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BIOLOGISTS TAIL COYOTES TO STUDY BEHAVIOR, HEALTH

Working with a coalition of regional partners, researchers from Metro Parks, Serving Summit County have started tracking coyotes as part of a multi-year project aimed at learning about the wild canines' range, diet and overall health.

Mike Johnson, the park district's chief of natural resources, said five coyotes in northern Summit County were fitted with VHF radio collars last fall and blood samples were taken. The coyotes' daytime whereabouts are recorded daily using a vehicle-mounted antenna, which picks up the radio signals, and once a week staff and volunteers go out at night to determine their evening locations.

Later this year, Johnson said his staff intends to track up to 10 more coyotes, this time using GPS collars, which will allow biologists to simply download the animals' locations.

Both Metro Parks, Serving Summit County and Cuyahoga Valley National Park have previously conducted howling surveys, in which coyote calls are played at night and responses from the animals are tallied, helping researchers determine how many coyotes live in select areas. The studies have suggested annual increases of up to 14 percent, but population densities are still unknown.

"Some research has been completed on coyotes in our region, but there are still many basic questions," Johnson said. "Where are they? How many are in a given park? What are their ranges? Where do they go? Are they healthy? These are some of the questions we're trying to answer," he said.

Biologist Marlo Perdicas, who is leading the park district's efforts, said the team has made a lot of observations – including one young female that has traveled between Furnace Run Metro Park in Richfield and Sand Run Metro Park in Akron – but the data has not yet been analyzed.

Johnson believes new findings may help corroborate other studies of urban and rural coyotes east of the Mississippi River, including work done in the Chicago region by Dr. Stan Gehrt of The Ohio State University. He said obtaining data on Northeast Ohio's population will increase public awareness of coyotes and their habits, and may help diffuse future human-wildlife conflicts.

The University of Akron, Cuyahoga Valley National Park and nonprofit conservation foundation Wild4Ever are providing partial funding and/or field biologists for the new project. Support is also being provided by The Ohio State University and Cleveland Metroparks. A special study permit was issued by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife.

Coyotes, found throughout Ohio and in each of the Metro Parks, resemble small German shepherds. The slender animals have bushy, black-tipped tails. Most are gray, though some have brown, off-white or rust-colored coats. Males are larger than females and can weigh between 20 to 40 pounds.

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Metro Parks, Serving Summit County manages 10,000 acres, including 13 developed parks, six conservation areas and more than 120 miles of trails, with 21.5 miles of the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail. Annual attendance averages 4.5 million visitors.