

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



Ontario Conservation Centre

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E-MAILED
07/24/14

Ms. Anne Anderson, Special Projects Coordinator
Lower Trent Conservation Authority
714 Murray Street, RR1
Trenton, Ontario K8V 5P4

Dear Ms. Anderson:

Subject: Murray Marsh Draft Management Strategy Review

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), its 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 720 member clubs, we have reviewed the draft Murray Marsh (MM) Management Strategy prepared by the Lower Trent Conservation Authority (LTC). We would like to thank the LTC for hosting OFAH staff during the stakeholders meeting and attending a follow up meeting at the OFAH head office to discuss the strategy. We have identified some concerns with the draft strategy, and have provided additional management options for your consideration below.

MM Management Strategy Section 1 - BACKGROUND

OFAH Comments:

- The OFAH seeks clarification on what is meant by “*Management Strategy*” and what power/implications this document holds. Typically, we find that management strategies contain visions/goals/objects and list suggested actions to attain these, with some form of incorporated performance measurement and reporting. The LTC might consider revising the current document to be more consistent with typical strategies or change it to a different type of document (e.g. best management practices, management plan, and guidance).
- Under the subheading “*Murray Marsh Natural Habitat Area*”, the OFAH finds the last sentence confusing, “*While it is managed to remain in its natural state, with no maintained trails or facilities, the area is open to the public.*” The OFAH suggests replacing the term “*managed*” to “*unmaintained*” and rephrasing the sentence.
- It would be helpful to include a map of the provincially significant wetland boundaries as identified by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), with the LTC property boundaries and Crown land boundaries displayed, for reference for the remainder of the document (similar to the one found in the Murray Marsh backgrounder).

MM Management Strategy Section 3 – DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

Subsection 1 -PERMITTED AND PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES

OFAH Comments:

- The OFAH seeks clarification on the inclusion of “off leash dogs” in the list of prohibited activities. If this is based on a provincial regulation or act, it should be referenced in the document. If it is solely based on the LTC Conservation Lands Strategy (as referenced in the strategy), then we suggest a provision be included to allow the use of “off leash dogs” (when permitted through an approved management plan) for the purposes of hunting, retrieving and tracking. This type of exception has been made in other publicly accessible areas (e.g. Algonquin Park).

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- The OFAH feels that including “off leash dogs” as a prohibited activity within Murray Marsh, is unnecessary and overly restrictive. Provincial regulations address this in the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (1997) under section 25 (3) “The owner of a dog or any other person responsible for a dog shall not permit it to run at large.” The use of dogs is extremely important for locating, flushing, and retrieving game species during hunting (a permitted activity).
- The use of dogs is also very important for hunting coyotes. The full implications of a blanket restriction on “off leash dogs” should be considered before a decision is made in this management strategy.

Subsection 2 - NATURAL HABITAT PROTECTION & ENHANCEMENT

OFAH Comments:

- The OFAH supports the completion of vegetation community mapping within the marsh in recommendation two. We are, however, curious about when the Ontario Wetland Evaluation was completed for this provincially significant wetland? If the evaluation is dated, perhaps this would be an opportunity to collaborate with the MNR to update the evaluation for future land use proposals.
- The OFAH supports the collaboration of the LTC with the MNR on land management approaches for LTC lands and adjacent Crown lands in recommendation 10, so long as it does not result in any unnecessary restrictions to traditional uses, such as hunting or trapping

Subsection 3 - GRANDFATHERED/TRADITIONAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

OFAH Comments:

- The OFAH does not feel comfortable with the term “grandfathered” as this often suggests the eventual elimination of the activity. If this is not the LTC’s intent, we suggest removing that term from the title.

Subcategory 1 - TRAPPING

OFAH Comments:

- Please clarify the use of the term “was” in the sentence, “*This use (trapping) was seen as a traditional use of the land and as an acceptable conservation activity.*” The OFAH suggests replacing the term “was” with “is.”
- The OFAH finds the statement “*There are no data on the status of populations of furbearing animals in the Murray Marsh NHA and no evidence that trapping is required to assist with population control,*” misleading. If there is no data on the status of furbearing populations, how can one conclude that population control (trapping) is not required?
- If trapping has been occurring since the LTC acquired the land, the lack of perceived population issues may be due to the existing trapping efforts. In other words, if there is no empirical evidence (baseline or current data) to support this statement, the OFAH suggests removing this sentence.

LTC recommendation 1: *Permit the individual that currently traps in the Murray Marsh NHA to continue the practice.*

- Clarification is required with respect to the future of this traditional trapline. What will happen once the trapper is unable or unwilling to continue? The OFAH strongly recommends that a traditional trapline be maintained within Murray Marsh on LTC properties unless there is a legitimate and demonstrated need to prohibit trapping.

LTC recommendation 2: *Additional trapping permissions would only be granted if deemed necessary to control nuisance wildlife populations. A list of interested trappers will be maintained for this purpose.*

- The OFAH suggests removing/replacing the term “nuisance,” as this term undervalues the furbearing species and their importance to biodiversity and habitat health.

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- It is important to note that trapping is a sustainable cultural heritage activity. The management of local furbearer populations is only one of the many benefits (e.g. habitat protection, human-wildlife conflict avoidance, conservation of traditional heritage activities on the landscape, etc.) of allowing trapping to continue in Murray Marsh.
- It is our understanding that the MNRF maintains a list of licenced trappers in Ontario, therefore we suggest that the LTC coordinate with them instead of creating their own list of trappers.

LTC recommendation 3: *Require any trappers using the Murray Marsh NHA to submit annual records of the numbers and species of animals harvested, including a map of trapping sites.*

- Ontario trappers have an incredible amount of valuable knowledge of the wildlife and ecosystems in areas where they trap. This information can be used in the absence of, or to supplement scientific data to inform management decisions. Trappers are generally happy to share their observations from the field as long as they have a clear understanding of what the data will be used for. What will this information be used for, and how will it impact trappers?

LTC recommendation 4: *Require any trappers to sign a hold harmless agreement and have proof of insurance coverage.*

- The OFAH suggests including a description of what a “hold harmless” agreement is, and what it means for the user and the LTC (e.g. liability, damages, etc.).

Subcategory 2 – Bee Keeping

OFAH Comments:

- The OFAH is generally supportive of bee keeping within Murray Marsh, so long as it does not result in any unnecessary restrictions to traditional uses, such as hunting or trapping.

Subcategory 3 – Agriculture

OFAH Comments:

- The OFAH is generally supportive of agriculture within Murray Marsh, so long as it does not result in any unnecessary restrictions to traditional uses, such as hunting or trapping.

Subcategory 4 – Hunting

OFAH Comments:

- Please clarify the use of the term “was” in the sentence “*This use (hunting) was seen as a traditional use of the land and as an acceptable conservation activity, assisting with population control.*” The OFAH suggests replacing the term “was” with “is.”
- The OFAH suggests including a summary of the many benefits of licensed hunting on publicly accessible lands in this section. Some examples include, but are not limited to, wildlife management, habitat and population health, socio-economic benefits, and decreased human-wildlife conflicts. The OFAH would be happy to provide further information on the value of licenced hunting.

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- The OFAH finds the sentence “*There are no data on the status of wildlife game populations in the Murray Marsh NHA, to indicate whether hunting is having a beneficial or detrimental effect.*”, completely misleading. The OFAH suggests rephrasing or removing this sentence considering the following:
 - Wildlife species in Ontario are regulated at a landscape level through Wildlife Management Units (WMUs). Hunting by licensed hunters in Ontario provides the best regulated means of wildlife population management within WMUs. The status of wildlife populations in WMU 71 (where Murray Marsh is located) is available from the MNRF.
 - Hunting has been occurring within Murray Marsh since the LTC acquired it, **therefore, there is no baseline data to use as a comparison to determine its impact.**
 - There is evidence that a lack of active wildlife management can lead to overabundance, which can have a negative impact on the wildlife population, habitat/ecosystem, and human-wildlife conflicts.

Based on these considerations and that hunting has and continues to occur in Murray Marsh with minimal issues (biologically or socially), this should indicate that hunting is a beneficial activity biologically, socially, and economically.
- In general, **the OFAH finds that this draft management strategy severely undervalues the benefits associated with hunting.** We would be happy to meet with LTC staff to discuss the benefits of licensed hunting in Murray Marsh, and provide input on this Management Strategy.

The OFAH questions why hunting is the only traditional management activity that has a “*Pros and Cons*” list in its description. The OFAH suggests that attempting to label factors involved in hunting in such a manner can be high influenced by personal bias. We suggest removing the list and speaking about the various considerations in a neutral tone, allowing the readers to make their own conclusions; however, if the LTC chooses to include the list, the OFAH has several concerns regarding the list of “*Pros and Cons*” for hunting, including:

LTC suggested pros of permitting hunting include:

- 1) *it is a traditional recreational use*
 - The OFAH suggests rewording this to read “it is a sustainable traditional cultural heritage activity.”
- 2) *provides a local opportunity for hunting*
 - Licensed hunting at Murray Marsh also provides access to opportunities for local hunters.
- 3) *it results in a small amount of revenue generation*
 - The OFAH suggests removing the word “*small*” as it is a relative term. For example, allowing hunting results in larger revenue generation compared to not allowing hunting. The OFAH suggest rephrasing the point to read “Licensed hunting generates revenue.”
- 4) *appreciation of a LTC service by a small number of individuals*
 - The OFAH is unsure what is meant by “*a LTC service*”? If access to Murray Marsh is what is meant by *a LTC service*, then the OFAH questions how this is different from birdwatchers, hikers, and anyone else who uses the area?
 - The OFAH suggests that the use of the marsh by hunters helps to diversify users and broadens the overall interest in the LTC and the services it provides (i.e. more people who see the value of LTC lands, services, etc.).
 - The OFAH suggests that in reality, it is a small number of individuals (hunters) **paying** to provide a service (wildlife management) for the LTC. The OFAH suggest rephrasing or removing this point.

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5) *potentially game species population control*

- The OFAH finds this point misleading. Wildlife species in Ontario are regulated at a landscape level through Wildlife Management Units (WMUs). Hunting by licenced hunters in Ontario provides the best regulated means of wildlife management within WMUs. The provincial government collects and analyzes harvest data for many game species (e.g. turkey, deer, moose, etc.). Using this information and the best available science, the MNRF can determine the number of animals that can be sustainably harvested. Therefore, the OFAH suggests that the point should read “sustainable, science-based, wildlife population management.”

LTC suggested cons of permitting hunting include:

- The OFAH recommends rewording to read “perceived cons of permitting hunting.”

1) *Safety/liability concerns*

- Licensed hunting is a safe and compatible activity. Hunting is one of the few recreational activities that requires proof of competence before engaging in the activity, through the mandatory hunter education and firearms safety courses.
- Statistics Canada has stated that the activity of hunting is measurably safer than bicycling, boating, swimming, horseback riding, and most recreational sports. The National Safety Council has stated that hunting is responsible for only 0.001% of (non-participant) mortality-related accidents (per 100,000 people), which pales in comparison to automobiles (18.6%), home accidents (8.6%), falls (5%), insect bites (0.02%), and lightening (.04%).
- Hunters are also required to wear “hunter orange” during the gun season for deer, making them clearly visible to other users of the marsh, further reducing any safety concerns.
- Given the rationale provided, the OFAH recommends this point should be removed or amended by adding “perceived” to the beginning.

2) *Potential conflict with agriculture (however, current farmland lease holders have not indicated any major concerns)*

- The OFAH questions the necessity of this point, as it begins with the term “potential” and ends with the acknowledgement that there is “no conflict with farmland lease holders.” In other words, if there is no identified issues, then it should not be included as a “Con.”
- The OFAH suggests that any “potential” conflicts with agriculture, most likely stems from concerns over trespass and property damage. If not removed, this point should be further refined to address the perceived core issue.
- The OFAH suggests that hunting by licenced hunters is beneficial for agriculture as hunters assist with wildlife management, reducing human (farmer) - wildlife conflict (crop damage, vehicle collisions, etc.).
- The OFAH recommends rephrasing this point “benefit to agriculture” and moving the point to the “pros” column.

3) *Destruction/disruption of wildlife*

- The OFAH finds the terms “destruction/disruption” inflammatory and inaccurate in the context of hunting’s relationship with wildlife. Please provide us with the rationale used to arrive at this conclusion.

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- Hunters are true conservationists. In addition to their participation in wildlife management, hunters spend tens of thousands of volunteer hours on fish and wildlife conservation. Overabundant wildlife populations resulting from a lack of wildlife management can result in a loss of biodiversity and destruction of ecosystem health. Overabundant populations can also negatively impact sensitive and at risk plant communities as feeding behaviours become more general, and animals venture into areas they would not have traditionally utilized. The removal of individuals from a population by licensed hunters is a sustainable means of wildlife management in Ontario.
- Also, hunters work very hard not to disrupt wildlife (with the exception of the use of dogs) as that is counterproductive to their goals.
- The OFAH suggests rephrasing to read “*Sustainable harvest of wildlife*” and removing this from the “cons” list.

4) *Difficult to police (i.e., do the hunters have a permit from LTC?)*

- The provincial government employs conservation officers to ensure hunters are complying with regulations under various provincial and federal acts related to hunting. It is the duty of every responsible hunter to obey/comply with all laws and regulations. If this point is specifically referring to permit compliance, then it may be worthwhile to make it more explicit.
- There are cost-effective solutions that have been employed elsewhere that the LTC could investigate to address any non-compliance with permits. The OFAH would be happy to discuss these examples further with the LTC.

LTC recommendation 1: *Divide property into hunting zones and issue a limited number of permits for deer hunting for each zone (gun and bow season). Two hunting zones, Parcel A and Parcel B (see map below) with a maximum of 30 permits per zone, are proposed for 2014-15 (to be reviewed annually).*

- The OFAH has concerns regarding the recommendation to divide the property into two zones. Can you please explain the rationale behind this recommendation?
- How does the LTC plan to display the zone A and B boundary for deer hunters?
- The OFAH strongly feels this proposed permitting and boundary approach is overly complicated and will be very difficult to enforce. There are proven, effective ways to control hunter density that have been employed elsewhere in Ontario that the LTC could use as potential models. The OFAH would be happy to discuss these options further with the LTC.
- The OFAH noticed that the two southern properties owned by the LTC adjacent to Crown land were not included in the boundary mapping for hunting. Has there been hunting on these lands previously? Why are these lands not identified and addressed in this draft?

LTC recommendation 2: *Hunters having a permit for deer hunting in one or more zones would also be permitted to hunt in any zone for other types of game outside of deer season.*

- The OFAH has concerns regarding the recommendation to permit deer hunting differently than hunting other species? Can you please explain the rationale behind this recommendation?
- With overlapping seasons, how will the LTC determine if a hunter is deer hunting or hunting other game?
- The OFAH suggests that this recommendation overcomplicates the intent and will make enforcement unnecessarily challenging.

LTC recommendation 3: *Issue permits to other individuals for hunting in any zone outside of deer season. No more than 20 additional permits would be permitted.*

- With an average of 30 permits purchased each year, can you please explain why a permit cap is required by the LTC? Also, since the results of the hunter survey suggest most hunters are deer hunters that can hunt small game with a deer permit, why are these permits necessary?

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LTC recommendation 4: *Review the administration fee in conjunction with the LTC fee schedule review (\$50 proposed for 2014/15).*

- The OFAH has serious concerns regarding the proposed \$30 increase (\$20 to \$50) for LTC hunting permits in Murray Marsh. In the hunter survey conducted by the LTC, only one respondent indicated that they would pay \$50 or more for a permit. Can you please explain the rationale for such a large cost hike? What is the money generated from hunting permit sales used for (e.g. administration, enforcement, wildlife management, etc.)? In other words, is the permit fee intended for cost recovery or to generate revenue?
- Hunters already contribute to provincial wildlife management through their licence fees.
- The OFAH generally supports pay for use on conservation lands on a cost-recovery basis, where the cost is justified by administration or on-the-ground work for wildlife management and enforcement. Considering the low amount of permit sales (average 30 in a year) and the fact that Murray Marsh is largely “unmaintained,” can you please explain why the additional money is required by the LTC?
- The OFAH also questions why hunters are the only user group being targeted for permits. Has the LTC explored options for revenue generation from other/all user groups?
- If the extra revenue is to be earmarked for increased LTC enforcement, the OFAH cautions that this drastic increase in cost may decrease permit purchases (considering the adjacent Crown land is free to hunt).
- Some hunters may perceive the drastic increase in permit costs and over complication of boundary designations as a barrier or an attempt to dissuade hunting within Murray Marsh. This could also be observed as an attempt to privatize the hunting area for only those with above average financial standing (i.e. like a private golf course). In either case, the OFAH would not support such motives and suggests that LTC remain open and transparent about their decision-making by providing clear rationale for these proposed recommendations.
- Considering hunters already pay more than any other user group in Murray Marsh, the OFAH suggests small annual increases in permit fees, based on cost of living increases, would help to ease the burden on local hunters.

LTC recommendation 5: *Exclude leased agricultural lands from hunting permissions.*

- The OFAH is unsure of the rationale (see “cons” section) for this recommendation, and we find it too restrictive. The OFAH suggests that a caveat be added stating “unless under the express written permission from the lease holder and the LTC.”
- Besides the many benefits of hunting in Murray Marsh for local farmers, hunting may be required on the leased agricultural lands to reduce potential human-wildlife conflicts, and may actually be welcomed.

LTC recommendation 6: *Require each registered hunter to provide LTC with proof of insurance (OFAH membership), provide a copy of his/her valid hunting licence, and sign a hold harmless agreement.*

- The OFAH supports this recommendation; however, it is important to consider the added cost of a membership to hunters (see Recommendation 4).
- Does the LTC have the legal obligation to request a copy of a valid hunting licence? If not, the possession of a valid outdoors card and the necessary hunting licences is a requirement under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, enforced by the MNRF mainly through conservation officers

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LTC recommendation 7: *Require each registered hunter to complete an annual survey regarding hunting experience and game harvested.*

- Licenced hunters are true field biologists, logging long hours in often inaccessible or remote areas. Hunters are generally happy to share their observations from the field as long as they have a clear understanding of what the data will be used for. In the case of the provincial hunter survey, the hunters understand that the data collected directly relates to population estimates and tag allocation for the following year within their WMU.
- We support the collection of information for the purposes of determining presence/absence and biodiversity monitoring; however, abundance estimates to determine hunting regulations must remain solely under the MNRF's control. Why is observation and harvest data being requested by the LTC? What will this information be used for, and how will it impact hunters?

Subsection 4: GENERAL ISSUES

Subcategory 1 - RECOMMENDATIONS – ATV & GARBAGE

LTC recommendation 1: *Post prohibited uses (e.g. snowmobiling, ATVs, vegetation removal) on the property in a kiosk.*

- The OFAH supports the installation of an information kiosk near the entrance to Murray Marsh.
- The use of ATVs and snowmobiles by hunters and trappers to retrieve game animals and move equipment can be very important, especially for those with mobility issues. The OFAH suggests including an exception for use of these vehicles for specific purposes during specific harvest seasons and defined in the provincial regulations.

LTC recommendation 2: *Increase general surveillance of the property*

- Hunters will often spend time in their hunting area outside of the season. This traditional user group could contribute to the surveillance of the property and report misuse, often providing “free” surveillance.

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OFAH Review Conclusion:

The OFAH would like to thank the LTC for allowing us to provide input on the development of this draft management strategy for Murray Marsh. We appreciate LTC staff taking time to come to the OFAH head office to provide more details/clarification on the plan to help staff develop comments. The OFAH is generally supportive of developing this strategy; however, we feel that the scope and intent of this document need to be further defined before moving forward. The OFAH has some major concerns with the hunting section of the strategy. Generally, we feel that this section needs to be revised to remove any unintentional biases and to fully explain the rationale for the various recommendations based on science and experience. With increasing development pressure and the loss of publicly accessible areas to hunt in southern Ontario, it is more important than ever to maintain access to Murray Marsh for licenced hunters. The OFAH looks forward to continuing to work with the LTC on this strategy and would be happy to provide any assistance (education material, data, review, etc.). Finally, we would like to commend the LTC for their commitment to wildlife conservation and ecosystem health by allowing traditional cultural heritage activities (hunting and trapping) to continue on their lands.

Yours in Conservation,



Chris Godwin
Land Use Specialist

CG/DS/GH

cc: OFAH Board of Directors
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