Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 35 YEARS

Beaver Trapping Continues Unabated in Ottawa

This April, Greely homeowners who had been keeping an eye on a small beaver dam in their neighbourhood creek were assured by a City of Ottawa employee that "nothing needed to be done" as the water was flowing fine, so flooding was not an issue.

However, just days later, traps were set and the beaver was killed to the disgust of residents. The trapper, with the assistance of a City employee and City truck made great effort to escape the media at the site, showing that public funds should not be spent on something that the City has to hide from the public because it's unjustified.

Photo Courtesy of Worth a Dam

Beaver Dam in Grey's Creek, April 16, 2026. (Katelyn Wilson/CTV News Ottawa)

In June 2024, Ottawa City Councillors voted to support a "*Wildlife Strategy that reflects modern day practices to coexist with wildlife in our City*". It followed pressure from residents in a series of public consultations that received 900 responses where, as reported by the City, the majority called for the "*reduction or elimination of lethal wildlife management practices, especially for beavers, coyotes and other large mammals*".

In response, in opposition to staff recommendations, Councillors approved a number of Motions as an alternative to trapping beavers and that required staff to produce a summary of current (lethal) beaver management costs.

But, as seen from our Report Card on pages 4 & 5, City staff have been able to either ignore or circumvent Council's Motions. It is not surprising as a previous Wildlife Strategy, a decade ago, was also derailed by trapping interests and City staff, the latter benefitting from padded departmental budgets and little accountability.

Trapping – a Lucrative Business in Ottawa

Given the unreliability of the City's published records on trapping costs, the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre (OCWC) filed an Access to Information application requesting a summary of the invoices from vendors trapping beavers paid for by the City of Ottawa.

The public will be shocked to learn that in each of the last few years, as much as $167,799 has been spent annually on trapping. One of the two principal trappers earned over $95,000 in 2024. It is no coincidence that this individual was a member of the Wildlife Strategy Working Group in 2010 who voted against more progressive measures to coexist with wildlife.

Why during Drought Conditions were Beavers Trapped in Ottawa?

It is outrageous that during the major drought in Ottawa last summer and fall, when ponds, creeks and wetlands dried up and people's wells failed, that beavers continued to be trapped at over 50 sites across the City.

Beavers are the one species able to keep water on the landscape during a drought. Removing them was not only unnecessary but had an extremely negative impact on recharging groundwater and aquifers over a large area in this region, seriously affecting the wells on which rural residents rely.

City Councillors Need to Stand Behind their Motions

Councillors overwhelmingly supported Motions, approved by Council, for a progressive Wildlife Strategy in June 2024. Our Report Card on pages 4 & 5 reminds Councillors of their commitment and what, 2 years later, has yet to be achieved. The essential role of beavers in the face of Climate Change, outlined on page 6, is a reminder of those benefits and why Ottawa must finally join the modern world in adopting progressive wildlife policies.

NCC Greenbelt Master Plan Review–

We must ensure the Natural Environment remains the priority

The National Capital Commission's (NCC) Greenbelt was created in the 1950s to protect land from urban sprawl. It totals 20,000 hectares of green space and includes forest, wetlands and agricultural areas, it is the largest publicly owned greenbelt in the world.

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is located on the Greenbelt, so it holds a very special place for us. It is where we deliver our outdoor education programs connecting people of all ages to nature. Through these programs we promote and celebrate this wonderful resource.

This is also where we work on stewardship projects with the community and levels of government to protect and restore the area. An example is the restoration of the badly degraded wetland near our Centre.

The NCC is currently reviewing and updating its Greenbelt Master Plan, the last review was completed in 2013. This is an opportunity for all of us to stand up for the protection of the Greenbelt and to ensure the natural environment remains the priority.

CPAWS Hosts Greenbelt Forum

This winter the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre was pleased to participate in Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society's (CPAWS) first National Capital Greenbelt Forum, held at the Museum of Nature.

It was great to see stakeholders, including community organizations, government and residents gather to discuss a vision for the Greenbelt's future.

Through presentations and roundtable discussions, participants were able to collaborate about ways we can move forward to protect the Greenbelt. Some main themes developed around insuring protection, accessibility, connectivity, opportunities for education as well as supporting local sustainable farming.

This was a great lead in for community involvement in the Greenbelt Master Plan Review.

Editorial

Time for City Commitments to be Turned into Action

It is an embarrassment for Ottawa residents that this City continues to be so out of step with jurisdictions around the world when it comes to valuing and protecting biodiversity. The Report Card on the Wildlife Strategy in this newsletter exposes yet another failure.

Ottawa is the only major City in Canada that does not have a Biodiversity Strategy. Cities like Vancouver, Edmonton and Montreal have had such Strategies in place for decades. They include action plans where wetlands are incorporated into new developments and where multiple City departments work together on the design and implementation of safe wildlife passages.

The contribution of beavers is recognized worldwide in articles, research studies, videos and now, just released, a movie 'Hoppers', a lesson in letting nature lead.

Beavers have been reintroduced in England, Scotland and in the Western United States to fight climate change. Yet, during a serious drought in 2025, the City of Ottawa trapped and killed over a 100 beavers while creeks, streams, wetlands and people's wells dried up. How does this make any sense?

The essential environmental services provided by beavers, outlined on page 6, should be required reading for City of Ottawa staff.

Mayor Sutcliffe recently said, with respect to another City project, "*this is about turning commitment into action"* and *"when you engage with us, you get results*".

The public expects no less a commitment from the City of Ottawa in finally implementing the Wildlife Strategy Motions, ones that represent 21st century environmental policies.

Donna DuBreuil

President, OCWC

We Need Nature and Nature Needs Us—Exploring Nature Next Door

It is hard to believe that it has been 20 years since Richard Louv wrote the book, Last Child in the Woods, sounding the alarm about nature deficit disorder. Thankfully, many people now realize the important role a connection to nature plays in healthy childhood development. It provides a space for children to let their imagination take hold, take risks, build confidence and realize they are part of something bigger.

Sadly, even with this growing awareness that exposure to nature is essential, many children are still spending much of their time on devices and not outside exploring.

For more than two decades, our Education Programs have helped children and families build lasting connections with nature. Each year, growing demand reinforces how valuable these programs are. Children get to connect with nature close to home in their communities. Nature does not have to be a vast forest to matter; local spaces are also valuable and worth exploring and celebrating.

Here is glimpse of the outdoor adventures we get to share with children through our Nature Discovery Workshops.

On a crisp Sunday morning in January, we welcomed families with children ages 2 to 13. Together, we played in the snow, explored the trails, tried snowshoeing, and learned about the remarkable wildlife that shares our space. Here is some of the feedback from parents and children:

"*The event was a great success, with sounds of laughter and kids playing throughout our time there. Families had engaging conversations about nature, climate and how we can support our kids to spend time outside and connect with their environment*." Parent

"*I liked technically everything we did. We saw squirrels' nests way up high in the trees. Kate told us stories about skunks and porcupines using stuffies. The quills are cool. We also saw animal's homes. We made butterfly crafts and drank hot chocolate."* 7-year-old participant

Residents Value Wildlife

One aspect of our Community Outreach Program is helping residents who submit wildlife questions through our website. Initially, most requests were for information to help people resolve a human-wildlife conflict.

In the last several years, however, more people are reaching out with concerns for wildlife. In March, a resident emailed us worried about a fox they were seeing in their neighbourhood. It was a busy area, and the fox seemed to be favouring a hind leg. The resident wanted to know how they could help this animal.

Thanks to photos and videos they provided, we were able to assess and decide that the best course of action was just to wait and monitor. We knew from first-hand experience with a fox that we cared for that had to have a hind leg amputated, that it would be able to compensate.

We have had several positive updates from the resident, and the most recent, on the May long weekend, was very uplifting. The fox has pups, and they are all in great shape, as you can see from the photo.

It is very inspiring to see the growing public concern for wildlife and the awareness about the impact human development is having on our wild species and spaces.

Photo provided by William Cooke, who used a 400mm lens to ensure the foxes were not disturbed.

Report Card on Wildlife Strategy Motions

After decades of negative actions against wildlife in Ottawa, City Councillors, in opposition to staff's recommendations to maintain the status quo, instead listened to residents and community organizations in overwhelmingly supporting the following Motions.

However, our Status Report below assigns Grades and shows that City staff have been able to either ignore and/or circumvent the intent of the Motions, leaving the public to question who runs City Hall.

Motion: That the wildlife specialist work with IWSD to create an inventory of existing culverts and watercourses with ranking of beaver conflicts and feasibility of alternatives for each, and costing for those alternatives. Progress reports to come to both committees and council.

Status: Where is the inventory of existing culverts and watercourses with a ranking of beaver conflicts? Based on Access to Information documents obtained by the OCWC, the invoices submitted by trappers, providing the specific locations and frequency of sites trapped in Ottawa, is readily available, so why has this information been withheld?

As for the cost of alternatives to trapping such as a flow device, its one-time cost would be around $15,000 compared to $1,000-$2,000 paid the trapper for each of the 64 sites trapped in 2024, with 25 of these sites trapped multiple times that year. This does not include the considerable City staff time monitoring and maintaining sites, making flow devices a huge cost savings for the City and the reason more jurisdictions are using them.

Motion: That City staff invite a flow device expert to analyze the results of the inventory of existing drains and watercourses, review current practices of the City for beaver management and provide recommendations on an approach that integrates flow devices as a beaver management tool for Stormwater Systems based upon respectful coexistence.

Status: Without the inventory and ranking of beaver conflict sites, it is impossible to know why the 10-12 sites staff provided the flow device expert to evaluate were selected.

Access to Information documents obtained by OCWC show 49 sites where beavers were trapped in 2025, with 28 of these sites in stormwater infrastructure. However, few of these regularly trapped sites made it onto the list given the flow device expert, showing that staff have, once again, gotten around a Motion they do not support.

One of the flow devices on the federal Campus where the OCWC is located is an example of the increasing use of these devices.

Motion: That City staff identify specific locations where alternative management practices such as flow devices will be used, excluding Municipal Drains under the Drainage Act while maintaining its responsibilities under the Drainage Act and that staff convene a public forum to learn more about the benefits of flow devices and their application within municipal infrastructure systems, specifically stormwater management systems pending confirmation that the Environmental Compliance Approvals for those facilities are not contravened. This forum should include an invitation to flow devices experts, as well as a municipality with a proven tract record of using these devices, City staff and the City's Drainage Engineers should also attend.

Status: The Motion's requirement that a public forum be held to learn about the benefits of flow devices became an example of staff's determination to circumvent the intent of this Motion and a missed opportunity for the City to demonstrate leadership.

(Status continued on next page)

Approved by Council in June 2024

The forum was held with very short notice, little publicity and no option for virtual participation. Most attendees were only there because the OCWC had notified them. Some came from considerable distances, from Navan to Stittsville, and had questions for the flow device experts, but the carefully orchestrated and controlled event meant there was little time for them to do so.

It is unfortunate City staff from drainage, parks and roads who deal with these issues did not attend.

The purpose of the forum was for the flow device expert to present the conflict sites they had been hired by the City to evaluate. Yet, the City project lead indicated at the end of the meeting that there was no decision on whether any of these recommendations would be implemented, leaving those that took the time to attend question the purpose of this forum.

Motion: That the City complete a summary of the amount of time per week, that City staff inspect and clean culverts and break up dams at the 30 to 50 beaver management sites in Ottawa. This summary should include where equipment is required along with staff time and salary costs, including expenses associated with any contracted service providers and overtime.

Status: Why is the City withholding this information? Although the money paid to beaver trapper(s) averages $150,000 annually and is among the highest in North America, it is just a fraction, or less than 10%, of City staff salaries and equipment costs hidden in stormwater, municipal drain and roads department budgets on beaver management – costs that would be eliminated or greatly reduced with flow devices.

Two years later, the lack of this information adds to the cynicism of residents. Like that of a West Carleton resident who reported City staff made 5 trips in a little over a month to unblock the same culvert. Or a Navan resident who asked a City roads crew why they always came late afternoon to unblock a culvert, received a wink and a reply "overtime".

Motion: That the Wildlife Resource Specialist, proposed in Action 7, in consultation with the Office of the City Clerk, review the membership, scope and objectives of a Department-led Working Group, in keeping with Action 2, including the potential participation of representatives from other levels of government, non-governmental agencies and Councillor Liaison(s).

Status: The intention of the amended Motion was *"to review the membership, scope and objectives"* of the staff recommendation for a Working Group that was limited to *"improve public information, outreach and education"*.
Despite the amendment, staff were successful in maintaining the limited scope. OCWC declined an invitation to participate since discussion on the longstanding public concerns around the management of beavers, coyotes, and other large mammals, would not be addressed.

The little relevance of this Working Group in addressing public concerns was confirmed in a recent staff report on the Group's terms of reference. The Report states:
The following matters are beyond the scope of the Working Group:

- City wildlife management policies
- City wildlife management operations

A section of the restored wetland on the Carling Campus where Beavers are welcome and their benefits appreciated.

Beavers Amazing Contribution

The climate crisis has become very real for many Canadians. Catastrophic flooding, tornadoes, drought, poor air quality and wildfires have made us aware of the critical role wetlands play in reducing the impacts of these events. But, did you know that Beavers are the single most important species in maintaining healthy wetlands and thus a key ally in fighting climate change?

Modern flow device technology can protect infrastructure while allowing Beavers to continue providing their essential environmental services. The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has been working to promote Beaver coexistence for over 20 years. Here are some great facts shared from our friends at Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary:

Photo provided by Sylvie Sabourin

There is no denying the remarkable contributions of beavers. While this keystone species is widely recognized for its ability to construct dams and create ponds, less is known about the role that beavers play in keeping our ecosystems healthy and helping to manage water-related issues. The following are five facts you may not know about Canada's national symbol.

Beavers minimize flood risk. Yes – you read that correctly. Beavers minimize the risk of flooding in the same manner that they provide insurance against drought. Essentially, beaver dams slow down the speed at which water moves through a system (like a speed bump). Slower water means delayed and, in some cases, reduced flood peaks further downstream.

Beavers provide insurance against drought. An individual beaver pond can store a tremendous amount of water and has often been referred to as a "sponge". This sponge-like reservoir can lessen the effects of drought, because in addition to storing water on the surface, the weight of the pond forces water into aquifers and rehydrates the soil itself.

Beaver ponds improve water quality. By slowing the rate at which water flows, beaver ponds give suspended sediment time to settle to the bottom. This sediment absorbs and filters pollutants, such as heavy metals, pesticides, and fertilizers. Not only is this filtration crucial for surrounding ecosystems, it improves the quality of water downstream that is used by humans and other species.

Beavers increase a landscape's fire resistance. By building dams, forming ponds, and digging canals, beavers irrigate vast stream corridors and create fireproof refuges in which plants and animals can shelter. In fact, the beaver's engineering activities have been known to stop fire in its tracks. It is not uncommon to see large green patches only where beavers live, after a fire has swept through.

Beavers create habitats for other species. As you know, beavers build watertight dams made of sticks, reeds, branches, and rocks, which are glued together with mud. These dams slow the flow of water, resulting in the creation of ponds and wetlands. This, in turn, provides habitat for a large number of species, including fish, mammals, waterfowl, songbirds, amphibians, and insects – far more species than you would find in a pond without beavers. Also, the felling of trees provides space for new plant species to emerge in their place. Such plants then provide food and cover for other species.

There is no denying their role in keeping our ecosystems healthy. Akin to the multi uses of a Swiss army knife, they equip us with a filtration system, firewalls, speed bumps, sponge-like reservoirs, and awe-inspiring homes for many species. Beavers matter!

For more information about the benefits of beavers and ways to coexist visit:

Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre *www.wildlifeinfo.ca*
The Beaver Institute *www.beaverinstitute.org*
Aspen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary *www.aspenvalley.ca*

Mosquito Spraying Harms the Environment

by Citizens for the Protection of Wetlands and Wildlife

Stittsville resident, Catherine Clysdale, a member of this group, is a strong proponent for the protection of biodiversity. The following is an excerpt from her article in Stittsville Central https://stittsvillecentral.ca/the-plight-of-critical-insects-pollinators-the-absolute-mvps-of-life-on-earth/

I recently discovered the negative impact that spraying for mosquitos has on pollinators when I attended a webinar on Wildlife Friendly Garden Care.

Most mosquito and tick control services spray pyrethroids which are synthetic derivatives of Pyrethrins (a naturally occurring insecticide derived from Chrysanthemum cinerariifolium). Just because it's "natural" doesn't mean it's safe for people, pets, and the environment.

Pyrethroids are highly toxic to all insects, including pollinator species. Adult mosquitoes live only about two weeks, and new larvae hatch constantly. This means spraying cannot be a one-time solution – it must be repeated frequently to have any impact. Yet even with repeated applications, the results are disappointing. Why? Because mosquito predators are far more susceptible to pesticides than the mosquito populations, and you eliminate nature's built-in solution.

Bees, butterflies, ladybugs, dragonflies, and thousands of other beneficial insects are killed on contact. The ripple effects include birds who rely on insects as the food source for their babies. When you spray for mosquitoes, you're also eliminating that food source, making it harder for birds to reproduce.

Contaminated runoff from pyrethroid application near bodies of water poses a significant risk to aquatic species, and the risk is exacerbated by bio-accumulation of pyrethroids in sediment.

Photo provided by Sally Hansen

Instead of spraying, I realized there are safe and effective methods that help control mosquitoes, that don't have the same negative impacts:

- Mosquitoes breed in standing water. Check trays underneath pots, eavestroughs, empty containers, wheelbarrows – everywhere that water can accumulate.

- Rinse your birdbath every two to three days.

- If you are going to sit on a patio, put a fan on low. Mosquitoes can't fly in the wind.

- Plant native shrubs that attract birds to keep mosquitoes in check.

Mosquito Spraying in Ottawa

Selena Walker, a member of the above group, and long-time advocate for wildlife and Goulbourn's wetlands, noted that in Kanata North including the South March Highlands, the City of Ottawa uses both ground and aerosol spraying of BTi which is a biological or naturally occurring bacterium found in soils. BTi contains spores that produce toxins that specifically target and only affect the larvae of the mosquito, blackfly and fungus gnat.

BTi has no toxicity to people so while it doesn't pose a risk to human health, it has a very real and negative impact on biodiversity by destroying the base of the food chain which other species like birds, fish, frogs, dragonflies and bats depend. Many of these species are already struggling given habitat loss and climate change – adding another major stressor is unwarranted for something that represents a seasonal inconvenience to us humans.

OCWC Footnote: Given the money the City is spending on mosquito spraying along with the lack of information residents have about the wider environmental and biodiversity consequences, has encouraged private companies to enter the market, using even more damaging control measures such as pyrethroids.

Canada's Strategy to Protect Nature

The Liberal Government recently announced a Strategy to Protect Canada's Nature, Biodiversity, and Water. It recognizes that Canada's natural heritage is under threat from climate change and unsustainable development, and that Nature is foundational to the Canadian identity.

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre is pleased with this timely announcement for several reasons. We need the leadership of the federal government to affirm that the climate and biodiversity crisis are one. The City of Ottawa is the only major city in Canada without a Biodiversity Strategy and while the National Capital Commission extols the importance of biodiversity in the Greenbelt, there has been little concrete action to protect it.

More than a decade ago, in a Review of the Greenbelt Master Plan, the Greenbelt Coalition, a group of all the major environmental organizations in the Nation's Capital and the Federation of Citizens' Association of Ottawa, strongly urged that the Greenbelt become "*a model of biodiversity in an urban setting*".

Engaging the community in stewardship on the Greenbelt's Carling Campus - OCWC and partners work with residents of all ages to plant trees and disperse native seeds.

Aligning the Greenbelt Master Plan Review with Canada's Nature Strategy

We strongly urge that the NCC's current Review of the Greenbelt Master Plan align itself with Canada's Nature Strategy by taking actions to recognize and better protect the biodiversity within the Greenbelt. And, in addressing another of the Coalition's recommendations, building a broad, on-going base of community partners to support the role of the Greenbelt, while also meeting the Nature Strategy's goal for increased stewardship and cost-effective partnerships.

New National Urban Parks

The Nature Strategy's commitment to establish 15 new national urban parks is timely. The Greenbelt must be given equivalent status, legal protection and funding. For Canada to be recognized as an important sovereign Nation, it must provide a fitting residence for its Prime Minister and legal protection for its most significant visual asset, the National Capital Greenbelt, the largest publicly owned greenbelt in the world, and a symbol of Canadian identity.

Our Thanks - OCWC gratefully acknowledges:

The William Muir Hawes Wildlife Fund

Ruth and Ray Wesenberg Wildlife Fund

TD Friends of the Environment Foundation

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