

Amendment Management Strategy for Double-crested Cormorants at Presqu'ile Provincial Park

December 29, 2006

1. Background

A management strategy was approved in 2002 to guide the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) in a four year program to manage double-crested cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) (hereafter referred to as cormorants) in Presqu'ile Provincial Park. The strategy was implemented 2003-06, with amendments approved in 2003 and 2004 to improve its effectiveness. A copy of the approved 2004 amended strategy can be obtained on the Ontario Parks website via: http://www.ontarioparks.com/english/pres_planning.html

The goal and objectives of the strategy are as follows:

The goal of cormorant management operations at Presqu'ile Provincial Park is:

- to protect representative woodland flora and fauna of High Bluff Island, Presqu'ile Provincial Park, while retaining maximum diversity of nesting colonial waterbird species.

There are four objectives associated with the goal:

- to limit cormorant use of trees for nesting on High Bluff Island,
- to reduce cormorant use of trees for roosting on High Bluff Island,
- to reduce recruitment from ground nesting cormorants on Gull and High Bluff Islands, and
- to minimize impacts of cormorant management on other colonial bird species nesting on Gull and High Bluff Islands.

Based on annual evaluations to date, the strategy has had some success in meeting the first two strategy objectives (limiting nesting in trees and limiting roosting in trees) and greater success in meeting the last two objectives (reducing recruitment from ground nests, minimizing impacts on non-target colonial waterbird species nesting on High Bluff Island). It is clear that the number of cormorants at Presqu'ile has been reduced to levels similar to those observed in the early to mid 1990s.

The approved strategy was scheduled to end in December 2006. In accordance with this strategy, MNR has begun a full review and assessment of the results of the current management strategy and this process is anticipated to take at least a year to complete. Based on the outcome of the review and assessment, a new strategy will be developed; however, such a strategy would not be ready for implementation in 2007.

Experience and annual evaluations to date suggest that some level of control will be required in 2007 to prevent the cormorant population at Presqu'ile from increasing while the program undergoes a full review and assessment.

2. Amendment

This amendment extends the period of the strategy by one year to allow continued implementation of some of the management activities during the 2007 season. The goal of the amendment is to maintain the cormorant population at the 2006 population level to prevent an increase in the negative impacts of cormorants on the woodland habitat of the Presqu'île islands while a new strategy is being developed. The techniques which will be used in 2007 include egg oiling, removal of nests, and disturbance of roosting cormorants and will not include culling.

2.1 Management Technique Evaluation and Selection (section 6 of the approved strategy, page 15)

This amendment extends the strategy for one year, allowing management in 2007. The management program in 2007 will involve:

- oiling of eggs in ground nests;
- removal of tree nests; and
- disturbance of roosting cormorants.

The combination of techniques listed above for the 2007 management program is expected to maintain the cormorant population at 2006 levels to prevent an increase in the negative impacts of cormorants on the woodland habitat, pending the outcome of a full review and assessment of the current strategy and development of a new strategy. Monitoring efforts will continue.

Culling of breeding adult tree nesting cormorants will not occur in 2007. All references to culling in the strategy do not apply to 2007 management.

2.2 Implementation Details (section 7.0 of the strategy, page 18)

Management at Presqu'île in 2007 will include a combination of egg oiling, nest removal and disturbance of roosting cormorants. Culling of adult birds will not be utilized as a control technique in 2007.

3. Amendment and Implementation Process

The amendment process followed MNR policy and procedures requirements, including posting on the Environmental Registry of the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR).

Environmental assessment requirements for this wildlife management project will follow MNR's requirements under *A Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves*.

3.1 Consultation on Amendment

Beginning November 24, 2006, the public, First Nations, interest groups and stakeholders were invited to comment on the proposed amendment during a 33 day period, ending December 27, 2006. An invitation was sent directly (by postal mail or email) to about 860 individuals and groups on the project mailing list. A policy proposal notice was posted on the Environmental Registry http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/env_reg/ebr/english/. The proposed

amendment was posted on the Ontario Parks website (weblink provided in the Environmental Registry notice). Supporting documents were available at this site (e.g., annual reports on management, existing management strategy).

In total, 56 responses were received during the comment period. Five respondents quoted the EBR Registry Number. The position of respondents on the proposal can be reported in one of four categories: support the proposal (43%), oppose the proposal unless culling added (4%), oppose the proposal (32%) and unclear of their position on the proposal (21%). Of those whose position on the proposal was unclear, 75% indicated support for some type of cormorant management at the park and / or in other areas.

3.2 Consultation on Project Implementation

From 2003-2006, implementation of the strategy has been under *Environmental Assessment Act* Exemption Order MNR 59/2. In January of 2004 the Exemption Order was replaced by *A Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves* (Class EA), and in accordance with transitional provisions in the Class EA, the ongoing project continued under the Exemption Order.

The requirements of the Class EA are being applied to project implementation (wildlife management) in 2007, as it is beyond the term of the original strategy. The project evaluation for the resource management activities planned for 2007 under the amended strategy has been completed. A Category B project evaluation of the resource management activities (egg oiling, tree nest removal and disturbance of roosting cormorants) was carried out in accordance with the Class EA, and it identified no significant environmental effects.

3.3 Decision Process

Following the 33 day comment period, comments received were reviewed and considered, and a decision was made to approve the amendment.

Notice of the approved amendment was given on December 29, 2006, through posting of a decision notice on the Environmental Registry, followed by a mailing to individuals and groups that had responded to the invitation to review the proposal.

Notice of the decision on the amendment to the strategy occurred concurrently with notice of completion of the Category B project evaluation.

If no request for an individual environmental assessment is received within a 30-day period, which expires on January 31, 2007, or if a request is successfully resolved, MNR may proceed to implement the project without further public notice.

Approved by:

original signed by
Bruce Bateman
Zone Manager
Ontario Parks, Southeast Zone

Date: December 29, 2006