



Media Release

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PILOT PROJECT TESTS NON-LETHAL RABBIT CONTROL AT UVIC

The University of Victoria has entered into a pilot project agreement with Common Ground, a wildlife damage control company, as the next step toward a long-term management plan for the feral rabbit population on campus.

Under the agreement, Common Ground will test non-lethal approaches to remove at least 150 feral rabbits from areas in and around the university's athletic fields. The pilot project involves live capture, removal from campus, sterilization and relocation to new homes.

The project will also identify the most effective methods and administrative structures for a long-term management plan as well as potential costs, the community's capacity to respond and support a large-scale initiative, and the level of external resources such as donations and sponsorship that can be made available to assist.

"Our athletic fields were chosen for this pilot project because of the safety and potential health issues posed by the presence of rabbits," says Richard Piskor, director of UVic's Office of Occupational Health, Safety and Environment. "If this project proves successful, we will look at how the lessons learned can be applied elsewhere on campus within the context of a long-term management plan to reduce the rabbit population on university grounds to sustainable levels."

The feral rabbits at UVic are pets or descendants of pets that were abandoned on campus by members of the community. Although many people on and off-campus enjoy the presence of rabbits, their activities can pose risks to human health and safety, and cause damage to plants and property. The rabbits are also dispersing into surrounding neighbourhoods.

"Feral rabbits are a region-wide issue that got its start by irresponsible owners abandoning their pets in public spaces," says Piskor. "It affects not only UVic but also properties around the Capital Region and it's going to take a region-wide effort to resolve it by governments, municipalities, organizations and individuals."

"UVic recognizes we can play a key role by tackling the issue on our campus. This pilot project represents a significant step toward that goal."

Community members or organizations who are interested in volunteering, providing financial support, or potential new homes for the rabbits

captured during the pilot project are encouraged to contact Common Ground through <http://earthanimalrights.org>.

The university is also supporting ongoing efforts by the BC SPCA to encourage local governments to toughen up their bylaws dealing with rabbit abandonment and to consider banning the sale of unspayed and unneutered rabbits, except to registered or licensed breeders.

UVic is continuing its public awareness campaign to change how people view and interact with feral rabbits on campus. The campaign is aimed at preventing further rabbit abandonment, reducing human-provided food sources for rabbits and preventing harassment of and cruelty to rabbits.

Common Ground was the successful applicant in a request for proposals (RFP) process conducted in September. Since that time, UVic has been in discussions with Common Ground on elements of the project and has consulted with the BC Ministry of Environment, which has jurisdiction over feral rabbits under the BC Wildlife Act. Preliminary work starts immediately and the project will continue into January and February.

"The BC SPCA is pleased that UVic is taking this issue seriously and attempting non-lethal control methods as a pilot, but the abandonment of rabbits is a community-wide issue that needs community-supported solutions," says Sara Dubois, manager of wildlife services for the BC SPCA.

"Controlling the rabbit population on campus is in the best animal welfare interest of the rabbits and it is important that surrounding communities assist UVic's feral rabbit management through bylaw changes and public education programs," adds Dubois. "Members of the public need to understand both the responsibilities and rewards of owning a rabbit and that it is not only illegal to abandon their pets, but very inhumane."

For more information on the pilot project and the university's rabbit awareness campaign, visit www.uvic.ca/rabbits.

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