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Opinion: Julie Marshall: Mindless cruelty for the sake of a tidy park

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Julie Marshall For the Camera

There are so many things wrong with Colorado's latest planned attack on wildlife — it's hard to know where to begin.

Two weeks ago, our tax dollars paid a gaggle of federal employees to stalk Canada geese by land and by lake at Denver's highly popular Washington Park, without witnesses, at the break of dawn. It was hardly a stealthy operation, because seasonally molting geese cannot fly.

The goose hunt was triggered by Denver Parks and Recreation, whose manager, Scott Gilmore, explains that it's mostly about poop. People complain a lot about goose poop, he says.

And so up to 2,200 geese will be rounded up this year, poisoned or gassed, and churned into meat to feed to poor families, our government tells us.

My friend, Lizzie, just texted me after one week and a half of goose captures: "We walked the park this AM and i thought it was odd that there were no geese (when there have been TONS, goslings included)."

If this were about feeding indigent families, which it's not, killing wildlife in such an unsportsmanlike way is not only repugnant, but insulting to those who are seriously working to stop rampant food waste and to help those in need. Just today at King Soopers I asked the deli worker what they do with the unsold fried chicken at the end of the day. His answer: We throw it out.

The fact that our state hired the feds — an agency called Wildlife Services, an arm of the U.S. Department of Agriculture — is telling. Formerly called Animal Damage Control, this program changed its name after earning a soiled reputation for trapping, poisoning, shooting from aircraft, chasing down and burning out of their dens millions of birds and hundreds of coyotes, beavers, skunks, raccoons, bears, mountain lions, badgers, foxes, bobcats and, inadvertently, many dogs and cats annually, costing taxpayers tens of millions of dollars. One employee was so disgusted with what his agency was doing to wildlife, he stacked 11 severed heads of lions killed by government workers in a pyramid beneath a tree and took a photograph.

Despite this activity, we did see a monumental shift toward humane treatment of wildlife across many states throughout the 1990s; in Colorado, we banned grisly steel-jawed leghold traps, and the unsportsmanlike act of baiting bears with doughnuts for an easy kill. While the alarming reversal of such important progress is another topic for another column, there is a sense that the larger threat to wildlife is not the hired triggerman, nor the bad apple hunter, but rather the urban citizen who has no broadbased understanding of our natural history beyond selfish experience.