

## **Timothy Casey (Secretary to the Board)**

---

**From:** Rae Goodman <rae.goodman@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, February 07, 2022 3:37 PM  
**To:** CookCounty Board (Secretary to the Board)  
**Subject:** River Trail Nature Center's Coyote

---

**External Message Disclaimer**

This message originated from an external source. Please use proper judgment and caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding to this email.

---

---

**External Message Disclaimer**

This message originated from an external source. Please use proper judgment and caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding to this email.

---

---

**External Message Disclaimer**

This message originated from an external source. Please use proper judgment and caution when opening attachments, clicking links, or responding to this email.

---

Hello,

Please add the following to the record for the Forest Preserve Board of Commissioners meeting for Tuesday, February 8, 2022 at 10 am.

My name is Rae Goodman-Lucker. I am a Northbrook resident and regular visitor at River Trail Nature Center. I am a science teacher and a parent. I take my kids to River Trail, I've taken students on field trips to River Trail. I've sent my kids to River Trail's summer camps, and I've attended numerous programs at River Trail, including programs featuring many of the animals they take care of. I am also a Forest Preserve Volunteer, working weekly at Somme Prairie and Woods. I am a biologist, with experience in doing research with animal subjects, including wild animals and animals in the lab.

I was at River Trail on January 30, 2022, attending the "What's on the Menu" program with my children, who are 7 and 4 years old. In the middle of the program, a woman interrupted Ranger Brian and started yelling about her allegations about River Trail's supposed mistreatment of Coyote. The woman yelled that parents shouldn't bring their kids to see this, that it was bad for children. Ranger Brian respectfully and repeatedly asked the woman to stop, reminding them that people were here to attend the program. When the woman persisted in shouting over the educational program, Ranger Brian ended the program and calmly dealt with her. I spoke to the woman briefly, letting her know that I support Ranger Brian and River Trail, and that I'm proud of the work that they do, and that I'm glad to bring my children there. Within a minute or so, the woman

began swearing. I reminded her that there were young children present, and perhaps her language wasn't suitable. She ignored me and continued swearing, loudly. When a teenager came up to talk to her, she cursed repeatedly at the teenager. While she professed concern for the children's well-being, her actions did not display such a concern. She entered a family-friendly environment and spoke as one might at a bar brawl.

Ranger Brian and his staff handled the interruption beautifully, with concern and respect for all of the visitors, including the children. While Ranger Brian dealt with the interruption, Ranger Maya (sp?) led the rest of the attendees aside and asked if we were okay, and asked if the kids had any other questions about the animals. She continued feeding the rest of the animals, showing that her priority was taking care of the animals, regardless of those who were trying to interfere with the animals' care. She continued teaching the kids about the animals, answering their questions and engaging their curiosity. She asked us if we were okay, and she was concerned about whether the disturbance might have upset the kids. She was attentive and caring to us, to the animals, and to the other attendees.

Throughout the interruption, Ranger Brian and the rest of his team remained calm and respectful, even in the face of the woman's abusive language. Ranger Brian calmly stated the Forest Preserve's position, explained that a statement had been put out, asked if the woman had read it (she didn't answer), and reiterated that she was welcome to read the statement and reply to it. I know, from my experience at protests and handling hecklers, that it is difficult to remain calm and composed when confronted so rudely. Ranger Brian did so beautifully, and I was impressed with how he and his staff handled the incident.

After the feeding program was over, we spent a while longer looking at the animals. Ranger Brian and Ranger Jerry each came over to check on us as well. They asked if we were okay, and they wanted to see if my kids were at all upset by the disturbance. They know me and my kids by name, because they care about and pay attention to the people who come to explore and learn at River Trail. They have displayed, time and time again, their commitment to the environment, the animals, and the people who visit River Trail.

In my experience doing biology and conservation research with animal subjects, I've worked with a great many researchers, rangers, wildlife care experts, and animal rehabilitators. All of these people care deeply about the animals and environments under their care. The idea, which the woman yelling at the program was suggesting, that River Trail is housing a coordinated team of people dedicated to mistreating one of their animals is preposterous. It's a conspiracy theory that ignores basic reality. They are suggesting that people who go into wildlife and conservation biology don't have a basic level of concern for their animals nor a basic understanding of what their animals need. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Certainly, there are lone bad actors, people who abuse animals for financial gain or out of personal problems. But the Forest Preserve isn't a for-profit sideshow where someone could hope to make it rich by showing animals. The rangers here have nothing to gain from mistreating their animals. The rangers are public servants, helping the public and the environment. Taking care of animals is, in many ways, unpleasant work - picking up scat and half-eaten carcasses, showing up in all weather to care for the animals, having the endless patience to work with and train a scared, injured animal and bring it back to health. The idea that these rangers aren't doing everything in the best interests of the animal is absurd. Yes, it's possible that one person, somewhere, might act in bad faith. But to imagine that a whole team of dedicated wildlife caretakers is purposely neglecting one of their most charismatic animals is untethered from reality.

The work of taking care of an animal is tricky and complex, especially for a permanently injured wild animal. In taking care of people, doctors, parents, and other caretakers sometimes have to make difficult decisions for how to care for a patient. Sometimes that means a person needs a medication that has unpleasant side effects. Sometimes that means a person has to undergo medical procedures and must be sedated. Sometimes that means a person must be restrained, for the safety of themselves or others. Sometimes a person with a disability might need to live in a specialized facility, that would be completely unsuitable for someone without their disabilities, but that facility is completely right for them, and in fact makes them happy and fulfilled. A nursing home would be a terrible place for a child to live, but it was the right level of care for my aunt, and it helped her stay out of the hospital. And, when the person can't make their own decisions, someone else must make these difficult decisions for them. The same is true of animals, especially injured and disabled animals. The people in charge of them make the tough decisions. When someone looks at those decisions, without any

knowledge of the situation, the animal, standards of care for wildlife, relevant laws, or other relevant details, they can misunderstand what's going on.

I don't know the details of how River Trail is taking care of their coyote, other than what I see in the public programs. I know that what I do see is appropriate for the animal, and that the animal appears to be in good health, and has appeared to be in good health every time I've been to River Trail, for years. When I heard the woman yelling about Coyote receiving sedatives, I didn't know if it was true. But I knew, from what I know of the rangers at River Trail, that they take good care of their animals, and they would only give appropriate medicines. A sedative might be appropriate if needed to calm an animal down so the vet could give the animal necessary medical care. It might even be kinder to give the animal a sedative than to let them remain scared while undergoing medical treatment. When I've had animals in my care, I had to clear all of my actions with the university Animal Care Committee, made of experts in humane and ethical treatment of research animals. They approved my methods, which caused no pain or suffering for the animals in my care. When I mentioned a part of my methods to some members of the general public, they were shocked, and they loudly insisted that I should instead use a different method - which may have sounded better, but would have caused the animals tremendous pain and suffering. Caring for animals is a complex field, which is why people can pursue advanced degrees in the subject. When people without that depth of knowledge try to insert their gut reactions in the place of knowledgeable experts, it is not beneficial to the animals.

To those who are concerned for Coyote's wellbeing, I invite you to come to River Trail. Visit monthly, or even weekly, as my family and I have done. Come for a period of years. That way, you'll be able to see, as we have, that Coyote is reliably healthy looking, with a clean shiny coat and suitable weight. He is appropriately alert and attentive. He responds to new visitors, looking at them. He is strong and can easily move about, without any apparent pain or limitation. His ears are up and alert. His posture is calm, and his tail is at ease. He has progressed in his training over the past few years - when we started coming to River Trail, the rangers were often using clickers to train him to sit and wait to be fed. Now, they often use only words or hand signals. Coyote's posture shows that he is excited to be fed, and he reliably has a good appetite. He obeys the rangers' commands, and he is calm in their presence. He does not show any signs of fear or aggressiveness towards his caretakers. The rangers treat him appropriately for a wild animal - with respect and distance, taking care of his needs without promoting a "pet-like" closeness. They know him well, including his personality and likes and dislikes. This is true of all of their animals. I recently learned that their bald eagle's food preferences vary by season. I challenge those who disrupted the feeding program to explain, in such detail, what an appropriate feeding schedule and diet is for a coyote, or one-eyed owl, or a disabled hawk.

I love taking my children to River Trail Nature Center, because of what they learn there. Rangers Brian, Jerry, Ryan, Maia, Sarah, Michelle, Molly, and others have reliably been excellent, caring educators. They teach the kids - and the adults - about the land and animals they have been allowed to steward. Every time I go there, we learn something new and interesting. My 4 year old considers Coyote a 'friend' of his, and he looks forward to seeing Coyote every time we go. My 7 year old has been inspired, by his visits to River Trail, to volunteer regularly at the Forest Preserves. I have pages upon pages worth of stories to tell, about the wonderful experiences we've had at River Trail, as well as at the many other wonderful Forest Preserve sites.

I hope and expect that Coyote will remain at River Trail, under the care of the wonderful rangers there. I hope that Coyote will continue to be an 'animal ambassador,' helping to teach people about wildlife and how to protect the environment. I hope and expect that the fantastic staff at River Trail will be able to continue their fantastic work, without further interruption.

Thank you for your time.

Rae Goodman-Lucker  
800 Meadow Rd, Northbrook, IL 60062  
909-816-5606  
[rae.goodman@gmail.com](mailto:rae.goodman@gmail.com)

