

For Information Only

Geese Control Review

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Committee

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Recommendation

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Background

At the June 11th, 2013, Council meeting Council of the City of Greater Sudbury (Council) requested an information report on the Geese Management Program operated by Parks Services.

In 2006, staff brought forward concerns related to the increase in Canada Geese visits to parks and playfields, especially those near bodies of water or marshlands. Council approved \$45,000 for the purchase of a sweeper to assist in clean up of droppings from these areas. Parks staff have utilized this equipment continuously as a method of reducing waste, in collaboration with the current management program. In 2013, an additional sweeper was purchased to further increase and expand the day to day maintenance of various sites.

As part of the 2008 budget, Council approved a one time allocation of \$75,000 for a Geese Management Program pilot project to take place during the 2008 season. Staff presented a report to Council at the end of the 2008 season highlighting the program's success.

Council approved permanent funding in the amount of \$75,000 in 2009 in order to continue the Geese Management Program.

Geese Management Program

In 2009, City of Greater Sudbury (CGS) requested proposals and secured the services of a qualified and experienced company, DST Consulting Engineers, to assist with the management of Canada Geese in parks for a 2 year period. The contract was awarded for an additional 2 year term (2011 and 2012) with a 3 year option to renew, 2013, 2014, and 2015 subject to negotiations favorable to both parties. The program operates for approximately 5 months per season, commencing in mid May until late October.

The sites which were part of the original pilot project were assigned the highest priority sites for the Geese Management Program. The sites included James Jerome Sports Complex, Bell Park, Grace Hartman Amphitheatre (GHA) properties, Nepahwin Park, Robinson Playground, and Moonlight Beach.

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The current program consists of a variety of control methods which based on initial staff research in 2008, were shown to be effective in geese management. The control methods include, canine control, habitat modification, public awareness, and control pyrotechnics (noise makers) modification.

The canine control has proven to be the most effective control method. Habitat modification has been introduced within the program by way of installing a "goose fence" at Robinson playground and Nepahwin Park. The fences have assisted to deter some entry of geese to the sites from nearby water bodies. The public awareness program consist of signage installed at the program sites in order to advise the citizens of the geese management activity taking place, by educating park patrons against feeding the geese. The control pyrotechnics (noise makers) are included as part of the daily program resulting in "scaring" the geese away from sites. Using a combination of different control methods and changing tactics often assist in preventing geese from being conditioned to any one method.

The program commenced in May of 2009 and allowed for 10 visits per week to each of the sites identified in performing the control methods listed above. Due to cost increases within the option years, the program was adjusted by the number of weekly site visits and by cutting back on the number of program weeks. The program started one week later in 2013 (week of May 27th, 2013) in order to work within the budget allocation.

Optional provisions to control the geese population were included in the contract and costed separately. The program included an egg depreciation program which included nest searches and egg oiling. This component has not been tested for effectiveness and destruction techniques have not been implemented within the program to date. Under the current contract, the cost provided for an egg depredation program over and above the current techniques was approximately \$3,500 for 1 site, provided that there were eggs in the area.

Geese Populations

It has been estimated that on average throughout Ontario, geese populations are increasing up to 10% - 15% per year. This could mean a possible 40% increase in the volume of geese visiting CGS parks since the program was introduced in 2009. Geese have been observed in the local parks much earlier in the season than in previous years, some sightings within the month of April. Canada Geese are known to adapt quickly to new conditions, therefore in order for deterrence measures to remain effective, it is beneficial for programs to be reviewed, modified and extended periodically.

A recent publication from the Canadian Wildlife Service on Canada Geese indicates that "The extraordinary growth of Canada Geese, like that of many species of geese, has occurred because of their adaptability to environments that have been heavily influenced by human populations. Many gravitate to suburban and urban areas where they are not only protected from predators, but also are safe from hunting."

Current Management Techniques Used in Other Areas of Ontario

A recent publication from the Canadian Wildlife Service published articles on Geese Management and Control. The publication highlights that "In addition to reducing the attractiveness of public lands to geese and employing different deterrent techniques, municipal governments can also reduce conflicts by allowing hunting wherever possible, preventing well-meaning citizens from feeding wild waterfowl, and considering geese when making future landscape planning decisions."

Some techniques being used within Geese Management programs across Ontario include:

Hazing or Harassment of Geese

Considered as one of the most popular, effective and humane goose control methods used. Hazing includes various scaring techniques and canine control. Many municipalities, school boards, golf courses, and cemeteries accross Ontario employ the use of canine handlers and dogs for hazing of geese. The Border Collie is a popular breed used in this method and there are companies in Ontario that offer these services. For example, two Border Collies were recently hired in 2013 on a 1 year contract in the amount of \$44,000 to solve these issues for Agriculture Canada at a federally run Central Research Farm near Ottawa. The dogs have so far been effective in reducing geese presence as they are involved in 3 hour monitoring of the site at both dusk and dawn. Border Collie services have also been hired for the campus of University of Waterloo, the canines patrol the campus grounds twice daily to assist with their geese problem. Students are also able to text in nesting sites when discovered to assist in resolving past problems of aggressive geese who are nesting.

Habitat Modification

A recent publication from the Animal Alliance of Canada, which was funded by various partners including the Canadian Wildlife Service and the City of Mississauga, indicates that Habitat Modification of geese is considered to be an effective long term strategy, as it deters geese from inhabiting a particular area. The publication highlights that; "A barrier of long grass separating grazing areas from a water source is successful in deterring waterfowl from an area. Waterfowl do not like to walk through tall grass (or shrubs, trees) because it interferes with mobility and predators can hide in it. Some natural barriers that can be used are: trees, brush, shrubs, hedges, and wildflowers." The publication suggests the following do's and don'ts for effective habitat modification:

- Do - Vegetate / landscape at shorelines to make it less attractive to geese.
- Do - Restrict a goose's access to the shoreline from the water.
- Do - Establish tall vegetation within barrier planting, such as trees.
- Do - Invest in the installation of fencing along shorelines where possible to deter geese from coming off waterways onto public lands.
- Don't - Allow access through breaks in shoreline barrier plantings.

Egg Management

Some municipalities in Southern Ontario where extensive nesting sites exist utilize egg management techniques to help reduce future local populations of geese. The City of Pickering has adopted this method within their program. With a permit from the Canadian Wildlife Service, trained contractors search common breeding areas and place a vegetable based, biodegradable oil on the eggs within 10 days. This prevents the egg from developing and hatching. The City of Toronto uses this technique within their High Park property as well, this park has a large pond area which have been an attraction for the nesting of geese in some areas of the park.

Capture and Relocation

The City of Pickering also employs this technique by employing qualified contractors for rounding up and relocation services. This technique is completed during the 6 to 8 week molting phase in June when the geese have no flight feathers and can safely be captured. Similar to egg oiling, permits are required from the Canadian Wildlife Service to proceed with this activity. The City of Toronto at times has utilized relocation services to move geese from High Park to approved sites outside of Toronto.

Pilot Project (Ottawa's "Goosebuster" - Remote Controlled Hexcopter)

The City of Ottawa has engaged in a pilot program with an Ottawa tech expert in August of 2013, to scare geese away from Petrie Island, a beach that has been closed in the past due to concerns with geese. The method being tested is the use of a small remote control device that was self built. If the method proves to be effective, The City of Ottawa may expand the program to other beaches.

Conclusion

Additional research will be conducted on Geese Management/Control strategies in 2013 and 2014. Based on the results of the research, a budget option will be presented to Council as part of the 2015 budget to further expand the existing program to include geese population controls, an increase in site visits, along with an expansion of the program to include additional sites.