

TOWN OF PALM BEACH

Information for Town Council Meeting on: July 9, 2019

To: Mayor and Town Council

Via: Kirk W. Blouin, Town Manager

From: Jay Boodheshwar, Deputy Town Manager

Re: Report and Recommendation on Population Control of Invasive Green Iguanas

Date: July 1, 2019

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that Town Council review the following report and recommendations regarding the population control of invasive green iguanas and provide direction as necessary.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

At the June 11, 2019, Town Council meeting, staff was directed to prepare a report regarding the explosive growth in invasive green iguanas on the island and provide information about how to control their migration and reproduction.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission Information Regarding Green Iguanas

The green iguana is a large lizard that is green to brown to almost black in color, although they usually remain predominantly green as they mature. Some adults can take on an orange or pink coloration during certain times of the year. Hatchling and young green iguanas usually have bright green coloration. Male green iguanas can grow to over 5 feet in length and weigh up to 17 pounds. Females reach lengths similar to those of males, but usually do not exceed 7 pounds. Females typically reach reproductive maturity at two to four years of age. Females dig egg chambers that may contain nearly 80 feet of tunnels and multiple entrances and lay clutches of anywhere from 14-76 eggs. Green iguanas can live up to 10 years in the wild and 19 years in captivity.

Green iguanas can live on the ground, in shrubs, or in trees. Green iguanas are excellent swimmers and tolerate both salt and freshwater. They can submerge themselves for up to 4 hours at a time. Green iguanas feed on a wide variety of vegetation, including shoots, leaves, blossoms and fruits of plants such as nickerbean, firebush, jasmine, orchids, roses, Washington fan palms, hibiscuses, garden greens, squashes and melons. Adult green iguanas can also feed on bird eggs and dead animals. Juvenile green iguanas feed on vegetation, insects and tree snails.

The native range of green iguanas extends from Central America to the tropical parts of South America and some eastern Caribbean islands. Green iguanas were first reported in Florida in the 1960s in Hialeah, Coral Gables and Key Biscayne along Miami-Dade County's southeastern coast. Green iguana populations now stretch along the Atlantic Coast in Broward, Martin, Miami-Dade,

Monroe and Palm Beach Counties and along the Gulf Coast in Collier and Lee Counties. There have also been reports as far north as Alachua, Highlands, Hillsborough, Indian River and St. Lucie Counties. In cleared habitats such as canal banks and vacant lots, green iguanas reside in burrows, culverts, drainage pipes and rock or debris piles. South Florida's extensive man-made canals serve as ideal dispersal corridors to further allow iguanas to colonize new areas.

Green iguanas can cause damage to residential and commercial landscape vegetation, and are often considered a nuisance by property owners. Iguanas are attracted to trees with foliage or flowers, most fruits (except citrus) and almost any vegetable. Some green iguanas cause damage to infrastructure by digging burrows that erode and collapse sidewalks, foundations, seawalls, berms and canal banks. Green iguanas may also leave droppings on docks, moored boats, seawalls, porches, decks, pool platforms and inside swimming pools. As is the case with other reptiles, green iguanas can transmit the infectious bacterium *Salmonella* to humans through contact with water or surfaces contaminated by their feces.

Can I remove iguanas from my property?

Green iguanas are not protected in Florida except by anti-cruelty laws and can be killed on private property year-round with landowner permission. The FWC encourages removal of green iguanas from private properties by landowners. Captured iguanas cannot be relocated and released elsewhere. Hired trappers or homeowners who capture iguanas on their property may be able to obtain euthanasia services from local exotic veterinarians, humane societies or animal control offices depending on the location and availability of services. The FWC's PowerPoint on Iguana Technical Assistance for Homeowners provides more information (see attached).

How can I deter green iguanas from frequenting my property?

If you have an iguana frequenting your area, you can take steps to deter the animal such as modifying the habitat around your home or humanely harassing the animal. Examples of effective habitat modification and harassment include:

- Removing plants that act as attractants
- Filling in holes to discourage burrowing
- Hanging wind chimes or other items that make intermittent noises
- Hanging CDs that have reflective surfaces
- Spraying the animals with water as a deterrent

In addition to the Technical Assistance for Homeowners PowerPoint, also attached to this report is a detailed brochure produced by the FWC and a guide for dealing with iguanas prepared by the University of Florida.

(Source: Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission website)

Iguanas in Palm Beach

Green iguanas have frequented to south end of Palm Beach for many years, especially in the vicinity of the Par 3 Golf Course. Cold spells in winters past have helped to control their population but the recent warmer than usual winters have fostered population growth. About 50 to 75 iguanas live at the golf course. An estimated 100 more live in the vicinity of the golf course,

including Phipps Ocean Park, on Ibis Island, on the new mangrove islands in Lake Worth, and on greens spaces with dense vegetation along South Ocean Blvd. Smaller numbers of iguanas have been seen in the mid-town area on residential and golf course properties. They have also been seen in the far north end of Palm Beach. Without intervention, their population growth and migration north are expected to continue.

Staff recommends Town Council approval to begin removing iguanas from public properties and encouragement of private property owners to hire trappers to do the same. Without private cooperation, the population reduction effort will be limited.

PURCHASING RECOMMENDATION

Purchasing staff has researched trappers under contract with other municipalities actively dealing with iguana population control. There are numerous companies available but Purchasing is recommending that the Town engage Iguana Management and Removal Services, Inc. to remove iguanas from public properties, including the Par 3 Golf Course, parks and rights of ways, based on their reviews and pricing. They are licensed and insured to perform the services. This company handles large hotels on Miami Beach as well as golf courses in Miami and Coral Gables.

FUNDING/FISCAL IMPACT

Iguana Management and Removal Services has reported that they can remove between 100-200 iguanas of various sizes per day. The cost for capture and removal would be \$700 per day and staff expects to spend approximately \$3,500 to remove most of the iguanas from public properties over a 5-day period. Said expenses can be absorbed in the existing FY2019 budget so no additional appropriations are necessary at this time.

Attachments

Cc: Paul Brazil, Director of Public Works
Carolyn Stone, Director of Business Development and Operations
Jane Le Clainche, Director of Finance
Dean Mealy, Purchasing Manager