CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL REGULATION
111 EAST FIRST STREET
624-5211, EXT. 1771

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DECEMBER 9, 1969

JIM MC NAMARA

The Los Angeles City Department of Animal Regulation has embarked on a new wild life conservation program designed to return stray undomesticated animals to their natural habitat by helicopter.

Mayor Sam Yorty announced the revolutionary concept today at the Van Nuys Airport when a group of animals was flown from the site to areas of re-location.

The Mayor said the airborne program, labelled "Animal Airlift," is the first of its kind in the country, and added "what can be done here can be accomplished elsewhere".

Yorty urged other cities and counties in the country to re-evaluate their wildlife problems.

"Virtually every community has some form of wild animal life to consider," he said. "It's a problem that requires constant attention and remedial action."

Robert I. Rush, General Manager of the Department of Animal Regulation, noted there are two basic courses of action open in solving the complexities created by wild animals in areas of human habitation. One, he said, is wholesale destruction of wild animal life; the other entails re-location and conservation of the animals.

(more)

"Our Department believes in the conservation approach," Rush declared. "Wild animals were placed on this earth for a purpose. For one thing, they play a vital role in the balance of nature. It is incumbent on all of us to preserve the lives of animals whose fate is ours to decide."

Only animals native to California are released back to the wilds. Other animals are given sanctuary in zoos or similar facilities.

Land, air and water, Rush emphasized, are the key elements of animal habitat. With Los Angeles' booming population daily encroaching on wildlife domains and eliminating these elements of survival, it is the responsibility of man, according to Rush, to re-locate animals who are losing their homes.

Yorty pointed out that with the use of the helicopter, which saves time and money in re-locating animals, Los Angeles has established an animal conservation program that other communities might want to emulate.

He said "success of any conservation program hinges on individual community initiative. Accordingly, it behooves all local governmental agencies to expedite all conservation efforts, not only in terms of wildlife, but in areas embracing all forms of resources. These community efforts should be implemented in concert with State and Federal Conservation Agencies.

"Conversely," he added, "the State and Federal Agencies should encourage and support local government in this activity."

(more)

Yorty hit strongly at what he termed were "lackadaisical" attitudes by many in the sphere of animal conservation.

"Federal and State Agencies are realistically concerned about conservation only in the areas where their jurisdiction is clearly defined," he said. "Where local autonomy prevails, these Agencies are not actively interested in the welfare of wildlife.

"Thus, the tendency of many urban developments, whether they be counties, cities or small town, is to solve their wildlife problems in the most convenient and expeditious manner--that of destruction or total disregard.

"This type of action," declared Yorty, "constitutes a waste of a natural gift."

"Most communities do not have a conservation program, and where this deplorable void exists, the citizens should ask their representatives at all government levels what is occurring to their wildlife and press for strong measures in the interests of animal conservation and worthwhile humanitarian effort.

"Conservation is a local and national concern," Yorty said, "and the role of the individual is vital to its success."

The Los Angeles conservation project, currently under the supervision of George W. Mason, Animal Shelter Supervisor, was launched in 1960, but a major change occurred in September, 1969 when helicopters were pressed into service. Through the

(more)

use of air transportation, it became possible to re-locate animals in more favorable areas which are inaccessible to ground vehicles.

The program now involves the human trapping of wildlife in fringe residential areas of the City and flying the cargo to remote areas of Angeles National Forest (35 miles northeast of the City) and releasing the animals in natural surroundings necessary for their survival.

Once each week, wildlife specimens are collected by Mason and Ray Schutte, Chief Helicopter Pilot for the City's Bureau of Transportation (Board of Public Works) from the five Los Angeles City Animal Shelters.

The Shelters are located at 215 West Ann Street; 11950 Missouri Avenue, West Los Angeles; 13131 Sherman Way, North Hollywood; 3612 Eleventh Avenue; and 735 Battery Street, San Pedro.

The helicopter is based at 1000 South Flower Street in Glendale, and makes landings at heliports near the Shelters.

Joe Purko, Director of the Bureau of Transportation, said the helicopter is capable of carrying the animals with no modification to the aircraft.

The flying cargo on any trip may include opposum, raccoons, foxes, hawks or any small creature indigenous to California forested areas. Usually, twelve to sixteen specimens comprise the manifest. Other forms of wildlife such as deer which cannot be transported by helicopter are re-located by Animal Collection Vehicles.

(more)

From September 11 to December 9, 1969, 12 flights have been made with 127 animals re-located. It is anticipated that well over 1200 wild animals will be returned to the wilderness in the coming year by helicopter. The ground release areas have been carefully selected by Leon Fisher, Game Manager of the Angeles National Forest and with stress laid on the availability of water, food and shelter.

The program has been endorsed by the California Fish and Game Department, the U.S. Forestry Service and the Audubon Society of Los Angeles.

--30--