

THE WILD ANIMAL Sanctuary

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TO: Cook County Board of Commissioners
Forest Preserves of Cook County
Staff at River Trail Nature Center

RE: Relocation of Rocky the Coyote

Friday, February 18, 2022

Dear Commissioners, Forest Preserve Staff, and Nature Trail Staff,

I am writing to you today in order to help convey important information concerning the possible relocation of “Rocky” the Coyote, who is currently at the center of controversy within the Forest Preserve system. My goal is to ensure accurate information concerning our organization’s potential role in Rocky’s current and/or future wellbeing reaches all parties involved.

First, I would like to convey how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to participate in a preliminary discussion with Commissioners Britton and Suffredin on the 20th of January. I believe the meeting provided a great opportunity for pertinent information to be brought forth and discussed in a respectful manner.

I hope this environment of open thought and discussion will continue with your receipt of this letter, and that all recipients will consider my comments and professional insight with an open mind. Given that Rocky has no say in any of these proceedings, I think it is only fair that we all take the time to discuss what eventually will be in his best interest.

Given the basis of this controversy revolves around Rocky’s current status being held at the Nature Trail within a small traditional cage, and the public challenge that he would be far better off going to a Sanctuary such as ours, I would like to address these two issues further.

I would like to start by stating my professional experience with large carnivores, which includes Coyotes, Wolves, Fox and dozens of other species. Our facility currently has nearly a dozen Coyotes in its care, and most of these previously lived in similar situations such as Rocky does now.

Although the staff who know Rocky and care for him on a daily basis are convinced that Rocky is happy, healthy and perfectly fine living the way he does, it is simply not true. However, that is not to say the staff is lying or misleading anyone, since they are not.

Through the 42 years that I have been rescuing exotic animals and large carnivores, the one thing that has been vastly evident in 90% of the cases where animals were transferred to us, is that their previous caretakers were

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never given the opportunity to see what their species of wildlife was like when given an opportunity to experience completely different care and accommodations. It truly is a life changing opportunity.

I have used the analogy of raising a child in a closet numerous times since it helps illuminate how a false reality can exist. If there was a situation where someone raised a child from birth in a closet and kept them well fed, happy and healthy, and always addressed their needs (other than being able to exit the closet), that child would not understand what he or she was missing, as well as would have no choice but to learn and adapt to the environment it was restrained within.

More than likely, the child would think its world was “normal” and there was nothing that existed which could fulfil the yearning or itch it had for something better. Although it tried to make the best of what it had, the child would always feel there was something that wasn’t right.

Of course, when that child was finally allowed to join society and actually see the world, the changes that would take place are nearly indescribable. New behaviors and senses would overwhelm the child as it began to find it’s real place in the universe, one that was far more natural and far more fulfilling than its previous pseudo life had ever been!

Such is the same for all animals that we rescue. With human perception, empathy and compassion now enabling much better care and accommodations for captive wildlife, we now have the opportunity to see just how amazing the transformation can be when a restrained animal is given the chance to be free – or at least given the next best thing.

Our Sanctuary does just that – as we give each and every rescued animal the chance to experience what their natural life would be. Of course, since they cannot be returned to the wild, we do everything in our power to give them a very real version of the wild while remaining in a specified area.

In order to do this, we always make every effort to see the world from their eyes, which starts with the transferring and transporting process, and continues all the way to their introduction into a new habitat and the process involving how they will eventually meet others of their own kind. One step at a time we make sure to protect each animals’ safety and wellbeing, and ensure they are not stressed or ever placed in a situation where they are not comfortable.

In Rocky’s case, we would take great care in transferring him into a comfortable transfer cage that allows him to see his surroundings and know that he is safe. We have climate controlled trucks and trailers that were specifically designed and built for transporting animals, and they allow us to monitor the animals at all times.

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Once Rocky arrived at our facility he would be placed in a very familiar environment which would mimic his previous housing so he would not feel overwhelmed. This temporary cage would be utilized to allow him time to get used to the sights, sounds and new environment that surrounds his new home.

The temporary cage would be located within his new natural habitat so he could begin to see there were no threats to his existence and that he would be completely safe when the time came to allow him to exit the temporary space. There would not be other Coyotes within his new habitat so he would not have to compete or defend his territory.

We would have other Coyotes in other habitats near his so he could begin to see and hear them, as well as observe their behaviors and mannerisms from a safe distance. Over time, like all newly rescued animals, Rocky would soon realize he was very happy and safe, and would discover a myriad of new senses, behaviors and instincts that he never knew before.

Eventually, Rocky would yearn for the company of other Coyotes since he is a pack oriented species. Like all the other Coyotes we have rescued who were raised alone, he would begin to realize he belonged in a pack setting and would start to virtually join one of the existing packs.

Through cues and behaviors that we have come to recognize, Rocky would make it clear that he was ready for companionship. We would begin by introducing a female Coyote who demonstrates an interest in him, so they could begin to bond in a safe manner.

Given there is no competition for food at our facility, since we always feed more food than the animals can finish, there would be no fighting over resources. Again, with the massive amount of natural space we give to our animals, they never feel cramped or forced to be together. As such, Rocky would never feel trapped or forced to interact with anyone.

This kind of story has been repeated literally a thousand times here at the Sanctuary, and endless numbers of people can attest to the authenticity of what I am saying. We absolutely understand the process that is required to transition captive wildlife into a life that is much more fulfilling and natural.

This is why I stated that the Nature Trail Staff and others that know Rocky are mistaken when they say he is happy and well where he currently lives. Rocky is not happy or fulfilled where he lives now - there's no denying it. He has adapted to his severely restricted space and the pressures of the visiting public to his best ability.

Unfortunately, he has no choice in the matter, as the small and primitive items that have been provided for him to retreat into actually fail to reduce all of the senses he uses to detect the presence of humans – which he sees

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as direct threats to his territory and general safety. Rocky has no way to block out the sounds and smells that invade his space whenever people are present, which in some cases can amplify his fear due to his need to listen and smell more intently to identify approaching threats.

Regardless of the presence of pseudo shelters or dens, Rocky is subjected to intense pressure by being put on display to the public. The behaviors he displays are not natural and toggle between stress and boredom.

It truly is in Rocky's best interest to be allowed to live far more freely and with others of his own kind. He would not be in danger from the transfer or subsequent introduction to other Coyotes, as has been purported by others, so our organization will guarantee his safety and wellbeing at all times.

I hope that everyone who has an opportunity to read this letter will take the time to truly evaluate Rocky's situation with an open mind. Without investing significant funding to expand the River Trail Nature Center, and build Rocky a true habitat where he can retreat to safety as needed, he will continue to suffer on a daily basis.

Allowing Rocky to be relocated to our Sanctuary is by far the best answer. Doing so will allow Rocky to transform into a real Coyote that roams freely without the pressure of humans, while also enjoying social companionship and the many other health benefits that come with living with fellow pack members.

Like all of the animals we take in, we invite anyone who cared for them previously, as well as others that care about their wellbeing to come visit them in their new environment. Doing so is a life-changing experience and we hope this opportunity will become a reality soon.

If any of the staff of the River Trail Nature Center or commissioners would like to come visit our facilities to see many of the previous Coyotes and other animals that previously lived in similar situations as Rocky, we would be more than happy to accommodate you.

Our organization is an IRS 501(c)3 public non-profit and does not charge for our services, which means we are prepared to come transport Rocky free of charge. On Rocky's behalf, thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Pat Craig
Executive Director

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