

From: [Ellen Schwartzel](#)
To: [Infrastructure and Environment](#)
Subject: My comments for 2019.IE7.8 on September 9, 2019 Infrastructure and Environment Committee
Date: September 3, 2019 9:04:06 PM

To the City Clerk:

Please add my comments to the agenda for the September 9, 2019 Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting on item 2019.IE7.8, Toronto Biodiversity Strategy

I understand that my comments and the personal information in this email will form part of the public record and that my name will be listed as a correspondent on agendas and minutes of City Council or its committees. Also, I understand that agendas and minutes are posted online and my name may be indexed by search engines like Google.

Comment submitted:

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee, City of Toronto;

Submitted by the Toronto Field Naturalists

September 9, 2019

Subject: Biodiversity Strategy item IE7.8

The Toronto Field Naturalists offer a long record of experience and expertise with Toronto's natural areas. This September we want to both applaud and urge action on the City's new strategies for Biodiversity and Ravines. The two strategies show a lot of promise and are interlinked of course, but they urgently need to get rolling. Toronto is lucky in many ways: we still live in the midst of remarkable natural heritage; the city's experts have designated almost 2,700 hectares as environmentally significant areas – roughly 4% of the city's area. But those areas face intense and growing pressures, including development, pollution, erosion, severe weather, high visitor numbers and invasive species. The pressures - and the degraded habitat - have been documented in multiple studies, by the TRCA and others.

The Biodiversity Strategy is a foundation document; no more, no less. Our members hope and request that over the next one to five years, the strategy will trigger a host of measures on the ground. Ultimately, people in Toronto want to see our city's most vulnerable natural habitats – the gems in High Park, the Don Valley, the Humber Valley, along the lake and elsewhere - prioritized, monitored, and restored.

The Biodiversity strategy has had a long gestation. The City's chief planners had a Biodiversity roundtable in spring 2017, with extensive consultation following. This strategy has been in the works for over two and half years now. So please, let's get the strategy finalized; let's start the action and start seeing results on the landscape.

What action steps are needed? As we noted in our deputation back in February of this year, we need:

1. Funding and an action plan to support stewardship; dedicated volunteer groups such as TFN and PNTA have already spent years weeding, planting and mulching in our parks and ravines, but the work needs stronger city coordination to triage the top priorities, to scale up projects, and to keep newly restored sites healthy over the long term. So budget and staffing must be strengthened for the city's Natural Environment Community Programs department, most particularly for the Community Stewardship Program."

2. A stronger focus on fighting invasive species, because frankly, the aggressiveness of invasive weeds like dog-strangling vine and Phragmites means our natural areas are quickly being eaten alive. We are not by any stretch keeping up with the pace of degradation.

3. Priority protection for the best bits of nature; the city must identify which Environmentally Significant Areas most urgently need Management Plans. And the city must give teeth to those Management Plans; nice vision statements on paper aren't enough. We were pleased to hear earlier this year that the City's Urban Forestry staff have been working to identify the most sensitive zones within ESAs. These evaluations have to be fast-tracked, and we would like progress to be shared publicly. A city-led workshop on the status of ESAs and their management plans would bring the community up to speed and would be a great project for this winter.

To manage something effectively you also need to monitor. So we were delighted to learn that the city has this year established 200 ecological monitoring sites in ravines and natural areas across Toronto, in partnership with U of T's Faculty of Forestry. We understand that the city is following the lead of several other Southern Ontario municipalities by using a tool called Vegetation Sampling Protocol (VSP). Again, our communities would love to learn more about this initiative, ideally through a public meeting or workshop to bring the public into the loop and exchange expertise.

The city does not need to go it alone – you can lean on your communities of volunteers: Here's what we can contribute:

- We have experience helping with restoration projects; sites like the Glen Stewart Ravine (completed by the City 2012), Cottonwood flats (Where TFN leads a multi-year monitoring project) and Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve have taught our communities a lot about setting priorities, perseverance and building capacities.
- We have dedicated volunteers, ready to be deployed pulling invasives and planting native species.
- We have active and well-connected members who are working to help spread the word.

Thank you for this chance to offer our input. We hope that on November 7 we can be present to applaud the roll-out of the Ravine Strategy Implementation Plan.

Submitted by Ellen Schwartzel

(TFN Board Member) on behalf of the **Toronto Field Naturalists**.