



Deputation for January 27, 2021 Executive Council, City of Toronto
Exe 20.3 **City of Toronto Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Annual Performance Report**

Mayor Tory and members of Executive Committee; thank you for the chance to comment.

As advocates for Toronto's nature and biodiversity, we applaud the launch of the city's very first Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Report. We do observe a big gap in the report, but first things first: the reporting concept is excellent. We definitely agree that annual performance reporting on key indicators is essential for tracking environmental achievements and for driving forward improvements, year over year.

We applaud the report's clear metrics charting Toronto's performance on Greenhouse Gas emissions. The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer and her team have set up a reporting framework that will help the city's many departments work with a common purpose towards agreed-upon goals and targets. The report has the potential to become more valuable with every passing year.

We are also pleased to see the explicit commitment to continually monitor what city stakeholders expect from this report (Exe.20.3; p.4). So please allow us to point out that major gap:

- This report has no metrics on nature and the protection of natural heritage in the city. While TransformTO is aligned with a number of Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 15, (p. 28), there is no status report on our city's biodiversity or ecological integrity.

Nature is vitally important in its own right. But the pandemic has reminded us all that nature nearby is also vital to our well-being and to the livability of our city. In fact, Toronto still has a surprising amount of biodiversity ranging from common native species such as robins and goldenrod to provincially rare and even globally rare species and communities. All of this is under threat. UN Goal 15, Life on Land, urges us to "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss." Toronto does have policies to support this Goal but they need to be given a much higher profile and to be aggressively implemented.

The Toronto Field Naturalists and ProtectNatureTO strongly recommend that biodiversity metrics and nature indicators get a dedicated section in next year's ESG report. As for

choosing the most effective indicators, we suggest you consult staff in the Planning and Parks, Forestry and Recreation Departments, and also reach out to community groups with expertise in Toronto's natural heritage. As well, Toronto's Ecosystem Services Working Group has a focus on reporting with a triple-bottom-line lens, and is informed by multi-agency membership. Internationally, indicators for urban biodiversity are being evaluated by academic researchers, especially in the lead-up to the UN Biodiversity Conference in May 2021. For today we merely offer a few illustrative examples of metrics, derived from policy documents recently approved by City Council. Relevant policies include the *Biodiversity Strategy*, adopted October 2, 2019; the *Ravine Implementation Strategy* adopted January 9, 2020, the *Pollinator Protection Strategy*, adopted April 24, 2018 and the Environmentally Significant Area provisions of the Official Plan.

Our key point is that next year's ESG report should begin tracking Toronto's progress in protecting its natural heritage and biodiversity, using a defensible suite of metrics. Metrics suggested below are not meant to be definitive or exhaustive.

We would be happy to discuss this further, and to answer questions.

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Karen Yukich, member, ProtectNatureTO



ProtectNatureTO

Metrics for tracking nature and biodiversity health in Toronto: an illustrative list

1. **"Percentage of ravine lands impacted by invasive plant species:** Toronto's natural areas are showing declining vegetation quality: about 20% of our ravine lands are impacted by invasive plant species. (p.26; Biodiversity Strategy)
2. **"Number of Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) with completed management plans;** The city's Official Plan has designated and mapped 86 such nature hot-spots across Toronto. Management plans have been promised since 2016.
3. **"Number of Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) determined to be in good/fair/poor condition;** The city's Official Plan has designated and mapped over 80 such nature hot-spots across Toronto. Their health needs tracking over time.
4. **"Number of local-seed-source trees planted each year in Toronto's ravines** (Biodiversity Strategy, p. 36) "
5. **"Number of action plans drafted and in use for local vulnerable species** (Biodiversity Strategy; Action #2: p. 46) "

6. **"Hectares of natural lands restored each year** (Biodiversity Strategy; Action #9: p.48)

7. **"Hectares of natural lands managed each year to control invasive species**
(Biodiversity Strategy; Action #10; p. 49) "

8. **"Hectares of ravine lands receiving litter pick-up each year** (Ravine Strategy Implementation; City Council decisions #14, 15 and 16; Jan. 29, 2020) "

9. **"Hectares of valley lands acquired to add buffers to Toronto's ravine system**
(Ravine Strategy: long-term action #10)

10. Percentage of City Wards with City-managed Pollinator Gardens

11. Percentage of City parks with City-managed Pollinator Gardens

Resources:

Measuring Ecological Integrity: History, Practical Applications and Research Opportunities;
Bioscience 2016