



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services
Committee

Date: June 12, 2017

From: Mike Redpath
Senior Manager, Parks

File: 11-7000-01/2017-Vol
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Re: 2017 Urban Wildlife Program Update

Staff Recommendation

That the Urban Wildlife Program as detailed in the staff report titled "2017 Urban Wildlife Program Update," dated June 12, 2017, from the Senior Manager, Parks, be received for information.

Mike Redpath
Senior Manager, Parks
(604-247-4942)

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO: Sustainability	CONCURRENCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: 	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

The City of Richmond's Community Services Division has an active, multi-faceted urban wildlife program. The primary goal of the program is to minimize conflict between people and wildlife. As such, the program focusses on education, habitat enhancement, landscape interventions and limited hazing and re-location when required.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on this program and seek Council endorsement to continue with initiatives currently funded through both the ongoing operating budget and a one-time additional level support.

This report supports Council's 2014-2018 Term Goal #2 A Vibrant, Active and Connected City:

Continue the development and implementation of an excellent and accessible system of programs, services, and public spaces that reflect Richmond's demographics, rich heritage, diverse needs, and unique opportunities, and that facilitate active, caring, and connected communities.

2.3. Outstanding places, programs and services that support active living, wellness and a sense of belonging.

Analysis

Background – Snow Geese Management Program

Richmond is located on the Fraser River estuary, an area of immense biological productivity and abundant wildlife. The estuary is integral to the lifecycle of numerous species, including waterfowl. Each year millions of migratory birds pass through Richmond on route from their northern breeding grounds to their southern winter habitats.

Lesser Snow Geese are among the most abundant birds that migrate through the Fraser River estuary. Snow geese migrate south in October/November and north in April/May. They can also spend up to seven months overwintering each year in the region, travelling between the Fraser and Skagit estuaries.

Snow geese traditionally feed in the estuary and other wetlands, but increasing pressures on land in and around the estuaries has led to geese looking to other feeding grounds such as farm fields, playing fields and parks. There are added pressures in Richmond as a result of YVR's aggressive hazing program to ensure aviation safety, which drives snow geese populations south into Richmond.

Snow geese population levels have increased in recent years. While the mid-winter count of the Fraser and Skagit estuary flocks was previously as low as 57,000 in 2008, flocks have steadily increased over the past decade. In 2016, the count was close to 100,000 snow geese.

While snow geese populations may be considered a nuisance, their stable populations are a tribute to successful environmental protection. They are also valued by bird-watchers and ecotourists. While conflicts with humans can arise when geese consume crops, pose risks to aviation and soil playing fields and parks, these conflicts can be minimized through education and other mitigation techniques.

Since the adoption of wildlife management programs described in more detail below, Council adopted the Richmond’s first Ecological Network Management Strategy (ENMS) in 2015. The ENMS furthered the City’s commitment to habitat and wildlife management by articulating the following goals to guide future planning, design and management activities related to habitat:

1. Manage and Enhance our Ecological Assets
2. Strengthen City Infrastructure
3. Create, Connect and Protect Diverse and Healthy Spaces
4. Engage through Stewardship and Collaboration

The City’s wildlife management programs are consistent with the vision, goals and strategies articulated in the ENMS.

Current Snow Geese Management Program

In order to minimize damage to park and school grounds and address negative public perceptions regarding snow geese, the City of Richmond implemented recommendations from the *Best Management Practices Guide for Snow Geese in Richmond* (2008).

Ongoing actions include:

Action	Description	Outcomes
Membership in the Lower Mainland Snow Goose Steering Committee	A group of various stakeholders including local governments, YVR and Environment Canada that meets bi-annually to share information on current populations, best practices and other issues of mutual concern.	Ensures the City of Richmond remains informed of current best practices and participates in regional initiatives.
Landscape Interventions	In 2017, the Parks Department launched a pilot project with YVR to limit the mowing of grass along the Dyke Trail on River Road, west of Terra Nova Park, in order to discourage geese from congregating in this area.	Reduces hazards to aviation, minimizes traffic and other impacts to residents along River Road.
The Lesser Snow Goose in Richmond School Program	A school program, launched in 2010, to educate students about snow geese in Richmond.	Encourages awareness and appreciation for snow geese, minimizes conflict between people and snow geese. To date, 6,000 students have participated in this program.

Action	Description	Outcomes
Snow Goose Hazing	Humane snow goose hazing to disperse large flocks from school grounds and sports fields.	Minimizes fecal accumulation in parks and school grounds, contributes to aviation safety.
Winter Crop Cover Program	Provide funding to the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust to coordinate planting winter cover crops on farms in Richmond.	Addresses challenges facing wildlife and agriculture by providing funding to farmers to plant winter cover crops. These crops protect soil from erosion, improve soil fertility and provide feeding habitat for birds, including snow geese.

Background – Urban Wildlife Management Program

Interactions between people, pets and urban wildlife are frequent and at times challenging. In response to these challenges the Parks Department developed and implemented an *Urban Wildlife Framework* (2013). This work built on the Snow Goose Management Program and refined the City’s approach to managing urban wildlife.

Furbearing animals, including coyotes, beavers, skunks and raccoons, are protected under the BC Wildlife Act. Migratory birds, including geese and other birds, are protected by both the BC Wildlife Act and the federal Migratory Birds Convention Act.

Within the context of provincial and federal legislation, the City works to mitigate the impacts of urban wildlife on residents.

Current Urban Wildlife Management Program

Ongoing actions include:

Action	Description	Outcomes
Membership in the Lower Mainland Canada Goose Steering Committee	A group of various stakeholders including local governments, YVR and Environment Canada that meets bi-annually to share information on current populations, best practices and other issues of mutual concern.	Ensures the City of Richmond remains informed of current best practices and participates in regional initiatives.
Landscape Interventions for Canada Goose Populations	In 2017, the Parks Department launched a pilot project with YVR to limit mowing of grass along the Dyke Trail on River Road west of Terra Nova Park in order to discourage geese from congregating in this area.	Reduces hazards to aviation, minimizes traffic and other impacts to residents along River Road.

Action	Description	Outcomes
Richmond Nature Park Urban Wildlife Exhibit	A permanent exhibit at the Richmond Nature Park's Nature House that educates visitors about urban wildlife specific to Richmond.	<p>Encourages awareness, appreciation and safe behavior around wildlife in Richmond.</p> <p>Minimizes conflict between people and urban wildlife.</p> <p>Over 60,000 people visited the Nature House in 2016.</p>
Special Events and Programs	<p>Raptor Festival at Terra Nova Rural Park.</p> <p>Weekend shows, events and programs at the Richmond Nature Park including: A Day for the Birds, Hummingbird Homecoming, Slugfest, Bug Show, Owl Show and boat tours.</p>	<p>Encourages awareness, appreciation and safe behavior around wildlife in Richmond.</p> <p>Minimizes conflict between people and urban wildlife.</p> <p>Over 1,000 people participate annually in the Raptor Festival.</p> <p>Over 5,000 people annually visit shows, events and programs with a wildlife-focus at the Richmond Nature Park.</p>
Informal Education through the Richmond Nature Park	Providing information to residents in person, by phone and over email.	<p>Encourages awareness, appreciation and safe behavior around wildlife.</p> <p>Minimizes conflict between people and urban wildlife.</p> <p>The Richmond Nature Park fielded over 130 inquiries from residents related to urban wildlife in 2016.</p>
Co-existing with Coyotes	Launched in 2017 in partnership with the Stanley Park Ecology Society, this program includes public education, tracking and reporting of coyote sightings.	<p>Encourages awareness, appreciation and safe behavior around coyotes in Richmond.</p> <p>Minimizes conflict between people, pets and coyotes.</p> <p>Accurate data encourages appropriate response from BC Ministry of Environment Emergency if required.</p>

Action	Description	Outcomes
Barn Owl Box Program	Established in 2009, there are now 12 barn owl boxes installed throughout Richmond.	Provides nesting habitat for barn owls to support breeding and monitoring for research purposes. Ten of the 12 boxes are currently being used for roosting.
Richmond-based Research	In 2015, the City supported a research project, <i>Knowledge, Attitudes and Activities Around Wildlife and Nature: A Case Study of Richmond, BC</i> , to better understand the knowledge, attitudes and activities of residents around wildlife and nature.	Informed decision making around program and outreach opportunities that are relevant for Richmond residents.
Wildlife Signage	Installation of signage as required to inform residents about wildlife safety (ie. coyotes or marine mammals displaying threatening behavior)	Encourages awareness, appreciation and safe behavior around wildlife. Minimizes conflict between people and pets and urban wildlife.

Future Urban Wildlife Management Program Opportunities

In 2017, \$28,400 was carried forward from a one-time additional level to support an enhanced level of wildlife management, including the development of The Lesser Snow Goose in Richmond Program and to support the winter crop cover program. In order to continue with these programs on a permanent basis, ongoing additional funding will be required.

Additional opportunities currently being explored include the development of an expanded urban wildlife public education program and a new Urban Wildlife in Richmond School Program. Modelled on the success of The Lesser Snow Goose in Richmond Program, this program would encourage students, and their families, to engage in safe and responsible behavior around urban wildlife. Funding for wildlife management is based on the current levels of service. Expanding levels of service with additional programs will require additional ongoing additional funding.

Financial Impact

None. Any ongoing additional funding requests will be presented and considered as part of the regular operating budget process.

Conclusion

The City of Richmond has an active, multi-faceted urban wildlife program. The primary goal of the program is to minimize conflict between people and wildlife, as such; the program focusses

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on education, habitat enhancement, landscape interventions and limited hazing and re-location when required.

Staff will continue to review and monitor the effectiveness of the Urban Wildlife Management Program to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marie Fenwick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marie Fenwick
Manager, Parks Programs
(604-244-1275)