

Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, October 25, 2024 Meeting

FROM: Richard Ubbens, Director, Conservation Parks and Lands
Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **2025 ANNUAL FEE ADJUSTMENTS REPORT**

KEY ISSUE

Recommended fee changes for Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) public facilities and programming. These fees are reviewed and amended annually as stated in the background of this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the 2025 Annual Fee Adjustments as set out in Attachment 1, effective January 1, 2025, be approved.

BACKGROUND

The Conservation Authorities Act requires a conservation authority to administer the charging of fees in a transparent and accountable manner by adopting and publishing a written fee policy, which includes a fee schedule that lists the programs and services for which an authority charges a fee and the amount to be charged. Annually, staff conduct a review of TRCA's Fee Schedule for Public Facilities and Programming and recommend changes for TRCA Board of Directors approval as required. This review considers the value provided to visitors and participants through TRCA programs and facilities, service delivery costs, current market conditions and comparable fees imposed by other public authorities such as local municipalities, school boards, the Province of Ontario at provincial parks, and other Conservation Authorities. Any fee disputes are reviewed at the park or program level with site staff who resolve them or escalate them to senior management, if necessary.

As with all other public and private sector organizations, inflation and other external factors continue to have a significant impact on overall operational and delivery costs. While municipal and senior government grants have been secured in support of capital projects at certain education facilities, it

is important to note that unlike other government agency educational or cultural institutions or organizations, TRCA receives no direct, dedicated municipal, provincial or federal support to subsidize or sustain parks, family or educational programming or school-based out-of-classroom learning at TRCA's eight (8) major education facilities, parks or attractions (The Village at Black Creek, Kortright Centre for Conservation, Bruce's Mill Nature Centre, Claremont Nature Centre, Claireville Nature Centre, Lake St. George Field Centre, Tommy Thompson Park Nature Centre and Albion Hills Field Centre). As a result, programming at TRCA education facilities is almost entirely dependent on self-generated revenue, which continues to necessitate increased user fees in 2025 in order to balance operating budgets for these facilities without major reductions in services or offerings.

RATIONALE

For the 2025 calendar year, TRCA staff are primarily proposing increases in fees ranging from 0% to 5%, with a smaller number of fees seeing larger increases due to significant program changes and enhancements or other factors. Fee increases are driven by multiple factors including inflation, the transition to point of sale/customer resource management software, maintenance and level of service requirements and market forces. The proposed fee adjustments, including comparisons to 2024 fees, are provided in Attachment #1.

As noted in Attachment #2 of this report, TRCA provides a range of financial mechanisms to remove, reduce or mitigate economic barriers to access programs, services, and facilities. However, demand and requests for free or low-cost access continues to grow. With no dedicated ongoing government funding support for programs, programming, or school-based learning at TRCA education facilities, including The Village at Black Creek, the Kortright Centre for Conservation or TRCA's other Nature Centres and Field Centres, social equity and equity of access programs will continue to be constrained as these facilities rely almost exclusively on user fees to sustain programming and operations.

Fees for access to parks and programs provide the funds required to operate and maintain conservation parks and assets, as well as provide community programming and natural-science and cultural heritage education for area schools and school boards. Ensuring that TRCA parks, facilities and programs are accessible and safe for public enjoyment is of

great importance to the millions of people who live near and visit TRCA greenspaces.

Conservation Parks and Lands Fees

As communities around TRCA managed greenspace systems continue to grow, the demand for access to natural spaces, and park use also increases, particularly for walking, picnicking, and other passive park activities. Increased use, more frequent severe weather events, and aging infrastructure result in increased operating costs for conservation parks, lands, and facilities. As landowners and managers of conservation areas, TRCA is obligated to ensure a standard of care for our lands. Providing clean and safe environments for all visitors is an integral part of why we need to collect fees.

Proposed fee increases include inflation costs and, in some cases, minor over inflation adjustments to ensure that increasing costs do not negatively affect maintenance and our ability to keep parks and amenities safe, clean, and inviting for public enjoyment. The proposed fee changes will assist TRCA in covering costs to provide accessible and enjoyable greenspace and programs for public enjoyment. With the above in mind, TRCA commissioned a feasibility study of paid parking at TRCA managed Conservation Lands in 2023. TRCA evaluated the results of the study to inform options for expanding paid permit parking to other TRCA managed trail heads. A new parking fee category has been added to the fee schedule and will be applied once the system is operational. Advance notice for users would also need to be provided through signage and other means prior to implementation. The proposed fees are consistent with the trailhead parking permit rates being applied in the Township of Uxbridge. Any associated revenue from parking at sites beyond Uxbridge is proposed to be allocated for trail and trailhead maintenance within close proximity to areas where such fees would be applied.

School and Family Programs Fees

The proposed fee adjustments for school and family programs mitigate rising inflation costs and provide funds required to operate education centres and programs safely while ensuring fees remain competitive within the sector.

Staff have developed fee ranges for program offerings to provide both flexibility and accountability in covering program delivery costs while also

reflecting market trends and the value of the program to our participants. Fee ranges allow staff to dynamically adjust program and event fees per year, based on demand and market conditions, thereby ensuring TRCA can continue to respond to the growing interest in programs and services within the communities we serve.

Commercial Filming and Special Event Fees

Commercial and Special Event fees are dependent on various factors such as the location, scale of production or event, unique requirements or authorizations, timing and length of the event, and associated staff time, including but not limited to filming, photography, outreach programs, and third-party event/vendor fees.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

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

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

FINANCIAL DETAILS

The anticipated revenues generated by the proposed increase in fees are estimated at \$500,000.00 which will be used to offset financial pressures associated with operating parks, programs, and facilities.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Following Board of Directors consideration and approval, TRCA will implement the 2025 Fee Schedule, and the updated fee schedule will be utilized for finalizing the 2025 budgets.

Conservation Parks and Lands together with Education and Training staff will work with internal Corporate Services partners, including Marketing and Communications and ITRM, to ensure all required updates to the 2025 Fee Schedule are adopted in updated publications and materials on the TRCA public website and online booking and reservation systems. If new fees are proposed to be applied to trailhead parking areas or parking at TRCA facilities advance notice in terms of signage and web page updates will be provided.

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Date: September 19, 2023

Attachments: 2

Attachment 1: 2025 Annual Fee Adjustments

Attachment 2: Access to TRCA Public Facilities