

**REPORT TO PARKS & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JUNE 26, 2019**

SUBJECT **Non-Migratory Canada Goose Management Update**

ISSUE

To provide an update on non-migratory Canada goose management activities by the Capital Regional District (CRD).

BACKGROUND

In the 1960s, Canada geese were introduced to Greater Victoria for hunting purposes. These imported geese never adapted to migration, resulting in today's large, non-migratory resident Canada goose population that negatively contributes to economic, health, recreational and environmental issues affecting municipalities, parks, farmers, businesses, health agencies, large land owners and airport authorities.

In 2010, the CRD, provincial agencies, participating municipalities and stakeholders partnered to fund a project to collect extensive data on the goose population abundance and distribution, seasonal habitat use by geese and agriculture impacts in the capital region. The resulting Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy outlined a long-term, multi-faceted approach for the management of non-migratory Canada geese in the capital region and included a technical report completed by EBB Environmental Consulting that examined population data and historical impacts in the CRD. The Strategy's goals were to (1) reduce impacts on agricultural crops from Canada goose populations in the capital region to a level that prevents conflict between geese and human activities; (2) develop a knowledge base for the CRD, First Nations, farmers and local governments; and (3) reduce goose impacts on parks and recreational areas.

The CRD Board endorsed the strategy in December 2012, which was supported by local governments, provincial wildlife authorities, Canadian Wildlife Service farmers, and other stakeholders. The Board directed staff to continue to partner with interested municipalities and stakeholders to ensure effective implementation and coordination. This work was operationalized through departmental service plans and a summary of CRD activities is provided in Appendix A.

In 2015, CRD Regional Parks participated with other stakeholders in a pilot project to capture and euthanize non-migratory Canada geese (under permit) on agricultural lands on the Saanich Peninsula. The municipalities and other stakeholders conduct regular egg addling programs and additional population control efforts in partnership with other stakeholders. The working group of stakeholders continues to meet and implement the Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy to reduce goose-human conflict across the region. Members of this group participate on a larger Vancouver Island Regional Canada Goose Management Working Group.

An alternative option is for local governments to encourage farmers to pursue Crop Damage Permits through the Canadian Wildlife Service. These permits allow for limited hunting on farmland to control Canada Goose damage to crops. This is a collaborative effort between local governments, law enforcement agencies (to ensure public safety) and farmers in an attempt to control the issue at the source.

Recent Canada goose population estimates for the region are estimated between 4,000 and 6,000, based on recent aerial counts, indicating that despite ongoing individual efforts by local governments and stakeholders, Canada goose populations in the region remain relatively high and stable.

ALTERNATIVES

That the Parks & Environment Committee recommend to the CRD Board:

Alternative 1

That the Board advocate to senior levels of government for resources (e.g., policy, programs, research and grant funding) to maintain the scope and scale of non-migratory Canada goose management in the region.

Alternative 2

1. That staff be directed to explore the feasibility of including hyper-abundant wildlife management into an expanded regional invasive species service; and
2. That the CRD Board advocate to senior levels of government for additional resources and support.

Alternative 3

That the report be referred back to staff for additional information.

SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Canada geese have a significant impact on the commercial crops in the Saanich Peninsula farm community and affect the viability of producing local food for the region. Additional issues related to the large regional goose population include territorial goose actively protecting their nest sites and young broods; families of geese crossing streets within parks creating traffic hazards; geese aggressively begging for food; high density of fecal matter on recreational fields, beaches and grass; and concerns over fecal coliform originating from geese feces polluting swimming areas.

Large populations of Canada geese can contribute to the degradation of natural and environmentally sensitive habits, impacting ecological function and biodiversity. Although no specific studies have quantified the damage potentially related to Canada geese, biologists and land managers have witnessed degradation of sensitive ecosystems. Eelgrass damage in estuaries is most noticeable, as it results in silt erosion.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

In 2012, the Peninsula and Area Agriculture Commission estimated annual goose damage at \$300,000. A less measurable impact is the conflict that can arise between farmers and their urban neighbours when goose mitigation, such as hazing, noise makers, or hunting, is used for crop protection. Local governments and large land owners incur increased maintenance costs at many recreational playing fields and parks due to impacts and damage from Canada geese.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Canada geese and other waterfowl are protected under the provincial Wildlife Act, as well as the federal Migratory Birds Convention Act and Migratory Birds Regulations. Any attempts to manage geese require collaboration with senior government authorities and efforts must abide by the federal Act and any provincial and municipal regulations that apply. As a regulating body, Canadian Wildlife Services can support local governments with permitting advice on appropriate methods and tools to manage Canada geese.

Currently the CRD participates on a loosely-coordinated working group made up of local governments, provincial wildlife authorities, Canadian Wildlife Service, Peninsula Agriculture and Area Commission, and other stakeholders, as part of the Food and Agriculture Strategy.

All parties agree that advocacy to senior levels of government for resources (e.g., policy, programs, research and grant funding) is required to maintain the scope and scale of non-migratory Canada goose management in the region.

In the short term, however, local governments have the ability to work with the Canadian Wildlife Service and local farmers to control goose populations within specific property boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Non-migratory resident Canada geese have been an ongoing concern in the capital region for many years. They contribute to economic, health and environmental issues affecting municipalities, parks, farmers, businesses, health agencies and airport authorities. The CRD Board endorsed a Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy with its goals to reduce the damage to agricultural lands, park areas and other land uses, reduce economic losses, and build a knowledge base among all stakeholders.

Local governments can work with stakeholders to try and address the issue on a sub-regional level by working directly with farmers. The Canadian Wildlife Service can issue Crop Damage Permits to allow farmers to address the issue on site.

While work to implement the recommendations of the Regional Canada Goose Management Strategy has been ongoing, no one agency has taken the lead on advancing its progress in a coordinated fashion. If the use of the Crop Damage Permit process is not effective, increased coordination and collaboration among multiple local governments, senior government agencies, large landowners and the agricultural community may be required to effectively manage geese populations in the region and minimize the social, environmental and economic impacts to the region.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Parks & Environment Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

That the Board advocate to senior levels of government for resources (e.g., policy, programs, research and grant funding) to maintain the scope and scale of non-migratory Canada goose management in the region.

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Attachment: Appendix A – Summary of CRD Activities for Managing Canada Geese
Populations on CRD Lands