

REPORT TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Curries Road Wetland Conservation Agreement

To: Warden and Members of County Council

From: Acting Director of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

1. That By-law 6669-2024, being a by-law to authorize the Chief Administrative Officer and Director of Public Works to execute an agreement with Ducks Unlimited Canada to maintain the naturalized property known as the Curries Road Wetland, for a 20-year period, be presented to Council for enactment.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Naturalization work has been completed at the Curries Road Wetland, part of the greater Hodge's Pond Wetland Complex, which commenced 8 years ago and has been carried out in various project phases.
- Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has committed to a contribution of \$9,350, in addition to a contribution of \$5,000 from the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program and approximately \$2,700 in private donations related to local DUC projects, for a total of \$17,050 in partner contributions.
- Naturalization work included creation of 1.02 acre wetland to provide natural flood control and promote biodiversity.
- The final stage of work includes the execution of a 20-year agreement with DUC to confirm the County's commitment to ongoing stewardship of the property in order to achieve long term land conservation.

IMPLEMENTATION POINTS

Upon County Council adoption of the proposed by-law, staff will execute the agreement documents.

Financial Impact

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. The total project cost for the Curries Road Wetland amounts to \$18,700, and with respect to the DUC agreement, reimbursement back to the County will total \$9,350. In addition to the DUC contribution, a contribution of \$5,000 from the ALUS program (as facilitated by the DUC representative executing the project) and \$2,700 from private donations related to local DUC projects were received. These various funding streams provide significant leverage of the County's net contribution of \$1,650.

This project was not originally budgeted for but was seen as an opportunity to leverage the available funding to keep the County's cost to a minimum, which can be absorbed in the 2024 budget for Woodlands Management. Accordingly, the 2024 budget forecast includes an update regarding this reimbursement revenue of \$17,050 from the project partners.

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. Staff will work with Communications to release a social media post about the project completion for public awareness, and promotion of the partnerships with DUC and ALUS.

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
	<p>Goal 2.1 – Climate change mitigation and adaptation</p> <p>Goal 2.2 – Preserve and enhance our natural environment</p>	

See: [Oxford County 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#)

DISCUSSION

Background

Since 2016, naturalization work has been ongoing in various phases around the Hodge’s Pond Wetland Complex, located between Old Stage Road and Curries Road, south of Woodstock. Beginning with the removal of the old Cedar Creek dam structure, the previous phases have been jointly funded by Oxford County, DUC, Stewardship Oxford, Cowan Foundation, Woodstock Field Naturalist Club, ECO Action Fund, UTRCA, Oxford County Trails Council, 50 Million Tree Fund, the Southwestern Ontario Deer Management Association and numerous private donations.

Through the completion of this work, the wetland restoration 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 and improves the quality of the water in the Cedar Creek watershed.

Comments

In 2024, DUC identified an opportunity to further improve the south end of the Hodge’s Pond Wetland Complex by restoring approximately 1.02 acres of wetland off Curries Road, adjacent to Cedar Creek. The work would further complement the previous naturalization work that has been completed, by expanding water retention abilities on the property. The wetland has been constructed in a manner to receive and store local runoff, increase water quality, and provide new habitat for waterfowl, and wildlife.

Oxford County and DUC executed this work, with DUC facilitating and overseeing much of the site work. Due to updated funding structures, DUC now requires a longer term commitment of 20 years to ensure long term viability of the development as an assurance that the landowner will not alter or develop the property.

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, achieving the long-term goal of sustained conservation.

A significant portion of the greater Hodge's Pond property has been rehabilitated into a well functioning wetland through multiple phases of work since the removal of the dam interrupting Cedar Creek. 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 landowner, has been requested to enter into a management agreement with DUC in order to receive the identified project funding. Staff recommend entering into this agreement to receive the funding and to demonstrate commitment 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

Melissa Abercrombie, P.Eng., PMP
Acting Director of Public Works

Approved for submission:

Original signed by

Benjamin R. Addley
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – Curries Wetland Location