

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

SUBMISSION TO PORT COLBORNE COUNCIL REGARDING
WATERFOWL HUNTING IN GRAVELLY BAY

JULY 8, 2019

MARK RYCKMAN
OFAH MANAGER OF POLICY

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest non-profit, conservation-based organization representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 740 member clubs. We appreciate the opportunity to address the concerns about waterfowl hunting in Gravelly Bay. We also appreciate the explicit recognition of the importance of our waterfowl hunting heritage in the Council Package.

Waterfowl hunters play a critical role in the management and conservation of Ontario's natural resources. The revenue from the Canadian Wildlife Habitat Conservation Stamp, that every waterfowl hunter must purchase, is directed to wetland conservation. This is in addition to the cost of a provincial small game licence that funds the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's Special Purpose Account, which funds almost 70% of fish and wildlife management in the province. Many waterfowl hunters belong to conservation organizations that work towards the betterment of fish and wildlife habitat and populations. The benefits of these wetland improvements go well beyond increased habitat; it also supports water filtration, flood control, carbon sequestration, and the control of invasive species. As mentioned in the Council Package, there are also many indirect economic benefits that waterfowl hunters bring to the areas they are hunting including lodging, food, supplies, and general tourism.

Many of the complaints that are being presented to council seem to be regarding safety. Ontario waterfowl hunters must complete both the Ontario Hunter Education Program and the Canadian Firearms Safety Course. These total a minimum of 20 hours learning about wildlife management, hunting laws and regulations, hunter responsibilities, species identification and biology, firearms safety such as safe handling, carrying, and firing practices, and responsible hunting/shooting. Regulated hunting is proven to be a safe activity, with per capita injury rates that are far lower than many recreational sports that we enjoy such as golf and hockey.

It is highly unlikely that any steel shotgun pellets would travel across the existing 600 foot buffer, so safety is not a realistic concern. Therefore, the addition of 150 feet would be strictly administrative. An additional 150 feet would also have a negligible effect on noise. While 163 people who responded to the survey were concerned about hunting in Gravelly Bay, only 39 people have ever reported a safety concern to the authorities, and to our knowledge there have been no actual documented safety issues. This suggests that this is likely more of a perception issue rather than an actual safety issue.

Regardless of the above, any instance of unsafe hunting should be immediately reported to the appropriate authorities, in this case the MNRF or relevant police services. In our opinion, a by-law enforcement officer is not the appropriate person to be enforcing these laws.

To our knowledge, Port Colborne has no jurisdiction to regulate waterfowl hunting in the Bay – any change to the zone boundaries would require permission from the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation on behalf of Transport Canada. In fact, we question how the existing No Hunting Zone has been established in the first place, given that ownership of the bed of a waterbody generally does not confer the right to prohibit or regulate activities on the surface. We would be interested to see any documentation that confirms Transport Canada's ability to restrict hunting in this way. We also note in the Council Package that City staff discussed their concerns with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which is not responsible for waterfowl hunting or migratory bird management. This responsibility falls on the Canadian Wildlife Service and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

There are many places where waterfowl hunting coexists with other multi-use activities and landowners safely, Gravelly Bay should not be an exception. OFAH, along with other conservation partners like Delta Waterfowl, would like to maintain and enhance hunting opportunities for their economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Thank you for considering these comments.