

June 13th, 2016

Prepared by:

Graham Currie

Executive Director, Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton

780.288.7642

executivedr@wildlife-edm.ca

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY



Kasia Brytan



PARKLAND COUNTY

&

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION
SOCIETY OF EDMONTON

PARTNERSHIP PROPOSAL



WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

Table of Contents

WHO WE ARE	2
REQUEST TO COUNCIL	3
FINANCIAL INFORMATION	3
Funding Sources.....	3
Start-Up Costs.....	4
WHY WE ARE IMPORTANT TO PARKLAND COUNTY	4
Expansion and Infrastructure.....	5
Part of the Wildlife Management Strategy	7
OTHER BENEFITS	8
Education Program	8
Public Communication and Environmental Responsibility.....	8
Indicators, Trends and Safety.....	9
CONCLUSION.....	9

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

WHO WE ARE

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton (WRSE) is committed to proper environmental stewardship and recognizes the important role we play in conserving Alberta's native species through the services and programs we provide to the community.

WRSE is a charitable organization that provides compassionate care for injured, contaminated and orphaned wildlife and educates the public on the importance of wildlife in our community. WRSE has been serving the Capital region and Northern Alberta for over 25 years and is considered an essential service by the City of Edmonton. We work hard to provide the best care and housing possible for a wide variety of native and migratory birds as well as native small mammals and are permitted to do so through the Canadian Wildlife Service and Alberta Environment Sustainable Resources Development.

We currently have 6 full-time core staff; **Executive Director, Director of Wildlife Services, Animal Care Manager, Senior Rehabilitator, Education Coordinator and Volunteer & Events Coordinator**. We also employ a small compliment of part-time staff; Animal Care Workers, Accountant and Office Administrator. Aside from paid staff, we have approximately 50 interns and 50 volunteers in the busy spring/summer months. Each paid staff member, volunteer and intern play an essential role in keeping the organization operating smoothly so we can best serve the public.

Our animal care staff members are trained animal care professionals and ensure top quality medical and rehabilitative services to our patients. Each volunteer and intern goes through a relevant and necessary training program prior to volunteering/working with WRSE.

WRSE operates out of two locations. Our primary intake hospital is in North Edmonton and our rehabilitation centre is located on acreage owned by the National Conservatory of Canada in Parkland County. Our rehabilitation centre is comprised of a main hospital facility as well as several other free-standing structures such as flight pens. These buildings and others are used for wildlife rehabilitation.

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

REQUEST TO COUNCIL

WRSE is requesting the following from Parkland County Council:

- Recognition for the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society as providing an **essential service** in Parkland County, and;
- Inclusion in Parkland County's annual operating budget on an ongoing basis in the amount of **\$30,000**.

Funds will be used to assist with operating expenses such as salaries, utilities, medical/treatment costs, facility maintenance, etc. The dollar value requested is reflective of our operating and treatment costs and considers future equipment maintenance and facility development expenses.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The current annual budget of WRSE is approximately \$500,000. At present, virtually the entire budget reflects necessary operating costs such as wages, utilities, facility maintenance and treatment costs (feeding, medicine, etc.). As our intake grows, so do our medical costs, staffing needs, utility usage, etc. While it is difficult to determine exact costs per patient, to give some understanding of operating costs, it currently costs an average of approximately \$250 per animal received. This cost considers all organizational expenditures related to staffing, treatment and facilities. For at least the last three consecutive years, our overall intake has increased considerably which has driven up our staffing and volunteer needs, utility costs and treatment costs.

Funding Sources

WRSE receives funding through various sources; private donations, corporate donations, grant funding, operating funds from the City of Edmonton and fundraising events. Along with Parkland County, we will be pursuing ongoing funding from other capital region municipalities such as Sturgeon County, the City of St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Strathcona County, Leduc County, etc.

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

Start-Up Costs

For the county of Parkland to provide these services themselves, the start-up and ongoing operational costs would be significantly greater than the above requested dollar value. Veterinarian X-ray machines alone can cost upwards of \$30,000. Staff salaries for a **single** vet technician are in the range of \$38,000 to \$45,000 per year. Other necessary facility and equipment development/maintenance costs such as appropriate enclosures, pools, treatment facilities and medical supplies are also very costly. An investment of \$30,000 annually as part of Parkland County's operating budget is a fraction of the annual costs it would require for Parkland to facilitate these services internally.

WHY WE ARE IMPORTANT TO PARKLAND COUNTY

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton is the northern-most full scale wildlife rehabilitation organization in Alberta. Our primary focal point is currently in the capital region. Next to the City of Edmonton proper, neighboring municipalities of the city in the capital region make up the bulk of our intake and phone inquiries, and Parkland County is no exception to this.

Last year we treated 114 patients and received significantly more phone inquiries from residents of Parkland County. Previously all of our statistics for Parkland County were inclusive of Spruce Grove statistics. Recently we have begun separating Spruce Grove statistics from the rest of Parkland County so as to refine our analysis of regional intake and activity.

The residents of Parkland County have demonstrated that they value our services and wish for them to continue as is evident with the large volume of intake and inquiry activity we receive from members of the Parkland County community. In addition to the intake and inquiries we receive from Parkland, many residents recognize the value of the work that we do; we historically have had many volunteers from Parkland County working at our rehabilitation centre. Accumulatively in 2015, volunteers from the county recorded 2887 volunteer hours and interns recorded approximately 8300 hours. On top of these recorded hours, we have several volunteers that work on ad hoc projects such

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

as neighbors building enclosures, performing general maintenance and helping fundraise for various projects.

Within Parkland County's vision, mission and values, as well as policy and procedures, environmental stewardship and healthy wildlife diversity is a common sentiment and frequently addressed. Citing preservation of Parkland County's natural environment as a distinguishing feature of its communities, services provided by organizations such as WRSE are increasingly important as the county grows in population and the needed expansion of infrastructure that comes along with it. The human impact on wildlife habitats can have adverse effects on the ecosystems that make Parkland County an ideal place to live. With proper planning and collaborative efforts in place, the risk of impact on healthy ecosystems can be mitigated significantly. As an example, migratory birds return year after year to similar locations to nest and lay eggs. With development and expansion, many of these nesting grounds may become unfit for some migratory birds resulting in many circumstances in industrial or commercial areas where hatchlings require assistance to leave nesting areas to continue their migration.

Expansion and Infrastructure

With the encroachment of municipal infrastructure into wild habitats as well as development projects that attempt to immerse human activity into nature, the chances for human-wildlife interactions are increased. As Parkland County is developing its trail systems within vibrant landscapes of river valleys with its three major river systems, such as the Devonian Gardens Trail Link and Prospectors Trail, these interactions will undoubtedly increase.

In 2016, Parkland County's Department of Parks, Recreation & Culture is investing approximately \$1,960,300 for Prospector's Trail and Devonian Gardens Trail Link construction. As the county expands its green space, as well its building infrastructure, an investment of \$30,000 in WRSE to provide our essential service is taking a proactive measure in mitigating the risks involved with ever increasing human-wildlife interactions. By including us in the development plan going forward, we will be able to manage relevant wildlife scenarios as they appear and develop this aspect of Parkland's wildlife management strategy as the county's development plans move forward. This will allow

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

us to grow our services organically in alignment with Parkland's goals, and appropriate to the needs of the county and its residents as opposed to working our services into the development plan as an afterthought.

With regards to municipal development and habitat encroachment, this naturally increases the risk of injury and contamination to wildlife, whether caused by a vehicle strike, inaccessibility to water sources or appropriate habitats, or exposure to unnatural substances. While human populations certainly have increasing needs for necessary development and infrastructure, it is important to also employ strategies to mitigate the impact that has on the natural environment.

Having some of the world's most expansive municipal parkland is something that all municipalities in the capital region should be proud of. Throughout the capital region, this parkland is rich with trail systems. These trail systems undoubtedly foster a sense of appreciation among residents and visitors alike for the natural environment and they also result in more frequent human-wildlife interaction.

Often, these interactions are in the form of an injured animal or the discovery of orphaned young. Many of the animals we receive are found in the trail systems by concerned residents. In the case of Parkland County, with its close proximity to nature as a defining feature (and for many, a selling point of living in the county), interactions may be more frequent on or near personal and commercial property as well. For many, when they discover an animal that appears to be injured or orphaned, they believe it is their responsibility to ensure that the animal is cared for compassionately, or at the very least that the animal is appropriately removed for the safety of their children, pets, patrons, etc.

When situations like these arise, the more closely we work with a municipality, the safer the circumstance for the individual who has made the discovery, the animal and any other people who could potentially come into contact with it. Streamlining communications to the appropriate experts (in this case WRSE) results in increased safety for all involved through proper instruction and education in dealing with the animal (and when not to take any action).

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

In many cases as well, we encounter concerned, well-meaning but sometimes misguided individuals who wish to intervene to “save” an animal. For example, baby hares are often left alone in open grassy spaces by their mother for extended periods of time. This is normal for the baby hare, however, often people believe that the animal is abandoned and needs to be rescued. By doing so, they actually decrease the hare’s chances of survival. Another example that we periodically encounter is individuals “rescuing” a small bird that is being “harassed” by larger predator, but this is a natural part of the lifecycle of wildlife and is a necessity for the survival of predatory animals. In these circumstances, we are able to educate people as subject matter experts to leave the animals alone and allow nature to be natural.

Part of the Wildlife Management Strategy

Currently WRSE works closely with Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (Alberta Fish and Wildlife) as well as the City of Edmonton as part of their Wildlife Management Strategies. Alberta Fish and Wildlife issues WRSE the necessary permits to treat and rehabilitate wildlife. While many may assume that Alberta Fish and Wildlife handles all wildlife concerns, this responsibility has been delegated to WRSE by Fish and Wildlife in the capital region and Northern Alberta. We work closely with our district biologist to understand trends and best practices with regards to the patterns of wildlife behaviour and human-animal interactions.

The City of Edmonton has included WRSE in their Wildlife Management Strategy, relying on us to manage wildlife concerns regarding injured, orphaned and sometimes at-risk wildlife. We are part of Edmonton’s 311 script and work closely with Edmonton’s Peace Officer Section; we have direct lines of communication with their administrative management as well as two designated wildlife peace officers. This relationship allows for more effective public communications to promote public awareness with regards to taking appropriate action (or non-action) in dealing with urban wildlife; for example, taking preventative measures in dealing with Canada geese nesting on private property. This relationship also ensures that public inquiries are streamlined appropriately to WRSE resulting in less strain on the city’s wildlife administration.

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

The positive impact that this official relationship has had with the City of Edmonton's administration and peace officer section can be mirrored with Parkland County's administration and protective services. Each municipality has its own set of values and needs based on a variety of important factors. Working together as an official part of Parkland County's Wildlife Management Strategy means we can more effectively refine our procedures and public communications to meet the needs of this specific municipality and its residents.

OTHER BENEFITS

Education Program

WRSE runs free educational programming that fits within the scope of Grade 4, 5, and 6 Alberta curriculums. This program is called the Junior Wildlife Ambassadors Program and teaches children about urban wildlife interactions, Alberta native wildlife species, and engages students in activities that promote healthy ecosystems. The presentation also touches upon healthy backyards and educates students in areas as to what animals they might find in their yards. They learn how to protect those species as well as protect their homes and yards from wildlife. As this program receives partial funding from Capital City Clean Up, part of the presentation includes a focus on the impact of littering on the environment and to wildlife. Presently, this program is generally used by schools within the City of Edmonton, given the collaboration with Capital City Clean Up. With ongoing funding from Parkland County, we would be able to justify promoting and extending this program to schools within Parkland County.

We also provide family education at community events and tradeshow, encouraging responsible environmental stewardship and information on how to identify if an animal is injured or orphaned and how to respond if it is.

Public Communication and Environmental Responsibility

As Parkland County prides itself in environmental stewardship, partnering with WRSE demonstrates to its residents that it is taking those claims seriously and employing

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

measures to ensure that our human impact is reduced as much as possible. Ongoing collaborative public communications to residents regarding relevant wildlife education such as addressing community specific wildlife concerns and appropriate/inappropriate human intervention will continue to reinforce positive and effective messaging from the perspective of jurisdictional authority (Parkland County administration) and subject matter authority (WRSE).

Indicators, Trends and Safety

There are many side benefits to the rehabilitative work that we do which provides crucial information about communities and the environment that they are in. We are able to provide important data and identify trends for local authorities and conservation/environmental health authorities. For example, in terms of wildlife management strategies, our data can help identify problem areas where there may be human-wildlife conflict. Another example is encountering wildlife with apparent illnesses; when we receive animals that exhibit certain behaviors due to illness, we typically send the animal to labs to test for disease or contamination. If trends occur in terms of disease or contamination, this can be an important indicator identifying a larger environmental or health concern in a particular region that affects both the natural environment and human health.

Additionally, when animals are encountered by residents, there are a number of safety concerns for individuals, their children and their pets including exposure to disease and risk of human injury upon approaching an injured animal. When people come across animals in these situations either along the trail, on a commercial property, or on their private property, WRSE is able to provide professional advice in how to safely handle the situation, or we are able to safely remove the animal ourselves to avoid endangering the general public.

CONCLUSION

The Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton is requesting recognition by Parkland County as providing an essential service and to receive ongoing funding in the amount

WILDLIFE REHABILITATION AS AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN PARKLAND COUNTY

of \$30,000 as part of the county's annual operating budget. The WRSE will continue to provide rehabilitation and inquiry services to the residents of Parkland County. Going forward, using WRSE's partnership with the City of Edmonton as a general guiding tool, WRSE will collaborate with the county in its wildlife management strategy (including its development plans such as the river valley trail systems) to provide appropriate services as well as work towards formal internal communications procedures with Parkland's administration and enforcement. We will also collaborate with public communications to county residents on important issues pertaining to the interactions between residents and wildlife. A partnership between Parkland County and WRSE will be an important achievement for both parties as it will highlight Parkland as a leader in environmental stewardship that will positively impact other neighboring municipalities' attitudes and policies surrounding environmental conservation and municipal responsibility.