

CORMORANTS AT TOMMY THOMPSON PARK

WORKPLAN Updated February 25, 2008

BACKGROUND

Double-crested Cormorants represent one of several species of waterbirds that nest in colonies at Tommy Thompson Park, also known as the Leslie Street Spit. Cormorant populations in the Great Lakes declined dramatically in the 1960 and 70s, primarily because of toxic contaminants, such as DDT, which caused thinning of eggshells and other health problems, leading to reproductive failure. Due to new regulations, increased enforcement and public awareness, toxic contaminants were significantly reduced by the 1980s, and cormorant populations have made a dramatic and successful recovery.

The colonies of cormorants and other waterbirds, including Black-crowned Night-Herons, Ring-billed Gulls and Common Terns, are a significant feature of TTP and one of the reasons it is celebrated as an Environmentally Significant Area and an Important Bird Area (IBA) of global significance. However, the large number of cormorants at TTP (7,241 nests in 2007 representing approximately 30,000 birds) has resulted in the loss of approximately 25 per cent of the tree cover at TTP, and there are concerns about the effects on the many other species of plants and animals that live there or stop-over to rest and feed during migration.

TRCA is seeking input on possible management measures to limit further spread of the cormorant population at TTP; however these measures do not include a lethal cull. The intent is to balance the continued existence of a healthy, thriving cormorant colony with the maintenance of other values of Tommy Thompson Park.

The 1992 Master Plan and Environmental Assessment for TTP provides direction for the development of the park. The goals and objectives include conserving and managing natural resources and environmentally significant areas, as well as maintaining and improving wildlife habitats. The document provides a framework for the management of colonial waterbirds and the preservation of significant species such as the Black-crowned Night-Heron.

The purpose of this workplan is to outline an approach to addressing the issues of concern regarding Double-crested Cormorants at Tommy Thompson Park.

OBJECTIVES

The proposed objectives of this process are to:

1. Investigate the need for management of cormorant populations at TTP
2. Evaluate management options (including "do nothing"), based on the best available scientific information
3. If required, identify a proposed management approach
4. Involve key stakeholders through an advisory group
5. Consult with other stakeholders and the public using an open and inclusive process
6. Ensure provision of accurate and balanced information to the public, media and policy makers

PROCESS

Advisory group

TRCA will establish an Advisory Group with a mandate to:

- Provide input and advice
- Ensure that all perspectives are considered
- Provide linkages with other stakeholders

The Advisory Group will:

- Identify and discuss the values and interests associated with Tommy Thompson Park in order to understand the range of views held by different stakeholders
- Discuss existing conditions and concerns
- Review a short list of management options (including “do nothing”)
- Help TRCA staff to evaluate the management options
- Participate in the public meeting
- Advise TRCA on a recommended management plan, if appropriate
- If management actions are recommended, provide advice on implementation

Most of the proposed members of the Advisory Group have considerable experience with various aspects of research, management and protection of colonial waterbirds and associated issues. They will bring a range of expertise, knowledge and perspectives to the process. The committee will develop consensus where possible. Any dissenting views will also be recorded.

Liaison with stakeholders will continue during any implementation to ensure that the agreed-upon approach is implemented and the desired results are achieved.

Advisory group membership:

TRCA

Restoration Services

Federal/Provincial

Canadian Wildlife Service
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
Toronto Port Authority
Transport Canada

City of Toronto

Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Public Health

Academia

University of Toronto
York University

Interest Groups

Aquatic Park Sailing Club
Cormorant Defenders International:
Animal Alliance of Canada
Zoocheck Canada Inc.
Canadians for Snow Geese
The Animal Protection Institute
Earthroots
Friends of the Spit
Local Enhancement and Appreciation of
Forests (LEAF)
Ontario Nature
Ontario Society for the Prevention of
Cruelty to Animals
Outer Harbour Sailing Federation
Toronto Island Residents
Toronto Ornithological Club

Liaison with other stakeholders

It is proposed to include all the key stakeholders on the Advisory Group. However, if necessary, individual/small group meetings will be held with other stakeholders prior to the public meeting to ensure that all participants have sound information and a shared understanding of the issues and the process.

It may also be necessary to hold follow-up meetings with specific stakeholders following the public meeting, to assist in formulating a management plan.

Public meeting

A public meeting will be held to present existing conditions and concerns and propose alternative management approaches. Facilitated round-table discussions will provide an opportunity for all participants to provide input on values, issues and management options. Comment sheets will also be used to collect individual and group input. Discussion groups will report back to each other in a plenary forum. A facilitated plenary discussion will strive to reach consensus on a management approach. Any dissenting viewpoints will be acknowledged and addressed.

A backgrounder is available to participants on the TRCA website to facilitate an informed and productive discussion. It includes:

- Background on ecology and management of colonial waterbirds in the Great Lakes
- Results of TTP monitoring program on Double-crested Cormorants
- Annotated bibliography of relevant research

Communications

A communications team has been established including TRCA representatives, the facilitator (Suzanne Barrett), representatives from City of Toronto Parks, Recreation and Forestry, Office of the Mayor, and Councillor Fletcher.

Report

A public report will be prepared and posted on the TRCA website. It will describe the results of the process and identify any actions that will be taken to manage cormorant populations on TTP.

Timeline

Advisory Group Meeting #1	January 24, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify values and interests associated with TTP • Discuss existing conditions and concerns • Review proposed list of management options (including "do nothing")
Advisory Group Meeting #2	February 19, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate management options • Discuss alternative management approaches
Public Meeting	April 3, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present existing conditions, concerns and alternative management approaches • Provide feedback
Advisory Group Meeting #3	April 23, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review public response • Formulate management plan
TRCA Watershed Management Board	May 23, 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present report for Authority action
Advisory Group Meeting #4	tbd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review implementation workplan