

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2024**

SUBJECT **Regional Canada Goose Management Service - Activities Update**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide an update on the Regional Canada Goose Management Service activities in 2023-2024.

BACKGROUND

In February 2023, the Capital Regional District (CRD) Board established a Regional Canada Goose Management Service to work with key partners to reduce the impact of the rapidly growing Canada goose (CAGO) population in the region and to coordinate implementation of the Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy (RCGMS). The RCGMS provides guidance for controlling adverse impacts of the population of non-migratory, resident CAGO and recommends the use of management tools such as preventing feeding, habitat modifications, water management, hazing, egg addling, hunting, harvests and public outreach. This report outlines the service activities undertaken in 2023-2024 to implement the RCGMS and provides recommendations for future service levels.

The following activities were taken to coordinate implementation of the RCGMS:

Administration and Coordination

The CRD hired a half-time coordinator in September 2023 to coordinate goose management efforts in the region, establish partnerships with key agencies responsible for wildlife management, engage with landowners affected by geese and undertake coordinated mitigation efforts. The service was supplemented this past spring with an auxiliary Goose Management technician to support the egg addling program, conduct recruitment/young of the year surveys, and to assist with the region-wide summer moult survey. Staff developed a detailed communications strategy to increase awareness of the regional impacts of the growing population and to engage with landowners experiencing issues. In January 2024, the CRD established the Regional Canada Goose Working Group made up of representatives from local governments and First Nations, provincial and federal partners, Peninsula and Area Agricultural Commission, and other key stakeholders. The working group meets quarterly to share information and coordinate efforts across the region.

Coordinated Nest Survey and Egg Addling Program

The CRD obtained a region-wide egg addling permit from Canadian Wildlife Service. Several local governments and 55 participating landowners added their properties to the CRD's permit and granted CRD technicians access to their land to survey nests and addle eggs. CRD staff discovered 142 active nests on 18 properties and addled 672 eggs. 31 missed nests (eggs already hatched) and 5 inaccessible nests were found, resulting in total of 178 nests located. Some landowner agencies addled eggs or contracted egg addling on their lands, resulting in an additional 280 active nests located and 1,369 eggs addled. In 2024, a total of 422 active nests

were located and 2,041 eggs were added preventing their recruitment to the local Canada goose population. The 2024 egg addling report is attached in Appendix A.

Region-wide CAGO Summer Moulting Survey

Previous moulting surveys estimated the regional summer breeding population of geese at 2,500, though these were only partial surveys focused on known hotspots like Sooke Basin, Esquimalt Lagoon, Oak Bay shoreline, and northeast Saanich Peninsula. In June 2024, the CRD collaborated with working group partners, local governments, First Nations and conservation groups to conduct the first region-wide CAGO moulting survey. A total of 6,669 geese were counted and new hotspots were identified along the shorelines of Victoria, Metchosin, East Sooke, Juan de Fuca Electoral Area, Southern Gulf Islands, and on private farmlands, golf courses, small lakes and ponds. The 2024 moulting survey report is attached in Appendix B.

Canada Goose Harvest

The CRD contracted an experienced non-profit agency to coordinate with First Nations to implement an ethical and humane harvest of Canada geese under permits obtained from Canadian Wildlife Service and the Province of British Columbia. In late June, the harvest reduced the population by 465 birds and the meat was shared among the participating First Nations communities.

Despite significant success in coordinating efforts to manage the regional Canada goose population since service establishment, the actual population is significantly higher than previous estimates indicated and the negative impacts from goose populations are more widely spread and significant.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff be directed to develop increased service levels for consideration in the 2026 service planning process.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for further information.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental and Social Implications

The increasing Canada goose population continues to affect regional farmlands and degrade coastal ecosystems and salmon habitats through over-grazing, trampling of vegetation, soil erosion, and the spread of invasive species. Additionally, public health concerns are rising due to high densities of fecal matter, degradation and contamination of water sources, territorial goose conflicts, the spread of disease, and increased risk of exposure to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. These impacts are seen at public and private sites, including sports fields, swimming beaches, golf courses, and farmlands. Significant economic impacts also persist for local farmers, who are experiencing increased maintenance costs and financial losses due to Canada goose damage.

The service has provided more accurate data on the regional goose population. According to the 2023 Christmas Bird Count data, an estimated 9,000-11,000 geese overwinter in the capital region, primarily on farmland and recreational playing fields. Staff continue to receive reports from the farming community about large flocks wiping out entire crops in a matter of hours, despite efforts at hazing, habitat modification and regional egg addling. Similar to the moult population estimates, staff anticipate that overwintering populations are also substantially higher than previously thought. Staff plan to conduct a region-wide survey in January 2025 to obtain a more accurate and up-to-date estimate of the overwintering population, which will better inform future management efforts.

Recruitment surveys showed the largest numbers of goslings were in Colwood, Saanich and the Gulf Islands. More robust addling programs are needed in areas with high numbers of juveniles. Areas where the ratio of adults to juveniles are high will require additional harvests to effectively reduce the CAGO population.

Current mitigation efforts, including a coordinated egg addling program and an annual harvest, may help stabilize the CAGO population but are unlikely to result in a significant enough reduction to meaningfully ease the environmental, recreational, and economic impacts across the region. Additional resources will enable increased mitigation efforts.

Intergovernmental and First Nations Implications

Several municipal partners have expressed capacity issues to fully participate in egg addling programs and would benefit from additional CRD staff capacity to conduct addling on their lands.

Two local First Nations communities participated in the harvest and have expressed interest in future harvests. Efforts to engage with First Nation Guardians programs to participate in a coordinated egg addling program are ongoing.

Financial Implications

The current service budget is \$237,000. In 2024, this supported a part-time coordinator (\$85K), egg addling program including a six-week assistant Goose Management technician (\$25K), a region-wide summer moult survey (\$35K), one annual harvest (\$82K) and administrative support/equipment (\$10K). Without a budget increase, staff cannot achieve the mitigation efforts required to achieve a meaningful reduction of the CAGO population and their impacts. These resources appear sufficient to stabilize the regional population but are insufficient to dramatically reduce the population to a sustainable level in the near future.

Service Delivery Implications

A significant reduction in the CAGO population in the short-term is required to lessen the significant negative ecological, economic, recreational impacts and public health concerns caused. An increase to the Regional Canada Goose Management Service levels would enable additional mitigation efforts, including increased capacity for the coordinated egg addling program and support for additional First Nation-led harvests.

CONCLUSION

The new Regional Canada Goose Management Service has demonstrated success in controlling the regional population and gathering important information to support ongoing species management. The regional population is higher than previously predicted, however, and impacts to farmlands, public infrastructure, and public and wild lands continue to be well-documented. Current resources and efforts appear sufficient to maintain the population at its current levels, but additional resources would be required to reduce the regional population to a level that meets economic, social and environmental objectives.

RECOMMENDATION

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That staff be directed to develop increased service levels for consideration in the 2026 service planning process.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A: 2024 CRD Egg Addling Report (September 2024)
- Appendix B: 2024 CRD Moulting Survey Report (September 2024)