



# Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre

SERVING THE COMMUNITY FOR OVER 25 YEARS

## Discover Your Relationship With Nature



Photo courtesy Sally Hansen

By Kate MacNeil

There are so many remarkable things that nature has to offer, it is the life-support for our planet from filtering our water and air to providing lifesaving medications. Our environment is a spectacular collection of interactions, from the simple to the complex, with each species having a role to play. These interactions are fascinating, but today I want to talk about something more personal, the intrinsic value of nature and what it means to us individually.

I want to start with my Nature Story. I feel fortunate that from a young age I was given the gift of nature. We camped many weekends and I took my first steps in a provincial park in Northwestern Ontario. I vividly remember falling asleep to the wonderful chorus of frogs and the excitement of waking up and peeking out of the tent and seeing the dew glisten on the leaves. Each day was a new world of possibilities for adventure and exploration. The options were endless and our imaginations were free, we would

we try to catch minnows in the river, albeit unsuccessfully, we would roll down the hill of moss or build a fort with old branches. Most of my memories of growing up have an association with nature, it truly was my playground.

As I grew up and became a parent, I was excited about sharing my love of nature and wild things. Living in a more urban setting, this meant some of our adventures took place in city parks and local nature trails, but it was just as incredible. Whether it was snowshoeing through woods, investigating beaver ponds, or our annual pilgrimage to see the geese and their goslings, nature had an endless list of adventures and was a place to bond and watch my child explore and develop.

I also have the pleasure of nature being my workplace. I began working at the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre 18 years ago. I started during the animal rehab years and spent much of my time talking to people about wildlife and nature. Some people

talked about the enjoyment of watching the antics of squirrels in their backyards while others were looking for a solution to a conflict with wildlife.

Through my current work as the Education Coordinator, nature is my classroom where I get to showcase its brilliance with people of all ages. I am fortunate to have a job that allows me to work on behalf of the natural world and to share this gift with others, hopefully inspiring them even a little bit to discover their own relationship with nature.

At difficult times in my life, nature has been a place of quiet contemplation and inspiration. A few years ago, at the age of 38, I needed a mastectomy. I went from diagnosis to surgery very quickly. It was surreal and even now it seems like a dream. With appointments, biopsies, MRIs, surgeries and radiation therapy, I would find myself going for walks on nearby trails as a way to unwind. Without fail, being surrounded by nature restored a feeling of peace and calm in me. It was like my reset button. Looking back I am so grateful for the hope and peace nature provided me.

I am happy to report that I have come full circle, nature is once again my playground. I spent last weekend with my family, hiking in the woods, looking at animal tracks and building a fire to roast marshmallows.

Everyone's relationship with nature is unique. Like all relationships it changes with the passing of time, and although it has meant many things to me it has always been a friend. But like other relationships it also takes work, not only in the form of each of us doing our part to protect it but also in making the time for nature in our lives and in our children's lives. The benefits are far reaching.

# ONTARIO'S WAR ON WILDLIFE



Photo courtesy Bear With Us

The attack on wildlife which started with the controversial reinstatement of the spring bear hunt as a 'pilot' in 2014 has just gotten a whole lot worse. Not only is the spring bear hunt being extended and expanded but the Ontario government is now also targeting wolves and coyotes.

## Spring Bear Hunt

The controversial Spring Bear Hunt, announced by the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, Bill Mauro, as a two-year pilot in 2014 was supposed to be about ensuring public safety. This in spite of studies by his own scientists that showed no correlation between increased hunting and a reduction in human-bear conflict.

Bear conflicts are the result of natural food shortages and the failure of people to secure attractants like garbage when bears wandered into towns. The two-year pilot proved the experts right. There was no decrease in human-bear activity. In fact, due to severe natural food shortages in 2015, there were more conflicts with bears in some towns.

Now, the Ontario government has instead decided it's really about economics by announcing an additional five-year 'pilot' and opening it up to non-resident hunters. In an attempt to justify the hunt on economic grounds, the Ontario government maintains that the bear population is 'sustainable'. But, what about ethics?

It is entirely unethical to hunt any species in the spring when, having just come out of a hard winter, animals have not only themselves to sustain but newborn young to care for, all before natural food becomes available.

Bear hunting has become known as the 'Sport of Cowards'. The use of baits is controversial. It's particularly offensive in the spring. Who sits in a tree blind next to piles of fats and sweets and waits for some groggy bear, just out of hibernation and desperately hungry, to come within rifle range? Like shooting 'ducks in a barrel' said one former hunter.

Opening it up to non-resident hunters will attract trophy hunters like the internationally-condemned killer of Cecil the Lion. Ontario isn't Zimbabwe and this isn't twenty years ago, when the public knew little about what bear hunting actually involved.

## Wolves and Coyotes

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry propose a plan to increase killing of wolves and the unlimited killing of coyotes across most of Ontario, the rationale being to enhance declining moose populations.

A large coalition of groups, including animal protection and conservation organizations in Ontario and across Canada have come together to oppose this proposal. The decline in moose populations is due to hunting pressure and the greater access to moose habitat. Even the ministry's own research shows that these regulatory changes will have little to no effect on the moose population.

*"This proposal is frankly a political move to gain voter support in rural and northern communities and to placate the hunting lobby so that they have more animals to hunt,"* said Liz White of Animal Alliance of Canada.

Wolves and coyotes in natural abundance play a critical role in maintain healthy, functioning ecosystems. Targeting them only causes these highly social animals suffering and stress, impacting their family structure and eroding the fabric of interconnectedness that supports all life.

Rather than scapegoating wolves and coyotes, *"the responsible thing for the MNRF to do would be to immediately move to a mandatory moose hunting reporting system and prohibit hunting in the areas of most concern,"* said Julie Woodyer of Zoocheck. *"Overhunting and the MNRF's mismanagement are to blame, not the wolves or coyotes."*

## Editorial

### Remaining Optimistic - A News Flash!



We just got the news! An important update to the article on this page is that the Ontario government is abandoning the controversial plan to let hunters gun down more wolves and coyotes.

Thanks to thousands of you who submitted comments and petitions, the government was forced to listen.

It has announced that no additional wolves and coyotes would be killed, acknowledging widespread opposition to hunting and trapping, as well as comments that a wolf/coyote cull is not science-based and will not protect moose populations.

This victory is proof that when compassionate Canadians join together to demand our politicians treat animals with respect, we can make a difference.

However, there's still work to do as the unconscionable Spring Bear Hunt has not been cancelled in spite of thousands of petitions opposing it as well as the condemnation of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, under the Liberal government, has reduced its support and reliance on evidence-based research and turned away from proven education and prevention strategies in responding to human-wildlife conflicts. It, too often, relies on bullets and traps in catering to special interest groups like hunting organizations and outfitters for managing wildlife resources that belong to ALL Ontarians.

Nevertheless, we remain optimistic because we know that people will continue to strongly oppose cruel and outdated practices that target wildlife. And, because we see great new strides being made by city governments like London Ontario and groups in Alberta, in improving the environment while demonstrating the substantial benefits of living with wildlife.

Donna DuBreuil  
President, OCWC



## Animal Stories

# A Happy Ending for a Little Coyote

Even though we no longer do wildlife rehabilitation, the animals we have helped over the years are never far from our minds. In fact, having had the privilege of caring for these special animals has reinforced our commitment to giving people a better understanding of them.



When the coyote was brought into the Centre late one evening in June everyone was worried it would not survive. The two young boys who found the tiny coyote and her sibling kept them hidden for two weeks until one of them died. This is when they finally decided to find help for the remaining malnourished pup.

Upon examining the tiny animal, it was discovered she had a severe case of sarcoptic mange. The new patient was painstakingly shaven in an attempt to control the mange. The veterinarian prescribed a series of injections and a strict regime of oral medication, creams and medicated sprays.

The coyote also had two different types of intestinal parasites that had been competing with her for what little nutrients she had been receiving before her arrival at the Centre.

These invasive treatments were made all the more difficult due to the fact that she had been treated roughly by the people who had found her. She was terrified of being touched by people.

Her recovery was slow, but eventually our diligent care began to show results and her skin slowly cleared up and her distended abdomen became a healthy, full tummy and her fur started to grow back. Despite her return to physical health, she

was still very nervous and wary. While this cautious behaviour is important as the animal matures, it was a concern given she was still a baby and needed nurturing so we were concerned about her psychological state.

We organized a rehabilitation schedule using patient, caring volunteers who would sit and gently talk with her. They tried to coax her to interact with them so that she would be more comfortable with attempts to treat her medically. In due course, arrangements were made to continue the coyote's rehabilitation at another facility with an outdoor enclosure with two other orphaned coyote pups.

When our coyote was ready to go, she was sporting a beautiful thick coat. After a long car ride, she was ready to meet her new friends. They were in a large outdoor enclosure and were hiding in the tall grasses, near the den they had dug out under a tree. We put the carrier down and opened the door and left her to get acclimated to the sights and sounds.

Before long our frightened pup was in the middle of a game of chase with her new-found friends. She was overwintered and released in the spring with her coyote companions. She had beaten the odds and despite her rough start became a healthy and well-adjusted wild coyote.



### Coyote Facts:

- *The Eastern Coyote that lives in this area is a hybrid between western coyotes and eastern (Algonquin) wolves and weighs on average 30 – 40 pounds.*
- *They are highly intelligent and adaptive and thus are able to take advantage of a wide range of habitats.*
- *Coyotes are very social and the majority belong to a pack, led by an alpha male and female who often mate for life.*
- *On average 4 -6 pups are born in April and May and both parents are involved in raising the young.*
- *The pups are very playful, much like domestic pups.*
- *An extensive study of urban coyotes showed the foundation of their diet was small rodents, such as mice and voles. Surprisingly, it also showed 23% of their diet consists of fruit.*
- *Coyotes are susceptible to sarcoptic mange, consisting of microscopic mites that cause itching and hair loss. It can have deadly consequences, particularly in the winter months, as it makes it difficult to maintain body heat.*
- *The mite can easily be treated by using a medication called ivermectin. People have had success in treating animals by putting the medication in food for the affected animal.*

# 'Best Wildlife Management Practices'

## CITIES, LIKE LONDON ONTARIO, ARE TAKING THE LEAD

In cities that have established progressive policies in protecting wildlife and natural habitat, there is a clear trend emerging. These cities are innovators and leaders with respect to municipal practices, they are responsive to their citizens' views and promote community engagement, they quickly move from planning to 'action' by implementing pilot projects and they enlist multiple partners in the process.



Beaver Flow Device shortly after installation

London, Ontario is one such city. Through the leadership and hard work of volunteers on the City's Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) and a collaborative and forward-looking Council and professional staff, a Humane Urban Wildlife Conflict Policy was approved in November, 2014.

Little time was lost in developing the Protocols to make this policy a reality. The first Protocol was on behalf of Beavers. Approved in March 2015, it's outlined in this newsletter on pages 6 and 7. Almost immediately, the goals of the Protocol were put into operation.

### Background to the Beaver Protocol

Scott Mathers, Division Manager of Stormwater in London, and the lead in the Protocol, identified that with the significant number of waterways along with forest cover (London is known as the Forest City), it was not surprising there would be conflicts with beavers. An inventory showed 40 locations where there were on-going conflicts, including damage to infrastructure, flooded pathways and trees taken down. "These were urban sites – after all that is where the

trees are, not in the agricultural lands that surround London", said Scott.

The conventional means of dealing with these conflicts such as trapping the beavers by lethal means, relocating them or destroying dams was simply not addressing the issue, in that they had to be continually repeated. In addition, stormwater infrastructure has to be relied on to function 100% of the time so what is its value if beavers block a culvert just before a major rain event? And, finally, there was a growing public outcry over what many felt were inhumane and ineffective measures.

With the emphasis at the City on fostering innovation and the public support for a progressive approach in dealing with wildlife, a holistic look at beaver issues and solutions was launched.

### The Role of the Public

*"The City valued the community's input – it was helpful in educating city staff and in providing constructive and practical advice",* said Scott. The role of AWAC and its Wildlife Sub-Committee was particularly important in maintaining a focus on the issue in spite of competing council priorities.

The Chair of AWAC at the time, Vicki Van Linden, said *"ridding urban areas of wildlife isn't a solution. Wildlife need to stay where they are. In most cases, we can learn to co-exist."*

At the request of AWAC, the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre (OCWC) gave a presentation on 'Developing an Effective Wildlife Response' in December 2014. Donna DuBreuil of the OCWC said "we



After several small rainstorms, the flow device was working well. It continued to perform just as well after a later massive storm event

were very impressed with how thorough this committee was in gathering information and how receptive councillors and staff were in adopting new ideas".

### Working with Partners

Internal and external partners have been critical to implementing the goals of the Beaver Protocol. Andrew MacPherson, Manager, Environmental & Parks Planning said *"there are people out there with new methods to deal with beavers and we are all for that"*. Ecologist, James MacKay, is another important member of the team.

Animal Alliance of Canada provided funds to bring Mike Callahan, an expert on flow device technology, to London to give a public presentation and meet with city and conservation authority staff. After reviewing beaver-conflict sites where flow devices would be beneficial, Mike went on to advise on the design and installation of the devices. *"I was honored to contribute to the City of London's innovative and progressive beaver management policy. Their model policy*





Mature trees being wrapped

cost-effectively protects human property and safety, while increasing the many benefits of beaver created wetlands, including biodiversity,” said Mike.

Dan Jones, Land Management Supervisor of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority was contracted by the City to advise on regulations and carry out the installation of flow devices. He and his team brought a great deal of passion and enthusiasm to the project. *“The pilot taught us that we need the whole package if we are to balance the needs of beavers and people – the water level required in the design of new stormwater ponds, the types of trees and vegetation to be planted and the education needed to make the public partners. It’s an exciting time in wildlife-sensitive planning that I want to remain part of,”* Dan said.

### What has been Accomplished

No time was lost in putting the Protocol into action. 2015 was considered a learning year with a commitment to carry out three (3) pilot projects in various areas throughout London.

The first was the Hyde Park Stormwater Pond No. 1 where a flow device was installed in May 2015. Beaver activity there had led to a blockage of the outlet impacting the functioning of the pond. The goal of the flow device was to allow a beaver family to remain while ensuring the stormwater pond did its job in preventing flooding. Monitored over periods

of rainfall throughout the summer, including one massive storm event in June, the flow device has performed well, allowing the pond to function as it was designed.

Pilot projects No. 2 and No. 3 involved wrapping mature seeding trees with protective fencing that would otherwise be lost through beaver activities. Almost 150 trees in several locations were wrapped last Fall.

### The Importance of Education

Education will remain an important part of the program. Helping residents understand the need for maintaining wetlands and the key role played by beavers on the landscape has become an essential part of the job. Initially, according to Scott, *“some people think beavers shouldn’t be in an urban environment but when you discuss the benefits as well as the solutions with respect to conflicts, they get it.”*

Involving environmental groups and the community in tree planting on behalf of this project will help to also increase the number of ambassadors for this model program.

The City of London website <http://www.london.ca/residents/Sewers-Flooding/stormwater/Pages/Beaver-Protocol-Pilot-Projects.aspx> provides detailed information and photographs on the Protocol and its pilot projects. It’s an excellent educational tool for residents

as well as a ‘best management practices’ example for other communities seeking progressive alternatives. Most important, the site provides transparency and an alternative to practices many other municipalities still feel compelled to hide, given the public controversy generated when animals are needlessly killed.

### The Future

There is excitement and pride on the part of staff and the community in seeing an approach that works in a City that is open to new ideas – ideas that are considerate of wildlife, benefit the environment and also happen to save money for taxpayers.

*“This is a 20-year program that will be based on using flow devices, wrapping trees that need to be protected while planting others that can serve as a traditional food source for beavers, evaluating and carrying out improvements while continuing to engage the community in this work”* said Scott Mathers.

He credits a capable and committed team of people who came together to make this project a reality. *“It’s encouraging that other communities are showing an interest in learning more about these ideas as well,”* Scott said.



Scott Mathers’ background provides insight into how he became the lead for putting the Beaver

Protocol into action. With a degree in Environmental (Civil) Engineering from the University of Waterloo, he went on to complete a Masters in Public Administration, choosing the University of Victoria for its highly-regarded Local Government Institute. His time as Manager of Development Finance at the City also gave him an appreciation for the cost benefits associated with prevention and innovation.

# London Ontario's Model Beaver Protocol

## HUMANE URBAN WILDLIFE CONFLICT POLICY: BEAVER PROTOCOL

March 10, 2015

City of London

Version: 2.0

### Why have a protocol?

To successfully implement the City's Humane Urban Wildlife Conflict Policy. Specific protocols are required to address potential human wildlife conflicts. This protocol will ensure that beavers are treated in a respectful and consistent manner, balancing the various needs to protect the beaver and their habitat; the overall environment; City infrastructure; people; and property.

### Needs of the Beaver

Beaver communities require a minimum of 1-1.5 meters of standing water where their lodge is located for protection from predators and to successfully weather the winter months. They also can build secondary downstream dams to create shallower ponds to access new trees for food, as well as for ease and safety of travel. They require access to woody vegetation for building materials and food.



### Primary Goals of the Protocol

The protocol attempts to balance the following goals:

- Respect and protect beavers in their natural habitat;
- Allow for enhancements to biodiversity and the creation of wetland environments;
- Educate the public about the value of beaver created wetlands;
- Protect critical infrastructure;
- Protect people and property from flooding; and
- Maintain the use of the City's pathway and trail networks.

### Governing Principle

Creation of beaver ponds / marshes have many positive ecological benefits, but sometimes negative impacts occur that require intervention. This governing principle of this protocol is to strive to coexist with the beaver community in its existing location whenever possible. Use low impact, non-lethal control methods as first options when any of the primary goals of the protocol are negatively impacted. If all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted for coexistence, relocate the beavers to an appropriate alternative site only under specific circumstances and in accordance with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests (MNRF) legislation and the Council's approved Humane Urban Wildlife Conflict Policy.

### Continuous Improvement

The protocol will be reconsidered and brought back to Council by the middle of 2016 following the first year of implementing the protocol. Going forward, any significant changes to the protocol will be reported back to the various stakeholders and Council prior to implementation.

## Humane Urban Wildlife Conflict Policy: Beaver Protocol

### Protocol

If a human-beaver conflict is reported, staff will inspect / assess the conflict situation.

**In this situation is there a net negative impact on the “Primary Goals” due to the beaver activity (flooding or tree chewing)?**

**If No:**

No direct action required – monitor the situation, plant fast growing native species of trees to provide food for beavers where applicable, and reassess as needed.

**If Yes:**

**Tree Related Issues:**

- 1) Chewed trees to be downed or removed when necessary to resolve issue.
- 2) Protect at risk mature trees nearby from chewing to prevent new issues where feasible.
- 3) Plant fast growing native species of trees to provide food for beavers where needed.

**Flooding Issues:**

- 1) Determine if the flooding issue can be resolved with the use of a water control flow device while leaving enough depth for beaver survival.
- 2) Only lower the water enough to resolve the conflict.
- 3) Consider prevention by installing flow devices on nearby at-risk manmade structures such as road culverts.
- 4) Determine the feasibility of relocating the dam materials upstream or downstream within the same general area if it will not create a negative impact to the “Primary Goals”. If feasible, move the materials to the preferred location.
- 5) In all cases above plant fast growing native species of trees to provide food for beavers at the time the water control device is installed.
- 6) If above interventions are not feasible or successful, resettle the beavers using live trapping and move to an appropriate location at an appropriate time of year and in accordance with MNRF policy and the Council approved Humane Urban Wildlife Conflict Policy.
- 7) If all above management actions fail or are not feasible to implement – address the current conflict as per the Council approved Humane Urban Wildlife Conflict Policy.

**New Construction Projects:**

- 1) In cases where beaver are in conflict with construction activities, consideration will be given to sensitive timing windows and pre-stressing, employing low impact non-lethal control methods, the specifics of which will be directed by the council approved Humane Wildlife Conflict Policy and will be provided in any related committee report.

### Contacts

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# Beaver as a Restoration Tool

You know there's a more-informed appreciation for beavers developing right across North America when our Centre in Ottawa receives a glowing recommendation from a group in California about a new publication produced in Alberta.

The publication "*Beaver – Our Watershed Partner*" is a wonderful addition to the growing body of knowledge about the significant role that beavers play in our environment. Written by Lorne Fitch, P. Biol., Provincial Riparian Specialist, and based on his 35-year career with the Alberta Fish & Wildlife Division he said "*we may think we can't live with beaver, but the reality is we can't live without them.*" Lorne has a B.Sc. in Zoology and is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Calgary.

On reading the handbook, it's not so much that the information is new to those working in the field, it's about the compelling way in which the facts are put forward, building a better understanding across public, private and community lines.

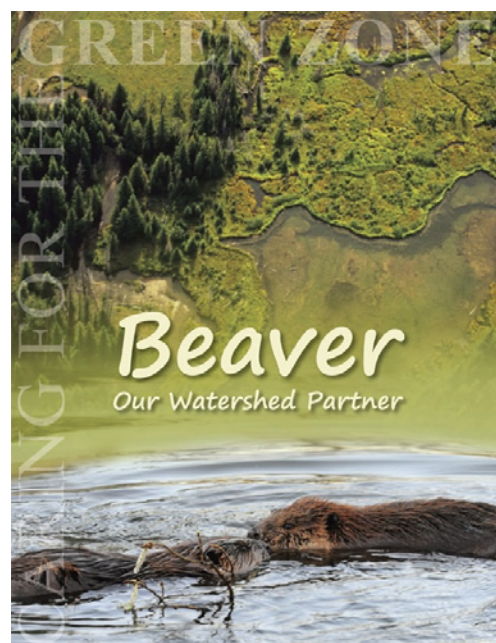
Using engaging, often humorous, and thought-provoking text, along with great photos and illustrations, the handbook makes a very effective case for why it's in our best interest to rethink our relationship with beavers. One illustration shows a beaver dam connected to a drinking tap, demonstrating how a pond acts as a natural water treatment plant by its downstream impact: 50-75% fewer suspended solids, 20-60% less phosphorus; 5-45% less nitrogen, up to 23% less carbon; reduced fecal coliforms.

The handbook was produced by the Alberta Riparian Habitat Management Society, an NGO affectionately known as 'Cows and Fish' in honour of two of its founding members – Alberta Beef Producers and Trout Unlimited Canada. "*Lorne was one of the key players in creating the organization and he continues to be a spark plug for many of our initiatives,*" said Norine Ambrose, the Executive Director of Cows and Fish.

Since its creation in 1992, Cows and Fish has delivered presentations, field days and workshops to over 50,000 people across Alberta and Canada and completed 2250 riparian health inventory assessment sites on streams, rivers, lakes and wetlands, winning many provincial and national awards for its work. It has offices in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer and Edmonton.

Of particular interest is its '*Leave it to Beavers Watershed Stewardship*' program with its own website, a research component and plans to develop materials for teachers, educators and researchers so they can implement their own citizen science projects.

"*Beaver – Our Watershed Partner*" is a must read for anyone concerned about saving our precious water resources – a substance more valuable than gold and likely to become even scarcer with climate change. <http://cowsandfish.org/whatsnew/documents/BeaverOurWatershedPartnerforWEB2.pdf>



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