

Why Bother Restoring Swan Lake?

by Fred Peters

That's the question we tried unsuccessfully to address in recent discussions with the City of Markham about the long-term water quality goals for Swan Lake.

In November, the Village of Markham Subcommittee of Council accepted a staff proposal for another chemical treatment in three years, then cutting back on the frequency or volume of chemicals applied thereafter.

The three year treatment cycle is a significant improvement over last year's proposed five year treatment cycle, but this is still not enough to restore a healthy aquatic environment.

In our March 2021 community survey, area residents strongly supported the more challenging restoration goal as an important community objective. (See chart at the end of the article)

The committee approved a five year, \$900,000 program that includes continual geese management programs and should stabilize the water quality in the lake. This should minimize the chance of health risks associated with the bacteria arising from algae in the lake. Certainly, a big improvement over the current situation.

We argued that there are three fundamental reasons for spending more money to improve the aquatic environment.

First, the staff goals are based upon a "no contact" water policy. Even if the targets are met, the water would not be considered safe for human interaction.

We don't know when it will be safe to bring back the fountain. The water quality certainly would not support some of the original goals for the lake such as canoeing, kayaking that many respondents wanted to see.

Secondly, a healthy aquatic environment provides critical baseline support essential for sustaining the broader environmental elements in the lake and park. A healthy aquatic environment includes healthy aquatic plants, which are essential contributors to oxygen in the lake, feedstock for waterfowl and an important element in the habitat for many fish and other aquatic species. A healthy fish population is an attractive food source for many of the birds that frequent the park. Under the approved plan, it will be at least five years before the lake is

healthy enough to support planting of water-based plants and stocking with fish.

The third reason is that a healthy aquatic environment, what the scientists call mesotrophic, can be a significant contributor to a natural self-sustaining aquatic balance. Lower-level forms of aquatic life consume algae. Higher oxygen levels reduce the draw of nutrients from the lake bottom.

The poorer water quality categories of eutrophic (which staff is now proposing) and hypereutrophic (where we have been for many years), are not environmentally stable. The death spiral for the lake perpetuates under these conditions and will require continual and frequent management.

We recommended spending an additional \$1.6 million on a restoration plan leading to a healthy aquatic environment in the lake. We proposed spending \$500,000 more for annual chemical treatments over the next five years to neutralize the phosphorus levels in the lake which is described as more than 60% of the algae problem. Another \$1,100,000 would be required for physical changes to the lake to improve oxygen levels and to reduce the amount of road salt going into the lake. These investments would help stabilize the improved water quality over the long term.

Concerns About Road Salt Use in Swan Lake Village

There was an active discussion on how to minimize the amount of road salt that is entering the lake. Two approaches were discussed.

The councillors asked staff to investigate and report back by next June on our claim that much of the road salt entering the lake could be reduced by rerouting the amounts now entering the lake directly from Amica and from the traffic circle into stormwater sewers on 16th Avenue. It is estimated this change would cost about \$500,000.

However, councillors felt that the central issue was how to convince local property owners to reduce their use of salt. The city salts the street areas north of the park which represents about 15% of the road surfaces that drain into the ponds. The bulk of the stormwater flow entering the ponds

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comes from Swan Lake Village. One councillor implied that Swan Lake Village was creating the salt problem and was expecting the city to pay for the cleanup.

There was an active discussion on how to encourage area property owners to adopt more prudent salt management programs including

hiring contractors that meet the *Smart About Salt* management protocols. We agreed to pass on to the authorities in Swan Lake Village, the committee's concerns about road salt use in the area.

We will have other opportunities to make the case for a healthier Swan Lake but it's going to be a tough sell getting the tax dollars needed. □

Community Role and Water Quality Goals

Over 82% of Respondents Call For Restoration



Tracking the Travel Bug

by Marg May

I was bitten by the travel bug in 1954 when, at age 24, my girlfriend and I set out to cross the Atlantic on The Ascania for the total cost of \$300. We arrived in Norway, suitcases in hand, and a two-month holiday plan to see Europe, staying in youth hostels. It didn't take long for us to learn from the Norwegian hostellers that we must change those plans.

We bought Norwegian backpacks, mailed our suitcases to Canada House in London, bought pots and pans and studied the art of hitchhiking. We were fast learners. We soon realized that Canadians were popular in Europe. We purchased signs to hang from our backpacks to tell the world we were from Canada.

From September to December we visited Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Germany, England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Austria, Italy



and Switzerland. Unforgettable!

I returned home to happily marry Les May and to have three kids. Since the desire to travel was still a big part of me. I had luckily married a guy who supported my dream.

We travelled in tents, tent trailers, campers, ships, planes and trains. I thought of a way to

keep each trip vivid in my memory. My family bought me a very large map of the world and hundreds of coloured stick pins, and I began to relive my travels.

Orange pins reminded me of my hitchhiking days. Blue pins reminded me of cruises—Alaska, Russia, South America, Europe. Yellow pins reminded me of other various excursions.

I stand in front of my colourful map and remember each trip. What a lucky person I have been!

Now I am living at Amica (and that's "okay" too.) □