Beaver Management Workshop
2006-09-21

1.0 Introduction

A workshop to discuss the management of beavers in the City of St. Albert was carried out on September 21, 2006 from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at City Hall in the East Boardroom. The following individuals participated in the workshop:

- Doris Bailey, Citizen, St. Albert
- Elke Blodgett, Citizen, St. Albert
- Dave Burkhart, President, BLESS
- Trevor Craft, Parks Worker II Pest Control, City of St. Albert
- Councillor Nolan Crouse, Councillor, City of St. Albert
- Deane Doucette, Citizen, St. Albert
- Dave Ellis, Citizen, St. Albert
- John Folinsbee, Wildlife Biologist, Sustainable Resource Development
- Leah Jackson, Environmental Manager, City of St. Albert
- Stuart Loomis, Citizen, St. Albert
- Robert MacDonald, Wildlife Control Services, Edmonton
- Meghan Myers, Environmental Coordinator, City of St. Albert
- Carol Rankin, REEP & Community Gardens, St. Albert
- Dan Stoker, Environmental Advisory Committee, City of St. Albert
- Kevin Veenstra, Red Willow Park Foreman, City of St. Albert

1.1 General

L. Jackson thanked everyone for coming and asked each attendee to sign in. If interested in receiving a copy of the workshop summary or an invitation to attend future meetings, attendees were asked to provide an email address.

1.2 Background

Early this summer Public Works discovered two beavers blocking a culvert going under the CN railway bed near Lacombe Park. The City took several steps to deter and then relocate the beavers from the area. Unsuccessful, the City made the decision to terminate the beavers. This management decision raised concern within the community. Consequently, beaver management was brought up and discussed at St.Albert's Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) meeting in July. EAC recommended a workshop on beaver management issues to clarify the provincial regulations and the City current approach and to obtain public input, ultimately resulting in the development of beaver management guidelines for future decision-making endeavours.

1.3 Motivation for Attending

L. Jackson asked attendees to introduce themselves and explain why they chose to attend the workshop. Reasons included:

- Beaver trapping was part of family's early history
- Following through after writing an article on the termination of the beavers at Lacombe Park Lake
- Motivated to explore living with beavers
- An educator; has taken kids to see the effects beavers have made, therefore have an interest in the educational value. As well have drafted up some operational guidelines to suggest
- Provide beaver habitat on farm land near Sandy Lake; infrastructure protection issues with adjacent municipalities
- Believe municipalities should not build structures that are beaver friendly or else coexist with beavers
- Interested in people who have field experience and their knowledge to persuade beavers to leave an area
- Believe wildlife is a common good and government should protect them
- People treasure beavers. Beavers are wildlife and don't need to be regulated
- Here to learn more about beavers and the river
- Feel beavers have a strong place in the City's river system, however this is a hard issue to deal with
- Concerned what is happening with beavers in the City of St. Albert
- Always seems to be people first and wildlife last. Humans are encroaching on their territory

2 Discussion

2.3 Beaver Biology

J. Folinsbee commenced discussion with an overview of the basic biology of beavers. Points included:

- Main predator is the black bear and coyote
- Beavers live in family units called colonies or clans. Family units consist of female and male adult pair with offspring from the last 2 years
- During the summer months when young beavers reach 2 years of age approximately 45 lbs, the adults release the beavers from the clan
- Each beaver released looks for new territory or move into a clan where a mate has been lost
- Territories are identified with a urine marked clump of mud
- If an area has large amounts of habitat to support additional clans, beavers will allow new beavers into the area
- When seeking territory, beavers look for their main food, aspen and willow, however, will also feed on cattail and lilies
- Source of food must be close to a water body
- Require more than 1 meter of water to be able to survive the winters

- Beavers dig underwater channels to the den for access in the winter
- Beavers are good engineers; they will use lakes and ponds to create their own ideal habitat
- Key in on the flow of water
- If relocated, beavers are rarely accepted into another established colony. Chances of survival are also low if beavers are relocated in fall or winter, as they do not have time to build a new lodge or gather a food stash to survive for the winter
- Ideal time of year to relocate would be after the 15th of May and before September 1st at the latest
- If the habitat is not attractive the beaver will not settle
- Beavers have incredible impact on water flow and habitat (will change a forest from mixed wood to evergreen)

2.4 Lacombe Park Lake Beavers

L. Jackson disclosed the City's informal policy to date has been if beavers are not affecting our infrastructure, the City will not disturb their infrastructure. Following discussion focused around the situation in Lacombe Park.

2.4.1 Conflict

- Beavers were tunnelling paths adjacent to the lake causing the pathways to be undermined
- By blocking the flow of water through the culvert under the railway tracks, were concerned that during a large storm event, the water would flow around the culvert, jeopardizing the integrity of the railway bed (L. Jackson consulted City engineers)
- Beavers were removing trees in close proximity to the pathways and there was a concern for pedestrian safety.
- Lacombe Lake Park is a heavily used area; interaction of the beavers with the public and dogs was a concern

2.4.2 Management Decisions

- City tried to regularly remove the beaver dam at the culvert to deter the beaver
- City put wire around the large trees in the park area to limit the amount of food/building materials for the beaver
- After these deterrents were not successful, the City then hired a company (R. MacDonald) to trap and relocate the beaver
- People were preventing the beaver entering the trap by jamming the trap with sticks
- After three weeks, live trapping the beaver was unsuccessful and the City made the decision to terminate the two beavers
- R. MacDonald stated that if knew that the beaver was tame, he could have tried capture with a snare

3 Questions and Answers throughout the session

Q1: If a beaver is relocated, how far do you need to/can one take them?

A1: Do not have any data but an estimate would be at least several miles away from the original area. An unoccupied territory is an ideal location unless there is a vacant spot in a colony, where a mate has died or left.

Q2: Does the Wildlife Act allow beavers to be destroyed while in their den?
A2: Yes, on private land but this would have to be verified. On public land, a permit is needed.

Q3: Attendees asked for examples of Cities that have beaver management policies in place?
A3: Richmond Hill, Port Coquitlam, Vancouver Island Region and Fish Creek Provincial Park.

Q4: Group asked R. MacDonald if the beavers were live trapped successfully, where would they have been taken?
A3: The beavers would have been taken to Johnny Lake in Duffield. R. MacDonald added, in his opinion the probability of survival would be high for there are several channels in the marsh for the beavers to occupy.

4 Suggestions

- Take a step back to urban design and the building of storm water systems. Construction of fewer hardened surfaces, gravel roads in urban areas and curbing water
- There may be places where we can live with beavers and places we can't; these areas need to be identified
- As a guideline, during the months of May and June, attempt to relocate beavers using harness or noose
- Use of tranquillizer, however, this is expensive and beavers will run for the water once hit and then drown
- J. Folinsbee discouraged movement. Study on relocation showed that unless the City has a really good reason and have good information on disease and parasites in the area, you don't want to move them to another area
- Find a way to live with a sterilized dominant male and female to permanently habituate an area. Mentioned that this would be expensive and beavers are good at reproduction and will find another mate. Theoretically this situation could work but practically it would not
- Policy may be needed for different parts of the City. City of Edmonton has a hand off policy in some areas unless public safety is an issue. There are also areas where beavers are just not tolerated creating a hierarchy of management in different parts of the city. Beaver response matrix states a clear procedure to analyze a situation.
- Signage of beaver activities for ecotourism
- When developing areas, during the construction phase, collect trees being cut down and leave these trees in areas inhabited by beavers to reduce them eating established City trees. Unknown whether the beavers would actually utilize this food source

5 Conclusions

5.3 Closing Comments

- Fish Creek (near Calgary) have volunteers that track the beaver resulting in pro-active management. City of St. Albert public works takes this role for the City
- Encourage development of guidelines with a focus on living with beavers even if this costs the City money
- Disagree, people should take priority over beavers
- Education of the public needs to be holistic rather than one sided
- From biology point of view this a political issue. The City has all the necessary permits to control beavers and any beavers terminated would not have an impact on the healthy beaver population in the area. Once the City zones or develops a response matrix, the decision ultimately comes down to political judgement rather than a biological one.

5.4 Questions to Answer when developing guidelines

- Are there locations in urban settings beavers don't have a place?
- What would these places be?
- Can we define unacceptable beaver behaviour?

5.5 Next Steps

- Develop guidelines for City of St. Albert Beaver Management utilizing a group of people 2 - 4 individuals in size (duration 2 weeks to month)
- Post these guidelines at Office of Environment link on City website
- Ask for input from the public
- Meet again to go over these guidelines

6 Website Links

Town of Richmond Hill
http://www.richmondhill.ca/subpage.asp?textonly=&pageid=heritage_beaver_management_policy

Port Coquitlam
http://www.portcoquitlam.ca/Citizen_Services/Pets___Animals/Beaver_Management.htm

Vancouver Island Region
http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/vir/pa/Beaver-Guide.pdf#search=%22Vancouver%20Island%20Regional%20Beaver%20Management%20Guidelines%22

Fish Creek Provincial Park
http://www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/featured/fishcreek/beaverman.asp

More Information
http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/agdex3469?opendocument