

## Geese Mitigation in Allegheny Commons

To deal with the health and safety hazards posed by the presence of so many Canada geese in our park, the Allegheny Commons Initiative (ACI), along with the cooperation of the City, the North Side Leadership Conference, and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, has decided to enter into an agreement with the USDA Wildlife Services (USDA-WS). A department of the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services has a long track record of assisting with geese management throughout the U.S., Allegheny County, and the City of Pittsburgh.

ACI will contract with USDA-WS to pester the geese using a variety of methods, including adding eggs (although generally we have not seen any nests in the Commons). If these methods prove successful and are still warranted, we will extend our contract to subsequent years. The USDA-WS employs only humane methods to make the geese uncomfortable and maintains compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and any other applicable federal statutes (it is in their contract).

Their methods to disrupt the geese will involve a variety of proven techniques, such as laser lights, sounds, toy boats in the lake (we all need one of these!), and chasing with specially-trained dogs. The USDA-WS will notify the Aviary in advance when they will be in the Park, which is tentatively scheduled to be twice per week with the number of visits adjusted according to observations of the geese.

Geese mitigation is not scheduled to begin until after the Lake Elizabeth cleanup on April 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> and the lake has been re-filled. Activities will also cease during the molting period, which is generally mid-June through the end of July, but will continue through the remainder of the year.

APHIS-WS will also be providing up to two (2) educational presentations during the timeframe of our agreement. These presentations will be organized by ACI and the entire community will be informed as to time and place. We encourage everyone to attend and, if possible, to volunteer to assist with this geese mitigation effort.

In addition to the USDA-WS work in the Commons, ACI will be working with the City to initiate temporary habitat modification around Lake Elizabeth to discourage the geese. Geese love "low vegetation adjacent to open water," which is what we generally have around Lake Elizabeth. By reducing sightlines and access points that the geese have to the water, we may discourage them from feeling comfortable. Currently, they feel totally safe in the open areas next to the lake and they have even begun straying as far as the East Commons. That is how safe they feel.

To make them feel less safe, we will be TEMPORARILY inserting plantings at some key locations, primarily toward the northern end of the lake (near North Ave.) to provide a visual barrier between the geese and the water. The southern end (nearest the dog park) is not attractive to the geese because the apron around the lake is mostly elevated on this side, providing a concrete impediment to getting to the water. Plus, it is closer to the dogs, which the geese prefer to avoid.

Furthermore, we will be asking the City to temporarily designate “no-mow” areas. Geese prefer short grasses; by allowing the grass in some areas to grow longer, it makes it less attractive to them. We will also be discussing with the City the possibility of planting a flower garden on the island (or elsewhere) to further dissuade the geese. We will be developing signage that will educate park users about these changes and plantings.

Some (or all) of these habitat modification ideas may be unpleasant to our neighbors, who are accustomed to viewing the neat and tidy lines between mowed grass and water. However, at this moment our orderly landscape is marred by the prodigious amount of goose poop, making the environment unhealthy as well as unattractive. A TEMPORARY solution that will dissuade the geese from taking up residence in the Commons is needed NOW.

Rest assured that ACI will be working with the PPC to make sure that our future restoration plans for Lake Elizabeth will be in accordance with the already accepted Master Plan. However, given this unpleasant experience, we will be carefully considering landscaping features that will dissuade the geese. But those are a long way off and if we continue to welcome the geese to the Commons we will never be rid of them.

A video recording of the recent ACI meeting during which all of these plans were discussed is available on Google drive. Participants included the USDA-WS, City of Pittsburgh DPW representatives, and Leah Friedman (Office of Community Affairs), as well as Councilman Wilson (and staff). Watching this video affords a great opportunity to become more familiar with the plans. We thank the City and the NSLC for all of their support on this effort. Please feel free to email me if you would like to have access to this video or have any other questions.

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