

**Subject: Wildlife Strategy Review**

**File Number: ACS2024-SI-CCR-0001**

**Report to Joint Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Environment and  
Climate Change Committee on 17 June 2024**

**and Council 26 June 2024**

**Submitted on June 6, 2024 by Will McDonald, Director, Climate Change and  
Resiliency, Strategic Initiatives Department**

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**Ward: Citywide**

**Objet : Examen de la Stratégie de gestion de la faune**

**Dossier : ACS2024-SI-CCR-0001**

**Rapport au Réunion conjointe du Comité de l'agriculture et des affaires rurales et  
du Comité de l'environnement et du changement climatique**

**le 17 juin 2024**

**et au Conseil le 26 juin 2024**

**Soumis le 6 juin 2024 par Will McDonald, directeur, Changements climatiques et  
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**Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville**

## **REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**That the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and the Environment and Climate Change Committee jointly recommend that Council approve the action plan described in this report.**

## **RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Comité de l'agriculture et des affaires rurales et le Comité de l'environnement et du changement climatique recommandent conjointement au Conseil d'approuver le plan d'action décrit dans le présent rapport.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City's Wildlife Strategy was [approved by Council](#) in 2013 and originally developed in response to human-wildlife conflicts in the rural area of Ottawa, and included, among other issues, specific information and recommendations on managing human-coyote interactions in both rural and urban settings.

In October 2022, [Council directed staff](#) to undertake a review of options to better manage human-coyote interactions, in consultation with experts and other municipalities, and to report back with options, recommendations and resourcing implications for implementing a proactive strategy. After considering the requirements of such a plan and other persistent wildlife issues, staff recommended that the coyote strategy be considered as part of a larger review of the 2013 Wildlife Strategy.

A public engagement campaign for the Wildlife Strategy review was launched in 2023 and included an Engage Ottawa project page, two public surveys, and two public information sessions. Staff also undertook targeted consultations with subject matter experts, Canadian municipalities, the agricultural sector, and environmental groups. Throughout the consultation, staff received hundreds of comments and questions.

Much has changed since Council approved the 2013 Wildlife Strategy. In particular, the pace and impacts of climate change have accelerated. Wildlife-transmitted diseases have become more of a threat, especially Lyme Disease, which is now endemic in Ottawa. Ottawa's human population has grown and diversified, with more people making use of Ottawa's natural spaces. Provincial protections for natural habitats have been reduced, especially for wetlands, while environmental policies in Ottawa's Official Plan have been strengthened. These changes have both direct and indirect implications for a renewal of the Wildlife Strategy.

This report summarizes the feedback received through the most recent public consultations and provides an action plan to address issues identified through the review of the 2013 Wildlife Strategy as follows:

1. **Conserve wildlife habitat:** Protecting habitat is the most effective tool for reducing and managing human-wildlife conflicts. Environmental policies were strengthened in the new Official Plan and the City will continue to implement those policies for long-term habitat conservation, and to acquire additional natural lands.
2. **Improve public information, outreach and education:** In coordination with Public Information and Media Relations, staff will work to improve public knowledge around the prevention and resolution of human-wildlife conflicts.
3. **Monitor wildlife-transmitted diseases:** Animal-transmitted diseases have become more prevalent since 2013 and Climate Change and Resiliency Services will build on work done with Ottawa Public Health to support monitoring of these diseases and the implications for managing wildlife and greenspaces.
4. **Develop a plan to implement OP policies on wildlife crossings and protection:** Staff will identify and prioritize City road segments where wildlife crossings and other protection measures should be considered. This would include a high-level cost estimate and potential funding sources.
5. **Identify a financial means to recoup costs when assuming ownership of mitigation and compensation features for species-at-risk and other wildlife:** Mitigation and compensation for protected species at risk and their habitats is often a legislated requirement for new development. Staff will explore options to develop a financial mechanism for recouping the associated costs.
6. **Improve public information and communication with the agricultural community regarding the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program (OWDCP):** Administered by municipalities, the OWDCP compensates agricultural producers for loss of domestic livestock to wildlife. Staff will seek to increase familiarity with the program and consider ways to improve delivery.

7. **Engage a wildlife resource specialist to lead City wildlife response and management activities:** Funding exists to create this position, which will support proposed actions under public education and outreach and other actions outlined in this report.
8. **Maintain current beaver management solutions in municipal drains (MD) and stormwater systems and evaluate beaver management practices in other locations:** Staff will continue to explore opportunities to use alternative beaver management practices, such as flow devices, outside of municipal drains and stormwater management infrastructure, where feasible and safe for City infrastructure.
9. **Support on-going operation of the large wild mammal response protocol:** The new wildlife resource specialist will provide additional support to By-law and Regulatory Services staff in coordinating the protocol for responding to reports of large wild mammals and directing them back into natural areas.
10. **Negotiate an agreement with Coyote Watch Canada (CWC) to adopt its Municipal Canid Response Strategy (MCRS) for a three-year pilot:** CWC offers support in implementing its approach in instances of human-coyote conflicts. CWC provides trained volunteer teams to help with investigation, education, prevention and enforcement. Staff will seek an agreement with CWC for a three-year pilot at an estimated cost of \$48,000 per year.

All action items recommended in the action plan can be implemented using existing resources and budgets.

## RÉSUMÉ

La Stratégie de gestion de la faune de la Ville, [approuvée par le Conseil](#) en 2013, visait originalement à résoudre les conflits entre les humains et la faune en secteur rural, et comprenait notamment de l'information et des recommandations sur la gestion des interactions entre humains et coyotes en milieu rural et urbain.

En octobre 2022, le [Conseil a demandé au personnel](#) d'étudier, avec des spécialistes et des municipalités, des pistes d'amélioration de l'encadrement des interactions entre humains et coyotes et de lui présenter un rapport contenant des options, des recommandations et les ressources nécessaires à l'instauration d'une stratégie

proactive. Vu les exigences de cette demande et d'autres problèmes tenaces avec la faune, le personnel a recommandé d'intégrer cette démarche à l'examen approfondi de la Stratégie de gestion de la faune de 2013.

Une campagne de consultation publique a été lancée en 2023 pour l'examen de la Stratégie, avec une page de projet sur Participons Ottawa, deux sondages et deux séances d'information. Le personnel a aussi tenu des consultations ciblées avec diverses expertises, des municipalités canadiennes, des membres du secteur agricole et des groupes environnementalistes. Le personnel a reçu des centaines de commentaires et de questions.

Beaucoup de choses ont évolué depuis l'approbation de la Stratégie par le Conseil en 2013, surtout les changements climatiques, dont le rythme s'est accéléré et les répercussions se sont intensifiées. La menace que posent les maladies d'origine faunique est exacerbée, surtout la maladie de Lyme, qui est maintenant endémique à Ottawa. La population ottavienne a augmenté et s'est diversifiée, donc plus de gens utilisent les espaces naturels. La province protège moins les habitats naturels, surtout les milieux humides, et les politiques environnementales du Plan officiel ont été renforcées, ce qui influe directement et indirectement sur le renouvellement de la Stratégie.

Ce rapport résume les commentaires reçus à la dernière consultation publique et présente un plan d'action adapté aux problèmes notés lors de l'examen de la Stratégie de gestion de la faune de 2013, à savoir :

1. **Préserver les habitats fauniques** : La protection des habitats est le meilleur moyen de réduire et de gérer les conflits entre les humains et la faune. La Ville continuera d'appliquer les politiques environnementales, qui ont été renforcées dans le nouveau Plan officiel, pour préserver les habitats à long terme et acquérir des terres naturelles.
2. **Améliorer la façon d'informer, de sensibiliser et d'éduquer le public** : De concert avec Information du public et Relations avec les médias, le personnel promouvra la prévention et la résolution des conflits entre les humains et la faune.

3. **Surveiller les maladies d'origine faunique** : Les maladies transmises par les animaux sont plus fréquentes qu'en 2013, et les Services des changements climatiques et de la résilience miseront sur ce qui a été fait avec Santé publique Ottawa pour surveiller ces maladies et leurs répercussions sur la gestion de la faune et des espaces verts.
4. **Préparer un plan d'application des politiques du Plan officiel traitant des passages fauniques et de la protection de la faune** : Le personnel ciblera et priorisera des tronçons pouvant accueillir des passages fauniques et prendra d'autres mesures de protection, ce qui suppose une estimation globale des coûts et une évaluation des éventuelles sources de financement.
5. **Trouver comment couvrir les frais associés aux mesures d'atténuation et d'indemnisation pour les espèces en péril et le reste de la faune** : La prise de mesures d'atténuation et d'indemnisation en lien avec les espèces en péril protégées et leurs habitats fait souvent partie des exigences légales des projets d'aménagement. Le personnel se penchera sur les options de couverture des frais connexes.
6. **Mieux faire connaître au secteur agricole le Programme ontarien d'indemnisation des dommages causés par la faune (POIDCF)** : Administré par les municipalités, le POIDCF indemnise les productrices et producteurs agricoles dont les animaux d'élevage sont attaqués par la faune. Le personnel cherchera à mieux faire connaître le Programme et à en améliorer la prestation.
7. **Embaucher une ou un spécialiste des ressources fauniques pour diriger les activités de gestion de la faune et les interventions en la matière** : Des fonds sont disponibles pour créer ce poste. La titulaire ou le titulaire sera responsable des activités de sensibilisation et d'éducation du public proposées ainsi que des diverses mesures du présent rapport.
8. **Conserver les solutions de gestion des castors en appui aux drains municipaux et aux infrastructures de gestion des eaux pluviales, et évaluer d'autres pratiques de gestion des castors** : Le personnel continuera d'envisager le recours à d'autres pratiques de gestion des castors – comme les dispositifs de régulation du débit d'eau hors des drains municipaux et des

infrastructures de gestion des eaux pluviales – lorsque c’est possible et sécuritaire de le faire.

9. **Soutenir l’application continue du protocole d’intervention auprès des grands mammifères sauvages:** La ou le spécialiste des ressources fauniques épaulera les Services des règlements municipaux dans la coordination du protocole afin d’intervenir lors de signalements de grands mammifères sauvages et de favoriser le retour de ces mammifères dans les espaces naturels.
  
10. **Conclure une entente avec Coyote Watch Canada (CWC) pour appliquer, dans le cadre d’un projet pilote triennal, sa stratégie municipale d’intervention auprès des canidés (MCRS) :** CWC propose de l’aide pour appliquer son approche des conflits entre humains et coyotes. Ses équipes de bénévoles formés peuvent participer aux enquêtes, à la sensibilisation, à la prévention et à l’exécution de la stratégie. Le personnel cherchera à conclure une entente avec CWC en vue d’un projet pilote triennal pour environ 48 000 \$ par année.

Toutes les mesures recommandées dans le plan d’action sont applicables sans ressources ni fonds supplémentaires.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City’s [Wildlife Strategy, approved by Council](#) in 2013, was originally developed in response to human-wildlife conflicts in the rural area of Ottawa, and included, among other issues, specific information and recommendations on managing human-coyote interactions in both rural and urban settings. Staff have implemented many of the strategy’s recommended actions, such as the Wildlife Speaker Series and the updated Protocol for Wildlife Protection during construction; however, due to resourcing, not all of the actions outlined in the 2013 strategy have been implemented. In October 2022, [Council directed staff](#) to undertake a review of options to better manage human-coyote interactions, in consultation with experts and other municipalities, and to report back with options, recommendations and resourcing implications for implementing a proactive strategy. After considering the requirements of such a plan and other persistent wildlife issues, staff recommended that the coyote strategy be considered as part of a larger review of the 2013 Wildlife Strategy.

This report provides an action plan to address issues identified through the review of the 2013 Wildlife Strategy, and summarizes the feedback received through the most recent public consultations.

### **Changes Influencing the 2024 Wildlife Strategy.**

Much has changed since Council approved the Wildlife Strategy in 2013. The following changes have both direct and indirect implications for a renewal of the Wildlife Strategy.

- Accelerating impacts of climate change on the City’s natural areas, habitats, and wildlife.
- Increased population and population densities, with residents making greater use of natural areas, increasing the number of human – wildlife encounters.
- Greater recognition of the function and value of “green” or “natural infrastructure” by the public and policy makers.
- Reduced Provincial protections for natural habitats, especially wetlands.
- Strengthening of environmental and natural heritage policies in Ottawa’s Official Plan.
- Increased costs to the City of wildlife mitigation and compensation measures on City projects and City properties, such as wildlife fencing and wildlife passages.
- Animal-transmitted diseases becoming more prevalent:
  - Lyme disease is now endemic in Ottawa;
  - Avian flu in wild birds has become a regular occurrence in Eastern Ontario;
  - Long-term potential for expansion of mosquito-borne diseases into Ottawa due to climate change.
- By-law and Regulatory Services’ responsibilities have increased to include the pick up and transfer of sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife to the Ottawa Humane Society, emergency veterinary clinics, or wildlife rehabilitators.



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Summary**

A public engagement campaign for the Wildlife Strategy Review was launched in 2023 and included an Engage Ottawa project page, two public surveys, and two public information sessions. Staff also undertook targeted consultations with subject matter experts and other Canadian municipalities. Throughout the consultation, staff received hundreds of comments and questions.

The majority of those participating in the external consultations were advocating for more proactive, preventative approaches to human – wildlife conflicts. Most respondents identified the welfare of wildlife as the highest priority for a wildlife strategy; however, the following themes also were noted:

- The need for more consistent, effective, and timely public information, outreach, and education on prevention of human – wildlife conflicts.
- The reduction or elimination of lethal wildlife management practices, especially for beavers, coyotes, and other large wild mammals.
- A perceived lack of consideration for wild birds in the Strategy.
- Several volunteer-run and funded wildlife rehabilitation organizations noted the reliance on their services for the receipt and care of injured wildlife, without provision of financial support or compensation.
- Concerns for public safety, commenting that fear for themselves, their children, or their pets from coyotes and other urban wildlife sometimes led them to modify their use of City greenspace.
- Concerns for property damage from urban wildlife such as squirrels and raccoons.

Until April 2024, the primary responsibility for the Wildlife Strategy resided with Natural Systems and Rural Affairs in the Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development Department (PRED). Following the recent restructuring, responsibility now resides with Climate Change and Resiliency Services in the Strategic Initiatives Department.

## Scope of the Wildlife Strategy

The City is governed by numerous legislation with overlapping scopes of influence, including the *Planning Act*, the *Provincial Policy Statement*, the *Endangered Species Act*, the *Aggregate Resources Act*, and the *Drainage Act*. A wildlife strategy must also respect legislation setting out the professional obligations and scope of practices of certain professions, such as the *Ontario Professional Engineers Act*. Despite the potential impact on wildlife, the following matters lie beyond the scope of the City's Wildlife Strategy:

- Urban land supply and growth requirements.
- Provincial approvals of aggregate quarries and pits.
- Normal farm practices.
- Permits or other authorizations issued under the *Endangered Species Act* for impacts on species at risk and their habitats.
- Municipal drain construction and maintenance required by an approved Drain Engineer's Report under the *Drainage Act*.
- The exercise of professional judgement and responsibility by an engineer under the *Professional Engineers Act* in the design, maintenance, and operation of engineered infrastructure, including stormwater infrastructure.
- Actions taken by a Police Officer under the *Police Services Act* for protection of public safety.
- Matters regulated under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, administered and enforced by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Restrictions on outdoor domestic and feral cats, rat management, and changes to the implementation of the City's Bird-Safe Design Guidelines are not addressed as part of the proposed Wildlife Strategy as these topics have multiple cross-Departmental implications and would need to be subject to separate dedicated reviews.

The Wildlife Strategy review was undertaken based on the following principles:

- Human health and safety remain the City's highest priorities, given its overall mandate.
- Human – wildlife relations should be based upon respectful coexistence. Humans have an ethical responsibility to avoid causing unnecessary suffering of animals, regardless of any question of animal rights.
- Human – wildlife conflicts are human-made and a human responsibility.
- Some roles, responsibilities, and constraints of the City are established in law and regulations.
- Public interest and concerns regarding the City's exercise of its roles and responsibilities with respect to wildlife are legitimate.

### **Ecosystem Management and the Official Plan**

The City of Ottawa's Official Plan is the City's most important tool for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat. Within the framework provided by the *Planning Act* and the *Provincial Policy Statement*, decisions regarding density and urban boundary, urban form, greenspace, infrastructure, and transportation have far-reaching impacts on wildlife. Ottawa's new Official Plan designated for the first time a connected natural heritage system of core natural areas and landscape linkages intended to maintain the integrity of Ottawa's natural landscapes and habitats for the long-term. The Official Plan avoided this natural heritage system in the identification of new urban growth areas, and it has excluded natural heritage system lands from consideration as future urban growth areas.

The natural heritage system encompasses 89,036 hectares or 31 per cent of Ottawa's area. In addition, the Official Plan supports the continued acquisition of natural lands by the City for long-term habitat conservation, adding to more than 10,000 hectares of rural lands and 864 hectares of urban lands already held by the City for that purpose. These properties support approximately 9500 hectares of forest and 6700 hectares of wetlands (note: these numbers are not cumulative, because swamps are counted as both forest and wetland).

Other policies in the new Official Plan limit future fragmentation of critical wildlife habitat by roads and support the installation of wildlife fencing and crossings where City roads cross through wildlife habitats.

In 2023, Council approved the Bill 109 Resource Report, which included funding for a new Planner in the former Natural Systems and Rural Affairs Branch dedicated to the conservation of wetlands and other natural heritage features. The creation of this position provided the necessary staff resources for the City to implement more proactive approaches to land and habitat conservation, especially through collaboration with the City's valued conservation partners, including the Conservation Authorities, the National Capital Commission, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Nature Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, other lands trusts, and private property owners.

### **2024 Wildlife Strategy Action Plan**

Subject to Council's approval of this report, the following actions will be undertaken to address the issues identified in the Wildlife Strategy review.

#### *Action 1: Conservation of wildlife habitat*

Protection of habitat remains the most effective tool available to the City for the reduction and management of human – wildlife conflicts. Large, intact, and connected natural landscapes allow wildlife to carry out their necessary lifecycle requirements with the least interference by humans. Conservation of natural landscapes provides additional ecological functions and services, such as flood reduction, carbon sequestration and storage, maintenance of biodiversity, and support for fundamental ecological processes necessary for human welfare and survival.

The City will continue to implement current Official Plan policies and program initiatives for conservation of wildlife habitat:

- Application of the natural heritage system policies in the Official Plan in planning decisions.
- Funding of the Environmental Lands Acquisition Budget (rural) for acquisition, stewardship, and other conservation actions to secure and protect natural lands providing wildlife habitat, consistent with the long-range financial plan and subject to annual review and approval through the budget process.
- Prioritization of habitat protection in the use and management of rural, municipal environmental properties.

- Development and implementation of approaches, tools, and partnerships for the conservation and stewardship of natural lands providing wildlife habitat.

*Action 2: Improved public information, outreach, and education*

The public information, outreach, and education components of the 2013 Wildlife Strategy have been implemented successfully. However, the past decade has shown that substantial gaps and needs remain in the education of residents on co-existence with wildlife. Climate Change and Resiliency Services and By-law and Regulatory Services will work with Public Information and Media Relations to improve public information, outreach, and education on prevention and resolution of human – wildlife conflicts, including:

- Establishment of an advisory board of wildlife experts and service providers to meet twice yearly (late summer, late winter) to provide advice on the City's wildlife information, education, and outreach activities and materials, including seasonally appropriate guidance and messages.
- A bi-annual review of the City's wildlife web pages (late summer, late winter) to ensure that all information is current, useful, and seasonally appropriate.
- Clear identification on the City's web pages of community resources for the prevention and resolution of human – wildlife conflicts, including mandates and services.
- Improved use of the City of Ottawa's traditional media and social media accounts to communicate time-sensitive messaging around specific wildlife incidents or issues.

*Action 3: Monitoring of wildlife transmitted diseases*

Since the 2013 Wildlife Strategy was approved, animal-transmitted diseases have become more prevalent, including: Lyme disease, which is now endemic in Ottawa; Avian flu in wild birds, which has become a regular occurrence in Eastern Ontario; and long-term potential for expansion of mosquito-borne and tick-borne diseases into Ottawa due to climate change.

As a result, Climate Change and Resiliency Services will build on the successful relationship with Ottawa Public Health (OPH) to support the monitoring of wildlife transmitted diseases and their implications for management of wildlife and greenspaces. For example, this has included research into the prevalence of Lyme

disease through the identification of potential tick survey sites and facilitation of permits to enter, and a Wildlife Speaker Series promoting greater public awareness of ticks and Lyme disease.

*Action 4: Develop an implementation plan for Policy 4.1.3(8) of the Official Plan regarding wildlife crossings and protection measures.*

Environmental assessments for road projects and other major infrastructure now frequently identify requirements and associated budgets for such things as wildlife exclusion fencing, wildlife passages, and wildlife habitat compensation. Usually, these requirements arise from Provincial and Federal legislation, such as the *Endangered Species Act*. However, the new Official Plan also supports such measures, stating in Policy 4.1.3 (8) that, "the City shall support wildlife crossings where: a) City highways and arterials cross through the natural heritage system; or b) studies have identified an elevated risk of hazardous wildlife collisions or elevated mortality of species at risk." These measures increase the costs of projects, imposing new pressures on the City's infrastructure capital budget.

A City-wide assessment of the need for wildlife protection measures would help identify priority road segments and support development of an implementation plan.

In consultation with Infrastructure and Water Services, Climate Change and Resiliency Services will lead a project to identify and prioritize City road segments where wildlife crossings and other protection measures should be considered, and will prepare a high level cost estimate, and identify potential funding sources, including Provincial and Federal programs.

*Action 5: Determine a financial mechanism for recouping the costs of assuming ownership of mitigation and compensation features for species-at-risk and other wildlife.*

Mitigation and compensation for protected species at risk, other wildlife, and their habitats is often a requirement for new development under several pieces of legislation. The directive in Policy 2.3(2a) of the [Provincial Policy Statement](#) for efficient use of development land often leads development proponents to seek the use of City greenspaces, road allowances, or other City properties for construction of mitigation and compensation features. Ultimately, responsibility for the maintenance and long-term replacement of these features passes to the City. However, no financial mechanism exists for the City to re-coup the costs associated with maintenance and replacement of these features. Without such a mechanism, City operational and asset management

groups are reluctant to grant permission for these features, which are incidental to City development approvals and which require City assent.

Subject to Council's approval of this report, staff will explore options to develop a financial mechanism for recouping the costs of assuming ownership of mitigation and compensation features for species-at-risk and other wildlife.

*Action 6: Improve public information and communication with the agricultural community regarding the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program.*

Municipalities administer the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program (OWDCP) on behalf of the Province of Ontario. This program compensates agricultural producers for loss of domestic livestock to wildlife. During consultations, representatives of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the City's own Wildlife Damage Investigators commented that many agricultural producers may not be familiar with the Program, may not know how to apply, or may regard the process as too onerous. The Rural Affairs Office will review its public information and communications regarding the OWDCP and consider ways to improve delivery of the program.

*Action 7: Creation of a Wildlife Resource Specialist within Climate Change and Resiliency Services to lead, coordinate, and support wildlife response and management activities by the City.*

A key recommendation of the 2013 Wildlife Strategy was for staff to review the business case for the creation of a Wildlife Resource Officer and propose the establishment of the position as a term of Council priority, if warranted, for the next term of Council. The position would coordinate, lead, and support wildlife response and management activities by the City. The position was intended to deliver on several recommendations in the 2013 staff report, including the extension and expansion of the beaver deceiver pilot project and implementation of the proposed coyote response program. However, the position was not included in the final list of term of Council priorities for the 2015-2018 term of council and therefore was never funded.

On April 17, 2024, a new Strategic Initiatives Department was created to bring together expertise in key areas, reinforcing Council's commitment to delivering key priorities, including climate change and resiliency.

As part of the restructuring and creation of the new department, a temporary resource has been identified, which will enable the creation of the long sought after Wildlife Resource Specialist position.

Creation of this position will support proposed actions under public education and outreach, beaver management, the Large Wild Mammal Response Protocol, and the recommended partnership with Coyote Watch Canada described later in this report.

*Action 8: The City will maintain current beaver management solutions in Municipal Drains and Stormwater Systems and evaluate beaver management practices in other locations.*

Stormwater infrastructure plays an important role in ensuring that stormwater runoff is safely collected and managed to prevent flooding while protecting the environment, human health and preserving local ecosystems. Stormwater infrastructure protects municipal infrastructure and private property while providing water quality and quantity control.

Stormwater infrastructure consists of pipes, maintenance holes, swales, ditches, culverts, pumping stations, stormwater management ponds and outfalls. Stormwater infrastructure is designed in accordance with City design guidelines and approved by the Provincial Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) through the issuance of Environmental Compliance Approvals.

Environmental Compliance Approvals are environmental permissions granted by the MECP to businesses, individuals and public sector organizations that operate in Ontario. Environmental Compliance approvals require organizations to operate their facility or site with environmental controls to protect human health and the natural environment.

The City delivers related stormwater programs and customer-facing services that directly affect businesses and residents. The City operates and maintains more than 2,700 kilometers of stormwater collection systems, including 315 stormwater management facilities, 1686 stormwater outfalls, as well as ditches, swales, culverts, etc. The 315 stormwater facilities include 98 wet ponds and an additional 37 wet ponds expected soon through new development.

Stormwater management ponds are designed to improve the quality of runoff as well as providing flood protection and erosion mitigation. The engineering design of a stormwater pond dictates water volumes, depths, and retention times within specific ranges to achieve the regulatory performance. In this regard, engineered stormwater management ponds are different from natural ponds and wetlands.



A municipal drain is a system used to move water. Municipal drains are authorized through a municipal by-law passed under the *Drainage Act (2001)* that adopts an engineer's report. Municipal drains are designed to convey runoff predominately in the rural area, and there are over 700 municipal drains across 2,700 square kilometers in Ottawa. Most municipal drains are located on private property in rural and private agricultural areas. They are either ditches or closed systems buried in the ground. These are constructed to improve the drainage of agricultural land. Municipal drains can also remove excess water collected by roadside ditches, residential lots, commercial lands, and other properties in rural areas.

In municipal drains, beaver dams are considered an obstruction under Section 74 of the *Drainage Act (2001)*, and the City is obligated to remove the obstruction. If not, the City can be considered liable for the damages incurred by the affected landowner(s). As a result, the City is obligated to continue current beaver management practices and remove dams within municipal drains.

Ottawa contains approximately 51,000 hectares of wetland, which represents approximately 18 percent of the City's total land mass and is home to beavers. In addition, the City has an extensive network of rivers and streams, with some 4,500 kilometers of watercourses in total spanning the Mississippi, Rideau and South Nation watersheds. The City responds annually to beaver management requests at 30 to 50 sites across the City related to:

- Ditches
- On roads and in parks
- Stormwater Management Ponds
- Municipal Drains
- Stormwater Sewer Systems
- Stormwater Outfalls

In accordance with the MECP, Environmental Compliance Approvals for stormwater management systems require the City to maintain infrastructure to perform as designed during normal to extreme rain events. Beaver management requests are assessed using a risk-based approach on a case-by-case basis, with beaver trapping considered as a last resort. When necessary for compliance, staff hire a licensed contractor to trap

beavers in accordance with the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (1997)*. City staff assess beaver management requests for the:

- Level of risk to surrounding residents, property, and infrastructure.
- Options available to mitigate the risk.
- Impact a proposed solution may have on beavers.

In some cases, beaver activity causes flooding and has negative impacts to the performance and integrity of stormwater infrastructure flow. When there is no risk to infrastructure, or the risk is low, staff continue to monitor the situation.

Staff will continue to look for opportunities to implement alternative beaver management practices (e.g. flow devices) outside of municipal drains and storm water management infrastructure, where it is safe for surrounding municipal infrastructure and operationally feasible. Current examples of where flow devices are being used by the Public Works Department include along the Prescott Russell Trail and in the Marlborough Forest.

The creation of the Wildlife Resource Specialist position will provide an additional resource and expertise for the evaluation and deployment of alternative beaver management approaches, like pond levelers, where appropriate. Current beaver management practices will remain necessary in municipal drains and engineered stormwater infrastructure.

*Action 9: Additional support for implementation of the Large Wild Mammal Response Protocol.*

Ottawa is fortunate to have substantial natural areas and habitats surrounding and weaving into its suburban and urban area. These areas, such as Mer Bleue and the South March Highlands, support most of the large wild mammals historically found within the region, including black bear, moose, and white-tailed deer. Not surprisingly, these large wild animals sometimes find their way into developed areas, where they are at risk of injury to themselves or cause concern for public safety.

By-law and Regulatory Services have developed a protocol for responding to reports of large wild mammals in the City's developed areas since 2002. The protocol was developed with the Ottawa Police Service, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the National Capital Commission (NCC). The protocol's objective is to direct animals back into natural areas where they will no longer be at risk.

Responsibility for coordinating the Large Wild Mammal Response Protocol lies with By-law and Regulatory Services.

During public consultations, some respondents suggested that the City should partner with non-governmental, wildlife rescue or rehabilitation organizations on responses to reports of large wild mammals. However, bears, deer and moose present challenges that require a coordinated response between authorized and trained agencies: e.g. the need to access private property, the need to restrict or redirect vehicle traffic, the need to perform chemical immobilization and transport. Staff are not aware of any other non-governmental organizations that have the capacity, skills, or authority to respond to these challenges. Furthermore, responsibility and accountability for public safety in these circumstances must remain with the City.

The creation of the Wildlife Resource Specialist position will provide additional support for the Large Wild Mammal Response Protocol, improving its effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

*Action 10: Negotiate an agreement with Coyote Watch Canada for adoption of its Municipal Canid Response Strategy as a three-year pilot project.*

Coyotes remain common in Ottawa's urban, suburban, and rural areas. A few high profile, negative encounters have heightened public awareness of their presence and the potential hazard that they pose. These encounters include three reports of alleged physical attacks on humans over the past ten years, and the killing of five coyotes by City contractors and Ottawa Police Services during that period.

Coyote reports follow several seasonal patterns. Sightings of coyotes tend to peak in winter as coyotes gather in larger social groups, they become more vocal, mating occurs, and there is less vegetation to screen coyotes from human eyes. Coyotes may also approach dwellings more frequently in the winter to hunt for rodents around foundations, to forage for windfall fruit, or to look for other human food sources, such as composters. Tragically, this sometimes includes deliberate feeding of coyotes, which greatly increases the risk of conflicts. In spring and summer, coyotes may be encountered in the City's natural areas, often engaging in "escorting behaviour" in which they will trail anyone passing near their dens and pups until they have left the area. During this time, off-leash dogs may provoke defensive attacks. Coyotes may also prey on free-roaming cats or smaller, off-leash dogs, if provided with an opportunity.

The risk of injury from coyotes is very low and very manageable. The actual risk of injury from coyotes is about ten times less than the risk from lightning and can be

reduced to near zero by simple precautions. Coyotes typically avoid humans unless they have been fed, either deliberately or inadvertently. Past incidents have generally been the result of human behaviour and could have been avoided by changing human behaviour.

Hunting and trapping of coyotes to reduce their population has never proved successful at eliminating conflicts. Coyotes respond to hunting and trapping pressure by increasing their reproductive rates. They are highly mobile, quickly re-colonizing vacant habitats. They are intelligent, quickly becoming more wary and difficult to hunt or trap. At best, hunting and trapping may put downward pressure on populations, but they will never eliminate coyotes and must be continued indefinitely. Furthermore, hunting and trapping in urban and suburban environments comes with substantial complications and drawbacks, including risks to domestic animals and the need for cooperation from residents.

Traditionally the City has taken a reactive approach to coyote incidents, responding to local human-coyote conflicts when they escalate to become an issue of public safety. In such cases, staff have attempted to work with the local Councillors and resident associations on community education, typically offering to hold public information sessions. In rare cases, some incidents have warranted the hiring of a professional trapper to trap and remove coyotes from a problem location. However, neither the City, the National Capital Commission, nor the Province of Ontario conduct active coyote management due to the low risk from coyotes and the impracticality of population control. In the case of an immediate threat to public safety, the City advises residents to call 911 for emergency police response, but this is very rare.

Since 2013, the organization Coyote Watch Canada (CWC) has developed as an alternative provider of coyote education and response for municipalities. CWC describes itself as, “an all-volunteer Not-For-Profit community-based, wildlife organization that advocates positive human-wildlife coexistence with a focus on canids.” In response to the need of municipalities for clear guidelines on how to avoid and minimize human-canid (coyotes, foxes, wolves) conflicts, CWC has developed a “Municipal Canid Response Strategy” (MCRS) consisting of four cornerstones: investigation, education, prevention, and enforcement. CWC also offers support in the implementation of the MCRS through its Coyote Response Teams. These trained, volunteer teams provide, “on-site assessment, attractant identification, mitigation consultation, wildlife proofing strategies, wildlife rescue and assistance, outreach, educational resources and follow-up support and monitoring.” Several municipalities in Ontario, including the City of London, have partnered with CWC. During a visit to the

City of London, City of Ottawa staff heard positive feedback from London's Ecology Unit about the value of their partnership with the CWC. The CWC has indicated its willingness to discuss a similar partnership with the City of Ottawa.

Subject to Council's approval of this report, staff will enter into negotiations with Coyote Watch Canada to implement its MCRS in Ottawa as three-year pilot project. The cost of the service is estimated at \$48,000 per year (\$144,000 over three years) and would be funded from within existing resources through the Climate Change Master Plan.

### **Changes Not Recommended by Staff**

During the consultation process, the City heard from a number of respondents proposing changes to the Wildlife Strategy that staff are not able to support.

#### *Elimination of lethal trapping in favour of live-trapping and relocation.*

The City is required to respect provincial laws and regulations that limit the distance that live-trapped or chemically immobilized animals can be relocated. For some animals, such as white-tailed deer, moose, and bears, suitable release locations can be found within a reasonable distance. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry will normally provide permission for removal to a location that it provides and approves, from which the animal is unlikely to return to the urban area. However, for other wildlife, especially beavers and coyotes, the Province does not support relocation beyond the immediate area. Consequently, lethal trapping will continue to be required in some circumstances.

#### *Support for Wildlife Rehabilitation Organizations*

During consultations, several wildlife care, rehabilitation, and education organizations commented on the lack of financial support from the City, despite residents' reliance on these organizations for their services. These services include receipt and care of sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife, and training of By-law and Regulatory Services Officers on the rescue and transportation of wildlife. The operation of wildlife rehabilitation organizations has become more challenging and expensive over the past several years due to factors such as the impact of COVID on volunteer retention and recruitment, protocols around animal-borne diseases such as avian influenza, and growing demand. The organizations argue that without their assistance, the City would be required to provide these services itself.

In reviewing past practices and the municipal mandate with respect to animals in general, staff found no strong case for reconsideration of core funding for wildlife

rehabilitation organizations. Council has not considered this service to fall within the mandate of the municipality.

*Seasonal restrictions on vegetation clearing for development.*

Advocates for more protective wildlife policies often call for seasonal restrictions on development-related clearing of vegetation. The Federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act* (1994) already restricts large-scale vegetation clearing during the breeding season (approximately April 15 to August 15). Other times of year can also be problematic. During late autumn and winter, clearing may deprive animals of critical shelter. During early spring and late summer, clearing may injure or kill infant or juvenile animals, which cannot move quickly. Ideally, vegetation removal is best done in early autumn, when young animals are mobile and sufficient time remains for animals to seek new winter shelter.

However, restricting vegetation clearing to early autumn is not practical. Only a limited number of companies in Ottawa have the capability to carry out large-scale site preparation. It is unlikely that they could meet demand for their services if limited to a six-week period, nor would they likely survive as businesses if restricted from operating for the remaining 46 weeks of the year. Such a limitation would greatly affect the ability to carry out approved development and construction across the City.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The creation of a temporary Wildlife Resource Specialist will be funded from within existing resources and a three-year pilot with Coyote Watch Canada to implement its MCRS in Ottawa at an estimated cost of \$48,000 per year will be funded through the Climate Change Master Plan.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal impediments associated with Committee and Council's approval of the recommendation of this report. The following is provided for additional information.

Section 74 of the *Drainage Act* (the "Act") imposes a positive obligation on a local municipality to maintain and repair a municipal drain at the expense of upstream lands and roads assessed for the drainage works pursuant to the governing by-law.

Under the Act, the term "maintenance" means the preservation of drainage works and the term "repair" means the restoration of drainage works to its original condition. The

removal of beaver dams is considered maintenance work and common practice in the context of municipal drains to preserve drainage works.

In addition to the general obligation under section 74, subsection 93(3) of the Act, provides that a drainage superintendent for a municipality shall:

- (a) inspect every drainage works for which the municipality is responsible and report periodically to council on the condition of those drainage works;
- (b) initiate and supervise the maintenance and repair of the drainage works for which the municipality is responsible;
- (c) assist in the construction or improvement of the drainage works for which the municipality is responsible; and
- (d) report to council on the superintendent's activities mentioned in clauses (b) and (c).

If the municipality is not aware of circumstances that impact the functionality of a drain or refuses to undertake maintenance and repair, a person who is affected by the condition of drainage works because of the lack of maintenance or non-repair, may serve a notice on the municipality pursuant to section 79 to request that the work be completed. Upon receipt of the notice, the municipality will have to complete the work within 45 days failure which, a Drainage Referee may compel the municipality by an order to complete the maintenance or repair and the municipality will be liable for any damages incurred by the affected landowner(s).

Stormwater facilities typically operate subject to an Environmental Compliance Approval ("ECA") issued by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks ("MECP"). Generally, ECAs impose a positive obligation on the owner of the ECA to design, build, install, operate and maintain the sewage works in accordance with the conditions described in the ECA.

Under an ECA, conditions are set regarding regular inspection and necessary removal of sediment and excessive decaying vegetation to mitigate the impact of sediment, debris and/or decaying vegetation on the treatment capacity of the sewage works. The conditions also ensures that adequate storage is maintained in the sewage works at all times as required by the design. Furthermore, conditions are included to ensure that the sewage works are operated and maintained to function as designed. Therefore, the City, as an owner of an ECA, must comply with the conditions of the ECA to ensure the infrastructure functions as designed.

It should be noted that non-compliance with the conditions of an ECA constitutes an offence under the *Environmental Protection Act* (“EPA”) for which an owner may be prosecuted and subject to penalties upon conviction. Section 186(3) of the EPA states, “every person who fails to comply with the terms and conditions of an environmental compliance approval, certificate of property use or renewable energy approval or of a license or permit under this Act or who fails to comply with the terms of a report under section 29 is guilty of an offence.” With respect to the penalty, Section 187(2) states that a corporation convicted of an offence under Section 186 is liable, on first conviction, for each day on which the offence occurs or continues, to a fine of not more than \$250,000, and on each subsequent conviction, a fine of not more than \$500,000.

If the ECA establishes a numerical limit, including a limit of zero, on the amount, concentration or level of anything that may be discharged to the natural environment, then the offence provision is laid out in Section 187(4), which states that the corporation is liable, for each day the offence occurs, to a fine of not less than \$25,000 and not more than \$6,000,000 on first conviction. The penalty increases for subsequent convictions.

### **COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR(S)**

This is a city-wide report.

### **CONSULTATION**

A public engagement campaign was launched in 2023 and included an Engage Ottawa project page, two public surveys with over 800 responses, and two public information sessions attended by approximately 135 attendees. Staff also undertook targeted consultations with subject matter experts and other Canadian municipalities.

### **ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS**

The Wildlife Strategy will follow all accessibility standards as legislated under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA). Additionally, this Strategy will equally adhere to the City’s Accessibility Policy, as required.

Other accessibility-related legislation was equally considered during the public engagement phase of the review, including actively offering accessible format and communication supports as per the corresponding corporate procedure. Going forward, any accessibility-related requests or feedback will be available upon request regarding the approved recommendations regarding the Strategy’s public outreach and education.



## **ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The recommendations documented in this report are consistent with the City's Comprehensive Asset Management (CAM) Program objectives. Implementation of the Comprehensive Asset Management program enables the City to effectively manage existing and new infrastructure to maximize benefits, reduce risk, and provide safe and reliable levels of service to community users. This is done in a socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically conscious manner.

As discussed within the report, mitigation and compensation for protected species at risk, other wildlife, and their habitats is often a requirement for new development under several pieces of legislation. This can result in the acquisition of new assets, for which the City inherits responsibility for the maintenance and long-term replacement of these features.

When the City commits to the acquisition of new assets, consideration must also be given to the City's commitment to fund future operations, maintenance, and renewal costs. It must also account for future depreciation when reviewing long term financial sustainability. When reviewing the long-term impacts of asset acquisition, it is useful to consider the cumulative value and lifecycle costing of the acquired assets being taken on by the City.

Establishment of a financial mechanism to plan for and/or recover the costs associated with maintenance and replacement of these features is part of good asset management practice and supports the continued service of these assets.

If approved for acquisition, new assets acquired for the sole purpose of providing wildlife protection would be added to the inventory of assets and financial forecasts included under the Greenspace and Urban Forestry Asset Management Plan

## **CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

Climate change and climate resiliency have been considered in the recommendations regarding conservation of wildlife habitat and response to emerging, animal-transmitted diseases.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The report makes recommendations regarding respectful coexistence with wildlife and reduction of human – wildlife conflicts, including conservation of wildlife habitat. These

recommendations are consistent with conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecosystem services.

## **INDIGENOUS GENDER AND EQUITY IMPLICATIONS**

### **Gender and Equity Implications**

Gender and equity have been considered as factors in perceptions of wildlife, human – wildlife implications, and public health and safety. The report includes recommendations regarding public outreach and education, which will require consideration of gender and equity in the implementation.

## **RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

The report considers risk management implications in its analysis and recommendations. In particular, the report considers risk in the development of recommendations for management of stormwater infrastructure, a Coyote Strategy, and the City's Large Wild Mammal Response Protocol.

## **RURAL IMPLICATIONS**

The need for coexistence with wildlife and prevention of human – wildlife conflicts exists across the full urban, suburban, and rural extent of the City, although the nature and intensity of conflicts varies. Policies and approaches that may be relevant to urban and suburban areas may not be relevant to the rural area and vice versa. Each of the issues in the report has been considered from both an urban and rural perspective as reflected in the discussions around the recommendations. Rural considerations are reflected most clearly in the recommendation regarding improved administration of the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program and the recommendations regarding beaver management.

## **TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

This report does not directly address any of the objectives under Council's Strategic Priorities. However, it is consistent with the following priority: A city that is green and resilient.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

Document 1: *As We Heard It* report

## **DISPOSITION**

The Strategic Initiatives Department will work in conjunction with other relevant Departments and Services to implement Council decisions arising from this report, including updating the Wildlife Strategy.