



Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

Outdoor Education Task Force Agenda

#3/20

October 19, 2020

6:30 P.M.

The meeting will be conducted via a video conference
Members of the public may view the livestream at the following link:

<https://video.isilive.ca/trca/live.html>

Members:

Melinda Chartrand

Cynthia Cordova

Will Davies

Frank Di Cosola

Rowena Santos

Anu Sriskandarajah

Morgan Ste. Marie

Basudeb Mukherjee

Garry Tanuan

Jennifer Wigston

Pages

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS TERRITORY
2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING #2/20, HELD ON JUNE 15, 2020
[Minutes Link](#)
3. DISCLOSURE OF PECUNIARY INTEREST AND THE GENERAL NATURE THEREOF
4. DELEGATIONS
5. PRESENTATIONS

- 6. CORRESPONDENCE
- 7. ITEMS FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION TASK FORCE ACTION
- 8. ITEMS FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION TASK FORCE INFORMATION
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NEXT MEETING OF THE OUTDOOR EDUCATION TASK FORCE #4/20, TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 30, 2020 AT 6:30 P.M. LOCATION TO BE DETERMINED.

Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

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Items for the Information of the Outdoor Education Task Force

TO: Chair and Members of the Outdoor Education Task Force
Meeting #03/20, Monday, October 19, 2020

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

**RE: UPDATE ON COVID-19 OUT-OF-CLASSROOM LEARNING AT TORONTO
AND REGION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**

KEY ISSUE

Update on COVID-19 impacts and activities as it pertains to provision of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment delivered to area schools by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS Toronto and Region Conservation Authority provides both in-school and out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment;

WHEREAS as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, in-school visits and out-of-classroom field trips have been cancelled;

AND WHEREAS Toronto and Region Conservation Authority continues to adapt programs and services for local schools to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the following report be received for the information of the Outdoor Education Task Force;

BACKGROUND

With the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic and Provincially declared emergency, TRCA facilities, programs and events were either closed or cancelled. Continued restrictions have dramatically impacted TRCA's education and community programming.

Following the Stage 2 Re-Opening in Ontario, the Kortright Centre for Conservation and Black Creek Pioneer Village re-opened to the public on August 8, 2020 with safe operating protocols in place, however, TRCA's conservation field centres remain closed, while all in-school programming has been cancelled as restrictions related to access to schools have continued and are anticipated to continue.

To adapt to this uncertainty, since the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, TRCA has initiated alternative programming and delivery methods as a means of adapting business operations to the changing circumstances while continuing to stay relevant. This includes inviting participants to take part in TRCA's *#AtHomeWithNature* and *#VillageAtHome* series on Facebook, along with several other home-based family activities, live interactive workshops, learning modules for students, and online exhibits.

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To respond to the educational needs of local students, TRCA continues to develop resources and live learning experiences for classes that provide curriculum-linked lessons related to natural science, conservation and the environment. In order to better understand opportunities to intersect with vastly different learning environments, TRCA continues to work with area school boards and staff to determine how best to support students learning needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In September 2020 TRCA staff convened a professional development exchange with four of the eight school boards located in TRCA's jurisdiction (TCDSB, DDSB, PDSB, YRDSB) with the purpose of gaining a better understanding how TRCA can support teachers, students, and school boards in the GTA during the current global pandemic. Key learnings from these conversations are outlined below:

- Logistically, similar models are being used across all school boards for the 2020-2021 school year and includes in-person school and as well as online school.
 - Elementary – Either online or in-person learning. Students are cohorted with their class and teacher and there is limited rotary/movement from classroom. Breaks are staggered in some instances.
 - Secondary – Blend of online and in school learning. Using the quadmester model with A and B cohorts.
 - No club, teams or out of class experiences permitted currently.
- Non-essential visitors and volunteers are not permitted at any of the school boards therefor all external programming with schools must be online or virtual.
- Higher online enrollment has been experienced in regions with elevated COVID positive numbers.
- Some school boards have reduced class sizes in areas with higher COVID positive numbers by using gymnasiums and other areas of the school to facilitate social distancing.
- To facilitate student movement between in-person and online school, school boards have indicated that they have either prepared or may consider preparing a set schedule for curriculum delivery for the academic year.
- The main platforms being used by school boards for online learning are Google Classroom (Google Meetup for live online sessions) and D2L. Zoom is also being used for live online sessions by some school boards.
- External organizations may provide presentations and programming to students and teachers, however, it must be virtual. The host of these programs will vary depending on the school board – some school boards will allow an external provider to host the online program while it must be hosted through the teacher within other school boards. Teacher presence is required for live online synchronous learning with students.
- School boards are focusing on outdoor learning and getting their students outside as much as possible. Incorporation of indigenous pedagogy into outdoor learning and anti-

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black racism and anti-oppressive training for teachers is also an area of focus for some boards.

- School boards with outdoor education staff have shifted their focus to community-based programming and supporting teachers on outdoor learning. One school board is doing this virtually and has assigned each educator to a family of schools (or multiple families of schools) while another school board is posting their outdoor education staff at schools.
- The demand is high for safe outdoor learning environments. Access to community can be a challenge. Some schools are accessing adjacent park spaces and allowing community walks.

Based on this discussion, there are a number of ways that TRCA can offer support to school board partners:

- Provide professional development and learning opportunities and/or resources to support teachers in how to use and/or connect the natural environment to both virtual and in-person learning settings. These can be live online sessions or pre-recorded videos, resources, activity packages, etc. One board suggested providing a designated 'bookable' outdoor educator for teachers to go to for assistance and support on connecting their student to natural spaces.
- Provide synchronous or asynchronous curriculum connected learning opportunities for students in all grades.
- Provide virtual SHSM programs and independent co-op opportunities for secondary students.
- Support getting students outside into the community and local outdoor learning environments through the provision of greenspace mapping around schools and the assessment of outdoor greenspaces near schools for safety concerns and learning opportunities.
- Identify and provide resources to support teachers in finding creative and hands-on ways to use the new math curriculum.

RATIONALE

On an annual basis, TRCA provides approximately 155,000 learning experiences for students and classes from schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). These experiences are delivered either through TRCA's in-school education services (eg. Watershed on Wheels and Aquatic Plants Program), or in one of TRCA's education centres or conservation areas. With the current COVID-19 global pandemic, both in-school and out-of-class learning experiences have been cancelled.

While the timeline for restart of out-of-classroom education programming is not known at this time, building on the information noted above, staff are developing opportunities to leverage TRCA's resources, including curriculum, teaching expertise and education facilities that will engage students from area schools and school boards in learning related to natural-science, conservation and the environment. These offerings include:

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- Live Synchronous Field Trips
- Live Synchronous Webinars
- Curriculum-Linked Resources and Learning Supports

The curricular goals of these programs are to continue to provide safe, effective learning experiences during the global pandemic while maintaining important relationships with local schools, teachers and administrators. Additionally, the ability to develop and deliver online learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment is complementary to the overall objectives of TRCA and the Outdoor Education Task Force as it provides the ability to enhance and leverage out-of-classroom learning by integrating online curriculum with experiences in nature. As a key element of curriculum-renewal, on an ongoing basis, TRCA has developed and delivered integrated learning experiences that scaffold multiple educational experiences into unified learning units, thereby expanding the opportunity to improve student literacy related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

While some program offerings will be provided on a fee-for-service basis, as with normal education offerings, TRCA has a range of opportunities for schools to access learning experiences both at a subsidized and non-subsidized cost.

Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Staff are currently working with local schools and school boards to develop and offer these new educational offerings as an interim measure until out-of-classroom learning experiences are able to resume and will provide an update report at the November, 2020 Outdoor Education Task Force meeting.

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Date: October 13, 2020

Items for the Information of the Outdoor Education Task Force

TO: Chair and Members of the Outdoor Education Task Force
Meeting #03/20, Monday, October 19, 2020

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **SUMMARY OF OETF I-THINK WORKSHOP 2**

KEY ISSUE

Summary overview of the results of the Outdoor Education Task Force (OETF) *Workshop Two* facilitated by I-THINK on June 15, 2020 related to developing a draft statement for a framework of the future of outdoor education in the Greater Toronto Area school boards.

RECOMMENDATION

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the following workshop summary and draft statement (as prepared by I-THINK) from the Outdoor Education Task Force Workshop Two held on June 15, 2020 be received;

BACKGROUND

At the Outdoor Education Task Force meeting conducted via video conference on June 15, 2020, staff from I-THINK facilitated a workshop with OETF members focusing on models and mechanisms for the future of outdoor education. After a brief introduction, task force members were divided into two groups and placed in separate, virtual meeting rooms to discuss and record their thoughts related to the following topics:

- Outdoor Education and Community Building;
- Outdoor Education and Taking Action/Leading;
- Outdoor Education and Problem-Solving Fun.

Task force members and/or TRCA staff captured these ideas using the interactive whiteboard, *Jamboard*. Upon completion of the exercise in small groups, the task force members reconvened to review the queries together. Data was then downloaded for analysis and summary.

RATIONALE

From the June 15, 2020 OETF meeting facilitated by I-THINK staff, ideas generated by the Task Force members were collected and synthesized to form a draft statement (see attachment) for review and input from OETF members at the October 19, 2020 OETF meeting. The draft statement begins to develop a vision for outdoor education and roles that offer support for school boards and GTA communities in their pursuit of outdoor education excellence. Please see attachment, *Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Outdoor Education Task Force: Statement Draft for Feedback*, as prepared by I-THINK.

Next steps for the OETF include finalizing the draft statement, including formation of broad strategic public policy goals that inform and support the overall objectives of the OETF and will guide future efforts to optimize out-of-classroom learning for students of the GTA. At the next meeting of the OETF, a final report, including recommendations related to the draft statement, framework and broad strategic policy goals, will be provided for consideration and adoption.

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Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following strategies set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:

Strategy 4 – Create complete communities that integrate nature and the built environment

Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 12 – Facilitate a region-wide approach to sustainability

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Date: October 7, 2020

Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Outdoor Education Task Force: Statement Draft for Feedback

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Outdoor Education Task Force Statement Draft for Feedback October 2020

In 2019, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) convened the Outdoor Education Task Force (Task Force) to develop a framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning experiences related to natural science, conservation and the environment that meets the needs of the student population to the year 2040.

As part of a series of working group activities, the Task Force was asked to imagine a future where outdoor education is accessible to all - holding an important role in students' learning experience. The Task Force proposed the following for TRCA's role in bringing the framework to life:

We envision a future where...

The students of Ontario have consistent and equitable access to high-quality outdoor education.

Educators have the confidence and self-efficacy to make environmental stewardship the core of their classroom pedagogy.

Trustees, in partnership with parents and guardians, advocate to school boards for system change in how funds are allocated for outdoor education, ensuring flexibility for classrooms and whole boards in their support of outdoor education.

Community comes together to create a system of support safeguarding impactful out of classroom learning related to natural science, conversation and the environment.

Generations of environmental stewards are nurtured , nourished, empowered and sustained with outdoor education experiences; contributing to a citizenry with a life-long appreciation for nature and land, and the agency required to take action. These actions ensure a viable future for ourselves and the environment.

TRCA is the...

Catalyst that brings stakeholders together to make environmental learning and stewardship, that is rooted in equity and anti-oppression, a reality for all students.

Convener of important conversations and facilitator of taking actions that will link school boards to school boards, organizations with school boards, and school boards in around its jurisdiction to TRCA - along with valuable input from council members, community liaisons and educators. This work shifts the culture of the education community - with students, parents, guardians, classroom educators, administrators and central staff - to one that champions the importance of outdoor education.

TRCA will bring this vision to life by...

Stepping into our leadership role | As TRCA we have a leadership role to play.. A history of doing meaningful, impactful work has made us a leader in conservation and outdoor education; uniquely grounded in science. We will leverage our ability to influence how the education community fosters environmental stewardship rooted in equity, anti-oppression and cultural appreciation.

Leading with student voice | For outdoor education to become equitable, anti-oppressive and reflective of student identities, students must lead the way in imagining, influencing and informing possibilities. As an organization at the forefront of watershed and ecological management, we will collaborate with students to centre their identities and lived experiences in outdoor education experiences.

Convening and building the collaboration ecosystem | Shifting culture requires stakeholders to collaborate. TRCA is the connector for groups, creating support systems for educators, students and communities to engage in outdoor education. It is this collective that will build momentum to advocate for system change in funding outdoor education and creating the budget flexibility needed to allow individual schools and school boards to engage in outdoor education. As collaboration grows in the system, new partnerships will emerge.

Setting the standard for outdoor education programming | As a collective, we will identify the guiding principles that must be embedded within outdoor education design. It is these principles that will set the standard for experiences that are rooted in equity and anti-oppression; accessible to all and affirming to student identities, regardless of socioeconomic and geographic proximity. Guiding principles will jointly be created with school boards, educators and organizations and used in designing their outdoor education experiences, promoting environmental stewardship. This is how we build capacity in community to look for quality experiences in outdoor education.

Co-creating the entry points | TRCA supports students, educators, school boards and community organizations in bringing outdoor education experiences to life. There is no single right way to start developing as an environmental steward. Instead, TRCA will collaborate with organizations and educators to co-design outdoor education experiences that are rooted in cultural knowledge and appreciation, and embedded within inquiry-based learning that amplifies the learning and experiences.