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CRD Regional Deer Management Strategy Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, June 5, 2012 – 4:00pm

Activity Room, Burnside-Gorge Community Centre, Victoria

Meeting Notes

Present:

Jocelyn Skrlac (Chair)
Robin Bassett
Richard Christiansen
Wendy Fox
Lisa Kadonaga
Sol Kinnis
Terry Michell
Robert Moody
Patrick O'Rourke
Kerri Ward

Regrets:

Phil Tom

Staff:

Jeff Weightman (Deer Management Project Manager, CRD Regional Planning)
Marg Misek-Evans (Senior Manager, CRD Regional Planning)
Corey Burger (Recording Secretary, CRD Regional Planning)
Jan Pezzaro (Facilitator)

Presenters:

Kim Brunt (Senior Wildlife Biologist, Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations)
Orlando Schmidt (Regional Manager, Ministry of Agriculture)

- 1. Introductions**
- 2. Approval of Agenda**

R. Christiansen moved approval of the agenda. L. Kadonga seconded.

CARRIED

- 3. Review and Approval of Minutes of May 16, 2012**

W. Fox moved approval of the minutes. R. Moody seconded.

CARRIED

- 4. Correspondence**



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J. Weightman proposed a method of circulating correspondence addressed directly to the CAG whereby the members would receive the correspondence via email and have the option to discuss at the following meeting.

5. Purpose of Presentations

J. Pezzaro introduced herself and, provided a brief synopsis and background to the two presentations requested at the last meeting.

6. Presentation – Inventory/Count

K. Brunt introduced himself and began his presentation with information about farmer's deer harvest permits in the CRD including the process for getting permits. The CAG asked about the deer kill permits issued to farmers and what farmers need to prove and K. Brunt replied that there are about 15 to 20 permits currently active in the Saanich Peninsula. K. Brunt further explained that the local permits are reviewed by both him and conservation officer service staff. A background check is carried out to determine if the applicant has any recent infractions under the Wildlife Act. K. Brunt also explained that the permitting process is designed to deal with individual or a small number of problem deer, not as a population control mechanism. Farmers also need to show alternative means of dealing with the issue; he noted electric fencing as an example, further indicating that it is inexpensive but not always effective with high value crops such as strawberries. K. Brunt also mentioned that many of the permits he sees are repeat permits and some farmers take no deer in some years.

K. Brunt then spoke about the deer inventories that the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations carries out on Vancouver Island. K. Brunt then showed historic deer population trends, adding the impact of predation on deer populations in undeveloped areas. K. Brunt also explained that the numbers were an index of the population level, not an absolute estimate of the total population.

The CAG asked how the index was derived and K. Brunt stated that while the Ministry's index is collected by counting deer per linear km on driven transects the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource research found deer per km² was very similar. K. Brunt also stated that the index closely tracks hunter success (as measured by number of hunter days per deer shot) and predator numbers, thus he has a high level of confidence with them.

K. Brunt spoke to the limitations of the current inventories done by the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, including its applicability to urban, rural and agricultural areas particularly in the CRD. K. Brunt mentioned that in the CRD habitat variability is much higher than more remote areas that the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations currently inventories. K. Brunt then spoke about the challenges of doing an inventory in the CRD with the high variability of habitat



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compounded by the typically small home range of a resident urban or rural deer. K. Brunt mentioned that the Ministry's method of inventorying via driving transects at night with spotlights likely would not work in the CRD.

The CAG asked if the inventories in the Cowichan Valley Regional District included the agricultural areas and K. Brunt replied that they did not. K. Brunt mentioned that they tried to count deer in primarily cultivated fields of Denman Island, for one or two years but discontinued due to lack of comparability with existing deer inventory methodology. K. Brunt also spoke about the logistical issues of using volunteers for inventories and the challenges with standardization of data collected by volunteers.

The CAG asked about the changes in historic population trends and K. Brunt replied that changes seen in the short term were due to predation while the longer term downward trend was due to habitat loss. The CAG asked about effect of hunting on deer numbers and K. Brunt replied that hunters over the past decade have taken between 1900-3100 deer per year on Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast, while the estimated Vancouver Island population of 150-250 wolves and 400-600 cougars would each take a deer approximately every 10-12 days per animal (a maximum estimate assuming they are feeding exclusively on deer), and thus the impact of hunting as a means of population management was negligible.

The CAG asked about fawn survival rates and reproduction and K. Brunt replied that the average doe lives 10 to 12 years, usually has a single fawn by age two, and twins every year thereafter. K. Brunt mentioned that fawn survival rate in the bush is 30% and said that it would likely be significantly higher in the urban, rural and agricultural areas of the CRD. He emphasized that given the reproductive rate of deer long-term solutions will need to be found.

The CAG asked about deer migration to repopulate areas that have had deer numbers reduced and K. Brunt replied that it would be a very slow process as resident deer do not migrate quickly or long distances.

The CAG asked about other issues that might affect deer survival and K. Brunt explained that predation and winter severity are the biggest short term determinants of total deer numbers. K. Brunt explained that in recent years there have been no severe and protracted winters. K. Brunt expanded by saying that deer numbers are determined in the longer term by habitat, and logging tends to create boom and bust cycles of deer numbers as the new forest matures.

The CAG asked how much forage a deer would consume on a daily basis and K. Brunt said that elk, which are about five times bigger than deer, consume about 15-20 pounds per day, and inferred that a deer would consume about 3 to 4 pounds daily.



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The CAG asked about how effective a cull would be and K. Brunt replied that it was not a one-shot management item; it would need to be continuous or pulsed. The CAG asked if Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations checked if farmers had required municipal permits for firearms discharge and K. Brunt replied that the Ministry does not.

The CAG asked about contraception and K. Brunt replied that the most common contraception drugs are not available in Canada except on an experimental basis. He said that the process for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to approve any new drugs is lengthy and a company must effectively champion the drug; a company has not yet done this for the current drug, SpayVac. K. Brunt also mentioned that effective immunocontraception requires 85%+ of does to be sterilized, with the remaining 15% of does culled in following years.

The CAG asked about observations of hunted versus non-hunted deer and K. Brunt replied that while deer become habituated, there are no major differences in production of fawns or biology between the two populations. He did note that hunted deer tend to become more nocturnal and secretive.

The CAG asked about the number of fawns seen by the wild animal rehabilitation centres and K. Brunt replied that the number seen by those centres is only a small fraction of the numbers of fawns that likely starve in the wild and that small fawns seen in early spring likely wouldn't have survived the winter in the wild.

The CAG asked about mortality rates of fawns hit by vehicles and K. Brunt replied that vehicle collisions are likely the most significant factor in deer mortality in urban, rural and agricultural areas.

The CAG asked about predators and K. Brunt replied that the cougars seen in the urban fringe are mostly two-year-old males recently separated from their mother and trying to establish their own territory and are attracted by prey.

The CAG asked about repellants and K. Brunt replied that PlantSkydd is effective and has worked in forestry but that heavy rains generally tend to reduce the repellants' effectiveness.

7. Presentation – Options for agricultural damage

Orlando Schmidt introduced himself and stated that he will give an overview of options for agricultural producers impacted by wildlife in the CRD with a presentation prepared by Rob Kline, Regional Agrologist, Ministry of Agriculture.

O. Schmidt started by giving an overview of insurance programs, including Production Insurance (PI), formerly called crop insurance, outlining its coverage limitations such as



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wildlife, adding that insurance is more aimed at unpredictable events such as weather.

O. Schmidt mentioned that loss of tree fruit due to deer are occasionally covered but that fencing is required for this coverage. He also mentioned that silage, corn and grain are occasionally covered too, although these crops are not typically found within the CRD.

O. Schmidt then spoke about the Agricultural Wildlife Program (AWP) and its history, starting with migratory waterfowl issues in the Lower Mainland. The CAG asked the total dollar figure for the CRD under this program and O. Schmidt replied that in 2011 \$500,000 was allocated to farmers on Vancouver Island of which \$18,000 went to three farmers in the CRD. He further explained that the loss needed to be visible and that the program covered 80% of verifiable loss.

The CAG asked about the limitation of the AWP to grain and cereal and if it could be expanded to fruits and vegetables. O. Schmidt replied that any expansion of the program to add additional crop types would require a proposal to be created. He explained that the AWP spent six or seven years piloting the dual goal of testing to see if the program could protect wildlife while protecting farmers' livelihoods.

The CAG asked about lure crops as are used in Saskatchewan for birds and O. Schmidt replied that he wasn't aware of any for deer although the AWP did have a fencing program to help with deer eating feed in other parts of BC.

O. Schmidt then offered a number of wildlife management options including education of farmers about AWP, including more crops in PI, requesting the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations to change hunting regulations, encouraging fencing for high value crops, and establishing a Regional Agricultural Wildlife Committee (RAWC) under the Provincial Agriculture Zone Wildlife Program (PAZWP).

The CAG asked who would establish a RAWC committee and O. Schmidt replied that it would be the Provincial government by request. He further explained that it was a cross-ministry effort and that K. Brunt would be the local contact. K. Brunt then explained that part of the PAZWP program was connecting willing hunters with willing land owners. The CAG asked about the role of a PAZWP committee and O. Schmidt explained that it would be similar to what the CAG is already doing.

M. Misek-Evans asked about ministry support for a new RAWC and O. Schmidt replied that in-kind staff support would be provided as required. M. Misek-Evans then asked about the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) funded by the Federal Government and O. Schmidt explained that the program educated farmers to assess farms for stronger environmental practices then funded the implementation of some of the suggested changes. The program included a section called Beneficial Management Practices Program (BMP Program) which provided funding for Wildlife Damage Prevention. O. Schmidt said that the 2012 fiscal year was the end of the funding agreement with the federal government and the program was already fully allocated for that year.



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O. Schmidt mentioned he had a report just released on the BMP Program looking at the socio-economic impact of the various parts of the BMP Program including the Wildlife Damage Prevention section.

ACTION: CRD Staff to circulate the Socio-Economic and Environmental Assessment of Beneficial Management Practices report to the CAG

O. Schmidt also mentioned the risk involved in such a program, where wildlife could move from a fenced field to a non-fenced field. The CAG asked about the total funding for projects under the EFP and if it was tied to size of farm and O. Schmidt replied that it was either 30% or 50% up to \$10,000 per farm with no variance for size of farm. The CAG asked if the EFP was only for-profit farms and O. Schmidt replied that it was.

R. Moody then passed out a press release he had received today regarding a new Agriculture Environment Initiative Program (AEI) from ArdCorp that will fund research into wildlife and agricultural issues.

The CAG asked what British Columbia Agricultural Council (BCAC) was and R. Moody replied that it was the member organization of representatives from various farm sectors and included about 90% of the farmers in BC. R. Moody then explained that the group lobbies government on behalf of the farming community and administers various programs. R. Moody also mentioned that the current Minister of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations was the executive-director of BCAC and thus understood the issues. The CAG noted that such programs are partner driven and the more diverse the people at the table, the better.

8. Break for Dinner

The committee broke for dinner from 5:40 to 6:05pm.

9. Facilitated Discussion of Table of Contents

J. Pezzaro introduced herself and what her role was for the next steps. J. Pezzaro mentioned that the Table of Contents that the CAG worked on last meeting was circulated but J. Weightman had not received any comments from the CAG yet.

The CAG asked whether the Table of Contents was still draft and J. Pezzaro replied that it was. The CAG asked about the issue of crop loss and stated that it needed more work and J. Pezzaro replied that the CAG can have a robust discussion about that topic.

The CAG discussed the public opinion survey and where it fit in the Table of Contents, it was determined that in the event the Board opted to complete a poll it would be added.



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J. Pezzaro then spoke about the development of some principles of the plan to guide the process and guided the CAG through development of principles, looking to various principles written by CAG members and collating them into single statements under the group's direction.

The CAG discussed wording regarding agriculture, including food security and FN treaty hunting rights. The CAG discussed the differences between food security and supporting the livelihood of farmers.

The CAG also discussed principles around the challenges of implementation including long-term sustainability in all senses of the word including fiscal.

The CAG discussed differences between public acceptability and public defensibility of options including the relative unpopularity of certain management options.

The CAG discussed the CAG Terms of Reference and how to word a principle around consensus-based decision including the reference to the possibility of a minority opinion included in the final report.

The CAG then discussed next steps, including the drafting of the evaluation criteria which is to be undertaken at the next meeting. This included discussion of management options that are short-term versus long-term.

The CAG then discussed the level of information regarding agricultural damage and how ongoing monitoring might fit into the objectives of the report. The CAG also discussed the wording of human/deer conflicts and if they were comfortable with the current language.

ACTION: J. Pezzaro and CRD Staff to work on principles to circulate for discussion and editing by the CAG before the next meeting.

10. Next Steps and Outstanding Items

J. Weightman then spoke briefly about various information requests the CAG had given to staff. He mentioned that he is awaiting response about First Nation capacity for deer and that the Upper Thames Conservation Area deer management information is currently hard copy only.

ACTION: CRD Staff to circulate outstanding information requests to CAG as they become available.

11. Next Meeting



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The CAG then discussed the next meeting date and set the date for 4 to 8pm on June 12, 2012 with the tentative location to be the Burnside Gorge Centre's Activity Room if available.

The meeting ended at 8:05pm