

Featured

The Culling Fields

By Paul Harris

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In sleepy backwater London, in even sleepier backwater Ontario, there is an area known as Sifton Bog. It's a small area, less than a hundred acres, that the city has grown up around and as the Bog has been confined, so has the wildlife that lives within it. The property is actually owned jointly by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) and the City of London.

As an urban space, the Bog is not much use to anyone. You can't build anything on it and it just sits there, full of green stuff and non-taxpaying wild animals. Of particular concern to city officials is a grouping of deer. Not dangerous killer deer, not the kind who prowl the streets carrying weapons and threatening our very way of life; just the cute kind who have, unfortunately, earned the dislike of some of their neighbours.

You see, the deer like to eat vegetation and they are apparently unaware or unconcerned about whether that vegetation happens to be expensive ornamental shrubbery. Their neighbours, on the other hand, know all too well what it cost them to put in that damn-cotoneaster-bush-and-look-what-the-bloody-deer-have-done-to-it. Naturally, the only acceptable solution to this crisis is that the deer must die.

Of course, you can't usually just kill off wildlife, especially cute wildlife, for such a cavalier reason. So a more solid excuse needed to be found. Thankfully, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) came to the city's rescue.

The Bog is capable, according to OMNR and UTRCA, of sustaining about three deer (the so-called 'carrying capacity' of the area) but at last count it actually contains around fifty. So, with the advice of OMNR scientists to mull over, there has been an interminable debate among London's councilors for the past few years about how to proceed. These folks could never make a decision about lunch, let alone anything that might result in bad publicity, but it is fair to say that whatever direction they end up choosing is going to annoy a lot of people.

The discussion has centred recently around the idea of issuing licenses to cull the herd with bow and arrow. Mostly, this is because it is illegal to discharge firearms within city limits. But also, one suspects, because the politicians somehow think this will make them seem less like cold-blooded killers in the minds of the electorate. Dead is dead, but I imagine the politicians think a benign Robin Hood figure is more appealing than Rambo.

In a marvel of scientific reasoning, the idea is being floated to kill about thirty of the deer to ease the pressure on the Bog. Obviously, the math is somewhat suspect: if the Bog can only hold three deer, why eliminate only thirty out of fifty? And if it really can sustain only three,

how is it managing to sustain fifty? Oh wait, it *isn't* managing to do that: that's why they're eating the expensive shrubbery, not enough of the cheap natural vegetation lying around.

At this point, the debate is not over and now the opponents of bow hunting, who are concerned about the low percentage of 'clean kills', are muddying the water. Apparently, killing wild animals because they failed to pack their bags and leave when you encroached on their space is only good if you can do it cleanly.

There is no end in sight to this battle and meanwhile, the deer are cheerfully having lunch on someone's lovely French lilac.

At the same time, all across Ontario, there is another conflict involving OMNR because of changes they are proposing that will constrain wildlife rehabilitators. OMNR authorizes individuals to care for orphaned and injured wildlife, but new rules threaten to prevent anyone from caring for these animals humanely. Before I go further, it is important to understand who OMNR is: they are the Ministry which has carriage of the wildlife rehabilitation file but their main responsibility is to generate revenue by issuing licenses to hunters for the killing of said wildlife. Much like entrusting the keys to the wine cellar to your favorite drunken brother-in-law.

This matters to me personally because I am one of those rehabilitators, and my time has been consumed for the past half-year trying to get OMNR to get its head out of its collective butt and allow us to rehabilitate according to internationally accepted standards. So far, it's been like talking to brick ... a particularly stupid brick. Still, while we haven't got them to change their minds, we have at least got them to halt in their tracks and reconsider the issue. In the end, however, they'll probably do what the current Ontario government has consistently done ... whatever the hell they damn well please. Rehabilitation of wildlife will grind to a halt in Ontario and the last barrier between diseased animals [think rabies, here] and an uneducated public will have been removed.

The whole problem appears to arise from the Liberal government's desire to be a Nanny for all its citizens. We are all too immature, or stupid, or untutored to be permitted much control over own lives, so Premier McGuinty's crew of babysitters is racing to protect us.

But while I have been one of the foot-soldiers in this battle with OMNR and Dalton Lord-of-the-Manor McGuinty, it has occurred to me that Ontario's government is missing a splendid opportunity to exercise similar good judgment to cure a whole host of social ills in the province. As a public service, then, I approached the Premier about a plan to solve all these important social issues in one easy step. His eyes misted over as he listened to my idea, and I could see he was entranced and intrigued. We are presently working out the final details.

My plan is guaranteed to generate large sums of revenue to help reduce budgetary shortfalls. It will reduce waiting times in emergency departments, simply by reducing the number of patients. Overcrowded classrooms will be a thing of the past, our doctor shortage will be resolved in short order, our tourist trade will experience a resurgence. There will be a reduced tug on strained social services costs.

If you aren't convinced immediately that this plan will work and be all that we could hope for, then you just aren't thinking outside the box. Take off the blinders, and let your minds

soar with the possibilities.

So here it is: the government is going to introduce a program of selling licenses to hunt school children. Think of the benefits:

- Immediate income from selling hunting licenses. It's a unique program, so we can charge a high price for the privilege of culling our herd. Now that Ontario has eliminated Grade 13, it makes sense to have a month-long 'season' on each grade. There will have to be a quota, perhaps adjusted for each school grade by total body weight rather than actual numbers of kills, but those details are still to be determined. Additional income can be derived from the sale of the pelts. [Note that the Premier believes we should not include kindergarten children in this program, even though he knows that waiting until they reach Grade One increases the risk that parents will have become attached to the little buggers. He just isn't thinking clearly on this.]
- Since children unable to avail themselves of a regular family doctor in Ontario make up a large proportion of the visitors to hospital emergency rooms, there is obvious benefit to having less children to burden the system. This would also free up those emergency rooms for more needy citizens, like aging politicians. Plus, eliminating future patients before they really start to weigh down the system with old people's ailments is just prudent planning.
- There should be a tremendous increase in Ontario's tourist income, particularly from the United States. Those folks delight in shooting anything. We can even tell them that they are helping in the war on terror because it is certain that some of these children would otherwise grow up to despise Americans. Like the rest of us. For an additional cost, we could also issue a one-time license to a lucky American, selected by lottery, to hunt Carolyn Parrish.
- One of Ontario's most pressing problems, overcrowded classrooms, will be gone in an instant. This will also impact on teachers who cry about the government overburdening them with these little rascals and might, perhaps, make it possible for them to enjoy their twelve months pay for eight months work.
- Ontario's welfare system, known euphemistically as Ontario Works, will realize a drop in costs because there would simply be less mouths to underfeed. Mind you, since the benefits granted are so niggardly, the savings won't be great. But every little bit helps.
- Canada Pension and Old Age Pension plan balance sheets would suddenly look a little brighter. Now these are Federal programs, but we know from the unbiased lips of the Premier himself that Ontario is paying far more than its fair share of this burden. So maybe the Feds will ease up a bit and stop trying to dip their mitts into Ontario's wallet.
- We will nip in the bud our burgeoning crop of squeegee kids and help calm the fears of citizens who are panicked over the threat of clean windshields.
- And we will gradually make our shopping centres safe places again. We can prevent a future horde of teenagers cluttering up the malls with their multi-coloured hair, baggy pants, and flagrant body piercings. The aesthetic improvement alone is reason enough to support this government initiative.

I have to admit this program may not work in other provinces. First, it requires a

government willing to take the stupidest steps imaginable to solve its problems. That's why I approached McGuinty in the first place: where could I possibly hope to find anyone more daft? My idea will be a winner in Ontario because our government has absolutely no ethical or moral sense, is committed to breaking its commitments with unreserved vigour, and generally thinks it is the cleverest group of people ever assembled in one place ... all the evidence to the contrary continues to escape their notice. Further, a more obtuse collection of elected people is simply not possible.

But since Ontario considers itself to be the centre of the universe, or at least the most important part of Canada, you should expect that officials in your own province will do all they can to emulate McGuinty & Co. So, approach the government in your province to see if they might not be willing to consider this plan. Even if it is not as successful where you live as we expect here, it will at least help to resolve some of your persistent social ills.

No need to thank us ... guiding the rest of you is what Ontarians do best and why we are here. You're welcome.

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