

WILDLIFE STRATEGY REVIEW

LARGE MAMMAL RESPONSE PROTOCOL

Ottawa is very fortunate to have extensive natural areas like the Greenbelt, running through the heart of the city, together with rural and agricultural lands that are both part of Ottawa and extend well beyond.

Along with river and hydro corridors, these natural areas provide both habitat as well as easy access for the movement of large mammals such as black bears, white-tailed deer and moose.

Lack of a Plan

Given these natural areas, you would think that there would be a well-established Plan in place to respond when the occasional large wild mammal wanders from adjacent natural habitat into someone's backyard or neighbourhood. However, there is no such Plan or, at least, none that informs and assists the public in knowing what to do or who to call.

The City's response to incidents over the years has been criticized, as far back as 2013, as *"secretive and unaccountable"*. At the time, the city acknowledged that the *"ad hoc approach taken was not sustainable"* and yet nothing has changed in the last decade.

Ensuring the Right Response

The role of police should be to manage the public not to determine the action required with respect to the animal. With no expertise on wildlife, it is unfair to police and will more than likely end in a bad outcome for the animal and lots of public criticism.

The young bear that was shot 14 times by police in Kanata was trying to flee, as reported by the traumatized residents who witnessed it. It was dusk and had the bear been left alone, there was no threat to people in their homes.

Other bears have been relocated this spring but moving bears that live in the Greenbelt to unfamiliar distant counties, where they will face even more competition for the same limited food supply, along with a spring bear hunt in that region, is unacceptable.

Particularly, when targeted education, reminding people about bears coming out of or going into hibernation in spring and fall will be seeking extra food, urging that bird feeders be removed and garbage secured, has been shown to eliminate the problem.

Recommendations

- 1) A clear, publicly transparent, Large Mammal Response Protocol is long overdue in Ottawa.
- 2) Public Education must be the first component of the Protocol – specifically targeted and seasonal education to those communities adjacent to the Greenbelt or wildlife corridors where large mammals have previously appeared. One of the most effective means for informing the public is through Councillors' newsletters.
- 3) The Protocol should outline, in detail, the specific roles of the NCC, City By-Law and Police so that the public has a clear understanding of who does what.

- 4) The NCC needs to be the lead as it has experienced Conservation Officers who are well trained and fully equipped to assess, treat if necessary, and handle large wild mammals.
- 5) Relocation should only be used as a last resort. The majority of these animals have come from and live on NCC managed lands. If relocation is necessary, it should only be to the nearest natural area.
- 6) There is a requirement for a publicly transparent Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Ottawa and the NCC on respective responsibilities and jurisdictions, including cost-sharing details, something that has been of contention in the past.

Prepared by Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre
October 2023