

**PENINSULA & AREA AGRICULTURAL COMMISSION MEETING
COMMITTEE ROOM #2 – SAANICH MUNICIPAL HALL
THURSDAY APRIL 13, 2023 7:00 PM**

In attendance: Robin Tunnicliffe in the Chair; Linda Geggie; Jenni Michell; Terry Michell; Larry Sluggett; Katie Underwood; Dianne Williamson; and Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary.

Guests: Megan Halstead, Regional Agrologist; Cassidy Daskalchuck, Saanich Planning; Mike Doehnel; Noah Brotman, CRD; Jody Watson, CRD; Bob Peart, Sheila McDonald, Haliburton Farm.

Regrets: Satnam Dheenshaw; Anita Bull; Councillors De Vries and Paltiel

Minutes: The March 9, 2023 Minutes were adopted as circulated.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Jenni Michell

- Nothing to Report re balance of accounts
- Cheques were given to Katie to pay for the room rental at Saanich Fairgrounds (\$236) and for two \$100 honorarium cheques for participants at the South Island Farmers' institute meeting on Sunday April 16, 2023.
- These funds will be refunded from the PAAC account held by Saanich, which is normally used for workshops.

SPEAKER'S BUREAU

a) Jody Watson, CRD: Goose Management Service

- The CRD has approved Goose Management as an established regional service.
- The CRD was aware that while there was public support to address the increasing geese population, there were some concerns.
- An on-line survey to determine support had 174 people who objected.
- A budget was approved in April; a coordinator will be hired to work with community groups and organizations such as GOOSE (Guardians of the Salish Estuary), and a contract has been negotiated with them as they are experts in this area.
- It is hoped to engage the First Nations and provide training programmes.
- The farming community can help by reporting goose sightings and nesting areas; GOOSE can work with farmers.
- Estuary habitats are in poor condition: the CRD will be working with First Nations and stewardship groups on restoration work.
- An addling programme will be created to help control the population, although this action doesn't reduce the population – just stops it from increasing at such a fast rate.
- This is why culls are required – and this is can lead to public resistance.
- It is important to be upfront with the community to ensure they understand the overwhelming impacts of allowing the populations to continue to expand.

- She asked how PAAC would like to be involved and asked what is being done currently to manage the goose population.

Comments noted as follows:

- Michell's Farm is working with Graeme Fowler of GOOSE to addle eggs using a GPS tracking system to locate nests, and they have used hunters in the past.
- The hunters have to buy their own shells and dispose of the birds. It is a lot of work.
- Many crops have already been destroyed this year. Estimated almost 3000 birds in one of Michell's fields recently, resulting in a crop of lettuce being destroyed at a \$4,000 loss. They eat everything, including sprouts and leeks, right down to ground level.
- Hunting doesn't always work as it leads to conflicts with the neighbours (the sound of the guns spooks horses, and the danger of stray bullets) and the shots scare the geese away.
- A liaison programme is needed to work hand in hand with the police department to ensure neighbours and the general public understand what is happening and why. Jody noted this is a key piece of the CRD's communication strategy to get the public on side, initially focusing on the impact of the geese – such as a threat to food security.
- When the Central Saanich Agricultural Advisory Committee was active, information was included in newsletters to keep the public informed. Questioned if the CRD has a newsletter, or could put information on its website.
- Noted drones could be used to target nesting sites and spot the areas geese congregate.
- CRD is planning a helicopter flight to identify key problem areas.
- It is not just farm fields that are affected – but school fields, parks, beaches, golf courses, airports as well.
- In answer to a question about whether the CRD had set specific targets to reduce the population, Jody stated that when the populations first began a major problem around 2012, there were about 1,000 geese in the region. There will be more discussion about annual target numbers. However, in the short term, we need to get things under control quickly.
- Jody advised the CRD will be recruiting staff next week and she hopes within the next four to six weeks to complete the contract with GOOSE.
- Addling has already started and three First Nations bands have expressed an interest in helping.
- She acknowledged that PAAC had sent funds last year and this year to GOOSE; Funds were also received from Butler Bros. With addling you cannot miss a year or it negates the work of past years, so it is important to keep the programme going.
- Timelines are a little tight for this year to organize any harvests.
- An annual budget will be provided and in the fall it is planned to establish a working group with stakeholders, including PAAC, if the group is interested. A regional conference is planned, bringing municipalities to the table to establish programmes for future years.

b) Bob Peart: Bio-Regional Framework for the Saanich Peninsula

A report on the Bio-regional Framework was circulated to members before the meeting.

Bob stated:

- The Saanich Peninsula Environmental Coalition was formed in 2018 to develop a bio-regional framework outlining a holistic approach to environmental health and management on the Peninsula. The document was completed in 2021.

- Collaborating with First Nations and Peninsula Municipalities, it is hoped to achieve ecological sustainability to ensure the future environmental health on the Peninsula in three areas: ecosystem integrity; jurisdictional collaboration and community perspective.
- The main focus will be to maintain ecosystem integrity, increase jurisdictional collaboration and support community perspectives.
- There are twelve Peninsula-wide environmental groups they are working with, as well as local councils adhering to the Official Community Plans and Bylaws.
- It is important to establish a base-line on the current state of the environment on the Peninsula, taking into consideration connections between land and ocean, as well as climate change.
- It is planned to communicate with the public by providing progress reports.
- From an agricultural perspective, the importance of agricultural (ALR) lands, organic matter, sustainability of farms, protecting food security, wildlife corridors, etc. will be explored as well as the benefit of farm markets and farm stands.
- Bob thanked the Commission for the opportunity to speak about the Bio-Regional Framework. A key component is to get people thinking and talking about the environment. The Coalition would be willing to help PAAC with any projects etc.
- Further information: www.PlaceSpeak.com/bioregionalframework

Discussion continued:

- Sometimes communication is the biggest deficit because farmers have to deal with problems on their own much of the time. If there was more liaison between farmers, First Nations, municipalities and other stakeholders it would be an improvement.
- Suggested that the Coalition may want to look into the benefits of hedgerows from an environmental standpoint.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) 4251 Blenkinsop Road: non-farm use on ALR lands – Response to Saanich
- b) 4400 Blenkinsop Road: non-farm use on ALR Lands – Response to Saanich
- c) 536 Brookleigh Road: removal of fill for pool & accessory building on ALR land
 - Response to Saanich
- d) Report on Size and Location of homes on A-zoned lands – District of Saanich
 - Cassidy Daskalchuck (Saanich) was able to draft a response based on comments from the meeting.
 - Brief discussion about “Home Plate” - relating to how much site coverage should be permitted on ALR lands; Megan was asked to get more information on this, or perhaps invite someone from the Ministry to speak to PAAC about it.

AGRICULTURAL ISSUES: CURRENT

a) Water update – Mike Doehnel

- Water rates for agriculture will stay the same this year, although this could change as there are a few balls in the air.
- Total volume of water being used for agriculture has been flat since 2018, with a slight drop from 2020 to 2021.
- The agricultural/residential meters vs the agricultural only meters: the agricultural only meters are rising (depicted on the graph in the 2022 Annual Rpt)
- The subsidy paid to municipalities when the programme was initiated was \$265,000; now it is \$1.6 million.

b) Spring Farm Tour 2023 – Linda Geggie (Robin and Isobel)

- Bus driver confirmed.
- Isobel working on information sheets, a map, timetable, etc. for the tour.
- Robin stated lunch will be 4 varieties of salads, bread and cookies from a local bakery, sausage from Stillmeadow Farm, local berries if available, tea, coffee and nettle tea.
- There are some covered areas in case of wet weather.
- Katie Engqvist is trying to get a reporter from the Black Press to attend the tour (she is away)
- Suggested that the Capital Daily may be able to provide some press (Jenni to check).
- For speakers on the bus: journey is just under 30 minutes each way, so perhaps maximum of 4 speakers total (2 each way). Suggestions include Jody Watson and Noah Broatman (CRD), Reed Bailey and Megan Halstead (Ministry of Agriculture), Linda Geggie, Bob Maxwell, Mike Doehnel or other Water Commission reps.
- Two pickup points: Michell's Farm and Saanich Municipal Hall.
- Agreed we can do without a PA system.
- Hoping for a good turnout as there were many new councillors elected last fall.
- Elizabeth May has accepted the invite.

CARRY to May meeting to finalize details

c) 50th Anniversary of ALR – Megan Halstead

- Megan advised nothing is planned in terms of local events. The ALC will be making an announcement on their website using a 50 year ALC logo. No budget has been allocated.

d) South Island Farmers' Institute Workshop – Sunday, April 17, 2023 (Katie)

Approximately 50 attendees confirmed.

- Room reserved for under \$250 at the Saanich Fairgrounds.
- Agreed to pay \$100 honorarium panel members.
- Shellie Macdonald will be the moderator and Megan will be on hand to answer technical questions.
- There are many variations to Farmers Institutes; hoping that participants will speak up and share ideas about what they would like the South Island one to look like and what they need.

- It is hoped once the SIFI is established there will be workshops, field trips and farm tours.
- She suggested the SIFI could work with CR-Fair to help with the Farmer2Farmer workshop.
- Good to have workshops in the winter months when farmers have more time.
- Isobel will arrange for refreshments and pick up the goodies ordered from The Roost.
- There was talk about getting reduced rental (or free rental) at the fairgrounds and assistance from the Ministry through a grant. In the meantime, PAAC will cover all costs, including refreshments. If any money is received from the MOA or the Fairgrounds, it can be returned to PAAC.

MOTION: Moved by Linda Geggie and Seconded by Katie Underwood: "That PAAC financially support the workshop for a proposed South Island Farmers' Institute to a maximum of \$1,000."

CARRIED

OTHER BUSINESS

- a) **Vancouver Island Agriculture Adaptation Group – Bob Maxwell** – not present
- b) **Vancouver Island AgriService Newsletter – Meghan Halstead**
 - Currently the Ministry does not have good networking communication strategies, so the Vancouver Island Agri-Service Newsletter is a start.
 - Editions will be published quarterly, covering local events and professional workshops, providing agricultural news throughout the Island.
 - The next edition will be in June and will include information on Farmers' Institutes; a copy will be sent to the secretary who will distribute via email.
 - A new staff person will be hired to work on the newsletter.
 - To date 80 people have signed up for it.
 - https://agriservicebc.campayn.com/contact_list_form/signup/110236
- c) Brett Smyth resigned from N. Saanich Council recently; the Secretary has contacted the District asking for a replacement representative.

PACC ANNUAL REPORT 2022

- The document is complete and ready to be distributed.
- Thank you to those who contributed either with reports and/or photographs.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WEBINARS

- Spring Farm Tour – Saturday, June 10, 2023

NEXT MEETING: The next PAAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 12, 2023 at 7:00 pm at the Saanich Municipal Hall, Committee Room No. 1.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm

Isobel Hoffmann, Recording Secretary