

Memorandum

TO: Member's of the Conservation Advisory Board

FROM: Chris Firth-Eagland, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

RECOMMENDED BY: T. Scott Peck, MCIP, RPP, Director, Watershed Planning & Engineering

PREPARED BY: Mike Stone, MCIP, RPP, Manager of Watershed Planning Services

DATE: June 12, 2014

RE: HCA Wildlife Management Committee

BACKGROUND

The Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) owns or manages approximately 4,400 hectares (11,000 acres) of land. HCA's holdings include lands dedicated for conservation purposes, as well as lands that support a variety of recreational activities and that contain significant infrastructure.

Wildlife management on HCA's lands has been required in some circumstances where conflicts have arisen between wildlife and land use activities and/or land management objectives. In these instances, wildlife management has been conducted to ensure human health and safety, to conserve important natural heritage features, or to protect infrastructure investment. HCA staff have experience dealing with a wide variety of wildlife, including racoons, squirrels, skunks, Canada Geese, fish, muskrat, and beavers. Live trapping/capture, relocation, and humane kill trapping have been employed by HCA in the past. HCA currently has no formal policy or protocol for wildlife management on its lands.

The trapping of beavers at Fifty Point Conservation Area has received recent public and media attention as the result of an unintentional trapping of a snapping turtle. Beaver trapping at Fifty Point has been conducted since the 1980s. The control of beaver at Fifty Point has been a near annual requirement at the trout pond since 2006 in order to minimize damage and habitat destruction to the area. The removal of beavers at Fifty Point has always been contracted and carried out by a professional trapper who is

registered with the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). All trapping regulations, policies, and enforcement are administered by the MNR.

In response to this recent incident at Fifty Point, HCA staff took a report to the Board of Directors on May 1st, 2014 recommending that a Wildlife Management Committee be established to develop best management protocols for managing wildlife on HCA lands. The report also recommended that no further trapping, other than live relocations, take place on HCA lands until the Wildlife Management Committee had completed its work and released best practices.

The Board of Directors endorsed staff's recommendation and directed that the Board also be represented on the Committee. It has since been determined that Board of Directors Vice Chair, Jim Howlett, will sit on the Wildlife Management Committee. Mike Stone, Manager of Watershed Planning Services, was also appointed to sit on the committee and serve as the project manager.

STAFF COMMENT

Further to the staff recommendation that was considered and endorsed by the Board of Directors on May 1st, 2014 HCA has established a Wildlife Management Committee (WMC) to develop management protocols and best practices for the management of wildlife on HCA lands. The WMC is comprised of staff from different program areas and divisions, including ecology and customer service, to ensure there are varied perspectives and experiences for the WMC to draw on.

The WMC held its first meeting on May 13th to discuss the mandate of the committee, scope of work to be completed, key tasks and timelines. Key tasks identified by the committee to be completed include reviewing current HCA practices, documenting existing wildlife management rules and regulations, and consulting with experts, agencies and other stakeholders/groups that have an interest in wildlife management. Based on this review and consultation, the WMC will then work towards identifying appropriate wildlife management protocols and practices for the Board of Directors consideration.

It is anticipated this work will take several months. The WMC will provide periodic updates on the status of the committee's work to the Board of Directors and Conservation Advisory Board.

It may be necessary for the WMC to consider and advise on specific wildlife management issues as they arise during the course of the committee's work and while the interim live trapping only policy is in place.

STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGE

The initiative refers directly to the HCA Strategic Plan 2014-2018:

- Strategic Goal #2 – Natural Heritage Conservation
 - Strategic Objective – Maintain and enhance the natural heritage features of HCA lands and manage these lands on an environmentally sustainable basis

- Strategic Goal #3 – Conservation Area Experience
 - Strategic Objective – Maintain and enhance conservation area infrastructure and natural heritage features within the context of approved master plans

- Strategic Goal #5 – Organizational Excellence
 - Strategic Objective – Lead by example in the environmentally sustainable management and maintenance of the organization

AGENCY COMMENTS

None.

LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of a WMC provides HCA with an opportunity to review and reflect on its current wildlife management approaches, to make adjustments to existing practices, and to develop new protocols where necessary. This work is being undertaken with the objective of ensuring HCA is employing effective, practical and responsible approaches to the management of wildlife on its lands. In conducting its review the WMC will be mindful of HCA's diverse mandate and the range of program objectives HCA works to fulfill.