

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2022**

SUBJECT **Goose Management Update**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To report back on a Goose Management Service and provide results of recent Canada goose population surveys in the capital region.

BACKGROUND

Ongoing environmental, economic, and health impacts from expanding populations of non-migratory Canada geese continue to affect municipalities, parks, farmers, businesses, health agencies and airport authorities in the capital region and across Vancouver Island.

In August 2020, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board directed staff to provide a report on a Canada Goose Management Service.

In 2021, CRD staff established a Memorandum of Understanding with the Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuaries Society (GoMIES) to (1) provide a summary report (Appendix A) of Canada goose population estimates and trends using historical and current survey data, as well as known/suspected nesting locations and goose hotspots; and (2) develop a draft action plan that includes longer-term mitigation activities with a proposed budget (Appendix B).

The increasing population of Canada geese will continue to put significant pressure on regional and municipal resources, parks and recreational fields, beaches, estuaries and agricultural crops, if coordinated population control actions are not implemented.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That staff bring back a report outlining costs for a Canada Goose Management Service.

Alternative 2

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:
That staff bring a Canada Goose Management Service forward for the 2024-2028 service planning and budget cycle.

Alternative 3

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental & Climate Implications

The current Vancouver Island Canada goose population ranges from 10,000 to 15,000, with an estimated 3,500-7,000 birds over-wintering in the capital region (Appendix A). Data from banded birds confirms that Canada geese are moving between regions on Vancouver Island. In the capital region, the Canada goose population had an annual growth rate of 16% from 1977-1997 (Christmas bird count), while survey data from 2017-2021 indicates the population is roughly doubling every 4.3 years.

Surveys in 2020 and 2021 identified Sooke Basin, Esquimalt Lagoon, Portage Inlet and Gorge Waterway, Victoria/Oak Bay southeast shoreline and near shore islets, and the east coast of Saanich Peninsula from Sidney to Tsartlip Nation Reserve lands as key hotspots where moulting geese congregate. Nest and egg surveys conducted by GoMIES located 168 nests and added 854 eggs in 2020 and found 241 nests and added 1,282 eggs in 2021.

While there are a suite of tools for managing Canada goose populations, recent discussions indicate most local governments, farmers and large land owners rely on hazing techniques (using dogs, noise and lights) to deter Canada geese from their jurisdictions; very few of these groups conduct regular egg addling, while some farmers have obtained hunting permits.

Hazing is proving effective to manage the volume of goose droppings that accumulate where large flocks congregate; however, the 2020-2021 nest surveys indicate that reliance on this method is likely moving goose nesting activities to nearby quarries and off shore islands, many of which are part of the BC Parks Ecological Reserves. Hazing also does nothing to reduce goose populations over the long term.

To see a significant reduction in Canada goose populations, regionally coordinated population control measures, such as egg addling and regular goose harvests, need to be implemented. A humane harvesting program could include efforts to utilize all parts of the bird and ideally would provide a significant food source (i.e., City of Victoria Set the Table program, homeless shelters). Opportunities to support and provide training for First Nations Guardian programs to implement a regional egg addling program and to participate in repairing the goose impacts to important estuary and wetland habitats could also be explored.

The inconsistent and uncoordinated approach across the region has resulted in moving geese and their associated impacts into new areas, continued expansion of nesting and over-wintering Canada goose populations, and more significant ecological, economic, social impacts to agricultural and recreational facilities, estuaries and wetlands, large land owners and local governments.

Stewardship groups report significant and ongoing damage to native ecosystems on nearshore islands and to important estuaries, as a result of increasing goose populations, while the farming community reports significant and ongoing agricultural and economic impacts from geese.

Intergovernmental and First Nations Implications

The Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy, endorsed by the CRD Board in 2012, is being implemented in an ad hoc fashion by some key stakeholders. Coordination of roles and responsibilities between all levels of government, First Nations, Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission (PAAC), large land holders, and community groups is required. Preliminary conversations also indicate a need for inter-regional conversations and collaborations across Vancouver Island and perhaps the Salish Sea.

In early 2022, CRD and GoMIES staff initiated conversations with local government staff, large property owners (Recreation Centres, Department of National Defence, and School Districts), other governments (some First Nations, the Province) and PAAC to discuss a regional collaborative approach and obtain funding contributions toward an egg addling program. There was general support for a more coordinated regional approach and \$30,000 was obtained to contract GoMIES to conduct egg addling through April and May in key nesting hotspots around the region.

Social Implications

Public education outlining the problems associated with too many geese would be an important component of a goose management service. Under a new service, a coordinated communications strategy with an education and awareness program would be developed and implemented to help residents understand the impacts Canada goose populations are having, the need for more aggressive and coordinated population control tactics to be implemented, and to engage the community in helping to protect and restore ecological habitats that have been negatively impacted by Canada geese.

Financial Implications

The proposed Action Plan developed by GoMIES includes a regional egg addling program, regular summer and winter population surveys, development of outreach materials and establishing additional partners. The action plan does not include goose harvests. The estimated cost for a regional egg addling and population monitoring program is \$120,000 annually.

A Canada Goose Management service would require additional staff resources to: establish collaborative partnerships and build alliances with other agencies, First Nations and key stakeholders within the region (and inter-regionally as necessary); facilitate the development and implementation of a communications strategy; develop educational outreach materials, manage egg addling contracts with non-profits and First Nations partners, contract manage regular population surveys, support and facilitate regional implementation of the Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy and the action plan, including regular goose harvests.

A potential service could be partially funded through municipal requisition and supplemented with direct funding from large property owners (i.e., golf course operators, PAAC, farmers, recreation centres). The estimated cost to implement a service is approximately \$250,000.

Legal Implications

This service can be created by way of an “establishing bylaw”. Before an establishing bylaw can be adopted, it must receive approval of the electors and the Inspector of Municipalities. The *Local Government Act (LGA)* provides three ways to obtain approval: referendum/elector assent (s. 344 LGA); Alternative Approval Process (AAP, s. 345 LGA); and consent by municipal councils on behalf of electors, and by AAP within the Electoral Areas (s. 346 LGA) – while the choice on the method of participating area approval for a regional service is made by the Board, but subject to review of the Inspector of Municipalities at the time of Inspector approval of the bylaw.

For a new regional service where participants are in agreement that it should be created, the most cost-effective form of approval is municipal consent on behalf and alternative-approval process in the electoral areas. Such approval must be unanimous. The typical process prior to drafting a service bylaw is to solicit interest in consenting by writing in advance of drafting a formal bylaw and going forward with a formal consent process. If a potential participant council disagrees with proceeding with service creation, staff can look at alternatives to a regional service, such as a sub-regional service. This process takes three to five months and costs approximately \$15,000, depending on the level of support requested by municipalities and electoral areas.

CONCLUSION

Increasing populations of Canada goose in the capital region are causing significant impacts to estuary habitats, near shore islands in the ecological reserves, recreational beaches and lakes, playing fields and agricultural crops; resulting in increasing pressure on local governments to take more coordinated actions.

Effective management of Canada Geese requires regional collaboration, cooperation and coordination between land use agencies under various jurisdictions, including federal and provincial wildlife agencies, parks and recreation boards, local and regional governments, airport authorities, farmers, and owners of large properties such as golf courses.

RECOMMENDATION

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff bring back a report outlining costs for a Canada Goose Management Service.

Submitted by:	Glenn Harris, Ph.D., R.P.Bio., Senior Manager, Environmental Protection
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: Canada Goose Mitigation and Population Monitoring (Guardians of Mid-Island Estuaries Society) – January 27, 2022
- Appendix B: Capital Regional District 2022 Canada Goose Mitigation Draft Action Plan (Guardians of Mid-Island Estuaries Society) – February 14, 2022