

Section III – Items for the Information of the Board

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, February 26, 2021 Meeting

FROM: Anil Wijesooriya, Director, Restoration and Infrastructure

RE: **TRCA LAND MANAGEMENT AND MASTER PLANS**

KEY ISSUE

Update on the status of land management and master plans for TRCA properties.

RECOMMENDATION

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT an update on the status of land management and master plans for TRCA properties be received.

BACKGROUND

Of the mandated programs and services that Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) provides, a key service is the responsible management of natural resources within its jurisdiction. TRCA has 16,139 hectares (ha) of greenspace secured throughout its watershed communities through ownership or management agreements with various stakeholders, representing 6.7% of the total land area in TRCA's jurisdiction.

Management of these greenspaces supports TRCA conservation efforts through the planning and provision of water conveyance features, flood control reservoirs and channels, riverside erosion control, shoreline protection on the Lake Ontario waterfront, habitat creation and enhancement projects, parks and trails, and cultural heritage resource management. TRCA cares for these greenspaces as conservation parks, education field centres, resource management tracts, conservation reserves, forest and wildlife areas, and other conservation lands. These greenspaces are critical pieces of municipal greenspace, natural heritage and park systems. The programming of TRCA lands often varies in response to the needs of the municipality and its residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented increase in public use of TRCA greenspaces. Based on a series of permanent trail counters at several TRCA trail access locations, TRCA is projecting an increase of approximately 140% over 2019 user numbers at the same locations. This is putting additional pressure on existing facilities and infrastructure. TRCA must manage users and address the duty of care and operational maintenance needed to ensure the sustainability of the lands and quality visitor experiences.

TRCA Land Management Models

TRCA-secured lands may be managed by TRCA, by a municipality or other conservation organizations subject to a land management agreement, or some sort of co-management through a trail or co-management agreement (see Table 1).

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Table 1: Management direction for existing TRCA land securements

Type	Area (hectares)	% of TRCA Land Holdings
TRCA lands managed by others (subject to a land management agreement)	3,291	26
TRCA-managed or co-managed lands	11,986	74
<i>TRCA-managed lands with current management plans</i>	<i>7,260</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>TRCA-managed lands without current management plans</i>	<i>4,725</i>	<i>29</i>
Total	16,139	100

TRCA land and trail management agreements include:

- **Land management agreements with local municipalities** for park, recreational, flood control and conservation purposes. These management agreements transfer the cost and responsibility of activities to develop and maintain the lands, such as management planning, daily operations and infrastructure improvements, to the municipality. TRCA retains responsibility for all aspects of the river channels, flood control, river protection, erosion control and dams in the agreements. TRCA participates on technical or steering committees when a municipality is preparing land management or master plans for TRCA-owned property.
 - a. TRCA has such agreements with the City of Mississauga and City of Toronto and with the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, to transfer management responsibility for all TRCA land holdings, with some exceptions, to the municipality.
 - b. TRCA also has such agreements for select properties with most other municipalities (examples include Milne Dam Conservation Park in the City of Markham, Cold Creek Conservation Area in the Township of King and Greenwood Conservation Area in the Town of Ajax).
- **Land or trail agreements with local user groups or conservation associations** for those groups to assist TRCA in the management of lands and trails.
 - a. TRCA has such agreements with Green Durham Association and Durham Mountain Biking Association for the East Duffins Headwaters Properties and with Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association to manage the Humber Valley Heritage Trail through Bolton Resource Management Tract.

In addition to managing TRCA-owned greenspace, TRCA manages 1,754 ha of greenspace on behalf of others through agreements or easements. For example, TRCA manages the Oak Ridges Corridor Park as part of the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve in the City of Richmond Hill on behalf of Infrastructure Ontario (IO) and Glassco Park in the City of Vaughan on behalf of the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT).

Management Direction for TRCA-Managed Lands

All greenspaces require regular and proper inspection, planning, management and monitoring to ensure reduced risk to people and property and to improve the visitor experience, contributing to healthy lifestyles and meaningful engagement with TRCA. While a general management and

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operational approach is often determined at the time of property acquisition, the following instruments provide land care direction and procedures for TRCA-managed lands:

- TRCA policies and procedures
- Land tax models, such as Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program
- Land management and master plans
- Forest management plans
- Asset management plans.

Plans articulate a response to current pressures, anticipated demands and TRCA capacity to accommodate lifecycle costs. They use forecasts to ensure that TRCA can continue to be a leader in its care for naturally and culturally significant greenspaces in the Toronto region. Site-specific objectives, priorities and actions are prescribed in land management planning documents such as land management plans and master plans. These planning documents provide long-term visions for properties, land management zones and management recommendations. They may also include public use plans, trail plans, restoration plans and facilities plans. When TRCA prepares these plans, consideration is given to how the infrastructure can be built and sustained so that TRCA can manage its duty of care and provide quality visitor experiences. Therefore, these planning tools help leverage investment in capital and green infrastructure to support TRCA programs and services.

TRCA engages our municipal partners, local residents, greenspace users and the community at large in the planning process. A public advisory committee is formed with municipal representatives, partners, local stakeholders and neighbours to provide input into the development of the various plan components. These committees often develop into stewardship groups that continue to support TRCA and engage the community in implementing the recommendations of the plans. General public engagement happens through a variety of means, including meetings, information centres, online presentations/webinars, surveys, newsletters and other engagement techniques.

TRCA has prepared land management planning documents for 60% of the TRCA-managed properties (see Table 1, maps in Attachment 1, and a list of current management planning documents in Attachment 2). These plans are at various stages of implementation.

Major parcels of TRCA-managed land holdings that do not have approved land management planning documents include:

- Black Creek Pioneer Village in the City of Toronto
- Boyd Conservation Area in the City of Vaughan
- Glen Haffy Conservation Area in the Town of Caledon
- Petticoat Creek Conservation Area in the City of Pickering

Care of TRCA greenspaces without management plans are guided by one or more of the following:

- Forest Management Plans that specify practices as part of the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program and the Conservation Lands Tax Incentive Program.
- TRCA policies and standard operating procedures also provide management guidance to TRCA land holdings. TRCA is finalizing a risk-based land classification process that will establish standard levels of care across TRCA land holdings.

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- Partnership models that allow for partners to assist and support TRCA care of TRCA greenspaces, such as the agreement for land management support of the Duffins Headwaters Properties with Green Durham Association.

RATIONALE

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented increase in public use of TRCA lands. These greenspaces allow people the opportunity to stay close to home and use the outdoors as a venue for physical activity and mental restoration and as a place to be able gather safely while maintaining physical distance requirements. Based on a series of permanent trail counters at several TRCA trail access locations, TRCA is projecting an increase of approximately 140% over 2019 user numbers at the same locations. This is putting additional pressure on existing facilities and infrastructure and requires TRCA to manage users (both through education and enforcement) and to address the duty of care and operational maintenance required to ensure the sustainability of the lands and quality visitor experiences. Municipal enforcement capacity is also being burdened responding to parking issues along municipal roads where people park to gain access to TRCA trails and facilities.

The *Conservation Authorities Act* provides TRCA the objective of providing programs and services designed to further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources other than gas, oil, coal and minerals within TRCA's watersheds, and to manage the lands we secure in a manner that supports this objective. Land management and master plans are valuable planning initiatives that support the successful delivery of programs and services related to the conservation and care of TRCA greenspaces. These plans ensure that parks, conservation areas and other greenspaces are managed to achieve the greatest environmental and community benefits possible. They also address factors around risk management, infrastructure state of good repair, and exceptional visitor experience. TRCA has been able to leverage past planning documents for further investment in TRCA lands and infrastructure. This planning-driven revitalization has led to greater attendance and revenue at TRCA facilities.

The Toronto Region has developed around TRCA lands, so these spaces are even easier to access than before. TRCA greenspaces also play an integral part of the greenspace systems of its partner municipalities. TRCA needs to embrace these visitors and guide them on how to use these greenspaces responsibly so that access and conservation objectives can be achieved harmoniously.

Opportunities

Opportunities exist to further and improve TRCA implementation of land management plans and master plans to leverage TRCA's vision and support the delivery of TRCA programs and services.

Strategic Opportunities

- **Improve fulsome lifecycle asset management** to address failing capital infrastructure that is critical to TRCA programs and services. There is a need to address issues around state of good repair so that TRCA can continue to support existing and proposed greenspace programming. TRCA is in the process of creating asset management plans that will address lifecycle management actions required for existing infrastructure. Management plans help identify actions required to sustain new and existing assets over the long term. If existing infrastructure falls into a further state of disrepair because of lack of maintenance, cost

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estimates at the time of management plan approvals will not accurately reflect the costs required to address state of good repair.

- **Review and update existing plans** to ensure that they support current programs and services with realistic funding approaches for outstanding deliverables. TRCA can identify strategic linkages between TRCA and municipal strategies and plans to develop shared visions for the future and meaningful ways to achieve each other's goals. TRCA can then align the implementation of these projects with capital budget planning processes so that TRCA can leverage additional investment by municipalities. This approach is being used to implement TRCA's Trail Strategy for the Greater Toronto Region.
- **Explore diversification of land management models.** Management of lands can be transferred to local municipalities so that they are responsible for the management of the lands, including taxes and utilities, where the lands better serve local initiatives. New models that involve municipal management of lands with co-branding or cooperative utilization of a site with TRCA can also be explored. There is also an opportunity to explore co-management models with park agencies with similar objectives and mandates, such as Parks Canada or Ontario Parks.
- **Pursue opportunities for municipalities, park agencies and others to partner on greenspace management** to satisfy both development-related greenspace requirements, as well as public demand. TRCA has an abundance of lands that are interwoven into greenspace networks within its watershed. TRCA can increase municipal, park agency and community relationships/partnerships through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and develop new partnerships to deliver infrastructure and programs identified through development and municipal planning processes. Partnering with others who have similar objectives to co-manage lands will allow TRCA to further opportunities to invest in land care. This may include supporting proactive land management planning and implementation through regular capital budgets from regional and local municipal partners in a manner that supports a consistent level of continued adaptive management of TRCA lands. Continued coordination with municipal partners will allow for collective management implications related to access to and use of TRCA lands, such as parking and washrooms, to be better coordinated in the local area. This could be achieved by coordinated parking and access studies that look at opportunities outside of the lens of a single agency.
- **Increase the responsiveness of TRCA community learning initiatives.** There is an opportunity to improve community education across TRCA's land base so that people better understand the services provided by the greenspace and how to recreate responsibly in these spaces. Building on the Trail Ambassador initiative during the spring and summer of 2020, TRCA community learning staff can be directed to areas where there has been a higher incident of problems or unauthorized uses or where there are new initiatives that impact how people use an area, so that TRCA can engage positively with users to teach people how to use areas responsibly, given the rules and etiquette of particular areas.

Funding Opportunities

- **Build on-going land care costs into the land securement decision-making framework.** As soon as TRCA secures lands, there is an associated cost for its care. The cost of managing TRCA lands varies depending on the programs and services to which the land contributes. As TRCA continues to refine the standards of care associated with TRCA's draft land service level framework, the on-going costs of managing TRCA lands to satisfy the

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desired service level can be identified early so that implications on land care budgets can inform decisions about the potential land securement.

- **Identify opportunities to animate TRCA greenspaces and make them destinations.**
This can include providing for third party investment to increase opportunities for public use where appropriate. TRCA should continue to explore and nurture partnerships that can lead to support implementation of the plan recommendations. Increased use can animate TRCA greenspaces and generate revenues that can be reinvested in capital asset management and development to continue to support public use and natural and cultural heritage conservation and restoration.

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 3 – Rethink greenspace to maximize its value

FINANCIAL DETAILS

All properties, regardless of the management category and intensity of public use, require regular and proper inspection, land planning, management and monitoring to ensure that TRCA lands support TRCA programs and services. Regular management of TRCA lands as part of TRCA's Land Care Program includes basic inspections of and response to property boundary securement conditions and hazards to respond to TRCA's basic duty of care responsibilities. These boundary maintenance activities consist of minor encroachment resolutions, work order resolution, garbage removal, neighbour relations management, property identification and regulatory signage, fence and gate installation and maintenance, tree assessments and tree hazard mitigation. These actions include activities that are both proactive and reactive. As such, response and mitigation costs can vary from year to year.

The cost of managing TRCA lands varies depending on the programs and services to which the land contributes. TRCA established a land care rate of \$309/ha in 2008 (nearly \$370/ha in 2020\$). As part of the Greenspace Securement and Management Plan that is being developed by staff, TRCA staff are updating the annual aggregate cost to perform the aforementioned basic land care responsibilities to reflect current regulatory requirements and TRCA policies and procedures that inform the more comprehensive approach to land management that TRCA undertakes. Preliminary estimates for basic land care activities, taxes and insurance is estimated at approximately \$465/ha for lands classified as low service in TRCA's draft land service level strategy. This amount fluctuates based on social, environmental and operational factors such as weather events, changes in service levels, invasive species destruction, and ease of access from nearby communities. Additional natural and cultural resource management activities, enforcement, outreach and other programming are not included in the \$465/ha rate.

In addition to the basic duty of care responsibilities, TRCA may add services to the lands to support additional TRCA programs and services. These range from no-fee, passive use trails and supporting infrastructure to fee-supported, active recreation programs and significant built infrastructure. These additional services increase the costs to service said lands and are supported through business and budget planning. TRCA costs associated with delivery of these programs and services are being refined through the Greenspace Securement and Management Plan project.

TRCA currently receives land care funding from the Region of Durham, the Region of Peel and the Region of York. The degree to which these support TRCA land management planning, on-going operations, management of passive use and conservation lands, and some capital

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development recommended in the land management and master plans varies by regional municipality because of the different funding amounts provided to TRCA for land care.

TRCA's only current land management and master planning project for TRCA-managed lands is the master plan for Glen Haffy Conservation Area and Surrounding Niagara Escarpment Properties, funded through Peel Land Care (440-01). Occasionally, plans are developed that supplement master plans or management plans in place for certain sites. For example, a Public Use Activation Plan is being prepared for Claireville Conservation Park, which complements the Management Plan already in place.

In addition to funds levied from partner municipalities, TRCA has leveraged investment from local municipalities, community partners, and the development industry to complete priority projects identified in land management and master plans. However, TRCA has not secured full financing to implement all capital development recommended in the approved land management and master plans.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

The current financial realities coupled with the ongoing increase in use of TRCA lands has clearly demonstrated a need to rethink the way we plan, manage and care for TRCA greenspaces. This has been further amplified because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The unprecedented increase in public use of TRCA lands has brought to light the need to clearly address infrastructure to manage and control users and to address the state of good repair and operational maintenance required to ensure the sustainability of our land.

Therefore, there is a need to focus on completing several key initiatives in support of general TRCA land care. These include:

- **Improve lifecycle asset management.**
 - Develop asset management plans to improve TRCA's capital asset management with a better understanding of the state of good repair of existing infrastructure to support the current and expected use of TRCA greenspaces.
- **Use an adaptive management approach to guide TRCA land planning and care.**
 - Review and update implementation plans for management and master plans with outstanding deliverables to identify actions that reflect the current operating environment, the demand for access to greenspace during the COVID-19 pandemic, a consistent duty of care approach across TRCA-managed lands and TRCA's strategic objectives. These updated implementation plans will be incorporated into TRCA's capital budget planning process to provide clear priorities for the next five years and the 10-year forecast.
 - Continue to develop the master plan for Glen Haffy Conservation Area and Surrounding Niagara Escarpment Open Space System (NEPOSS) properties, with a target completion of Q4 2022. NEPOSS properties are to have a land management/master plan for each park and open space in the NEPOSS in accordance with 3.1.5.1 of Part 3 of the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* (2017).
 - Employ a combination of community learning and enforcement to engage people in responsible use of TRCA greenspaces, with a focus on areas with the greatest pressures and impact risks.
- **Diversify land management models.**
 - Continue to develop a land classification risk model so that TRCA can better

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respond to the demands for use of TRCA greenspaces and refine TRCA standards of care that influence on-going land care costs associated with greenspace securement.

- Continue MOU and Service Level Agreement (SLA) discussions with municipal partners to look at new taxation and funding models for TRCA lands, informed by the asset management plans that will be developed.
- Explore potential partnerships with municipalities, park agencies and third parties on animation, enforcement and co-management of TRCA greenspaces.
- Update TRCA's Forest Management Plan to leverage the stewardship of TRCA's forest assets to better support land care objectives and current TRCA programs and services.

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Attachments: 5

Attachment 1: Region of Durham Map of TRCA properties with Management Plans

Attachment 2: Region of York Map of TRCA properties with Management Plans

Attachment 3: Region of Peel, Town of Mono and Township of Adjala-Tosorontio Map of TRCA properties with Management Plans

Attachment 4: City of Toronto Map of TRCA properties with Management Plans

Attachment 5: List of Land Management Planning Documents for TRCA-managed Properties