

To: Board of Management

From: Dr. William A. Rapley
Executive Director
Conservation, Education & Wildlife

Subject: **ADOPT-A-POND & TURTLE ISLAND CURATORIAL OUTREACH – 2015 SUMMARY**

Date: 2016-03-30

Summary:

This report focuses on the primary activities and achievements of the Adopt-A-Pond and Turtle Island Conservation Programmes at the Toronto Zoo for the year 2015.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

Dr. Andrew Lentini is the Curator of Amphibians & Reptiles and oversees the Adopt-A-Pond and Turtle Island programs. In 1989 at the first World Congress of Herpetology, a global gathering to discuss the study of amphibians and reptiles, it became clear that frogs, toads and salamanders – animals that rely on wetland habitat for most or part of their life were declining worldwide. Eager to take action, a group of Toronto Zoo staff formed an Amphibian Interest Group to promote water and wetland conservation throughout the Zoo. In 1991, Adopt-A-Pond was chosen as the name for Toronto Zoo's Wetland Conservation Programme.

The programme's purpose was to engage families in identifying important wetland habitats and the creatures that these habitats support. Its first educational poster "Amphibians are Disappearing - If you love to hear frogs sing, no-one wants a silent spring" was sent to over 1 million school children. With its early success in community wetland conservation, Adopt-A-Pond was awarded the American Zoo Association's North American Conservation Award in 1997.

Partnerships created through Adopt-A-Pond have resulted in the production of a series of unique Ontario focused reptile and amphibian identification guides, frog call CDs, and the Zoo's first citizen science programme – Frog Watch Ontario. Adopt-A-Pond now maintains an expanded group of citizen science initiatives that include the Wetland Guardians Registry and Ontario Turtle Tally along with a wide range of conservation projects focusing on local amphibian and reptile species.

Toronto Zoo's Turtle Island Conservation programme (TIC) respectfully shares the hopes and goals of First Nations (FN) partners in our commitment for the preservation of biodiversity. The programme celebrates culturally diverse and community-based approaches to conservation, recognizing that socially

relevant programming is an imperative component to educating and motivating people to take action for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat. The TIC has partnered with FN communities to develop culturally appropriate programming to protect and preserve community knowledge and significant natural and cultural landscapes since 2005.

TIC 's objectives are: 1) To increase understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of First Nations culture and ways of knowing among all people; 2) To promote and acknowledge understanding of the connections between traditional ways of knowing and western science; and 3) To facilitate intergenerational knowledge sharing through the creation of educational resources and community.

Comments/Discussion:

In 2015, the Adopt-A-Pond Program engaged people in conservation programming about turtles and frogs at over 50 events. Some of our most memorable events are those that take place on the Zoo site to add value to the guest experience. Spring Toad Festival was held at the beginning of May and engaged 2,000 of the on site visitors in wetland conservation programming in the Americas Wetlands outdoor area. Over the course of two days, a series of activities and games were available to guests that highlighted wetland habitats and the frogs and toads that live in them. Visitors were also encouraged to join Frog Watch Ontario, our citizen science frog monitoring program. Our largest on site event is World Turtle Day, which takes place at the end of May. In 2015 our conservation staff engaged with 3,500 visitors over two days in the Americas Wetlands outdoor area during this event. Games and activities were set up in the wetland area to promote participation in Ontario Turtle Tally and a giant turtle bouncy castle was set up for children who made a donation to our conservation programs. Both of these on site events are very well received by visitors who enjoy the opportunity to directly interact with the conservation staff and learn about local backyard wildlife.

The year 2015 has been a great year for Frog Watch Ontario. We had over 200 people participate in this program who submitted reports on 535 frog sightings. There were many requests for Frog Watch presentations, including a presentation for VIP members and board members of the Royal Botanical Gardens. Our partnership with Rouge Park has also helped to increase the participation in Frog Watch. Each spring we host a Frog Watch training session in the atrium for Rouge Park volunteers who monitor frogs within the park. Once their monitoring in the park is complete, these people also have the skills to continue to contribute to the Frog Watch program going forward. The Rouge Park program fills up every year and 2015 was no different. Frog Watch is now also being promoted through the larger Nature Watch program with several other partners across Canada including the University of Ottawa, Wilfred Laurier University, Nature Canada and the David Suzuki Foundation.



Ontario Turtle Tally also saw a significant number of turtle reports (1280) come through the 633 participants this year. Many of these participants were submitting sightings of species at risk turtles, which is very significant to the conservation of these turtles throughout Ontario. This information is used to directly inform land management decisions regarding species at risk habitat. Ontario Turtle Tally is what draws most of our public outreach requests. The public really enjoy this program and find it an easy

way to get involved with conservation. Having our expert conservation staff available to interact with participants through emails, phone calls, or in person at events, is a huge draw. Ontario Turtle Tally is also the program which we promote the most through school outreach. Visiting schools with model turtles, or a live outreach turtle helps students to connect with the program, especially if they have never seen a turtle before.



Each year we host an appreciation day at Toronto Zoo for people that participate in Frog Watch and Ontario Turtle Tally. Every year this event fills beyond capacity and our waiting list for 2015 told us this year was no different. We had 143 participants in 2015. This event brings huge support from program participants and it encourages others to get involved as participants bring friends along with them. We provide a lineup of speakers who share new research on local turtle and frog conservation projects and help connect the audience to the science which harnesses the power of their observations.



The Adopt-A-Pond newsletter and blog has been an invaluable way to get our message out to the public over 2015, and adds to our already well received general interest articles and other published media. With over 200,000 people reached through media created by conservation staff, our Turtle Tally and Frog Watch programs continue to grow, as does the awareness of conservation projects for amphibians and reptiles at the zoo.



In school presentations focusing on salamander and frog programming reached a total of 550 students from Kindergarten to Grade 6 at 10 different GTA schools.

We partnered with Toronto Animal Services to participate in four Animal Open House events throughout the city.

We also engaged local communittee members by developing and conducting an information presentation and outreach visit with AMICA at Bayview Senior's Residence which reached 36 residents, many of whom could not have accessed the zoo due to their health status or limited mobility.



We partnered with Crime Stoppers Canada for a Wildlife Trafficking campaign and produced a poster that was distributed widely. We also presented an invited talk to delegates from around the world at the 36th Annual International Crime Stoppers Convention held in Toronto in 2015.

In an ongoing collaboration with the Canadian Armed forces we were able to provide training in identification and handling of venomous and dangerous reptiles to the Preventative medicine Technician class fro Canadian Forces Base Borden. We have been providing this pre-depoyemnt training since 2005.

In 2015, Turtle Island Conservation engaged people at various events including pow wows, community cleanups, Earth Day, environment days, community consultations, educator training sessions and more from the Windsor area, all the way to Sault St. Marie. One of our largest and most time consuming projects this year was our summer employment programme. TIC hired two First Nations students to work in their own communities documenting Traditional Knowledge on harvestable species their community has priority on developing best management practices for. Throughout the summer these students were interviewing knowledge holders in their community, researching the priority species and utilizing TIC's 'Sacred Spaces and Special Places' map as a living document for their community to contribute to and use as a knowledge source. The students then completed their work by planning and hosting a community gathering where they showcased all of their work and presented the community maps. TIC staff is heavily involved in the training and supervision of summer students.

This year TIC staff worked with six communities to develop and translate both turtle and snake crossing signs in their specific dialect. Through this programme TIC is better able to provide a valuable resource with community specific variations of these signs versus a one size fits all solution that we had previously done. Last year we were able to provide these six communities with a total of 106 crossing signs. TIC also worked with various communities to begin the development of interpretive and educational signage around Species at Risk that will be erected alongside various workshops engaging the community to learn more and do more to protect and help the Species at Risk in their territories.

Last year TIC staff was able to attend training on teaching with Monarch Butterflies through the Monarch Teachers Network at the Toronto Regional Conservation Authority. Through this partnership, TIC has begun working with staff at the TRCA, teachers who are a part of the network, and partnering First Nation communities to develop TIC's monarch butterfly programming. Last year TIC staff held two successful monarch butterfly workshops in partnering communities where youth and adults were invited to come help us build the garden, learn about native plant species that support butterflies and pollinators, and get hands on training on how to maintain their own areas to support species like the Monarch. TIC staff have developed hands on activities and programming for children around the Monarch Butterfly which began being implemented at various community gatherings and schools, alongside TIC's typical work around the Turtles of Ontario. TIC also began the work of collecting information and working with our partner community Walpole Island First Nation to develop and produce an educational resource about Monarch Butterflies from a First Nations perspective.

William A. Rapley, D.V.M., M.Sc.
Executive Director
Conservation, Education & Wildlife