

Proposal to Permit Ownership of a Pet Raccoon in Kansas

Submitted By: Stephen Kaspar

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Introduction

This proposal is submitted to the State of Kansas to request the legalization of raccoons as domesticated pets under regulated conditions. Raccoons, while traditionally considered wildlife, have increasingly proven to be adaptable, intelligent, and affectionate animals when raised in a controlled domestic environment. With proper regulations, Kansas can allow responsible ownership of raccoons without compromising public safety, animal welfare, or environmental integrity.

Background

Raccoons are currently classified as wildlife in Kansas, making private ownership illegal without proper licensing. However, other states, such as Oklahoma and Indiana, have established frameworks that allow raccoons to be kept as pets under specific conditions. These programs have shown that responsible ownership is feasible and does not pose significant risk to the public or wildlife populations.

Case Study: Nebraska

In Nebraska, individuals can legally keep raccoons as pets if they obtain a Captive Wildlife Permit from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The process includes:

1. Application and Fee

- Prospective owners must submit a completed application along with a fee of \$33.

2. Inspection

- Before issuing the permit, a Conservation Officer conducts an inspection of the applicant's property to ensure that enclosures provide adequate shelter and meet specified standards for the raccoon's well-being.

3. Permit Issuance

Case Study: Oklahoma

In Oklahoma, raccoons are legal to keep as pets with a permit and when purchased from a USDA-licensed breeder. To keep a raccoon as a pet, individuals must obtain a non-commercial breeder's permit, which costs \$48 and needs to be renewed annually. An inspection by a game warden is required before obtaining the raccoon.

Case Study: Indiana

In Indiana, raccoons are legal to keep as pets with a state-issued permit. The state requires individuals to meet specific standards for housing, care, and health.

Rabies Vaccination and USDA Requirements

When acquiring a pet raccoon from a USDA-licensed breeder, it is essential to follow vaccination guidelines to ensure the health and safety of the raccoon, the owner, and the public:

4. 1. USDA Regulations

- USDA-licensed breeders are required to ensure that raccoons under their care receive appropriate vaccinations, including for rabies.

5. 2. Rabies Vaccination Guidelines

- Initial Vaccination: Raccoons should receive their first rabies vaccination at 12 weeks of age.
- Booster Shots: A booster is recommended 3–4 weeks after the initial vaccination, followed by annual boosters to maintain immunity.

6. 3. State Compliance

- States like Florida mandate rabies vaccinations for pet raccoons. Kansas could implement similar measures to safeguard public health.

7. 4. Veterinary Care

- Regular check-ups with veterinarians experienced in exotic animals will ensure raccoons are healthy and vaccinated appropriately.

USDA Breeder Requirement

To ensure the ethical and responsible ownership of pet raccoons, all raccoons must be purchased through USDA-licensed breeders. No wild raccoons will be allowed to be captured, kept, or owned under any circumstances. This provision ensures:

8. 1. Animal Welfare:

- Purchasing raccoons from USDA-licensed breeders guarantees that the animals are raised in humane conditions and are free from diseases commonly found in wild populations.

9. 2. Public Safety:

- Preventing the capture of wild raccoons reduces the risk of zoonotic diseases and aggressive behavior, as wild raccoons are not accustomed to human interaction.

10. 3. Conservation Efforts:

- Prohibiting the capture of wild raccoons helps preserve local wildlife populations and ecosystems, ensuring raccoons remain part of their natural habitat.

Veterinary Recommendations for Raccoon Care

Veterinarians emphasize the importance of specific health measures to ensure the well-being of pet raccoons and to prevent the spread of diseases:

11. 1. Vaccinations

- Rabies: Raccoons should receive the rabies vaccine to prevent transmission of the virus.
- Canine Distemper and Parvovirus: Vaccinations are recommended, as raccoons can contract these diseases.
- Feline Panleukopenia (Feline Distemper): This vaccine is also recommended for raccoons.

12. 2. Health Monitoring

- Regular Check-ups: Routine veterinary visits are essential to monitor health and address any concerns.
- Parasite Prevention: Implement measures to protect raccoons from internal and external parasites.

13. 3. Behavioral and Environmental Considerations

- Socialization: Raccoons are intelligent and curious, requiring enrichment and social interaction.
- Safety Measures: Secure enclosures are essential to prevent escapes and ensure public safety.
- Diet: A balanced diet appropriate for raccoons is necessary to prevent obesity and related health issues.

Proposal Overview

This proposal seeks to introduce a regulated framework for the private ownership of raccoons as pets in Kansas. Key components include:

14. 1. Licensing and Permits

- Owners must obtain a permit from the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.
- Permits will require proof of adequate housing, care plans, and veterinary support.

15. 2. Health and Vaccination Requirements

- Raccoons must be vaccinated against rabies and other transmissible diseases.
- Regular veterinary check-ups will be mandatory.

16. 3. Housing and Care Standards

- Owners must provide a safe, secure, and stimulating environment for the raccoon.
- Enclosures should meet minimum size and enrichment standards.

17. 4. Breeding Restrictions

- Breeding raccoons in captivity will be prohibited to prevent overpopulation.

18. 5. Education and Training

- Owners must complete a brief educational program on raccoon behavior, care, and handling.

Public Education and Awareness Programs

To ensure responsible pet ownership and the safe handling of raccoons, the following educational initiatives will be implemented:

19. 1. Public Awareness Campaign

- Kansas residents will be educated about the needs, care, and responsibilities associated with owning a pet raccoon through public awareness campaigns. This includes information on proper care, habitat needs, and health precautions.

20. 2. Owner Education Programs

- Before obtaining a permit, potential pet raccoon owners will be required to complete an educational course on the basics of raccoon care, handling, and legal obligations. These courses will be offered by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks or approved animal welfare organizations.

Enforcement and Monitoring

To ensure compliance with these new regulations, the following measures will be put in place:

21. 1. Periodic Inspections

- The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will conduct periodic inspections of pet raccoon owners' facilities to ensure they are providing proper care, meeting housing standards, and adhering to health and vaccination protocols.

22. 2. Reporting Mechanism for Violations

- A system will be established for the public to report any violations of raccoon ownership regulations, such as escape, neglect, or illegal breeding. These reports will be investigated promptly to ensure public safety and animal welfare.

Rehoming and Euthanasia Procedures for Unfit Owners

In the event that an owner is found unfit to care for their pet raccoon, a clear protocol will be established to ensure the animal's well-being:

23. 1. Assessment of Fitness

- Owners will be periodically assessed to ensure they are providing appropriate care. If an owner is found neglecting their pet or failing to meet the care standards, they may be deemed unfit.

24. 2. Rehoming

- If an owner is found unfit, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will work with animal rescue organizations or sanctuaries to find a suitable new home for the raccoon. This will ensure the animal is cared for in a safe, controlled environment.

25. 3. Euthanasia as a Last Resort

- In rare cases where rehoming is not possible, or the raccoon's health is in critical condition due to neglect, euthanasia may be considered. This will be done following humane practices and in accordance with state regulations.

Establishing USDA-Licensed Breeders in Kansas

To ensure the ethical sourcing of pet raccoons, Kansas will work to establish a framework for USDA-licensed breeders who can legally breed and sell raccoons to responsible owners. Key elements include:

26. 1. USDA Licensing for Breeders

- A system will be set up for breeders to obtain USDA licensing, which ensures that they meet the necessary standards for animal care, health, and safety.
- Breeders will be required to maintain detailed records of each animal, including vaccination history and care practices.

27. 2. Breeder Inspections

- USDA-licensed breeders will undergo regular inspections to ensure compliance with animal welfare standards, including the proper handling, housing, and health care of raccoons.

28. 3. Breeding Restrictions

- Breeding raccoons will be strictly regulated to prevent overpopulation and ensure that all raccoons are raised in safe, humane environments.

Benefits of Allowing Pet Raccoons

29. 1. Promotes Responsible Pet Ownership

- By establishing clear guidelines, Kansas can ensure raccoons are raised humanely and responsibly.

30. 2. Economic Opportunities

- Licensing fees, veterinary care, and raccoon-specific products create economic activity.

31. 3. Improved Animal Welfare

- Legalizing ownership reduces the risk of illegal capture and improper care.

32. 4. Public Engagement with Wildlife

- Pet raccoons can serve as educational ambassadors, fostering greater appreciation for Kansas wildlife.

Addressing Potential Concerns

33. 1. Public Safety

- Proper training and secure enclosures will minimize risks of escape or harm.

34. 2. Wildlife Impact

- Strict breeding prohibitions and tracking of ownership will prevent interference with wild populations.

35. 3. Health Risks

- Mandatory vaccinations and regular veterinary care will mitigate risks of zoonotic diseases.

Conclusion

Legalizing raccoons as pets under a regulated framework will allow Kansas residents to responsibly enjoy the companionship of these unique animals while maintaining public safety and wildlife conservation. I urge the State of Kansas to consider this proposal and look forward to discussing its implementation in detail.

Supporting Documentation

- Case studies from other states allowing raccoon ownership
- Recommendations from veterinarians and wildlife experts
- Draft regulations for raccoon ownership in Kansas

Statewide Preemption of Local Regulations

To ensure consistency across Kansas, this proposal includes a provision explicitly preempting local governments from enacting ordinances or regulations that conflict with the state law on pet raccoon ownership. Specifically:

36. 1. Preemption Clause

- Cities, counties, and other local jurisdictions will not have the authority to ban or restrict the ownership of pet raccoons if the owner complies with state laws and regulations.

37. 2. Uniform Standards

- The regulation and oversight of pet raccoons will be governed exclusively at the state level, ensuring all Kansas residents have equal rights and responsibilities regarding raccoon ownership.

38. 3. Reasoning for Preemption

- Allowing cities or counties to create conflicting ordinances could lead to confusion, unequal treatment of residents, and unnecessary burdens on raccoon owners.
- Statewide regulation provides a clear, consistent framework for enforcement and public understanding.

39. 4. Enforcement of State Law

- Any attempt by a local government to regulate pet raccoons in conflict with state law will be null and void. The Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks will retain sole authority to enforce regulations on pet raccoons.

- Upon successful inspection, the permit is granted, allowing the individual to purchase raccoons from USDA-licensed breeders.

This structured approach ensures that raccoon ownership in Nebraska is conducted responsibly, with attention to both animal welfare and public safety.