

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
HELD BY ZOOM
THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2022, 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie; Bev Marley; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Dianne Williamson; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Emily Carmichael, Ministry of Agriculture; Jody Watson, CRD; Mike Doehnel; Anita Bull; Katie Underwood, Jenni Michell and Bob Maxwell.

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw, Councillors Smyth, Thomson and De Vries.

Minutes: The Minutes of March 10, 2022 were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT

- The secretary advised the last statement received from Island Savings was May 2020.
- She will check who is an authorized signatory and why we have received no statements for almost two years.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU

Jody Watson, CRD – Geese Management Strategy Updates

Presenting a power point presentation, Jody stated:

- Due to staff changes, she has only recently seen the goose management files and no one has been officially assigned to the project.
- Goose population surveys have been carried out in partnership with the Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuary (GOMIE); an action plan has been developed and they are trying to access funding to continue with addling programmes.
- Annual population growth from 1950 to 2019 is estimated at around 16% a year.
- The over-wintering populations double every four years and there could be over 15,000 geese in the region within the next 4 years unless some action is taken.
- While good work has been done in some of the known nesting areas around farms and wetlands, the geese keep moving and it is difficult to find the new sites.
- There has been inconsistent and inefficient management of the goose population for years.
- Winter and summer surveys have been conducted over the past few years, using helicopters and kayaks, to not only gather information on population, but also search for nesting sites.
- While some short-term strategies have been applied, we need to work together on a consistent and regional addling programme and long-term management strategies.
- GOMIE needs \$20,000 to \$30,000 for programmes this spring. They are about half way there.
- The plan is to continue to build partnerships and awareness throughout the region – including farmers, municipalities, First Nations, Parks Canada, BC Parks, golf courses, and other stakeholders.
- A long-term strategy would be to conduct regular moulting surveys during June and July at the known hot spots, which will help to monitor egg addling programmes successfully and identify if the geese move to another area. The geese cannot fly during moulting season.
- A priority this year is to get addling programmes in place; Jody asked if PAAC would be able to

- help with funding.
- The CRD does not have a dedicated wildlife service; without this, providing funding for goose management is an issue, and challenging for staff because there is no legal way to address it.
- She is currently working on a report to the CRD's Environmental Services Committee in May. She would appreciate receiving information from PAAC and the farming community to include in the report about the impact the increasing geese population has on agriculture.
- She knows that farmers are very frustrated and this should be relayed to the elected officials.

In response to questions and input from the Commission, Jody stated:

- Regarding funding, GOMIE has been working to obtain more funding from the province. The funding they did receive allowed them to do egg addling in 2020 and 2021. She noted some farmers did their own addling.
- Some municipalities (Parksville) and First Nations have used hazing as a successful control method. There has been interest in hazing programmes from Peninsula and Sooke First Nations. However, there is political sensitivity and fear about backlash from the general public over hazing methods.
- GOMIE services areas up and down the Island and they have noted that populations continue to increase. This is why we want the ability to do regular moulting surveys so we can determine if the addling programmes are working.
- If all the municipalities participated in addling programmes or contributed funding it would make a difference. Central Saanich, West Shore Parks and Recreation, BC Parks, CRD Parks and Sooke have contributed funding. BC Parks is holding a meeting next week and we are hoping for a \$10,000 contribution, which would go to GOMIE. Groups and municipalities that contribute would receive priority for addling programmes and moulting surveys.

Discussion on Funding Issues:

- Suggested PAAC contribute to the project; concern as to who would manage the funds.
- Jody explained the CRD would have a Memorandum of Understanding with various agencies who contribute. The MOU will outline the services to be provided (by GOMIE). If PAAC were to contribute, an MOU would be completed and PAAC can identify priority areas.
- Another option would be for PAAC to set up something directly with GOMIE. The CRD Board has been asked three times to implement a Wildlife Service without success. For a regional government to facilitate or create a programme within municipal boundaries, the municipalities have to give the CRD authorization. Currently no service where Wildlife Management falls.
- She hopes the staff report she is working on will open the door and interest will be there for a coordinated effort with all stakeholders. Perhaps bringing money to the table will inspire the elected officials to agree to establish a wildlife service. If this doesn't happen, every year we will be looking for funding – and that is not the best way to manage the goose population.

PAAC discussion noted that a number of years ago Kate Hagmeir from Canada Wildlife Service ran a number of programmes around the province. At the time, Central Saanich did not allow volunteers to help with addling; farmers had to obtain permits but still couldn't legally addle eggs on their property. At the CRD, things were going around in circles, being passed from one person to another and nothing was getting accomplished. For this reason, and because there has been no service established yet, some members were reluctant to give any funds directly to the CRD to manage and would prefer to work with GOMIE.

Jody stated:

- The problems geese cause have a significant impact to the region; she understands PAAC's

frustration and their preference to work with GOMIE.

- GOMIE will be able to acquire the necessary addling permits and work with farmers. They are a “boots on the ground” group.
- The CRD Board is getting closer to establishing a wildlife service; advocacy from PAAC would be helpful.
- GOMIE prioritizes goose management in the areas where the donations come from. If PAAC were to donate, the south Island would benefit.
- Over the long-term, doing things in a piece-meal manner is not a good way to get a handle on controlling populations. This is another reason to seek on-going support from all stakeholders.
- It is hoped that working with regional districts, municipalities and first nations, a Vancouver Island Strategy could be adopted. She will be including this in her report to the Board and hopes they will agree finally on the importance of a goose management strategy.
- Banding of geese allows for tracking up and down the Island, and this has been carried out in some areas. It has been found the geese move between Comox, Parksville and Nanaimo.

PAAC discussion noted:

- The CRD Board has been waffling on this important service for many years, and meanwhile the geese populations continue to rise.
- It is best to leave it to the professionals, those who want to help. For this reason, any funding from PAAC, and other stakeholders, should be directed to GOMIE.
- Suggested PAAC write to the CRD to advise we are proposing to donate to GOMIE and that if the CRD adds wildlife control as an approved service, we would consider another contribution.
- We need a comprehensive look at the current status on the effects of the increasing populations. The longer we wait – the worse it gets.
- The recent outbreak of Avian Flu could also be a major concern with the transient geese; Dianne mentioned she is taking measures to keep geese off her property.
- Acknowledged that Central Saanich has donated to the programme; have any other municipalities on the south Island donated?
- Suggested if PAAC donated money, member municipalities – and other stakeholders - could be encouraged to match the donation.
- At one time, the airport was a participant in discussions and funding – it is a major safety issues for them. Questioned if they were still contributing.

Jody stated:

- DND has egg addling programmes on their lands around Esquimalt Lagoon and Beecher Bay.
- CRD monitors the watershed and does egg addling and hazing.
- Farming communities in Sooke have located nesting sites.
- CRD Parks has carried out successful addling around Elk and Beaver Lakes.
- Saanich is the only south Island municipality to carry out an egg addling programme.
- Oak Bay has hired hazing contractors but has done no addling.
- Hazing is not the best method, because it gets rid of a few geese, and scares the others from one field to another.
- The CRD are gun-shy about culls, particularly after the backlash from the deer cull.

Much discussion ensued re funding to GOMIE:

- Should it be annual grant, a one-time grant, and/or potentially a matching grant with the member municipalities?

- Should other stakeholders be approached?
- The South Island Direct Farm Marketing Association may wish to contribute.
- Jody suggested asking Royal Roads University or the DND.
- If they are still active, Investment Agriculture is another group that could be approached for a grant. Linda was asked to check on this.

MOTION: Moved by Bev Marley and Seconded by Terry Michell: “That:

1. The Peninsula & Area Agricultural Commission (PAAC) contribute \$4,000 to the Guardians of the Mid-Island Estuaries (GOMIE) to assist with the addling and banding programmes to reduce and control the goose populations on the southern part of the Island;
2. That the member municipalities of Saanich, Central Saanich, North Saanich and Metchosin, as well as the South Island Direct Farm Marketing Association, be requested to consider providing matching funds to the programme;
3. PAAC enquire if the Investment Agriculture Fund is still operational and if so, suggest that GOMIE apply for a grant for the Goose Management Programme.”

CARRIED

It was suggested that a draft letter be circulated to PAAC members for comment before sending to the municipalities and SDFMA.

Note: some discussion took place regarding the importance of planting trees and hedgerows on farmland; Jody noted she has done some work in this area and agreed to come to another PAAC meeting to elaborate.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: NEW

Saanich Fair Planning – Linda Geggie

- The theme this year is “Rooted in Agriculture” – so basically vegetables.
- Suggested that we partner with other groups that we are working with that would generate some public interest, such as pollinators and hedgerows and help with volunteer staffing issues at the tent. The South Island Farm Hub, and Lifecycles as well.
- It’s a lot of work and planning to set up the zucchini races – although this is very popular.
- Linda will reach out various groups to see if there is an interest.
- Our main goal is always to provide information about agriculture, and getting the kids engaged first brings in the parents.
- Linda asked if anyone has suggestions to email her. Bob Thompson had previously sent an email with suggestions.
- Terry confirmed he will be able to supply hay bales and produce for enhancing the tent area.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

- a) **Saanich Farm worker Housing Policy – Pierre Iachietti – Not Present**
- b) **Hedgerow Project with HAT – Carry forward for discussion at May meeting**
- c) **Central Saanich OCP – No updates available from staff** A few PAAC members went to the Open House & Focus Session on March 16th. Well attended. Another meeting was held the next week and there still wasn’t enough time to cover everything. Some issues outstanding so a third meeting may be required. Drainage in particular is an issue.

d) Proposed Drainage Sub-Committee (Terry, Larry & Mike)

Terry advised there is nothing to report yet. Hopefully the group can meet soon. He was going to ask Phil Christie for his input. He was hoping that Saanich and Central Saanich would take more of a lead on the project. The water was almost gone from the fields earlier this week, but with heavy rains the past few days the fields are flooded again.

He talked to Central Saanich about the impact of the subdivision on Keating Ridge. More water than ever before is flowing downhill and he felt something was wrong with the systems used for the latest two subdivisions.

Noted that Central Saanich Councillor BobThompson has been assigned to the committee; still waiting for an official appointee from Saanich Council.

e) Water Update – Michael Doehnel

The Water Advisory Committee had advised they would be hiring a person to take the lead in the agricultural water issues (prices) as set out in our letter from almost two years ago, to which we have had no response. He has heard nothing yet about this appointment and he is not sure what to do.

The Central Saanich Council rep for PAAC goes to all the Regional Water Supply Commission meetings and has not been in favour of a review.

A letter to Ted Robbins of the Integrated Water Services had been drafted in March to urge a response to our 2019 enquiry about equitable pricing, and was put on hold pending the possible hiring of a new staff member. Suggested after a review by Mike and the Chair, the letter now be sent to Mr. Robbins.

COMMENTS, UPDATES & CONCERNS RE FARMING OPERATIONS:

Avian Flu Outbreak:

- Dianne stated her poultry farm is on red level alert. Any trucks coming in and out of the property have to be hosed down.
- She and her brother are the only two people allowed in the barns and they have to use precautions when entering and leaving.
- To date, the only farm in BC affected is the Okanagan. Other outbreaks are reported in Newfoundland, Labrador, Quebec and Ontario.
- The restrictions are in place from April 13 to May 13. All outdoor flocks have to be kept indoors. To date, 240,000 birds have been destroyed due to the outbreak.
- The bird flight path just misses her farm, but is right over poultry farms in the Fraser Valley.
- Radio stations have been calling her, but she refers them to the Egg and Chicken Marketing Board.

- Other comments noted that once the fields dry out planting can start. It's way too wet now.
- Noted there have been price increases on the regulated side for crops like beets and parsnips.
- Prices continue to fluctuate depending on supply and demand – and the weather.
- Farm market prices are still lower than the grocery store. For the past 40 years it's the large chains that determine what people in BC will eat.
- Someone needs to ask why local food is so hard to find in the stores.

CORRESPONDENCE

a) Letter to Saanich re 304 Walton Road – Additional residence on ALR land

- Anita Bull questioned why PAAC was asked to consider this application. She went directly to the Saanich Planning Department to ask the question and was told it was sent to PAAC, as well as other interest groups such as the community association, for information. Planning staff appreciates the comments received from PAAC. The applications are not sent to Mayor and Council until the Planning staff report is prepared. The staff member didn't know if the letter from PAAC would be made available to the applicants. Anita questioned some of the comments in the letter, and also noted that although there have been changes to the ALC regulations; the municipality still has to allow a second dwelling on farmland.

b) Letter to Saanich re 5927 West Saanich Road – non-farm use on ALR land

c) Letter from North Saanich to FIRB in support of increasing poultry prices

- o A letter was received from FIRB noting that they had increased the minimum prices for chicken growers from mid-March to June.
- o Dianne pointed out that the interim relief is for only two cycles (12 weeks) and the "minimum price increase" was 12 cents per bird.
- o For her farm, that works out to a \$6,000 increase. Whereas the feed costs have increased by \$30,000, and shipping costs have increased by \$24,000.
- o Feed is now \$28,000 a tonne. It is an on-going battle.
- o Noted that the cost of chicken in the supermarkets has become very expensive – increasing by as much as 60% - but that money is not going in to the farmers' pockets.

OTHER BUSINESS

a) VANCOUVER ISLAND AGRICULTURE ADAPATION GROUP – Bob Maxwell

Bob stated he had nothing to report.

Mike Doehnel attended a virtual meeting noting the group had received \$50,000 to hire a consultant to study the agricultural water capacity from Courtenay to the Saanich Peninsula.

b) MEMBERSHIP

- Three applications were received and submitted to the four sponsoring councils for endorsement.
- The applicants were approved by North Saanich, Central Saanich and Metchosin. Before granting its approval, Saanich Council recommended that a public advertisement be posted in the Saanich News seeking applicants – as per the current Terms of Reference.
- In discussions with Legislative Services, the secretary explained that in the past placing recruitment ads in the local papers (Saanich News, Peninsula News and Goldstream Gazette) have not been successful and cost over \$800. No members have ever been recruited through this process.
- At one time, information was posted on the municipal websites, but again no applications were received.
- This year and last year, information was sent to the email list with Island Farm Fresh Guide and the Southern Vancouver Island Direct Farm Marketing Association.

- Unfortunately this did not generate any applications either.
- The only method that has worked has been via word of mouth.
- The Secretary advised she had forgotten about clause 4 under the Rules of Conduct which states “...a public notice shall be issued annually seeking new members to fill vacancies to the Commission”. Technically, it could be argued that public notice was given via the Island Farm Fresh Guide – which would be seen by farmers, other producers and those working within agriculture who meet the required qualifications for membership on PAAC.
- However, Saanich Council voted to proceed with a general public advertisement in the Saanich News. The secretary will work with a staff member to draft an ad, being specific about qualifications.
- Noted that the 3 current applicants meet the qualifications and have been approved by the other 3 Councils. PAAC has 5 vacancies at this time, as we are permitted to have twelve members according to the TOR. We have for many years had 10 members.
- Saanich has advised that the three applicants can still be considered as potential members.

CARRY to next meeting

c) PAAC ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report is completed and has been emailed to PAAC members, the Councils & staff, Ministry of Agriculture, the CRD, the Minister of Agriculture. A copy will also be sent to Elizabeth May, MP for Saanich and the Islands. The sponsoring municipalities have been asked to post the report on their websites. It was suggested that a few copies of the Annual Report could be available at this year’s Saanich Fair booth.

NEXT MEETING: **The Secretary advised she will be out of the country for the June meeting. Members were in agreement of cancelling the June meeting and holding a meeting on July 14 instead. The member municipalities to be advised so the change can be posted on-line.**

The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 12, 2022 at 7:00 pm by ZOOM

ADJOURNMENT: **The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.**

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary

PARKING LOT (Pending Issues)

1. T-5 slip from 2020 & 2021 further to interest on PAAC's GIC
2. Grape & Fruit Atlas for Vancouver Island
3. 50th Celebration of ALR 2023 (ALC & Ministry of Agriculture)
4. Appointment of new representative from Minister's Office
5. Additional Farm Tours with Brian Spencer for Council members (Spring 2022)
6. Agriculture in the Classroom
7. Agricultural Land Reserve Inventory
8. Response from Water Commission re variances in municipal water rates
9. Saanich Fair Booth