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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 24, 2011

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RABIES CASES IN WILDLIFE INCREASE

--Protect yourself and your pets from rabies--

Tallahassee—Richard Ziegler, Director of Leon County Animal Control, warns citizens to use extra caution when they see wild animals, especially raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes and bats, to protect themselves and their pets from the dangers of rabies. A rabies vaccination is the first line of defense for pets.

Since September 27, there have been four cases of domestic animals and one human being exposed to raccoons that were acting strangely. The first case was a baby raccoon that attacked a pet dog near Charleston Road, off Centerville Road just north of I-10. The owner was bitten when he pulled the raccoon away from the dog, while the raccoon fled into the woods. The owner was advised to contact the Health Department. The dog was current on his rabies vaccination and is under a 45-day quarantine.

The other three raccoons were each captured, tested, and found to be positive for the rabies virus. Five pet dogs were exposed in these three incidents. "Exposure" can include bites, scratches and saliva in the eye, mouth or nose. All of the exposed pet dogs are current on their rabies vaccinations and are under a 45-day quarantine.

These three cases were scattered around Leon County, including two cases in the northeast at Thornton Road between Miccosukee Road and Mahan Drive (one dog), and O'Brien Road off Shamrock North (three dogs). The third case was in the northwest on Ox Bow Trace off Ox Bottom Road (one dog).

"People and their pets are out enjoying the beautiful weather, so they need to be especially alert to wildlife," Ziegler said. "Many of the raccoons displayed unusual behavior such as wobbling, walking in circles, staggering, attacking objects, having a discharge from the nose or eyes, and acting disoriented. Whenever you see a raccoon showing these symptoms, keep away and secure your pets," Ziegler added.

Rabies is a virus that is transmitted from animal to animal or animal to human, usually by a bite from an infected animal. Raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes and bats are all common carriers of the virus. To prevent the spread of rabies, take the following steps:

- Keep your pet's rabies vaccination current.
- Keep children and pets away from wildlife.
- Keep pets indoors, if possible.
- Do not feed wildlife.
- Do not leave food outside or accessible to wildlife.

If you are bitten, scratched or spat upon by a wild animal, seek medical attention immediately and wash the wound with soap and water. Also if you see sick animals, contact Leon County Animal Control at 606-5400 for assistance. For more information, please call Richard Ziegler at 606-5400.

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