

Crystal Lake Park Goose Management and Charity Harvest Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Urbana Park District

May 2020

From April 27-May 27 the Crystal Lake Park Goose Management survey was open to the public, and the park district received nearly 900 responses, as well as many more in writing and via phone. This document highlights some of the most commonly asked questions, concerns, suggestions, and ideas. We thank everyone who took the time to provide input!

FAQ:

Aren't Canada geese a protected species? Isn't this against the law?

Yes, they are protected and that is why an official permit is required. The permit is issued by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and the harvest is performed by United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) division of Wildlife Services.

Are you getting rid of all the geese?

No, Canada geese provide beauty and recreational value and are a native part of the environment. They also can contribute to many nuisance, damage, and human health and safety conflicts. Because resident Canada geese are long-lived (10-24 years), breed prolifically (5-8 eggs per year), and have very limited natural predation in protected urban park systems, their population grows quickly and unsustainably. The goal of the harvest is to reduce the population to be in better balance with the local ecosystem and to inflict less damage on the park and lake. Because there will still be geese in the park, there will still be goose feces deposited in the park. However, it will be much reduced as will its impact on park amenities, visitor experience, and water quality.

Are you going to kill the baby goslings?

The harvest will happen in late June or July during the Giant Canada Goose molting season and this year's 1st year hatch class is grown at that time and difficult to discern from an adult goose.

Won't you accidentally be killing migrating, protected geese along with the resident geese?

The harvest takes place at during the molt season when the geese in the area are resident Giant Canada geese. Migratory geese are on northern breeding grounds, typically in Canada at this time of year.

How are the geese damaging Crystal Lake?

Each goose typically deposits 0.5-1.5 lbs pound of feces per day, leading to contaminated park amenities such as the Lake House decks, boat docks, rental boats, trails, parking lots, and the pool deck. The fecal deposits are a potential health concern and also contribute to diminished water quality. A single goose can deposit 0.5 lbs of phosphorous in a lake if present year around. Testing of Crystal Lake water quality indicates that phosphorous in Crystal Lake is exceedingly high and contributes to the proliferation nuisance plants that coat the lake and potentially harmful blue green algae blooms. The geese additionally graze park vegetation and have contributed to erosion of the lake shoreline areas. As the park district prepares to replant the shoreline as part of the upcoming rehabilitation project, goose grazing is a concern. Once the tall grass shoreline is established and goose numbers are in balance, the lake will be less attractive to more geese and will provide improved habitat for many more species.

Isn't goose feces a good fertilizer?

Yes, goose feces may be good for gardens, but in a park like Crystal Lake, it is detrimental to the water quality of the lake when deposited by so many geese.

Isn't there something you could do before resorting to killing the geese?

Since 2012, UPD has made progressively more invested attempts to control the goose population.

2012

- Goose beacons installed in the lake, proved effective in year 1.

2013

- Beacons are no longer effective.

2014

- Urbana Park District Advisory Committee recommends increased management.
- Park district hosts area agency lunch and learn with IDNR to learn more about effective management options.

2015

- Park district seeks public input on egg and nest management, public supportive.
- Training on egg and nest management, 1st year (59 nests/ 118 nesting geese).
- Turf application of chemical deterrents. Coyote decoy hazing.
- Physical exclusion (limited fencing) installations in high impact areas.
- Ropes along boat dock and bungee cords on boats added to block access to boats.

2016

- 2nd year of nest management (44 nests/ 88 nesting geese).
- Ongoing turf deterrents and decoy hazing, exclusion through limited fencing.

2017

- Environmental education programming on the Canada Goose and negative impacts of feeding them.
- 3rd year of nest management (50 nests/ 100 nesting geese).
- Ongoing turf deterrents and decoy hazing, exclusion through limited fencing.

2018

- Training and implementation of dog and laser hazing, both which mimic predators of geese.
- Dock and deck application of chemical deterrents.
- 4th year of nest management (43 nests/ 86 nesting geese).
- Ongoing turf deterrents, exclusion through limited fencing.

2019

- Lake rehabilitation engineering for habitat modification.
- 5th year of nest management (39 nests/ 78 nesting geese).
- Ongoing deck/dock/turf deterrents, dog/laser hazing, exclusion through limited fencing.

2020

- UPD hosts area agency lunch and learn with Illinois Department of Natural Resources Urban Waterfowl Manager and U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services.
- UPD begins lake rehabilitation project and habitat modification: \$2.5+ million investment on lake and park amenities.
- 6th year of nest management.
- Ongoing deck/dock/turf deterrents, dog/laser hazing, exclusion through limited fencing.

In the year 2019, the park district significantly increased its dog hazing program at the risk of pushing more geese onto our neighbors. In spite of these intensified efforts, geese remained a significant public concern through recent Crystal Lake Park planning efforts over the last 3 years and during the strategic plan developed over the last year. There are other approaches that were considered but not pursued because of the concern on their impact on visitor use of the park and surrounding neighbors.

Can the geese be relocated?

Relocation is not permitted in the State of Illinois due to the likelihood most birds will return to the park and younger birds may create a nuisance to surrounding communities. The stress endured by the birds in failed relocation attempts is not justified and therefore relocation is not permitted by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Can't you enhance shoreline with tall grasses to deter the geese?

Yes, the first phase of shoreline was planted in the fall of 2019. The next phase covers most of the rest of the lake and is contracted as part of the park rehabilitation for fall/spring 2020/21. The native tall grasses take several years to establish densely enough to provide a significant deterrent and while establishing they will be prone to grazing by the geese. The park district has plans to include protective caging to exclude geese from planted area, to spray new plantings with chemical deterrents and continue dog/laser hazing to the potential for damage due to goose grazing remains. Additionally, there are several locations where the proximity of the road limits the width of tall grass buffer that can be established to less than is typically recommended to deter geese.

How long were dogs use to scare them?

Dogs have been used since 2018. Prior to that, the park district was not familiar with anyone with a dog service in our area and used coyote decoys instead as advised by a consultant specializing in goose management and who prioritize non-lethal methods over culling. The consultant helped the park district work with our current dog service to develop a program that hazes and herds the geese to limit impacts in priority areas such as the Lake House and our day camp pavilion. The protocol was developed to limit the likelihood of geese leaving the park to become nuisance on neighboring properties. As impacts and park user concerns continued, the district increased the frequency of hazing last year at the risk of burdening our neighbors but in hopes of avoiding a Charity Harvest. Despite the increased efforts, impacts and visitor concerns continued.

How often will this need to be done?

Management practices including ongoing egg and nest management, hazing, and deterrents help limit a quick return to existing conditions and most landowners are able to maintain for 7-10 years following a cull before goose impacts again become elevated. The continuation of such practices and the planned lake edge habitat modifications at Crystal Lake will help.

Will there still be goslings in the spring?

Yes, because in our egg and nest management efforts we occasionally miss a nest and eggs develop. More frequently, geese nest outside the park, increasingly on surrounding flat roofs, and the geese find their way to Crystal Lake Park. The goal will be to maintain a balanced and sustainable population through ongoing egg/nest management, hazing, deterrents, and lake edge habitat modification.

Can you bring in a family of coyotes?

Coyotes are already occasionally present in the park as they roam free along the Saline Branch of the Salt Fork River, Busey Woods, and other surrounding habitat. They have not shown a sizeable impact of the population.

Can you use swans?

Swans can be aggressively territorial, more so than geese. They have been known to inflict harm, sometimes catastrophic. The park district would be especially concerned about the danger they might pose to boaters.

Can you perform more egg “shaking”?

The park district already manages every egg and nest we can using a PETA and Humane Society endorsed protocol that involves floating eggs to determine confirm they are not yet viable before dipping them in food grade corn oil.

Can you install man-made barriers along the entire shoreline?

This was considered but not pursued due to the public uses of the lake such as fishing and boating. Long term, the tall grass planting will provide a similar deterrent.

Can you use avian contraceptives?

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources does not endorse the use of contraceptives for wildlife.

Isn't it cheaper to just pay staff to keep cleaning and herding geese away from public areas than to do a Charity Harvest?

It costs approximately \$1,500 per year in staff time to manage nests, maintain exclusionary devices, and spray deterrent. Additionally approximately \$500 per year for boat workers to clean boats, docks, and decks of goose feces during boating season. It costs up to \$11,000 per year for our dog services hazing program. Despite our cleaning and herding efforts, a large population remains, and the much of the feces washes into the lake where it contributes to ongoing water quality issues.

Why can't we just walk around the feces and accept it as mother nature?

The issues extend beyond walking around feces and include diminished water quality and the impacts on the lake health. Additionally, the district has received concerns from parents with young children unknowingly picking up feces, pet owners' dogs ingesting the feces, and worries about the feces in areas where picnicking, gathering, and weddings take place such as the Lake House.

Can you recruit citizen volunteers, scout troops, and others to research, raise money, and to help with other methods?

The park district welcomes volunteers to help with our ongoing efforts. Our staffing levels are sufficient for the level of spraying and nest management required, however, and in particular, we would like to help spread the message that feeding geese is not good for the geese and can cause deformities. It also contributes to more geese coming to our parks as feeding grounds.

Why do you call it a charity harvest when it is actually killing geese? It's deceptive.

UPD did not create the term "charity harvest". This is the official term and program of the IDNR permit that describes the end use of the meat products from the culled geese.

Are UPD personnel conducting the charity harvest?

The harvest is conducted by USDA trained wildlife professionals. Park staff may assist under the permit but it is not a requirement.

Did the UPD purposely choose to do this during a pandemic when food insecurity may be an issue?

No, the timing was based upon many years of intensified efforts that have not met the ongoing expressed concerns of park visitors and continued diminished water quality. As the park district prepares to invest in revitalizing the park and rehabilitate the lake, 2020 was determined to be the most suitable time, if ever, to perform a harvest cull. The park district has tried many other approaches in hopes it would never be in the position it is today.

Isn't goose meat unsafe to eat?

Studies have shown that only a small percentage of Canada geese collected from urban environments carry higher than recommended levels of contaminants.

Canada geese will be evaluated first by wildlife biologists that capture the geese and by the processor for obvious signs of disease or other malformation. Geese unsuitable for processing will not be processed. All Canada geese suitable for processing will be delivered to a Type II poultry processor licensed by Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA). The processor is required to follow all sanitation regulations as required by IDOA of any licensed Type II poultry processor and the plant is inspected for proper sanitation.

Requirements will be met for the donation of wild game under the "Good Samaritan Food Donor Act" for human consumption of the Illinois Food Service Sanitation Code (77 Ill. Adm. Code 750).

Canada goose hunters and their families eat goose meat from urban and rural areas on a regular basis.

Are you going to shoot the geese?

No, USDA captures the geese by encircling them with nets while they are flightless during their summer molt in late June/early July. The process has been used across the country by state wildlife agencies for decades to capture Canada geese and place them in different locations for population restoration efforts. It is a process that is still used today by the IL DNR and other state wildlife agencies to capture Canada geese to affix uniquely numbered metal bands on their leg for population monitoring purposes. Once USDA staff confine geese within net panels, USDA-WS biologists will visually evaluate geese for obvious malformations (i.e. broken wing, broken leg, etc.) or evidence of disease. Geese with malformations or disease are placed in a separate holding cage from the other geese, humanely euthanized and disposed of by USDA-WS according to the provisions of the Illinois Dead Animal Disposal Act. After evaluation, geese are individually transferred to commercial poultry cages. The geese are then transported to the licensed/permitted poultry processor in accordance with the “Specifications for the Humane Handling, Care, Treatment, and Transportation of Warm-blooded Animals Other Than Dogs, Cats, Rabbits, Hamsters, Guinea Pigs, Nonhuman Primates, and Marine Mammals” (Subpart F, Subchapter A, ch. 1, Title 9 CFR, 2004). The poultry cages are designed to transport large domestic turkeys and have adequate ventilation to provide the birds fresh air during transportation from the capture site to the processing facility

Will the geese be processed at a local plant and will the meat remain local?

The meat products are typically distributed to charitable organizations in the greater Chicago area.

Can hunters hunt the geese at Crystal Lake Park?

No, hunting of geese is not permitted in Crystal Lake Park, nor is it permitted within Urbana.

Canada Geese mate for life. What happens if we take one of a bonded pair and not the other in the cull?

The geese generally remain in groups when flightless,. It should be expected that mated pairs are close to each other and either will be in the park or not in the park (and not captured) when you conduct a Charity Harvest. The process of exercising the Charity Harvest action during the timeframe permitted by the DNR in and of itself reduces the potential to ‘break’ pair bonds. They are not being dispersed and flying away in all different directions. They are flightless at the time the Charity Harvest is conducted. However, Canada geese are wild animals and when a member of a pair dies the remaining goose will bond with another goose.