

Dear Board of Directors,

I hope this letter finds you healthy and well. Thank you opening the floor to hearing the public on this matter once again. At the risk of sounding pandering, I get the alerts for all your meetings; I know how busy you all are hearing from so many people who are unbelievably passionate about whatever it is they are arguing. The things we're talking about are just a blip of your day, while it weighs on the hearts of those on either side of the aisle every day. I sincerely appreciate your time listening, as well as reading. With that said, I once again implore you to read my written submission in its entirety even though we would be hard-pressed to find a non-coyote expert that has ever gotten excited to read an essay on coyotes.

It is also important to note how privileged we are to spend the time worrying about a coyote, as well as having the time, space, and education to prepare and state our arguments on this topic.

I have attached my written statement entered into the record from the previous hearing, for ease of accessibility (PDF included: HNelson_Coyote Rebuttal_1-10-2022). The science in those referenced studies remain valid, peer-reviewed sources.

I will state up front that I am trying to refute emotions with science, which has never been done. I'm certainly not going to do it here.

Such an argument is futile, but I am here to remind us how inappropriate, dangerous, and costly (See "Costs") it is to have an argument based on emotions in the first place.

I will present my written argument in similar sections my previous letter separating the Background information from the Argument, but the Argument and the Arguments Expanded sections will be combined.

The Background:

With that said, I'm not trying to appeal to the logic of Ms. Milan's supporters. They have proven time and again that they would rather dig their heels in at the ground than potentially hear the other side of the conversation. To say this is juvenile is an understatement.

I also refuse use the name "Rocky" for our Coyote. Emotionally, that was the name of my own late dog, and I do not wish to sully his memory. Objectively, scientists do not name animals that they are working with in order to remain unbiased in their observations. Also objectively, this comes across as cold and uncaring, which are descriptors for the staff and volunteers of the River Trail Nature Center that I would never even think of utilizing. Everyone loves our coyote, but the staff and volunteers must lead by example by respecting the autonomy of a wild animal and using objective evidence in caring for him.

Another characteristic working against myself and those on the side of science is that we are not the loudest. We don't have a catchy tagline that will incite rage and lead to blind petition signing by slacktivists (see "Petition" in the Arguments section). We have one video clip of Brian Winters, a couple of sentences in writing from Winters by the same journalist, and two Facebook posts stating 1) their position that the RTNC takes great care of their animals and **2) the FPDCC's willingness to review and change their own internal processes (see "1. Internal Review")**.

I note below the non-exhaustive list of the organizations who have posted about this issue in the days after our initial hearing. While some are blatantly illegitimate (RoadsideZooNews.org) and/or biased (all

variations of Robert McCoppin’s article), only one is a thoughtful institution that has been unfortunately caught up in these catchy taglines: The Wild Animal Sanctuary (TWAS). Emotionally, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt. Who vets the legitimacy of claims of animal abuse before posting a call-to-action?

Objectively, however, I argue that they may have posted their support too quickly. While they haven’t posted anything since initially promoting the change.org petition, they have also not clarified their affiliation with Ms. Milan, nor have they clarified to the board of the processes awaiting the coyote if relocation is granted (See “**3. TWAS**” in Arguments).

Since our hearing last month, there have been many developments including but not limited to:

- The morning of the initial hearing on Jan 10, Milan called the Sheriff’s Office to the River Trail Nature Center as a heavy-handed message that she will not wait for the Board’s involvement and will pressure the nature center to “surrender” Coyote.
- The [petition](#) has grown to 4,298 supporters with 288 commenters (6% of petition signers have commented) (see “**2. Petition & Comments**”).
- Ms. Milan’s supporters organizing the staking out of the River Trail Nature Center’s 3PM feeding program so that they may heckle and push their agenda (see “**5. In-Person Efforts**”).
- The harassment of the family who lives on-site at the nature center and the subsequent need for security cameras around the grounds (see “**5. In-Person Efforts**”).
- An Instagram account for the coyote has been created.
 - There is a photo on the page that shows how close the enclosures are to the Parking Lot. I worry that this is proof that they consider the pop-culture term if “Roadside Zoo” literally means that it is next to a road (see “**6. Roadside Zoo**”). Instagram also houses their linktree to self-affirming articles and “expert” testimony in their favor: https://linktr.ee/rocky_the_coyote
- Student journalists have reached out to the RTNC regarding this topic. No matter what side of the issue one finds themselves, it is encouraging to hear that the students are engaging with their community and taking the time to hear both sides of an issue.
- More articles covering the same general talking points have been published online:
 - Chicago Tribune’s Robert McCoppin published articles saying the main talking points in various locations under various headlines in tones conveying Slight-Neutral/Slight Pro-Relocation to Completely Pro-Relocation biases ([initial article](#) published 1/10/22)
 - Via [TheColumbian](#) (1/14/22)
 - Via [YahooNews](#) (1/11/22)
 - [Phys.org](#) (1/11/22) (Notes that one of Milan’s supporters is her friend Cherie Travis, former animal attorney – her insight is invalid due to her background of fraud and harassment (See “**6. Cherie Travis**”).
 - [Arcamax.com](#) (1/11/22)
 - This article states: “Brookfield Zoo, partially funded by the forest preserve and located on forest preserve land, has habitats built for wild animals, but zoos don’t typically house common local animals like coyotes.” It is crucial to note the keystone sanctuary and educational roles that River Trails and other nature centers play in the local area.

- [PostGuam.com](#) (originally posted 1/14/22; updated 1/24/22)
 - [Pantagraph.com](#) (1/27/22)
- ([Fox32 – follow up published 1/27/22](#) (original article published 1/10/22))
 - The statement “He’d be able to roam in a natural environment and be with other coyotes, he'd be able to be a coyote,” is worrisome because it does not seem as though they understand the evaluation process of TWAS nor the science behind pack animals. Please see **section “3. TWAS”**, and section **“8 Coyote Behavior”**)
- [NBC5](#) (1/11/22 – updated the evening of the same day with input from Naturalist Brian Winters)
- [RoadsideZooNews.org](#) (1/14/22)
 - Due to their “.org” status, I reached out for details regarding some statements put forth in the article (such as “The smallest enclosure at The Wild Animal Sanctuary is about 800 times larger than the coyote's enclosure.”) which has no source, as well as to discuss the opposing side. I have not received a response. That statement may be true, however, it’s unclear if that’s the space available to coyotes (800 x 266 sq ft = 212,800 sq ft = 4.89 acres – performing the non-detailed math based on the quoted statement [800 times 266 square feet] results in the unsubstantiated statement that the smallest enclosure at the TWAS is a little less than 5 acres in area).
 - Then I learned that it costs about \$12 to buy a “.org” domain, and you do not need to register your website as being educational, as I had been taught in school. Welcome to Fun facts with Hannah.

Argument (In no order of importance):

1. Internal review

According to the official statements from the FPDCC published on Facebook on January 14 (see [jan14-post.jpg](#)) and January 26 (see [jan26-fbpost.jpg](#)) regarding this issue, the background of the coyote is described, and statements are quoted from unnamed “experts” including a veterinarian familiar with the coyote and the Forest Preserve’s Senior Wildlife Biologist. In fairness to both sides of the issue, the FPDCC does not name who these individuals are, just as Milan and her numerous resulting publications did not name their experts. I enjoy a healthy level of skepticism of my government, so I were someone just walking into this issue, and I saw that the FPDCC using broad statements such as “our experts,” I’d be questioning their legitimacy.

Luckily, we will hear/heard (depending on when you’re reading this) from the FPDCC’s veterinarian describing the level of care afforded to all of the animals, but as of my typing this in the wee morning hours of Feb 7, 2022, I am uncertain if we will hear/have heard from our senior wildlife biologist, [Chris Anchor](#), and I believe it crucial that we do. He’s been with the forest preserve with 1981, has been in his current senior position since 1986, and is a long-term partner of the Cook County Coyote Project under the umbrella of the Urban Coyote project. His work in navigating sharing our local environment with the specially-adapted Urban Coyote has been crucial in understanding meanings behind behaviors exhibited by and needs of coyotes in the wild, as well as under the care of the forest preserves. These behaviors and needs include but are not limited to Enrichment Needs, Privacy Needs, and Imprinting

Repercussions (Please see Section **8. Coyote Behavior** for links to current science behind urban and domesticated coyotes).

In their Jan 26 statement, the FPDCC stated that a review of its ambassador animal program, including its procedures and practices are under review because of this situation. To remain critical of both sides, my stance on this is: Good, that's what you're supposed to do. I can't commend you on doing what you're supposed to do.

However, we must note with praise that this is the FPDCC, a government entity, stating publicly that they are taking the time and effort to listen to us, to review their own practices, and make changes where necessary. They are taking the time to reflect and admit where they could use improvement or potentially in some instances, where they are wrong. I don't see the opposing side reflecting, listening to science, or stating any instances where they could be wrong.

I hear a bellow of "Do Better!" In an age where we are holding people and organizations accountable, I agree. Should have it taken Milan to start her campaign for this reflection to come in to effect? No, but I also can't argue beyond a reasonable doubt that this review would NOT have taken place without Milan. However, we can't change the past; we may only move forward.

Let's work together, without hostility or a goal of vindication to find the proper resolution. A private citizen offering money to a government entity sets a precedent of "the richest get their way in the government." We already see this happen at a federal level, and we can see it right now where the richest are the loudest and get two commissioner hearings...and maybe a lawsuit which will cost more taxpayer dollars.

Based on my research a way we could have a very far-reaching impact is to advocate for the guidelines listed in the Animal Welfare Act to become more robust and forward-thinking themselves. These are the [guidelines that the USDA](#) uses when facilities state that they are licensed by the USDA, including our nature center.

2. The Petition & Comments

The way Change.org works is that it gains public awareness and creates pressure on the individual or institution named in the petition to change on their own accord. I understand this is a rudimentary description, but Change.org is where things can get away from us. Change.org and social media in general have changed the petitioning game.

It is Slacktivism (sometimes known as "Clicktivism") wherein our particular issue lies. "Slacktivism (a portmanteau of "slacker" and "activism") is the practice of supporting a political or social cause by means such as social media or online petitions, characterized as involving little effort or commitment" ([Wikipedia](#)). A Change.Org petition that incites rage is an effective tool, yes, but it can also be detrimental to a cause such as this one. Saying a petition about one coyote in northwest Illinois would strike anyone as a worthy cause because as I argued before, who performs due diligence on a movement advocating for animal rights? This [write up on FirstMonday.org](#) goes into great depth of the political impact of Slacktivism and the involvement of Slacktivists.

I, for one, would have absolutely signed this is my friend Nicole Milan sent this to me and asked me to. If I had no idea what was going on, I would have committed the cardinal Slacktivism Sin: Clicking Sign and

Forgetting About It. Depending on the day, I would type something in the box that prompts “I’m signing because...(optional).” But it’s optional, so who’s to say. Of course, I would allow my name to be publicly listed because how could I be wrong in wanting what’s best for a coyote whom my friend says is being abused?

Well, I wasn’t sent by Nicole Milan, and we’re not friends, so allow me to Repent for my Slacktivism Sins with due diligence.

Along with the optional comment box, my name and default location are pre-populated into the survey because I have a Change.Org account. With a box you may un-check so that your name and comment are not publicly displayed, we have the information we need to break down supporters of the petition into 3 categories: 1) Public Signers, non-commenters; 2) Public Signers, Commenters, and 3) Private Signers, Unknown Comment Status.

While all 3 categories contribute to the overall total signatures, I consider Category 2) Public Signers, Commenters to be the most passionate of the signers...the least egregious of the Slacktivists, if you will. Here are the people, who by definition, want it publicly known their support and thoughts regarding the matter.

In the PDF’d spreadsheet attached (petition-commenter.pdf), I have catalogued the Location of all public commenters, as well as the comments of those noted in Illinois. This is because they have the highest chance to have actually physically visited the coyote.

There are a few surprising locations of folks who claim the injustice of the situation (such as South Africa, Italy, and the Netherlands), though I argue these individuals have never seen the coyote in person and signed as a favor to their friend Milan due to their comments dating to the inception of the petition. I have excluded their comments, as again, I am not operating on emotion, and their comments are only based in emotion.

To view all public comments, please direct yourselves [HERE](#).

Of the 4,298 signers of the petition, 288 have commented, including Nicole Milan and two individuals from Glenview, IL and Fredonia, NY having commented twice. It is unclear if they signed twice, but it is likely due to the lack of actual comment put forth by the Fredonia, NY commenter. These duplicates have been noted in the spreadsheet.

There is a large population of Colorado-based commenters and this could be because of one or both of the following reasons: 1) Milan has associates in Colorado who will also blindly sign; or 2) When someone “Chips In” after signing a petition, funds go towards marketing the petition to like-minded Change.Org members (as conveyed in [this Medium.com article](#)). However, I do want to note that Change.Org is NOT for-profit agency, which the article incorrectly states. Change.Org is a B-Corp-accredited 501(c)(3) which is a status not to be taken lightly. The explanation this article gives, though, brings to light that “chipping in” are not used directly by the petition organizers to further their cause, it is used for marketing, thus bringing to light the truth that the advocates with the most money get to be the loudest which is why you are hearing from me a second time. Upper-middle class suburban self-righteousness is the one of squeakiest of wheels.

Of the 288 commenters, 89 are from Illinois (which includes the Glenview individual who commented twice but with different statements). Within those comments there are those who simply don't know what they're talking about. One individual from Midlothian, IL called our coyote a "she." Another individual from Lincolnwood, IL calls for the coyote to be "free" "unless the coyote is hurt, rabies, and no threat to anyone." Psychological hurt is very real, I would argue. At least they said "please."

The real kicker is from an individual from Prospect Heights, IL saying "I'll never visit!!!" This reinforced my argument of a lack of due diligence and signing in blind allegiance to a fallible person.

I will note that I included the comment from someone listed only as being in the US because they comment caught my eye. They comment "release those coyotes NOW." We are not dealing with multiple coyotes, here.

3. TWAS

After speaking with a receptionist at The Wild Animal Sanctuary, she gave me a brief rundown of the process if the coyote were to be taken away. TWAS is open to taking in any animal in need, but housing is a different matter. The animal would be assessed and if deemed fit, the coyote could begin the very slow introduction to the pack, a process that could take around 5 years according to the TWAS website. Also mentioned in the phone call, if our coyote is not deemed fit to join either of the pre-existing packs at TWAS, the coyote would be sent to a different facility for care. The logic behind this is that the animal is rescued from an abusive, cruel environment, so even the stress of transport is better than neglect.

I really truly hope that the executive director of TWAS speaks in this hearing. He would not speak to me on the phone (understandably so – who am I, after all?), and I only have the utmost praise for TWAS. They are not under fire here. I called just wanting to know if he knew his name and organization were being bandied about over here in Illinois. I do sincerely the time the receptionist took to explain the process to me, however. She did not take the situation lightly, and empathy is very emotionally taxing.

While Milan and her supporters claim our coyote is neglected and abused, he simply is not. I already backed up that statement in my last submission to the record. The lack of guarantee of a stable home if the coyote were to be cruelly ripped from the only stable and loving home it has ever known (indeed, his pack to which he has imprinted) would be psychologically devastating.

4. Costs

Non-Profits have a fund we dip into if expenses of a current year exceed the annual budget. We are dipping into those funds now, which is wasting taxpayer money – something that seems to be a massive talking point from the opposition. Relocation would not cost taxpayers any money. However, litigation against the FPDCC is being bandied about, which costs the taxpayers money. Our forest preserve lawyers don't do this for free. These hearings are costing the taxpayers money – you all certainly don't read this for free.

"Doing Better" also costs money. If we were to go for an optional accreditation, that costs money that taxpayers don't want to pay. Who wants to pay taxes? The FPDCC is between a rock and a hard place when it comes to getting more funding to expand their efforts.

5. In Person Efforts

As I mentioned before, Milan and her supporters coordinate vocal, disruptive protests to interrupt the educational program of Feeding time, which occurs at 3PM every day, except Fridays when the center is not open to the public. This does not, however, mean that the animals do not experience the same level of dutiful care of cleaning and feeding on Fridays.

I commend the RTNC for not disrupting their programming out of fear because this is not a fear campaign being run by Milan's supporters. They have, however, organized a plan that requires multiple naturalists to be present so that one may take over in case a heckler refuses to not interrupt the program. The stand-by naturalist taps in and continues the program while the naturalist who was originally presenting talks to the heckler. Sometimes curious citizens engage and ask the heckler or the naturalist to elaborate.

Unfortunately, we are at the point where all interactions need to be filmed. One individual berated the visiting parents for bringing their children to "witness animal abuse." I'm not certain if this interaction was captured on video. What has been captured on video is a heckler who recorded last week threatening a minor (who was engaging in the dialogue with her and a naturalist) by saying something along the lines of "if you were 18, I'd smack you down." The parents did not press charges after speaking to the Sheriff's department. Video is available of this interaction. Nicole Milan may be seen standing in the background in a long white parka covering her face, not wanting to be filmed.

6. Cherie Travis

In the Phys.org and PostGuam.com articles, Cherie Travis, noted as an animal law attorney as well as a friend of Ms. Milan's, was quoted calling the coyote's captivity "'cringeworthy'" ([Phys.org](#) and [PostGuam.com](#)). **While Ms. Travis is very quotable, she is not very credible.**

In 2012, she was sued by the Illinois attorney general to explain the \$70,000 given loans to her mother (listed as treasurer and director at the time) and a friend ([Chicago Tribune Sept 26, 2012](#)). She was the former commissioner of the Chicago Department of Animal Care and Control, she founded the People and Animals in Community Together Humane Society (PACT), and she was a former adjunct professor at DePaul University's Center for Animal Law. At the time of that same 2012 article, the IRS revoked PACT's 501(c)(3) status due to the lack of financial transparency.

In 2013, she settled out of court with the State as the Illinois Attorney General's office sued her over misappropriation of funds of her 501(c)(3) (People and Animals in Community Together Humane Society (PACT)) as loans to her mother and friend totaling \$70,000. This came to the State's attention after "PACT volunteers questioned Travis' failure to pay the organization's bills despite the influx of nearly \$107,000 from the estate of a deceased benefactor...PACT is now under new leadership" ([Chicago Tribune, March 21, 2013](#)). While misappropriation of funds is not the same as not being a good Animal Law Attorney, her untruthful past deems her as not credible.

Travis also does not seem new to targeting non-profits who seem blindsided by the accusation, in 2004, she brought about accusations of neglect to a non-profit DuPage animal shelter due to the post-surgical appearance of a dog's ear ([Chicago Tribune September 15, 2004](#)). Her "watchdog group" [PACT] was issued a cease-and-desist letter from the Judicial and Public Safety Committee, as "Travis has 'personally harassed members of the staff as well as volunteers' by repeatedly calling them at home and at work."

To speak from personal experience, I'm on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Association for the Advancement of Archaeology. We can't spend a single dollar, not even flowers for a memorial, without board approval.

Travis has clearly learned from her previous heavy-handed approach, however, I would urge we do not put too much weight into any of her arguments or quotable statements due to her ability to deceive, defraud, and, as a result, remain disgraced to this day.

I bring the legitimacy of Travis' insight into question with hesitation because she did (albeit unsuccessfully) initiate the process of suing her whistleblower for \$500,000 in damages on the grounds of libel, defamation, and fraud ([Chicago Tribune 2012](#)). However, I find it essential to 1) perform due diligence on "experts" giving their insight, and 2) note the kind of company Ms. Milan keeps and lack of discernment when asking for "experts" to weigh in.

It's also important to note that it's not libel if it's true ([Minc Law](#)), and there is not much I can do to further defame Travis. Based on [Travis' LinkedIn profile](#), she is now a real estate attorney.

7. Roadside Zoo:

On the Instagram account created by Milan, she has posted a Google satellite image to show the proximity of the coyote's enclosure to the road to the parking lot at RTNC. This, along with the engagement of RoadsideZooNews.org, I think it's best we clarify the actual definition of a Roadside Zoo, as it does NOT mean animals that are housed next to a road. According to the [Animal Legal Defense Fund](#) (a 5-star rated agency on [CharityNavigator.org](#) even though on their website, they incorrectly credit themselves with 4 stars), a roadside zoo is characterized by observations outlined in a [checklist](#) which I argue the River Trail Nature Center's facilities fails to meet the criteria outline in the checklist that would legally qualify it to be roadside zoo.

8. Coyote Behavior

You may find my rebuttal to Milan and her supporters' usage of the term "pacing" in my previous submission to the record. In our acute observations of the coyote in the youtube videos, we are observing the coyote monitoring his surroundings, as was also observed in the afore-cited study on captive coyote behavior patterns.

With the FPDCC's close collaboration with the Urban Coyote Research Project, the coyote's behavior being monitored by expert Chris Anchor, means that this monitoring is done by a tenured scientist with over four decades of experience. I sincerely hope he speaks on his work in this hearing because his work is at the forefront of the science between urban-dwelling and wild-dwelling coyotes. The generations-long impact of its association with humans due to it being an Urban Coyote, has led its innate behaviors regarding survival to differ from its Wild-Dwelling counterparts. Alertness in response to its surroundings will present differently, as will its willingness to vocalize. Urban coyotes have been shown to only come out at night, watch for cars before crossing the street, and not howl all the time. These are adapted methods of survival; those who do not adapt, will perish and fail to reproduce. Natural Selection is at work, and rarely do we get to see such quick adaptations during our lifetime. Similar to the observation that fewer bugs hit our windshield now because low-flying insects who can't avoid being hit will be selected-against.