

**SMALL GAME/MIGRATORY BIRDS/WETLANDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT**  
**NOVEMBER 8, 2023**

PRESENT: Maya Basdeo, Chair   Chris Bayles   Thomas Benoit   Vince Falcigno   Stephen Huntley  
          Kelly McLean         Rick Moore     Roy Polsky         Brooke Wright

ABSENT: James Chambers     Kerry Coleman   Chris Davies         Emma Northey     Jeffrey Pye  
          Kathy Richardson

STAFF:     Matthew Robbins, Liaison   Mark Ryckman

GUESTS:   Steven Mills and Dr. Patrick Hubert, MNRF  
          Brittany Gravel and Jenn Salo, Thunder Bay Falconers  
          Roy DeCorte, Merrill Elliott, Mike Evers, Stu Paterson, Chris Roman, OFAH Board of Directors  
          Mark Robbins, Neil Wiens, OFAH Advisory Committees

The Small Game, Migratory Birds & Wetlands Committee (SGAC) met via ZOOM on November 8, 2023, from 7:00pm to 9:15pm. Maya Basdeo chaired the meeting; Brooke Wright took Minutes.

**Small Game Management and Decision Making**

The SGAC was pleased to welcome Steven Mills, Acting Manager, Wildlife Section, and Dr. Patrick Hubert, Senior Biologist, Wildlife Section from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. They delivered a slide presentation that outlined the MNRF's framework that guides creation and implementation of policy for small game species in Ontario under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (FWCA). Their policy framework integrates the MNRF strategic plan, applicable legislation, program-specific policies (e.g., Small Game & Furbearer Management Framework, Strategy for Preventing and Managing Human-Wildlife Conflicts), species-specific policies (e.g., Wild Turkey Management Plan, Wolf Conservation Plan) and operational policies. The shortened season for snowshoe hare, particularly in the north, and the viability of opening a season for wild turkey on Manitoulin Island were discussed in greater depth.

The impact of the shortened snowshoe hare season on falconers and other small game hunters in northern Ontario was discussed. Thunder Bay Falconers Brittany Gravel and Jenn Salo attended as guests and were invited to share the ways in which falconry in particular has been impacted by a decision that seems to have been made with southern Ontario in mind. While MNRF provided assurances that the decision to shorten the snowshoe hare season had been informed by available science and published literature, they appreciated hearing the first-hand experiences about the different weather conditions north of Highway 17 during the middle of winter that result in considerably fewer hunting days. They acknowledged that this is an issue that might warrant revisiting.

The viability of establishing a season for wild turkey on Manitoulin Island was raised by SGAC members. The MNRF acknowledged the presence of wild turkey on Manitoulin, and highlighted the fact that any release of these birds is unsanctioned and/or accidental (i.e., escaped pen-raised birds). Their concern is that creating a season could result in more people participating in the illegal release of these birds in order to create more hunting opportunities, which is not a precedent they wish to set.

**OWAC Updates**

Tundra swans - Policy staff recently sent a letter, in partnership with Delta Waterfowl, asking CWS to explore the viability of considering a Tundra swan hunt in the province. Staff clarified that this letter was not a request to have a season, but rather to signal to CWS that if there were discussions, OFAH would like to be involved. OFAH does not have an official position for or against a harvest, but one individual OFAH member has been quite insistent over the years in requesting staff to push for a season.

The SGAC does not view this issue as a priority, and generally do not support the idea of a Tundra swan hunt in Ontario largely because the areas these birds frequent are also hotspots for birders and other wildlife viewers. The general consensus of the committee is that the cost is far greater than the benefit that would really only satisfy one OFAH member.

Duck stamp - CWS gave an update on the potential of increasing the stamp cost for migratory birds. The matter is still pending, and we are unsure of when it will come into force.

Black ducks – there will be an increased bag limit for Black ducks of six ducks per day with the exception of Wildlife Management Units 88 and 85 where the limit will be three per day.

### **Delta Waterfowl Partnership**

The SGAC continued discussion from the previous meeting in July about the request from Delta Waterfowl for a formal partnership. Maya had asked Brian McRae for a proposal that could be presented to the SGAC for discussion that would outline the terms of a formal partnership and address questions raised by the committee. While additional communication was received informally in an email to Maya, no proposal has been received. With nothing additional to review, the SGAC unanimously agreed that OFAH continue to work with Delta on issues of common cause and mutual benefit as is already the case. If we receive a proposal, we will discuss it at that time. The SGAC also unanimously agreed that any collaborative effort, whether with Delta or other organizations, reflect OFAH goals and benefit OFAH members.

*The following agenda items were summarized via email, due to time constraints at the November 8 meeting:*

### **Prince Edward Point and Monarch Point**

OFAH staff have been hearing from members in the Prince Edward County area who are concerned about potential threats to access in that area, particularly relating to waterfowl opportunities. The South Shore Joint Initiative, a local NGO aiming to permanently protect the south shore of PEC, has alluded to the aim of restricting certain undesirable activities in the area. Members are concerned that some individuals are pushing to eliminate hunting from Monarch Point Conservation Reserve, for example, and that the public water access point in Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area will not be shut down.

A representative from Environment and Climate Change Canada has made it clear that there are no plans to limit access to the water within the wildlife area. OFAH staff also spoke with representatives from Parks Canada about the conservation reserve, who informed us that a committee may be formed to inform the development of the new reserve's management plan. OFAH will endeavor to have representation on this committee, should it be formed.

### **HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza) Update**

There has been a significant drop this year in sick/dead birds from HPAI in Ontario. Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) found high antibody levels in Mallard ducks and Canada geese in southern Ontario, with relatively low active shedding. This suggests that a significant portion of these populations have been exposed to the virus and survived, likely with some degree of natural immunity or resistance going forward. ECCO has also sampled the eggs of infected geese, finding that some amount of antibodies are being passed on to the next generation.

### **Canadian Wetland Roundtable**

The Canadian Wetland Roundtable is a partnership between Environment and Climate Change Canada and multitude of stakeholders, including industry, conservation organizations, and academia. The group's objectives revolve around improving the management of Canada's wetlands by advocating for government, industry and public actions and regulation.

CWR is developing a National Wetland Policy Framework and has asked the OFAH to contribute. Policy staff participated in an interview with the organization, answering questions around current Ontario policies, their efficiency and effectiveness, and areas for improvement. OFAH is currently participating in a workshop run by the CWR to discuss the findings of the larger project in a group setting.

Respectfully submitted,

Maya Basdeo  
Chair