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DATE: April 15, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Distemper found in Haywood County

Haywood County has experienced an increase in the confirmed number of canine distemper cases. Since the beginning of March three raccoons (Clyde, Ironduff, Waynesville,) a fox (Maggie Valley) and a dog (Rabbit Skin Rd.) have tested positive for canine distemper virus infection. Canine distemper is a highly contagious and serious disease caused by a virus that attacks an animal's respiratory, gastrointestinal and nervous systems. In wildlife, infection with canine distemper closely resembles rabies. Wild animals with distemper appear to act tame or confused and are often disoriented and found wandering aimlessly during the day. Their sense of fear of humans is lost. The public will not typically witness these behaviors until the latter stages of the disease, by which point, most of these animals have suffered irreversible neurological complications and will soon die.

Haywood County Animal Services and the Haywood County Health & Human Services Agency wish to share the following information:

- Contact between wild animals and pet dogs can facilitate the spread of the virus. Unlike rabies, people cannot contract distemper.
- All dogs are at risk, but puppies younger than four months and dogs that have not been vaccinated against canine distemper are at increased risk of acquiring the disease.
- There is no cure for canine distemper infection. It is often fatal, and dogs that survive usually have permanent, irreparable nervous system damage.
- Vaccination is crucial in preventing canine distemper. Contact your local veterinarian to be sure your pet's vaccinations are up to date.
- Use caution when socializing puppies or unvaccinated dogs at parks, puppy classes, obedience classes, doggy day care and other places where dogs can gather.

Haywood County Animal Services Director Doyle Teague is urging anyone that sees unusual behavior being displayed by a wild animal (i.e. raccoon, skunk, coyote, fox) to **avoid contact with the potentially infected animal and call Haywood County Animal Services at 828-456-5338 immediately.**

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