



Municipality of Port Hope

Staff Report

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Report Title: Fishing Update

Report to: Parks, Recreation & Culture Committee

Date of meeting: June 7, 2022

Report Author:

Julia Snoek, Director, Parks, Recreation and Culture

Department responsible:

Parks, Recreation & Culture

Report Number: PRC-09-22

Recommendation:

Receive for information.

Highlights:

- The Ganaraska River is one of the premier fisheries along the north shore of Lake Ontario. Up-to-date information provided by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) indicate that it is the most fished tributary on the north shore and draws anglers from across Ontario, Quebec, and beyond.
- The main species of fish found in the Ganaraska over the course of the year include Rainbow Trout (Steelhead), Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, Pink Salmon, Atlantic Salmon, and Brook Trout. Both the Salmon and Trout seasons bring anglers and visitors to the community.

Background:

In 2016, the Municipality introduced a joint planning and review effort with various government bodies to try and address concerns and develop initiatives to improve the issues relating to fishing along the Ganaraska River. The group consists of representatives from the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA), Port Hope Police Service (PHPS), and Municipal staff.

There are two main angling seasons in the Ganaraska River, and each are characterised by the species, the quantity, and the life cycle of fish. Rainbow trout are a challenging species to fish for several reasons, including the difficulty in getting close enough to cast a line in their proximity.

They are also less plentiful when the season opens (spring) as a substantial number would have already spawned upstream and made their way back to the lake. Salmon on the other hand are much more plentiful and have a much different behavior and can be approached by an angler. The season closes (fall) around the peak of their spawn.

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;
- High numbers of fish carcasses being left on shore and other areas;
- Ongoing enhanced municipal requirements to manage increased need.

Staff continues to deliver on 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 and GRCA promotional videos and brochures focusing on regulations and ethics.

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, and adequate placing of, garbage bins 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, precipitation, and volumes of natural die-off);
- Increased tourism activities and consideration for re-instating angler surveys.

Discussion:

Enforcement continues to be a high priority in dealing with fishing related issues. It is evident that enforcement presence along the river has positive impacts. Both the MNRF and PHPS are committed to continuing the programs currently in place. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the number of ministry officers patrolling the river, and blitzes are anticipated to return in 2022. PHPS additional patrols are typically made up of overtime officers on weekends throughout the month of September. PHPS will utilize Special Constables for river patrols, as well as officers working day and night shifts. Ministry enforcement blitz details will be released to staff early in September. By-law Enforcement staff are available as an additional resource to monitor the downtown and river corridor for infractions as part of a new initiative through Protective Services.

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. In years past, 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 took place in Rotary Park. For 2022, the focus will be adjusted to a walking educational outreach, with these resources at the river's edge. The goal with this is to reach anglers with the information, not just the general public, as in the past.

Targeted social and online messaging for visitors will be managed through our Municipal and Tourism websites. Enhanced messaging for anglers will be implemented this year, including the "Respect the River" campaign, sharing of information from partners, as well as targeted messaging in popular parking areas (requiring collaboration from local business owners).

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 that future changes to the regulations to further restrict unethical behaviors may need to be considered. Initial concepts relating to regulatory changes have been presented to the Ministry, and it is the desire of the Ministry to look at these impacts to the entire Zone rather than by individual tributaries. The Ministry is preparing a response to these considerations but has expressed a desire to act on communications and education broadly to continue to see improvements annually, and not focus on individual tributary changes.

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

- Enhanced enforcement;
- Enhanced communications;
- Riverbank monitoring and clean up;
- Additional garbage receptacles and clean up along the river and in the downtown area;
- Additional signage relating to respecting the river and proper use of this resource;

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- Fish Cleaning Station operations, including staff, to clean, gather, and dispose of waste and carcasses;
 - Responding to ongoing public inquiries and complaints.

Annually, following the Salmon Run, a resource group meeting occurs, to evaluate and plan for future years. Specific to the Ganaraska River, targets for 2022 include:

- Enhanced patrolling through new techniques:
 - PHPS drone (possible);
 - New education: adjusting educational trailer to focus on walking outreach to connect with anglers including and educational session at the fishway;
 - Enhanced patrolling (COVID-19 impact was a reduced number of hours for ministry blitzes);
 - Increased By-law Officer patrols.
- Enhanced communications:
 - Ministry statements on frequently asked questions and communicating biological information (life cycle, species identification, etc.),
 - Targeted communications at popular parking areas and various lawn sign communications the length of the river.
- Review Fish Cleaning Station operations.

An analysis of the spring trout opener has identified one potential change relating to camping permission along the Ganaraska River. Staff will make recommendation relating to this through the upcoming review of the Parks By-law.

Financial Considerations:

Ongoing review of financial impacts is included in regular operational budgets for PRC and Planning and Development (formerly Marketing and Tourism), the details of these impacts are listed below where additional considerations may be required.

There are minimal financial impacts to Parks, Recreation and Culture during the spring trout fishing season:

- Fishing for this species mostly results in anglers keeping their catch, and there is minimal cleaning or carcasses left behind;
- Spectator crowds are very manageable;
- For the opening weekend in 2022, staff collected additional twelve (12) bags of garbage between Highland Drive and Optimus Park (estimated \$200 dumping fee);
- Portable toilets rental cost, \$350.

The more significant financial and resource impacts to the Municipality take place during the salmon fishing season, including (calculated based on a normal peak season):

- Daily staff hours to clean the Fish Cleaning Station, \$4,500;
- Daily staff hours to transport, remove, and cover fish waste, \$4,200;
- Daily staff hours of garbage clean up along the river and pushing carcasses into the water, \$3,000;
- Portable toilet rental cost, \$1,440;

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- Lift gate purchase for truck and ongoing maintenance, \$6,000;
 - Additional cleaning supplies, \$300;
 - Fishing Line disposal units, \$500;
 - Increased waste removal and dumping fees for garbage in parks and trails, \$750;
 - Fuel to transport waste, \$1,000;
 - Marketing and Tourism advertisement purchases, \$1200.

In addition to the above estimated financial costs, additional resourced such as staff time in responding to issues, development of strategies, graphic design and website design are above the noted impacts and take substantial time and effort.

It is also important to note the assistance of the community in identifying areas of concerns and managing community organized clean up along the river during the fishing seasons.

In 2021, staff removed a total of 150 barrels of fish carcass (during peak run - typically August and September). Currently, the Municipality has an agreement with a local farmer who utilizes the fish carcass at their farm as fertilizer. If this arrangement were to change, costs to the Municipality are estimated to be more than \$4,500 in dumping fees. Operations at the fish cleaning station have in the past used a garburator, which has not been in functioning condition for a number of years. The current cost to replace this amenity is approximately \$15,000 and would require replacement biannually due to wear and tear based on the type of usage it sees (example full carcasses) and staff are currently managing without.

PHPS have included an additional \$7,000 in their annual budget since 2016 to provide dedicated police presence and patrols along the river during the month of September. Officers have been trained by the MNRF on the Fisheries Act and the Ontario Fishing Regulations and are enforcing with a zero-tolerance approach. Utilizing a municipal police force to enforce fishing regulations is not a typical approach taken with other communities and considered unique.

Communication and Public Engagement:

Annually a communications plan is established to manage and encourage positive community interactions and behaviour in the community. This is completed through the Communications, Marketing and Parks, Recreation and Culture departments.

Conclusion:

Fishing in Port Hope continues to be a focus of staff and our partners. There are no easy solutions to curb the illegal behavior that occurs in the fall other than an effective enforcement campaign. Staff will continue to engage with our partners to address issues and work towards further educational opportunities. Substantial municipal resources are in place to manage the situations as best possible.

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.

Attachments:

None.