

Duking it out with the Vegas ducks

LAS VEGAS — This year, wild ducks invading golf courses, swimming pools and back yards to nest and raise their young is 10 times worse than in was a decade ago, according to Mel Anderson, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's district wildlife services supervisor.

His job is to capture wild ducks

from golf courses and back yards, by drugging and netting them, then returning them to the wild.

According to the *Las Vegas Review Journal*, there are at least 42 courses, parks, resorts and communities with lakes and ponds in the Las Vegas area that attract nesting pairs of mallards from the Pacific flyway, their migratory

route. They build their nests on just about any area that is shady and grassy, from the fairways of Summerlin's Palm Valley Golf Course to the Hard Rock Hotel.

Mike Cox, a Nevada Division of Wildlife biologist, estimated there are 1,000 adult, wild mallards that nest in Las Vegas in the spring, in addition to about 60 Canadian geese. Hundreds of coots and dozens of other duck

species, such as redheads and ringnecks, are also frequent visitors to the area, he added.

Anderson's technique for trapping a hen mallard and her brood is to put an immobilizing drug in the corn or bread baits that the hen eats. When she becomes drowsy, the ducklings are netted. "Then I keep them in a cage or dog carrier and take all the family and relocate them," Anderson said.

Sheep could baaa-dly delay Palm Springs development

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — A dispute between a local developer and a federal conservation agency over an endangered sheep could threaten a golf/real-estate project.

Developer Mark Bragg, head of Shadowrock Development Corp., said if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has its way, he won't be able to build the public course that is the centerpiece of his planned resort and residential development in the mountains near Palm Springs. A substantial portion of the land acquisition was financed from \$15 million in revenue bonds sold by the California Desert Public Financing Authority.

The controversy centers around the peninsula bighorn sheep, a subspecies of the Rocky Mountain bighorn that was recently added to the list of federally-protected endangered species. The Fish and Wildlife Service says Bragg's planned course interrupts the sheep's habitat, and late last year asked the developer to donate 100 acres and \$500,000 to help protect the animals, whose population has dropped by more than 75 percent in the last two decades, to just 280.

Bragg countered that he has already donated 600 acres for permanent bighorn sheep habitat out of a total of 900 acres he had available for a course. If he lops off another 100 acres from the remaining 300, Bragg argued, he won't be able to build the full 242-acre course and adjoining hotel and residential development.

Bragg told the agency earlier this year that he has redesigned the project in a way that moves it out of the agency's jurisdiction. But Pete Sorenson, USFWS division chief for the California desert, said recently that Shadowrock still needs a permit from the Fish and Wildlife Service for the project and must file a "habitat conservation plan" in order to obtain one.

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