DEER ISSUE

Town of Yarmouth to recommend controlled cull

Council told other options for deer management have been studied but none are doable

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In the Town of Yarmouth deer are commonplace on sidewalks and in the streets.
TINA COMEAU PHOTOS

While it's widely agreed that the Town of Yarmouth has a problem with a seemingly ever-growing deer population, agreement on what to do about it is not unanimous.

After a year and a half of study and work, the town's deer management committee is recommending that Yarmouth Town Council submit a management plan to the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables (DNRR) that would include a controlled cull.

The motion was approved at council's Nov. 14 meeting but it did not pass unanimously. Councillors Kelly Bishara-Lacroix and Derek Lesser voted against it.

"I'm struggling with all of it. I know that there's a deer issue. I have a hard time thinking the only solution can be a cull," said Lesser, who said he's heard from residents who are not in favour of a cull.

"I don't know what the solution is. I don't see the cull working. I have an uncle that lives in Truro and the numbers haven't gone down, and I know maybe the numbers haven't gone up," he said in regards to organized, controlled culls that have taken place there. "I can't see myself supporting a cull at this point knowing that there may be something else out there. Maybe there isn't at this point."

Bishara-Lacroix had a lot to say on the issue.

"I agree, as an animal lover, there are too many deer in town. What I don't agree with is a violent reaction to try and depopulate," she said, feeling there must be a solution that could appease everyone.

"This is just my own personal opinion. If we cull we upset a lot of people. If you don't cull, but reduce the population, no one is upset, if that's possible," she said.

She said it's important that the town is guided by scientific data when it comes to determining measures with the deer population. She said one thing scientific data points to is that culls don't work. It has to be a hunt, she said, saying it can't be a one-time thing.

"It would have to happen, based on scientific studies, every year, for a period of many years," she said.

Coun. Gil Dares, who has served as chair of the town's deer management committee, said the intention is that a controlled cull would be a multi-year occurrence. He said the town cannot do anything without DNRR approval.

"The plan we submit would be a multi-year plan. We'd have to be repeating the data year after year in order to justify the continuation," he said. "It's not going to be a one-shot deal. It is going to be something that we'll probably have to do, ongoing for as many years as it takes."

Dares said the committee has explored and studied all options but presently no alternative option is doable.

"Trap, neuter, release is not practical. Trapping and relocating is not permissible," he said, noting such measures would create a lot of stress on the deer that they likely wouldn't survive anyway. He said there is talk about contraceptives, but none currently exist.



Photos taken on Elm Street in Yarmouth in the spring of many deer outside a property. When a vehicle attempted minutes later to pull into the driveway, the deer would not move out of the way.

Coun. Wade Cleveland expanded on the contraceptive issue.

"My dream, ultimately, was to get a research project going because that contraceptive is only available now, legally, in the States. In Canada, you can use it for research purposes," he said, saying he approached various universities trying to drum up interest for such a research project but there were no takers.

Cleveland also identified himself as an animal lover. But while he loves seeing deer the problem is they're everywhere.

"Yearly we're getting huge increases in the amount, to the point where this year was the only year that I can honestly say I felt it was unsafe because there are deer in the roads all the time," he said.

Dares mentioned he recently had to stop on Chestnut Street to let 13 deer cross the street in front of him. He said an organized, controlled cull would be done as humanely as possible, and that deer carcasses would not go to waste.

The meat will be donated to the food bank for distribution, and an individual who makes drums for First Nations would take as many deer hides as can be provided.

Yarmouth Mayor Pam Mood supports a cull. Deer are destroying parts of people's properties and she said no one wants to see a loss of human life because there are so many deer on the streets.

She said donating the meat to help feed others in the community is a good thing.

"They're beautiful animals and nobody likes to hurt them. But we seem to be okay with hunting season and fishing and all these things that feed people," she said.

"I don't think it's going to solve it completely, but you're saying part of the solving is the cull, not the whole piece," she said to Dares, who confirmed this.

"Quite honestly … there may be in the future another mitigation strategy to employ along with an organized cull," he said.

It was noted around the table that a cull in Truro has not decreased the deer population there, but on the flip side, the population hasn't grown either.

Coun. Bishara-Lacroix noted a problem in the province is a bounty that was placed on coyotes, which are the only predators of deer.

She repeated research she's done doesn't include data showing a cull works.

"My fear would be that we pay a lot of money to engage a cull that ultimately won't work – or highly possible that it won't work," she said. "So we pay a lot of money. Upset a lot of people town people."

But based on the committee's work, Dares questions how else the population can be managed.

Meanwhile, said Dares, deer population management is a slow process.

"I'm an animal lover as well. This is not something that we have taken lightly," he said about the committee's extensive work.

"But it is, I believe, the most practical and the most sensible and the most affordable method of moving forward with this," he said, noting when Truro's mayor first wrote to DNRR about that town's urban deer problem, to the day the town was first approved to have an organized cull, seven years had passed.

"We're hoping because our numbers are high we won't be at it for seven years," Dares said. "We've been at it for a year and a half now. We wanted to make sure that we did due diligence in looking at every single possibility that there is out there."

LOBSTER SEASON

Will lobster tariffs be on the menu?

ANDREW RANKIN
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As thousands of fishers are seeing Canada's most lucrative lobster fishery off Nova Scotia's southwest coast get underway, there's a new worry this year: the prospect of tariffs being imposed by the United States.

Nova Scotia exported 51,000 tonnes of lobster valued at more than $1 billion last year. The U.S. is the province's biggest market, with about 60 per cent of exported lobster going there each year.

The stakes are high if U.S. president-elect Donald Trump makes good on his promise to impose duties of between 10 per cent and 20 per cent on all imported goods. Such a tariff could cost the Canadian economy about $30 billion per year in total, according to a Canadian Chamber of Commerce report in October.

With Trump's inauguration still a couple of months away — he officially takes office on Jan. 20 — fishers are trying to take the threat in stride.

"People are concerned, but until it happens, we'll just carry on," says Geoff Irvine, executive director of the Lobster Council of Canada. "There's not a lot we can do to prepare. Speculating on what it could mean doesn't really get us anywhere."

Besides being the country's most lucrative lobster fishery area, combined, LFA 33 and 34 is also the largest. The two areas are the country's biggest producers, accounting for about a third of the $1.5-billion worth of lobsters caught in Canada each year. Nearly 1,700 boats and more than 5,000 people fish these waters.

The season, which runs until late May, will be well underway by the time Trump takes office. There's reason to believe the industry will be spared by the new U.S. administration says David Campbell, New Brunswick's former chief economist.



Lobster fishermen load traps aboard a boat at the Falls Point Wharf in Woods Harbour in preparation for the upcoming commercial lobster season in southwestern Nova Scotia.
KATHY JOHNSON

He says Trump's tariff threats are about protecting and increasing investment in the U.S., especially in manufacturing. You can't manufacture more lobsters, Campbell says. It's a limited resource and the U.S. only produces a third of the lobsters caught in Canada.

"They're not going to increase lobster production in the U.S., so if they cut off Nova Scotia and Canada, it's just going to be more expensive to consume lobster in the United States," he says. "My gut is that they're not going to put a tariff on something that they can't produce in the U.S. But I wouldn't bet on this because (Trump) is so unpredictable."

And so it's a waiting game.

Irvine says Canada and the U.S. have a good trading relationship. Canada buys half of Maine's lobsters in any given year so the prospect of a trade war doesn't help anybody.

For now, he says fishers have more immediate concerns: "What's the catch going to be like? What's the price of lobster going to be like? What's the weather going to be like?"

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