



Date: Wednesday, July 19, 2023

From: Niall Lobley, Acting CAO/Director of Community & Environmental Services

Subject: Agreement for the Provision of Category 3 Programs by Grey Sauble Conservation Authority

Report CAO2023-11

This document and its attachments are public and available in an accessible format upon request.

Recommendation

That Council enter into an agreement with Grey Sauble Conservation Authority to provide Category 3 programs and services and,

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to sign said agreement.

Background

Conservation Authorities provide a range of significant and valuable services to communities and residents, as well as the municipality across the Township area. The Township of Georgian Bluffs enjoys and benefits from working collaboratively with Grey Sauble Conservation Authority and staff hope that the close working partnership can be further enhanced over coming years.

Conservation Authorities provide a range of services on a watershed basis that serve communities in a way which has often been viewed as an approach demonstrating both national and international best practice. The model of Conservation Authorities has been applauded as an environment-first model for planning, development and land use planning and management.

Conservation Authorities are formed at the request of their member municipalities and traditionally have served both provincial and local priorities, funded by provincial funding, local levy, and self-generated revenue. Over recent years, the degree of provincial funding provided has decreased as the funding for Authorities has been downloaded to local municipalities alongside an increased reliance on self-generated revenue sources.



The Provincial government introduced changes affecting the delivery of services by Conservation Authorities to Municipalities. Category 1 (mandatory) and 2 (municipal) services make up the majority of the municipal levy. Category 3 services are optional, and the Conservation Authority is required to enter into agreements with municipalities on the continued delivery of these services.

The Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA) has proposed that the category 3 services and the related municipal levy for these services remain the same for the member municipalities and has proposed an agreement to reflect this arrangement.

Analysis

In April the GSCA provided a [consultation document](#), and [presentation](#) to Council on the impacts of Ontario Regulation 687/21. This was to address the requirement to prepare an inventory of all programs and services offered and identify the programs as either Category 1 (Mandatory), Category 2 (Municipal Service), Category 3 (Other Programs and Services) or General Operating Expenses. The following provides more detail on these categories.

Category 1 programs are mandatory for conservation authorities to undertake. These mandatory programs include:

- Programs and services related to the risk of natural hazards.
- Programs and services related to the conservation and management of lands owned or controlled by the authority, including any interests in land registered on title.
- Programs and services related to the authority's duties, functions and responsibilities as a source protection authority under the Clean Water Act, 2006.
- Programs and services to support the authority's functions and responsibilities related to the implementation and enhancement of the provincial groundwater monitoring program.
- Programs and services to support the authority's functions and responsibilities related to the implementation and enhancement of the provincial stream monitoring program.
- Programs and services to support the authority's functions and responsibilities related to the development and implementation of a watershed-based resource management strategy on or before December 31, 2024.

Category 2 refers to programs and services that a conservation authority provides on behalf of a municipality. Examples of this within the Grey Sauble watershed are:



- Review and Commenting Agreements under the Planning Act (currently altered by Bill 23),
- Risk Management agreements under the Clean Water Act, and
- The management of Grey County's Forested properties, and the Forest Management By-Law.

Category 3 refers to Other Programs and Services that an Authority determines are advisable to further the purposes of the Act. Examples of Category 3 programs and services are:

- Tree planting
- Stewardship activities
- Watershed monitoring (other than Category 1), and
- Some of the revenue generating activities GSCA carries out on its land holdings.

Agreements for Category 3 services are required prior to January 1, 2024 and the GSCA is requesting these to be finalized as soon as possible so that budgeting for 2024 can occur.

It is staff's suggestion that the required Category 3 Agreement (Appendix 1) reflect the continuation of those services currently being provided by the GSCA. This will include the following:

Watershed Monitoring & Management

For over 30 years, GSCA has partnered with the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to complete water quality monitoring at 10 provincially selected locations. This work is part of the Mandatory Category 1 programming at GSCA.

GSCA has expanded upon this program by adding an additional 25 sites to better cover the 3200 square kilometers of GSCA's watershed jurisdiction. Samples are collected eight times per year at each site. Key parameters are summarized on GSCA's website and are reported back to the public through GSCA's Watershed Report Cards and Watershed Health Checks. The specific number of sites and sample events may change without further notice.

Additionally, GSCA conducts benthic macroinvertebrate sampling at 35 sites over a 2-year rotating period. Benthic macroinvertebrates are the organisms that live in the bottom of the streambed for at least part of their life cycle. By collecting and analyzing these organisms, GSCA is able to better assess the long-term health of our stream



systems. This information is also reported back to the public. The specific number of sites sampled and analyzed per year may change without further notice.

Stewardship

The Watershed Stewardship work provided by GSCA serves to inspire and enable landowners to further their stewardship of the land and water within our watershed community. This program is currently geared largely towards Report the agricultural community, collaborating with rural landowners to develop and complete on the ground projects that will help to improve the local environment.

To date this program has worked with agricultural landowners to implement projects such as livestock exclusion fencing, alternative watering systems, barn eaves troughs to divert runoff, and planting of cover crops. When implemented properly, each project will help to improve the quality of water through reduced sedimentation and nutrients within the water. Additionally, GSCA has worked with local landowner groups to control invasive species that negatively impact the local environment.

The GSCA notes that these projects will change every year and have a different bearing on the Municipality dependent on this. However, it is to the benefit of the whole watershed.

While municipal apportionment currently contributes to staff salary within this program area, GSCA is continually working to acquire additional grants to help landowners implement these projects. Since 2018, GSCA has secured over \$400,000 in grant dollar to improve the watersheds. This has been matched by over \$200,000 in contributions from benefiting landowners.

Conservation Information and Community Outreach

GSCA's Conservation Information and Community Outreach program area (Communications) is an internal service department that helps spread awareness of all GSCA's program and service areas. Although this program area is fully funded by municipal levy apportionment, much of this work is geared towards mandatory programs and services (Category 1). However, the GSCA acknowledge that some of the work conducted by GSCA's Communications Team is allocated to Category 3 programs and services. In an effort to be transparent, some of the costs of this program area have been included as Category 3.

Staff have been advised that all the other member municipalities have agreed to the continuation of the category 3 services.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact as a result of this report, nor is any impact predicted.



Conservation Authority budgets have included services now considered Category 3 in the past, and no changes to those services are proposed. The agreement and this report are administrative changes to funding, rather than material changes to the services benefiting residents.

Strategic Priorities

Demonstrate and Enhance Environmental Stewardship

The Township of Georgian Bluffs strives to become a leader in Environmental Stewardship by reducing energy consumption, reducing solid waste, increasing diversion rates of recyclable materials, and lessening the environmental impact of existing and future infrastructure through innovation and upgrading.

Conclusion

Conservation Authorities are an important piece of the fabric of environmental protection in Ontario and are a respected and critical authority in respect to integrated watershed management. The services that they provide are of value to resident and community in Georgian Bluffs on a daily basis, and the Township enjoys, and hopes to increase, the collaborative way in which as watershed agencies, GSCA and the municipality work together. With provincial changes to the way in which Conservation Authority funding is allocated and accounted for, the need for recognizing and agreeing the value of non-mandated activities of the authority as a distinct element, has arisen. Staff recommend that the Township enter into an agreement with GSCA for the continued delivery of Category 3 programs across the watershed, including within the Township.

Respectfully Submitted: Niall Loble, Acting CAO/Director Community & Environmental Services