

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON  
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT  
RAPPORT

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Our File/N/Réf.  
Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 15 November 1999

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator  
Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee

FROM/EXP. Councillor Wendy Stewart

SUBJECT/OBJET **OTTAWA-CARLETON WILDLIFE CENTRE**

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### **REPORT RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee recommend Council approve funding for the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre in the amount of \$143,000, as a pre-commitment to the 2000 Regional Budget.**

### **BACKGROUND**

Since 1987, regional residents have come to depend upon the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, one of the most progressive and effective urban wildlife services in the country, as have lower tier governments and the Regional Health Department. RMO ratepayers benefit from both the rehabilitation service for orphaned and injured wild mammals and the Human/Wildlife Conflict Resolution service that has assisted homeowners in finding humane and cost-effective solutions to wildlife problems for a total cost of less than .07 cents per capita. Other Canadian cities not only have to pay more for a reactive service, but must also euthanize thousands of healthy young wild mammals every year at public expense.

This non-profit organization has been funded largely by private donations and volunteer support. In 1999, RMO paid \$51,100 (Purchase of Service Agreement) of an annual budget of approximately \$235,000 for the Centre's Conflict Resolution Service (a figure that does not include their rehabilitation service - paid for by volunteers).

## DISCUSSION

In the past few years demand for the Centre's services has increased dramatically (32 %) for several reasons:

- substantial development and accompanying habitat loss occurring in Ottawa-Carleton means that conflicts with urban wildlife such as raccoons, squirrels, skunks and woodchucks are increasing at a very significant rate. It is not just the urban core that is undergoing major development but suburban ring communities and the surrounding agricultural hinterlands where larger mammals such as deer are increasingly affected by roads and housing developments.
- the entry of raccoon rabies into Eastern Ontario communities and the recent cases involving rabid bats in Ottawa-Carleton have not only created a much higher volume of calls but has added considerable complexity with respect to legal, liability, human and animal health issues.

In 1998 and 1999 the Wildlife Centre tried to get a major corporate sponsor to pick up the funding required for the Conflict Resolution Service. After two years of negotiations, this corporation declined to provide further support because the need for this service is driven by development and therefore was seen to be the responsibility of local government. (Most recently, the report from David Crombie's Sub-Panel on Municipal Administration that looked at "Who Does What" clearly recommended that nuisance wildlife is an area of responsibility within the municipal domain.)

The Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre has incurred deficits in the past 3 years and can no longer afford to subsidize this service. Reserves are depleted. The shortfall for the year 2000 budget is \$91,900, which would bring the Region's contribution up to \$143,000, the entire cost of the Conflict Resolution Hotline (total Wildlife Centre budget of \$274,500). This represents a per capita commitment of .19 cents, compared to .42 and .45 cents in other Canadian cities.

## CONCLUSION

In the short term, RMOC must act soon to provide interim funding or it will lose one of the most effective and cost-efficient urban wildlife services in North America. If the Centre does not receive a commitment for adequate funding by mid-December, it will not be able to start the process of recruiting staff and students and applying for other funding to prepare for the spring birthing season. The Centre would have to close for good in the spring of 2000 and wildlife calls would be returned to municipal governments for response.

In the longer term, following restructuring, all animal issues (Humane Society, urban wildlife and wild bird care) ought to be comprehensively studied for fit and funding in the new municipal

structure. It will be crucial to examine issues of increased development, community demand, alternative delivery options and the costs involved without commitment of volunteers and private sector support that we now enjoy.

*Approved by  
Wendy Stewart  
Regional Councillor*

#### HEALTH DEPARTMENT COMMENT

The Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Centre continues to provide thorough and quality screening of calls involving wildlife conflict issues. This screening accounts for most of the successful detection of rabies in wildlife within the region. This is of particular benefit for the Health Department and allows us to follow-up promptly with any human contacts of the case, ensuring that rabies post exposure prophylaxis is administered where appropriate.

The recent discovery of three cases of raccoon rabies in Eastern Ontario underscores the importance of a consistent response for public concerns regarding wildlife conflict and the prompt referral of potentially rabid animals for analysis. The service provided by the Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Centre is an essential component of the local rabies control strategy.

*Approved by  
Robert Cushman, MC, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health*

Attach. (1)

APPENDIX I: Submission in Support of the Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Centre by Andrew Roche, Environmental Health Branch of the Health Protection Division, RMO Health Department

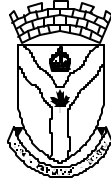
#### FINANCE DEPARTMENT COMMENT

This request from the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre represents a pre-commitment of the 2000 Budget.

Base funding in the amount of \$51,100, representing the amount approved in the 1999 Budget, has been provided in the 2000 draft operating estimates for the Centre. Should the Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee wish to recommend that Council approve the requested amount of \$143,000, it is recommended that the additional funding of \$91,900 be provided from the Region Wide Capital Reserve Fund. The uncommitted balance as of October 31, 1999 is \$4.3 million.

*Approved by T. Fedec  
on behalf of the Finance Commissioner*

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### Submission in Support of the Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Centre

Aside from their important function generally, the Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Centre performs an essential task in relation to wildlife response issues in this region. This, in turn, helps to ensure that the Health Department is able to fully meet the objectives of the Mandatory Programs and Service Guidelines from the Ministry of Health relating to Rabies Control - **To maintain the incidence of rabies at 0 in the human population.**

Over the years, the OCWC has been a major player in the discovery of rabid wildlife and successful referral of any human contact associated with them to the Health Department for the critical follow-up essential to ensure that human rabies does not develop.

In the early years, much of this involved cases of rabies amongst the fox and skunk population of the Region. However, with the successful control of rabies among these animals in Eastern Ontario, the focus recently has been rabies occurring amongst the bat population.

For example, in 1998, the Health Department was involved in the successful follow up of three (3) cases of rabies involving bats. In every case, the OCWC was the original recipient of the animal. With thorough record keeping by trained and immunized staff, specimens were promptly and safely referred to the CFIA for examination and confirmation of the deadly rabies virus. This enabled the Health Department to consult with those individuals who may have handled the bat and their physicians to ensure that, if they were exposed to the rabies virus, they received post exposure prophylaxis as soon as possible. Failure to treat anyone exposed to the rabies virus could result in the disease developing over a period of weeks to months and ultimately, death. The last case of human rabies in Canada was in 1967 and occurred in this area.

The most recent cases of human deaths from rabies in the United States involved the bat strain and, in some cases, the exposure was so subtle (i.e. undetected bite to a sleeping person) that rabies was not originally suspected. This serves to underscore the importance of a consistent means of screening and referral of potentially rabid animals for testing no matter where in the region the original wildlife conflict issue arises. The fact is, these issues usually don't originate as rabies issues, they originate as one of many wildlife conflict issues handled daily by the OCWC as referred by various bylaw, and other agencies involved in animal related issues. Because OCWC personnel are aware of rabies and sensitive to the importance of prompt follow up of potential human exposures, the risk of human rabies in Ottawa Carleton is reduced as a result of their existence.

Several years ago, representatives of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Natural Resources convened a meeting of all parties involved in rabies related issues in this area. The reason for the meeting was to begin the process of contingency planning for what would be the biggest challenge ever faced by those of us involved in rabies control, the imminent onset of raccoon rabies. This strain of the disease, which has been spreading northward through the Eastern U.S. for many years represents a new dimension of risk in terms of human exposures to the rabies virus.

The Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Center quickly became a major player in this effort, always working towards co-ordination and consistency amongst the various stakeholders in wildlife issues so essential to successful planning of this type.

I always considered the contributions of the centre as a valuable component in the overall effort to minimize wildlife/human conflict and the inherent risk for disease transmission associated with it. However, I don't think I realized how invaluable, in fact, their presence in Ottawa Carleton was until this past summer when the prolonged threat of raccoon rabies in Canada became reality in Eastern Ontario.

With three cases of raccoon rabies being confirmed just to the south of the Region of Ottawa Carleton, the need for a single competent response to deal with the elevated concerns of its citizens relating to wildlife conflict was imperative. Proper screening of calls and the quick consistent referral where animal rabies and human exposure might be an issue, was and remains vital to minimize the threat to human health. It also ensures that post exposure treatment is provided without hesitation to those who require it. With proper expert counselling to those experiencing conflict with wildlife, actual human exposures are minimized as is the need for this treatment which can cost in excess of \$500.00 in each case per individual treated.

Once again the Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Center responded by proactively offering to have its number published in press releases issued from the Health Department as the number to call with concerns about potentially rabid wildlife. This partnership with the Health Department ensured that the public were able to access the service they needed by calling either the Wildlife Center or the Health Department. The alternative for dealing with wildlife concerns would have been a fragmented and confusing array of responses depending on which of the other stakeholder agencies, both regional and municipal, had been called.

In conclusion, I am in no position to comment specifically on what might be an appropriate level of funding for the Ottawa Carleton Wildlife Centre. I have no hesitation, however in expressing my concern for the prospect of not having its invaluable presence for both the immediate and long term future. The benefits of the service to the citizens of Ottawa Carleton and other allied agencies dealing with wildlife should not be underestimated or left to be appreciated when it's too late.

Andrew Roche  
Acting Branch Manager  
Environmental Health Branch

Health Protection Division  
Region of Ottawa Carleton Health Department