

Grand River Conservation Authority

Report number: GM-03-23-27

Date: March 24, 2023

To: Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

Subject: Conestogo Pheasant Club Update

Recommendation:

THAT Report Number GM-02-23-27 Conestogo Pheasant Club Update be received as information;

AND THAT the Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to sign the agreement with Conestogo Pheasant Club and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters on behalf of the Grand River Conservation Authority.

Summary:

As a follow-up to reports GM-04-22-37 Grand River Conservation Authority Hunting Review, GM-05-22-47 Pheasant Hunt Program Third Party Agreement, GM-08-22-63 Update on Expression of Interest – Pheasant Program, Conservation Areas and Conservation Lands staff have drafted a tri-party agreement with the Conestogo Pheasant Club (CPC), and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) for the provision of a third-party agreement to allow the operation of a pheasant hunting program on GRCA lands located at Area 3, Conestogo Lake.

Report:

In 2019, GRCA staff began a review of the GRCA hunting program and updated criteria for the evaluation of GRCA conservation lands that would be suitable for hunting activities to be permitted. The review culminated in 2022 with a report to the General Membership, GM-04-22-37. Miscellaneous hunting properties were updated, some acres were removed from the hunting offering and some areas saw an increase in available land for hunting. All areas were evaluated. As a result of the hunting review, an operational decision was made to no longer offer pheasant hunting at Conestogo Lake. The pheasant program was not feasible as staff resources are required to attend to their primary responsibilities of dam operation and conservation area management. There were no pheasant hunting programs offered in 2021 and 2022.

As part of the hunting program review, a delegation attended the GRCA board meeting to request that options to reinstate the pheasant program could be considered. The delegation offered to “volunteer” to manage the pheasant program which was viewed as an important offering and the public desired to have this activity continue on GRCA lands.

Staff advised that even with volunteers there would still be significant resources required to operate the program, and Conestogo Lake staff did not have the capacity to operate the program given their other accountabilities. An option to review the requirements to operate as a Third-Party, with no on-site GRCA staff involvement style of the program was proposed. Report GM-05-22-47 to the board outlines the parameters and risks that would be undertaken if GRCA was to permit Third Party business to operate on GRCA Conservation Lands. The Board approved a motion at the May 2022 meeting that directed staff to discuss operating a pheasant program with interested third-party groups.

Discussions commenced with representatives of the Ontario Federation of Hunters and Anglers, the North American Versatile Hunting Dogs Association, and a few former pheasant hunters began to examine the idea of an expression of interest to allow any interested parties to express their interest in hosting a pheasant program at Area 3, Conestogo Lake, and an update was provided to the Board in Report # GM-08-22-63. The Expression of Interest was shared with the original delegation and other interested pheasant hunting groups. One submission was received, a joint proposal from the newly formed CPC and the OFAH.

Discussions for working towards an agreement for a pilot project commenced in October of 2022, and the draft agreement was finalized in March 2023. This agreement outlines the parameters for a pilot project that would commence in the fall of 2023 and end in 2026.

The agreement includes defined roles and responsibilities of both the CPC and GRCA. The CPC is responsible for the inspection and enforcement of their permits issued for the pheasant program, collection of all fees associated with the program, ensuring that hunters have appropriate OFAH personal insurance, and that they sign an indemnity waiver agreement prior to hunting. CPC is also responsible for all operational aspects of the program, including garbage collection, order, and purchase and stocking of pheasants. The CPC is required to demonstrate appropriate insurance coverage and provide an annual report that identifies the number of permits, the total operational cost, and the total number of pheasants released each year.

Consideration was given to potential conflicting uses on the property where pheasant hunting will be allowed. The GRCA will continue to allow snowmobiling on Area 3 at Conestogo Lake, as part of the agreement with Lake Conestoga Snowmobilers Inc. Provisions were also made to continue to allow the shotgun and muzzle-loader hunt with respect to deer season on those lands. When either of these activities are occurring, the CPC will temporarily cease the release of pheasants and will not sell active permits for pheasant hunting during this time.

An annual check-in with GRCA staff, CPC, and OFAH is included in the agreement to continue the great dialogue and relationship that has developed throughout this process.

Financial Implications:

There is no financial impact on the GRCA's hunting program, Conestogo Lake Conservation Area, or the Conservation Lands Department as a result of this agreement.

Prepared by:

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Approved by:

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