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BRIEFING FORM

SUBMITTED TO: Environment and Sustainability Committee

DIRECTOR'S APPROVAL: 

DATE OF MEETING: February 3, 2010

SUBJECT: Lakes Banook & MicMac Plant Growth

ORIGIN

This report originates from staff as an update to work underway with an adhoc community group, to address lake quality issues in Lakes Banook and Micmac.

RECOMMENDATION/ DECISION REQUIRED

(NONE REQUIRED IN THIS CASE, INFORMATION ONLY)

BACKGROUND

During the summer of 2009, complaints started about excessive plant growth in Lakes Banook and MicMac. Weeds were being seen in places not seen before and the prevalence and size of them was beyond previous experience. In 2010, the plant growth became acute, impacting swimmer and resident safety and rendering the paddling activities on the Lakes in jeopardy.

There was a profound community outcry for help.

Local Councilors, supported by SEMO staff, organized a public meeting in early September to discuss the issue. Prior to the meeting, staff investigated some remedial options to suggest for the boat clubs (which included small hand rakes or cutters) and discussed the remediation with Provincial and Federal authorities.

At the meeting, the status of the plant growth was demonstrated to be substantially greater than what staff was expecting. Small hand tools were certainly not a solution.

The outcome of the meeting resulted in two things:

1. Formation of an adhoc committee to investigate solutions; and
2. A community awareness that the community needs to take stewardship responsibility for their lakes.

In November, the adhoc committee met, which included:

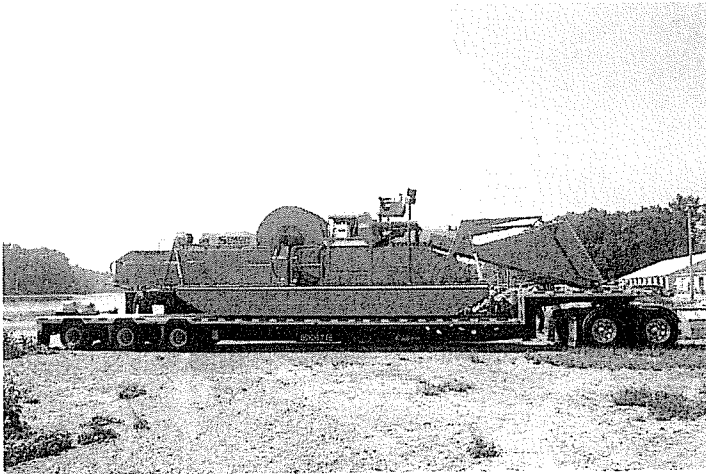
- two members of Regional Council;
- two members of Provincial Legislature;
- representatives from the Shubenacadie Canal Commission;
- members from the Paddling Clubs;
- SEMO Staff; and
- local residents.

Two actions were initiated:

1. Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) would lead a solicitation for market solutions to remedy the plant growth; and
2. Formation of a registered not-for-profit Lake Conservation Society (the example used was John Kennedy Jr. as a leader of RiverKeepers).

Staff, and local environmental NGO's, are very pleased that this issue is incubating community stewardship of the lakes – which will lead to some collaborative work around policy and education.

In December, HRM issued a Request for Information, seeking market solutions to the management of the plant growth. It is fairly clear from results of the solicitation and talking to other community associations that are maintaining lakes for paddling and recreation purposes, that there is a need for a Weed Harvester. As pictured below, a new unit costs approximately \$200,000.



This unit was recently purchased for a lake in St. Catherine's as a legacy gift from a paddling championship that they hosted. Staff received two responses to the solicitation:

- one to supply a unit for approximately \$200,000; and
- one from a local construction company to supply and operate (the same piece of equipment) for a rate of approximately \$200,000 per year.

The adhoc community group has an upcoming meeting to discuss possibilities of how to raise funds to either rent or purchase this piece of equipment. Staff is working with the Councilors on a funding application for approximately \$100,000 toward this unit.

HRM does not own the lakes, they are provincial responsibilities; however, there appears to be no appetite for the province to acquire such a piece of equipment or provide such a service. Prior to amalgamation, the City of Dartmouth owned and operated a weed harvester (a smaller unit) which maintained small portions of the lake. That unit was inspected at a salvage yard – it is not repairable.

HRM staff is not suggesting that this is a municipal responsibility. Our role is to support the community group's exploration of ways to access this sort of equipment. Also, to use the opportunity to advance community stewardship that will complement work around HRM's Storm Water Management Functional Plan.

The intent of this report is to simply advise the committee of this ongoing work.

ALTERNATIVES AND ASSOCIATED RISKS

HRM is not leading this initiative, but supporting a community group. The alternative is to do nothing, and possibly plant growth may render Lakes Banook and Micmac unfit for recreation.

IMPACT/BENEFITS:

Recreation and lake quality protection.

COMMUNICATION ISSUES/OPPORTUNITIES:

This is a community effort, and enables communication and collaboration around water resource management.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

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