

**Full Authority**  
**17 September 2020**  
**Agenda Item: 13**

**General Manager's Report**

**Background**

The General Manager's report provides a brief update for the Board Members prior to the Board meeting bringing forward additional information and/or progress on initiatives or current issues for the Board members consideration.

**General Comments**

For the Board's information, since May, there have been staffing circumstances that have had an impact on the Authority. An In Camera session has been scheduled to update the Board.

In general, the following comments are submitted for the Board's information.

As mentioned in previous updates, like all aspects of society, COVID has left its mark on the CVCA as well.

Three regulations staff were assigned to work from home since their work was easiest to complete in that environment. The remaining staff worked from the office for two primary reasons. Obviously, dam adjustments/field work must be done on site and much of Lou and Amanda's jobs require access to files and information from the office. In addition, phone calls were the lifeline for people to contact the office and allow the Authority to conduct work as seamlessly as possible. Lou was also able to coordinate and assist the regulations officers with the distribution of work/files to be completed from home.

The system put in place worked very well and continually improved. Work was being finished and the turnaround times for permits and pifs were on par with last year's standard.

However, in early June the necessity to have at least one regulations officer in the office became apparent as inquiries increased. From a communication and service perspective, it was a much better fit to have Andrew working as per usual from here.

With a spacious office, social distancing has not been an issue.

The office remains closed to the public. At this point, there have been no complaints from the public as access via e-mail, the telephone and a drop box has allowed for the exchange of information necessary to complete all aspects of the regulations program. Only occasionally have the public approached the office to enter and even then, verbal communication without opening the front door was possible.

Therefore, interactions with the public has gone smoothly. The real impact COVID has had on the regulations program is the significant increase in PIFs, permit applications, violations and planning.

## **Regulations and Planning**

More people in the GTA are looking for a rural escape (access out of the city has also improved), staycations mean more projects around the home/cottage are being completed and increasing property values results in more people taking advantage of the market. People are also spending longer at their homes and cottages, which leads to decisions to. These factors have resulted in increased activity for the CVCA.

These conditions and staffing circumstances have culminated to create a situation which has seen an increase in time to process permits.

Unfortunately, options currently available to the Authority are somewhat limited due to extenuating staff circumstances. However, the following has been implemented in an attempt to relieve some of the pressure.

1. Regulations staff have voluntarily limited vacation time off this summer.
2. Overtime hours have been authorized.
3. Peripheral staff (Amanda and I) have assisted as much as possible.
4. Permits have been categorized into easy, medium and complicated. This enables Lou and Ben to process the easier permits to prepare them for Andrew's review.
5. In certain circumstances, permits have also been fast tracked (ie. permits for septic).
6. By keeping the office closed to the public, the time saved from impromptu meetings or scheduled appointments has been noteworthy
7. I have approached neighbouring conservation authorities requesting assistance both while at work and as a part time position. Regrettably, all CAs are experiencing higher workloads and were not able to share staff at this time.
8. Recently became aware of a retired regulations officer and will investigate further.

In summary, the permit approvals are taking longer, however the vast majority of the public have been patient. There have been some recent complaints since the Labour Day weekend. Staff have been under extreme pressure and are currently not falling further behind and we should soon see a peak in the number of applications arriving at the office.

This will allow us to begin reducing the number of outstanding applications with the above noted practices in place.

## **Watershed Management**

Although the spring freshet was average and presented few (if any) flooding issues in the watershed, since that time the management of the watershed has stretched staff at the Authority.

As a result, I have been required to assist Neil McConkey with all aspects of dam operations since that time, which include stop log adjustments and jacking to seal dams. There has also been an occasion when Amanda Donald and myself had to complete dam adjustments in Neil's absence.

### *Current Watershed Conditions*

- Temperatures were extremely hot late in the spring and for an extended time in the summer. As well, precipitation in most of the watershed was extremely low.
- The three month flow and precipitation averages triggered declaring a Level 1 Low Water Status for the watershed.
- Although a Level 1 was declared, this year is a good indication that the Provincial Low Water Response program needs to be revamped. Briefly, the averages did not show a true picture on the ground. Although there were one of two lakes that showed signs of stress and dipped below the summer water levels, generally, the watershed was able to withstand the effect of the weather conditions. The wetland coverage in the watershed is extensive and slowly released stored water into the system helping to alleviate the dry conditions.
- As well, the Low Water program is heavily weighted toward surface conditions and averages. It doesn't seem to take into consideration seasonal "norms" that typically occur at some point. Reviewing the historical flows indicates that there will be periods of hot dry conditions and the surface water flows will always decrease to some degree.
- In addition, the flow gauges in the watershed, which are relied upon by the Province as indicators of a drought could easily be manipulated by the CVCA dam operations. In staff's opinion, this reliance on this set of data could be considered an oversight.

- Specifically, there should be more monitoring of groundwater conditions, especially in a rural setting like the Crowe watershed. It could be argued that groundwater conditions are really the best indicator of drought conditions. It is tough to convince residents living on a lake there is a drought when their lakes have varied minimally from the summer elevations.
- Rainfall totals for July, August and September at the following rain gauges:
  - Glen Alda - 5.1"
  - Belmont - 9.7"
  - Bancroft – 11.5"
- As a result, surface water flows/conditions are continuing to improve and summer water levels remain in good shape heading into the later stages of the recreational season. Of all the lakes, Kasshabog Lake could be considered the exception and it is only three inches below its summer elevation since its subwatershed (input) is considerably smaller in relation to the size of the lake.

### ***Recommendation***

***That the Level One Drought status be terminated effectively immediately and confirmed with the remaining Low Water Status Team.***

### ***Low Water Team Decision***

### ***Anticipated Conditions***

- The CVCA will initiate the fall draw down as scheduled, starting at Paudash Lake, aiming to have the water level lowered to winter levels by the end of September to accommodate fish spawning.
- Given the status of the lakes and trending toward at least average or slightly above seasonal precipitation amounts, staff expect an average draw down volume and a normal dam adjustment period. Of course, extreme fluctuations in precipitation amounts either way will have a significant impact on the flow and duration of the draw down.

## Administration

- Ben Colgan has been hired for 6 months for a paternity leave.
- After the hiring process and training, Ben has done an excellent job fulfilling his duties.
- Ben was not only hired to assist with the regulations program, but also because of his GIS expertise and educational background. One of Ben's deliverables is to complete an online mapping tool for the CVCA to offer to the public. **Please see the attached description and example.**
- This online service should help the public perform a basic search of their property to determine if a permit is required or not. This will help to reduce the calls, e-mails and general inquiries to the office while providing an internet service.

## COVID Management

- All of the eastern conservation authorities continue to have their offices closed to the public with only a couple that will schedule appointments.
- The same authorities have also seen increases in applications for permits, hence the negative response to my request for assistance, they simply cannot afford to take time out of their schedules.
- Up to this point if there was any doubt about an individual's health or exposure to the COVID virus, staff were sent home to self-isolate for 14 days. This occurred twice in the past six months and will be enforced in the foreseeable future if necessary. For all staff except dam operators, the remaining staff will be able to perform most if not all of their duties from home during this isolation period.
- In order to help facilitate any work from home, the CVCA's IT support will be requested to set up for server access from remote locations for the remainder of this year and in preparation for next year.
- Staff currently proceed in separate vehicles to carry out dam operations. At this time, dam operators are at a premium and reducing their risk to exposure from each other is imperative.
- Regulations staff do continue to conduct site inspections. Staff have been instructed to follow social distance rules while on site if the applicant is also present. If a person refuses to social distance, staff are instructed to disengage and leave the premises.

- Disposable masks have been made available to staff in the event they have forgotten or misplaced their own personal mask. Hand sanitizer is also present at various locations throughout the office.
- Staff have been requested to use sanitary wipes and wipe down areas or items that others will come into contact with during the day. This includes the use of vehicles.