



City of Richmond

Report to Council

To:	Richmond City Council	Date:	February 4, 2008
From:	Councillor Linda Barnes, Chair Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee	File:	10-6160-06/2008-Vol 01
Re:	SNOW GEESE MANAGEMENT PLAN – RECOMMENDED CITY ACTION		

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee, at its meeting held on January 29, 2008, considered the attached report, and recommends as follows:

Committee Recommendation

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 Services, 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.*

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

Attach.

VARIANCE

Please note that in Part (2), the Richmond Advisory Committee on the Environment (ACE), and The Agricultural Advisory Committee were specifically named as appropriate City advisory committees.

Staff Report

Origin

The City of Richmond is situated along the Pacific Flyway – a major migration route for many birds, including the Lesser Snow Geese. In the fall of 2007, the number of Lesser Snow Geese migrating through Richmond led to concerns from the public regarding damage to lands and health and safety. In addition, a number of school grounds, which the City maintains, experienced substantial damage.

This report provides background information on the Lesser Snow Goose and recommends a plan of action consisting of both short-term remedial works and a long-term comprehensive approach aimed at reducing issues for Richmond and supporting wildlife needs.

Background

About Lesser Snow Geese

Each year, Lesser Snow Geese stage on the Fraser River delta between late September and early December and again between late February and April. During their stay, snow geese feed on plant material along the foreshore as well as upland grasslands and farmlands.

Challenges in 2007

In the fall of 2007, the City of Richmond experienced significant park damages from the snow geese as birds staged in higher numbers and more inland areas than in the past. Many of the areas where the snow geese located were parks situated adjacent to schools. Community concerns were expressed regarding potential health and operational impacts from bird feces.

The City's Parks department has a bird deterrent program using dogs to chase away snow geese; however, this initiative was only moderately effective for mitigating impacts in 2007.

City Response Action

In response to impacts from the 2007 snow geese staging, the City of Richmond undertook an assessment of the issue. Key findings are:

- The Lesser Snow Goose feces are not considered to pose a significant health risk by the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (Attachment 1)
- The Lesser Snow Goose winter population on the Fraser-Skagit Deltas has doubled in the last 10 years but numbers remain at approximately ½ of historical levels
- The Lesser Snow Goose is considered to be a threatened species by Russia where its breeding habitat is located
- Habitat capacity for supporting the Lesser Snow Goose has been declining since the 1960s¹

¹ Changes, including urban development, foreshore development, airport expansion, shifting agricultural crops (from multiple soil-based to monoculture berries) have reduced available habitat.

- Populations can fluctuate substantially in response to weather conditions during breeding; however, populations are likely to generally increase over time as a result of Arctic warming trends
- Impacts on staging areas are likely to increase due to anticipated increasing populations and declining habitat capacity
- An unified regional landscape-based management approach is required given that snow geese move between areas and management taken in one area impacts adjacent jurisdictions
- Action currently being taken is not coordinated and is ineffective at reducing long-term impacts and supporting responsible wildlife management

Recommended Action

It is staff's recommendation that the City:

1. Undertake immediate remedial action in the Spring 2008.
2. Develop an overarching management plan for guiding future City action.

Spring remedial action is proposed to consist of:

- Repair of City lands
- Conducting public communications to convey information pertaining to Richmond's snow geese population and clarify City action
- Strengthened on-site management action, including strengthened deterrent use (if necessary) and on-site monitoring

The proposed Snow Geese Management Plan is to be developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including senior governments, Richmond School District, neighboring municipalities, Vancouver Airport Authority and Richmond community. The Plan is intended to better ensure that:

- The City undertakes actions that supports approaches which reduce issues for Richmond over the long-term and supports responsible wildlife management
- A shared responsibility approach is adopted, involving the Richmond community and that all responsible parties, including senior governments, undertake necessary action.

The Plan will consider a wide range of tools including:

- New habitat alternatives
- Improved management of existing habitats
- Local population control
- On-site deterrent management such as canine control, noise disturbances and visual decoys (scarecrows, balloons, flags, mylar tape, etc..) as approved by Canadian Wildlife Services and in accordance with City By-laws
- Public education

Financial Impact

Financial resources of \$50,000 are required from General Contingency for 2008 to allow for the Spring Remedial action:

\$30,000 – Monitoring of the snow goose population; use and testing of additional deterrent methods such as canine control, noise disturbances and visual decoys (scarecrows, balloons, flags, mylar tape, etc..) as approved by Canadian Wildlife Services and in accordance with City By-laws; and communications with stakeholders and the public

\$20,000 – Overseeding and aeration repair work to damaged fields

The Snow Geese Management Plan will be developed using existing City resources. It will identify costs for Snow Geese management for consideration by Council in the 2009 budget process.

Conclusion

The management of Snow Geese in Richmond is required to address issues caused by a changing bird population and changing conditions in the Richmond community. This report recommends that the City undertake early remedial action resulting from the 2007 staging season and ensuing Spring 2008 migration. It also recommends that the City develop an overarching management plan for reducing conflicts over the long-term and supporting responsible wildlife management.



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**Richmond Health Department
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January 17, 2008

Serena Lusk, Park Programs Manager
Parks Design and Programs
City of Richmond
5599 Lynas Lane
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Dear Ms. Lusk:

Re: Snow Geese

In follow-up to our recent conversation regarding the potential public health impacts of geese congregating in playgrounds and parks I provide the following.

The Richmond Health Department would categorize the effects of large numbers of geese feeding and defecating in playgrounds and parks as a nuisance but not a public health hazard.

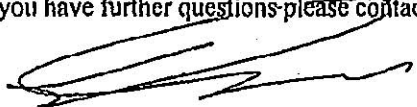
It is categorized as a nuisance as it does require some vigilance and precaution be taken by those exposed to areas soiled with bird feces.

There is a potential for goose droppings to contain pathogens but the risk of exposure is low in that a person can minimize the risk by practicing the following precautions:

- Persons who have been in areas soiled with bird droppings should keep their hands out of their mouths and always wash their hands prior to eating or preparing meals.
- Playground toys and equipment soiled with goose droppings should be adequately cleaned.

The importance of frequent hand washing can not be overstated not only in this circumstance but in all situations prior to eating or preparing meals.

If you have further questions please contact me.



Yours truly,

Dalton Cross, C.P.H.I. (C)
Senior Environmental Health Officer

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