

Item for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, May 31, 2023 Meeting

FROM: Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services

RE: **TRCA's WATERSHED PLANNING PROCESS AND THE WATERSHED PLAN**
Humber River, Etobicoke Creek, and Carruthers Creek

KEY ISSUE

To provide an overview of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) integrated watershed planning process and update on the status of the development of the Etobicoke Creek and Humber River watershed plans and the implementation of the Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS TRCA is a watershed-based organization involved in integrated watershed planning and management to help achieve healthy and resilient watersheds, community well-being, and safety over the long term;

AND WHEREAS watershed planning provides a framework to assess the current and potential future conditions of the watershed and identifies measures to protect, restore and enhance watershed health;

AND WHEREAS provincial policies in some cases require and encourage municipalities to complete watershed plans, in partnership with conservation authorities;

AND WHEREAS TRCA and its partner municipalities are working on advancing the Humber River Watershed Plan (HRWP), completing the Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan (ECWP), and implementing the Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan (CCWP) and other previously completed watershed and subwatershed plans;

AND WHEREAS TRCA will be undertaking the final stages of public, stakeholder, and First Nations and Indigenous community engagement this Fall to receive feedback and to support finalizing the draft ECWP;

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) provide input on the planned engagement sessions be received and incorporated into the final engagement strategy for the ECWP;

AND FURTHER THAT RWA members be encouraged to communicate opportunities for engagement on the ECWP and on watershed plan implementation including restoration, education and other community projects

through their networks.

BACKGROUND

A watershed refers to an area that is drained by a river and its tributaries. Healthy watersheds provide various benefits (e.g. clean water, flood protection, recreation opportunities) that are critical to healthy ecosystems and safer human communities.

The purpose of a watershed plan is to help understand current and potential future watershed conditions, and identify measures to protect, enhance, and restore watershed health. These measures ensure that ecosystems are resilient and human communities are safe from natural hazards over the long term. Watershed planning integrates natural systems into land use and infrastructure decision-making, and climate adaptation planning. It helps identify strategic management actions for nature conservation and mitigation measures to minimize the undesirable impacts of land use and climate change.

Watershed plans are not land use plans. However, as supported by provincial policy, the data, scientific analysis, modelling, scenario evaluation, and management actions generated through a watershed planning process are used by municipalities to help inform future land use planning and infrastructure decisions. Watershed plans can also be an excellent resource to municipalities and other stakeholders. These plans inform sustainability and climate adaptation planning, green space securement and management, green infrastructure implementation, stormwater management planning and retrofits, and urban revitalization initiatives.

Currently, TRCA and its partner municipalities are working on three watershed plans at various stages of the process as part of TRCA's next generation of watershed planning. They include:

- (i) Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan (CCWP)
- (ii) Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan (ECWP)
- (iii) Humber River Watershed Plan (HRWP).

TRCA has an over 30 year history of advancing watershed and subwatershed plans with municipalities, industry and community stakeholders beginning in the 1990's across TRCA's jurisdiction. These plans have helped to inform and provide certainty for land use and infrastructure planning and investments while mitigating negative environmental impacts. Watershed and subwatershed plans have helped identify issues to better inform development and infrastructure decisions and to achieve restoration opportunities. In most cases the plans have played a major factor in helping to maintain water quantity and quality conditions to help avoid and or mitigate negative environmental impacts that typically accompany urbanization. In some notable instances in the Rouge and Duffins Creek, populations of coldwater species have been able to persist in large part due to adherence to watershed and subwatershed plan recommendations. Work on earlier watershed and subwatershed plans has informed the development of the next generation of watershed plans currently underway that are described in more detail below.

RATIONALE

Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan

The Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan (CCWP) was endorsed by Durham Regional Council in June 2021 and approved by the TRCA Board in September 2021. Since then, it has been in the implementation stage. TRCA's Watershed Planning and Reporting (WPR) staff have been working closely with our partner municipalities to facilitate implementation.

To support this, an Implementation Steering Committee consisting of staff from TRCA, the Region of Durham, City of Pickering, Town of Ajax, and Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation has been formed. This committee advocates for effective implementation of the CCWP, helps build partnerships and seeks funding, provides input on annual prioritization of actions and budgeting, and tracks progress for regular reporting. (Additional details is available on [TRCA's CCWP website](#))

In 2022, TRCA, with guidance from the Implementation Steering Committee, facilitated two projects that help advance the management recommendation 1.1.7 and 2.1.3, which are described briefly below.

- i) For management recommendation 1.1.7 TRCA in partnership with the Town of Ajax, and the Region of Durham has initiated a Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plan (SNAP) in one of the priority planting neighbourhoods that was identified in the CCWP. This project will focus on promoting sustainable home retrofits and hosting several awareness and planting events to plant more than 250 trees/shrubs and 400 stems of wildflowers.
- ii) For management recommendation 2.1.3 TRCA in partnered with the Region of Durham, Town of Ajax, and Ducks Unlimited Canada to restore about 8 hectares of riparian vegetation and wetlands in the Kerrison Wetland site. In addition, TRCA is assisting the partners to explore additional funding opportunities and to actively apply for various grants (e.g. Natural Infrastructure Fund) to expand this project to additional areas.

TRCA will continue to work with the Implementation Steering Committee to help identify priorities for each subsequent years and assist in advancing implementation and tracking and reporting on the progress.

To facilitate reporting on implementation progress, TRCA intends to increase the functionality of the existing [Watershed and Ecosystems Reporting Hub](#) by developing a watershed planning platform that would incorporate the CCWP (and each watershed plan going forward as they are developed), and a watershed plan implementation tracking platform to track and report on implementation progress / watershed trends over time to ensure public accountability on the part of TRCA and its partner municipalities.

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Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan

The development of the ECWP commenced in 2020 with the formation of a Steering Committee with staff from TRCA, the City of Toronto, Region of Peel, City of Mississauga, City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and the Greater Toronto Airport Authority. Additional Indigenous communities and First Nations, stakeholders, and members of the public have been involved and engaged throughout the watershed planning process using various means. Approaches to engagement included virtual webinars, in-person open houses and events, emails, project subscriber list, and the ECWP project website.

Currently, the ECWP is in its final stage of development with drafting of the ECWP document. This involves using a collaborative approach to implementation planning and drafting a management framework that identifies actions to protect, enhance, and restore watershed health. This information is combined with the key findings from the previous two stages that characterized current watershed conditions and provided insights on potential impacts of future land use and climate change.

The draft ECWP document is prepared with extensive input and review by the ECWP Technical Committee and the Steering Committee. The next step is to release the ECWP for public review. A 2023 engagement session is planned to facilitate this, which includes two Open Houses, two virtual webinars, and presence at TRCA events to share the draft ECWP document and receive feedback. This will be followed by the revisions, and final approvals from municipal councils and TRCA's Board of Directors. Once final approvals are obtained, the implementation stage of the ECWP will begin.

A summary of planned timelines is presented below. (Additional details on ECWP is available on [TRCA's ECWP website](#))

Stage	Timeline
Preparation and scoping	2020
Watershed characterization	2020 – 2021
Future management scenarios	2021 – 2022
Implementation planning and watershed plan development	2022 - 2023

Humber River Watershed Plan

The development of the HRWP commenced in 2022 with the formation of a Steering Committee with representatives from TRCA, City of Toronto, Region of Peel, Region of York, Dufferin County, Simcoe County, City of Brampton, Town of Caledon, City of Vaughan, Township of King, City of Richmond Hill, Town of Aurora, Town of Mono, and Township of Adjala-Tosorontio, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Additional Indigenous communities and First Nations, stakeholders, and members of the public have been involved and engaged through various means. Engagement approaches have included virtual webinars, in-person events, emails, project subscriber list, and the HRWP project website.

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Currently, the HRWP is in the middle stage of development with completion of the characterization stage that provides insights on watershed health. The future scenario analysis stage has also been initiated and highlights potential impacts of future changes in land use and climate.

Once this stage is completed in 2024, broader engagement with the public, stakeholders, and other First Nations and indigenous communities will be completed to share insights and receive input. This will ensure that a collaborative approach to implementation planning and drafting of the management framework is undertaken. Lastly, in 2025 the draft HRWP document will be developed, which will be released for public review, followed by revisions and final approvals.

A summary of planned timelines is presented below. (Additional information on HRWP is available on [TRCA's HRWP website](#))

Stage	Timeline
Preparation and scoping	2022
Watershed characterization	2022 – 2023
Future management scenarios	2023 – 2024
Implementation planning and watershed plan development	2024 - 2025

Relationship to TRCA's 2022-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillar(s) and Outcome(s) set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 1 Environmental Protection and Hazard Management:

- 1.3 Maintain healthy and resilient watershed ecosystems in the face of a changing climate

Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

- 2.3 Advocacy and adaptability in the face of policy pressures

Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:

- 2.4 Integrate environmental considerations and science into decision making

FINANCIAL DETAILS

The development of the watershed plans, engagement, and the reporting tools was supported by capital funding from the Region of Peel, York Region, Region of Durham and the City of Toronto (capital levy accounts 120-02). TRCA technical staff involvement was also supported through a variety of other accounts. Additionally, TRCA staff secured external funding in the form of grants from Mitacs Inc. to complete parts of

the watershed planning and reporting needs.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Carruthers Creek Watershed Plan

TRCA will continue to support implementation of the CCWP and develop tracking tools to report on implementation progress. Implementation actions will be identified annually by the Implementation Steering Committee, subject to available budget and capacity.

Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan

The final engagement session with the public, stakeholders, and First Nations and Indigenous communities is planned for August and September 2023. The draft ECWP will be available for a 60-day public comment period starting on August 1, 2023.

Prior to the public commenting period, TRCA will provide engagement notifications and an information brief on the draft ECWP to TRCA Board Members and the Regional Watershed Alliance via TRCA's Clerks Office and to municipal councilors in the watershed via TRCA's Government and Community Relations Team. Engagement notifications will also be sent to First Nations and Indigenous communities, stakeholders, and the project webpage subscribers list.

TRCA staff will also undertake project webpage updates, a broader social media campaign, and will participate in various TRCA events to raise awareness of the draft ECWP (i.e., Bike the Creek on June 10, 2023, MPP open houses, etc.). Lastly, TRCA, in collaboration with Steering Committee partners, will host online webinars and in-person open houses during the comment period to provide information on the draft Etobicoke Creek Watershed Plan and receive feedback from the audience.

After the broader engagement on the draft ECWP is complete, TRCA will complete revisions based on comments received and will prepare the final ECWP. The final ECWP will then go through the appropriate approval/endorsement processes within each municipality and finally through TRCA's Board of Directors.

TRCA is currently working with its partner municipalities to confirm the approval/endorsement process for the final ECWP. It is important that partners municipalities within the watershed take the final ECWP document to their respective decision-making bodies and/or Councils for endorsement (or equivalent). This will emphasize that the ECWP is a collaborative plan developed by all partners and ensure that all partner organizations continue to be committed to the watershed plan and its implementation.

Upon approval/endorsement from each of the municipal Committees/Councils, the final ECWP will proceed to the TRCA Board of Directors for approval. Following the TRCA Board of Directors approval, if received, the ECWP will be considered final and ready for implementation by all watershed partners.

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Humber River Watershed Plan

The next steps for the HRWP include preparation of the Characterization Report and sharing the key findings in 2023. This includes posting the report on the TRCA's HRWP project website and sending notifications advising of the webpage updates and available reports to the public, stakeholders, First Nations and Indigenous communities, municipal councilors, TRCA Board members and the Regional Watershed Alliance. In addition, the project team will participate in various TRCA events including Celebrate the Humber event on August 27, 2023 and other local events as opportunities arise. The intent will be to focus on raising awareness about the HRWP and the key findings from the Watershed Characterization Stage.

Also, TRCA staff will complete the Future Management Scenarios Stage in 2023-2024 to understand how the watershed conditions may change under different future land use and climate scenarios. Once this stage is completed in 2024, a broader engagement with public, stakeholders, other First Nations and Indigenous communities will be completed to share insights and receive input. This will ensure that a collaborative approach to implementation planning and drafting of the management framework is undertaken. Lastly, in 2025 the draft HRWP document will be developed, which will be released for public review, followed by revisions and final approvals.

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