

Frequently Asked Questions

About

GOOSE MANAGEMENT

What is the procedure to harvest Canada Geese?

On the City's behalf, a kill permit application was prepared by the Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuaries Society (Guardians) in 2016 for authorization by the Province of BC and the Canadian Wildlife Service. In 2016, over twenty volunteers joined the Guardians and K'omoks First Nations to round up over 500 geese during their flightless "moult" stage. A contractor was hired to humanely dispatch 486 geese to reduce locally overabundant Canada Geese in the Parksville area. Future efforts will involve First Nations who can legally utilize the meat. The City is now working with other municipalities at a more regional scale (Victoria to Campbell River). Goose harvests will now be led by First Nations and the Guardians will continue to help develop the permit applications and improve upon techniques used in the 2016 Parksville harvest. Until local populations are lowered to a more manageable level, introduced (resident) Canada geese will be harvested in a humane manner according to Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Services best practices for Canada Goose management and standard operating procedures developed by the province and approved by the BC Wildlife Chief Veterinarian.

What are the problems with geese?

Young Canada Geese were introduced in significant numbers in the 1970's and 1980's by federal and provincial wildlife agencies, (with support from local hunting organizations/volunteers) to increase goose populations for hunting and wildlife viewing. These geese did not learn to migrate and established a Vancouver Island resident population which began to nest, moult and feed year-round in estuaries, wetlands, agricultural lands and urban green spaces. During the same time period, the east coast of Vancouver Island had a significant population growth and for public safety, most urban areas now have bylaws prohibiting the discharge of firearms. This has led to a recent explosion of resident urban geese. These geese have overgrazed the mid-island estuarine marshes and in particular, Nanoose Bay, Craig Creek, Englishman River, Little Qualicum River, K'omoks and Campbell River estuaries have been severely degraded. Estuaries are important habitats for an estimated 80% of coastal fish and wildlife and have become favourite nesting grounds for resident geese.

The Guardians studied goose populations and movements from 2010 to 2015 in the Regional District of Nanaimo and found Canada geese utilized these estuaries year round and of all habitat features, goose counts were highest at the estuaries. During the flightless molt, 1,000 to 1,500 geese were found to concentrate in the estuaries and in marine and fresh water habitats. In the fall and winter, estuaries are preferred roosting and loafing sites. Degradation along the estuary by the geese can increase the potential for flooding along the river and also severely degrade critical habitat necessary for salmon fry survival.

In urban centers, high concentrations of geese can lead to contamination of drinking water, fouling of beaches, parks, school grounds, sports fields and other sites, all of which pose risks to human and animal health. Children playing in sand may have a greater exposure to goose-borne bacteria as bacteria persist longer in sand than in water. Geese cause damage to landscaping and can be aggressive towards people and pets and diminish the quality of life by keeping residents and tourists from enjoying special places and activities.

What approaches to population control have already been used?

Harvesting geese is a “last resort” option to be considered when mitigation efforts, which have been ongoing in the City since 2004, have limited success. Examples include:

- Hazing with dogs and volunteers working in the Community Park, Springwood Park and along Jensen Avenue East. The City also employed a falconer with an eagle to harass geese.
- Since 2002, members of the Guardians led efforts to reduce regional Canada Geese populations by adding more than 6,000 eggs and surveyed geese in the region to learn more about their seasonal abundance, use of estuaries and other habitats.
- Population control through egg adding focused on the Englishman River and although successful in preventing many eggs from hatching, the number of nesting geese in the estuary has increased.
- The City regularly conducts mechanical sweeps in parks and sports fields to remove goose feces.

Why not leave the geese alone?

Non-migratory resident Canada Geese are not native to Vancouver Island. These birds were introduced from Eastern Canada in the 1970’s and 1980’s for wildlife viewing and hunting. Adult geese can live beyond twenty years and a pair can reproduce to raise over 100 geese. Municipalities now provide urban sanctuaries for geese where hunting has no affect to control their rising populations and adult geese have no natural predators. Conservation agencies have invested more than \$100 million to acquire, maintain and restore estuaries critical to Pacific salmon and tens of thousands of migratory birds and these huge investments are being lost along with native species diversity and fish and wildlife populations.

Are all geese being targeted?

No. Migratory geese using the Parksville region as part of their traditional and instinctive migratory pathway will not be targeted. These geese stop over during spring and fall migrations and some over-winter. They do not nest here nor do they cause the conflicts which we have been addressing in our initiatives.

How can you tell the difference between resident and migratory geese?

Physically they look similar but behaviourally the geese are very different.

- Migratory geese do not nest here and are not typically present in the summer
- Migratory geese use traditional routes and habitats on those routes are rarely present in more urban locations

Why can the geese not be used for public consumption?

The *Migratory Birds Regulations* do not allow “donation of birds to another person or entity, including permit nominees”. This is currently being evaluated. The meat from the Parksville harvest was used by First Nations and to feed other wildlife; First Nations can use the meat for food and ceremonial purposes.

Why not allow open hunting?

Bylaw No. 1458 prohibits the discharge of a rifle, shotgun, spring gun, fire arm or bow for the purposes of hunting within the City of Parksville.

Do other places have this problem?

Yes. This is an issue throughout southern BC and Vancouver Island. Other areas in Canada and the United States also struggle with geese. Information is available on the internet about different areas, issues and management techniques. The first harvest on Vancouver Island was held in the Capital Region in the 2015. Municipalities are starting to work together to coordinate a Vancouver Island goose management program.

RESOURCES available at Parksville.ca

- Guardians of Mid-Island Estuaries Society www.guardiansmie.org
- Environment Canada and Climate Change <https://www.ec.gc.ca/mbc-com>
- Canada Goose Management Strategy for Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region
- City of Parksville Bylaw No. 1458
- Additional background information and reference materials