



February 25, 2013

Dear Chair Dingfelder and Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

I am writing on behalf of the Audubon Society of Portland and our 13,000 members in the Portland Metropolitan Region in support of Senate Bill 474 (Habituated Wildlife). We appreciate the willingness of Senator Olsen and Senator Hass to sponsor this legislation. Deliberate feeding of raccoons is a significant problem in Oregon--on both our urban and rural landscapes.

Habituating certain wildlife species to human handouts can cause them to lose their instinctual fear of humans and begin associating humans with food. It can also lead to unnaturally large local wildlife populations that are unsustainable based on the available natural food and habitat. Finally drawing large numbers of certain wildlife species to the same location day after day can create disease vectors that result in local die-offs. Each of these situations increases the likelihood of negative interactions with people and property---a situation which is good for neither humans or wildlife.

Portland Audubon Society receives approximately 15,000 wildlife related phone calls each year at our urban wildlife resource office. Too many of these phone calls involve conflicts between humans and wildlife specifically precipitated by feeding of wildlife. Problems associated with habituated wild animals range from property damage, to serious disease outbreaks to direct attacks on humans. Addressing what are in many cases truly preventable situations costs tremendous resources and often results in the removal (either y relocation or lethal control) of the offending wildlife.

We urge you add raccoons to the list of "potentially habituated wildlife. Raccoons are without question one of the species of greatest concern because of their predilection to become habituated to human handouts combined with their potential to cause real harm to people and property once they become habituated. On average we deal with well over 100 complaints each year regarding habituation of raccoons.

Feeding causes raccoons to associate food with humans and to lose instinctual fear of people. Feeding of raccoons is particularly problematic because raccoon are only quasi-territorial and populations will tend to increase in a limited geographic area as food sources permit. A single person placing out large quantities of food can quickly cause dramatic increases in local population levels.

Along with the typical problems associated with habituation (loss of fear of people, aggressive behavior towards people and pets, property damage), raccoons pose an additional challenge. Raccoons are prone to periodic outbreaks of the Canine Distemper Virus as well as Parvo and other diseases. Canine Distemper is contagious to dogs as well as various other wildlife populations. At least 4 times over the past 18 years the Portland Metro Region has been hit with a significant outbreak of raccoon distemper. These outbreaks have been significantly

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exacerbated by intentional feeding of raccoons which creates elevated opportunities for disease transmission among raccoon populations as multiple raccoons are drawn to the same location day after day to access feeding stations. Audubon, ODFW and Multnomah County Animal Control have worked together to respond to these outbreaks and facilitate quick removal of diseased animals from the environment primarily because of the significant risks that sick, disoriented animals pose to humans on densely populated landscapes. Responding to these outbreaks is tremendously resource intensive. Problems with raccoons have become so acute that in 2006 ODFW adopted new administrative rules limiting relocation of problem raccoons due to the large number of animals being relocated (>800 in Portland in 2003) and their high potential to serve as a disease vector to vulnerable wildlife populations. Problem raccoons are now typically euthanized rather than relocated.

We view the addition of raccoons to the list of potentially habituated wildlife as a critical tool in the toolkit for addressing feeding of potentially habituated wildlife species. An ordinance alone will not solve the problem, but it does send a clear and strong message to the public that providing food for certain species is not appropriate and it provides agencies with the ability to enforce when education is not sufficient to deter feeding activities. We have found for example that the ability to inform the public that there are fines potentially associated with intentional feeding coyotes (another common problem) which were included under the original "No n Feed Ordinance (HB 2175) passed in 2011 has been tremendously helpful in dissuading even some of the most obstinate feeders to cease and desist without referred them on for enforcement. Over the past two years, Audubon has only referred a small handful of cases to State Police Game Division for follow-up. We are currently working with a variety of local, state and federal agencies to increase educational outreach resources available to address this topic and we expect that in the vast majority of situations, education alone will be sufficient to deter inappropriate behavior. Research has demonstrated however that the most effective programs are those that are backed by enforcement capabilities.

We respectfully urge you to add raccoons to the list of potentially habituated wildlife by passing SB 474.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Sallinger". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bob Sallinger
Conservation Director
Audubon Society of Portland

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Coyote walking down Alameda neighborhood sidewalk in middle of day after being fed by neighbors. (c) Bob Sallinger

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