

Full Authority
21 January 2021
Agenda Item: 14

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.

Administration

Further to my 22 December 2020 e-mail, I would like to provide the following update:

The staff situation is slowly improving with the addition of two contract positions. Although this provides some relief, the staff complement is still down 1 Full Time Equivalent (FTE). Therefore, I may still have to consider hiring another short term contract depending on current and predicted workload, as well as the status of permanent staff presently on leave. This decision will be based on additional information as it becomes available in the next few weeks.

As the new staff settle into their roles, their contributions will help to alleviate some of the workload from staff who had been left to continue with the operations of the Authority. As I'm sure the Board is aware, there will be additional training for the new employees which takes time to complete for them and time is also taken away from current staff who are providing the training and/or instruction.

For example, Liam BaileyMcDade has been hired primarily as a dam operator and for related duties. Dam operations are very specific with very few people who have that kind of experience. Therefore, it will take some time to provide the necessary training, get familiar with the role and be able to perform the work in a safe manner. In addition:

- There is no formal MNRF dam operations training available
- Current staff to do the training also have limited experience
- Dam adjustment training is a "hands on" situation – you can't learn the majority of the work sitting in the office
- Winter conditions can impede/slow down training
- Dam adjustments can be sporadic, especially in the winter

Beth Lowe has been hired for a 1 year term contract to replace Vicki Woolfrey and started work on the 11th of January 2021. Beth is fitting well into her role with the experience she has gained at the Quinte Conservation. However, there are still hurdles to overcome. Beth has noted that the mapping tools available here are substantially different than at Quinte and as a result, it will take time to become familiar with the system and be comfortable using it to provide the necessary comments for permits, property inquiries and planning items.

For Beth, I would also like to provide as much cross training in other aspects of the CVCA's operations, time permitting. For example, knowing and understanding as much about Source Water Protection, assisting with water quality monitoring, benthic monitoring and provide some basic dam operations training. Exposure to as many aspects of the CVCA's services and programs will only aid the Authority in the event of unforeseen issues like we experienced in 2020.

While it is certainly not desirable to have experienced a year like 2020 coping with COVID and staff issues which have spilled into 2021, there is an opportunity to revise operations and identify areas for improvement or changes. As one begins training new staff, it quickly indicates where we could focus our efforts to become better.

A good example is the dam training. The CVCA has relied extensively on Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry training. Due to COVID, MNR did not provide any training in 2020 and 2021 will be no different by all indications. With new staff here, we will have to provide that training. Therefore, documentation will be required to prove the training has taken place, who participated and who conducted the training. In addition, that training in of itself identifies there are more steps, safety measures, specific tools and the importance of working as a team than is normally considered by experienced staff. As a result, dam operation manuals for each dam will be developed.

Undoubtedly, 2021 will be a continuing challenge as staff have been shifted from their normal duties to compensate for the situation and yet still perform the basics of their own job.

Amanda Donald, Andrew McIntyre and Lou Young have risen to the challenge as they have been the only staff here for all of 2020 and shouldered the brunt of the additional work covering off other positions. Their efforts have been stellar and without complaint. Amanda has and continues to conduct dam adjustments with Andrew who has backfilled Neil's role. Lou has had to contend with increased permitting, planning and property inquiry forms as GTA residents seek refuge in areas perceived as safer zones. The statistics she has provided are incredible with various categories virtually double from 2019.

Watershed Management

Current Watershed Conditions

- Since the last Board meeting in November, in general, the Crowe Valley watershed experienced above average precipitation and temperatures.
- This trend was almost exactly the opposite of 2019 for the same late fall and early winter timeframe.
- As a result of these conditions, the water levels and flows were higher than normal, but certainly on schedule to be prepared for the spring freshet.
- All was on track until mid-late December, as approximately 35mm of rain was received in approximately a 24 hour period.
- This additional rainfall reversed a slow downward trend on all lakes across the watershed and raised levels close to or even above summer water levels in some instances.
- Currently, the watershed is still feeling the effects of the late December rainfall event, but fortunately, all lakes are now exhibiting a downward trend and at a controlled rate acceptable to ensure winter water levels are attained in one to two weeks.
- Forecasted weather conditions are favourable as colder temperatures will reduce water input into the system as water freezes at an increased rate. Therefore, this weather pattern will also aid with this extended fall drawdown.

Specific Dam and Lake Issues

Oak Lake

- Oak Lake dam is a small water control structure controlling a relatively large lake in the North River subwatershed.
- The dam is small with 4"x4" dimensioned lumber used for stop logs. A resident also lives virtually on site and the CVCA has relied on residents at this location for the past 32 years to conduct stop log adjustments and perform regular minor maintenance.

- Staff were in contact with this dam operator in the fall of 2020 and he noted that the stop log adjustments for the winter had been completed.
- Water levels had begun to recede as per usual until the late December rainfall event and levels rose in line with other lakes in the watershed. CVCA staff also learned the dam operator was unable to perform his duties and staff proceeded to the site to remove any debris that may have accumulated due to the higher flow rate from the precipitation. This was completed before the break between Christmas and New Year.
- However, during the break, a number of Oak Lake residents had contacted CVCA Board Member Jim Martin indicating that the lake level had continued to rise and threatened personal property. In addition, one individual claimed an agreement had been signed by the Authority with this claimant to ensure water levels would be maintained.
- Jim contacted myself and CVCA staff proceeded to inspect the dam immediately after returning to work. A blockage (wakeboard) had effectively cut off 90 to 95% of the flow. Staff noted three or four inches of water was overtopping the dam. The blockage was removed and the discharge resumed as anticipated.
- Staff have since been conducting weekly inspections of the Oak Lake dam. Only minor debris has collected since the removal of the wakeboard. Water continues to flow at a substantial rate and water levels have receded. Since the discharge capacity is low, the lake level will take some time to recede to winter levels. Staff will continue to monitor and also determine if the primary dam operator will be able to resume his duties or not in the intervening weeks.

Anticipated Conditions

- The CVCA watershed management staff do not expect any unusual variations in winter levels in 2020/2021, except for the possibility of a thaw later in January or February since general forecast conditions are for above normal winter temperatures.

COVID Management

- In keeping with the recent announcement by the Provincial government, the CVCA office will remain closed to the public and adhere to all guidelines.
- Since the CVCA is considered an essential service (especially for Flood Forecasting and Warning and dam operations) with new staff that require training,

and with the current workload, it will be difficult at this time to have staff work from home.

- In addition, since trained dam operators are in short supply, it is impossible for staff to work from home. However, when it is deemed appropriate, one or two staff may be able to work from home in order to help minimize risk exposure and reduce the spread of the COVID virus. CVCA's IT support has made changes recently to the server in order to allow this to occur.
- Staff continue to drive in separate vehicles to carry out dam operations.
- Site inspections are normally limited for this time of year for regulation work. However, if an inspection is necessary staff have been instructed to follow social distance rules and wear a mask while on site.
- Additional restrictions will be enforced as necessary.

Conservation Areas Update

McGeachie Conservation Area

Further to the last update in November, developments continue to evolve with the McGeachie Conservation Area. Most recently, a trailhead sign has been installed at the parking area for the main trails. (Please see the attached photo)

Regarding the promotional video, it has been delayed until later in January. However, due to COVID restrictions, this activity plus planned cross country skiing and snowshoeing instructional events may be cancelled.

On a positive note, the trails are being groomed by a volunteer and only requests his expenses are covered. Donation money will be used for this purpose and it is expected the donations will come primarily from the cross country skiing community.

In general, the CVCA's conservation areas remain open to the public, especially since it is virtually impossible to monitor or control access.

Regulations and Planning

With the hiring of Beth Lowe and her experience garnered at Quinte Conservation, it would be prudent to designate Beth as a Regulations Officer for the CVCA. This would give Beth the authority to expand her role here as the replacement for Vicki Woolfrey. In addition, the Board should also rescind Ben Colgan as a Regulations Officer.

Staff Recommendation

That Elizabeth (Beth) Lowe be designated as a Regulations Officer for the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority.

That Motion G47/20 be rescinded removing Ben Colgan as a Crowe Valley Conservation Authority Regulations Officer.

Board Decision

TP