

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Thames River Wetland Conservation Agreement

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Director of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

1. That By-law 6629-2024, being a by-law to authorize staff to enter into a 20 year agreement with Ducks Unlimited Canada to maintain the naturalized property known as the Thames River Wetland, be presented to Council for enactment.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Naturalization work has been completed at the Thames River Wetland, which commenced 11 years ago and has been carried out in various project phases. In total, Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has contributed \$45,000 to the project to date and an additional \$10,000 is anticipated to be contributed for this final phase (Phase 5).
- Naturalization work included creation of functional wetlands to provide natural flood control and promote biodiversity.
- The final stage of work includes the execution of a 20 year agreement with DUC to ensure the County commits to ongoing stewardship of the property in order to achieve long term conservation goals.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Upon County Council adoption of the proposed by-law, County staff will execute the agreement documents and continue with any outstanding naturalization work at the site.

Financial Impact

To date, DUC has contributed \$45,000 for the previous four phases of naturalization work at the Thames River Wetland. In addition, approximately \$31,600 has been spent by the County to bring Phase 5 of the project to completion, including \$10,000 and \$21,600 of expenditures approved through the 2023 and 2024 Budgets respectively.

In accordance with the DUC agreement, the County will now be reimbursed for 50% of the project costs up to a maximum of \$10,000. Accordingly, the 2024 budget forecast will be updated to include this reimbursement revenue of \$10,000 from DUC. The County assumes responsibility for all future management costs associated with the project. Future maintenance costs will be minimal and are fully expected to be covered within the historical funding allocations for this property.


Communications

This project has no mandatory reporting requirements, but staff will release a social media post about the project completion for public awareness.

2023-2026 STRATEGIC PLAN

Oxford County Council approved the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan on September 13, 2023. The Plan outlines 39 goals across three strategic pillars that advance Council's vision of "Working together for a healthy, vibrant, and sustainable future." These pillars are: (1) Promoting community vitality, (2) Enhancing environmental sustainability, and (3) Fostering progressive government.

The recommendation in this report supports the following Strategic Plan pillars and goals:

		
Promoting community vitality	Enhancing environmental sustainability	Fostering progressive government
	Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment	

See: Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan

DISCUSSION

Background

Since 2013, naturalization work has been ongoing in various phases at the Thames River Wetland (located along Beachville Road west of Woodstock) (see report [PW 2013-20](#)). Significant naturalization work has occurred in five phases beginning in 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019, and finally 2023 (Phase 5) as shown in Attachment 1.

The previous four phases of this project have been jointly funded by Oxford County, DUC, Stewardship Oxford, Cowan Foundation, Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund, Salamander Foundation, Woodstock Field Naturalist Club, ECO Action Fund, UTRCA, Oxford County Trails Council, 50 Million Tree Fund, Hydro One, Carmeuse, and numerous private donations.

Through the completion of this project, the wetland restoration work has created a dynamic landscape that includes flood plains, flood retention areas that hold water longer, higher elevation areas that dry out quicker, and pockets of treed areas. This all comes together to promote a well functioning wetland that acts as a natural flood control system, while offering a unique environment for residents to enjoy the trails on the property.

Comments

Phase 5 of the Thames River Wetland naturalization project began in late 2023 and wrapped up in early 2024. This work was executed by Oxford County and DUC, with DUC facilitating and overseeing the majority of the site work. During an earlier phase of the project, the County had entered into a funding agreement with DUC in 2016 (see report PW 2016-30). However due to updated funding structures, DUC now requires a longer term commitment of 15 years or longer to ensure long term viability of the development as an assurance the that landowner will not alter or develop the property. The funding for the final phase of the project is conditional on approval of the agreement.

This specific agreement is for 20 years to ensure the County manages the natural property in a well maintained manner to achieve long term success. After 20 years, the agreement automatically renews on a yearly basis unless the County provides written notice to terminate. Maintaining the property on a long term basis aligns with the County's climate change mitigation goals as well as preserving the natural environment. Therefore, staff believe that this area will see little disturbance in the future.

The majority of the site has been rehabilitated into a well functioning wetland through the five phases of work completed to date. There is still some additional work that could be done in the future to help further promote aquatic plant life to fully realize the full potential of biodiversity in the area, and this will be looked at through future budget cycles.

CONCLUSIONS

With the completion of the project now achieved, the County, as land owner, has been requested to enter into a management agreement with DUC in order to receive the identified project funding, and to commit to maintaining the lands to sustain long term success of the project.

SIGNATURES

Report author:

Original signed by

Travis Lockhart
Woodlands Conservation Municipal Law Enforcement Officer

Departmental approval:

Original signed by

David Simpson, P.Eng., PMP
Director of Public Works

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 - Thames River Wetland Restoration Areas by Phase