

Text of letter to school board Superintendent re: skunk in distress on school property:

On Wednesday, March 5th, our custodian arrived at work to find a small skunk huddled against an outside wall of the school, behind a compost bin. It was very cold and he could see that the animal was shivering. We sought advice from Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, a Ministry of Natural Resources licensed facility that specializes in the rescue and care of native mammals, and our custodian followed Board protocol and informed his supervisor of the skunk's presence. Our concerns that day were as follows:

1. An animal on school property was in obvious distress and in need of help;
2. The animal presented a potential health and safety risk to people in the immediate area;
3. Students were aware of the animal's presence and were expecting staff to demonstrate compassion and assist;
4. The temperatures were such that the animal would not likely survive another night outdoors.

Unfortunately, someone at the board office said that no one but the SPCA could remove the skunk, and the SPCA told us they were not authorized to come on school property. Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary published a story about the red tape that stranded the skunk, as their March 7th weekly column in the Parry Sound North Star. We have attached a copy of the article to this letter, as it outlines in more detail the various solutions that were proposed and rejected.

We believe that board policy regarding native wildlife on school property is too restrictive and needs to be updated. MNR-licensed wildlife custodians should be included on the list of personnel who can provide physical assistance, in such situations. They are among the most competent wildlife handlers in the province and have the license, expertise and facilities to care of wild animals in need.

Thank you, in advance, for considering this incident, and for taking whatever action you deem appropriate. Please let us know what follow-up the board intends to take.

P.S. We have been in contact with the wildlife sanctuary that is currently caring for the skunk. They believe she is a healthy young animal that simply woke up too early from winter hibernation. The skunk has responded well to treatment and will be released back into the wild after the snow has melted and she can find food and shelter.