Sackville Waterfowl Park

A Development and Management Plan

prepared for the

Town of Sackville, New Brunswick

by the

Waterfowl Advisory Committee

9 March, 1988
Sackville, N.B.
9 March, 1988

To the Mayor and Council of the Town of Sackville:

In response to the request of the Town that we act as an advisory committee in
the matter of the Sackville Waterfowl Park, we have the honour to present
the attached development and management plan.

Bird-watching and nature-oriented tourism are two of the fastest-growing
recreational activities in North America today. We have attempted to devise a
plan of action for the park which puts the preservation of natural values first.
In so doing, we hope to help make Sackville an attractive destination for
visitors who are looking for this type of vacation experience, as well as a
community whose residents may always have ample opportunity to enjoy and
cherish the richness of the natural environment in which we live.

In presenting this plan, we wish to acknowledge the valued assistance of the
Town staff in arranging and recording meetings, and especially that of Mr.
Hesam Babai whose creative contribution in the preparation of drawings has
helped us to visualize the form that the park will take.

Please rest assured of our willingness to continue to serve in an advisory
capacity as this project moves on from planning, to implementation and
operational stages.

[Signature]

James (Sandy) Burnett, Chairman
Waterfowl Park Advisory Committee

Paul Bogaard
David Byers
Robert (Bud) Doncaster
Pat Estabrooks

Anne Johnson
Brian McCullough
Everett Mosher
Allan Smith, Vice-chairman
Table of Contents

Introduction ......................................................... 2

Objectives .......................................................... 3

Required Inventories ............................................... 4

Required Development ........................................... 6
  1. Physical Site Development
  2. Wildlife Habitat Enhancement
  3. Visitor Use Facilities

Regulation .......................................................... 12

Ongoing Administration and Maintenance ..................... 14

Summary of Recommendations .................................. 15

Further Considerations ......................................... 16
Introduction

Since the earliest days of settlement, Sackville has been intimately linked with the Tantramar marshes. Even today, the unique interpenetration of town and marsh contributes to a special sense of community identity. It is therefore very appropriate that the town, as part of its long-term development plan, should wish to establish a waterfowl and wetlands area as a means of extending public understanding of our community heritage, fostering a greater appreciation of wetland wildlife, encouraging concern for stewardship of the environment, and attracting visitors to share in the enjoyment of this special resource.

The acreage which the Town has set aside for this purpose is rich in plant and animal species. The present development plan is intended to preserve and enhance this diversity, and to guard against changes which might endanger it. For this reason, frequent references will be found to the importance of minimizing physical intervention on the site. Conventional engineering and maintenance methods such as grading, paving, and landscaping will be inappropriate. As a general rule, the maintenance policy for the upland fringe of the waterfowl park should be to let nature take its course, while wetland management techniques will be used from time to time to maintain the productivity and diversity of the marsh community.

It would be a mistake expect this project to be in any sense similar to commercial tourist attractions such as Magic Mountain, where, after an infusion of capital, the doors open and the crowds flock in. Nature does not respond well to forced growth; its attractions are subtle, emerging over extended periods of time. While tourists stopping at the Sackville Waterfowl Park are more likely to number in the hundreds than the thousands, this probability does not diminish its value nor its potential to enhance the quality of life of residents and visitors alike. In that sense, it will be a treasure of inestimable value for years to come.
Objectives

This project has four primary objectives:

1. To create and manage an area of wetland in the Town of Sackville for purposes of:
   a) providing breeding habitat for waterfowl and other wetland wildlife species.
   b) providing residents and visitors to the town with opportunities for year-round outdoor educational and recreational experiences in a natural setting.
   c) maintaining additional park/green space within the town.

2. To undertake habitat improvements which will enhance the area's attractiveness both to wildlife and to visitors without compromising its natural integrity through overdevelopment (e.g. paved pathways, mowed lawns, vehicular traffic, etc.)

3. To undertake an information program, through signage, pamphlets, etc., which will interpret the park as a managed wetland for wildlife, thus enhancing the visitors' enjoyment and appreciation of the area while keeping disturbance of wildlife and habitat to a minimum.

4. To serve as a focus for the Town of Sackville's choice of a waterfowl theme for its downtown and area tourism development initiatives.
Required Inventories

The Sackville Waterfowl Park area contains a rich and diverse mix of cattail, blue joint, freshwater cordgrass, burreed and horsetail, with vigorous growths of duckweed and algae wherever open water appears. Bird species which are regularly observed there include Red-winged Blackbird, Ring-necked Pheasant, American bittern, Common Snipe, Mallard, Black Duck and Blue-winged Teal. Muskrat sign is evident, as well as a wide range of insect life.

In order to develop and implement a satisfactory management plan for the area, it will be important to supplement this preliminary information by conducting initial and follow-up inventories of its biological resources. Some research will undoubtedly be undertaken by Ducks Unlimited in the context of its waterfowl habitat management responsibilities. Additional work will be required.

A student should be hired by the Town for the summer to conduct the following inventories (annually for the first three years, and every third year thereafter) under the supervision of appropriate personnel from the Canadian Wildlife Service and/or the Biology Department of Mount Allison University.

Ecosystem Mapping

To establish baseline data concerning the ecological communities which are present in the area, to make comparisons as the wetland area evolves over the years, and to indicate desirable management interventions.

Limnological Survey

A survey should be made regularly to determine the water chemistry of the flooded area of the park, and the range of invertebrate species to be found living in it. Data gathered will indicate the capacity of the area to sustain wildlife.
Breeding Bird Inventory
To assess the productivity of the area for waterfowl and other birds, and to provide up-to-date information for visitors as to what species they should look for.

Plant Community Inventory
To assess botanical productivity and diversity of the area and to provide information for use in the interpretive program.

Mammal Survey
For purposes similar to those of the breeding bird and plant community inventories above, a survey of mammal species inhabiting the area should be undertaken on a regular basis.

Visitor Survey
Regular records of visitation to the area should be kept (e.g. in a visitors' book), as well as comments and queries resulting from formal or informal questionnaires directed to residents and tourists alike, in order to make the park interpretive program as informative as possible and to enhance the visitor's enjoyment of the park.
Required Developments

If there is a dominant theme which should guide development of the Sackville Waterfowl Park, it is "Proceed With Caution". Time and timing are very important factors in the development of a wildlife area, and undue haste can readily lead to a situation where early mistakes have to be undone at great expense.

Experience elsewhere indicates that it will probably take two years after flooding by Ducks Unlimited before the newly impounded area will have stabilized sufficiently that sound judgments can be made regarding the optimum location for permanent fixtures. Precise location of facilities should not be determined until the impoundment has been flooded to its control level and the Committee has inspected the area to consider alternatives. Development of signage, footpaths, and interpretive materials should proceed immediately, but location and construction of certain installations, such as viewing stands and interpretive signage, should be undertaken with a view to the probability that they will have to be adapted and relocated as the park ecosystem develops.

The area which constitutes the Sackville Waterfowl Park falls naturally into two distinct sections.

Section A (corresponding to the area which has been leased to the Town by Mount Allison University) should be developed and managed as a multiple use wildlife and interpretive area.

Section B (corresponding to the area purchased by the Town) should be reserved from general public access to encourage wildlife production.
1. **Physical Development of Waterfowl Impoundment**

   This phase of development, including the construction of berms, dykes, control structure and nesting islands in sections A and B, has now been completed by Ducks Unlimited in accordance with their agreement with the Town of Sackville.

2. **Wildlife Habitat Enhancement**

   A variety of simple improvements should be undertaken to enhance the area (primarily Section B) as wildlife habitat. Among these are:
   
   - installation of loafing bars for ducks and muskrats
   - installation of perching posts
   - installation of nestboxes (wood duck, purple martin, etc.)
   - cattail control

   In years to come it is to be hoped that community organizations such as the Sackville Rod and Gun Club, the Chignecto Naturalists' Club, and local youth and service clubs might be encouraged to undertake ongoing sponsorship of selected activities in order to encourage a broad base of community interest and support for the Waterfowl Park.

   The foregoing habitat enhancement developments would be very appropriate projects for this purpose.

3. **Visitor Use Facilities** (Section A only)

   a) **Footpaths**, too narrow for vehicular traffic, should be laid out and constructed to permit visitors to tour Section A, and to provide access to the park from entrances at the Sackville Tourist Information Centre and beside St. Paul's Anglican Church, as well as to observation areas overlooking section B.

   These paths should be gravel surfaced where feasible. In areas where the paths traverse permanently wet ground or cross standing water, **boardwalks should be constructed of pressure treated lumber, and be**
similar in design to those used in National Wildlife areas (see illustrations). In areas where there is risk of stepping into deep water, unobtrusive safety rails could be erected.

The path from the main entrance (on East Main St. at the Tourist Information Centre) may require minimal grading and edging, after which planting should be done to make the approach to the park area appear as natural as possible. It is recommended that osier willow, a fast-growing variety found in abundance along this path, should be the chosen species for lining the transitional 'avenue' leading from the street to the impoundment. Wherever planting is to be done, this or other appropriate wetland species should be used.

The possibility of compacting the gravel on the main entrance path from the street to the bridge should be investigated, to determine whether this would facilitate access for visitors in wheelchairs.

b) Viewing platforms (see appended photographs), as well as boardwalks to connect them with the paths, should be constructed of pressure-treated wood. These might best be installed in the fall, after the impoundment banks have settled and stabilized enough to permit selection of appropriate sites. To facilitate viewing of wildlife in Section B, an earth mound could be raised some 5' – 6' above the natural contour at the northermmost end of the footpath.

c) Removal of rubble from the site of the abandoned concrete fuel tank stand beside the CN line near Clarence St. should be a priority. It is recommended that CN be approached with a request that they undertake this task without delay. At the same time, Mount Allison should be approached about enhancing the appearance of the area being reserved for future use as a sports field.
d) **Benches** should be installed at appropriate rest points along the footpath. **Waste receptacles** should be installed at the entrance/exit points to the park. Both could be simply constructed of pressure treated wood, left unpainted, and allowed to weather naturally. If benches and waste baskets of the type in use downtown are available, these, too, would be appropriate for the park.

e) **Directional signage** outside the park should be prepared and installed after major developments have been completed. There are two factors to be considered before proceeding. First, it may be unwise to promote a lot of visitation in the first year, given that the site will be under development and not very attractive, and the wildlife population just beginning to get established.

Second, the Town might wish to **review its present highway signage policy with a view to replacing and/or consolidating the numerous billboards now in place** to promote Sackville.

Notwithstanding the foregoing points, it will be important to announce the presence of the Waterfowl Park in some way. The Advisory Committee recommends that the province be requested to erect highway signs, similar to those which direct visitors to heritage attractions such as Fort Beauséjour. This would remove the necessity of major expenditure on large promotional billboards.

The view of Sackville, looking across the new park will be so attractive that it will draw the attention of tourists more effectively than garish signage or curiosities (giant waterfowl, etc.) If additional billboard signage is needed for identification, it should be unpretentious in style, and should neither obscure nor detract from the travellers' view from the highway.
For directional signage in town, the Committee fully approves of the signs which have been prepared for use on Sackville streets to direct traffic to the East Main entrance opposite the Tourist Information Centre parking lot.

At the main entrance to the Waterfowl Park, an attractive and highly visible sign will be required. One interesting approach could be to build gateposts of rough-hewn, local sandstone surmounted by a wrought-iron arch, the effect being to link the park entrance stylistically to the architectural style of the town.

An entrance gate or sign at the secondary entrance located between Cranewood and the Anglican Church should be much smaller than that at the main entrance, in order to preserve the natural panoramic vista from the street to the Waterfowl Park. Low sandstone pillars with a suitable metal plaque could serve well at this point.

Directional signs along footpaths within the park should be unobtrusive. Routed wood markers would be appropriate to the natural setting.

f) Interpretive signs incorporating text and photographs should be located at strategic points within the park.

1) Near each entrance, a sign should be erected incorporating a locator map, a preliminary explanation of the wetland ecosystem, and a summary of important rules for visitors. An indication that further information is available at the Tourist Information Centre would also be useful here.

ii) At the observation platforms, information should be provided on the species of wildlife that are likely to be seen by visitors.
Interpretive information panels should be mounted on wood laminated with fibreglass, and could be further protected against fading and vandalism by being covered by a shield of UV-resistant plexiglas bolted to the wooden backing. Those located at the observation platforms could best be mounted directly on the railing surrounding the platform. It is recommended that the construction and mounting of interpretive signs should be done in such a way that they can be readily dismounted and brought indoors for winter storage.

g) Interpretive materials should be prepared and printed, under the supervision of the Advisory Committee, to welcome visitors to the Waterfowl Park, explain its purpose and explain how it is managed. Publications should also include a trail map and notes for a walking tour of the park, and a check-list of wildlife species which they may expect to see. There is clearly an opportunity here to invite the attention of visitors to other attractions in the town and surrounding area as well.

Pamphlets, maps, etc. should be distributed only at the Tourist Information Centre, not from free-standing boxes within the park. This will encourage visitation to the Tourist Centre where additional information can be offered regarding the Town's business district and other attractions. As noted, a sign indicating the availability of such materials should be located at each entrance to the park.

To ensure consistency, the gathering and editing of information for interpretive signs and publications on the Waterfowl Park should be done under the direction/supervision of the Advisory Committee.

It is recommended that all interpretive signs and pamphlets be available in both English and French in order to accommodate the language preference of the greatest possible number of tourists.
Regulation
In order that the Sackville Waterfowl Park may be managed with as little disruptive human intervention as possible, it will be necessary to establish a few clear-cut policies governing the behaviour of visitors. To facilitate this, the Advisory Committee recommends that the Council adopt a By-law specific to the administration and regulation of this park. This By-law should include the following specific points:

a) Any molesting of waterfowl or other wildlife in the park, including disturbance of nests or destruction of habitat should be strictly prohibited.

b) In order to protect the waterfowl from becoming dependent on handouts, feeding of ducks should be strictly prohibited. (Note 1)

c) There should be no hunting within the park.

d) The park should be closed to all vehicular traffic, including bicycles, in order to avoid disturbance or damage to wildlife, visitors, or facilities.

e) Pedestrian access should be restricted to footpaths, boardwalks, and observation/rest areas, with the exception of authorized management and/or study activities.

f) Littering, defacing of signs, and other acts of vandalism should be strictly prohibited.

g) Muskrat trapping should be permitted only by special license, subject to provincial trapping regulations. (Note 2)

(Note 1: The idea of feeding waterfowl in the park, although it might seem attractive as a visitor activity, is inappropriate in a nature reserve. The area will be attractive to nature-oriented tourists as a self-contained natural ecosystem, not a "mini-zoo" or game farm where wildlife is kept in a state of semi-domestication. If feeding were to be permitted, the waterfowl could rapidly become dependent upon this source of support and fail to migrate. As a result, a large number of ducks might have to be sheltered and fed at Town expense throughout the winter months.)
(Note 2: The matter of muskrat trapping requires some further clarification. Muskrats live in the wetland area which constitutes the park, and from time to time in the past they have been trapped there. However, indiscriminate trapping so close to a residential area can pose a threat to family pets, especially cats, and can be offensive to residents and visitors if the trappers use inhumane methods, or leave rat bodies lying about.

Because the park will likely produce more muskrats following flooding, however, it will probably be desiraeable to permit a regulated harvest of animals in Section B, in order to avoid a population explosion followed by massive losses to disease or starvation. The mammal survey recommended as one of the Required Inventories on page 5 of this report will provide information as to when the population has grown enough to justify trapping, and how many muskrats should be harvested each year. If this management strategy is adopted, the Committee recommends that trapping be governed by the following regulations.

a) Permission to trap muskrats within the park should be granted under special license to the successful applicant(s) in a tendering process.

b) Muskrat trapping should be permitted in Section B only.

c) Only 'humane' trapping methods (e.g. underwater funnel traps, rather than non-lethal leghold traps) should be employed.

d) Trapping should be allowed only during the fall season to avoid disturbance and risk to breeding waterfowl.

e) The number of rats to be taken annually by license should be restricted to a sustainable yield defined on the basis of ongoing studies by DU and/or other competent wildlife management specialists.

f) The licensed trapper(s) should pay a royalty per skin as a contribution towards supporting the operation of the park.)
Ongoing Administration and Maintenance

While the foregoing sections provide guidance for the development and early management goals of the Sackville Waterfowl Park, it is evident that the ongoing administration and maintenance of the facility will require continued attention if the area is to thrive as a wildlife park and an educational and recreational attraction for residents and tourists.

Ducks Unlimited will, of course, be responsible for the ongoing maintenance of control structures and wetland management for waterfowl production.

The Town will need to make provision for execution of routine tasks such as cleanup, maintenance of footpaths and boardwalks, and security patrols, and should assign administrative responsibility for the park to an appropriate member of the permanent town staff who will liaise on a regular and ongoing basis with the Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

The dissemination of accurate public information, whether through the interpretive program, press releases, or presentations aimed at encouraging the participation of local organizations, will be an important task. At least for the time being, it is recommended that all such communications be made only via the Advisory Committee, or with its full advance knowledge.
Summary of Broad Recommendations for Action

The following general recommendations have been abstracted for easy reference. Please note that the detailed, specific recommendations in the full text are essential reading for anyone concerned with implementation of this plan.

1. The Town of Sackville should establish and develop the Sackville Waterfowl Park, to be managed in accordance with the Objectives listed on page 3.

2. To permit wise management of the park, biological inventories and human use surveys, as identified on pages 4 and 5, should be conducted annually by a summer student working for the Town under appropriate guidance from the Canadian Wildlife Service and/or the Mount Allison Biology Department.

3. Organizations such as the Sackville Rod and Gun Club, Chignecto Naturalists' Club, and local youth and service clubs should be encouraged to sponsor selected enhancement projects, as suggested on p. 7, to broaden the base of community interest and support for the Waterfowl Park.

4. Development of signage, footpaths, and interpretive materials for the Sackville Waterfowl Park should proceed immediately, but location and construction of certain installations, such as viewing stands and interpretive signage, should be undertaken with a view to the probability that they will have to be adapted and relocated as the park ecosystem develops. Detailed, specific recommendations for these developments appear on pages 6 to 11.

5. A Town By-law should be adopted which is specific to the management and regulation of the park as outlined on page 12, and staff responsible for its administration should be identified.

6. The Waterfowl Park Advisory Committee should continue to oversee and advise on matters of park policy and management, and should review all public information (press releases, promotional or interpretive publications, etc.) concerning the park for purposes of approval prior to release.
Further Considerations

During the preparation of this report, a number of considerations were raised in discussion which, although they fall outside the mandate of the Waterfowl Park Advisory Committee, were deemed to be of sufficient importance that they should be drawn to the attention of the Town.

1. Traffic Safety: A potentially dangerous situation exists at the intersection of East Main and King Streets, owing to pedestrian traffic to and from the United Church Home for Senior Citizens, the Quik Mart, and the University. With the opening of the park and the Tourist Information Centre, this situation will be further aggravated. It would seem desirable to implement preventive safety measures (possibly a pedestrian activated stoplight?) before a serious accident occurs.

2. Signage Policy: Many tourists who are attracted to natural areas for vacation experiences react negatively to large numbers of billboards cluttering an otherwise natural landscape. While attractive, informative advertising and directional signs are essential to inform travellers of what to expect in an area, they are easily overdone. At present, at least eight major billboards promote Sackville and its businesses on the highway between Beech Hill and the entrance to the Town. This could be an ideal occasion for the Town to review its signage policies with a view to making the most effective (as opposed to the most conspicuous) presentation of its attractions to passers-by.

3. Liability: The question of the Town's liability in the event of an accident resulting in injury or death within the Waterfowl Park has been raised in discussion. It would seem advisable to obtain an opinion on this matter from the Town Solicitor, and to determine if special provisions should be made to insure against such a risk.