

Item for the Information of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, February 28, 2024 Meeting

FROM: John MacKenzie, Chief Executive Officer

On behalf of Government & Community Relations

RE: **YOUTH COUNCIL 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATES**

KEY ISSUE

To receive Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) approval of the composition of the 2024-2025 TRCA Youth Council Executive and the appointment of two Youth Council Executives to fill the RWA Youth representative vacancies, as well as to present the 2023-2024 Youth Council Annual Report which provides highlights of the Youth Council's term.

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS TRCA's Youth Council has been active for five years with the 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive having completed their most recent one-year term;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the Youth Council Executive's term be extended for an additional year in 2024-2025 for those members who are eligible and wish to continue;

THAT RWA endorses the recruitment of additional Youth Council Executives to fill vacant seats for the 2024-2025 term;

THAT RWA appoints two Youth Council Executives to fill Youth representative roles on RWA for 2024;

AND FURTHER THAT RWA accepts the Youth Council Annual Report, attached as Attachment 1, which summarizes the work completed and evaluates the Youth Council's 2023-2024 term.

BACKGROUND

Youth Councils are deployed around the world as a means to engage and inspire youth and to gain perspectives from youth as an advisory body. TRCA's 2017 Community Engagement Strategy recommended the development of a Youth Council. The program framework of the Youth Council was developed by TRCA staff and Regional Watershed Alliance members, with the goal of the Youth Council being to build healthy communities.

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This is achieved through four program objectives:

- Build capacity and engage youth by providing youth across the Toronto region with learning opportunities;
- Build a youth network/strengthen existing networks through creation of a broad network of youth in the region that is interested in environmental and sustainability issues;
- Identify youth perspectives by developing an understanding of youth opinion around current environmental issues and how these might be incorporated in the work of TRCA and its partners; and
- Create fun opportunities for youth through entertaining and engaging learning opportunities.

The framework for the Youth Council was approved by RWA at its meeting held on February 21, 2018 (RES.#R11/17).

Youth Council members may either join as General members or Executive members. General members can take part in Youth Council events and initiatives and there is no significant vetting process to join, nor any limit on the number of General members. The Executive membership consists of ten members and serves as the guiding body for the Youth Council. Executive members are responsible for the development of program activities and initiatives that fit within the objects defined in the program framework, in collaboration with TRCA staff. Executive members have a one-year term with the possibility of extension for an additional year and are appointed through an annual application and selection process, in accordance with TRCA's Public Appointments Policy and the RWA Terms of Reference. The most recent 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive term ends in March 2024.

RATIONALE

Appointment of the 2024-2025 Youth Council Executive

The ten members of the 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive were selected in February 2023 by the Youth Council Executive Selection Committee and include three returning members from the previous year. For the 2024-2025 Youth Council Executive term, it is recommended that the following existing members who were eligible to have their terms extended by an additional year and chose to continue on the Executive, be appointed for one final term, ending in March 2025:

- Fatima Abidi
- Dhara Parsania
- Malhar Patel
- Lauren Smith
- Shatabdy Zahid

Recruitment to fill the Youth Council Executive vacancies for the 2024-2025 term was held from December 22, 2023 to January 31, 2024 and 46 applications were received. Of these applications, it was deemed that 44 applicants met the minimum criteria for

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Youth Council Executive membership based on age and residential or school attendance location within TRCA's jurisdiction. Youth Council Executive applications were reviewed by two relevant TRCA program staff and by one exiting member of the Youth Council Executive. As a result, it is recommended that the following applicants be approved as members of the 2024-2025 Youth Council Executive:

- Lamin Darboe
- Juliana Duguid
- Adam Mawani
- Sarvesh Sekar
- Evelyn Widner

Appointment of Youth Council Executive Members as Youth Representatives for RWA

The RWA has two Youth representative roles, to be filled by Youth Council Executive members. For the next 2024-2025 Youth Council Executive term, it is recommended that the following Youth Council Executive members be appointed as the Youth representatives for the RWA:

- Dhara Parsania
- Malhar Patel

2023-2024 Youth Council Achievements

The 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive continued with virtual monthly meetings throughout the term but was able to increase in-person events again between Spring and Fall 2023. New and returning Executive members first met in March 2023 and brainstormed new events and initiatives, assigned meeting roles, and agreed upon a communication framework for the year, including meetings on the last Wednesday of each month, use of Slack for regular touchpoints, a monthly newsletter for General members, and additional meetings to be booked as necessary.

Throughout the 2023-2024 term, the Youth Council Executive held monthly virtual meetings, which continue to be the preferred format for time and cost savings. Each meeting is managed by one youth, including agenda preparation, and chairing the meeting. Additional roles at each meeting include delivery of the land acknowledgement, minute taking, and commitment to produce the monthly newsletter, making each meeting a group effort of at least three separate Executive Members. The Youth Council newsletter is produced and circulated consistently each month and continues to provide an excellent learning opportunity for the youth to work with TRCA staff in its compilation, as well as serving as a venue to promote the achievements and opportunities of the Youth Council.

The nine Youth Council Executive members actively participated throughout the 2023-2024 term and continue to show passion and dedication as volunteers and representatives of TRCA. The Youth Council Executive was further able to hold in-depth discussions of the program's structure and goals at an in-person retreat in July 2023,

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which resulted in a fulsome schedule of events and initiatives planned for the remainder of 2023, and into 2024, outlined below.

Participation in single Youth Council events and initiatives by General Youth Council members and members of the public fluctuated depending on the location and nature of the event, with the guided mushroom foray and fall planting bringing in the highest numbers for participation, followed by Indigenous themed learning events and virtual town hall meetings. Social media, word of mouth, internal and external cross-promotion, and the monthly newsletter were the primary methods of promoting Youth Council events. The frequency of Youth Council newsletters increased this past year to monthly and the number of Youth Council members (Executive and General) increased by 150 to a total of 504.

Similar to the 2022-2023 term, the two themes that continue to gain traction and momentum through 2023-2024 include a rising interest in career options within the conservation sector, and the desire for increased engagement between the TRCA Youth Council and TRCA staff. Collaborations occurred between the Youth Council and the following TRCA divisions and teams: Restoration and Infrastructure, Ecosystem and Climate Science, Watershed Planning and Reporting, Government and Community Relations, Conservation Parks and Lands, and Community Learning. Marketing and Events staff also continued providing essential support for the program's communications. In addition, several Youth Council Executives also represented the Youth Council at TRCA signature events, including Bike the Creek and Adventures of Salmon.

Youth Council Highlights from 2023-2024 Term

The following events or outreach initiatives were created, delivered, or attended/volunteered at by the Youth Council Executive members, under the guidance and/or with the support of TRCA staff.

- YC Executive Volunteer at Loafer's Lake Earth Day Cleanup (April 2023)
- YC Executive Guest Interview on the Toronto Nature NOW Radio Show (May 2023)
- YC Executive Volunteer at TRCA Bike the Creek (June 2023)
- *Youth Council Town Hall Webinar: Pathways into Green Employment (June 2023)
- Four Colours Drum Circle hosted the Youth Council Summer Retreat Stewardship Activity and Indigenous Drumming Ceremony (July 2023)
- YC Executive Workplan Finalization for 2023 and Nature-based Art Activity (July 2023)
- Vaughan-Woodbridge Youth Council Environmental Stewardship Event - Buckthorn Removal (August 2023)
- TRCA Peel Education Youth Climate Retreat YC Executive Panel Participation (September 2023)
- YC Executive Volunteer at Adventures of Salmon (September 2023)

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- YC Executive Volunteers at the Four Colours Drum Circle hosted Truth and Reconciliation Event at Heart Lake Conservation Park (September 2023)
- TRCA Regional Watershed Alliance Flood Infrastructure Tour (October 2023)
- TRCA York Education Team Fall Friends Planting Event (October 2023)
- Sacred Medicines and Smudge Bundling Workshop at Heart Lake Conservation Park (October 2023)
- *Youth Council Town Hall Webinar: TRCA Controlled Burns at Alto Meadows (October 2023)
- Guided Fall Fungi Foray in partnership with Mycological Society of Toronto (October 2023)
- Co-facilitation by YC Executive Members at an Urban Nature Biodiversity Workshop with University of Toronto (November 2023)
- *Youth Council Town Hall Webinar: Peel Region Transition (November 2023)
- *Youth Council Town Hall Webinar: Developing Your Environmental Career Webinar and Introduction to Seasonal Opportunities at TRCA (Planned for January 2024)
- *Profile piece on Youth Council Executive Member in the Toronto Star (January 2024)
- *Joint YC/Canadian Conservation Corps Virtual Tour of the Ontario Turtle Conservation Centre (February 2024)
- 10 newsletters sent to the Youth Council General membership list in 2023
- 2024-25 Executive Recruitment - Social media promotion including 2 video testimonials from Youth Council Executive members (December 2023 through January 2024)

* denotes a virtual event or initiative

Full descriptions of the events can be found in the TRCA Youth Council Annual Report (Attachment 1)

Program Evaluation and Recommendations

The 2023-2024 Youth Council Executive was consistently and highly engaged throughout their term. They delivered a wide variety of events that ranged from planting stewardship events to in-person workshops, to outdoor forays, to virtual town halls, to various learning opportunities about Indigenous culture, history, and reconciliation. This continued engagement could be attributed to several factors including:

- A shift back towards in-person events with place-based and hands-on activities;
- Strong leadership and involvement from returning Youth Council Executives who helped to establish expectations and norms from the outset;
- Various opportunities for individual Executive members to gain leadership and public speaking experience in both virtual platforms such as monthly meetings, as well as at in-person events by providing volunteer, promotional and educational support;

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- Continued increased programming related to education and careers in the conservation sector; and
- A positive working relationship with, and involvement from, Four Colours Drum Circle providing Indigenous learning opportunities.

The positive impact of the Youth Council program for Executive members can be seen in their continued interest in leading activities, connecting with TRCA staff in various divisions, and the application of their experience in furthering their own careers and aspirations. This includes several Executive members citing Youth Council experience as being a positive factor in finding work in the environmental field.

While the program has seen much success in meeting goals and objectives, after undertaking a program evaluation process, the following is a summary of the recommendations for program improvement:

- Continue hybrid program delivery with online offerings for presentations and discussion forums, and in-person offerings for place-based or hands-on activities;
- Continue network building and marketing the TRCA Youth Council, tapping into other TRCA education and public-facing programs and TRCA connections with municipal partners;
- Continue strengthening the connections between the Executive and General members of the Youth Council through individual outreach to new General members and increased open Executive meetings or town halls;
- Building a communication platform to re-engage former Youth Council Executives to champion initiatives and attend events;
- Continue efforts to broaden the recruitment of the Youth Council to include more members from diverse communities through more deliberate recruitment strategies with different groups/agencies who work in target communities;
- Continue to find synergies between TRCA's work and strategic goals/priorities, and the work of the Youth Council;
- Reassessing membership structure/management and ensuring "Express Consent" is collected going forward to ensure ongoing communication and accurate membership numbers; and
- Increase opportunities for RWA members to be involved, either directly or through promotion of events, through quarterly updates at RWA meetings by RWA Youth Reps, or through other means.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.3 Informed citizens are conservation champions

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Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.4 Inspired communities take environmental action

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Funds are available in TRCA Government and Community Relations program accounts for watershed engagement and community projects to support the recruitment, convening and ongoing activities of the Youth Council. Staff will work with the Regional Watershed Alliance Youth Council working group and with the Youth Council itself to ensure that the scope of work reflects the available budget and staff support. In 2023, in addition to TRCA staff supports, approximately \$3000 of funding was required to support Youth Council events and initiatives.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Program recruitment and delivery will be continuously improved to further align with recommendations in Attachment 1.

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Date: December 22, 2023

Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: TRCA Youth Council Annual Report 2023-2024 Term