

Diving into Denver's geese controversy

January 29 2020, by Alyssa Hurst



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Last summer, nearly 2,000 Canada geese were killed across four of Denver's largest parks. Implemented to mitigate overpopulation, the move stirred great controversy in the city and culminated in a Washington Park protest as well as a signed petition calling for the city to immediately stop killing geese in Denver parks, among other requests.

With the [city](#) of Denver considering another large-scale goose culling,

the DU Newsroom asked Justin Marceau, a professor of animal law and policy in the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law and a fierce advocate for the city's geese, to weigh in. The following email discussion has been condensed and edited for clarity.

Last year the city killed more than 2,000 geese in Denver's parks. Did this turn out to be an effective move?

The killing of 2,000 geese was a desperate act that did not work at all. Last time I walked around Washington Park there were more geese than I have ever seen. These new residents saw that the [park](#), a manmade paradise for geese, was empty and apparently moved in.

Why are people so upset about the killing of these geese? And given the potential uproar, is the city likely to do this again?

Geese are sentient creatures with emotional lives, and they make our parks feel real. Killing the geese is cruel and unnecessary, and simultaneously a distortion of what it means to appreciate nature.

The city seems poised to continue on this same path. But we are working on [public outreach](#) and hoping to help our representatives understand that there are better options.

What does the city's decision to kill the geese say about its overall relationship with wildlife?

The decision to kill conveys a sort of NIMBY-ism (not in my back yard). We love nature and animals, but only if they are present at the times and

in the quantities that we set. Denverites want persons living in rural areas to coexist with bears, wolves and other predators, but we can't be bothered to tolerate geese.

Was the city within its legal rights as far as the way the killing was decided upon, announced and carried out?

The city has made a series of procedural blunders, including failing to provide an adequate hearing on the issue before they commenced the first killing.

What legal options do geese activists have as the city considers repeating its geese cull?

There are a variety of legal options that are being explored at this very moment. National groups have expressed an interest and willingness to help litigate the issue, so Denver [can expect] a serious fight on its hands.

The city said last year that the geese would be used to feed the homeless. Did that happen? What effect did this have on public perception of the issue?

I can't say for sure whether goose meat was used to feed low-income persons, but such a policy is a transparent attempt to use them as an excuse to kill the [geese](#) as planned. The city voted to ban camping in the parks, but now we are supposed to believe that the goose killing is a reflection of our deep empathy for less-fortunate persons.

Proponents of this move say the outrage is much ado

about nothing and the population needed to be controlled for a variety of reasons. What do you say to them?

I am quite familiar with the refrain that caring about the suffering and death of animals is much ado about nothing. Why should we care about factory farms, why should we care about animal experimentation, who cares if wildlife are killed by hunters or government officials? They are just animals, we are told. But for persons like myself who regard the suffering of a sentient being as a point that merits at least some moral consideration (even if it is not the same consideration we give to humans), the mass killing of wildlife in our community should be cause for concern.

Provided by University of Denver

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