

Council to consider ban on feeding deer, ducks, geese

By Keri Heath
The Herald-Zeitung

City staff recommended the New Braunfels City Council enact an ordinance banning the feeding of deer, ducks and geese during a Monday night meeting at city hall. The recommendation comes after two public meetings and three years of studying the impact of deer, ducks and geese on New Braunfels.

The instigator for the city's interest in curbing urban wildlife populations is two pronged.

On the one hand, automobile accidents caused by deer have been on the rise. Last year, city animal control collected 528 dead deer from roadsides.

On the other hand, increased urban wildlife populations have an effect on the area's water quality.

"Over the last 10 years, we've seen increases in bacteria in both the Dry Comal Creek and Comal River," Watershed Program Manager Mark Enders said.

A feeding ordinance is the first step recommended by Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists. Council members showed interest in starting with a feeding band, emphasizing the need for community education.

"If we move too fast, then our community reacts as opposed to becoming educated on the things that we can do," Mayor Barron Casteel said. "And then we go back to where we started."

An outreach campaign was also a key component of what Enders recommended to the city council. When deer and ducks live in concentrated areas, he pointed out, the animals become susceptible to disease or lose their ability to find natural food sources.

"We see disruption of migratory patterns," Enders said. "We've learned that some of the ducks are too fat and have eaten too much over the years that they've actually lost the ability to fly."

He also said feeding deer just adds to the problem of overabundance.

"We all see increased reproduction rates," Enders said. "If animals are well fed, they tend to want to reproduce more."

A public survey taken during and following an April meeting about wildlife management showed 68 percent of respondents believed there are too many deer in New Braunfels and would support a feeding ordinance.

Only 41 percent of people believe there are too many ducks and geese in Landa Park, with 48 percent in favor of a feeding ordinance.

Other communities in central Texas, such as Austin, Garden Ridge and Lakeway, which is a community west of Austin, have enacted feeding ordinances. Lakeway also actively traps and processes deer, donating the meat to a food bank.

The city received a grant to implement its Watershed Protection Plan, \$130,000 of which is directly for wildlife management. Enders said this could be used for public outreach, oil coating of non-native waterfowl eggs and signage.

Leah Garcia, District 6, council member said in a tourist town, the signage is especially important.

“Part of the problem that I see with Landa Park is we have so many visitors from out of town,” Garcia said. “They’re not going to know. I don’t want to create a lot of tickets that we then have to collect. That’s really not the goal of it. “

Council members showed interest in considering a feeding ordinance but no action was taken Monday night. Instead, the city council directed staff to return with a recommended ordinance and potential next steps.