



Submission to Parks & Environment Committee, July 12, 2018

RE: PE29.2 – A Draft Biodiversity Strategy for Toronto

We are making this submission on behalf of High Park Nature, which includes the Natural Environment Committee, High Park Stewards and the website highparknature.org.

High Park is one of the most significant natural sites within the City of Toronto. In fact it's a biodiversity hotspot for all of Ontario. While accommodating well over a million human visitors a year, the park still manages to support a rich variety of wildlife and diverse habitats, including a 4500 year old, globally rare black oak savannah. The people of Toronto, including thousands of children and students at all levels, as well as visitors and tourists, all benefit from this remarkable biodiversity in the midst of our urban environment.

We believe there is much to learn from the High Park experience when developing a Biodiversity Strategy for Toronto. High Park provides a positive model for what can be accomplished with a science-based management plan and a City-funded restoration crew working in combination with dedicated volunteer stewards over the last 20+ years. At the same time, it demonstrates the threats mentioned in the strategy, including high-impact recreational uses such as foraging, off-road cycling and dog-related activity. So while much has been preserved and improved, much has also been degraded, over-used or misused – undermining the restoration efforts and putting this natural treasure in peril. These threats are not unique to High Park: according to the June 2012 report of existing and proposed Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs), all sites that were studied were adversely affected to varying degrees by human disturbance.

One of our challenges at High Park has been to ensure that the protection mandated under the Provincial Policy Statement 2014 is actually applied: to ensure that nearby developments have “no negative impacts on the natural heritage, natural heritage features and ecological function”. This should be made a routine part of the planning process. Similarly, the strategy should ensure compliance with the Official Plan and all existing bylaws related to protection of natural heritage; and all relevant departments should be aware of the rules and ensure they are followed.

The draft Biodiversity Strategy contains many sound recommendations, but we believe it needs strengthening in the area of protection. Creating new habitat can be exciting and rewarding, but our richest biodiversity exists in the areas already designated as environmentally significant (the ESAs). Both new and existing habitats require a long-term commitment to protection, compliance and respect.

We hope that the adoption and implementation of a comprehensive Biodiversity Strategy will mean that High Park and many other natural areas throughout the City will benefit from community stewardship and adequately resourced staff to carry out restoration, education and enforcement, and protect our natural heritage for generations to come.

Thank you.

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Co-Chairs, High Park Nature