

Full Authority
15 April 2021
Agenda Item: 9

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.

Watershed Management

Current Watershed Conditions

- The spring freshet has been a relatively calm event this year. While flows did reach approximately 95 cubic meters per second at the Marmora Dam, there was little or no risk of severe flooding in the watershed.
- The snow pack melted in a very "orderly" fashion with minimal impact on the lakes, rivers and streams during a dry March.
- Rainfall held off until the end of March, but when approximately 50mm of rain was received, the watershed absorbed its effects and filled lakes to only slightly above summer recreational levels.
- Staff are currently replacing stop logs to capture enough of the spring freshet for summer recreational levels. Although this activity is considerably earlier than normal, there is a risk of "losing" a lake level should the low precipitation rate continue well into the spring.

Anticipated Conditions

- The long range forecast is for little precipitation in the first half of April, which may result in a quiet rest of the spring.
- However, there is still a possibility there may be periods of significant rainfall as spring progresses that could easily increase levels and flows higher than targeted summer recreational levels.

- Since precipitation amounts can fluctuate considerably in the spring, dam adjustment activity will be ongoing until lake levels and flows have stabilized. In addition, dams will be required to be sealed as tightly as possible after the spring freshet is completed.
- Should weather patterns remain consistent, the lower precipitation totals may be indicative of drought like conditions prevailing sooner than usual as we head into the summer recreational season.
- With the return of Neil McConkey, it has enabled additional training opportunities for current dam operators, especially for new staff.

Specific Dam and Lake Issues

Marmora Dam

- Staff met with Orillia Power representatives regarding the installation of fencing on the leased premises for the power plant and the operation of the plant.
- The fencing (with additional signage to be installed at a later date) further limits public access to the facility, the forebay, the south side of the facility and the intake zone for the plant. By doing so, Orillia Power has taken the steps to increase public safety and reduce liability.
- Operational changes to the plant will still be in the hands of the CVCA as the water level management for the Crowe watershed is the first priority. Communication protocols are being developed to ensure both parties know and understand when changes would be required. Orillia Power has requested that “surplus” water be directed through the plant first if at all possible and the generator capacity be utilized to the fullest.
- CVCA staff have confirmed this has been the past practice and will continue to do so at every opportunity. However, there may be circumstances when staff must consider other options, such as opening the by-pass gate first. Staff will certainly attempt to minimize these situations.
- Operationally, only one of the two generators have been functioning for the spring freshet. Orillia Power is hopeful to have both generators operating in the not too distant future. Unfortunately, with decreasing flows, the plant may not be operating at 100%

Water Erosion Control Infrastructure Status Update

- The WECEI committee has requested additional information for all three of the CVCA's projects submitted this year. This is a good indication that the CVCA may be the recipient of funding.
- As a reminder, the projects are for Marmora Dam repairs, Wollaston Dam safety improvements and the Crowe Bridge Weir assessment.

Conservation Areas Update

McGeachie Conservation Area

Developments and improvements of the trail network at McGeachie Conservation Area in 2020 has allowed for the trails to be better utilized in the winter months of 2021. Through a grant received by Hastings Development Trails Inc., the CVCA has also been the beneficiary of increased promotion for the MCA trails. The following excerpts are from the report submitted to Ontario Highlands Tourism Organization, which had given a small grant for the promotion of McGeachie.

During the summer of 2020 McGeachie Conservation Area (MCA) trail amenities were refurbished to include, trail improvements, accessible washrooms, new trailhead and kiosk, and new wayfinding and directional arrows. This work was supported through funding acquired through the North Hastings Economic Development Committee, utilising project management through Hastings Destination Trails Inc. This work so improved the amenities and value of non motorized recreation in the area that a partnership with the local municipality – Township of Limerick was arranged with CVCA for further improvements that included labour, equipment and materials to improve the parking lot. The municipality went even further to annually budget for regular maintenance of the parking lot including the winter plowing, garbage pickup year-round and grass mowing. A projected annual budget of up to \$4,500 (see Appendix A Limerick Township council discusses McGeachie Trail Maintenance) During the late fall, Hastings Destination Trails Inc., was approached by a group of individuals who were concerned about the lack of available cross-country skiing and snowshoe opportunities on groomed trails in Hastings County. The need to find outdoor recreation was further supported as outdoor recreation is a supported activity during the COVID pandemic when following public health guidelines. The group worked with HDTI to review options and to visit sites and found MCA would be a great spot for these recreation opportunities. The group further supported the efforts of CVCA and the Township of Limerick (see Appendix B Letters of Support), demonstrating strong community commitment support and

appreciation for the MCA. Previously, MCA was not recognized or marketed as a winter activity destination.

Local resident Don Stoneman headed the grooming operations while others participated in some trail work for safety and others made financial contributions on a pay to play basis. This was a value-added service that had not been tried before at McGeachie.

The amount, quality, and ease of access to conservation lands managed by CVCA in the region is certainly an important, if not the most important, factor behind this rise in popularity. The partnerships between the CVCA and HDTI with local trails enthusiasts and volunteers supporting the grooming of trails for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, walking further enhances the winter recreation experience in the region.

- *Winter pilot has demonstrated the increased possibilities for winter activities at McGeachie*
- *Wider and more promotion next winter season 2021-2022*
- *Winter grooming and maintenance activities may need updating*
- *Creative ways to finding the money needed to operate, as CVCA has access to the newly created winter promotional videos, seek out crowd-funding campaigns and sponsorship programs.*
- *Now, with grooming and getting cross-country skiers & snowshoers out, it's used throughout the year*
- *The location really is extraordinary*

Letters of Support

- 1. J D Fente – Private Citizen*
- 2. Steenburg Lake Cottagers Association*
- 3. Bancroft Area Stewardship Council*
- 4. Susan Latremoille – Private Citizen*
- 5. Wollaston Lake Home and Cottage Association*

Donations received from the public through our website and the donation box at McGeachie have exceeded the expense of grooming the trails for the winter recreational season. The trail groomer, Mr. Don Stoneman also performed a number of other tasks this winter including clearing trails, working during the video production and setting up trail markers. Therefore payment will be made to Mr. Stoneman for the work completed this winter.

CVCA staff will review next steps, expenses and revenues as the Authority works in conjunction with the volunteers and HDTI to determine possible courses of action for the recreational and educational opportunities at McGeachie.

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Conservation Areas - General

The following article is from the Provincial government newsroom website. It is yet another example of the Province not including Conservation Authorities in significant discussions and how they are moving forward with issues. As Board members may surmise, instead of providing CAs with the tools and resources to better serve the public especially during COVID, the government is sending a decidedly negative message to CAs.

Ontario Working with Conservation Experts to Protect More Natural Areas

New working group to provide advice on strategies to expand protected and conserved areas

April 1, 2021

TORONTO — The Ontario government has established a working group of conservation experts to identify opportunities to protect and conserve more natural areas in order to enhance the province's natural diversity and provide more recreational opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors.

"Expanding protected and conserved natural areas is a top priority in our Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan and we want to find new, innovative ways to meet this commitment," said Jeff Yurek, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. "That's why we want to hear from conservation and community leaders whose expertise can help identify new strategies to leverage the ideas, talents and expertise of the private sector and other outside organizations to help build on our government's conservation efforts, like the Greenlands Conservation Partnership."

The Protected Areas Working Group is made up of experts from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, as well as representatives from Indigenous communities.

Members include:

- Peter Kendall (Chair), Executive Director, Schad Foundation
- Andre Vallillee, Environment Program Director, Metcalf Foundation
- Chris McDonell, Chief Forester, Rayonier Advanced Materials
- David Flood, General Manager, Wahkohtowin Development GP Inc.
- Geoff Burt, CEO, Consecon Foundation
- George Ross, former Deputy Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Research and Innovation and Consumer Services
- John Beaucage, Principal, Counsel Public Affairs and former Chief of Wasauksing First Nation
- John Snobelen, former Minister of Natural Resources
- Lorne Johnson, Vice-President, Ivey Foundation
- Lynette Mader, Manager of Provincial Operations, Ducks Unlimited
- Mike Hendren, Vice-President (Ontario Region), Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Paul Genest, Senior Vice-President, Power Corporation

The working group will explore a number of areas, such as identifying opportunities and addressing barriers to increasing protected and conserved natural areas, and how public-private partnerships could be used to further advance conservation efforts. The working group will deliver a report with recommendations to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

"I want to thank Minister Yurek for his leadership on terrestrial conservation in Ontario. I'm honoured to chair the new Protected Areas Working Group which is made up of some of Ontario's leading conservation experts," said Peter Kendall, Executive Director, Schad Foundation. "For the next two months, our group will identify opportunities to increase protected areas in Ontario. By working together, we are confident Ontario will once again become a leader in conservation."

Protecting and recovering natural spaces and species and supporting conservation efforts to preserve Ontario's rich biodiversity are key commitments in the government's [Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan](#).

With regard to the above announcement, Crowe Bridge Conservation Area is a prime example that the government (and possibly other public and/or private partners) could contribute to provide an answer to the burden of additional visitors.

Since Callaghan's Rapids is just upstream of Crowe Bridge, it too will see an increase in numbers visiting the area, which may place an already stressed area under additional pressure.

Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area

- In addition to the potential problem as noted above, Callaghan's Rapids will undoubtedly be faced with the ongoing problem of further degradation and abuse from a small minority of users. These include visitors who typically ignore conservation area rules and run rampant with ATV's, camp illegally, run vehicles in the river and/or have large parties leaving considerable refuse and broken glass in their wake.
- In order to stem the tide, the CVCA has made some progress on this front.
- I have sent correspondence and had conversations with the Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance (EOTA) Manager, Mrs. Cindy Cassidy seeking their assistance to block access from the EOTA trail onto CVCA property. Mrs. Cassidy and I have agreed to proceed this spring with first steps. With the assistance of Mr. Marc Forget working for the Authority in a voluntary capacity and Mrs. Bernice Donaldson representing EOTA the initial stages have been put into place to find resolution to the issue.
- Mr. Forget and Mrs. Donaldson have met and will be creating a plan which will prioritize the necessary actions for this spring and beyond.
- A meeting is planned with key personnel interested in protecting Callaghan's and limiting access. Barb Hunter from the Madoc OPP detachment will be invited to join the meeting.

Crowe Bridge Conservation Area

The following motion was passed at the 25th February 2021 Board Meeting.

FA Motion G 37/21

Moved by: Jim Martin

Seconded by: Jan O'Neill

To proceed with the safety assessment on the Crowe Bridge Conservation Area weir.

Carried.

Subsequently, staff contacted the Municipality of Trent Hills CAO, Lynn Phillips to discuss the Crowe Bridge Conservation Area and inform Trent Hills of the CVCA's intention to proceed with the weir assessment.

Correspondence was also sent to the CAO indicating the CVCA's desire to extend the Crowe Bridge Lease Agreement.

Since the CVCA is moving forward with the assessment, Trent Hills Council at a recent Council meeting approved entering into a 1 year extension of the current agreement to operate Crowe Bridge.

The results of the assessment will be the driving force determining the level of investment in Crowe Bridge Trent Hills will be willing to consider. Then, it is my understanding the term of the agreement will be reviewed and agreed upon by both parties.

Trent Hills has also approved a 50% contribution to the safety assessment if required, to a maximum of \$10,000.

Due to the large influx of visitors to the area last year, parking safety issues and the opportunity to complete the assessment, the decision was also made to keep Crowe Bridge closed for this year. Fencing and signage will be put in place with the appropriate notice to the public. CVCA staff will put a notice on our website and facebook as well to support Trent Hills' efforts.

Staff will proceed with the necessary changes for extending the current agreement for signing and provide copies to Trent Hills.