Supplemental Wild Animal Feeding Policy

Policy

In an effort to protect the health and safety of Sewanee resident humans and wildlife, all supplemental wild mammal feeding on the Domain is prohibited.

Supplemental feeding as intended for this policy includes, but is not limited to, providing feed or mineral supplement for deer, raccoons, or opossums, feeding of feral dogs or cats, or leaving food intended for domestic animals in an open and accessible location for wildlife. Use of seed in elevated bird feeders is not applicable to this policy, although bird seed has also been known to attract coyotes, raccoons, and other animals.

Rationale

One of the unique aspects of residency in Sewanee is the village’s proximity and connection to relatively undeveloped forested land. This connection affords residents more frequent and varied opportunities to interface with wildlife than is experienced in many villages our size. Though it can be tempting to augment these wildlife opportunities with supplemental feeding of the wildlife, it can lead to several problems:

- Feeding encourages the congregation of animals in high densities in residential areas, increasing browse damage to lawns, gardens, and surrounding forests. The idea that supplemental feeding of deer will deter garden and ornamental shrub browsing is false. Supplemental feeding increases browse on the surrounding landscape.
- Feed intended for one species often attracts other less desirable ones. For example, corn left out for deer also attracts opossums, raccoons, coyotes, and foxes. Cat food left out for cats attracts coyotes and desensitizes them to residential areas.
- Feeding feral cats has negative effects on local bird and small mammal populations, and results in increased disease transmission and/or fight damage to domestic cats.
- Feeding is potentially unhealthy for the particular species, with feeding locations acting as distribution points for disease and parasites, and the wrong feed at the wrong time of year can cause serious physiological damage to wild animals (e.g., excess corn for deer in winter).
- Feeding increases the likelihood of diseases being spread from animal to humans.
- Feeding encourages populations to expand beyond levels that the natural food supply can support and encourages rats and other pest species.
- Feeding encourages animals to lose their natural fear of humans, increasing the possibility of negative human/animal interactions. Experience in other communities has shown that this is especially problematic for coyotes. As long as coyotes maintain their fear of humans, problems are minimal, but food-habituated coyotes harass people and their pets.

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