

Town looks to stay ahead of next year's LDD moth flare-up

At best, they were annoying caterpillars that dropped down on you from above this summer as you got some fresh air. At worst, they made meals of your trees' foliage, causing significant damage along the way.

We're living in an outbreak of LDD moths (*Lymantria dispar dispar*), previously known as Gypsy moths, and they're not expected to let up next year.

As such, the Town is looking to stay one step ahead of the invasive pests following a motion last week from Mayor Tom Mrakas.

The LDD moth can have serious, negative impacts on forest canopy, defoliating a significant number of trees during an infestation, said Mayor Mrakas in his motion. Healthy trees can generally survive, back-to-back years of LDD moth feeding can weaken a tree, making it susceptible to disease and damage from other insects and even death for some trees.

While the Town this year provided burlap wraps to help homeowners protect the trees, the motion, which was ultimately supported by Council, calls on staff to report back on all options to control LDD infestation and manage future years of this cycle, which could last up to 10 years.

Options outlined in the motion include further burlap banding, removal of eggs, pheromone traps in areas of moderate to severe infestation, and potentially targeted spraying of BTK (Bacterium Spray Treatment) on public lands.

Through passing the motion, Council signed off on the Town adopting a good neighbour approach and spraying buffer strips on the borders of publicly-owned Town of Aurora lands and private lands where there is known to be a severe infestation of LDD moths.

I think it is appropriate for us to get a report back on the options and what [BTK] contains and would it be harmful for other insects in the area, said Mayor Mrakas following questions from Councillor Wendy Gaertner on the impact such treatments would have on other species. If you look at some of the other municipalities and what they have done, while some of them have used it, some of them have used targeted spray, that is why [this motion considers] targeted spraying because you want to make sure you don't impact any other insects in the area that are vital to our ecosystem.

Councillor Gaertner said her concern was the spray is spread on the wind and she wanted assurances on its overall impact.

It is very complicated and we have a lot of upset residents and rightly so, she said. This is a tough one and I would like to know how effective staff thinks it would be.

In supporting the motion, Councillor Rachel Gilliland said she was glad it would enable municipal staff to work with other levels of government on the best approach as there are still questions on what the most appropriate steps are.

So long as we can work together and figure out what the best course of action is, this motion will do it, she said. This lends us an opportunity to at least find out more about [the options]. Staff has done a great job. I love the fact we had burlap available to our residents, [some information] videos and I think we're at a good start and we recognize that we need to mitigate this together. One of the key elements is an education piece and making sure everyone is on the same page, understands how to identify it, and [we] put our heads together to try and stop it.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter