

Mute swans have certainly garnered a lot of press recently both locally and nationally. The story that made national news was that a federal Appeals Court had ruled against a group that challenged an Act of Congress that stripped wildlife protection from non-native birds including mute swans.

That ruling has paved the way for several state governments to continue their programs of killing the mute swans in order to restore other indigenous swan species and to try and reverse some of the damage to local ecosystems that the birds are causing. This is especially true in Chesapeake Bay where the birds are accused of destroying submerged aquatic vegetation and forcing out native waterfowl species.

A flock of mute swans reside out in the Salem area and I have observed at least one of these flocks on numerous occasions while fishing out on Camp Lake. Never once did it dawn on me that these swans which seemed so peaceful were part of a large controversy that is spread across many states. Indeed, until recently I did not know these swans were a non-native species.

Our local DNR biologists have indicated that they have also been working to eliminate this flock in order that they too can start reintroducing swan species that indigenous to our area.

Many local outdoorsmen became aware of this situation last April during the Kenosha County DNR Spring Hearing held at the Bristol grade school.

I had noticed at the start of the meeting that there was a group of women in attendance. While having a few women in attendance is uncommon, those who normally attend are generally seen there with their husbands. This group of women appeared to be there by themselves.

My thoughts at the time were that this may have been a group who had attended the meetings in 2005 to take part in the vote for the infamous cat hunt proposal and were also attending the 2006 meeting to keep an eye on us crazy outdoor people.

However, when it came for the portion of the meeting that allowed for local resolutions, they submitted one that asked for the DNR to quit killing their swans.

At first it appeared there was general agreement by the people around me to vote yes to that resolution as I am sure most people were thinking that it was some silly DNR program that made no sense and was wasting money. That was until one person in the crowd asked the DNR why they wanted to kill the swans.

After the DNR biologist explained that this was not an indigenous species and why they wanted to remove them, it was apparent that the mood of the group around me changed from being for this group's resolution to siding with the DNR. In fact the resolution failed in a vote of 12 to 32.

Reflecting that vote by local outdoorsman, were the positions taken by Ducks Unlimited and the Safari Club which are two well known outdoor groups. Both supported the government in the federal lawsuit and issued press releases praising the court's decision removing the birds from protection.

Unless they're a bloody thirsty individual, I can't see anyone taking pleasure in the fact that these mute swans are being killed. If possible, the preferred method I am sure would be to move them to a better location. However, the fact that they are not indigenous to North America and are causing issues in other locations means that is not an option.

The argument has been made by the people who want to keep the swans that though they are not indigenous, they have become a part of the local ecosystem. I don't buy it, especially not here on our lakes. There doesn't seem to be any animal or plant species that now rely on the presence on these mute swans. If there are any, they probably wouldn't be welcome either.

What this mostly comes down to is that residents who have gotten used to the swans just don't want to see them removed. However, for the benefit of our lakes and the especially for improving the likelihood that indigenous swans can again be found on our local bodies of water, it seems to be best thing to do.

Terry Bitz