Quack if you like half-cent tax

For half a penny, you can prevent a plague.
Not通知: Duck.

Duck plague might sound silly to you compared to the Black Death. If you’re a blue-winged soul, there’s nothing funny about the Quack Death.

And you can help prevent it Tuesday.
That’s when Rapid City voters will decide whether to keep a half-cent sales tax that is set to expire in 1995. The tax originally helped pay for Rapid City Plaza Civic Center.

Mayor Joe McLaughlin and others want to see the tax to help pay for recycling, recreation, tourism, and economic development.
The tax would cost an average citizen $3 in a year. The sales tax also would pay for replenishing Canyon Lake. Please one would cost $2.2 million.

Here’s the problem:
When the lake was rebuilt after the 1972 flood, engineers constructed an island to divert water to dead zones.
It didn’t work. Not enough water flows north of the lake.
The solution is to drain and dredge the lake, then build a jetty on the island to better control the flow of water.
The city also would build a pedestrian bridge to the island and add other amenities.

Which brings me back to ducks.
The city culminates 6,000 ducks live at the lake.
Bird watchers say there are more — maybe as many as 2,000.
Wildlife experts say 100 ducks would be about right for Canyon Lake.

Why should you care?
A few years ago, when the city’s water began testing and smelling like Chateau Lafitte irrigation ditch, the problem seemed not to be — how can I put this delicately? — duck droppings.
The unpleasantness abated, but the ducks remain. Environmentally, the lake still gets low marks for its duck crap.

And excess duck droppings also hurt ducks, which brings me back to the plague.

My friend Dan O’Brien, a wildlife expert, says Canyon Lake is the duck equivalent of 19th century Europe.

“T’s not a strain,” O’Brien told me. “You get one duck with plague in there, and they’re all going to drop over dead.”

O’Brien also points out that domestic ducks released at Canyon Lake are mating with wild ducks to produce a deadly hybrid.

Then humans feed the ducks, further exaggerating their wild ways. That’s a magnification idea, and its beautiful creatures becomes a giant fertilizer-producing penning zoo.

Suffering succubi?
Obviously, we don’t have to spend millions to get rid of a few ducks.

We could try to relocate them, but O’Brien is skeptical about that plan. “They’d probably beat you home,” he said.

His suggestion: “They make great cat food.”

That’s a fairly temporary solution. Filling the lake might solve the problem for the long term.

Ducks and the overgrown island in Canyon Lake because humans and other animals can’t get there. Clean up the island, build a bridge to it, and the ducks would then disappear.

Of course, we’d also have to stop feeding them.

I know. It’s fun for the kids. And the lake project is expensive.

So tell me, how many parts per million of duck poop can you tolerate in a glass of water?

My answer is, damn few.