

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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Ontario Conservation Centre

OFAH FILE: 507
April 19, 2022

Mr. Chris White, Chair
and Board of Directors
Grand River Conservation Authority
400 Clyde Road, PO Box 729
Cambridge, Ontario
N1R 5W6
grca@grandriver.ca

Dear Mr. White and Board of Directors:

Subject: Grand River Conservation Authority Hunting Program Review

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. It was brought to our attention that the Grand River Conservation Authority has reviewed their current hunting program, including the previously canceled pheasant hunt. The OFAH has reviewed the information that was provided in Report GM-04-22-37 from the agenda package for the meeting to be held on Friday, April 22, 2022. As there is a short timeframe between the posting of this report with the agenda package and the request for written comments, we ask for a meeting with the GRCA prior to any future changes to the hunting program. We are very supportive of the recommendation within the report to re-establish a relationship with the OFAH. Our organization has a lot of experience with managed hunts, and we would gladly provide insight into ways that the hunting program can be improved. We fully understand the need to balance the competing interests of different user groups within a property and are appreciative of the areas where the GRCA has restricted certain areas to hunting access only and where you have divided the usages according to time of year. We do feel that there are ways to mitigate the conflicts instead of simply closing areas to hunting, as is proposed for Belwood Lake, and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss models for controlled waterfowl hunts with you. The OFAH would like to see hunting opportunities maximized wherever reasonable.

The OFAH believes that an easy way to maximize hunting opportunities in the GRCA is to reinstate the pheasant hunt. Pheasant hunting in Ontario is a novel hunting activity that would garner a lot of interest. While the OFAH understands the need for GRCA to consider the cost of staff time, we believe that this hunt could be largely reinstated using volunteers. The requirements for staff would be mostly focused on issuing permits, which is already a part of the hunting program and is largely online as per the report. Volunteers could be used to collect and release the birds onto GRCA properties, meaning that no additional staff time would be needed. The areas would have specific days where hunting was permitted to ensure that the releases were not taking place while active hunting was occurring. This would eliminate the major safety concerns identified within the report. There would not be a need to only use pre-existing GRCA volunteers, as many of the hunters who want to have a pheasant hunt in that area would be more than willing to volunteer to ensure it occurs.

Upland game bird hunting opportunities are decreasing in Southern Ontario as habitat loss drives a decrease in huntable birds. The GRCA has the opportunity to offer hunters a chance to participate in an upland game bird hunt that allows hunters and their bird dogs to have success in the field. Successful hunts are very important for the training and use of upland game bird dogs, as they require positive reinforcement after finding game. This hunt could also provide a meaningful opportunity for new hunters. Small game hunting has one of the lowest barriers to participation, as it requires less equipment and generally costs much less than other hunts, making it ideal for new hunters. Having a put-and-take hunting opportunity also removes a lot of the initial guess work of knowing where to hunt. There are many hunters in urban areas who find their biggest barrier is not knowing where to go hunting. By offering a pheasant hunt, the GRCA could make hunting more accessible to youth and new hunters.

The OFAH sees tremendous value in a pheasant hunt in the GRCA and we would like to work together to discuss the options moving forward. The OFAH has a large group of dedicated members who have shown their commitment in volunteering for conservation, hunting, and angling. We have many examples of volunteer run, controlled hunts that we would be happy to outline with the GRCA. Thank you for considering our comments, and we look forward to working with you to improve the GRCA's hunting program.

Yours in Conservation,



Lauren Tonelli
Resource Management Specialist

LT/jb

cc: OFAH Board of Directors
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
Matt DeMille, OFAH Director, Policy & Programs
Mark Ryckman, OFAH Manager, Policy
OFAH Policy & Programs Staff