

At the request from the City of Mercer Island, I have conducted and completed an assessment regarding concerns about increased coyote activity on Mercer Island. During the past week I organized coyote incident date, time, and location information that I acquired via phone interviews, internet media search, Mercer Island Police Department, and the many Social Media posts/threads that were forwarded to me by City staff. I overlaid this information on Google Earth imagery to get a better idea of the areas on the island that have been most affected by coyote interaction. I used this information to assist me during a site visit on Mercer Island where a coworker and I spent several hours visiting different parks and public spaces, where we looked for coyote evidence, potential attractants, denning sites, etc., and areas that our agency could safely perform coyote removal operations if needed. I was also able to visit with several citizens who were curious about the “USDA” guys walking and driving around. Several of these long time residents of Mercer Island also provided valuable information about their personal observations regarding wildlife on the Island.

The removal of coyotes from urban environments is not taken lightly by Wildlife Services (WS). For several reasons, capturing and relocating problematic coyotes is not an option in Washington State; first and foremost, it is prohibited by law (WAC 232-12-064). Therefore any removal efforts that take place result in euthanasia of the animal. Because of this, WS considers many factors when determining whether coyote removal is justified or necessary. We follow a 7 point decision model outlined here:

1. Coyotes rarely seen, but are heard at night
2. Increase in taking of unattended pets
3. Increase of coyote observations on streets and yards at night
4. Observations of coyotes on streets, parks, or yards during daylight hours
5. **Coyotes chasing or taking attended pets, especially during the day**
6. **Taking pets on leash and chasing joggers, bikers, etc.**
7. **Coyote seen in and around children’s play areas and schools during the day**

Typically, WS does not recommend coyote removal efforts until #5 on the scale is reached. From the information I have gathered, coyote behavior exhibited on Mercer Island rarely exceeds #3, with little-to-no evidence of a threat to human health and safety. My formal recommendation is that the City of Mercer Island forego physically removing coyotes. This of course does not preclude a more extensive action plan in the future should coyotes exhibit much more aggressive behavior. I believe that implementing an extensive educational campaign for the residents of Mercer Island will not only address and lessen unwarranted fear among the public, but if taken seriously, citizens can reduce the number of negative interactions that occur in the future.

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