

Section I – Items for Board of Directors Action

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Directors
Friday, May 28, 2021 Meeting

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

RE: **NATURAL SCIENCE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**
Establishment of Natural Science and Education Committee

KEY ISSUE

Establishment of Natural Science and Education Committee, as per recommendations of the Outdoor Education Task Force and TRCA Board of Directors.

RECOMMENDATION

WHEREAS at its Meeting #6/18 held on July 20, 2018, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's Authority approved the establishment of an Outdoor Education Task Force comprised of elected officials from local school boards and TRCA's Authority;

AND WHEREAS at its Meeting held on February 26, 2021, TRCA's Board of Directors endorsed the Final Report and Recommendations of the Outdoor Education Task Force, including the establishment of a multi-stakeholder Natural Science and Education Committee as a sub-committee of TRCA's Board of Directors;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the Natural Science and Education Committee be established as outlined in Attachment 1: Natural Science and Education Committee Terms of Reference;

THAT a formal request for representation on the Natural Science and Education Committee be made to member organizations, as per Attachment 1: Natural Science and Education Committee Terms of Reference;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report on proposed appointments to the Natural Science and Education Committee for Board of Directors approval at the October 22, 2021 Board of Directors meeting.

BACKGROUND

At Meeting #6/18 on July 20, 2018, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) Authority approved the establishment of an Outdoor Education Task Force comprised of Trustees from area school boards and representatives from TRCA's Authority. The Outdoor Education Task Force was convened with an eighteen (18) month term and mandate to study, develop, and recommend strategic future directions related to out-of-classroom learning as it pertains to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), specifically including Peel, York and Durham Regions and the City of Toronto.

TRCA's Board of Directors convened the Outdoor Education Task Force as a multi-stakeholder approach to identifying opportunities that will sustain the current system of publicly built and operated school board and conservation authority out-of-classroom learning centres and programs into the future.

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The Outdoor Education Task Force was comprised of the following School Board Trustees and TRCA Board members:

- Durham Catholic District School Board: Trustee Morgan Ste. Marie
- York Region District School Board: Trustee Cynthia Cordova
- York Catholic District School Board: Trustee Jennifer Wigston
- Peel District School Board: Trustee Will Davies
- Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board: Trustee Frank Di Cosola
- Toronto District School Board: Trustee Anu Sriskandarajah
- Toronto Catholic District School Board: Trustee Garry Tanuan
- Conseil scolaire catholique MonAvenir: Chair Melinda Chartrand
- TRCA (City of Brampton): Regional Councillor Rowena Santos
- TRCA (City of Toronto): Mr. Basu Mukherjee

On January 25, 2021 the Outdoor Education Task Force completed its work and submitted five (5) recommendations for review and endorsement by TRCA's Board of Directors, which were endorsed on February 26, 2021, as noted above. The Outdoor Education Task Force recommendations form the basis for strengthened collaboration amongst and between TRCA and area school boards as well as other learning organizations within the broader public sector. A key goal of the Outdoor Education Task Force was to build on Section 197 of the Education Act and establish mechanisms to better leverage the public learning assets and natural resources of both school boards and conservation authorities while maximizing the use of finite financial public and private funding in delivering important nature-based outdoor education experiences for students of our watersheds.

TRCA's Board of Directors, at its meeting held on February 26, 2021, adopted Resolution #A17/21 as follows:

WHEREAS at its Meeting #6/18 held on July 20, 2018, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Board of Directors approved the establishment of an Outdoor Education Task Force comprised of elected officials from local school boards and TRCA's Board of Directors;

AND WHEREAS the Outdoor Education Task Force has been convened to study, develop and recommend strategic future directions related to natural science, conservation and environmental out-of-classroom learning in the Toronto region;

AND WHEREAS at Meeting #5/20 held on January 25, 2020, the Outdoor Education Task Force endorsed the final report, Vision Statement and Strategic Recommendations, as amended, for submission to Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Board of Directors;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT the final report of the Outdoor Education Task Force be received;

THAT the Vision Statement, as amended at the January 25, 2021 Outdoor Education Task Force meeting, be endorsed;

THAT the following recommendations of the Outdoor Education Task Force be approved for action:

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Recommendation #1: Establish Shared Governance Model – Natural Science and Education Committee as a Subcommittee of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's Board of Directors

Recommendation #2: Establish Consistent Access and Curricular Standards Across TRCA and School Boards

Recommendation #3: Establish a Unified Performance Measurement System

Recommendation #4: Advance Shared-Ownership and Access Models That Enhance and Sustain an Overall Out-Of-Classroom Learning System

Recommendation #5: Develop a Long-Term Equitable Access Financial Plan

THAT the approved Vision Statement and Strategic Recommendations be circulated to area Boards of Trustees for consideration and endorsement;

TRCA has worked with local schools and school boards to provide outdoor education programs and services since 1953. Enabling this work, Section 197 of the *Education Act* provides for school boards to enter into agreements with conservation authorities for the purposes of providing out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation or other out-of-classroom programs. Currently TRCA is one of Ontario's largest providers of out-of-classroom experiential learning with over 155,000 students engaging in TRCA learning programs annually through a network of education centres, conservation areas and local greenspaces, in addition to in-school programs. TRCA educational offerings are curriculum-linked and enable student learning related to a wide range of subjects that both meet curricular objectives while advancing TRCA strategic goals and supporting TRCA's core mandate. Further to learning program services, TRCA provides access to TRCA lands and greenspaces for area school boards for board-operated outdoor education centres through lease or other formal agreements either on, or adjacent, to TRCA-owned land, thereby maximizing public-sector partnerships through efficient use of publicly owned land for learning purposes.

Central to the Outdoor Education Task Force recommendations is the establishment of the Natural Science and Education Committee to provide a shared governance framework to advance the recommendations of the Outdoor Education Task Force. TRCA has historically brought key stakeholders together as necessary for important discussions related to the segment of the formal education system that relates to natural science, conservation and the environment, most recently through the Outdoor Education Task Force. The convening of the Natural Science and Education Committee was seen as an essential component of TRCA's work as a leader in this field by members of the Outdoor Education Task Force.

RATIONALE

Building on the success of the Outdoor Education Task Force, the Natural Science and Education Committee will provide for a multi-stakeholder governance framework to advance shared objectives pertaining to out-of-classroom learning related to natural-science, conservation and the environment in the Greater Toronto Area. By bringing together key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, area school boards, indigenous communities and youth, TRCA and school board partners will be better able to leverage the value of the publicly built and operated system that supports out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment more effectively, while also ensuring the current and future learning needs are met.

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The Natural Science and Education Committee will be an advisory board of TRCA's Board of Directors with a mandate to:

Study and make recommendations to the Board of Directors of TRCA regarding recommendations to TRCA and government and agency partners on improvements and future needs as it pertains to the provision, planning or access for students to out-of-classroom learning related to natural science, conservation and the environment in the Greater Toronto Area region.

The objectives of the Natural Science and Education Committee will be to advise TRCA and partner agencies on the effective implementation and advancement of the recommendations of the Outdoor Education Task Force, specifically the following:

- (a) Establish Consistent Access and Curricular Standards Across TRCA and School Boards.
- (b) Establish a Unified Performance Measurement System.
- (c) Advance Shared-Ownership and Access Models That Enhance and Sustain an Overall Out-Of-Classroom Learning System.
- (d) Develop a Long-Term Equitable Access Financial Plan.

In order to ensure representation from key public-sector stakeholders, membership will be comprised of representatives from the following:

- (a) School Board Trustee from each of the area school boards (up to 10);
- (b) TRCA Board of Directors Member (up to 2);
- (c) Ministry of Education (up to 2);
- (d) Indigenous representatives with a Treaty right or historical affiliation to TRCA's jurisdiction (up to 2);
- (e) Youth representatives (up to 2) attending an educational institution in TRCA's jurisdiction.

Representatives from indigenous communities will ensure that appropriate voice is given to those with Treaty Rights or historic affiliation with TRCA's jurisdiction, which are historically under-represented in decision-making structures as it relates to this type and nature of experiential learning. Additionally, youth representation at future tables such as the Natural Science and Education Committee was an important point of discussion for members of the Outdoor Education Task Force, and as such has been integrated into the Terms of Reference for this new committee.

To align with municipal and school board election cycles, committee members will be appointed for a four-year term aligned with municipal and school board Terms of Council or until their successors are appointed, with meetings held, at minimum, three times per year.

As an advisory board of TRCA's Board of Directors, the Natural Science and Education Committee will report to TRCA's Board of Directors with minutes and action items circulated to participating member organizations as required.

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

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Strategy 5 – Foster sustainable citizenship

Strategy 7 – Build partnerships and new business models

Strategy 9 – Measure performance

FINANCIAL DETAILS

TRCA's 2020 budget for school-based education programs and activities was \$5.1 million, with \$3.77M (74%) generated through user fees, grants and other revenue and the remaining \$1.33M (26%) supported through municipal funding for special programs, such as Peel EcoSchools, Watershed on Wheels, Water Festivals and others.

The operational costs for administration of the Natural Science and Education Committee is estimated to be \$30,000 per year, primarily funded through operating account 365-01.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

With TRCA Board of Directors approval of the establishment of the Natural Science and Education Committee, TRCA staff will prepare a call for appointments to member organizations, including supporting documentation and information for prospective members.

Following the call for appointments, staff will report to TRCA's Board of Directors for approval of appointments at the October 22, 2021 Board of Directors meeting, with the anticipated inaugural meeting of the Natural Science and Education Committee taking place in November 2021.

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Date: May 17, 2021

Attachments: 1

Attachment 1: Toronto Region Natural Science and Education Terms of Reference