



Municipality of Port Hope

56 Queen Street
Port Hope, ON
L1A 3Z9

REPORT TO: Parks, Recreation and Culture Committee

FROM: Julia Snoek, Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture

SUBJECT: Salmon Fishing Update

DATE: August 3, 2021

RECOMMENDATION:
Receive for information.

BACKGROUND:

The Ganaraska River is a premier fishery located in Port Hope. Information provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) indicates that it is the most fished tributary on the north shore of Lake Ontario and most fish species have naturalized because the river habitat is so healthy. The River draws anglers and spectators from across Ontario, Quebec and beyond.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in Municipal land closures along the River, affecting access for fishing in the spring 2020, fall 2020 and spring 2021. As Ontario continues with its Roadmap to Reopening, it is anticipated that anglers and visitors will return to Port Hope this fall for the annual salmon migration.

The salmon run draws high numbers of spectators and anglers and the popularity of the season has been of particular focus by the Municipality for several years as it has resulted in several issues. The main concerns include:

- Illegal and unethical fishing activities including snagging, netting, overfishing of crowded pools, fishing without a licence and over limits;
- Increased garbage;
- Fish carcasses being left on shore and other areas;
- Alcohol consumption;
- Ongoing enhanced Municipal requirements to manage increased need;
- COVID related impacts for residents and visitors.

In 2016, the Municipality introduced a joint planning and review effort with various government bodies to try and address the concerns and developed initiatives to improve

the issues along the Ganaraska River. The group consists of representatives from the MNRF, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA), Port Hope Police Service (PHPS) and Municipal staff.

Staff continues to deliver on these initiatives to address the salmon fishing issues. Areas of focus include:

- Dedicated and enhanced enforcement through cooperation with the PHPS and MNRF, including coordinated enforcement blitzes;
- Enforcement of the By-law prohibiting night fishing from August 15 to September 30 between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. from the Molson Street Bridge to the Robertson Street Bridge;
- Support initiatives to educate the public and anglers on regulations, ethics of fishing and the natural elements of fish species and migration;
- Coordinated communications and marketing advertising campaign for visitors and anglers;
- Enhanced signage along the Ganaraska River and enhanced website messaging;
- Sharing of OFAH promotional videos focusing on regulations and ethics;
- Sharing of GRCA "River Watch" brochure which provides specific information related to the Ontario Fishing Regulations.

As the 2021 salmon fishing season is the first anticipated return since the start of the COVID pandemic, staff and partners will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the initiatives in place. It is noted that there have been improvements since 2016 but desire to ensure that outcomes do not become stagnant. The following results will continue to be targeted:

- Improved ethical fishing behaviour, and reduction in fishing related charges with increased enforcement;
- Decline in garbage along the River;
- Concentrated use of the fish cleaning station thus reducing fish waste being placed along the banks and in the River;
- Stabilized fish odors (typically affected by weather temperature and precipitation and volumes of natural die-off);
- Increased tourism activities.

Enforcement continues to be a high priority in dealing with fishing related issues; it is evident that an enforcement presence along the River has positive impacts. Both the MNRF and PHPS are committed to continue with the programs currently in place. PHPS additional patrols are typically made up of overtime officers on weekends for the month of September. PHPS will also utilize their Special Constables for fish patrol, as well as officers working day and night shifts. Ministry enforcement blitz details will be released to staff early in September.

In addition to enforcement, educating the public and anglers on regulations, fishing ethics and the natural life cycle and purpose of the salmon continues to be an important initiative. Thanks to the efforts of our partners, additional information will be provided to the public. On September 11, 2021, the MNRF Outreach Trailer and educational aspects, including the presence of a Ministry Conservation Officer, OFAH staff member and Lake Ontario Management Unit (LOMU) staff member will be located at Rotary Park. This includes interactive and educational information regarding natural resource violations, invasive species, Atlantic Salmon restoration and opportunities to learn to fish will be topics for the day.

Targeted social and online messaging for visitors will be managed through our Municipal and Tourism sites. New messaging for anglers will be enhanced for implementation this year. The “Respect the River” and “COVID-19 protocols are in effect” message will be deployed, sharing of information from partners, as well as Municipal messaging. It is anticipated that with the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions in Ontario easing, the salmon fishing migration will continue to be a main tourism attraction for Port Hope. Foot traffic through the downtown core is monitored during the months of September and October and is typically high during this time. Staff will continue to monitor the COVID impacts in the Province as the fall approaches.

It is important to note that Fishing Regulations are the responsibility of the MNRF. The Municipality maintains that the provincial government needs to enforce the regulations as outlined and future changes to the regulations to further restrict bad behaviors may need to be considered. Concepts relating to regulatory changes have been presented to the Ministry as initial concepts and it is the desire of the Ministry to look at these impacts to the entire Zone rather than by individual tributaries. Staff will be attending the Zone Council meeting in the Fall 2021 to continue these discussions.

To maintain initiatives and positive impacts, Municipal resources continue to be required and include:

- Enhanced enforcement;
- Enhanced communications;
- Riverbank monitoring and clean up;
- Additional garbage receptacles and clean up along the River and in the downtown;
- Additional signage relating to COVID protocols;
- Fish cleaning station operations- including staff to clean, gather and dispose;
- Responding to ongoing public inquiries and complaints.

An evaluative follow up meeting will occur with the resource group before the end of the year. Staff will monitor the impact of the above requirements and initiatives, as well as outcomes of the Zone Council meeting and provide an update report to Council early in 2022. This report may include a few future considerations, such as:

- Petition for regulatory or access changes with the Ministry;
- Enhanced patrolling through new techniques;
- Additional Bylaw adjustments;
- Fish cleaning station operations.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Existing initiatives are covered through the regular operating budgets of Parks, Recreation and Culture, Marketing and Tourism and Communications. A more detailed resource implication section will be presented in the 2022 update report, including hours of enforcement, human resource impact estimates and other related costs.

CONCLUSION:

The annual salmon run draws high numbers of spectators and anglers to the Port Hope community. The enforcement program continues to be effective and has seen some decline in poor behaviors. The PHPS and MNRF have developed a strong working relationship and are committed to continue to address the challenges faced in Port Hope alongside of the OFAH and GRCA. Staff will continue to meet with our partners to ensure the programs implemented to date remain effective.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Snoek,
Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture