

### Item for the Information of the Regional Watershed Alliance

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance  
Wednesday, November 20, 2024 Meeting

**FROM:** Richard Ubbens, Director, Conservation Parks and Lands

**RE: UXBRIDGE URBAN PROVINCIAL PARK**

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#### **KEY ISSUE**

To inform the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) on efforts related to the establishment of the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park (UUPP).

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

**WHEREAS TRCA is a member of the network of partners supporting the Province of Ontario in establishing the first urban provincial park in the Township of Uxbridge;**

**AND WHEREAS the Province of Ontario has established UUPP under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006 as of July 1, 2024;**

**THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT RWA receives the report on UUPP for information.**

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Province of Ontario announced its intention to establish the first urban provincial park, located in the Township of Uxbridge, in April 2023. The new park was envisioned to:

- To improve access to nature and greenspaces;
- To provide Ontario families and visitors with more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and the area's natural beauty;
- To strengthen the long-term protection of biodiversity, important habitats and ecosystems in southern Ontario's greenspaces;
- To connect parcels of land to create a corridor of trails;
- To connect communities and greenspaces to other parks, including the Rouge National Urban Park, and other trail networks.

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) created

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the UUPP Partners Network group to work with the Ministry and Ontario Parks to help identify the full recreational and protection potential of this proposed new provincial park. Partner organizations include:

- Nature Conservancy of Canada;
- The Regional Municipality of Durham;
- Township of Uxbridge;
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority;
- Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority;
- The Schad Foundation; and
- Green Durham Association.

### RATIONALE

UUPP has the ability to sustain and increase the amount of ecologically important habitat that is placed into permanent conservation protection as well as provide trail and green space corridors and linkages across the local area which are critical to support fragile ecosystems and wildlife. The park enables opportunities to connect trails and recreation systems across York and Durham Regions, across the Greenbelt from the Trent River to the Niagara Escarpment, and north into the Kawartha and Haliburton area. UUPP provides a variety of sustainable and appropriate outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and park visitors, and supports local tourism and regional economic growth.

The following are the steps in establishing the new park:

#### 1. Regulation

MECP consulted with the public and Indigenous communities on amending [Ontario Regulation 316/07](#). This is the regulation, under the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#), that describes all provincial parks in Ontario. Between October 19 and December 3, 2023, MECP posted the [proposed regulatory amendment](#) on the Environmental Registry of Ontario for public and Indigenous communities' feedback.

As of July 1, 2024, UUPP is Ontario's newest year round day use provincial park to be established under the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act](#). With regulation, responsibility for the

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management of the lands that make up the new park has been transferred from Infrastructure Ontario to MECP (see Attachment 1). Many of the recreational uses currently taking place in the surrounding area are able to continue. Any enhancements to current facilities on park lands or development of new facilities will take place once the park management plan is in place and budget is available.

### 2. Park Management Planning

MECP has started developing a [park management plan](#) that will provide direction to:

- Protect nature and biodiversity; and
- Guide land uses, and recreational opportunities (where appropriate).

Planning stages for UUPP include:

- Terms of Reference;
- Preliminary Management Plan – current step; and
- Park Management Plan.

#### Stage 1: Terms of Reference (consultation in summer 2024)

MECP prepared a Terms of Reference document that summarizes what MECP knows about UUPP and a summary of the 2023 survey results and regulation amendment proposal comments received relating to park management planning. This information will be the basis for all upcoming planning stages, including the development of a management plan which will guide the parks' long-term protection, development and management.

The document provides information on:

- the park lands and those that are adjacent
- natural and cultural heritage
- recreational use taking place in the area
- commercial uses currently taking place within the park
- pressures having an effect on values within the park

The background information document and summary of survey

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results and comments relating to park management for UUPP were available for public review and comment for a 45-day period on the Environmental Registry of Ontario at [ero.ontario.ca](http://ero.ontario.ca) (number 019-8727).

### Stage 2: Preliminary Management Plan (consultation in fall 2024)

Through park management planning, MECP can put controls in place to designate areas for protection and areas for sustainable outdoor recreation and create appropriate spaces for use (i.e., trails, access points, parking areas, etc.) with visitor management controls.

The preliminary park management plan will identify proposed:

- areas for protection and recreation;
- uses and ecologically sustainable recreational activities;
- areas for access; and
- potential development.

MECP intends to release the preliminary park management plan and management options for public and Indigenous community consultation in late 2024 or as directed by the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

### Stage 3: Park Management Plan (consultation in 2025)

MECP is targeting to initiate the park management plan approval process in spring 2025.

As part of the network of partners for the establishment of UUPP, TRCA is part of the Advisory Committee for the Park Management Plan. While the current lands regulated as part of the park are outside of the TRCA's watershed, they are integrated into the natural and recreational system in the area. TRCA is providing input to ensure that TRCA's lands are positively influenced by the establishment and operation of the new urban provincial park and that the management plan benefits from previous and ongoing work of TRCA in this area that has succeeded with extensive community input.

There are a number of stages during the park management planning process where the government will provide an opportunity for the public, Indigenous communities and stakeholders to provide feedback before MECP releases a final park management plan.

### 3. Park Operations

When the final park management plan is in place, MECP will take a gradual and phased-in approach to park operations and any new park development that reflects funding and resource capacities.

Many of the recreational uses currently taking place in the surrounding area can continue. Future uses will be determined through subsequent management planning processes which would include public and Indigenous consultation.

The creation of UUPP has been built on a legacy of conservation, natural and cultural heritage protection and an interest in providing recreational opportunities. The park will provide physical and mental health benefits to local residents and visitors from across Ontario by building stronger connections between communities and providing a space for high quality recreation. Providing recreational opportunities and access to nature will inspire residents and visitors to explore the local landscape and learn more about the area.

#### Youth Engagement

Throughout the process, TRCA has advocated for the involvement of youth in the process of establishing the park. Much of the youth engagement has been through the Environment Specialist High Skills Major Program at Uxbridge Secondary School, where two workshops have been held to garner ideas for the park and learn about park zoning. The Partners Network continues to look for ways to engage youth in the park management planning process in fall 2024 and winter 2025.

#### Boundary Expansion

Over time, MECP plans to work towards expanding the park boundary to protect more lands and create greater connection; land connections to facilitate animal and plant movement and trail connections to provide linkages to existing trail networks, including the Oak Ridges Trail, Trans-Canada Trail, and other trails and recreational areas. MECP is working with the Township of Uxbridge, the Regional Municipality of Durham, TRCA, and other private landowners on identifying lands that can be added to the park. Any future proposals for boundary amendments to UUPP will include public and Indigenous community consultation.

TRCA has provided support for the establishment of the nearby Rouge National Urban Park through transfer of land and planning, delivery and

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reviews of restoration, recreational trail and infrastructure projects, and could provide similar services to support UUPP going forward.

At Board of Directors Meeting held on October 20, 2023, Resolution #A169/23 was approved as follows:

WHEREAS TRCA has received a request from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to contribute potential lands and provide ongoing support for the proposal to create Ontario's first urban provincial park within the Township of Uxbridge - Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park (UUPP);

AND WHEREAS MECP has requested to enter into discussions regarding TRCA-owned lands in the municipalities of Uxbridge and Pickering that are suitable for inclusion in a future expansion of the UUPP as well as local and regional trail connections;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT TRCA staff be directed to engage in discussions with MECP, Parks Canada, the Regional Municipality of Durham, the Township of Uxbridge, and the City of Pickering to determine which TRCA lands could be conveyed to MECP subject to the following conditions;

- a) Land transferred to MECP must achieve a net ecological and community benefit, including additional investment and sustained maintenance by the province;
- b) Access to the future UUPP should be provided at low or no cost;
- c) Consideration is to be the nominal sum of \$2.00 where TRCA acquired the lands for nominal consideration;
- d) MECP is responsible for all legal, survey and other costs related to the land conveyance;
- e) Conveyance by TRCA of lands and/or easements for municipal infrastructure to the Regional Municipality of Durham, Township of Uxbridge and City of Pickering, if requested by the municipality and subject to concurrence by MECP;
- f) MECP is to fully indemnify TRCA from any and all claims from injuries, damages or costs of any nature resulting in any way, either directly or indirectly, from this conveyance and future use of the lands;

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g) Any additional reasonable terms and conditions as deemed appropriate by TRCA staff or its solicitor;

THAT TRCA enter into discussions with MECP and that staff report back to Board of Directors with recommendations on specific lands to be conveyed once determined;

THAT upon identification of the lands to be disposed of, public consultation and notification to the Minister of MECP occur in accordance with the requirements of Section 21 of the Conservation Authorities Act, as applicable;

AND THAT TRCA continue discussions with the province including MECP and Infrastructure Ontario and Federal Government including Parks Canada on government-owned lands that could be conveyed, restored and activated in support of TRCA's Regional Trail Strategy, Natural Heritage Strategy, and TRCA's partner municipalities' objectives that achieve a net ecological and community benefit;

AND THAT staff report back to the Executive Committee analyzing the benefits and disadvantages to transferring the lands to MECP and ensuring that there are measures for permanent legal protection to the features of the land.

At Board of Directors Meeting held on October 25, 2024, a resolution was brought forward for consideration as follows:

WHEREAS TRCA is in receipt of a request from MECP for the conveyance of TRCA-owned lands located in the Township of Uxbridge, Regional Municipality of Durham, required for the creation of UUPP, Duffins Creek watershed;

AND WHEREAS it is in the best interest of TRCA in furthering its objectives as set out in Section 20 of the Conservation Authorities Act to cooperate with MECP in this instance;

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT 39 parcels of TRCA-owned land containing 1545.66 hectares (3819.41 acres), more or less, of vacant land that will contribute to the expansion of the UUPP park boundary, as identified in Attachment #2 and Attachment #3, in the Township of Uxbridge, Regional Municipality of Durham, be conveyed to the MECP, subject to the following conditions; Item 8.2

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THAT land transferred to the MECP must achieve a net ecological and community benefit, including additional investment and sustained maintenance by the Provincial government as part of the UUPP;

THAT consideration be the nominal sum of \$2.00 and that all legal, survey and other costs to be paid by MECP;

THAT the MECP is to fully indemnify TRCA from any and all claims from injuries, damages or costs of any nature resulting in any way, either directly or indirectly, from this conveyance;

THAT MECP accept any additional reasonable terms and conditions as deemed appropriate by TRCA staff or its solicitor;

THAT should the Region of Durham or the Township of Uxbridge request lands and/or easement for municipal infrastructure projects, TRCA work to fulfill such requests subject to MECP concurrence;

AND THAT said conveyance is exempt from public consultation with the exception that notification to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is required 90 days prior to the disposition in accordance with the requirements of Section 21 (2) of the Conservation Authorities Act, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter 27, as amended;

AND FURTHER THAT authorized TRCA officials be directed to take the necessary action to finalize the transaction, including obtaining any necessary.

The above resolution was deferred to the November 20, 2024 Board of Directors meeting to allow for additional discussion and clarification between TRCA Board members and MECP staff. TRCA staff continue to work with MECP staff to identify appropriate parcels for inclusion in UUPP. The map of the proposed TRCA lands to be transferred to MECP for UUPP is found in Attachment 2.

### **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 1 Environmental Protection and Hazard Management:**

1.2 Leadership in greenspace conservation

### **Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:**

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

## **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

Through the [2024 Ontario Budget: Building a Better Ontario](#), the Provincial government is investing \$19 million over three years to create UUPP.

TRCA participation in the initiatives supporting the development and possible boundary expansion of UUPP is funded through regular operating budgets.

## **DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE**

TRCA staff will continue to work with MECP as part of the Partners Network to develop the park management plan.

TRCA and MECP will also continue to discuss the addition of TRCA lands to the park boundary and future potential services that TRCA could offer in support of the establishment and operations of UUPP.

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**Date: November 6, 2024**

**Attachments: 2**

Attachment 1: Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park map

Attachment 2: TRCA Lands Proposed to be included in the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park