

Full Authority
17 June 2021
Agenda Item: 13

Callaghan's Rapids Update

Background

Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area (CRCA) is 400 acres of pristine natural habitat located on the Crowe River. The property was purchased with the assistance of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and is situated at the transition zone between the St. Lawrence Lowlands and the Canadian Shield. As a result of its geological makeup, the property supports a diverse biological range of flora and fauna.

Regrettably, 30+ years of abuse by a small group of ATV, campers and public individuals has taken its toll on the property. Garbage is regularly dumped on site, illegal camping and its associated refuse is left behind and ATVers have created a crisscross of trails scarring the landscape, especially close to the Crowe River. Campfires have been prevalent, broken glass from parties and the CVCA outhouse was burned down.

This collection of abusers of the natural property has also led to confrontations between those who visit Callaghan's for an opportunity to enjoy the environment and don't cause any harm.

This conservation area poses many issues since there are numerous access points including the Eastern Ontario Trail Alliance (EOTA) trail that crosses through the property. Efforts are underway to curtail this access point, however, there are other ways to enter the property for those who wish to avoid any penalties from using the EOTA Trail.

Efforts have been made by the CVCA in past years to curtail the illegal activities and this has had very limited success.

1. Signage is usually torn down or ignored.
2. Barriers along the access road worked for a short time until ATVs created access around them.
3. Private security companies have been hired for key weekends, but they are either ignored by the abusers and/or not enough weekends were under surveillance to have enough of an impact.
4. OPP patrols have also been conducted, but it was sporadic in the past.

Ongoing Efforts

Currently, a local volunteer (a Crowe River watershed enthusiast) with many years of other conservation authority volunteer experience has obtained my permission to actively implement the initial phase of a strategy to slow down the illegal activity and discourage the ATV use at CRCA. With two or three other volunteers, natural barriers are being built across the illegal path in the riparian zone alongside the Crowe River to discourage use and remove the thrill from their ride.

As well, a detailed report has been submitted to myself and is attached for the Board's consideration.

Essentially, the objective of the proposed additional work should help to curtail most of the motorized activity and direct people to get off their ATVs and enjoy the area as it envisioned. Stopping all of the ATVs all of the time is going to be an extremely difficult, expensive and resource consuming exercise that will be an ongoing "battle". The effort should be to eliminate destructive behavior as much as possible and make the experience for those who persist as unpleasant activity.

The volunteer would like to be available for the Board to answer questions and review the proposal at the next meeting if necessary.

Staff Recommendation

That the Barricade Specifications for Callaghan's be received.

That the ongoing barrier work continue, along with discussions with the EOTA representative and the plan be phased in as two separate projects.

That the CVCA parking lot barriers be put in place this fall as the next phase since it is the less expensive task.

That the parking lot for ATVs, signage and EOTA barriers be completed in the spring of 2022 pending funding availability.

Board Decision

TP