



Town of Newmarket
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Catch and Release Fishing in Fairy Lake Pilot Program Information Report

Report Number: 2024-01

Department(s): Parks & Facility Services

Author(s): Kristi Carlen, Director Parks and Facility Services

Date: January 22, 2024

In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any member of Council may make a request to the Town Clerk that this Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole agenda for discussion.

Purpose

The Aurora Bassmasters (ABM) approached the Town regarding offering a 'Catch and Release' fishing program at Fairy Lake to promote fishing to younger generations while offering a new outdoor activity for the whole family to enjoy. The ABM have been working closely with Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) on the viability of the program at Fairy Lake. ABM has proposed fundraising, education and monitoring guidance to support a Pilot Program for the 2024 season. This report will outline the criteria for the pilot program.

Background

On September 18, 2023, Council approved the following motion:

1. That Council endorse, in principle, a catch and release pilot project in partnership with Aurora Bassmasters at Fairy Lake; and,
2. That subject to completing research and securing all necessary approvals, Council direct staff to re-introduce fishing as a catch and release program at Fairy Lake as a pilot project, and to be evaluated after one year; and,
3. That subject to completing research and securing all necessary approvals, Council direct staff to construct and install one fishing dock with appropriate signage and safety measures subject to the cost of the docks being covered through successful fundraising by Aurora Bassmasters and other partners.

This report serves as an update to Council and the public on the Pilot Program.

Fairy Lake is an 1800's man-made waterbody known as the Wesley Brooks Conservation Area on the East Holland River in Newmarket. Originally the location of a mill and a dam, the area is now a popular park known for its greenspace, trails, and proximity to downtown. Fairy Lake is open year-round providing access to several amenities which include covered pavilions, washrooms, an amphitheatre and playground. Throughout the year, Fairy Lake hosts several events including the Annual Fairy Lake Fish Out during the provincial family fishing week, which allows people to fish without a fishing licence across Ontario.

The Town has been approached by the Aurora Bassmasters (ABM), a not-for-profit organization, regarding a regular fish stocking program for Fairy Lake. There has been a noticed decline in the fish population over the years to the point where currently there is only a small population of carp and sucker species. A catch and release only zone would be established along with the installation of a dock that the ABM will fundraise for. The ABM have been working closely with the Lake Simcoe and Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) to ensure success of the program.

There will be Town staff time associated with the project delivery. This will include some staffing impacts in Parks as part of the ongoing maintenance – this is reflected within the budget section of this report.

Discussion

Criteria for Pilot Program

Initiating such a program requires careful planning and considerations. The Town has collaborated with various partners to ensure this activity can be introduced with both sustainability and safety prioritized. The following actions will need to occur in order to move forward.

Partnership with Aurora Bassmasters

The ABM will partner with the Town to offer a 'Catch and Release' Pilot Program at Fairy Lake. The ABM will liaise with the MNRF and LSRCA regarding the implementation of a 'Catch and Release' program to ensure regulatory compliance with the transporting and stocking of the fish in Fairy Lake, the design and fundraising for an accessible dock to be installed at the site along with guidance and recommendations on educational programming and monitoring of the program.

Catch and Release Program

The ABM have noticed a steady decrease in younger people fishing and want to build a program to educate and engage youth while providing a new recreational past time for individuals and families to enjoy. 'With preparation, information and experience, catch and release fishing can help maintain sustainable fish populations' (Government of Ontario, *Catch and release guidelines*, [https://www.ontario.ca/page/fishing-limits-size-](https://www.ontario.ca/page/fishing-limits-size)

Catch and Release Fishing in Fairy Lake Pilot Program

[restrictions-and-catch-and-release](#)) ensuring the ongoing success of the program. This will be further supported through educational initiatives which would notify anglers about the types of fish species, sustainable fishing practices and conservation.

The program will launch in late spring 2024 and will run with ongoing review through measuring of key performance indicators that include fish population, fish re-stocking, and number of people engaging in the activity. Staff will report back to Council once the Pilot is completed.

Fishing Licences and Enforcement

By way of introduction to fishing licences and regulations the annual summary document produced by MNRF is a good resource. The most recent copy can be accessed here: [2024 Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary](#)

The issuing of fishing licences falls under the jurisdiction of the MNRF. More information regarding fishing licence requirements is available by visiting the Ontario Government website: [Fishing licence \(Canadian residents\) | ontario.ca](#).

Enforcement of all fishing regulations also fall under the jurisdiction of MNRF and more information regarding enforcement is available from the following link: [Conservation Officer TIPS LINE 1-877-TIPS-MNR | Ontario Conservation Officers Association \(ocoa.ca\)](#):

The Town will refer all complaints of unauthorized fishing practices or individuals who are fishing without a licence to MNRF. Any such complaints will be directed through the Town's Customer Service Department to effectively track the number of inquiries and complaints.

Water Quality Review

A series of questions were asked of the LSCRA regarding water quality at Fairy Lake and their responses are included in Appendix A attached. In discussion with the LSRCA, the opportunity to transfer suitable fish to Fairy Lake or to stock the lake is a viable option to create fishing opportunities for families and individuals to enjoy.

Fish stocking and designated fishing zones

The ABM will be responsible for stocking fish species into Fairy Lake through guidance from the MNRF. Careful consideration will be required to ensure only species will be introduced that the waterbody will support. Should the Pilot Program be a success, the ABM will assist with a regular ongoing stocking program for the lake.

The Town will designate specific area(s) around the lake where "Catch and Release" will be permitted. These areas will be clearly marked to guide users and protect sensitive habitats and maintain the shoreline plants that mitigate geese populations in the park.

For the Pilot Program, one accessible platform (dock) preferably with helical piles will be designed and installed per Town specifications and paid for in partnership with the ABM. The exact location will be determined through collaboration with the LSRCA and the ABM. A new path will be installed from the trail to the platform to ensure the platform is accessible for all users. The platform will be closed in the winter months as it will not be maintained.

At the conclusion of the Fairy Lake Catch and Release Fishing Pilot Program, staff will report back to Council with findings and recommendations regarding the program.

Public Awareness and Educations

The Town, in collaboration with the ABM, will launch an awareness campaign to inform the community about the benefits of catch and release fishing while providing ongoing education, events (i.e. Urban Fishing Festival) and engagement opportunities.

Appropriate signage will be posted throughout the site in key locations along with educational material provided, potentially via the Town's website, social channels, and other forms of communication such as the Fishbrain APP (as appropriate) that will notify residents where they can find shore access, the fishing platform, details on local species of fish, fish handling, safety and more.

Municipal Comparators that provide urban fishing

The cities of Mississauga and London both successfully offer fishing in urban settings in collaboration with the MNRF. The majority of the municipalities that were researched do not have specific regulations for permitting fishing as this is provincial jurisdiction. Some municipalities offer annual fishing derbies that are solely managed by the municipality such as the Annual Huck Finn fishing event in The Township of Uxbridge.

Safety Measures

Welcoming a new activity to the area will come with some additional risks and safety measures related to water safety. The Town will develop an educational campaign to highlight the risks and the steps that can be taken to address these concerns, along with additional signage in key locations throughout the park. Staff will also review the activity with our insurer to seek input on all proposed safety measures.

The Town will work with LSRCA on habitat preservation with the goal of safeguarding the lakes ecosystem and protecting the environment. The Town will also implement signage and additional waste receptacles to deter littering or any other activities that may harm the lake's ecosystem.

Conclusion

A collaborative effort involving the ABM, local community groups and regulatory bodies will be beneficial in delivering the Pilot Program. Staff are satisfied that introducing a Catch and Release Fishing Pilot Program in Fairy Lake is a viable option. By following

the criteria noted above, while identifying and addressing potential risks, the program can contribute to sustainable recreational fishing in the lake, while preserving the ecological balance of the local environment.

Business Plan and Strategic Plan Linkages

This project represents strong linkages with Council Priorities including the creation of a truly extraordinary place by creating new outdoor experiences for the community while preserving our environmental assets.

Consultation

The following departments have provided input:

Parks and Facility Services

Legislative Services

Corporate Communications

Customer Service

Human Resource Considerations

There will be staff time associated with the project delivery. Additionally, there will be minor staffing impacts in Parks as part of the ongoing maintenance – this is reflected within the budget section.

Budget Impact

Initial costs for the dock will be supported by fundraising through the Aurora Bassmaster's. The Town will fund the initial costs for signage, infrastructure and promotional material at an approximate cost of \$5,000.

Ongoing operating and maintenance costs will be the responsibility of the Town. It is estimated that the annual operating expenses will be between \$3,000 and \$7,000.

Attachments

Appendix A – Memo from LSRCA

Approval

Jeff Payne, Commissioner Community Services

Contact

Kristi Carlen
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Date:	November 22, 2023
	Jeff Payne, Commissioner -Community Services, Town of Newmarket
From:	Rob Baldwin, CAO
Subject:	Opportunities for Fishing – Fairy Lake

Jeff, please find below some thoughts on fishing opportunities in Fairy Lake for the community.

Background

Fairy Lake is on-line urban reservoir created by the existing dam at the downstream end. The reservoir has existed for multiple decades with a series of different dams over that timeframe. The dam and reservoir do not provide any flood control / relief or erosion control functions. It is in essence a reservoir / lake for aesthetic and community aspects with the park surrounding the lake. The property has been under LSRCA ownership for decades and is currently managed by the Town.

Water Quality / Lake Quality and Fish Population

The water and lake quality of Fairy Lake as you can imagine is typical of an urban reservoir that captures urban and stormwater runoff from the upstream drainage areas in Newmarket, Aurora, and beyond. In general, water quality is impacted from sediments, chlorides, nutrients, and other elements typically found in urban drainage. The water temperatures in summer are generally high as there is little groundwater baseflow / discharge in this section of the East Holland River. The lake is shallow with slow moving water which also increases water temperature.

The water quality is suitable for a limited fishery, but long-term viability of a self-sustaining fishery is limited due to the dynamic nature of a highly urbanized reservoir / lake. The opportunity to transfer fish to Fairy Lake or to stock the lake is a viable option to create a fishery that kids and families could enjoy. There is an existing carp population within the lake and East Holland that does provide some minor angling

opportunities. Annual spring fish transfers to provide fish for the recreational summer season is an option and would rely on the assistance of the local fishing club/s who have conducted programs in the past and are interested to support this type of activity. Fish could be collected and transferred from existing ponds / stormwater ponds (where fish should not be but exist) to Fairy Lake by club members. This activity is coordinated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and their involvement has occurred in the past. Typically, the local fishing club obtains permission / permit to conduct a transfer and obtains permission from the Town and/or LSRCA to allow for the transfer to occur at Fairy Lake. This is best done in the spring and is reliant on the fishing club.

Fishing Opportunities

There are limited fishing opportunities within the Town with the opportunities principally limited to Fairy Lake and the East Holland River. The LSRCA supports providing any opportunity for fishing access and getting kids and families outdoors. We believe the best approach is to provide fishing access platforms which allow direct access to the lake, can accommodate AODA requirements to ensure full participation, and can make for easier programming or support of initiatives that fishing and/or service clubs have undertaken in the past.

Having dedicated fishing platforms also allows to keep the shoreline of the lake as naturalized as possible with high plants / shrubs which is critical to managing goose populations and providing natural cover to other flora and fauna. Geese management is challenging but this approach will greatly assist. The LSRCA would gladly support any request for the establishment of fishing platforms for public access.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Baldwin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rob Baldwin
Chief Administrative Officer