

Goose Management Strategy – City of Parksville

In June 2015, Parksville Council adopted in principle, the 38 recommendations contained in the Goose Management Strategy for the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region as prepared by the Guardians of Mid-Island Estuaries Society (Guardians). At this time, Council also provided specific direction to implement a cull program in 2016 which now involves the preparation of a kill permit to be submitted to regulatory agencies as a more permanent long-term solution to the overabundance of non-migratory Canada Geese in Parksville. At a meeting on January 18, 2016, Council approved funding for a cull program and to continue with other goose management initiatives.

A key recommendation of the goose management strategy is to humanely reduce non-migratory resident Canada Goose populations in the City of Parksville to a level which prevents conflict between geese and human activities and reduces the ecological damage to local estuaries.

Prior to the 1970's, Canada geese occurred in low numbers in the City of Parksville and throughout the Regional District of Nanaimo and were migratory only. Federal and provincial wildlife agencies brought over young Canada Geese from the mainland to areas of the east coast of Vancouver Island in the 1970's and 1980's which helped grow a local year round Canada Goose population that began nesting in the Englishman and other local estuaries in the 1980's. Over the past two decades, Canada Geese have overgrazed the mid-island estuarine marshes, in particular, the Englishman, Little Qualicum, Craig Creek and Nanoose estuaries.

Estuaries serve as important year-round habitats for Canada Geese but they are also used by an estimated 80% of coastal fish and wildlife species. Across all seasons, goose counts were highest at the estuaries of the Parksville-Qualicum Beach Wildlife Management Area. During the summer molt, Canada Geese concentrate in the estuaries and in marine and freshwater habitats. In the fall and winter, estuaries are preferred destinations. Degradation along estuary channels by Canada Geese can increase the potential for flooding along the river and have severely degraded critical habitat necessary for salmon fry survival.

Urban and agricultural areas have also suffered. Goose densities were found to be highest in the Parksville Church Road and Parksville Bay/City areas and in particular, on sites with access to freshwater.

High concentrations of geese lead to the contamination of drinking water, the fouling of beaches, parks, school grounds, sports fields and other sites, all of which pose risks to human and animal health. Young children playing in sand may have a greater exposure to goose-borne bacteria as bacteria persist longer in sand than in water.

Goose mitigation initiatives have been ongoing in the City since 2004. Hazing methods and egg addling are relatively expensive initiatives which have had limited success:

- In 2004, the City allocated \$30,000 for the purchase of equipment for mechanical removal of feces and another \$25,000 for annual operating costs. The need for and the potential of a cull was first identified at this time. The City regularly conducts sweeps in our parks and sports fields in an attempt to remove goose feces.
- From 2009 until 2011, the City conducted a canine goose control program using dogs and volunteers working in the Community Park, Springwood Park and areas along Jensen Avenue East.

- Through a federal permit from 2010 to 2012, the City employed a falconer with an eagle to harass geese from the Community Park.
- The City funds ongoing egg sterilization or egg addling program focused on the Englishman River and despite a successful addling program from 2002 through 2014 which prevented many eggs from hatching, the number of nesting geese in the Englishman River estuary has continued to increase.

Since 2002, members of the Guardians have led efforts to reduce regional Canada Goose populations by addling over 6,000 eggs and have surveyed geese in the region to learn more about their seasonal abundance and use of estuaries and other habitats.

On behalf of the City of Parksville, a kill permit application will be prepared by the Guardians for review by the Province of BC and the Canadian Wildlife Service and should the permit application be approved, a contractor or contractors will be hired to carry out all aspects permitted by the regulatory agencies to reduce locally overabundant Canada Geese in the Parksville area this summer. Canada Geese will be killed in a humane manner according to Environment Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Services best practices for Canada Goose management and standard operating procedures developed by the Province of BC and approved by the BC Wildlife Chief Veterinarian.

Please direct questions to:

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REFERENCES:

References are available from the *Quicklinks* section on the City of Parksville website and include the following:

- Canada Goose Management Strategy for Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region – Guardians of Mid Island Estuaries Society
- Dawe and Stewart. 2010. “The Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) on Vancouver Island, BC”
- Dawe, Boyd, Beuchert, and Stewart. 2011. “Recent, significant changes to the native marsh vegetation of the Little Qualicum River estuary, British Columbia; a case of too many Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*)?”
- City of Parksville – Background Information