

CRD Regional Deer Management Strategy Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, August 1, 2012 – 4:00pm
Activity Room, Burnside-Gorge Community Centre, Victoria

Meeting Notes

Present:

Jocelyn Skrlac (Chair)
Robert Moody (Vice Chair)
Richard Christiansen
Wendy Fox
Lisa Kadonaga
Sol Kinnis
Patrick O'Rourke

Regrets:

Phil Tom
Terry Michell
Glenn Jim

Staff:

Jeff Weightman (Deer Management Project Manager, CRD Regional Planning)
Marg Misek-Evans (Senior Manager, CRD Regional Planning)
Graeme Jones (Recording Secretary, CRD Regional Planning)

1. Approval of Agenda

R. Moody moved approval of the agenda. Lisa Kadonaga seconded.

CARRIED

2. Review and Discussion of Minutes of July 24, 2012

W. Fox moved approval of the minutes. P. O'Rourke seconded.

CARRIED

3. Chair's Remarks

The Chair opened her remarks by thanking R. Moody for filling in for her the previous week. The Chair discussed online communications with the First Nations representative and noted they were going well. The Chair commented on her support for the perspective reflected in the previous weeks minutes regarding the First Nation's view of anecdotal evidence, adding that the view expressed reflects a cultural perspective. The Chair concludes by thanking CAG members for their perseverance.

4. Correspondence

J. Weightman noted a letter from 1974 sent to the Mayor of Saanich regarding the subject of problem deer, accessed from the Saanich archives. The CAG suggested that deer human conflicts were minimal in suburban areas back then. M. Misek-Evans noted that suburban and urban land uses back then would have been limited. The CAG observed that the letter suggested a problem only in agriculture areas.

J. Weightman introduced the feedback from the Ministry of Environment senior wildlife biologist regarding the CAG's consideration of Crop Protection as an independent option, as discussed at the previous meeting.

5. Facilitated Discussion

Evaluation of Status Quo option

J. Weightman introduced the Status Quo Option noting not all CAG members had submitted individual evaluations. J. Weightman introduced the option as a "do nothing or stay the course" option. Comments on the individual evaluations indicated that this option would be ineffective especially in the rural geography and slightly more desirable in urban geography.

J. Weightman asked the CAG to assess the effectiveness for individual for the urban geography. The CAG noted doing nothing would have no effect and suggested a score of 1. . CAG scored 1 for Effectiveness: Broader impact in the Urban geography.

The CAG discussed the Rural geography for the Status Quo option. The CAG discussed rural perspectives, noting that some residents like the deer and that deer/human conflict was less of an issue. CAG scored Effectiveness: Broader Impact 1 for Rural.

J. Weightman introduced Ray Demarchi, Peninsula Agriculture Commission Representative of the ERWG.

The CAG discussed Effectiveness for the Individual and scored a 1 for the Rural geography. J. Weightman noted all geographies were currently scored 3 for Feasibility and Capability based on the median of the individual evaluations. The CAG proposed no change to the score. . The CAG discussed the possibility of legal issues for the region if the option to do nothing is selected.

The CAG discussed the Cost criteria. The CAG noted that a low Cost, and therefore high desirability score, would be perceived as a negative outcome. The CAG continued that the cost to levels of government is small compared to the cost to the individual. R. Demarchi discussed the cost, noting a low cost now could lead to higher costs later depending on changes in population growth rate. The CAG considered the likelihood of a widespread disease drastically reducing the overall population. J. Weightman asked R.

Demarchi what the chances were of such a deer disease outbreak occurring. R. Demarchi responded that it was highly unlikely. R. Demarchi mentioned a Bang's disease (Brucellosis) outbreak in Oregon's elk population as an example, stating that the disease affected the ability of the females to reproduce successfully (contagious or infectious abortion). R. Demarchi continued that often bad winters affect population, but most likely deer will continue to adapt to urban areas, and are often assisted with human feeding during difficult winters. The CAG considered costs borne by the individual and the collective cost to agriculture. The CAG scored the Cost criteria at 1.5 for urban and 1.5 for rural. The CAG suggested a bigger impact to agricultural costs if nothing was done, and agreed on a score of 1.

The CAG discussed the Time criterion. The CAG considered the variation in the amount of time people in each geography spent dealing with consequences of the deer conflict. The CAG proposed a score of 3 for time across all geographies. and that the longer the delay before a decision is made, the longer the it will take to implement an active management option..

The CAG discussed the Support Enthusiasm criteria for the Status Quo option. The CAG scored Support and Enthusiasm for the Agricultural geography as a 1, given the repeated requests for assistance from the Agriculture community. The CAG noted the geographically large scale of the rural area. A member noted, from personal experience living in a rural area, that many neighbours are not happy with the deer situation, but that some enjoy the presence of deer. The CAG commented that the urban geography should be scored lower compared to the rural geography. The CAG noted that in the rural geography there are varying points of view; some feed the deer and some try to repel the deer. R. Demarchi noted a survey on the public perception of hunting showed split support, correlated with whether respondents live with regular deer interactions. The CAG discussed the urban geography support in Oak Bay and noted the willingness of residents to purchase repellents. A CAG member added that, in conversation with a number of Oak Bay residents regarding deer, there was also a willingness to live alongside them. The CAG commented that the Status Quo option is not about comparing but rather about continuing on as is. R. Demarchi added that gauging public perception is difficult and consensus may not be possible. The CAG questioned, hypothetically, if the CRD chose the Status Quo option, what the public support would be? The CAG added that the optics would be poor after spending time and resources to recommend a Status Quo option. The CAG noted that there are many 'do no harm' options that are less feasible. The CAG further noted that this option is not really an option, but discussing it helps better understand the other options. The CAG scored 1.5 for the rural geography. The CAG noted the degree to which livelihoods are affected is the largest consideration between the rural and agricultural geographies. The CAG noted the higher tolerance of residents for deer in the urban geography. The CAG scored the Support and Enthusiasm Criteria for Status Quo as a 2.

The CAG discussed the Negative Community Impact criterion. The CAG agreed to a score of 1 in the agricultural geography. The CAG noted that with respect to the rural geography, if deer conflict increases, Negative Community Impacts will get worse. Some consideration was given to the potential for property owners to take matters into their own hands in dealing with deer, outside of the legal process. The CAG agreed to a score of 2 for rural and urban geographies.

Discussion of Crop Protection as a standalone option

J. Weightman re-introduced the correspondence from Ministry of Environment on crop protection as a separate management option outside of Controlled Public Hunt. The CAG commented that the Crop Protection program deals with 'hot spots', i.e. very localized problem areas, and refinements would be in order to be effective in the agriculture geography.

Discussion of management options recommendations for each geography

J. Weightman thanked the CAG for their draft submissions of recommended deer management options. J. Weightman explained that recommendations that had been submitted had been transcribed onto post-its and added to each geography specific evaluation matrix poster, with non-geography specific recommendations posted separately. J. Weightman invited the CAG to read the post-it notes and add any more recommendations to those already posted.

J. Weightman introduced Helen Schwantje, Provincial Wildlife Biologist with the Ministry of Environment and an ERWG member. M. Misek-Evans invited the CAG to start the group discussion by geography while also taking the opportunity to ask R. Demarchi and H. Schwantje questions.

The CAG discussed recommendations for agriculture. M. Misek-Evans directed the CAG's attention to the outcome statement for agriculture geography recommendations. The CAG discussed recommending population reduction. The CAG noted that this question needed to be decided before further recommendations were discussed. The CAG commented that recommending population control to bring numbers to a manageable level may be appropriate in certain areas. The CAG added that outcome statements are needed for all geographies for recommendations to be effective. The CAG noted the need to figure out if recommendations would reduce conflict or move it around. The CAG hypothesized if population control is selected, it may be applied differently in different geographies. The CAG commented that selected population control does not limit the ability to recommend other options. The CAG discussed a specific recommendation about population control with consideration given to broadening the scope of consideration beyond economic loss.

The CAG noted the agriculture outcome statement was about reducing deer to acceptable levels and improving tools available to farmers. H. Schwantje commented that tools are part of achieving an outcome. R. Demarchi noted that deer are mobile and therefore options need to be dispatched in a sustained program. M. Misek-Evans reminded the group of the discussion from the previous week about jurisdictional considerations. The CAG discuss the wording of an agricultural outcome statement.

The CAG discussed the inclusion of language to collect crop loss data. J. Weightman noted the data would be used for monitoring. H. Schwantje suggested the data would be useful as political leverage with respect to the requesting changes to provincial and federal funding programs. The CAG responded that farmers cannot be forced to supply data. The CAG raised the issue of time and resources required to collect such data. H. Schwantje added that Ministry help maybe contingent on proof through data. The CAG noted the data will be needed both for the short and long-term justification of a program. H. Schwantje added that there have been fence funding programs in the Kootenays and Peace regions. R. Demarchi continued with the example of Colorado where there is a large compensation program for crop loss. The program addresses the animal conflict but does not address the root cause. R. Demarchi concluded his comments by observing from experience that farmers do not want handouts. An agricultural representative on the CAG agreed and added that crop loss is frustrating emotionally not just financially. Another agricultural CAG representative agreed, adding that farmers grow food for more than just money. The CAG agricultural representative commented on collecting data and asked about Statistics Canada data availability. Another CAG member responded that Statistics Canada requests data on planted area and harvested area for certain projects but was unaware of how the aggregated values that are released publically.

Action: CRD staff to inquire what data Statistics Canada collects relative to crop loss and how it is reported.

The CAG discussed current limitations on data availability, adding that the crop loss data would be useful as a benchmark. The CAG noted that collection of such data could be part of their recommendation.

H. Schwantje commented that Capture and Relocate is unlikely to be allowed due to the stress on the animals. H. Schwantje added that her office is discussing this currently and due to the challenges associated with this option it is unlikely to be authorized. R. Demarchi agreed. H. Schwantje continued that monitoring of moved animals shows individuals exhibit bizarre behaviour. R. Demarchi added that trapping often happens in winter requiring storage of animals. H. Schwantje concludes that the process is very stressful on the animals, and the individuals often do not fare well. H. Schwantje invited CAG members to directly contact her for further information on this option.

The CAG asked H. Schwantje about the likelihood of Immunocontraceptives being approved as an option. H. Schwantje responded that they are expensive, outlining the requirements for authorization in today's regulatory environment: a research project permit, a biologist and a proposal for scientific research with a start and end date and several parameters for which data is to be collected and reported over the study period. The option also requires 90% of does to be inoculated to be effective and there are many unknowns as to the duration of effectiveness. Some trials indicate that does can remain infertile for up to 6 years; life expectancy is 12 years. No drugs have been approved in Canada. The geography of the Region would make it difficult to undertake Immunocontraception at a large scale. The option has been used on James Island. The CAG asked the ERWG for a comparison of the costs and benefits of public education relative to immunocontraceptives. The ERWG members responded that Public Education would be more advisable than Immunocontraception at this time.

She mentioned long-term trials on elephants in Africa and other species in the United States that may yield interesting findings by which to advance the science of immunocontraceptive use. The CAG noted the option could be recommended for the long term.

H. Schwantje suggested the CAG adopt a principle of no/low harm for animals in their recommendations. She commented that there are many different opinions on life and death and that no harm does not necessarily mean population reduction is not an option, but rather would influence the measures taken to reduce population. As a professional biologist, there are professional ethics to abide by and inflicting suffering on animals through options that prolong life only to enable the animal to starve to death or maim or injure itself trying to escape are more inhumane than outright destruction. R. Demarchi noted the German hunting model whereby organizations managing deer view them as a resource. H. Schwantje commented that the hunting is more privatized in Europe and the same cultural norms may not be applicable here.

6. Break for dinner from 6:40pm to 7:10pm

7. Facilitated Discussion Continued

The CAG discussed recommendations for the rural geography; J. Weightman explained the definition of 'rural'. A CAG member commented that deer conflicts were less urgent in rural areas, as livelihood was not at risk. The CAG noted that rural property owners suffer less economic damage compared to agricultural areas. The CAG added that the outcome statement for the rural geography should be aimed at the property level and owners. It was postulated that if the deer population was reduced in the agricultural areas, this would relieve pressure on the rural properties also. Conversely, the CAG noted the potential displacement of the deer issue from agriculture areas to the rural geography if agricultural measures are implemented faster than measures in the rural areas.

H. Schwantje noted that the deer primarily have local ranges; elevation and weather may cause some migration, however, the existing population are resident and non-migratory. R. Demarchi explained that animals may expand their range but mostly remain in local ranges. H. Schwantje added that younger deer are more likely to explore and expand their ranges.

The CAG commented that the Deer Vehicle Collision Mitigation (DVCM) option is a more rural issue than urban issue. M. Misek-Evans reminded the CAG that DVCM is separate from geographies. H. Schwantje agreed with the separation of DVCM from the specific geographies. M. Misek-Evans suggested noting the rural geography consideration during the DVCM discussion.

The CAG discussed whether the outcome statement should include maintaining the current population levels. The CAG noted that some rural properties would be too small for hunting.

The CAG discussed including a population reduction recommendation. M. Misek-Evans asked H. Schwantje and R. Demarchi for their opinion. R. Demarchi noted that population control in agriculture areas would require population control the rural areas. R. Demarchi continued by suggesting that smaller zones within geographies be identified in order to differentiate levels of deer human conflict. H. Schwantje commented that the acceptable level of deer in rural areas may be higher than in agricultural areas. The CAG added that time is also less urgent in the rural geography. M. Misek-Evans noted the discretionary aspect between agricultural and rural and asked CAG how to represent this in the outcome statement. R. Demarchi noted the variation within each area needs to be taken into account. The CAG added that opinions change by geography. The CAG added the tolerance of deer could change from property owner to property owner. The CAG responded that variation within an area balances out individual landowner's tolerance levels. The CAG added that a variety of options should be available for owners with varying tolerances to choose from. R. Demarchi noted the Status Quo could be an option in some rural areas.

The CAG commented that management options were not all geared toward individual land owners and asked about the role of the CRD. M. Misek-Evans explained that it is likely best for a community to decide what options to proceed with, rather than the region. The CAG commented that M. Misek-Evans' made it sound as if the CAG was making recommendations to the municipalities. M. Misek-Evans responded that there is no obligation for municipalities to implement an option and that there are varying authorities that would need to be involved in implementing any strategy, as previously discussed. The CAG noted that some options may be beyond municipal authority or that municipalities could say no to certain options. The CAG commented that the outcome statement should reflect the CAG's assignment to make recommendations.

The CAG added the need to be consistent with the agriculture geography outcome statement and be specific to the rural geography. M. Misek-Evans suggested CAG members consider the evaluation matrix to help form an outcome statement, informing it from the types of options that surfaced favourably during the evaluation phase. M. Misek-Evans closed the discussion noting that CRD staff will provide a consolidated digital version of all the straw-model recommendations and comments.

Action CRD Staff to provide CAG with a consolidated digital version of all the comments.

8. Project Manager's Remarks

J. Weightman reminded CAG of the draft report distributed late last week noting limited comments received so far and requested more feedback.

J. Weightman provided a verbal overview of anecdotal correspondence from the University of Victoria regarding landscaped areas newly planted after the removal of the rabbits are now experiencing deer damage.

J. Weightman reminded the CAG of the need for quorum and requested their availability. M. Misek-Evans outlined the timeline for future CAG meetings August 8, 2012 and August 22, 2012. The CAG asked about the rules regarding quorum with respect to two members resigning. The CAG passed a resolution to the Board with the recommendation for quorum to be adjusted to the new membership levels.

Motion to revise quorum

It was moved by P. O'Rourke and seconded by R. Moody. the CAG:

THAT QUORUM BE REVISED TO 6, THE MAJORITY OF REMAINING MEMBERS.

CARRIED

9. Next Steps and Outstanding Items

10. Next Meeting

The CAG agreed to meet Wednesday, August 8, 2012 at Burnside Gorge Community Centre, pending availability.