CITY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL REGULATION
111 EAST FIRST STREET

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Immediate Release

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Animal Airlift Third Anniversary

The City of Los Angeles has given 1385 wild animals a second chance for survival in the past three years.

The "second chance" animals are those which have been humanely trapped in the City of Los Angeles, loaded aboard a helicopter and flown to Angeles National Forest for relocation.

The unique conservation program is called "Animal Airlift" and was initiated September 11, 1969. Mayor Sam Yorty, who assisted in loading the first wild animal cargo for the inaugural helicopter flight out of Van Nuys Municipal Airport, strongly endorses the program as a prime example of humanitarian enterprise.

Since the inception of the program, originated by Robert I. Rush, general manager of the City Department of Animal Regulation, small wild creatures displaced by expanding urban projects, have been transported to the national forest in weekly flights.

The animals, including raccoons, opossum, foxes, squirrels, rabbits, owls, hawks and non-poisonous snakes, are generally trapped in outlying areas of the city at the request of harried home owners, who, for some reason or another, find the animals ~~to be~~ a nuisance. Humane box traps are set by Animal Regulation Department wildlife officers. The

trapped animals are placed in safe comfortable cages at a neighboring animal shelter and held BUT a few days, ~~at most,~~ before departing on the Airlift for new homes in the wilderness.

For the 35-mile flight to the Forest, the animals are placed in ventilated boxes and secured to the frame of the helicopter. Flying the Airlift are George W. Mason, district supervisor of the West Valley Animal Shelter, the ~~current~~ base of flight origination, and Ray Schutte, city helicopter pilot.

Larry Forbis, wildlife biologist for Angeles National Forest, assists Mason and Schutte in selecting release sites for the animals. (Availability of food, water and shelter are priority factors in selecting the sites.)

Only animals native to California are released back to the wilds. Other wild animals found in the city are given sanctuary in zoos or similar facilities. Deer, frequently found in Los Angeles urban areas, are corralled and returned to a native habitat by vehicle.

Rush urges other states and communities to emulate the Los Angeles wildlife conservation program.

"Wild animals are an integral part of our existence," he says, "and they're fast disappearing because of man's neglect, and in many cases, because of his short-sighted evaluation of a precious commodity--a natural gift.

"The City of Los Angeles prefers to protect that gift."