



FWC trail camera photo- Riverview



Wildlife Conflict Communication- Coyote Edition

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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

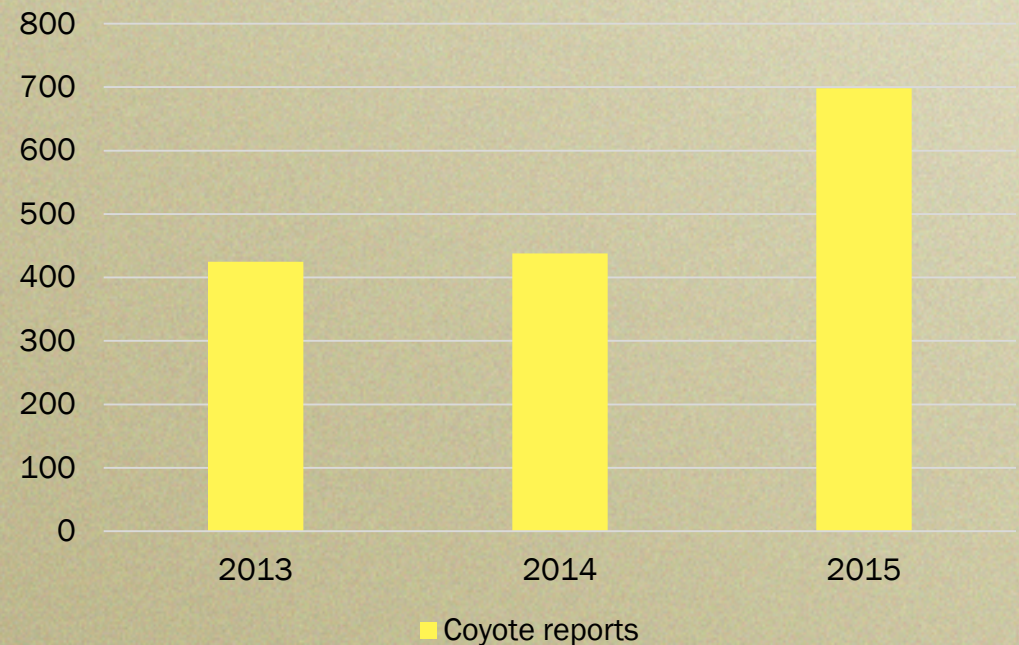
Situation

- Complaints about coyotes increasing
 - Presence
 - Pet depredation
 - Public safety
 - Diseased and injured animals



Photo courtesy of Greg Towle- Winter Haven (Polk)

Statewide coyote reports



Situation

- Issue can be contentious
- Media can drive negative message
- FWC working hard to be proactive

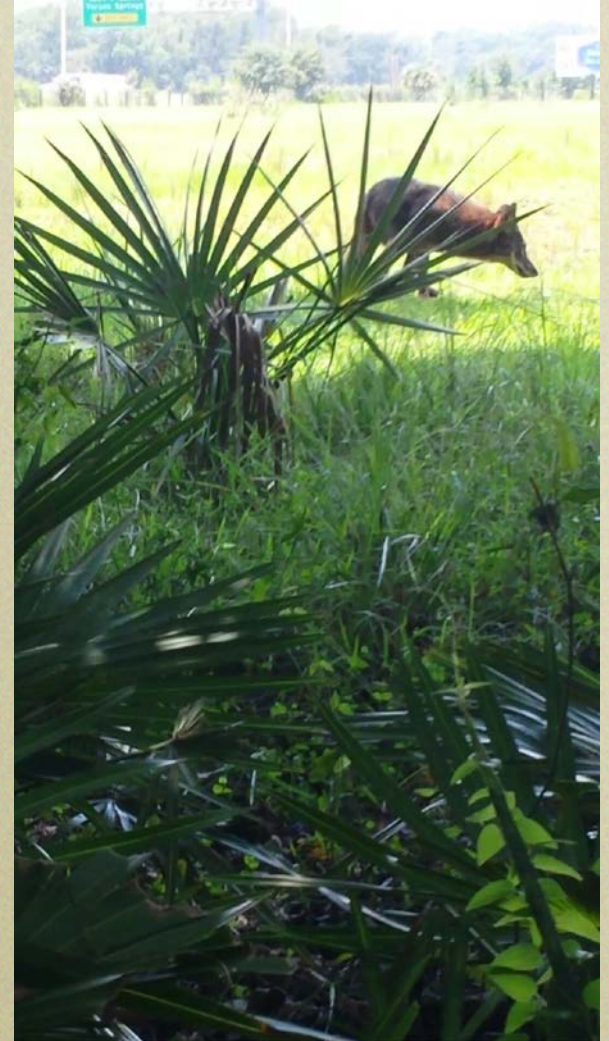
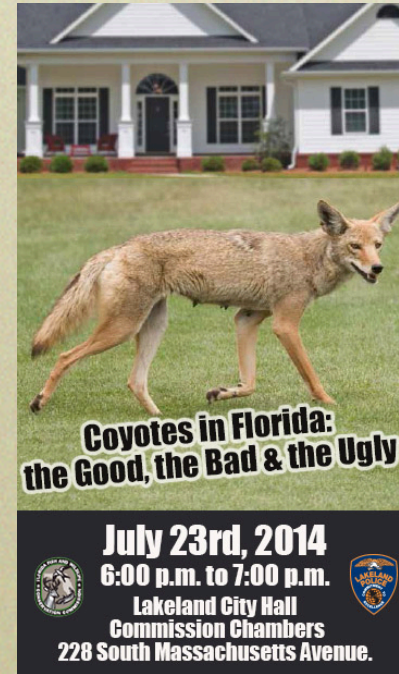


Photo courtesy of Patrick Deck- Tarpon Springs
(Pinellas)




Situation

- Previous efforts included education campaigns
 - Addressing local issues
- Maybe FWC should change the message?



Coyotes in Florida

Please join us for this informative program about coyote biology and ways to co-exist presented by Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



**Monday
March 25
6 p.m.**

Sarasota County Operations Bldg.
1001 Sarasota Center Blvd., Sarasota

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Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
MyFWC.com

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Situation

- Conduct focus group with stakeholders
- Pinellas county
- Goal: understand local perceptions
- Incorporate NRLI skills



Stakeholders

- Many stakeholders!
 - City and county officials
 - HOA members
 - Business owners
 - General public
 - Conservation groups
 - Elected officials
 - Media



FWC trail camera photo- Big Cypress



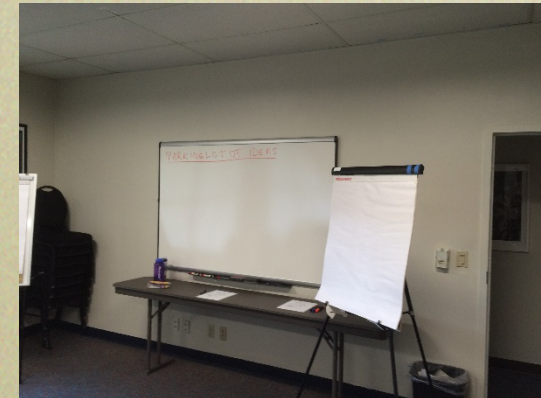
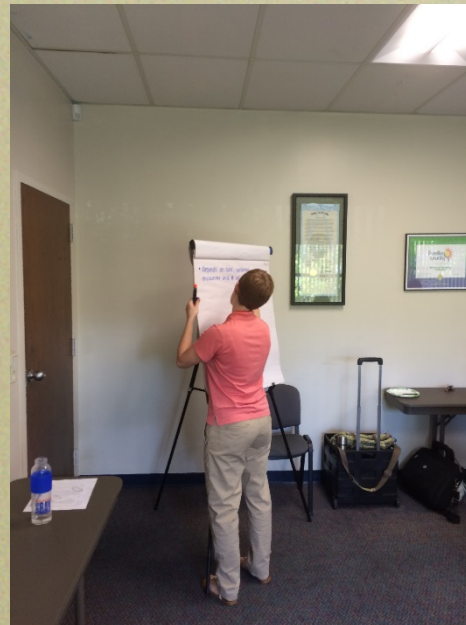
Stakeholders

- For the focus group...
 - Doug Brightwell- Pinellas County Animal Services
 - Rick Levi- SPCA Tampa Bay
 - Melissa Rivard- Meow Now Pinellas
 - Jim Schattman- Crossroads HOA
 - Barbara Schattman- Crossroads HOA
 - Marlene Murray- Meadowlawn HOA



Focus group set-up

- Facility- UF/IFAS
- Helpers!
 - Alex Gulde- FWC
 - Lara Milligan- UF/IFAS
- U-shaped table arrangement
- Audio recording in the middle
- Refreshments
- Flip charts in view of stakeholders



Focus Group Questions

- How do you define a predator?
 - Doug- “...Any animal that is killing and eating another species.”
 - Rick- “Anything that hunts something else.”
 - Melissa- “...Coyotes are the biggest thing because community cats are a snack for them...”
 - Jim- “...anything that’s out there can be construed as a predator or wildlife.”
 - Barbara- “...they go after other things to eat.”
 - Marlene – “To me, a predator would be something that endangers me, rather than endangering another animal...”



Photo courtesy of Dan Muccie- Estero (Lee)



Focus Group Questions

- When did you first become aware of coyotes in Pinellas county?
 - Doug- “...animal services has been aware of them for years and years...”
 - Rick- “I would say 10 years ago I knew there were coyotes here.”
 - Melissa- “We had a few come in [SPCA] over the years injured...”
 - Jim- “...about a year ago...”
 - Barbara- “It’s probably been sometime within the last year...the first time I heard that I got real scared.”
 - Marlene- “Saw an article in the paper sometime within the last year.”



Photo courtesy of Beverley Batts- Panama City



Focus Group Questions

- Have you had an encounter with a coyote in Pinellas county?
 - Doug- “...we’ve got one that lives in our neighborhood...I’ve gotten my kids to teach the other neighborhood kids on what to do, cause all the other kids run screaming when they see it...”
 - Rick- “I heard some ruckus one night at my house about three weeks ago...I went outside with my flashlight and looked underneath the fence...it was a coyote.”
 - Melissa- “Not personally. I’ve had calls or emails from caregivers...who didn’t see the actual coyote attack but they find remains of the cat around...”
 - Jim- “I’m going down 13th Ave at night...and it was like ‘what was that?’...I think it was a coyote but boy was that thing quick.”
 - Barbara- “...it ran across the road, and I said “Oh, look at that dog.” And Jim said, “No, that’s not a dog, that’s a coyote.””
 - Marlene- “I personally have not. You know, I wish I did.”



Photo courtesy of Mr. Nelson- Venice (Sarasota)



Focus Group Questions

- In urban area, are some predators more tolerable than others?
 - Doug- “We get calls about alligators...all the time and nobody removes them and they just go on about their business.”
 - Rick- “I think that it becomes a problem when people let it become a problem.”
 - Melissa- “...I think we’re...going through a phase of chaos and then eventually there will come acceptance [with coyotes].”
 - Jim- “Depends on the size of them.”
 - Barbara- “...the raccoons, everybody thinks they’re so cute...”
 - Marlene- “I know raccoons are, you never hear anybody complain about them. Bobcats you never hear about, nobody ever talks about a bobcat.”



FWC trail camera photo- Miami



Focus Group Questions

- What do you think is important for FWC to tell people about coyotes?
 - Doug- “...Targeted PSA’s to communities like Pinellas...not what the media is spinning but here are the actual facts.”
 - Rick- “...if they hear it from as high up as we can get...instead of hearing it from the media...I think it might have more of an impact.”
 - Jim- “Make it known that you are willing to come out [for presentations].”
 - Marlene- “You’re not protecting them...even though they are not protected, they are protected as part of the environment.”



Photo courtesy of Beverly Batts- Panama City (Bay)



Focus Group Questions

- Other interesting quotes...

- Doug- “Our calls for all those other nuisance wildlife issues would blow up if you didn’t have the coyotes regulating [them].”
- Rick- “Do we really have that many coyotes that everybody says they do, or are they just kind of moving around with the food source?”
- Melissa- “...community cats are probably one of the things that drew coyotes into our county...”
- Jim- “You need to get the coyote a good PR agent.”
- Barbara- “I was thinking of them [coyotes] like you would think of a lion. That it would come and attack adults, not the children and other animals, but adults...and that scared me.”
- Marlene- “...they are pretty comfortable in the neighborhood. But we make them comfortable and that’s the problem. And that’s what people don’t understand.”



Key 'take-aways'

- Fear
- Value
- Knew FWC message
- Education campaign by the City of St Pete?
- Want more education, including school level



Lessons Learned

Strengths

- Attendees enjoyed the experience
- Responses were surprising
- Allows for detailed data collection

Weaknesses

- Significant time commitment
- Better prep could have helped
- Group was biased

Challenges

- Getting stakeholders to attend future meetings
- Scheduling across the state



Next steps

- Future focus groups...coming to a city near you?
- Looking ahead to other areas
 - Jupiter/Tequesta
 - Brevard County
 - Orlando
 - Jacksonville?



Questions?



Photo courtesy of Reinier Munguia- Lakeland (Polk)

