

Dear Owners

## **ERADICATION AND RESTORATION OPTIONS ON SIDNEY ISLAND**

On December 2, 2020 Council provided the most recent material from the Steering Committee and the 2 Working Groups formed to produce a plan for restoration and eradication of fallow deer under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) approved by Sidney Island on March 29, 2020. The MOU is posted on the Sidney Island website under: Parks Canada Proposal. Most documents mentioned in this summary are on that website but for easy reference we have attached some of them.

We feel it is important to both provide new owners with background material and to respond to the recent material provided by Council. In the recent Community Plan Survey a question was asked regarding the importance of access to hunting. Hopefully we will have an answer to that shortly, remembering that eradication of fallow deer would end hunting on Sidney Island. No one wants to hunt black tail deer that are now subject to a new hemorrhagic disease. This further motivates us to provide this update to all owners.

### **BACKGROUND**

Just to confirm, we are not and never have been opposed to the restoration of Sidney Island's ecology. The original concerns related to the process used to ensure a fair and transparent dialogue regarding questions about eradication of the island's fallow deer. From May 2018 to September 2019, there was no response from the Council to our written attempts to ask questions and raise concerns, either by design or misunderstanding. From September 2019 to December 2019 there was a concerted effort to convince Council to distribute 4 documents on eradication that had been written by various owners. Council finally passed a resolution in December, 2019 ( 1 vote against!) to share those documents with the owners. This material is attached below and is now on the Sidney Island website along with a history of fallow deer by Vic Johnston and a letter signed by 19 owners who approved of eradication as it was then envisioned.

Since it was felt the Council was not representing all the owners' concerns about eradication and restoration to Parks Canada, a few owners took it upon themselves to talk directly to Parks. The result was a reset of the process ending in the drafting of the MOU between all interested parties. The MOU states that

“eradication is critical for restoration”. On March 15, 2020, an Owners’ Engagement Session was held to discuss the MOU. Any question put to Parks about why eradication was critical was ruled out of order. We were effectively muzzled. Parks did ensure owners the MOU had no legal force or effect.

There are 2 particularly relevant documents (both attached) which we encourage you to read if you want to delve more into the issues of eradication and forest restoration. They are:

1) In May of 2019, UBC published a research paper, "*Deer Abundance and the Recovery of Woody Plants of the Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem*" written by Prof Arcese and some of his graduate students. This paper was the result of 6 years of observation regarding the flora of Sidney Island (2013-2019). The paper provides detailed empirical evidence relating to much of the flora on the Island. The empirical evidence shows a general 30% improvement in flora restoration over the term of their observation. Anecdotal evidence of improvement is also encouraging. (Owners now have to mow the airstrip and their lawns!). Many owners report healthy *Arbutus* seedlings. There is a dispute about the conclusions drawn from the paper's data. The paper does not say eradication is “critical” for restoration (restoration never being defined). It does basically say “the less deer the better”. It does not look at the alternative of a continuing managed deer control program.

2) Dr Sara Dubois, Chief Scientific Officer of the BC SPCA has written a paper on the ethics of Wildlife Control entitled: *International Consensus Principles for Ethical Wildlife Control* (Conservation Biology, 2017). The paper suggests that the word “invasive” should not be used as a criterion for extermination. It emphasizes that the least harm possible must be used in any wildlife control endeavour. Dr Dubois is aware of the situation on Sidney Island and we have asked that any scheme to eradicate deer must be approved by her.

Our documents and subsequent correspondence raised the following basic questions.

1. Why is eradication of the fallow deer necessary to achieve restoration and what does “restoration” mean? Park's objective is to ensure a “sustained long term forest recovery.” But there is no clear idea what this is supposed to look like on the ground. Does it mean putting back the forest to the way it was before the Island was decimated by logging? It is assumed to mean, at the very least, getting rid of hawthorns, scotch broom (except on cliffs) and other noxious invasive plants. The UBC study provides empirical evidence regarding many floras. Does it mean restoring those plants to 100%. What does that look like

and is it even possible? Or is 75% enough? What would be acceptable. What does “long term” mean? To be useful, the objective must be defined in specifics and not in buzz phrases.

2. Why are “invasive” species automatically considered expendable? Would eradication meet international standards of ethical principles concerning animal welfare, wildlife management and impact on ecosystems? What would the impact be on black tail deer?

3. Why is lowering the fallow deer population to possibly less than 200 inadequate, given the significant ecological improvements we are witnessing. Why is a management control plan not a possible alternative approach?

4. How much will Parks Canada proposal cost owners? What are the safety concerns raised by the process of eradication? Helicopter hunting, hunting at night with sharp shooters using lights and hunting with dogs is now contemplated in Parks Canada’s agreement with First Nations. Is this acceptable to citizens of southern Vancouver Island and the wider Island Trust community? How would Canada and the Sidney Island owners deal with a critical press?

At a Special General Meeting by zoom on March 29, 2020 the MOU was authorized by 80% of the owners. Twenty percent voted to end the project immediately. When the project is put to a final vote, it must be approved by a 75% majority

## **THE PRESENT**

The Eradication Committee and the Restoration Committee have met 7 and 3 times respectively. In looking at the people sitting on the various committees we are concerned no one is or can advocate for a different or alternative narrative to eradication. This is a perfect example of “groupthink”, a dangerous dynamic that can lead to inappropriate decision making. (See: (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/basics/groupthink>)). We realize we have representatives on the working groups, but the work of these groups continues behind closed doors. There is no distribution of minutes or agendas. Secrecy ensures due process is adhered to in name only. However, recently Parks Canada has been helpful in sharing information.

We also note there are 9 Parks Canada personnel (both employees and contractors) working toward the eradication of a small herd of fallow deer, at

considerable cost of at least 1 million dollars to tax payers at the same time the Federal Government faces a 380 billion dollar deficit due to Covid 19.

The material distributed by these committees so far adds nothing more to what was disclosed 3 years ago. It is still not clear how eradication will be carried out safely taking into account the increased population of SI. It is still not clear what the owners' costs will be. There is no indication what the ethical standards referred to in the recent documentation actually means. Some methods of hunting suggested are certainly unethical and may be illegal. It will not be tolerated by many owners on the Island.

In very recent correspondence from Parks Canada, a suggestion has been made to have a "population ecologist" look at population numbers and our hunting history. The purpose would be to determine the viability of management control rather than eradication. We are optimistic about this possible new research. We have been suggesting this for 3 years. But there must be agreement on the range of the fallow deer population. Parks Canada is suggesting a range of 300-700. Those who hunt say these figures are vastly exaggerated. Mike Janssen from Parks Canada has now provided correspondence on the meaning of "restoration" advising it is a process rather than an outcome and we can never accurately predict that outcome. What we can predict is that eradication is irreversible. We agree that the key issue relates to the values of Sidney Islanders which we hope our Community Survey will help to identify in the near future. His letter is attached.

Some feel this is an issue between hunters and non-hunters. Nothing could be further from the truth. Some of us have never hunted and never will. This is about different world visions. Fallow deer are sentient social beings that feel stress, pain and anxiety just as humans do. They are here through no fault of their own. Although they have no legal right to exist (yet, anyway) we have moral and ethical obligations to the fallow deer that share Sidney Island with us. We should honour that by allowing these magnificent animals to exist in small and controlled numbers. Not only do they provide sustenance, they enrich the Island and with our help, they can stay healthy.

Our Council President has said we need to find a win-win solution to this very emotional issue. We agree. Win-win is not possible without having the information necessary to make an informed decision and then if possible, working together towards a compromise.

Jack Albrecht  
Ruth Albrecht  
Fred Anderka

Frank Nielsen  
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