

[A] OFAH Annual General Meeting – Thursday March 17, 2011

The meeting opened at 4pm, with about 40 OFAH Executive, Directors, Committee members, and Zone people at the head and side tables. They almost outnumbered the OFAH members present – I counted about 75 people in the audience, but about 10 of those turned out to be OFAH staff.

President's Report: Rob Hare

Rob announced that Angelo Lombardo (formerly Special Events Coordinator and fundraiser) is in a one-year transition period to replace Mike Reader as Executive Director. Mike has been very competent in his job, and it is hoped that Angelo will carry on the good work.

Rob also announced that we would be hearing about a Fall Elk hunt later in the weekend.

A 5-year Strategic Plan, developed over the past 3 years, was announced and printed copies made available. I brought several back with me.

Executive Director's Report: Mike Reader

Mike reported on the remarkable success of Ontario Outdoors magazine, which OFAH bought, and which has been more profitable than expected.

He also mentioned that they have been working on Succession Planning, especially for the position of Executive Director.

Fish & Wildlife Report:

OFAH is involved in a Joint Task Force formed to address the Asian Carp threat.

Government Relations Report: Greg Farrant

OFAH worked hard to try to get Bill C391 passed. Although it failed, efforts will continue to eliminate the Long Gun Registry.

They are heavily involved in the Algonquin Land Claim negotiation, which affects an area in Ontario the size of New Brunswick, and will be a template for future settlements.

They were involved in several instances of no-discharge bylaws in various municipalities, some of which were resolved and some are ongoing.

Treasurer's Report: Frank Wick

OFAH relies heavily on the lottery and the strong membership level (currently about 82,000 total).

Agricultural Committee:

Snaring of coyotes has become an issue in the last several months. Various organizations involved have agreed to go with the OFAH recommendation in a pilot project. Only non-lethal, relaxing snares are to be used, and only from early April through October 15.

Big Game Committee:

A new policy has been implemented for moose tag transfers. See your 2011 Hunting Regulations for details. The MNR is reviewing moose tag allocations for all WMUs.

Bowhunting Committee:

They are urging the MNR to increase the amount of time spent on bow hunting in the Hunter Ed course, because currently there is only 90 minutes spent versus 2 hours on firearms.

Firearms: Bill Blackwell

They are continuing to work towards another bill to eliminate the Long Gun Registry. They succeeded in getting inline muzzleloaders with electronic triggers approved for Black Powder season. They have proposed an adhesive metal sticker as an alternative to stamped or engraved labeling of firearms being advocated by the United Nations.

Approximately 2000 applicants for firearms licenses have been affected by the discovery that a number of instructors were not delivering the required number of hours of training. These people will have an opportunity to challenge the exam, or retake a course.

It was clarified with the CFO that showing your drivers license is **NOT** required when purchasing ammunition – only your PAL/POL is required. Retailers are being advised of this.

Hunter Education had strong growth for the 9th consecutive year, with 17,645 students in 1,586 courses. Average class size was 10.8 people.

Wild Turkey seminar DVDs will be available in 2011 for self-study. Follow-up exams can be conducted by Internet video with an examiner.

Following recommendations by OFAH, the MNR has dropped the requirement for hunter orange on pop-up blinds, although it is still recommended if you are hunting in an area where other hunters may be present who are not aware of your position.

Wetlands, Migratory Birds:

The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) has removed the bag limit restrictions on Canvasback and Redhead ducks for 2011. They are also looking at implementing a Mourning Dove season.

Long Point is continuing its excellent research projects.

OFAH is recommending Waterfowl Heritage Days on the weekend before Opening Day, for youth to hunt with mentors. These already exist in all provinces except Ontario and Saskatchewan.

There are concerns over the further development of Wind Turbines especially at offshore sites and onshore sites near wetlands. They are pleased with the recent moratorium.

Other Reports and Announcements:

Full reports on the above topics, and several other reports (Trails, Native Affairs, Past President's Report, Sporting Dogs/Small Game Advisory, etc.) are contained in the Annual Report 2010, several copies of which I brought back from the Conference.

John Ford is leaving the Native Affairs Committee and Past Presidents Committee, to take a position as Secretary at the Canadian Wildlife Federation.

The Jack O'Dette Conservation Leadership Award was presented to Tony Jackson.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15.

[B] Minister of Natural Resources – Linda Jeffrey

A video of her presentation and question period is available on the OFAH website.

She spoke about the following items:

- Emphasis on “partnerships” with OFAH, anglers and hunters
- The upcoming Elk hunt in Ontario (See later detailed report.)
- New Moose management policy and tag transfer rules
- Coyotes are a cyclical problem, and MNR are *not* looking at a province-wide cull or bounty, saying that such measures have been proven to be ineffective. Instead, they are looking at a multi-pronged approach and reviewing the options.
- In regard to Wild Turkeys, they have introduced a training course available both online and on DVD, and offer the option of exams conducted via web cam.
- The new “Fish Online” web-based information service, which should be helpful in engaging newcomers to angling, and consolidates a lot of information in one place, will be available soon. (See later detailed report.)

Numerous questions were posed to the Minister, but she tended to offer more “responses” than “answers”. One of the later questioners began by complimenting her on what a good politician she was, having only actually answered about 3 of 12 questions.

My question, on behalf of BPSA, was “What are the Ministry’s short- and long-term plans for the stocking of salmonids (including Rainbow Trout) in Lake Huron and Georgian Bay?” The response was mainly to the effect that there was opportunity for public input via the FMZ process.

If I had been thinking quicker and had been aware of how “sharp” some of the later questions became, I might have responded by saying that we were aware of and involved with the FMZ process, and were concerned that by the time any agreement was reached, natural evolution would have altered the species we were dealing with.

I also should have thought to respond to her earlier statement that, under the previous Conservative government, some 75 MNR offices were closed. I might have asked how many of those offices the current Liberal government had re-opened.

** Tony Kenny (active in the Peterborough Landowners’ Association) pointed out the importance of obtaining the original Crown Land Patent related to property you own. These are available upon request and payment of a fee (\$55 I think he said) from the MNR web site or www.OntarioLandowners.ca with a wait-time of several weeks. He explained how this defines the original rights granted on the property, and these rights differ depending upon when the Patent was issued (the standard apparently changed at different times), and also the specific property. He says that this can be very valuable in fighting undesirable by-laws that try to take some of these rights away from you without compensation. They may also be useful in dealing as a group with native land claims.

He suggested contacting Blaine Lewis (?) of the Owen Sound Landowners' Association for local information, and there may be other similar groups in your area.

[C] Mike Reader's Year in Review

Mike very briefly touched on the highlights of the printed Year in Review document.

Some items of special note were:

- Relevance was the theme of many of the outreach efforts of OFAH
- 870,000 Atlantic Salmon stocked in 2010, 657,000 in 2011, successful spawning in Credit River
- Continued efforts in regard to Invasive Species
- The Normandale hatchery will continue with new facilities, raising Chinook, Rainbows etc (does this signal anything in regard to Salmonid stocking?)
- The TackleShare Program has been very effective (Walter Mitz of the Lake Huron Club said to contact him if we are interested)
- The Women's Outdoor Weekend had over 100 participants, and women made up 25% of the students in Hunter Education courses last year
- OFAH are pushing for elimination of the heavy MOE fees levied on volunteer fish hatcheries
- A Strategic Planning document was prepared
- Angelo Lombardo will be taking over from Mike after a one-year transition

[D] Tim Hudak – Leader of the Opposition

Mr. Hudak's speech listed some of the things the Provincial Conservative Party proposes or supports:

- Moratorium on wind farms
- Give municipalities a say in wind farm projects
- Support ending the long gun registry
- Allow ATVs on roads
- Hatcheries should not be treated as industrial polluters and charged fees
- Eliminate ECO-tax, HST on basics, and other fees
- Stop the use of Smart Meters for electricity usage billing
- Eliminate the LHINS (Local Health Integration Networks)

[E] Federal Minister of Fisheries and Oceans – Gail Shea

- Gave \$25,000 to OFAH to host the Fish & Wildlife Congress in Ottawa in May 2012
- Last week conducted a “table top exercise” regarding dealing with Asian Carp in the Great Lakes to identify vulnerable locations, and are funding a \$415K study
- No longer required to register human-powered vessels or boats with motors of 10hp or less

[F] Whitetail Deer Decline – Mike Gatt, Regional Biologist, South Region MNR

- Developed in 2009 a framework for cervid ecological zones based on geology, forest type, climate and species
- Monitor populations through postcard surveys
- Deer numbers have gone down
- Approximately 70% of the harvest is in Southern Ontario and Shield areas
- In 2009, introduced Amalgamated Deer Hunter Survey (covers all types of hunts)
- Online survey reporting is available too. It is being used but doesn't seem to have increased the number of returns.
- Harvest peaked in 2007 at about 100,000, then declined in 2008 and 2009. This was partly due to a change in allocations.
- There are approximately 162,000 deer hunters in total
- The number of deer seen per day is a key indicator, and this declined from 2007 to 2009, and they also look at Hunter Success Rate
- They use a Winter Severity Graph. 2001, 2007 and 2008 were “severe”. 09/10 was less than average severity. 10/11 winter was not too bad in the South, but severe in the Northwest (lots of snow). Parry Sound and Bruce were hit a bit harder this year than average.
- CWD is being monitored by zones. None has been found so far in over 8000 samples tested.
- The 2010 harvest numbers are not yet in, but probably are similar to 2009
- Quotas for 2011 will probably be similar to 2010

Some comments posed and questions answered:

- Urge mandatory reporting by hunters
- No data to support reports of late rut due to warm Fall weather in past few years.
- Deer Removal Authorizations are very few in number. Max 300-400 per year.
- There is a discrepancy between the number of tags issued in some adjacent WMUs. He is not aware, but will look into it.
- Coyote numbers are up, but he doesn't think they are the main factor in the deer decline.
- Motor vehicle deer kills also declined after 2007 (~ 15000 annually).

Mike said he will put the various graphs and data and maps online, either on the MNR website, or the OFAH website.

[G] Wolf & Coyote Study – Dr. Brent Patterson, Research Scientist, Wildlife Research & Development Section, MNR

He described the 2005 Strategy for Wolf Conservation in Ontario.

- Multiple wolf species are present, and hybridization
- They studied abundance
- Investigated the viability of wolves in Algonquin Park
- Investigated the management of wolves and coyotes in Northern Region
- South of Algonquin there are “Eastern Coyotes” – coyotes with some wolf DNA
- Coyotes are not native to the region, the first being killed in 1919.
- There is no record of bounty reducing coyote numbers, but this can affect wolf numbers. In 1920 the total bounty was ~\$115.
- The Eastern Wolf is found in Algonquin Park area. It is common in the Park, but rare outside.
- The Gray Wolf is found in the far North of Ontario, weighing 80-120 pounds for females, 90-150 pounds for males. They are uncommon.
- There is a Gray Wolf + Eastern Wolf hybrid, called the Great Lakes Wolf.
- Wolf abundance is largely a function of prey abundance.
- They get useful data from questions about wolves on the Moose Hunter questionnaire
- Wolf numbers have been increasing over the past 10 years, but declined in 2010.
- Coyote abundance is estimated using data from the Deer questionnaire
- It peaked in 2008 and there has recently been a slight decline.
- In the 1990s there was concern over a decline of the Algonquin Park wolves due to human predation.
- In December 2001 a ban on harvesting around Algonquin Park was imposed
- The least hybridized wolves of this type occur in the park, but the type is found in a broad band from West of the Park to Quebec.
- There has been no increase in abundance of wolves in the Park over 5 years after the ban.
- After the ban, there was an increase in natural mortality and dispersal.
- The population density seems stable.
- The ban seems to have reduced hybridization of Eastern Wolves.
- The ban promotes naturally functioning population control.
- They are currently investigating why Parry Sound wolves are more hybridized – perhaps a year before results are available
- They conducted a research harvest of 143 animals, of which 1 was Eastern Wolf, 107 were Eastern Coyotes, and 35 were Great Lakes Wolves.
- There are very few Eastern Wolves north of the French River.

- Coyotes eat almost everything, whereas wolves generally rely on ungulates
- Both generally select the least dangerous prey available (e.g. deer versus moose)
- GPS collars have been used on wolves and coyotes to track predation.

[H] Fish Online Tool – Dave Brown, manager, Fisheries Policy Section, MNR

Dave described this new Web-based tool, that links many kinds of information to Google Maps:

- Stocking information
- Species in each lake
- Info on each species
- Depth contours in lake
- Regulations specific to the lake
- Guide to Eating Sport Fish, specific to the lake
- Parks
- Tackle Share
- Service Ontario locations

This is a work in progress, guided by feedback from users. It will be accessible on the new MNR website about April 1. Go to www.ontario.ca/fishing

[I] Algonquin Land Claim – Greg Farrant, Craig Selby, Phil Morlock (Shimano)

- Phil: - This claim will set a precedent for Canada as well as Ontario
- It is significant for the manner in which it is being processed
 - Recreational fishing generates \$7.6B per year and 100,000 jobs in Canada
 - Ontario accounts for 46% of the total (\$3.5B)
 - Hunting generates \$1.8B per year in Ontario
 - There are 3.6 million anglers
 - Algonquin Park has 25% of the Brook Trout lakes in Ontario with 230 naturally reproduction sites
 - This represents the largest contiguous native Brook Trout population in the world
 - The Park also contains about 10% of Ontario's Lake Trout lakes
 - The Park used to have restricted access to the interior (only by foot or canoe)
 - There was a ban on live bait and creel limits
 - In 1990, Bob Rae removed enforcement from the Park, winter fishing was allowed, no tackle restrictions, access to interior was permitted via truck, ATV, snowmobile
 - The result was overfishing, with clear scientific evidence of human impact
 - In the Land Claim, there is no species-specific harvest agreement, and it is not currently even being discussed
 - OFAH have introduced a concept of "Fair Sharing" they would like in the agreement
 - This land claim has been going on for 20 years.
 - In the U.S.A., there is an Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture involving 17 states, funded with \$30M per year.
 -

Recommended solutions:

- Conservation of fish and wildlife must be restored, not open to negotiation, and a top priority
- MNR should be allowed to speak out publicly on issues
- Must bring in a team of fish & wildlife management professionals to participate
- The Federal Minister of Indian Affairs, John Duncan, has agreed to do so.
- Stakeholders from the fishing and hunting communities must be actively involved.
- Species-specific harvest, management, enforcement, fair-sharing must be drafted by Ontario and Canada in the land claim area, for fish, small and large game.
- 6 First Nation groups (including Metis) plus the Algonquins are involved regarding aboriginal rights for fishing and hunting in the Agreement in Principle.
- Ontario has not put together an approach to reach agreement. They want an Agreement in Principle in one year, but a Fish & Wildlife agreement will take 3 years.
- Must develop timelines for fish & wildlife harvest agreement
- Must develop measures of accountability so public is informed
- Timelines for Agreement in Principle must be flexible to allow resolution of Fish & Wildlife Policy
- The last clear statement of protecting the Park was made by the Harris government
- The recent Minister merely said that the forest industry would not be affected, and angling and hunting is a 3rd party interest.

Greg: - This is the only “comprehensive” claim, i.e. not involving a previous treaty.

- Three different maps were shown, one of which was presented by the Algonquins and is not officially recognized in the negotiations.
- The area involved is 14,000 square miles, approximately the size of New Brunswick
- There are 1.4 Million non-aboriginal residents
- 7,000 to 10,000 Algonquin
- 150,000 licensed non-aboriginal hunters in the area
- 22,000 OFAH members in the area
- 13 Provincial and 13 Federal political ridings
- 35 Provincial parks, of which 18 are operational
- The Federal Minister is John Duncan
- The Provincial lead is Chris Bentley, Attorney General
- There are two phases:
 - 1) Agreement in Principle (AIP) which is non-binding but includes basic terms
 - 2) Final treaty
- There will be transfers of land, and financial payments

Concerns:

1. Transparency
2. Public information and meaningful consultation
3. Stakeholder input
4. Time frame

5. National resources:
 - Conservation of resources
 - Fish & Wildlife management
 - Fair sharing
 - Non-aboriginal hunting rights
6. Land issues :
 - Crown land (both Federal and Provincial)
 - Access to Crown land
 - Recreation camps
 - Development

[At this point, the presentation sped up considerably. Slides were only briefly displayed on the screens, and it became impossible to take complete notes. The following is all I could jot down.]

How can the AIP and treaty result in “certainty” with so many stakeholders involved?

The Federal and Provincial governments only recently agreed to timelines, allowing additional time to “get it right the first time”.

The OFAH supports an agreement that respects the Algonquin position, *and* respects the other stakeholders.

There is a small amount of Federal Crown land involved, therefore it is expected that financial payments will be involved in settling these.

There is a large amount of Provincial Crown land involved, therefore it is expected that land transfers will be involved in settling these.

There will be *no* expropriation of private land.

Craig: - The key is that the Provincial negotiator *must* accurately represent the broad interests of the public.

- Section 35 of the Constitution applies.
- The “Sparrow” legal case may apply, but in what way?
- There are existing AIPs elsewhere in the World, that do incorporate Fair Sharing

Fred Geberdt spoke about the apathy on the part of anglers and hunters, saying that there are no newspaper articles representing us in many newspapers, and we are stonewalled on getting input at the negotiating table.

[J] Ontario Elk Hunt – Erin Macdonald, Area Biologist, Bancroft MNR

Elk were extirpated in Ontario in the late 1800s.

The Elk Restoration Project started in 1996. In 1998-2001, 443 Elk (from the USA) were released in the following locations:

- Lake of the Woods
- North Shore (near Sault Ste. Marie)
- Nipissing/French River
- Bancroft / North Hastings

There have been many partners in the project.

Research and monitoring has been facilitated by the project. About 90% of the original animals had radio collars, so they were able to regularly monitor the population. The Bancroft herd has grown from about 200 in 2004, to somewhere between 300 and 700, with 20-30% annual growth. There is lower predation in the Bancroft area. The other 3 areas haven't grown as much.

They now shift focus to Sustainable Management. In 2009 they developed the Cervid Ecological Framework. This includes Population Objective Setting Guidelines and Harvest Management Guidelines. They want to maintain 400-600 animals in the Bancroft / North Hastings area, taking into account ecology, human impact, etc.

The first Ontario Elk Hunt will take place Sept 19-25 2011 in Bancroft / North Hastings, in WMUs 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, and 63A.

Seals will be specific to a sub-area (parts of WMU). Hunters will need a Resident Outdoors Card, and must apply to the draw as an individual or as a group. If successful in the draw, you then have to purchase a licence.

This will be a selective harvest: bulls and cows, no calves.

The quota will change annually, based on hunter success rate and population.

Quotas for 2011 are not yet established. See the 2011 Hunting Regulations when they come out.

How to apply:

- Maximum group size is 4
- You can specify a 1st and 2nd choice for your hunt area
- There is no choice of bull or cow
- A non-refundable application fee of \$16.95 applies (one for a group)
- The automated phone system or paper application may be available at some Service Ontario locations starting in May
- Deadline for application is June 10

- Check online to see if you succeed in the draw, and you will be notified by mail
- The license fee is \$50
- Successful hunters will not be eligible in the following year
- All classes of firearms and bows will be eligible
- Dogs are not permitted
- Written permission from landowners is required
- There will be mandatory reporting
- There will be optional registration of harvested animals at check stations
- You are allowed to keep a bull rack

Note that about 15% of the animals will have a radio collar. MNR are asking that you do not harvest these animals, because the collars are expensive and provide valuable data. There is also the issue of these animals having been chemically immobilized to install the collar, which may make the meat unusable.

Party Hunting:

- Maximum 4 hunters (not including apprentices)
- Must all apply together as a group, no substitutes allowed
- Each application gets one seal
- Multiple parties may not hunt cooperatively

See the www.ontario.ca/elk website for more information.

A fact sheet is also available.

Questions:

- How much Crown Land is in the area? Answer: About 50%
- Are landowners generally agreeable? Answer: Yes
- Have you looked into using the excess population instead to boost the populations at the other areas? Answer: There are concerns about spreading disease.
- There was agreement by Aboriginals at the beginning of the project that the other 3 release areas were not sustainable, and therefore would not be hunted. Will this hunt affect the protection of the other 3 areas? Answer: [After a bit of deliberation] No, it *should* not affect the protection of the other areas.

This report submitted from notes taken by Tim Lahey attending the Conference on behalf of BPSA. While I believe this information to be accurate, I may have misunderstood some comments, and I certainly missed some others. I hope that the OFAH will publish full accounts of each of the presentations, so everyone may review them in full detail.

Tim Lahey
2011-03-30