

Cormorant culls the fed's responsibility: MNR minister



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The Recorder

EVANSVILLE-The responsibility for any type of cormorant cull is the federal governments', says the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources (MNR), Donna Cansfield, who says she has advised the federal government of the current problem and concern with cormorants in areas around Ontario, including Manitoulin Island.

"If a cull of cormorants were to take place, it would be under the federal government jurisdiction, because cormorants are under the migratory act," stated Ms. Cansfield, on a visit to Manitoulin earlier this week. "I have advised them (federal government) of the concerns we have

in Ontario. And, I am prepared to work with individual requests for help."

The Recorder was able to ask Ms. Cansfield questions on several issues relating to the island, including among them cormorants, turkey stocking, the spring bear hunt, sandhill crane hunt, the aquaculture industry, Gore Bay hatchery and the close of the commercial fishery for sturgeon in 2009 (the latter led to the resignation of local commercial fisherman George Purvis, from the Fish and Wildlife Heritage Commission), during her visit to

Meeker's Fish Farm (owned by Mike Meeker), in Evansville.

Ms. Cansfield pointed out, "if an individual has requested help because of a danger to their feedstock or product, the MNR can and is willing to help out. And keep in mind any farmer can get permits to protect their property from nuisance cormorants, deer or any other type of nuisance animal."

She pointed out the only cull that has taken place in Ontario is at Point Pelee, which again, came under federal jurisdiction. "One of the main problems relating to this issue is that there is a strong opinion from each side of the issue, those in favour of culls and management controls, and those against. What is needed is action that provides a balance between the two. In areas like Pelee Island there is an abundance of them (cormorants) and that is why the federal government called for the cull of adult cormorants."

"We are willing to work on individual requests, and if anyone has any creative ways of controlling these nuisance animals, I am certainly willing to listen," said Ms. Cansfield.

"Groups or individuals need to bring their concerns to us, and we will go to the feds with them, as we have no authority to cull cormorants," said Ms. Cansfield. "Like sandhill cranes, cormorants come under the Migratory Bird act, so it is a federal responsibility. But we will work with them anyone that has a concern, to help out. I hate to say it is someone else's responsibility. We need to work jointly at developing a Memorandum of Understanding on issues like this, and are very open to do this."

On the issue of turkey stocking, the minister implied that the process is still under way.

"A commitment had been made by the Premier to have wild turkeys stocked on Manitoulin, and following on that we have undertaken an environmental assessment," said Ms. Cansfield.

"It is true there have been some concerns raised with stocking of wild turkeys on Manitoulin, and we have to do due diligence," said Ms.

Cansfield. "We have a responsibility to follow through on the commitment made by the premier, and that is why we need to do the EA to look at all the issues, for and against the stocking of wild turkeys. Manitoulin Island has some very particular ecosystems."

Ms. Cansfield stated, "it's because of the two different perspectives, for and against wild turkey stocking, that we are having the EA done. Once this process is complete, then we will have something in place to further discuss this proposal."

Minister Cansfield also implied that a similar process will be undertaken before a sandhill crane hunt is approved for Manitoulin.

"We know there are a lot of sandhill cranes on Manitoulin and in many other areas of the province," said Ms. Cansfield.

"This is an interesting one, but again sandhill cranes are a migratory bird, and come under federal responsibility," continued Ms. Cansfield. "Again there is a need to talk to our staff members and get more information before we look forward on this issue."

The minister was adamant, however, that the spring bear hunt would not make a return.

"The spring bear hunt will not be coming back," stated Ms. Cansfield.

"Obviously this has been a topic of great interest in the North, but this year unlike some of the past few years there is a bumper crop of berries. That has eased the concerns and sightings of bear a bit."

The MNR continues to use it's bearwise promotional campaign to alert the public of the concerns with encountering bear, and nuisance animals, she said.

"Overall the bear population is about the same, there has not been an insurgence of bears," said Ms. Cansfield. "Our biologists and technicians report that the bear numbers are the same, there has

certainly not been an explosion of bear since the hunt was terminated." "And, one of the reasons there hasn't been an explosion of bear numbers is because the fall hunt has helped," said Ms. Cansfield.

Unfortunately, there was bad news for the Gore Bay Hatchery, which faces closure if no additional funding could be secured for next year.

"The town of Gore Bay is looking to make their fish hatchery a year round operation, with a wider variety of fish species being raised, but I don't have this in my budget," said Ms. Cansfield. "There was nothing dedicated in the last budget toward this."

"We even have ministry owned hatcheries, such as Normandale that are also facing huge challenges," continued Ms. Cansfield.

However, Ms. Cansfield did say, "I'm open to suggestions and business plans, on how to grow and expand fish hatchery operations anywhere in the province. Fish hatcheries are needed in Ontario."

The minister also addressed George Purvis's recent resignation from the Fish and Wildlife Heritage Commission. Mr. Purvis announced he would give up his spot on the commission in protest against the close of the commercial sturgeon fishery in 2009.

"I appreciate Mr. Purvis perspective on this issue, but my job as minister of natural resources is the protection of all our resources," said Ms. Cansfield. She explained, "other areas, such as California are going through the same thing we are, where Lake Sturgeon are being butchered and left on the side of banks to rot."

"So we made the decision to clamp down on the illegal aspect on Lake Sturgeon," said Ms. Cansfield. "And

because of this, it is restricting the access commercial fisherman have to Lake Sturgeon. As I said I understand the different points of view on this issue. But my first responsibility is our natural resources, and I am very concerned about the illegal poaching of sturgeon. I want to make sure there is a stop to this.... and quickly." Ms. Cansfield pointed out that, to First Nations people Lake Sturgeon are a very spiritual fish. She noted several First Nations in the North were in favour of the action taken by the MNR on this issue. "They were very supportive of this proposal when we first talked about it. In fact the OFAH (Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters) was also very supportive at first."

"This whole issue is not about you, or me, but the fish and natural resource itself," stated Ms. Cansfield. "It is about the fishery, and I take the job of protecting the fishery very seriously."

As for the operations at Meeker's Aquaculture, which includes not only the fish farm operation, but composting of fish offal and sawdust, "this is a magnificent operation," said Ms. Cansfield. "I am very impressed at Mr. Meeker's entrepreneurial skills. Not just with his fish farm operation, but taking fish to fertilizer, just makes imminent sense. I am very impressed."

"I see a very real future for aquaculture in Ontario," said Ms. Cansfield. "I see a real opportunity in the future working together with the aquaculture industry, in the area of possible expansion at operations such as this or giving other entrepreneurs the opportunity to do something similar to what is being done here (Meeker's)."