January 20, 2009 - Special Town Council Meeting

Council President Semonelli announced, "The Middletown, Rhode Island Town Council, honors the inauguration of President Barack Obama, and on this historic occasion wishes the new leader of the United States of America Godspeed and long life."

At a Special Meeting of the Town Council of the Town of Middletown, RI, held at the Middletown Town Hall on Tuesday, January 20, 2009 at 6:00 P.M.

Council President Christopher T. Semonelli, Presiding

Vice Chairman Richard Cambra, arrives at 6:30 P.M.

Councillor Frank A. Bozyan

Councillor M. Theresa Santos

Councillor Barbara A. VonVillas, Members Present

Councillor Edward J. Silveira, Jr., Absent

Councillor Robert J. Sylvia

POSTED – January 13, 2009

Wendy J.W. Marshall, Town Clerk

Town of Middletown

Town Hall – 350 East Main Road

Middletown, Rhode Island 02842

Dear Mrs. Marshall:

Pursuant to the provisions of Article II, Section 203 of the

Town Charter and in accordance with Sections 42-46-2 and 42-46-6., RIGL, I hereby call a Special Meeting of the Town Council to formally consider, discuss and act upon the following item of business:

Presentation by Numi Mitchell, Ph.D., Lead Scientist and Project Director, The Conservation Agency – Coyotes and matters related there to

Said meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 20, 2009, at 6:00 P.M. at the Middletown Town Hall, 350 East Main Road, Middletown, Rhode Island 02842.

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Christopher T. Semonelli, President

Middletown Town Council

CC:

Town Council

Public Library

Town Administrator

Town Solicitor

This meeting location is accessible to the handicapped. Individuals requiring interpreter services for the hearing-impaired should notify the Town Clerk's Office at 847-0009 not less than 48 hours before the meeting.

On motion of Councillor Santos, duly seconded, it was voted unanimously to receive said communication.

Numi Mitchell, Ph.D., Lead Scientist and Project Director, The

Conservation Agency addressed the Council explaining the following Management Plan For Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands entered here:

-Coyote Coexistence and Management Plan for Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands

Draft submitted to RI Department of Environmental Management November 10, 2008

by Numi Mitchell, Ph.D., Lead Scientist, Narragansett Bay Coyote Study

with the endorsement of the Potter League for Animals

The Narragansett Bay Coyote Study (NBCS) has been tracking the resource use of coyotes on Aquidneck Island and Jamestown since 2005. We undertook this work because coyotes were clearly becoming more numerous on the Narragansett Bay Islands, and we saw the need for regionally tailored management/coexistence

strategies for them. Both island communities are searching for answers to coyote issues and we feel we are far enough along in our work to submit the following plan for your consideration.

Since we began our study, the unique GPS tracking collars we use have definitively revealed that coyotes on our islands are being heavily subsidized by foods that humans directly and indirectly provide to them. Coyotes respond to more food by increasing their numbers and to less food by decreasing their numbers. It follows that we can passively manage coyotes - get them to drop their own numbers - if we aggressively manage ourselves and decrease the food subsidies we are providing them.

To implement the following management strategies the three Aquidneck Island municipalities need to work as a unit, because there is no such thing as Portsmouth coyotes or Newport coyotes. Our research has shown individual coyotes can range over the whole island. Coyotes born in Portsmouth flow into any voids in Newport and vise versa. Newport, Middletown, and Portsmouth need to develop a joint strategy for Aquidneck Island coyotes. This study also showed that Jamestown could also benefit from this plan as well. A successful plan will probably require direct collaboration with state

agencies (DEM and DOT), or collaboration with state agencies through partnership with NBCS.

Below is the outline for a Management and Coexistence Plan for Coyotes on Aquidneck Conanicut Islands:

1. Issue: Road killed deer and other animals:

There is no current plan for disposal of road kills on Aquidneck Island, Jamestown, or elsewhere in RI. Some are buried or trucked to landfills, but most deer killed on roads are dumped somewhere or along roads where coyotes find and eat them. There are well over 1,000 deer killed on roads each year in Rhode Island. DEM reported 26 deer were killed on Jamestown roads alone in 2007 (complete statistics were not available for Aquidneck Island). At 150-200 lbs each this is a significant problem as abundant food is linked to increased litter sizes in coyotes.

Recommendation: The four municipalities develop local ordinances requiring proper disposal (burial, cremation, or composting) of road kills and/or develop statewide solutions in partnership with DEM and DOT.

2. Issue: Farm livestock carcasses:

Coyotes commonly feed on the carcasses of dead farm livestock on Aquidneck Island and Jamestown. Often livestock, like cattle or sheep, die in the winter when holes cannot easily be dug to bury them. This winter timing coincides with coyote breeding season. Again, if coyotes are in good condition in breeding season they have larger litters. Carcasses available may be contributing to coyote fitness and therefore increased reproductive output. Also, NBCS data show that abundant food in an area causes coyotes packs to decrease their territory size. Coyote packs cluster around reliable food sources and defend a smaller land area. Smaller territories created by point-sources of food may create room for the establishment of new packs (preliminary data from NBCS indicates this occurs). In short, livestock carcass availability may be contributing to coyote population increases. An associated problem for farmers is that coyotes that eat dead livestock are more likely to

prey on livestock.

Recommendation: Develop and implement a dead livestock disposal strategy for farmers. NBCS and partners (see 9 below) have received a Conservation Innovation Grant to look for alternatives (assistance or incentives for farmers) to composting or dumping unusable dead livestock in areas where the carcasses are accessible to coyotes.

3. Issue: Deer shot but not recovered:

Some fraction of deer shot during deer season are wounded but not recovered by hunters despite best efforts. Often these numbers go unreported. Estimates for Jamestown in 2005 were 10-15 animals lost (at 150 pounds each that is 1500-2250 pounds of food available to coyotes which generally find and feed on them). Currently use of dogs, which could locate wounded deer, is illegal in RI.

Recommendation: Work with DEM to allow use of dogs to find

wounded, otherwise unrecoverable, deer.

4. Issue: Free roaming, outdoor, and feral cats provide food to coyotes. Coyotes are attracted to and eat both the cat food left out for cats and the cats themselves. On Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands there is an undetermined number of pet owners who allow their cats to roam freely outdoors as well as a very active program to trap/neuter/return feral cats to managed colonies. Feeding these populations on our back porches or at feeding stations for feral colonies serves as a magnet for coyotes and trains coyotes to hunt cats. This is extremely unsafe for cats and many pet owners have reported their animals killed by coyotes. These common cat practices allow the coyote population to thrive.

Recommendation: Ordinance for cat ownership, defining ownership, limiting number, regulating feral colonies, controlling outdoor feeding, and educating the public.

5. Issue: Intentional and unintentional feeding by residents:

Coyotes eat fruit, meat, vegetables, pet food, birdseed, garbage, animals, and carrion. They tend to center their territories on places with abundant food.

Recommendation: Create Municipal Wildlife Feeding Ordinances forbidding the placing of any material that attracts coyotes to land or premises. For example, In British Columbia Section 33.1 of the British Columbia Wildlife Act provides a minimum $345 ticket and a maximum $50,000 fine and six-month prison sentence for anyone who "with the intent of attracting dangerous wildlife to any land or premises, provides, leaves, or places in, or about the land or premises, food, food waste or any other substance that could attract dangerous wildlife to the land or premises" intentionally or unintentionally feeds coyotes. NBCS GPS collars would help with the enforcement of these ordinances as they identify specific areas where coyotes are feeding.

6. Issue: Policies for normal vs. problem coyotes:

In general "normal" coyotes are not a problem if communities understand how to live with them. In an ideal situation, coyotes are sustained entirely by natural resources (mice, voles, rabbits, geese, deer, etc.) and do not rely on humans for food.

As long as these coyotes are not aggressive towards humans or preying on livestock it is advisable to leave them alone. If you remove them they will be replaced by other coyotes that could either be normal or problem coyotes.

Some background biological information will help explain why this occurs. Coyotes regularly roam an area of about 3-6 square miles or whatever it takes to get enough food for the pack members. As of April 2007 there were 6 coyote packs on Aquidneck Island and 3-4 on Conanicut Island. Normally, each pack is a territorial family group that varies in number from 3 to 10 individuals. A portion of the area the pack inhabits is the pack's territory, which they defend from other coyotes. The number of mature coyotes in the pack is linked to the amount of food resources in the territory. The pack system keeps coyotes from getting too numerous because the packs defend the area they need to survive. A coyote pack usually has one breeding

(or alpha) female. This female produces many more puppies than are ultimately wanted in the pack. All but one or two of the young are forced to leave the pack at about 9-11 months of age. These coyotes become transients. Other types of transients include older individuals that can no longer defend their role as upper level pack members and leave the pack. Transients move all over the islands in narrow undefended zones that exist between pack territories searching for an open habitat to occupy or group to join. They often die before they succeed (many are hit by cars). It is largely because of these transients, that wholesale coyote eradication plans are unsuccessful. Removing a group of territorial coyotes will create an undefended area into which the transient coyotes will flow. At all times of year, numbers of transients are immediately available on Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands to replenish any voids created by culling.

In some cases, individual coyotes become bold, in general because they have been fed by people. Feeding causes coyotes to lose their natural fear of humans and they become "problem" animals. This was the case with a bold coyote female that attempted to bring up a litter on Narragansett Ave, near the Cliff Walk, in Newport. This female originally came from the Navy Base where she had seven pups in spring 2006. On the Base the pups were fed by security guards. By fall the coyote family moved to the Park Holm

neighborhood where they were hand-fed by children and further trained to look to humans for food. The coyotes also preyed on cat colonies in the area. Since food was plentiful at the Park Holm neighborhood they abandoned the rest of their previously held territory: the entire Navy Base. When the weather got cold, people in Park Holm stopped feeding these coyotes and the cat supply quickly ran out. When the pack tried to go back to the Navy Base they found other coyotes had moved in to fill the void – and were defending it. The maturing puppies moved to Middletown and Portsmouth from where there were numbers of reports of them active in neighborhoods during daylight hours, and to the other side of Newport – where the alpha female had 6-7 more pups in spring 2007. For the first time there was a downtown pack of coyotes in Newport. Because they approached people expecting food they were problem coyotes. The female had to be shot and the new pups (already accepting food from humans) were destroyed. In winter 2006 NBCS began hearing reports of bold coyotes in Jamestown village (one was shot near on Narragansett Avenue). In fall 2007 there were numbers of sightings in the village area. In late 2007 a case of daytime activity downtown was reported: a bold coyote on a porch during daylight hours. Again, our extensive GPS habitat-use data clearly show that coyotes prefer rural habitat and avoid contact with humans - unless people are (intentionally or unintentionally) feeding them.

Recommendation: The Coexisting with Coyotes program based in Vancouver, British Columbia, provides a good model for urban coyote coexistence strategies which the NBCS supports. Aquidneck Island could use aspects of their accepted and effective program as a template that municipal officers here can point to as best practices. The Vancouver program has shown that most coyotes can be discouraged from lounging on lawns, and patrolling neighborhoods, by people acting "big, mean, and loud." They have designed loud shakers and also recommend relentlessly throwing things or charging with brooms. Coyotes should be made to feel unwelcome at all times. If the coyotes remain in the area they are probably being fed. Regardless, coexistence with individual coyotes that are aggressive or threatening is not an option. Aversive Coyote Training (ACT) should be attempted. If the police deem that the ACT is unsuccessful, problem individuals can be destroyed by the Police, trained personnel designated by the Police, or the DEM Division of Law Enforcement (401-222-3070). DEM has an existing policy for dealing with problem coyotes: refer to DEM Management & Response Protocols for Incidents Involving Coyotes drafted March 13, 2006 (http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/coyotpol.pdf).

7. Issue: Normally coyotes are shy and wary of people which prevents them from being a problem in most cases. Problems occur

when coyotes make a connection between humans and receiving food. Many people do not understand the consequences of feeding coyotes. If coyotes become dependent on humans they can become a public safety risk. It is important to educate the public about coexisting safely with coyotes.

Recommendation: NBCS has been developing and conducting an Education and Outreach Program since its outset in 2005. At this point the Conservation Agency's NBCS website gets between 1000-2000 hits per day (www.theconservationagency.org/coyote.htm or google "coyote study"). In 2005-6 NBCS had 15 local schools involved with our study on Aquidneck Island, Jamestown, and the adjacent coast. Currently any school with a web browser can participate. Because of the feeding that occurred at Park Holm in early fall, we targeted Newport and Middletown in 2006-7 for school visits. In addition to the efforts of NBCS, the Potter League for Animals has brings NBCS education and safety materials to more than 1,1000 students in Aquidneck Island classrooms each year and will be working with us in Jamestown schools in 2008. DEM provides brochures and additional information about coyotes on line at http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/fishwild/pdf/coyotes.pdf. In general we find that our regional scientific information and recommendations tend to reassure people and increase understanding. We explain that people are both unintentionally and

intentionally creating the "coyote problem." We also explain that is also within our abilities to reverse the trend. Reasonable changes in our behaviors and policies will cause the coyotes to lower their own populations to levels sustainable by the natural environment. Last, for those people who love feeding wildlife, a reminder that "A fed coyote is a dead coyote" will probably make sense. Because of the need for greater outreach efforts this upcoming year, the NBCS is partnering with the University of Rhode Island Coastal Resources Center (CRC) to further expand the NBCS program. This work will increase emphasis on education and outreach to the adult population. We have jointly applied to the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Informal Education Program for a five-year grant. Aquidneck Island and Jamestown municipalities can help the educational effort by contributing to part of the funding required for NBCS and CRC to develop educational materials specific to these areas.

8. Issue: Continuing baseline data collection and monitoring efficacy of the implemented Management/Coexistence Plan

Recommendation: NBCS is unique nationwide in using hourly GPS locations for a fine-scale study of coyote resource use. Our method

is central to our new discoveries of coyote subsidies on Aquidneck Island and Jamestown and our data have led us to the science-based management initiatives we present above (which we suspect will be relevant in wider New England). We plan to continue data collection in order to monitor coyote pack numbers on Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands. We will be using pack territory size to estimate number of packs and overall coyote population size on the islands. Changes in coyote population size will provide an index with which to measure progress and efficacy of the management plan. If our management efforts are successful we should see coyote territories increase in average size as the coyote families begin relying on natural foods. The municipalities should also hear fewer complaints about coyotes.

At this point we believe we have demonstrated the importance of our research. Prior to our study no one understood why coyote numbers seemed to be expanding in our study area. The next steps are to implement the management initiatives suggested in this plan and monitor the response of the coyotes.

9. Issue: Funding.

Recommendation: From 2004-2008, most of the funding for NBCS has come from private foundations and in-kind contributions. We continue to look for other funding sources for the program and encourage stakeholders to support it. NBCS has requested a $200,000 grant from Congressman Kennedy's office. The Congressman is concerned with the issues and is interested in assisting but we believe an endorsement from the four municipalities and DEM would help our application (contact Susan Sweet, Lobbyist, for guidelines at 401-438-7054). The NBCS has already received three legislative grants from the Rhode Island Senate thanks to the efforts of Senate Majority Leader Theresa Paiva-Weed. She is an enthusiastic supporter of our work. The NBCS and the Coastal Resources Center, URI, have applied for a 5-year grant of $3.5 million from NSF to expand the educational component to community residents. The NBCS and the RI Natural History Survey have received a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to develop and implement a plan to help farmers to dispose of unusable dead livestock. We hope to bring DEM in on this plan as well to deal with deer carcass (and roadkill) disposal.

10. Issue: Link between deer abundance and coyote population

numbers.

Recommendation: Deer populations are increasing in the suburban-rural landscapes of Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands. This makes for increased food opportunities for coyotes. DEM biologists have indicated that they may recommend some sort of coupled strategy for deer/coyote management when they submit their final comments.

Ms. Mitchell gave a power point presentation reviewing the Coyote Coexistences and Management Plan for Aquidneck and Conanicut Islands. The Conservation Agency is requesting the following from the Council.

1. Formation of a subcommittee or workgroup to discuss development and implementation of community-tailored management actions and ordinances,

2. Participation in joint coyote management/implementation workshops and council members from the 3 Aquidneck Island and Jamestown municipalities, and

3. Endorsement of the concept of the management plan for sustainable coexistence with coyotes.

Councillor Santos questioned which communities were participating at this time.

Dr. Mitchell, responding to Councillor Santos, noted that Portsmouth, Newport and Jamestown have the Management Plan however; Middletown is the first that has seen this presentation.

Councillor VonVillas questioned sterilization for the coyote.

Dr. Mitchell, responding to Councillor VonVillas, noted that sterilization is not possible.

Town Administrator Shawn Brown noted that currently Portsmouth, Middletown and Newport have a working group that may be able to work with the Conservation Agency on this matter.

On motion of Councillor Bozyan, duly seconded, it was voted unanimously to adjourn this meeting at 6:45 P.M.

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Wendy J.W. Marshall, CMC

Council Clerk