

### Items for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance  
Meeting #4/19, Wednesday, November 13, 2019

**FROM:** Moranne McDonnell, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure

**RE:** **TRAIL STRATEGY FOR THE GREATER TORONTO REGION**

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#### **KEY ISSUE**

Update on the final endorsement of TRCA's Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region (TRCA Trail Strategy) and next steps.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

**WHEREAS** the TRCA Trail Strategy received final endorsement from the TRCA Board of Directors at Meeting #8/19, held on September 27, 2019;

**THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT** the TRCA Trail Strategy and staff report be received;

**THAT** TRCA Trail Strategy priorities be integrated into the work plans of working groups of the Regional Watershed Alliance, where appropriate;

**AND FURTHER THAT** the Regional Watershed Alliance members help to advance the objectives of the TRCA Trail Strategy through advocacy and identifying grant, funding or program opportunities that can be brought forward for TRCA consideration.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) drafted the Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region (the Trail Strategy) in 2018. The Trail Strategy sets out the direction for TRCA to work towards achieving its vision of "a complete regional trail network in greenspace and along the Lake Ontario shoreline that connects our growing communities to nature, to culture, and to each other, contributing to active living and enhancing our conservation legacy." It outlines TRCA's plan to complete, expand, manage and celebrate the Greater Toronto Region trail network and serves as a framework to protect potential trail alignments. It acts as a guide for the planning, development and management of these trails, and creates the opportunity for partnership with our member municipalities, provincial and federal agencies, and trail focused groups.

The Draft TRCA Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region was endorsed by the Regional Watershed Alliance at Meeting #3/18, held on September 19, 2018 by Resolution #R5/18, as amended, and was adopted by the Board of Directors at Meeting #9/18, on November 30, 2018, with Resolution #A183/18.

At Board of Directors Meeting #8/19, held on September 27, 2019, Resolution #A157/19 was approved as follows:

*WHEREAS it was resolved by the TRCA Board at Meeting #9/18 on November 30, 2018 that the Draft Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region, dated November 2018, be endorsed in principle for the purposes of engaging with external partners to obtain input*

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*prior to finalizing the Strategy and Workbook and for informing staff reviews of projects and plans and preliminary budget submissions (RES.#A183/18);*

*WHEREAS it was resolved by the TRCA Board at Meeting #9/18 on November 30, 2018 that staff were requested to report back to the Board of Directors in Q3 2019 for final approval of the Strategy;*

*THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the TRCA Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region be approved;*

*AND THAT TRCA staff be directed to meet with partner municipalities to discuss priority projects, service level agreements, and funding agreements in support of the expansion and management of the regional trail network;*

*THAT TRCA request the Province recognize and build components of the TRCA Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region into the Province's transit and transportation strategies, projects, and provincial land use plans including the Metrolinx Regional Transportation Plan, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and official plan update and conformity processes;*

*AND FURTHER THAT TRCA'S trail partners and the Regional Watershed Alliance be so advised.*

### **RATIONALE**

When endorsing the Draft Trail Strategy in 2018, the TRCA Board of Directors directed staff to engage with external partners to obtain input prior to finalizing the Strategy. Staff proceeded to consult with external partners, stakeholders and the public from December 3, 2018 to January 18, 2019. Engagement occurred in the form of meetings, workshops, presentations, social media marketing campaigns, online commenting forms and public open houses. The extensive and constructive input provided by governments, community stakeholders and the public greatly improved the Trail Strategy.

Staff incorporated the feedback received from the additional engagement in late 2018 and early 2019 into the final Trail Strategy document. The overall framework of the Trail Strategy is maintained, including the concept and guiding principles.

See the approved [Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region](#) here.

### **Updates to the Trail Strategy**

The following highlights some of the changes made to the Trail Strategy as staff prepared it for final endorsement.

#### Purpose, Vision Statement and Strategic Objectives

The purpose of the Trail Strategy was updated to emphasize the importance of capitalizing on the development process to protect land in support of trail development. The updated purpose of the Trail Strategy is “to outline a plan to protect potential trail alignments, and to guide the planning, development and management of a network regional trails”.

The vision of the Strategy was updated to include the Lake Ontario shoreline as it serves as an integral feature of the regional trail network in the Greater Toronto Area. The updated vision for the Trail Strategy is “a complete regional trail network in greenspace and along the Lake Ontario

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shoreline that connects our growing communities to nature, culture, and to each other, contributing to active living and enhancing our conservation legacy”.

The strategic objectives now consist of seven strategies that set out how TRCA will work to achieve the vision of the Trail Strategy. The eighth strategic objective (Organize Effective Trail Leadership) was removed as a strategic objective and its content was included as part of the Making It Happen: Organizing for Success section of the document. The rationale for this change is that this strategic objective was better suited as a short-term operational objective rather than a longer-term goal.

The remaining seven strategic objectives are as follows:

1. Prioritize trail and destination area capital projects
2. Promote greater trail use and awareness
3. Build a sound knowledge base
4. Integrate community enjoyment and protection of our heritage
5. Promote meaningful community engagement
6. Support complete communities
7. Secure adequate and sustainable investment

### Trail Concept

Staff received important feedback from both our government partners and the public. Comments and suggestions were used to update conceptual trail alignments and provided TRCA staff with a greater understanding of how people use trails and where improvements could be made. Existing and conceptual trail alignments were refined to include updated, project-level detailed trail alignments and recommendations from municipalities, stakeholders and the public. The concept now better aligns with municipal initiatives.

The Greater Toronto Region Trail Network presented in the trail concept includes 1,000 kilometres of trails. This includes 520 kilometres of trails that are already in place and 480 kilometres of new trails yet to be built. The trail concept will continue to be updated to reflect current conditions opportunities and priorities, and TRCA will be making this spatial dataset available through TRCA's Open Data Portal so that it can easily be incorporated into the strategies and plans of others.

### Context

The Cultural Heritage context section of the Trail Strategy was expanded to elaborate on key terms and concepts. This complements the section on Natural Heritage and demonstrates TRCA's interest in cultural heritage protection and celebration.

### Making it Happen

The Trail Strategy positions trails as a key component of complete communities and as a mechanism to conserve the natural and cultural heritage features of our watershed. The development industry plays a significant role in the development of our communities. Therefore, more emphasis was put on the development process and its importance towards building the regional trail network.

The proposed external Trail Leaders Round Table was removed from the document and replaced with targeted meetings with government partners involved in trail planning, implementation and operations. These meetings will build on existing relationships with TRCA's municipal partners, other government agencies, and trail leaders.

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The Workbook is no longer included as a separate document. Financial information previously included as part of the Workbook was moved to the Trail Strategy document. Other information contained in the Workbook such as the trail and destination capital project candidate lists and implementation plans will be included as part of future online mapping initiatives and will be maintained to reflect current conditions including opportunities and completed works.

Priority trail projects will include those that will close gaps in existing major trail systems, quick win projects, and partnerships with government partners and other trail partners to plan, design and build trails.

### **Role of the Regional Watershed Alliance**

The Regional Watershed Alliance is identified as a trail and community leader with whom TRCA will be collaborating in order to deliver the vision of the Trail Strategy. Therefore, Trail Strategy priorities will continue to be integrated into the work plans of working groups of the Regional Watershed Alliance where appropriate. This work will focus on the following:

1. **Advancing Strategic Objectives:** TRCA will continue to rely on the members of the Regional Watershed Alliance to advance the objectives of the Trail Strategy through known grant or program opportunities, their respective networks, and municipalities.
2. **Creating Opportunities:** The Regional Watershed Alliance will work collaboratively with the TRCA Trails Working Group, as well as the other trail and community leaders, to create opportunities for all groups, particularly Indigenous communities.
3. **Coordinated Engagement:** Coordinating public consultation efforts through a geographically representative body such as the Regional Watershed Alliance will support consensus-building and ensure trail-based decisions with regional impact are made equitably.

### **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 4: Create complete communities that integrate nature and the built environment**

**Strategy 5: Foster sustainable citizenship**

**Strategy 6: Tell the story of the Toronto region**

**Strategy 7: Build partnerships and new business models**

### **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

Financial resilience will require a range of eligible funding sources as well as leveraging the revenue-generating potential of trails and related facilities. TRCA will use the Trail Strategy to collaborate with municipal, provincial and federal colleagues, non-governmental organizations, trail and community leaders, and the development industry to acquire, protect and enhance the Greater Toronto Regional Trail Network. A financial plan to obtain funding to deliver the projects will be developed and the Trail Strategy initiatives and actions will be incorporated into work plans and into business and budget planning processes in a manner that maximizes budgets, time, and resources. This will include all traditional funding sources and support, including the levy process, service agreements, mutually beneficial partnerships with municipalities, federal, provincial and municipal funding programs, Toronto and Region Conservation Foundation donations and funding campaigns, the development process, and development and management agreements, as well as other partnership projects with trail and community organizations.

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The total cost to increase TRCA's trail program budget to meet the directions provided in the Trail Strategy and its action plan will be identified as unfunded priorities within TRCA's budget planning process in 2020 and beyond. If funding support for the administration of the Trail Strategy is secured for 2020, it would include consideration of all proposed amendments or updates from trail partners, advancement of three actions identified in the action plan per year, and monitoring and reporting on the performance of the Trail Strategy at a cost of \$500,000.00 (2020 dollars). Staff will continue to explore a variety of additional funding sources to contribute to the financial implementation of projects outlined in the Trail Strategy in conjunction with budget planning process for the unfunded priorities.

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

TRCA is focused on:

- Securing more greenspace to provide trails, grow our natural system and accommodate growth (Initiative 1.1).
- Developing a business plan to deliver trail and destination area capital projects in partnership with our government partners (Initiative 1.2).
- Implementing a wayfinding plan for the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network (Initiative 2.1).
- Implementing a communications campaign for the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network (Initiative 2.2).

In order to achieve these initiatives, TRCA will:

- Continue to pursue and obtain funding to administer the Trail Strategy and deliver priority trail and destination capital projects through TRCA's budget planning process, the TRCA grants centre and with trail partners, with the assistance of Regional Watershed Alliance members.
- Use the TRCA Trails Working Group to guide the phased implementation of the Trail Strategy, to prioritize trail capital projects, and to ensure that trail-related activities are coordinated within TRCA and with our municipal partners and partner agencies.
- Formalize municipal partner working group meetings to discuss existing and future trail projects, coordinate implementation plans, seek opportunities for partnership, secure land and easements, and address trail ownership and management.
- Incorporate the Trail Strategy initiatives and actions into work plans and into business and budget planning processes, including those of the Regional Watershed Alliance.
- Track and report on the performance of the Trail Strategy.

Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance will be valuable in helping TRCA to:

- Identify capital funding or program opportunities to deliver trail projects in partnership with government partners that can be brought forward for TRCA staff review via the Strategic Business Planning and Performance business unit.
- Explore new forms of technology to improve natural and cultural interpretation on trails.
- Implement a communications campaign for the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network that builds on existing trail promotion efforts by TRCA and partners.
- Partner with municipalities, tourism agencies, and private businesses to promote destinations within the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network.

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Date: October 18, 2019