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INVASIVE SPECIES - GIANT HOGWEED UPDATE

The Transportation Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated April 15, 2011 from the Commissioner of Transportation Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides Regional Council with an update on the status of an invasive plant, Giant Hogweed, and the actions being taken to manage its impact.

3. BACKGROUND

Giant Hogweed is an invasive plant that may pose a health concern to residents and staff who come in contact with it

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is an invasive plant that was introduced to Ontario from Asia in the 1940s. It is a large plant that can grow in excess of five metres in height (*Attachment 1*). Giant Hogweed has been documented in several locations throughout the Region (*Attachment 2*) and is likely present in all nine local municipalities.

The sap produced by Giant Hogweed can cause a severe skin reaction (rash and blistering) that sensitizes skin to light. Sap contact with the eyes can cause temporary, and on rare occasions, permanent blindness. It should be noted that not everyone is susceptible to the toxic sap. In addition, Giant Hogweed is having a negative ecological impact on native plants and ecosystems in Ontario.

Provincial, Regional and local governments and agencies have taken action to manage the impact of Giant Hogweed

In the fall of 2010, in response to environmental and public health concerns, the Provincial government amended the *Weed Control Act, R.S.O. 1990*, to designate Giant Hogweed as a noxious weed. This designation allows municipalities to order the removal of Giant Hogweed on private lands. The Region has a designated Regional Weed

Inspector who liaises with local municipal weed inspectors to ensure harmonization of practices and actions.

The Region has collaborated with the province and local municipalities to share technical information and best practices. In September 2010, York Region hosted a Giant Hogweed workshop for local municipal staff with experts from across southern Ontario. Regional staff including representation from Environmental Services, Community and Health Services, and Transportation Services were in attendance.

To address the various concerns regarding the ecological impact of Giant Hogweed, the Region has undertaken a program to remove plants from its right-of-way. In 2010, three infestations in Regional road rights-of-way were treated through manual removal and/or herbicide treatments. Staff continue to monitor these locations to determine if further action is required.

To inform and assist residents, the Region has provided Giant Hogweed information and links to other resources on our website, and has participated in media interviews for both newspaper and local television. The web site will be kept current as new information becomes available.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

A management protocol has been developed to control and monitor infestations on Region-owned lands

To ensure the safety of Regional staff and residents, a Giant Hogweed management protocol has been developed for infestations on Regionally-owned lands. The protocol includes the following key steps:

Step 1 – Initial Assessment

- Forestry staff will complete an initial site assessment to identify the weed and verify the extent of any infestation.

Step 2 – Risk Assessment

- In consultation with the Regional Weed Inspector, the Regional department responsible for the property will complete a risk assessment to determine if there is any risk to public and/or staff safety
- Where appropriate, the department may install barricades and/or warning signs to protect the public and staff.

Step 3 – Infestation Control

- In consultation with the Regional Weed Inspector, the department responsible for the property will implement control measures to remove the infestation. Control measures could include manual removal of plants or herbicide treatments.

Step 4 – Monitoring

- The department responsible for the property will monitor the infestation to assess the effectiveness of treatments and prescribe any follow-up control actions required.

This protocol will be shared with all appropriate Regional Departments. To ensure the health and safety of Regional employees, information has been distributed to those who may come into contact with Giant Hogweed. Operations staff and summer students receive specialized training and are aware of the plant and its impacts.

For private land occurrences, public education materials have been developed to assist residents with identification and management

If a plant is located on private property, under the *Weed Control Act* (Ontario), the resident is responsible for its removal. It is recommended that a professional weed removal contractor undertake private land removals. The Region's website includes Giant Hogweed information and links to identification and removal resources. It will be updated in the late spring 2011 to include new resource material and additional information for residents. Any resident calling the Region about possible finds on local municipal property will be directed to the local municipality.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

At this time, there are no additional financial implications associated with this report. Any additional pressures will be brought forward in the 2012 budget cycle.

Invasive species will require additional resources to manage their impact

The management of invasive species such as Giant Hogweed, Emerald Ash Borer and the Asian Longhorn Beetle are placing new pressures on existing resources. Transportation Services has identified \$65,000 in the 2011 budget for contracted removal services for Giant Hogweed infestations. Invasive species' management protocols and strategies will be developed to deal with emerging issues. Additional financial and staffing resources will be required as the full impact of these invasive species is realized. The necessary resources required for the management of these issues will be brought forward through the multi-year business planning process.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Giant Hogweed infestations have been reported on lands owned by local municipalities and on private lands. In many cases these infestations if left unattended pose a health risk to residents. The Region will continue to collaborate with local municipal staff regarding best management practices and public education.

7. CONCLUSION

Giant Hogweed continues to spread across the Region. The presence of Giant Hogweed may pose a serious health concern for residents and employees. To address the impact of Giant Hogweed a management protocol has been developed to control infestations on Regionally owned lands. Training is being provided to affected staff, and information is available to help raise public education and awareness. Continued collaboration with local municipalities will assist with information exchange, actions and monitoring.

For more information on this report, please contact Ian D. Buchanan at Ext. 5204.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The two attachments referred to in this clause are attached to this report.)



Giant Hogweed Plants

