



Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Office of Inspector General

Advisory Memorandum

Date: March 5, 2020

To: Eric Sutton, Executive Director
Colonel Curtis Brown, Division of Law Enforcement

Through: Mike Troelstrup, Inspector General *M*
Michael Meaney, Director of Investigations *MM*

From: Captain Andrew Bickel *AB*

Subject: Administrative Review - OIG Inquiry # 2020-INQ-0007

Introduction

On February 5, 2020, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Office of Inspector General (OIG) received multiple complaints regarding the euthanasia of a coyote captured at the Port of Miami by Miami-Dade Fire Rescue the previous day. (*See, Exhibit 1*).

At approximately 7:23 a.m. on February 4, 2020, the FWC Regional Communications Center (RCC) in Miami received a call from the Miami-Dade Police Department regarding a coyote stuck on the seawall at the Port of Miami. Approximately four minutes later it was reported to the RCC that the coyote entered the water. Miami-Dade Fire Rescue launched a vessel and was able to rescue the coyote and bring it aboard. The coyote was brought to shore and turned over to FWC Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) personnel for transport to a wildlife rehabilitator. While the coyote was being transported to the wildlife rehabilitator it was decided that the coyote should not be taken to a wildlife rehabilitator and should be euthanized instead (*See, Exhibit 2*). In response to the volume of complaints regarding this decision, FWC OIG conducted a review to ensure that all applicable statutes, administrative codes, FWC rules, policies, and procedures were followed. This administrative review did not examine how or why the coyote became stuck on the seawall or what caused the coyote to enter the water,

initiating a response by Miami-Dade Fire Rescue. This administrative review focuses specifically on the FWC's response and involvement after it was reported to the FWC RCC.

February 4, 2020 Timeline Relating to the Captured Coyote

The below timeline was compiled using information provided by FWC personnel through interviews, along with documentation obtained during this review. The timeline covers the period from 7:23 a.m. on February 4, 2020, when the FWC RCC received the initial call regarding the coyote at the Port of Miami until 12:09 p.m. on February 4, 2020, when the coyote was confirmed to have been euthanized.

- 7:23 a.m. – Miami RCC receives a call from the Miami-Dade Police Department regarding a coyote stuck on the seawall at the Port of Miami.
- 7:24 a.m. – Miami RCC contacts FWC Lieutenant Manny Pomares. There are no other FWC officers on duty in the area at this time. Pomares contacts FWC Captain Alfredo Maza to brief him on the situation. Maza then contacts FWC Major Alfredo Escanio to brief him. Pomares drives to pick up an FWC patrol vessel and tells the Miami RCC duty officer to instruct the first available FWC officer to respond to the Port of Miami.
- 7:27 a.m. – Miami RCC receives a call that the coyote has entered the water (Exhibit 2).
- 7:41 a.m. – Pomares instructs the Miami RCC duty officer to contact wildlife rehabilitator Lloyd Brown to determine if he is willing to accept the coyote once captured. Brown agrees to take the coyote but is unable to pick it up. He asks that the coyote be brought to his facility (*See, Exhibit 3*).
- 7:44 a.m. – Miami RCC receives a call that Miami-Dade Fire Rescue has captured the coyote. Pomares no longer needs a patrol vessel so he continues to the Port of Miami in his patrol vehicle.
- 7:51 a.m. – Miami RCC contacts Brown again requesting to borrow a kennel to transport the coyote to his facility (*See, Exhibit 4*).
- 8:04 a.m. – FWC Public Information Officer (PIO) Officer Ron Washington comes on duty and responds to the FWC Miami office.
- 8:15 a.m. – Officer Keith Hernandez comes on duty and is instructed to pick up a kennel from Brown.
- 8:25 a.m. – Pomares arrives at the Port of Miami (Exhibit 2).
- 10:16 a.m. – Hernandez arrives at the Port of Miami with Brown's kennel. The coyote is placed in the kennel and Hernandez begins transporting the coyote in his patrol vehicle to Brown's facility. (*See, Exhibit 5*).
- 10:44 a.m. – Escanio sends FWC Lieutenant Colonel Brian Smith a text message that reads, "FYI – we caught a coyote at Port Miami – taking it to a rehabilitator that wants its [sic]. Lots of media – just giving you a heads up." (*See, Exhibit 6*). Smith contacts Escanio via telephone and asks why the coyote is going to a wildlife rehabilitator. Smith was unaware whether the coyote was injured and was concerned the coyote may become a "pet" at the rehabilitation facility. Smith added that a coyote does not meet the legal requirement to be released to a sanctuary. Smith and Escanio begin discussing other options. Smith tells Escanio he will consult with FWC Division of Habitat and Species Conservation (HSC) Assistant Section Leader Greg Kaufmann and call him back. Escanio directs Maza to contact Hernandez and tell him to await further direction.

Hernandez is directed to not deliver the coyote to Brown until Smith speaks with Kaufmann and calls back.

- ~11:00 a.m. – Smith meets with Kaufmann at FWC headquarters in Tallahassee. Smith tells Kaufmann he does not believe the coyote should go to a wildlife rehabilitator if it does not need to be rehabilitated. Kaufmann provides Smith with other options for the coyote, including relocation and euthanasia. They also discuss the limited number of suitable relocation sites within Miami-Dade County. Kaufmann tells Smith that HSC does not have any means of euthanizing coyotes beyond what is already available to law enforcement personnel (referring to firearms). Both agree that neither relocation nor euthanasia is ideal. Smith leaves the meeting believing he and Kaufmann agreed euthanasia would be the best option. Kaufmann leaves the meeting believing he and Smith agreed relocation would be the best option (*See, Exhibit 7*).
- 11:34 a.m. – After meeting with Smith, Kaufmann conducts an internet search and finds news articles explaining the coyote is being taken to a wildlife rehabilitator. Kaufmann attempts to call Smith but is not able to make contact and leaves Smith a voicemail. Kaufmann also emails links of the news articles to Smith (*See, Exhibit 8*).

After meeting with Kaufmann, Smith calls Escanio and the two continue to discuss options for the coyote. The discussion includes concerns about relocating an urbanized coyote to a rural environment such as the Everglades. Both agree euthanasia is the best option. Escanio instructs Maza to contact Hernandez. Maza calls Hernandez and explains the decision had been made to euthanize the coyote.

- 11:49 a.m. – Kauffmann sends an email to HSC staff which explains that Miami-Dade Fire Rescue captured a coyote and he (Kaufmann) discussed the options of relocation and euthanasia with Smith. The email also explains Smith did not think it was appropriate for the coyote to go to a wildlife rehabilitator unless it was injured and needed to be rehabilitated (*See, Exhibit 9*).
- 11:56 a.m. – Kauffmann forwards FWC South Region Wildlife Assistance Biologist (WAB) Bryce Pierce a copy of the email he sent to other HSC staff at 11:49 a.m. Kauffmann then calls Pierce and instructs Pierce to contact someone from DLE in Miami for a status update on the coyote. Pierce contacts Escanio and is told the coyote was already euthanized.
- 12:07 p.m. – Kaufmann receives an email from HSC Public Relations Specialist Jamie Rager explaining that a news reporter told her the coyote was euthanized (*See, Exhibit 10*).
- 12:09 p.m. – Pierce sends Kaufmann an email explaining that Escanio confirmed the coyote was euthanized due to a lack of available relocation sites (*See, Exhibit 11*).

Note: The exact time the coyote was euthanized is not known. Based on the above timeline, the coyote was euthanized by firearm between approximately 11:34 a.m. and 11:56 a.m. on February 4, 2020.

Findings

Finding 1: FWC lacks a comprehensive definition for the coyote:

Coyotes are defined as a “furbearer” in Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.) 68A-1.004(35) (*See, Exhibit 12*) that may be taken throughout the year by the use of guns, dogs, live traps or snares (F.A.C. 68A-24.002(2)(a)) (*See, Exhibit 13*). The FWC website, www.myfwc.com, describes coyotes as being a native species to Florida. However, during discussions with Escanio and Pomares both said they believed coyotes are a non-native species.

Washington said he referenced coyote talking points he received from Pomares on the morning of February 4, 2020, when he told the media that coyotes are a non-native species. Washington referred to one specific talking point provided to him that read, “People brought coyotes into Florida as early as the 1920s for pursuit by hunting dogs.” (*See, Exhibit 14*). Washington interpreted this to mean coyotes are not native to Florida. Wildlife rehabilitator Lloyd Brown said Washington seemed confused when Brown spoke with him as to whether coyotes were native, non-native, or naturalized.

Kaufman and Pierce both explained that FWC considers the coyote to be “naturalized.” The talking points referenced by Washington do not contain the word “naturalized.” Additionally, Florida Statutes and administrative codes do not define “naturalized.” This distinction is imperative because administrative codes pertaining to rehabilitation permits and nuisance wildlife, specifically F.A.C.s 68A-9.006(5)(a)(1) and 68A-9.010(3)(b), do not allow for the relocation and release of non-native species (*See, Exhibit 15*). Captured non-native species are not permitted to be relocated and may either be released on the property where it was captured or euthanized. Additionally, F.A.C. 68A-1.004(51) defines nuisance wildlife as, “Wildlife that causes or is about to cause property damage, presents a threat to public safety, or wildlife causing an annoyance within, under, or upon a building.” (*Exhibit 12*). Based on the information provided to him, Pierce did not believe this coyote met the definition of a nuisance animal. Pierce explained that if the coyote did not meet the definition of a nuisance animal it could not be relocated, and the options would have been to release the coyote on-site (at the Port of Miami) or euthanasia.

Clearly, there is confusion among FWC personnel regarding the classification of coyotes in Florida. The Agency website describes the coyote as a native species but also contains information available to the public including pamphlets, brochures, and articles that describe coyotes as naturalized. One article, referenced by several news reports, titled ‘The Coyote in Florida’ compiled in June 2007 explains, “Coyotes should be considered native or naturalized species, not exotics.” The article describes how ancestors of the coyote were present in Florida 2 million years ago and disappeared 12,000 years ago. This same article explains that the extirpation of the red wolf in the eastern United States allowed the coyote to naturally expand its territory into Florida, hence “naturalized.”¹ The article also discusses that the coyote’s range expanded across the Mississippi River into the Southeastern United States in the 1960s. This can be interpreted to mean the coyote was not established in Florida prior to the 1960s, hence “non-native.” (*See, Exhibit 16*).

¹ Extirpation: A localized extinction. The disappearance of a species only from a given area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that FWC management clarify whether the coyote is a native or non-native species and conduct training to ensure FWC personnel understand the importance of the various classifications of Florida wildlife.
- It is recommended that FWC management consider updating applicable Florida Administrative Codes (F.A.C.s) to include definitions of native, non-native, naturalized, exotic, invasive, non-invasive, and other terms as needed.

Finding 2: HSC external messaging is not consistent with the training and equipment provided to DLE:

The messaging provided to the public by HSC does not promote the capture and removal of coyotes. Instead, HSC promotes co-existence and conflict reduction. This includes such things as securing garbage, not leaving pet food outside, and hazing (aversion) techniques (*See, Exhibit 17*). FWC DLE officers are not trained in coyote aversion techniques. However, many officers are trained in black bear aversion techniques and issued a bear aversion firearm (a 12-gauge shotgun that shoots a low velocity bean bag round). When asked if this same firearm could be used for coyote aversion Kaufmann said he believed it would cause serious injury to a coyote. Kaufmann explained HSC personnel often use paintball guns to conduct coyote hazing. FWC officers are not issued paintball guns. Based on information found during this review, DLE officers are not properly trained in non-lethal coyote hazing/aversion techniques and are not provided equipment to respond using non-lethal methods.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that FWC management consider having HSC personnel provide training to all DLE personnel regarding human-wildlife conflict resolution and prevention.
- It is recommended that FWC management consider providing DLE officers with non-lethal equipment to properly conduct coyote hazing/aversion when needed.

Finding 3: DLE lacks wildlife euthanasia and human-wildlife conflict policies:

DLE does not have a comprehensive policy regarding the euthanasia of wildlife. General Order 5(3)(J)(1) authorizes officers to use their issued firearms “to kill seriously injured or dangerous animals when other disposition is impractical and the discharge of a firearm shall not endanger persons, property or create a negative public image of the Commission.” It should be noted that FWC General Order 5 is titled, “Use of Force, Response to Resistance, Transporting Prisoners.” (*See, Exhibit 18*). There is no further guidance in DLE policies.

Additionally, DLE does not have a specific policy that addresses law enforcement personnel response to human-wildlife conflict calls. In this case, local law enforcement officers initially responded to a call regarding a coyote stuck on the seawall at the Port of Miami. FWC Officers continued to respond after the coyote was captured by Miami-Dade Fire Rescue. Upon arrival, FWC officers took possession of the coyote. Maza explained it is common for the police or fire departments to catch animals and turn them over to FWC. Maza stated, “Animals are our thing,” and added that DLE does not like to “pawn off” animals to the police or fire departments for transport to wildlife rehabilitators or trappers. However, this review found nothing requiring FWC

to take possession of animals and found that wildlife rehabilitators and/or trappers may be better equipped to take possession of wildlife than the responding FWC law enforcement officers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that FWC management consider removing the portion of General Order 5 pertaining to euthanasia of wildlife and create a stand-alone General Order specifically addressing response to human-wildlife conflict. This General Order should be written with input from HSC personnel and provide direction on DLE's role in human-wildlife conflict resolution and include guidelines on taking possession of wildlife, transporting wildlife, wildlife relocation, and euthanasia.
- This review found that in most instances, HSC has the equipment needed to respond to human-wildlife conflict calls but may not have the necessary personnel available. DLE, on the other hand, has the personnel to respond, but not always the proper equipment. It is recommended that HSC and DLE, including the Captive Wildlife Section, collaborate to develop human-wildlife conflict protocols for responding officers.

Finding 4: DLE personnel are not adequately trained on implementing the Wildlife Incident Response Plan:

On December 2, 2019, FWC approved the FWC Wildlife Incident Response Plan. This plan was developed to "provide a general framework and guidance to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) staff handling responses to human-wildlife conflicts...This framework is intended to address public safety by ensuring that agency response to human-wildlife conflict is prioritized and implemented in a consistent manner." The plan explains that, "The FWC is the responsible agency for responding to incidents in which persons, livestock, or pets were threatened, injured or killed by wildlife or when wildlife behavior poses a potential public safety risk." The plan also points out that "most human-wildlife conflict response typically does not require the presence of FWC personnel on scene." The plan only requires FWC personnel be on scene when wildlife is creating a public safety risk or human-wildlife conflict has resulted in injury or death of a person (*See, Exhibit 19*). There was nothing found during this review to indicate that FWC duty officers or other DLE personnel referred to the Wildlife Incident Response Plan for guidance during the coyote response. This may be because the Wildlife Incident Response Plan was developed to provide guidance on human-wildlife conflict "during normal business hours" and the initial call came into the Miami RCC at 7:23 a.m.

The Wildlife Incident Response Plan is not species specific. Instead, the Wildlife Incident Response Plan is divided into six tiers. These tiers are broken down as follows:

- Tier 1: Reports of wildlife observations, sightings, and general information.
- Tier 2: Reports of human-wildlife conflict, non-emergency, not time sensitive, assistance provided via telephone or in writing.
- Tier 3: Reports of human-wildlife conflict requiring assistance beyond phone/writing, not time sensitive, assistance provided via in-person site visit.
- Tier 4: Reports of human-wildlife conflict with imminent risk to public safety, or recovery/capture of wildlife, time sensitive, immediate in-person response.
- Tier 5: Reports of wildlife conflict involving injury or death to contained pets/livestock, time sensitive, immediate in-person response.

Tier 6: Reports of wildlife conflict involving injury or death to a person, time sensitive, immediate in-person response.

Using the examples provided in the Wildlife Incident Response Plan, it seems the initial call of a coyote stuck on the seawall would require a Tier 2 response and not necessitate FWC personnel being on scene. After the coyote was captured by Miami-Dade Fire Rescue, the response level may have changed to Tier 4. According to the Wildlife Incident Response Plan, both Tier 2 and Tier 4 responses require, at a minimum, coordination with the regional WAB. In this case, the WAB (Pierce) was not notified until 11:56 a.m. on February 4, 2020, and only then by Kaufmann (Exhibit 9). Kaufmann directed Pierce to contact DLE personnel in Miami to ascertain how the situation was being handled. Pierce contacted Escanio and learned the coyote had already been euthanized (Exhibit 11). Pierce was not contacted by South Region duty officers or any of the responding DLE officers. Maza did attempt to contact FWC HSC Biological Administrator II Sarah Funck because he believed the officers were responding to a call involving non-native wildlife.² However, Funck is not a WAB and was not available at the time of the call.

The Wildlife Incident Response Plan and a 1 minute and 53 second “training” video were sent to DLE personnel, including duty officers, via PowerDMS in mid-December 2019.³ A search of the PowerDMS system shows Smith reviewed the plan on January 2, 2020, Escanio reviewed the plan on December 20, 2019, Maza reviewed the plan on December 30, 2019, and Pomares reviewed the plan on January 21, 2020. The search also showed that Smith, Escanio, Maza, and Pomares watched the video the same day they reviewed the plan. The “training” video is a brief overview of the Wildlife Incident Response Plan and does not provide clear instruction on plan implementation. Additionally, the “training” video does not address evolving situations that may move from one tier to another. Smith said he did not believe the initial coyote call would have initiated the Wildlife Incident Response Team as described in the Wildlife Incident Response Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

- It is recommended that FWC management ensure all applicable FWC personnel receive proper training and have a thorough understanding of the Wildlife Incident Response Plan.

Finding 5: The FWC RCC Non-Emergency and Non-Law Enforcement Incident (NELE) Guidebook is outdated:

The purpose of this guide is to provide FWC duty officers with “guidelines on how to handle calls that are Non-Emergency and Non-Law Enforcement related.” The “Purpose” paragraph also explains that the guidebook was “created through the collaboration of the Division of Law Enforcement and the Non-Sworn Divisions” of FWC. However, Kaufmann explained he was only recently made aware of the guidebook. On the “Coyote” Page of the guidebook (page 13) duty officers are instructed to dispatch a law enforcement officer and contact emergency medical services if there is a potential wildlife threat or attack. The guide also instructs the duty officer to consider contacting other law enforcement agencies if an FWC officer is unavailable (*See*,

² Funck works in HSC Wildlife Impact Management Section and specializes in non-native fish and wildlife.

³ PowerDMS is FWC’s electronic directives and training database.

Exhibit 20). The guidebook does not reference the FWC Wildlife Incident Response Plan and does not instruct FWC duty officers to notify the regional WAB or other HSC personnel.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- It is recommended that FWC management consolidate the Non-Emergency and Non-Law Enforcement (NELE) Incident Guidebook and the Wildlife Incident Response Plan. The amended plan should include contacting HSC staff (WABs or other biologists) for all human-wildlife conflicts so they may directly contact FWC personnel on scene and accurately assess the situation. After the documents are consolidated and updated, all duty officers and law enforcement officers, at a minimum, should be required to attend training.
- Wildlife incidents are often fluid situations. Training should include recognizing when an incident moves from one tier to another and understanding the additional requirements of the new tier. The training should also include response to unusual and extraordinary circumstances.

Finding 6: FWC internal communication is inconsistent:

After receiving information about the captured coyote, Smith met with Kaufmann to discuss options for the coyote. Smith left the meeting believing the two agreed euthanasia was the best option while Kaufmann left believing the two agreed to relocate the coyote. Although neither could remember specifically what was said that led to different conclusions being reached, both agreed there was miscommunication. During this review it was learned that the HSC biologists and DLE law enforcement officers often speak using different terminology to describe the same thing. Although subtle, these differences can lead to miscommunication within FWC. For example, during discussions with HSC personnel, terms such as 'naturalized', 'invasive', and 'non-invasive' were often used. These terms are not defined in statute, administrative code, or FWC General Orders, the main sources of information used by DLE officers to determine courses of action. Even the term 'hazing' used by HSC personnel to describe deterrent techniques is different from DLE. DLE refers to these deterrent techniques as 'aversion.' Smith explained that the FWC Wildlife Incident Response Plan was modeled after a Wildlife Attack Response Plan from another state. Smith added that FWC staff did not like the word "attack" and changed it to "incident" when creating the FWC plan. However, the NELE guidebook references "attacks" when discussing responses by DLE personnel to coyote calls.

RECOMMENDATION:

- It is recommended that FWC management consider developing a plain language policy and define a standard set of common terms to ensure consistent communication and terminology across FWC divisions.

Finding 7: The Wildlife Incident Response Plan provides inadequate after-hours direction and inadequate resources:

WABs are hired by FWC as Other Personnel Services (OPS) employees and work Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.⁴ Pierce explained FWC does have bear biologists that are on-

⁴ OPS employees are not considered to be full-time employees.

call after hours and on weekends, but they are only contacted for bear related incidents. Additionally, Pierce is located at the FWC Palm Beach office and not in Miami. Pomares explained there are no FWC biologists working out of the FWC Miami office. Kaufmann said there are non-native species biologists located in Homestead, but confirmed there are no FWC biologists in Miami. Smith said he believed it should be the WAB who decides on the disposition of captured wildlife. Due to the limited availability of WABs in the area, none were available at the time Miami RCC was contacted regarding the coyote.

The Wildlife Incident Response Plan states:

This plan will guide agency staff response to incidents involving human-wildlife conflict during normal business hours (8 a.m. until 5 p.m.), Monday-Friday. Wildlife conflict-related calls received by FWC Division of Law Enforcement (LE) dispatch outside normal business hours that fall into Tier 4, 5, or 6...should be responded to by LE until the appropriate Species Program Coordinator, Wildlife Assistance Biologist (WAB) or Subject Matter Expert (SME) is available to assist. (Exhibit 19).

In most cases, HSC Species Program Coordinators, Wildlife Assistant Biologists and/or Subject Matter Experts are not required to be available after hours or on weekends. It may potentially be several hours from the time a DLE officer is dispatched to a human-wildlife conflict call until HSC personnel are notified or arrive on scene. The plan does not adequately address DLE response to human-wildlife conflict calls that occur outside of normal business hours. In Tier 4 and 5 responses, the plan explains that responding officers should consult with a Subject Matter Expert (SME) and, in some instances, coordinate with the SME to arrange capture of the animal. This consultation cannot occur if the duty officer and/or responding officer do not know who to call or if an SME is unavailable. The plan also explains that DLE officers should, in certain circumstances, attempt to haze the animal (*See*, Findings 2 and 6).

DLE provides 24-hour response. Guidance provided to DLE personnel related to human-wildlife conflict calls must ensure consistent direction regardless of the time of day. Additionally, FWC personnel referenced in any DLE guidance related to human-wildlife conflicts should be available for a 24-hour response.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Human-wildlife conflicts do not occur just during normal business hours. It is recommended that FWC management consider amending the Wildlife Incident Response Plan and develop an HSC on-call regional biologist (either WABs or other biologists) to answer human-wildlife conflict calls received by FWC dispatch after hours, on weekends, holidays, etc.
- It is recommended that FWC management consider protocols making HSC the lead FWC division when dealing with human-wildlife conflict calls. DLE personnel should secure the scene and be instructed on appropriate courses of action until HSC personnel arrive.

Finding 8: Confusion caused a failure in FWC's response to the media:

Kaufmann said that after he spoke with Smith, he did an internet search regarding the coyote at the Port of Miami. The search immediately revealed three related news articles. These articles cited various FWC sources, including Pomares and Washington.

Pomares said that as the coyote was being placed into Hernandez's patrol vehicle a news reporter from Channel 10 news in Miami informally asked if he knew what was going to happen to the coyote. Pomares told her the coyote was being transported to a wildlife rehabilitator in Homestead. Pomares said he also told the reporter that the coyote could not be re-released and in some cases, animals taken to wildlife rehabilitators may need to be euthanized. Pomares explained the reporter did not ask for a formal interview or put a microphone in front of him. The reporter left and came back a short time later and asked Pomares for his name.

Washington explained he initially provided a statement to the media that the coyote was being taken to a wildlife rehabilitator. Washington said after he made his initial statement, he received a call from Maza. During the telephone call, Maza told Washington the coyote was going to be euthanized. When Washington provided the updated information, the media wanted to know why the decision was changed. Washington referred to the coyote talking points provided to him, and explained that the coyote was a "nuisance, non-native species." The talking points referenced by Washington were not the same talking points provided by HSC.

At 12:07 p.m. on February 4, 2020, Rager emailed Kaufmann explaining that a reporter told her the coyote would be euthanized (Exhibit 10). DLE and HSC personnel provided different information to different news outlets based on information available to them at the time. Although both accounts were accurate and the original plan had changed, the public perception was, at best, that FWC did not have a grasp on the situation.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Although each FWC division has its own Public Information or Public Relations personnel it is recommended that FWC management consider creating guidelines for addressing media issues that cross, or have the potential to cross, divisions or office lines. This could include determining which division will take lead on a given situation and coordinate statements to the media through that division or office.

Summary

This review found several weaknesses within various FWC policies that contributed to the coyote being euthanized on February 4, 2020, and the public outcry that followed. This administrative review resulted in 8 findings and 13 recommendations for improvement that, if followed, should reduce the likelihood of this incident reoccurring.

Exhibits

- 1) Complaints
- 2) FWC CAD call history log
- 3) FWC duty officer call to wildlife rehabilitator (initial call) – (audio)
- 4) FWC duty officer call to wildlife rehabilitator (second call) –(audio)
- 5) FWC radio recording – (audio)
- 6) Text message from Escanio to Smith
- 7) Timeline provided by Kaufmann
- 8) Kaufmann email to Smith dated February 4, 2020 at 11:34 a.m.
- 9) Kaufmann email to Pierce dated February 4, 2020 at 11:56 a.m.
- 10) Rager email to Kaufmann dated February 4, 2020 at 12:07 p.m.
- 11) Pierce email to Kaufmann dated February 4, 2020 at 12:09 p.m.
- 12) Florida Administrative Code 68A-1.004
- 13) Florida Administrative Code 68A-24.002
- 14) Talking points provided by Washington
- 15) Florida Administrative Codes 68A-9.006 and 68A-9.010
- 16) 'The Coyote in Florida' – June 2007
- 17) HSC coyote talking points
- 18) DLE General Order 5
- 19) FWC Wildlife Incident Response Plan
- 20) DLE NELE Guidebook