

Full Authority
19 November 2020
Agenda Item: 12

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 a significant 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.

Administration

On the 5th of November, the Provincial government released its 2020 Ontario Budget – Ontario's Action Plan: Protect, Support, Recover. Within this budget, the Province has recommended amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act under Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020.

- These changes to the Act are monumental and will have a significant impact on all 36 conservation authorities. Some examples:
 - Major changes include broad sweeping powers that will bypass conservation authorities and their Boards. For example, if a permit has been denied, the applicant could appeal directly to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry for a decision and depending how that appeal is handled by the Ministry, there would be an opportunity to appeal to LPAT.
 - Fees for the regulations program will likely be determined by the Ministry through changes to our regulation. This may result in significantly lower revenue for all conservation authorities.

- The amendment would authorize the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to issue an order to take over and decide an application for a permit under section 28 of the Act in place of the conservation authority (before a CA has made a decision on the application).
- Allow an applicant, within 30 days of a conservation authority issuing a permit, with or without conditions, or denying a permit, to request the Minister to review the conservation authority's decision.
- All Board members will have to be municipal council appointees.
- Enable the minister to appoint a member to the conservation authority from the agricultural sector.
- Conservation Ontario has prepared two detailed documents about the changes and the strategies to address them and have been included in your agenda package.
- As well, there is a prepared municipal resolution that all conservation authorities and Conservation Ontario is hoping all municipalities will pass. It is also included in the agenda package.
- A background document is also attached for your reference.
- A Conservation Ontario/General Manager's meeting is scheduled for Monday, 16 November 2020. Additional information and details from that meeting will be shared with the Board at our meeting on the 19th.
- An article from The STAR has been included in the agenda package for your information. It does an excellent job of providing a summary of the key issues, concerns and the direction the Act is taking the conservation authorities mandate.

Watershed Management

General

- Janet Noyes, Manager, Development Services & Water Resources at the Lower Trent Conservation Authority (LTRCA) visited the CVCA to observe and review the overhead gantry system used by the CVCA at our dam locations.
- The LTRCA has a fully funded project at the dam in Warkworth to replace a log lifting system and wished to observe the system used by the CVCA. A dam operation at Warworth could take hours, whereby the system used at the CVCA would only take approximately 15 minutes to do the same work.

- Data loggers (equipment used at our gauge stations) have been donated to the CVCA from Water Surveys of Canada. Some of their current equipment is being replaced with a new system and the free data loggers will assist in the transition of our older equipment to a more modern arrangement.
- I will be participating in a site meeting with Bill Grandy from EXP Inc. to further the work on the dam safety assessment update prior to the 19th of November.

Dam Activity

- Recently, there has been an increased activity regarding dams in the watershed, both by beavers and illegal activity.
- Beavers have once again dominated some of the workload for staff. A number of beaver dams have been built along Bass Creek, which runs through some of the property at the McGeachie Conservation Area. Typically, CVCA staff will remove part of these dams to lower water levels on Steenburg Lake to help prevent flooding issues in the spring. Staff have determined the best course of action is to occasionally work on the dams to lower the level in the fall. However, the beavers will rebuild the dams usually within two or three days and the lake has not been lowered.
- Therefore, staff have adopted the strategy to conduct this work just prior to freeze up, which makes it difficult for the beaver to make what they think are the necessary repairs and then the lake will lower to a winter level over the winter months.
- In the meantime, while the CVCA completes this work on the stretch of the creek running through our property, the CVCA hopes the adjacent landowner takes the same approach. EMCON, as contracted by the Ministry of Transportation has tried to clear the dam at the culvert crossing highway #62.
- At the outlet of Lake of Islands, it appears a number of people organized a work party with the appropriate materials to dam Dickey Creek. The dam appeared to be approximately 40 to 60 feet wide and approximately 3 to 4 feet high.
- This type of illegal activity has serious implications, especially when it comes to the spring freshet and flooding concerns both upstream and downstream. This action could easily cause damage to personal property or pose a risk to loss of life.
- As soon as I was informed of the illegal activity, I contacted the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry office in Bancroft. Ministry staff took immediate action and have removed approximately half of the structure at this time.

- Ministry staff have informed myself the CVCA will be kept informed of any further action and that an investigation into the matter has been initiated.

Current Watershed Conditions

- All controlled lakes in the CVCA are undergoing the fall draw down process to prepare for the spring freshet.
- Barring above average precipitation in the next two weeks, the CVCA anticipates the drawn down will be completed well before winter conditions arrive and stay for the season.

Anticipated Conditions

- The CVCA watershed management staff do not expect any unusual variations in winter levels in 2020/2021.
- Ground water conditions appear to be average for this time of year.

COVID Management

- All of the eastern conservation authorities continue to have their offices closed to the public, especially since COVID cases continue to escalate in Ontario.
- Should staff be required to work from home in order to help minimize risk exposure in the office, CVCA's IT support has made changes recently to the server.
- Staff currently proceed in separate vehicles to carry out dam operations.
- Site inspections are still being conducted for permits. Once again, staff have been instructed to follow social distance rules and wear a mask while on site if the applicant is also present. If a person refuses to follow social distancing without a mask, 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.

- A sign has been posted at the entrances for employees to do a self-evaluation prior to entering the premises.

Conservation Areas Update

Two used trailhead kiosks have been made available to the CVCA. Both are from municipalities in North Hastings and are in excellent condition. They are being stored for the winter until transportation and installation can be arranged in 2021

McGeachie Conservation Area

Further to previous updates, the improvements are reaching a close. Wayfinding signage has been installed and the two trailhead signs are in the process of being completed.

In addition, a local cross country ski club has walked the trails and are excited the refurbished trails will offer a new venue for their activities.

The club has volunteered to pack the trail in the winter to enhance the experience for the skiers and snowshoe enthusiasts.

The “education building” will provide an excellent warming station and arrangements will be made by the members to maintain the station when there are scheduled cross country ski events.

In addition, to help promote the area and earn some additional revenue for the CVCA, a promotional video will be produced (with a grant obtained by the Hastings Development Trail Inc.) showcasing the trails and the CVCA’s yurt located on the trails.

Volunteers will be staying at the yurt to identify the pros and cons of the experience and hopefully through another grant, any deficiencies will be identified and a plan put into place to use the facility.

The generous time and resources to make this a possibility is a result of the committed volunteers and HDTI. Working in partnership with these groups will help enable the McGeachie area reach its potential as it was originally identified over 25 years ago.

Callaghan’s Conservation Area

Jan O’Neil and I have met with the volunteers since our last Board meeting in September to convey the Board’s request that a MOU be put in place to move forward with the necessary changes to Callaghan’s and discuss further actionable items.

At the meeting, it was suggested that we establish contact with AECON and COVIA, both with significant business interests in the area.

To date, Shane McShane, Assistant Plant Manager at COVIA has returned calls, met with staff on site and is willing to work with the CVCA to provide boulders to barricade the parking lot.

Arrangements will need to be made for the transportation of the material to Callaghan's and then the placement of the boulders around the parking lot and prevent vehicular access to the bridge.

Discussions were made regarding the parking area for the ATV's coming off the EOTA trail using the boulders, but the logistics may prevent this from occurring. Further investigation may be required. At a minimum and as a first step, the main parking lot containment should be the priority.

In addition, discussions with Cindy Cassidy at EOTA have been positive. Cindy has indicated she wants to work with the CVCA and is willing to place additional signage and next year provide more barriers to limit ATV's leaving the EOTA trail and illegally entering Callaghan's.

The Gut Conservation Area

Regrettably, there has been an act of vandalism once again at The Gut. For the third time in four years, the washroom which was constructed by the students of Norwood District High School has been damaged.

In October, the outhouse was rammed by a vehicle resulting in physical damage and shifting it completely off its base.

In light of the washroom being a target, I strongly recommend the washroom be removed and the area be filled in until a viable alternative be considered. It is obviously a shame that a few have ruined a facility that others rely upon.