

### Items for the Information of the Outdoor Education Task Force

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Outdoor Education Task Force  
Meeting #2/20, Monday, June 15, 2020

**FROM:** Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

**RE:** **CURRENT STATE OF OUT-OF-CLASSROOM LEARNING RELATED TO  
NATURAL SCIENCE, CONSERVATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT –  
UPDATED REPORT**

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#### KEY ISSUE

Updated summary of responses and analysis of data received from Outdoor Education Task Force member school boards regarding out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

#### RECOMMENDATION

**WHEREAS the Outdoor Education Task Force (OETF) has been convened to study, develop and recommend strategic future directions related to out-of-classroom learning within the areas of jurisdiction of TRCA and participating school boards;**

**AND WHEREAS on November 19, 2019, Trustee Garry Tanuan, Chair, Outdoor Education Task Force issued a questionnaire to receive feedback from member school boards regarding the current state of programs and policies at their school boards with respect to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment;**

**AND WHEREAS an initial summary report was provided to OETF members at meeting #1/20 held on January 20, 2020;**

**AND WHEREAS this report will remain as a living document and will be updated as required to support the development of recommendations by OETF members;**

**AND WHEREAS additional feedback was received from OETF member organizations following meeting #1/20 held on January 20, 2020;**

**THEREFORE, IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the attached updated summary report and analysis of data (Version 2.0) prepared by TRCA staff be received.**

#### BACKGROUND

At Task Force Meeting #1/19 held on October 7, 2019, the Outdoor Education Task Force approved Resolution #OETF5/19, in part, as follows:

*... THAT the following Mandate, Objectives and Timelines of the Outdoor Education Task Force be endorsed;*

*AND THAT the Outdoor Education Task Force Work Plan and Timelines as outlined in this report be approved.*



## Item 8.1

An initial deliverable of the Outdoor Education Task Force (OETF) workplan consisted of the inventory and assessment of the current state of out-of-classroom learning policies and programs related to natural science, conservation and the environment at area and participating school boards. To facilitate this research, a questionnaire was developed to gain contextual information and useful background details to guide recommendations and/or further research. The questionnaire was circulated to OETF members by email on November 19, 2019.

A preliminary report on the current state was prepared for OETF meeting #1/20 in January 2020. Following this report, feedback was received from three additional member school boards (for a total of six school boards) plus TRCA. The current state report was updated with the additional feedback and analysis of the data collected was undertaken.

Key findings specific to natural science, conservation and the environment out-of-classroom learning indicate the following:

- DPCDSB, TDSB, YCDSB and YRDSB have strong value statements that are specific to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning.
- DPCDSB and YRDSB have formalized their commitment through policies specific to Outdoor Education while TRCA and other OETF member school boards do not.
- OPHEA Guidelines are followed by all OETF member organizations including TRCA.
- Some school boards have partnerships and agreements with other organizations to provide natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom educational experiences (for example, TCDSB and YRDSB have agreements with TRCA), however school boards are not partnering with each other.
- An array of policies, plans and programs related to equity are in place by school boards to provide students with some access to outdoor education programming, however only DPCDSB, TDSB and YRDSB have mandated these experiences to every student in their board. Furthermore, TDSB and YRDSBs mandates covers multiple grades.
- TRCA does not have formal equity and inclusion policies, however there are social equity programs in place at TRCA to support financially challenged communities access programs through funded field trips and bus grants (target of approx. 20% of overnight bookings).
- Use of the Ministry of Education's Learning Opportunities Grant by school boards is varied, which is reflective of the inherent flexibility provided by the government for the allocation of these funds. School boards also supplement this funding through other sources such as parents/families, donations, and other school board budgets.
- DPCDSB, TDSB, TRCA and YRDSB operate outdoor education centres in the Toronto region. At YRDSB, supplementary funding beyond the Learning Opportunities Grant for the operation of these facilities is required and is allocated from other school board operating budgets. TDSB also generates revenue through summer and weekend programming and third-party site bookings.
- The year-round operation of TRCA outdoor education centres is funded through user fees, agreements, municipal funding, grants and private fundraising.



## Item 8.1

- OETF member organizations that operate outdoor education centres have mechanisms to obtain feedback from teachers related to out-of-classroom natural science, conservation and environmental learning experiences. None of the responding organizations have formal feedback mechanisms that involved student participants.
- OETF member organizations seek appropriate ways to support and integrate the Indigenous voice into out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment.

A gap analysis of the data and information collected was undertaken to compare the current state of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region with the desired future state. Preliminary gaps were identified and include the following:

- No cohesive values system that acknowledges the impacts of urbanization on students/young people.
- Inconsistent access to curriculum-linked learning experiences.
- Little collaboration or sharing of programming between school boards.
- Inconsistent and inequitable access to assets and infrastructure.
- Little to no sharing of assets within the public system.
- Inconsistent and inequitable access to assets and infrastructure.
- No strong framework for how funding is used.
- The cost of transportation to out-of-classroom learning needs to be considered.
- Inconsistently applied policies.

This report and enclosed analysis will remain as a living document and will be updated as required to facilitate the collaborative development of strategic future directions connected to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Toronto region by the OETF membership.

### **RATIONALE**

The OETF has been convened in order to establish a strategic planning framework for the long-term provision of out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment that serve students of the Toronto region while maximizing the use and value of public assets and infrastructure.

The current state summary report will provide the groundwork for which the OETF can undertake its mandate through the formation of working groups.

### **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 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship**

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

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

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

TRCA staff will continue to incorporate additional responses and data into the report and will circulate to OETF members as required.

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## Item 8.1

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**Date:** March 8, 2020

**Attachments:** 1

Attachment 1: Current State of Out-of-classroom Learning Related to Natural Science, Conservation and the Environment. Summary Report, Version 2.0.