

Preamble/Note from Chair and Vice Chair

When the Citizens' Advisory Group (CAG) for the development of the Capital Regional District's (CRD) Regional Deer Management Strategy (RDMS) first began our work together, each of us brought our own unique perspective, preparations and anticipations to the table. The three local food producers whose hard work and livelihood are directly impacted by Black-tailed deer invading their crops naturally tended to see things through a different lens than the CAG members who had never experienced life as a farmer. Because the deer-human conflict is an emotional matter, it is fair to say that many, if not all, members experienced a shift in their beliefs and viewpoints during the process of developing our recommendations.

Eleven volunteers signed on to the CAG to complete a task that would prove very complex. Differing opinions amongst the group often led to more thorough discussions - and we had plenty of those! Nothing multifarious is ever simply black or white so, using the best available knowledge at this time, we endeavoured to examine the many shades of grey surrounding each management option as we evaluated it.

All of us may have been a little too optimistic when we agreed and aspired to reach optimal consensus with our evaluations. Indeed, two members of the CAG resigned part way through the evaluation process after informing the Board of the CRD that they were unable to finish the task with the rest of the group. The remaining CAG continued to work diligently to produce a set of strong - and consensus-based - recommendations for the Planning, Transportation and Protective Services Committee, a standing committee of the CRD Board that is responsible for making final recommendations to the CRD Board on a RDMS.

One challenge we faced during the evaluation process was a lack of scientific evidence in some cases, hence reliance upon anecdotal evidence was necessary. Statistical information was lacking for the exact number of deer within the CRD and also for the exact figures regarding farmers' income losses caused by deer. It is however important to note that "anecdotal evidence" and "convincing evidence" are not antonyms, nor does "anecdotal" mean "unscientific". Sometimes anecdotal evidence is not only all that is available (as in this case) but it can often be enough evidence to support a decision.

Examples: The use of cowpox as a vaccine for smallpox arose from "anecdotal" evidence. Many of Darwin's observations were "anecdotal" and while some may argue with his conclusions, few argue that his method of collecting evidence was "unscientific".

To maintain the transparency of the CAG's meetings, members of the public were invited to attend as observers, but not permitted to interrupt with questions or comments. Sometimes the topics being discussed by the group were not perceived favourably by attending members of the public. For some of

the volunteers on the CAG, the presence of members of the media and photographic and recording devices was a distraction. Moving to a larger facility allowed for more space between the CAG and the public gallery and ensured more open discussion between the group's members.

Three staff members from the CRD's Regional Planning Division provided invaluable assistance to the CAG and were reliable and helpful in every way possible. They also liaised with the Expert Resource Working Group members who were able to ensure the CAG had the latest information and assessments available about the efficacy and sustainability of all known deer management options.

It is difficult to estimate how long it will take to complete a complex process such as this one done by the CAG. When working with such a diverse group of people – selected to represent a broad cross-section of CRD residents - it's important to allow them sufficient time to do their job properly. The commitment of their time and effort from those volunteers chosen to serve on such a committee is sizeable as everyone selected must have a voice. As well, in order to maintain continuity of input, any person who cannot attend meetings regularly should be removed and replaced early in the process so as to avoid gaps in information that they could contribute regarding specific communal and cultural perspectives.

It has been our privilege to serve with the fine people who have persisted through this challenging process. We believe our recommendations for this emotional, economic and politically-charged issue will make a valuable contribution towards finding acceptable solutions to the RDMS.



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