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Ducks ...

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and turning them over to duck rescue volunteers, but decided to hold off until the council created a policy for dealing with the non-native birds.

The domestic ducks pose a threat for disease to the wild ducks in the Laguna, said Allan Buckmann, a wildlife biologist with the California Department of Fish and Game.

"In this particular case, it's a problem with the rest of the waterfowl population," said Buckmann.

The virus spread by domestic ducks doesn't currently affect humans, but if another domestic animal picked up the disease, it could become a public health issue, Buckmann told the committee.

"You never know when you're going to get a secondary complication like that, where you might have another

domestic animal in the area that would pick that up, and convert it into a virus — you could have a local outbreak here that very well could be public," said Buckmann. "You can't rule it out, as long as you have that kind of disease going on."

Buckmann said his department has worked with diseased ducks in other areas of the county, including Santa Rosa and Petaluma.

"This is where we had several huge outbreaks in the past, mostly from these domestic ducks," he said. "The disease vector is a real one in this area, and it affects a major part of the flyway" for native ducks.

"We'd like to see them removed," Buckmann told the committee.

Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation Boardmember Robert Evans volunteered to trap the ducks and bring them to a farm to live out their lives.

The committee also discussed the issue of feral cats

in the Laguna preserve. City officials say that despite regulations prohibiting the dumping of unwanted pets in city parks, a feral cat colony has settled in the preserve. The county's Human Society and Animal Control department have volunteered to trap the

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Laguna cats and remove them from the preserve.

Donna Best, director of Forgotten Felines of Sonoma County, told the committee the "trap-neuter-release" approach her organization uses has been embraced by other cities such as Santa Rosa, Petaluma and Cotati.

"We have done remarkable things to reduce the quantity of cats," Best said. Newcomers

to a feral cat colony are trapped and neutered, and adoptable cats and kittens are removed to maintain the colony.

Best said Forgotten Felines doesn't trap cats to euthanize them. She told the committee the Laguna colony is made up

of seven cats, four or five of which are neutered.

The "trap-neuter-release" program prevents the growth of a colony, and allows the cats to die out due to natural causes, Best said.

The population "definitely goes down through attrition" in a maintained colony, Best said.

But Evans said he believes there are more than seven

cats in the Laguna, and that maintaining the colony allows the cats to continue to impact native wildlife.

"The problem is that they are being fed" in violation of city parks regulations, Evans said. He said it is "disheartening" to see feral cats attack and kill small birds in the preserve.

Buckmann told the committee the Fish and Game department wants the cats to be removed as soon as possible.

"They're a serious problem in the Laguna," he said.

Committee member Kim Cordell said a maintained colony would be an attraction to people who want to abandon their pets, and that feeding a feral cat colony goes against the purpose of the Laguna preserve.

"We need to make a clear distinction here that these are wild areas and wild animals, and we can't be feeding them," Cordell said.

"People are dumping the cats; the cats aren't dumping

themselves," said committee member Jeff Edelheit.

Cordell introduced recommendations for the committee to make to the city council, including the creation of a management program for non-native animals in the preserve, public education on the dangers of abandoning pets, and a contact person within the city for issues with non-native animals.

The committee approved the recommendations by a 3-1 vote.

The last issue discussed dealt with homeless campers in the Laguna. The committee decided to hold off on a detailed discussion because homeless advocates were absent from the meeting.

However, they did recommend that the city council call for a meeting between homeless advocates and different agencies that own land in the Laguna, including the city of Sebastopol, the Department of Fish and Game and the city of Santa Rosa.