



To: Richmond City Council
From: Councillor Linda Barnes, Chair
Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Committee
Re: **SNOW GEESE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Date: September 25, 2008
File: 10-6160-06

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee, at its meeting held on Tuesday, September 23, 2008, considered the attached report, and recommends as follows:

Committee Recommendation

That:

- (1) the proposed Snow Geese Remedial Action Plan for 2008 / 2009 as described in the attached report (dated September 3, 2008 from the Director of Parks and Public Works Operations) be approved; and***
- (2) the proposed Snow Geese Remedial Action Plan for 2008/2009 as described in the attached report (dated September 3, 2008 from the Director of Parks and Public Works Operations) be referred to the Council/School Board Liaison Committee for information.***

Councillor Linda Barnes, Chair
Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee

Attach.

VARIANCE

Please note that staff recommended Part (1) and Committee added Part (2).

Staff Report

Origin

At the February 11, 2008 meeting of Council, staff received the following referrals:

That:

- 1) ***Immediate remedial action consisting of field repairs, strengthened on-site management action (use of deterrents and monitoring), and public information delivery be undertaken using funds from the General Contingency Fund in the amount \$50,000;***
- 2) ***An overall landscape-based management plan be developed in collaboration with the appropriate City advisory committees such as the Richmond Advisory Committee on the Environment (ACE), and The Agricultural Advisory Committee, as well as the Canadian Wildlife Service, Vancouver Airport Authority, Richmond School District 38, neighbouring municipalities and other stakeholders, inclusive of an implementation strategy and financial plan; and***
- 3) ***Staff report back to Council with a proposed Snow Geese Management Plan in Fall 2008; and***
- 4) ***Staff report back to Council with comments on related wild fowl issues.***

The purpose of this report is to respond to these referrals by proposing a remedial action plan and identifying opportunities for a broader Snow Geese Management Plan still to be developed in conjunction with appropriate stakeholders.

Analysis

In the fall and winter of 2007, the City experienced impacts from migrating and wintering Lesser Snow Geese (*Chen caerulescens caerulescens*) in the form of damaged playing fields, parks and green spaces. Impacts included removal of vegetation through foraging, trampling of vegetation and muddying of fields at forage sites, depositing feces and exclusion of use from play areas where goose numbers were high enough to prevent children from accessing fields and/or equipment. Additional impacts were seen on farm fields and gardens where crops were foraged with similar results of trampling, mucking / damage to soils, loss of crops and deposition of feces.

In response to these impacts, the City undertook the following actions in the spring of 2008:

1. On-going hazing of snow geese by a dog-handler who responded to calls to scare congregating geese. This reactive approach was successful in immediate removal of snow geese from specific school and playing fields but did not result in sustained absence of the snow geese from these sites and potentially encouraged the snow geese to seek additional habitat further inland.
2. Remediation and mitigation of further field damage through over seeding and aerating of playing fields. These actions were successful in ensuring fields were almost fully restored for the spring.

3. Establishment of a monitoring program which identified areas of impact, identified preferred habitats, identified timing of snow goose use and estimated the abundance and distribution of migratory and wintering snow geese in Richmond. This monitoring resulted in a better understanding of the snow goose patterns in Richmond and provides baseline information for formation of a management plan for the fall 2008 arrival of the snow geese.
4. Initiation of a public information program including media releases and a public forum which provided information on the ecology of snow geese, addressed related health and safety concerns and shared the City's current course of action to minimize the impacts of snow geese in urban environments. With over 35 participants in the public forum and significant media coverage of the event it is expected that many Richmond residents will have greater level of comfort with the impacts of snow geese in the future.
5. Participation in the Snow Goose Steering Committee was initiated by the Vancouver Airport Authority and co-chaired by representatives of Transport Canada and Canadian Wildlife Services. While originally conceived as an effort to address the impacts of snow geese related to aviation safety, the objectives of this Steering Committee have now been expanded as follows:
 - Promote activities that reduce to an acceptable level and as low as reasonably practicable the aviation-safety risks associated with snow geese in the Lower Mainland;
 - Promote activities that result in a sustainable snow goose winter population and sufficient high quality habitat for this population in the Lower Mainland;
 - Facilitate the coordination and communication of snow goose-management activities in the Lower Mainland;
 - Promote the humane treatment of snow geese in all goose-related mitigation activities; and,
 - Monitor the abundance and distribution patterns of snow geese in the Lower Mainland.

Membership in the Steering Committee includes the following:

Transport Canada	Metro Vancouver Parks and Recreation
Canadian Wildlife Services	Air Transport Association of Canada
The City of Richmond	NAV Canada
Vancouver Airport Authority	Boundary Bay Airport
The Corporation of Delta	Ministry of the Environment, Province of BC
Ducks Unlimited Canada	

The Steering Committee has appointed two working groups to advise on issues related to Snow Geese, habitat and population management and coordination and control. The specific terms of reference for each of these groups have yet to be confirmed. Richmond is a member of both working groups.

6. Consulted with the Agricultural Advisory Committee, the Advisory Committee on the Environment and Richmond School District No. 38 staff regarding 2007/2008 actions and

planned actions of 2008/2009. Feedback from all groups has been supportive of mitigating impacts but also recognizes the reality of challenges related to wildlife in urban areas.

7. Obtained the services of EBB Environmental Consulting, Inc. to draft a Snow Goose Management Plan for 2008/2009. This management plan considers the feedback from stakeholders as well as the concurrent work of the Snow Goose Working Group and the base information provided by the spring 2008 monitoring program.

Snow Goose Remedial Action Plan for 2008/2009

The Snow Goose Remedial Action Plan provides a balanced management approach which aims to minimize harmful impacts on snow geese and directly coordinates with the scientific knowledge base resulting from the Snow Geese Working Group and its related sub-committees. It provides site-specific recommendations for each of the areas impacted in 2007/2008 and suggests prioritizing areas of highest impact and implementing management techniques in a step-wise fashion to ensure evaluation of each technique. In 2008/2009 it is recommended the City implement an adaptive management plan including the following components:

1. Joint monitoring / dog hazing of geese in a coordinated and responsive fashion, i.e. both proactively and in response to resident, school and park requests.
2. Placement of scare kites in grass areas with periodic rotation or removal.
3. Pre-season aeration of playing fields to prevent ponding of water.
4. Ongoing public education through a "Snow Geese Information Kit" for teachers developed by the Richmond Nature Park and media releases / articles including the Richmond Review's "Green" Issue.

Targeted areas for 2008/2009 may change due to changing snow geese patterns but will initially be focused on the following park areas:

London Steveston Neighbourhood School Park
 Grauer Neighbourhood School Park
 Dixon Neighbourhood School Park
 Steves Neighbourhood School Park
 Spul-u-kwuks Neighbourhood School Park
 Thompson Neighbourhood School Park
 Gilmore Neighbourhood School Park
 Garret Park
 North Dyke (where impacts are seen on residential areas)

Foraging habits of seagulls and other waterfowl (particularly American wigeon) are substantially different than those of the snow geese. However, other waterfowl and gulls can exacerbate damage caused by snow geese. Ponding caused by snow geese will attract dabbling waterfowl. In addition, soil turned up by the geese exposes invertebrates and other food sources targeted by gulls and other bird species. Where snow geese are not an issue but grazing by wigeon and other

birds is a problem, similar management techniques can be employed. At most sites, snow goose mitigation practices should proactively address impacts from these waterfowl as well.

Financial Impact

Costs to implement the adaptive Snow Geese Remedial Action Plan for 2008/2009 including monitoring, hazing, field preparation and public education is estimated at \$39,800. Staff will seek funding from a one-time additional level request in the 2009 budget process.

Conclusion

Lesser Snow Geese are an important local and international resource. The proposed remedial action plan provides a balanced management approach and demonstrates a commitment to ensuring the Lesser Snow Geese population has adequate access to traditional feeding areas while minimizing the impacts on urban areas.



Serena Lusk
Parks Programs Manager
(604-233-3344)

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