

Witness feels frustrated by raccoon's killing

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Marie Williamson is frustrated. "People just referred me round and round in circles," said the Independence Green Apartments resident, who witnessed the killing of a raccoon with a concrete splash block Feb. 22.

When Williamson saw an apartment groundsman man kill the raccoon, she phoned for help. But no one rushed to her aid or the aid of the raccoon.

DNR conservation officer John Jurcich, who conducted an investigation of the killing, said he isn't surprised by Williamson's frustration. "Marie made several phone calls and was getting the usual bureaucratic runaround."

Frustration is common when residents call agencies such as the local police, DNR or Oakland County Animal Control, and no

immediate help is imminent.

But Jurcich said he can also understand the frustration someone, such as the groundsman, feels when they are confronted with a sick or injured animal and feel they have to do something.

STRICTLY BY the book, killing wildlife out of season in Michigan is illegal. And unless you're a police officer, shooting an animal out of season and without a hunting license is also illegal.

"How do you kill humanely and who makes the judgment call?" Jurcich said. "It's very frustrating."

When Williamson saw the raccoon being killed, she called Oakland County Animal Control, only to be told it couldn't do anything and that wildlife is not within its jurisdiction.

She called the DNR. "At this point, the animal was dead and they said they wouldn't

take a complaint," Williamson said. She also called Farmington Hills police, who referred her to the DNR.

"She followed all the proper channels," Jurcich said.

That doesn't mean everyone is satisfied. Jurcich admitted that some complaints to the DNR "are filed over the phone."

With five conservation officers — and only one earlier this year — to cover the county, many complaints are not followed with an investigation.

PROPER CHANNELS are calling the DNR about wildlife and Oakland County Animal Control for domestic animals. In some cases, it could be either agency.

For example, if an injured or sick animal is in a school yard, someone from animal control may be sent even though wildlife belongs to the DNR, said Oakland County Animal Control manager Carl Anderson.

The Michigan Humane Society or other small agencies that can cage an animal and care for it are other possibilities for help, Jurcich said.

"The public wants you to take the animal to a vet," Jurcich said. "It's very frustrating to me. We're not in the live-trapping business."

The conservation officer calls the dilemma a "gray area" when an animal must be killed while a DNR or animal control officer is unavailable.

The humane method is by legal injection or gas. But that's difficult out in the field and it's dangerous to try to pick up the animal, which may be rabid.

SHOOTING AN injured or sick animal also would be appropriate but it's illegal to discharge a firearm.

"The twist is, you have no way of killing a

raccoon," Jurcich said. "The local police can do it. They can shoot an animal if it's necessary."

Though Williamson called the Farmington Hills police, they did not come to the apartment complex. But Lt. Richard Murphy said the police department will send an officer.

"If we get a call, and the animal is in a bad condition, we will shoot it because the city unfortunately doesn't have an animal control officer," Murphy said.

Like Jurcich, Murphy said the police also have no means of transporting an animal to a veterinarian for help or paying medical costs.

The dilemma frustrates Williamson. "I know everyone is short-funded, whether it's for animals, abandoned children or battered women. But it's disgusting. You're in a supposedly civilized society."

Witness disputes events surrounding raccoon's death

Continued from Page 1

said his maintenance worker "had the best interest" of the animal in mind when he killed it.

"My groundsman, being an outdoorsman, acted in what he thought was a humane manner," Gerrish said. "In the future, it will be done differently."

DNR officials say that bludgeoning a raccoon to death with concrete "is not the preferred method" of killing.

"In a perfect world, it was an inappropriate method to dispose of the animal," Jurcich said. "There is a more than \$500 fine for killing a

raccoon. If I felt there was any malicious criminal intent, I would have pursued prosecution."

A WEEK after the killing, Jurcich viewed the raccoon's body, which had been placed in one of the apartment complex's dumpsters.

"The animal clearly showed an injury. I think the intent of the people involved was sincere. The animal had a sore on the rear leg, the rump. It also had one on the front paw," Jurcich said. "It was split open and filled with pus. Who knows what it was from. In my opinion, it might have been hit by a car."

Williamson said she still doesn't

believe the animal was injured. "To me, it was perfectly healthy animal. And they (groundsman) were having a morning's entertainment. The animal wasn't limping or anything," she said.

Williamson said she took photographs of the raccoon's paw prints, which showed no signs of hobbling or limping.

"How can she tell from a track whether the animal is hobbling or dragging? I probably couldn't look at a print and tell whether the animal is injured," Jurcich said. The fact that a nocturnal animal was out in

daylight is a signal that something is wrong, he added.

ACCORDING TO Jurcich's findings, the groundsman had encountered a sick raccoon a week before the killing. They called Oakland County Animal Control and were given permission "to dispose of it," Jurcich said.

At the time, the groundsman rounded up the animal in a garbage can and released it at the adjacent Independence Green golf course, Jurcich said.

Oakland County Animal Control

manager Carl Anderson disagrees. "We don't advise anyone to kill an animal. Wildlife is not in our jurisdiction. If we gave them permission, we would be in violation of DNR laws."

The raccoon was killed when it

appeared at the complex a week later. "That Friday, it showed up again. Whether it's the same animal is anybody's guess," Jurcich said. "They decided that second time that instead of moving it, they would kill it."

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