugene's Sustainability Commission was pretty much snubbed. The Eugene Planning and Development Department crafted the ordinance, as a hobby or side task to their development day job: making Eugene into Los Angeles North.

Presumably if you are caught giving a deer a pear, or if a raccoon is allowed to visit your cat bowl on the porch, the ordinance would put you in trouble with the city. But note: this is "complaint-driven." EPD (the city police) for one is not interested in hearing the complaint. So your neighbor, maybe the one annoyed with your latest bumper sticker, can instead call a confidential but not anonymous message line to weasel on you.

Next, a code compliance officer schedules a visit. The officer is encouraged to be friendly. The officer can also waive initial fines — but only if you promise not to continue to transgress. "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me," the Bible says.

From my perspective Eugene's wildlife needs habitat. It needs forested areas with big trees and drinkable water perhaps more than it needs human-proffered pet food. This summer Eugene's big trees are falling like dominos, making way for housing projects, street widenings, probably for the mega concrete and steel edifice which will be Hayward Field II. Compared to a radical tree hugger city (Pasadena, California, for example — 30 pages of code protecting legacy and landmark trees) Eugene has little protection for our private and public trees.

But a clause added to the proposed ordinance, one saying the city can't feed critters poison even as it bars residents from feeding them food, would be ecological (ecological as in ecology, a word not used once in the two city work sessions). Eugene's owls, hawks, and foxes, as well as resident's cats and dogs, would benefit. I'm referring to banning city of Eugene's internal use of anti-coagulant rat poisons, the poison made now chiefly by the British consumer giant Reckitt-Benckiser (who brings you Beech-Nut Organic Baby Naturals, D-CON Rat Poison, Clearasil Acne Cream).

This week I talked to Louise Shimmel, director of Eugene's Cascade Raptor Center rehabilitation facility. She couldn't stay long on the phone. The center had just taken in a red tailed hawk in convulsions, likely stricken by eating a poisoned rat.

Shimmel says the rat poison makes the rats thirsty before it kills them — the rats have time enough to stumble about the lawn looking for water. This makes them easy prey to dogs, cats, owls, or hawks. In rural areas the poisoned rats also kill foxes, coyote, bobcat and even mountain lions.

The City Council can't ban anti-coagulant poisons from Eugene as a whole — the state of Oregon preempts local action on privately purchased poison just as it preempts local action seeking to ban assault rifles. Salem's monopoly on killing, as they say. Rat poisons incidentally came within a whisker of being banned nationally during the last U.S. administration. Then the D-Con folks, who know a thing or two about baiting and con, started on congress.

But with a little public encouragement the Eugene City Council could and probably should lead by example by banning city department use of poisons, something permitted under state regulations, something cities nationwide have already done. And in a planned public outreach effort, the city could stress the safer and more effective methods of private rodent control: spring traps, sealing the openings in your attic or basement, cleaning up garbage. The city could educate residents looking for a quick solution. Tell them the rodent poisons act slowly, and then perhaps like the Eveready Bunny, go on killing, and killing, and killing...

Ralph McDonald is a commissioner on the Eugene Sustainability Commission and co-chair of the Eugene Southwest Hills Neighborhood Association. The viewpoint expressed here is his own.

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