

March 22nd, 2021

To the Board of Supervisors and whoever it may concern,

I believe that you should keep the contract with Wildlife Services. With the increase of human activity across wildlife landscapes, there will be encounters with wildlife. Wildlife Services provides a service to the public across Mendocino County to aid each landowner's decision in handling problematic wildlife activity on their property. The first step is education. Wildlife Services educate the cooperator (the landowner) with the animal's biology, ecology, and how to prevent the problem at hand. The next step is to determine the cooperator's decision. For certain species, such as a mountain lion, if a person keeps losing their livestock such as sheep or goats to this animal, they first get a non-depredation permit from California Department of Fish and Wildlife. That specific animal must return within 10 days and cause damage to a rancher's livestock in order to get a lethal permit. Once that lethal permit is given, a trap is set for a maximum of 10 days to capture the target animal. Wildlife Specialists are trained to understand the damage that wildlife creates whether it be a person's home, livestock depredation, property damage or a disease threat.

The issue with replacing Wildlife Services with Animal Control is that Animal Control is usually over worked, under paid, understaffed, and do not have the training to handle wildlife damage control methods. When it comes to problem wildlife, it is improbable to be able to rehabilitate them safely and successfully. Animal control officers are not qualified for this position and the training they would have to undergo to their already overwhelming for some. At the moment the state of California is not offering the required Law enforcement training for Animal Control officers and due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it will most likely be done virtually and not properly train them. There will have to be a complete reinstallation on properly sanitizing for vehicle caging, obtaining bigger and newer vehicles to keep up with demand and a new office space which does not seem large enough for the workers, especially during the pandemic. In addition, the short-term wildlife housing seems to be located at the animal shelter. My concern is if the wild animal escaped it could lead to harm for the pets at the animal shelter as well as the visitors and workers. I do not believe Mendocino County will provide the best training for Animal Control Officers to properly rehabilitate wild animals.

Wildlife Services has a national non-lethal program, a disease program, and is constantly researching how to prevent human wildlife conflict and damage. Many people believe it is cruel to trap and euthanize wildlife, but as people are moving into these landscapes, non-lethal strategies are not 100% effective even after all precautions are taken. Some problematic wildlife such as feral swine that are not only invasive, but also destructive, carry diseases, compete with native species and difficult rehab them. Is there a proper plan on dealing with larger problematic animals? There is large financial concern with your proposed plan, and it would only harm the county if you were to replace Wildlife Services with Animal Control Officers. I suggest keeping the contract with Wildlife Services, create a contract where there are presentations, newsletters, public outreach that the Wildlife Specialist, who is a properly trained wildlife professional, can do and give to your constituents.

There are options, consider how you can work with Wildlife Services that benefit your community instead of hurting animal care and control services. Allow them to do their job that they are trained to do, and work with Wildlife Services to give what it needed when it comes to wildlife.

Thank you,

Viridiana Rodriguez– Ukiah, Mendocino County