

A snow covered countryside and views of a freezing lake with flocks of Canada Geese provided our Christmas visitors with vistas of our Garrett County winter wonderland. Such a view was even featured on the front page of last week's Republican Newspaper. The presence of Canada Geese is really nothing to celebrate.

There are two kinds of Canada Geese in our area--the transient visitors who headed south months ago and the remaining "resident" geese. While Canada Geese are a federally protected species, the resident geese are labeled as a "nuisance" waterfowl by the EPA because they quickly overpopulate an area as well as pose possible public health threats. At Deep Creek Lake and elsewhere in the County, these geese have become a real problem leaving their droppings on docks and nesting and grazing on private property.

Well intended human intervention created this problem. In the 1930's government and private stocking programs released decoy flocks of giant non-migratory Canada geese from the Midwest to lure the migratory flocks to stop en route south and build wildlife hunting areas. These resident geese are not just migratory geese that just stopped by while flying north to breed. They are a separate, much larger and more prolific subspecies. They do not migrate, but stay where they were born, using the same nesting and feeding sites year after year. They live much longer, up to 15-25 years. They breed earlier in the season so often have two clutches per season and they lay a higher number of eggs per clutch. All these traits led to a rapid expansion of the resident population over time and need for an aggressive control program.

One goose "produces a pound of droppings per day threatening the waterways where they congregate." Even in this cold winter, we see flocks of 100 Canada Geese settling into areas of the lake. A flock of 100 geese produces over 3,000 pounds of high nutrient droppings per month, impacting water quality, and accumulation of nutrients and sediment, which promote growth of grasses and algal blooms.

Public health impacts should also be taken seriously. Various articles are available on risks to health on the friendsofdcl.org web site. Basically, exposure to goose droppings should be avoided, especially by the young, elderly and those with fragile immune systems. **Geese feces usually**

contain the parasites *cryptosporidium*, *giardia*, *coliform*, and *campylobacter* which can threaten humans and animals. Geese-infested lake waters are also high in concentration of bacteria and parasites. No health advisories or cautions about exposure have been issued.

Our summer months at the lake are now spent sweeping large quantities of goose poop from docks. Property owners install crime scene tape around the docks, plastic snakes and owls or weird blinking lights to try to convince the geese to go elsewhere. Lake Management staff recommended purchase of \$90 plastic coyotes for installation on yards visited by geese. At other lakes dogs are used to harass the birds, encouraging them to settle at some other location. Such actions by individuals to scare geese off their property does not address the systemic problem, just pushes it around.

Last Spring the Policy and Review Board created a working group to investigate options for control of the expanding population of resident Canada Geese. The first meeting of the committee looked at the range of control and eradication options presented by DNR. For large areas, the following control techniques are suggested: prevent any feeding, allow hunting, modify habitat such as preventing any mowing in the buffer strip, landscape plantings installation of low wires and barrier grids, fencing, using visual scaring devices, harassing geese with loud exploders or dogs, applying an approved repellent, addling to shaking eggs, or capture and euthanasia.

After looking at these many options, the PRB group determined control option needed in-depth analysis and action by DNR specialists due to the complexity of the challenge. For example, one approach is to addle or shake the eggs as a measure of birth control. The committee did not believe this should be left to volunteers since the eggs are often laid in the fragile wetlands at the head of coves. This task should be assumed by DNR trained staff. Each control option explored posed a series of questions and complexity. At the fall meeting of the PRB, the committee recommended DNR Lake Management staff undertake an assessment of control options and develop an action plan to control and reduce resident Canada Geese.

The most direct approach is hunting. There is a hunting season for resident

Canada Geese, which is in effect now through March 6, 2013 with a bag limit of 5 birds per day per person. According to DNR, a hunter must “possess proof of purchase of the 2012-2013 Maryland Migratory Game Bird Stamp, available at www.dnr.maryland.gov/service/license or by calling 1-800—918-2870. All waterfowl hunters age 16 and over must also possess the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, available at most U.S. Post Offices or by calling 1-800-DUCK-499 or order on line at www.duckstamp.com.

Canada Geese may not be hunted within the buffer strip area of Deep Creek Lake.

Since the Canada Geese may damage agricultural crops by excessive grazing, special permission can be obtained by agricultural producers for out of season hunting from May 1 through August 31, 2013. This is a simple process. A phone request to the USDA Wildlife Services Office in Annapolis at (877) 463-6497 will produce a special permit number, with no bag limits.

Clearly controlling and reduction of resident Canada Geese population at Deep Creek Lake needs to be done. The geese will be here and will be growing in number and negative impact until such measures are implemented. According to DNR Wildlife experts, “The best time to act is late winter, before nesting begins . . .” This nuisance waterfowl substantially reduces recreational enjoyment of the lake and creates ugly messes and clean up problems, and may threaten the public health. As owner of the lake, the State has the obligation to provide programs and funding to protect ecological balance in the lake watershed. Delay will only mean increase in the costs of controls and negative impacts of inaction. Protecting the County’s “golden” goose from goose poop is a no brainer.