

Rabies Vector Species Policy

Proposal: issue permits to specially trained, vaccinated rehabilitators to care for orphaned and injured rabies vector species

Rationale

Restrictions that prohibit the rehabilitation of rabies vector species were initially imposed in an attempt to limit the contact between humans and high-risk carriers. However, it is impossible to regulate the compassion the public feels toward animals in need. People want to help injured and orphaned animals, particularly the young, and they are unaware of or ignore the risks involved.

Rehabilitators, animal control organizations, wildlife officers and the police receive numerous calls from people who have rescued injured/orphaned rabies vector species. In most cases by the time a ‘rescuer’ calls they already have the animal in their possession and they have an emotional investment in the animal. A significant portion of the public choose not to surrender a baby raccoon when they learn that the raccoon will be euthanized. They attempt to raise the raccoon when there is no other humane option available. How many do not even call because they have heard that, if they do, the animal will be euthanized? The public health is at risk when well intentioned, but untrained, unvaccinated people care for these animals. (See attachment for survey results.)

The goal of this new program is to lower the risk to North Carolina citizens by decreasing the potential for exposure to rabies vector species. When specially trained rehabilitators are allowed to accept these animals, people agree to surrender the animals. Potentially rabid animals are removed from the public and are instead brought under the care of a few people who are thoroughly trained in safe handling procedures and understand the precautions that must be taken with these animals.

An additional benefit of this program is that rehabilitators will be better able to direct potential exposure cases to the correct authorities. They will serve as liaison between the health department and the public to ensure that potential exposures are properly referred and receive prompt medical care if needed. Today it is often not until an animal dies that a citizen comes forward concerned about rabies. When the animal has been reared at a citizen’s home, intimate contact frequently occurs before the animal’s death. At this point the post-exposure rabies vaccine must be administered.

With this policy in place rehabilitators will be a valuable and free resource to the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, the wildlife officers, and other wildlife officials for assisting with public health and safety in dealing with rabies vector species. WRNC would like to assist NCWRC in implementing this new program.

Requirements to obtain a permit

Requirements to obtain a rabies vector species permit:

- Attend an intensive training workshop. The workshop will cover understanding the disease and the transmission to humans and other wildlife, the procedures for the safe handling of rabies vector

species, the restrictions on their care and release, the procedures for dealing with the public and the reporting requirement. (See attachment for a more complete agenda for the workshop)

- Receive the pre-exposure rabies vaccination series. Submit a completed and signed immunization form.
- Have appropriate facilities that meet the minimum standards in the *NWRA/IWRC Minimum Standards for Wildlife Rehabilitation* guidelines. In addition the caging must provide isolated confinement from other wildlife and domestic animals and contain a double barrier to prevent contact between RVS and people/pets. Submit descriptions and photos of outside RVS caging.
- Have a licensed veterinarian on record who is willing to euthanize sick animals. Submit a completed and signed veterinarian support form.

Rehabilitation procedures

Proposed rehabilitation procedures for RVS:

- Animals will be released at the site of origin or within a five-mile radius of the site. State and county parks and recreation areas will not be used as release sites.
- Calls from the public will be screened carefully to reveal possible human exposure situations. Provide information on rabies exposure protocols to the ‘rescuer,’ including referring the person to the correct health department authorities, caller’s personal physician, and ensuring that the animal is relinquished and submitted for testing.
- Educate the public about rabies. Hand out a Rabies Advisory Notice to each person who turns in an RVS animal.
- Sick RVS animals and those with bite or puncture wounds will be euthanized
- If any rabies vector species being rehabilitated bites a person or a pet, the animal will be euthanized and submitted for testing.
- If any rabies vector species being rehabilitated tests positive for rabies, the finder will be notified and all littermates will be euthanized
- Keep strict detailed records of rabies vector species from intake to release. The records will be submitted annually to the NCWRC.

Implementation

WRNC agrees to help NCWRC implement this program by:

- Preparing, publishing and making available a RVS procedure manual to each permittee that will include
 - Prerequisites for being authorized to handle RVS
 - Procedures for effective communicating with the public
 - Procedures for the safe handling of RVS
 - Restrictions on the care
 - Release restrictions
 - How to submit an animal for testing

- Record keeping requirements
 - Disease information
 - Vaccine information
 - Who to call for additional information
 - Application form, veterinary support form, immunization form and reporting form
- Producing for approval the documents necessary to administer the program:
 - Application form for permit
 - Veterinarian support document
 - Certificate of rabies immunization requiring signature of applicant and physician or health official administering immunization
 - Admission report form
- Providing the training workshop annually for persons seeking to be permitted.
 - Collecting all documents from each applicant at the time they take the training workshop, ensuring that they are complete and submitting them as a set to NCWRC to alleviate state employees having to spend unnecessary time processing incomplete applications.
 - Collecting and reviewing the reports from the permitted RVS rehabilitators annually and submitting either the reports and/or a summary document as directed by NCWRC.