

UW WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT TASKFORCE
Report to the VP Academic & Provost
Oct. 15, 2007

Taskforce Members:

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Background:

Beavers had been spotted in 2004 and 2005 on UW campus in the Laurel Creek between the Village 1 and Health Services building. In September-November 2006, beaver felled a number of large trees and their dam caused serious flooding of areas frequented by students. Judging this to be a serious safety concern, the UW ground maintenance staff sought advice from experts at the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) on how to control the beavers. Lethal trapping was judged to be the most effective and legally permissible option (see 'Conclusions and Recommendations'). A professional trapper recommended by the MNR was hired, and the beavers were trapped. Although MNR guidelines regarding humane trapping were followed and the actions were supported by the K-W Humane Society, the event elicited strong public backlash, leading to extensive negative coverage in the media. On November 24, 2006 the VP Academic & Provost, struck a task force with the following mandate:

“The taskforce will examine how UW deals with campus-dwelling wildlife that pose a nuisance or health risk.

This task force, to be led by Deep Saini, Dean of Environmental Studies, will draw on campus expertise in wildlife and animal-care management and will also include representation from the community and UW students.

This group will examine how decisions were made to deal with a safety threat caused by beavers that were residing in Laurel Creek, which winds through the campus. The task force's recommendations for any changes in procedures and policies will be made to the university's Provost, Amit Chakma.”

Consultations:

The taskforce met three times, invited representatives from MNR and K-W Humane Society (unable to attend) for discussions and advice, considered various voluntary communications it received, studied wildlife management practices and policies on other sites in the vicinity of K-W, and finally had a site visit from representatives of the Ontario Wildlife Coalition (OWC). The OWC subsequently submitted written analysis of the wildlife situation on UW campus and recommendations for its management.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

Appropriateness of decisions and method for beaver control in November 2006. After reviewing the evidence and based on the feedback from MNR and OWC, the taskforce is satisfied that UW had used the legal and most humane method available in trapping the beavers. According to the MNR and other experts, the alternative option of live trapping and relocating the beavers at that time of year (in the fall) would have killed the animals cruelly through starvation as they rely on under-water food storage for winter survival. Moreover, according to the MNR guidelines, relocation outside a radius of 1 km would have been illegal. Breaching the dam or using “beaver deceivers” (diversion of water) close to winter would also have led to starvation of beavers.

The taskforce felt that prior communication with the UW community regarding the safety concerns associated with the beaver activity, and educating the community about the legality of trapping the animals versus dangers of relocating them at that time of year, could have averted the strong reaction to the lethal trapping. In retrospect, UW should also have been more proactive in dealing with the beavers when they were first seen on campus in 2004 and 2005.

Problematic wildlife on campus. The wildlife observed on the UW campus include Canada geese, beavers, groundhogs, chipmunks, squirrels, pigeons, hawks, rats, mice and occasional bat. Of these, **Canada geese, beavers and groundhogs** are considered the main problems in decreasing order of severity. After carefully considering various options, the following control measures are recommended for these three species, which also substantially concur with the recommendations of the OWC.

General recommendation

The University should establish a Wildlife Committee of experts to gain understanding about campus wildlife, especially those that pose a significant safety and health risk for the campus, so the University can arrive at the best possible solutions. Another important part of its mandate should be to engage in a proactive education program regarding campus wildlife, both for the campus community and the general public.

Canada Geese.

UW campus probably has approximately 1000 geese, which cause serious sanitation problems on pathways and grounds, are a traffic hazard and can be aggressive toward human beings. While it is accepted that elimination of this population would be neither practical nor a goal, a combination of the following control measures could reduce and keep their number in check:

- UW should engage in a more aggressive re-naturalization program, particularly along the banks of Laurel Creek and around the ponds and lakes on campus. The present re-naturalized edging needs to be widened, including aquatic and semi-aquatic plant edging around the ponds and lake in combination with an extended land naturalization. Any access to the water’s edge should be in the form of diagonal paths, which prevents the geese from having a straight line of sight from the water to the grass.

It should be noted that redefining habitat as a means of managing wildlife can create alternative problems, as removing one species could encourage another to

move in. UW needs to strike a careful balance and determine which species it can tolerate.

- Selective egg oiling should be continued, and UW should consider using the protocol developed by the Humane Society of the United States. A video of the recommended procedure and other control considerations is provided by the OWC.
- Considering the size and topography of the campus, the use of a Border collie, as used by several golf courses in the area and McMaster University, may not prove to be very effective as it could simply drive the geese from one site to another. However, the Border collie may be helpful in site-specific instances.
- Spraying chemicals such as Avigon™, when and where appropriate. This Health Canada approved spray deters geese from grazing but is only effective for a limited time and is costly.

Beavers.

By blocking water flow and felling trees, beavers cause physical hazards (flood, injury from falling trees) for the human population on campus. In addition, they can pose health risk as they can carry a parasite that causes Giardia (beaver fever), which, under some circumstances (contact with animals, drinking contaminated water), can be transmitted to human beings. The following control measures are recommended:

- Carefully monitor beaver activity and intervene in a timely fashion to deter the animals from establishing permanent colonies on campus. Effective deterrents include:
 - Persistently dismantle dams
 - Hire a professional to install modern flow devices (beaver deceivers)
 - Use of abrasive tree paint or ammonia
- Live trapping and relocation is not a viable option, as MNR does not allow adult animals to be moved outside a 1 km radius. Beavers that are moved such a short distance would likely return.
- Since even successful removal of a family of beavers would likely cause another one to take its place, the University would need to resort to deterrence on an ongoing basis. Despite its tedium and expense, deterrence offers the best long-term strategy for controlling the beaver population and activity on UW campus.
- In the unlikely event that the above measures fail to avert an imminent safety or health risk to human beings, a final decision on the most appropriate alternative course of action should be referred to a UW Wildlife Committee of experts.

Groundhogs.

The problem is primarily restricted to sports fields, where the possibility of injury from the groundhog holes is the main concern. The recommended control measures include:

- Apply a series of deterrents as soon as the groundhogs emerge in early spring (March) to encourage them to find a “safer” den (from their perspective) before the birthing season starts. Deterrents include:
 - Applying and digging in bloodmeal (not bonemeal) fertilizer around the burrow entrance
 - Placing dog hair (obtained from a grooming studio) in the toe of a nylon stocking and tying it to a stake(s) placed in the ground about head-height

for a groundhog, right outside the burrow. *This would be impractical on the sports field, but could be applied in surrounding areas.*

- Block the burrow opening on a rotating basis, because a woodchuck needs to have quick and dependable access to a burrow for a safe escape
- Live trapping and relocation within the 1 km radius (MNR rules for relocation) is unlikely to be effective, as the animals would return to the original site.