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

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance Meeting #2/20, Wednesday, May 20, 2020

**FROM:** Victoria Kramkowski, Government and Community Relations Specialist, Peel-York Watersheds, Government and Community Relations

**RE: TRCA RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

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#### KEY ISSUE

Key aspects of TRCA's operational response to the COVID-19 pandemic to date.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Regional Watershed Alliance receive this report for information.**

#### BACKGROUND

COVID-19 has emerged as a significant risk to the personal wellbeing of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's employees, volunteers, with resulting impacts to organization's operations. This report provides a high-level outline of TRCA's response, to date, to COVID-19, with a particular focus on TRCA operations.

At a high level, TRCA's past, current and future response plan to COVID-19 is divided into four phases, each of which have a different focus:

- 1) Phase I - Prevention: This phase focuses on promoting everyday prevention actions and strategies and includes: the review of governmental policy and legislation; the development and implementation of a communications strategy; monitoring and tracking of service level impacts and staffing needs; and change management
- 2) Phase II – Control: This phase is characterized by increased actions driven by Public Health agencies and includes: the management of public health and legislative requirements, such as cancelling events or closing facilities; environmental scans to ensure response alignment with partner municipalities; and implementing alternative work arrangements
- 3) Phase III – Management: This phase focuses on carrying out continued operations within the COVID-19 situation and includes: employee engagement; assessing and working with essential workplace orders; financial, operational and resource assessment; planning and issuing Declared Emergency Leaves; and redeployment of staff, as needed
- 4) Phase IV – Recovery: This phase focuses on organization-wide recovery and is also driven by Public Health requirements. This phase includes: a communication recovery strategy; a phased return to full operations; health and safety prioritization, including plans for a potential second wave of COVID-19; providing manager resources; and providing and implementing employee wellness supports.

TRCA is currently in Phase III–Management of the four-phase response plan.

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TRCA's response has also involved ongoing communications with staff in order to keep staff informed, as well as provide relevant guidance and direction. These communications began in late February 2020, with an emphasis on COVID-19 prevention and preparedness, and have since progressed in response to the rapidly changing situation. Ongoing communications with staff allow TRCA leadership to provide the most current information and direction.

At an operational level, TRCA's response has focused on different aspects of safety and service areas.

### **Encouraging personal and workplace hygiene, precautions and best practices**

Beginning in late February 2020, TRCA has circulated communications to staff to provide guidance on personal and workplace hygiene and precautions, such as frequent hand washing, staying home if sick, and avoiding touching the eyes, nose or mouth. This direction was complemented by TRCA implementing additional hand sanitizer stations and increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces like toilets, sink tap handles, doorknobs, and countertops.

TRCA has also provided direction on self-isolation for staff who have returned from out of country travel or have potentially been exposed to COVID-19 in alignment with the ongoing direction provided by the Province.

Furthermore, in recognition of the impacts that the current situation may be having on staff, TRCA has reminded staff of the services offered through the Employee Assistance Program, as well as providing an additional online employee guide to working from home and coping resources for staff.

### **Suspension of Events and Programming**

In accordance with recommendations from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health to suspend large events and public gatherings of more than 250 people, TRCA circulated communications on March 13, 2020 advising that large events, such as the Maple Syrup Festivals at Bruce's Mill and Kortright Center, TRIECA, March Break activities, and other events would be postponed. Subsequently, TRCA has formally cancelled all in-person programming and events, regardless of number of participants, until further notice. These decisions have been in alignment with those of TRCA's municipal partners, which have also cancelled in-person events and programming until at least June 30, 2020.

### **Transition to Online and Virtual Learning and Engagement Platforms**

In order to continue to engage local residents, families, communities and business sectors, TRCA has taken significant steps to transition education and training activities to online platforms. These include regular Facebook Live segments on backyard nature, online networking meetings and webinars for PPG members, web-based training sessions for professionals based on topics from TRIECA, resources for teachers and students learning at home, and others. There has been significant uptake on these activities, including over 1,000 views for each of the Facebook Live segments and over 220 registrants for the PPG Connects Forum.

### **Closure of TRCA Facilities to the Public**

In alignment with actions by TRCA's municipal partners, the decision was made on March 17, 2020 to close TRCA facilities to the public. This includes TRCA's Head Office, satellite offices, parks and education facilities.

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### **Flexible Work Arrangements and Delivery of Essential Services**

In recognition of the challenges posed by the closures of school, effective March 16, 2020, in order to protect employee health and prevent the spread of COVID-19, and in response to the Province's order to close all non-essential workplaces in Ontario, TRCA has implemented arrangements for all staff who are able to, to work from home. Arrangements have been made to increase the capacity of TRCA systems to allow increased remote access and staff have been reminded of, and encouraged to use, online tools and programs to conduct meetings.

Certain TRCA services, including several that involve work in the field and on construction sites, have been deemed to be essential services, in accordance with the Province's *List of Essential Workplaces*. As such, TRCA has permission to continue carrying out these services in the public sphere. Some of the essential service areas TRCA continues to support include:

- Construction projects and services required to ensure safe and reliable operations of, or to provide new capacity in, critical provincial infrastructure, including transit, transportation, energy and justice sectors beyond the day-to-day maintenance;
- Minimal asset maintenance to ensure state of good repair in parks and trails;
- Sewage treatment and disposal;
- Collecting, transporting, storing, processing, disposing or recycling of any type of waste;
- Critical infrastructure repair and maintenance including roads, dams, bridges etc.;
- Environmental rehabilitation, management and monitoring, and spill clean-up and response.

In addition, TRCA inspections and permitting services are captured in the following service categories:

- Administrative authorities that regulate and inspect businesses;
- Professional and social services that support the legal and justice system;
- Government services including but not limited to policing and law enforcement, fire and emergency services, paramedics, coroner and pathology services, corrections and court services, licenses and permits;
- Businesses and organizations that maintain research facilities and engage in research, including medical research and other research and development activities;
- Not-for profit organizations that support the provision of food, shelter, safety or protection, and/or social services and other necessities of life to economically disadvantaged and other vulnerable individuals.

As a result, and in accordance with the Provincial directive, TRCA offices continue to remain open to staff only and construction and field sites remain active to enable staff to support these categories of work.

In order to ensure health and safety considerations for staff working at field and construction sites, TRCA has provided, and regularly updates, COVID-19 Incident Management System Procedures for Field Work. This document provides guidance and direction on work site safety, as it relates to COVID-19. Direction provided includes, but is not limited to:

- Personal hygiene and protection;
- Personal protective equipment requirements;
- Ensuring social distancing requirements are met during vehicle usage and cleaning

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- requirements for fleet vehicles;
- Social distancing requirements when working in areas that the general public may have access to;
- Best practices when managing work crews and working with contractors;
- How to accept deliveries in a safe manner; and,
- Other general practices.

These procedures have been updated regularly to reflect ongoing situational changes and the most current knowledge surrounding best practices and public health requirements.

### **Declared Emergency Leaves**

Due to impacts on TRCA operations from COVID-19, TRCA is projecting an expected decrease of 2020 budgeted revenue in excess of \$20 million. As a result, TRCA Leadership has made the difficult decision to issue Declared Emergency Leaves (DEL) for certain staff. DELs have been predominantly issued in divisions that rely on user fees and have experienced the greatest impact due to COVID-19, such as Education and Training, Parks and Culture, and Corporate Services. Redeployment opportunities have been identified and made available to staff placed on DEL through a transparent process administered by Human Resources.

### **RATIONALE**

As an advisory committee to the TRCA Board of Directors, and as stakeholders and partners to TRCA with their own networks, TRCA staff wish to keep the Regional Watershed Alliance apprised of the organization's response to COVID-19. Furthermore, when TRCA moves into the Recovery Phase (Phase IV) of the COVID-19 response plan, RWA member support will be important as TRCA begins to phase in increased operations, including events, programming and public engagement activities. TRCA staff also anticipate seeking out government economic stimulus funding opportunities for infrastructure projects and foresee a role for RWA members to advocate for TRCA funding proposals with relevant elected officials.

### **Relationship to Building the Living City, the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan**

This report supports the following strategy set forth in the TRCA 2013-2022 Strategic Plan:  
**Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models**

### **FINANCIAL DETAILS**

TRCA staff will continue to evaluate financial implications of COVID-19 on operations and on TRCA's 2020 Budget. Staff will continue to work with partner municipalities to provide essential services and special projects where TRCA has significant, specialized expertise in order to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the organization.

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

TRCA will continue to carry out delivering essential services, as currently defined by the Province, and will respond on an ongoing basis to direction from the Province related to public health and safety, and business operations. TRCA will resume currently suspended operations in accordance with Provincial direction and in a phased approach.

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