

Disbursement of grants in the InTO the Ravines collaboration with Park People

Date: May 19, 2022

To: Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: General Manager, Parks Forestry and Recreation

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In 2020, InTO the Ravines, a collaboration between the City of Toronto and the national, Toronto-based registered charity, Park People, was launched as a two-year pilot program to connect the people of Toronto to the city's rich ravine system. InTO the Ravines is a program that focusses on reaching people who have not visited ravines before or who experience barriers in accessing ravines. It consists of three main components: innovative public programming; micro-grants to support groups to host events and activities about the ravines; and training for individuals to become InTO the Ravines Community Champions for their local ravines.

In 2021 and 2022, Park People received 51 and 41 applications, respectively, for the micro-grant program. Fourteen grants were allocated each year (\$1000 per group in 2021 and \$1400 per group in 2022) to enable grantees to host two environmentally-focused events, in person or online, to help communities connect to, celebrate and champion Toronto's one-of a-kind ravine system.

A written program agreement, monthly meetings between City of Toronto and Park People staff, and annual reporting ensure the success of the program which has directly engaged over 2,700 people in the last two years, through community-led events organized by InTO the Ravines "Ravine Champions" and micro-grants, as well as public programming by Park People.

This report responds to a motion by Council on May 12, 2022 to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the disbursement of grants through the InTO the Ravines program.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The 2022 Council Approved Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) includes \$0.1 million to support the InTO the Ravines program in 2022.

At its meeting on May 12, 2022, City Council authorized the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to extend the InTO the Ravines program with three additional option years at PFR's discretion until December 31, 2025.

Annual base funding to implement the InTO the Ravines program will be included in future year budget submission for PFR subject to annual budget approval.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on May 12, 2022, City Council considered MM43.7, Authorization to extend the InTO the Ravines partnership with Park People, and requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee on the disbursement of grants in regards to the InTO the Ravines program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.MM43.7>

At its meeting on January 29, 2020, City Council adopted the key next steps to implement the Ravine Strategy over the next ten years and directed the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation to develop and implement the InTO the Ravines program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EX12.1>

COMMENTS

In January 2020, as part of the Ravine Strategy Implementation staff report, City Council directed the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) to develop and implement the InTO the Ravines program in partnership with the national, Toronto-based registered charity Park People, to amplify existing engagement opportunities.

InTO the Ravines ("the Program") was launched in the spring of 2020, as a two-year pilot program to connect the people of Toronto to the city's rich ravine system, with a focus on people who have not visited ravines before or who experience barriers in accessing ravines, including those in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and Ravine Strategy Priority Investment Areas. The Program is helping develop a deeper understanding of ravine ecology, Indigenous knowledge and heritage in ravines and the goals of the Ravine Strategy and building the foundation for a long-term sense of connection and care for Toronto's ravines.

The Program consists of three main components:

- Innovative public programming that shines a light on the ravines
- Training for individuals to become [InTO the Ravines Community Champions](https://parkpeople.ca/meet-our-2021-into-the-ravines-community-champions/) for their local ravines (<https://parkpeople.ca/meet-our-2021-into-the-ravines-community-champions/>)
- Micro-grants to support the capacity of small grassroots groups to host events and activities about the ravines (<https://parkpeople.ca/opportunity/into-the-ravines-grants/>)

Details of programming offered, Community Champion neighbourhoods, and micro-grant recipients from 2020 to 2022 are outlined in Attachment 1.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, public events and park permits were cancelled, which affected the planning for Year 1 of the Program. The Community Champions project was launched in Year 1; however, the start of the micro-grant program was postponed until 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions limiting in-person events, a series of popular webinars were created to deliver a wide range of ravine related topics to hundreds of participants. A series of blog posts was also commissioned and promoted across social media channels and the Park People newsletter, as detailed in Attachment 1.

The InTO the Ravines micro-grant program launched in Year 2 (2021), when the changing public health situation allowed. The Program supports groups with hosting two environmentally-focused events, in person or online, to help communities connect to, celebrate and champion Toronto's one-of-a-kind ravine system.

The micro-grants are focussed on supporting grassroots community leaders, community-led/grassroots groups such as park friends groups, community associations, neighbourhood groups, and Black, Indigenous and People of Colour-led (BIPOC-led) groups. The programs were designed to support community development and capacity building for communities who have not historically used these spaces, to understand the value and benefits of ravines.

Program details, including eligibility criteria and micro-grant recipients, are available through the Park People InTO the Ravines web page: <https://parkpeople.ca/opportunity/into-the-ravines/>.

InTO the Ravine micro-grant events must:

- Be posted publicly and events must be free and open to all. Every reasonable effort should be made to ensure the events are accessible
- Abide by City of Toronto local laws, by-laws and permit requirements and follow tips for ravine engagement to ensure events do not impact sensitive natural areas
- Follow all public health guidelines in place at the time of the event
- Ensure administrative expenses, including human resources costs, do not exceed 75 per cent of the grant
- Collect and provide information to support the evaluation of the success of the program

In 2021 and 2022, Park People received 51 and 41 applications, respectively, for the micro-grant program. All available micro-grants were allocated in 2021 and are anticipated to be allocated in 2022. Applications are assessed based on the following criteria:

- Events should incorporate the Ravine Strategy guiding principles relevant to the InTO the Ravines program: Protect, Connect and Celebrate.
- Applications should show an intention to host events with minimal environmental impact.
- Priority will be given to groups that focus their engagement with those that have not previously visited ravines or who experience barriers in accessing ravines.
- Strength of their application which includes details of past event experience.
- Originality of event ideas - simple but creative ideas while following ravine engagement tips.
- Geographic diversity, representation of many neighbourhoods across Toronto.

Grant award decisions are made in collaboration between City and Park People staff.

Fourteen InTO the Ravines Community Grants were approved in 2021. Community Grantees received \$1000 in funding to host two ravine events and in 2021, 13 out of the 14 grantees hosted ravine gatherings. One grantee group chose to postpone their event due to construction in their local ravine and will have until November 2022 to host their event. In 2022, grants were increased to \$1400 each for 14 groups to deliver two in-person or virtual events by November 2022. Grant recipients will be notified in the coming weeks and published on the Park People InTO the Ravines project web page. A list of grantees for 2021 can be found in Attachment 1.

Thirty-seven applications in 2021 and 27 applications in 2022 were not successful. Reasons included applications that had little to no connection to the ravine or Ravine Strategy, incomplete or insufficient information provided in the application, and no mention of equity, inclusion or barrier reduction to engage community members. Applicants that were not successful in 2021 were invited to submit an application for 2022. The names of unsuccessful applicants will not be made public as this is not standard practice for granters, nor does it align with the City of Toronto Community Grant Policy or the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA). There are also concerns about the potential impact to the reputations of unsuccessful applicants. Public knowledge of an unsuccessful application may affect their ability to gain funds from other grantors or raise donations from the community. It may also affect their confidence in applying for future grants.

Micro-grant recipients are required to sign an agreement with Park People which outlines requirements, such as promoting their events on a Park People map and the City of Toronto's online Festivals and Events Calendar, as well as to collect information and complete an event evaluation form to report on their event(s) to support Park People's evaluation of the success of the Program.

PFR staff ensure success of the Program through a written program agreement, monthly meetings between City of Toronto and Park People staff, and annual reporting. Park People have provided annual evaluations of the success of the program across micro-grant recipients, including a summary report of the pilot (Attachment 2). On May

12, 2022 Council authorized the General Manager, PFR, to negotiate and execute an agreement to implement the InTO the Ravines program in 2022, as well as three additional option years at PFR's discretion and subject to budget approval. This will allow PFR to continue to review and evaluate the success of the Program and the impact of the investment on an annual basis until 2025.

Council approved the first two years of the collaboration through the January 2020 Ravine Strategy Implementation staff report. At its meeting on May 12, 2022, City Council authorized the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, to extend the InTO the Ravines program with three additional option years. Park People is uniquely positioned to coordinate and offer the InTO the Ravines program, including the evaluation and distribution of micro-grants. They have a proven track record in supporting and mobilizing community park groups, community organizers, non-profits, park professionals and funders who activate the power of parks and have past experience managing successful micro-grant and engagement programs nation-wide and especially in Toronto, such as the Sparking Change Toronto micro-grants and The Weston Family Parks Challenge. Beyond the micro-grant funds, Park People importantly provides mentorship and support to these groups to ensure that their events are successful. They have also successfully brought philanthropic and corporate support to increase the impact of the Program. In 2022, a corporate sponsor, Patagonia, has committed additional funds to supplement the Program, providing additional Park People staff time to support and mentor individuals and groups.

The InTO the Ravines program is just one avenue in which the City provides support and encouragement for organizations engaging their communities in the ravines. Other initiatives include stewardship events coordinated and led by PFR staff through the Parkland Naturalization Program, Ravine Days which are coordinated and promoted through a marketing effort led by PFR in collaboration with community organizations, establishment of the Partnerships, Outreach and Education Working Group, and partnerships with Evergreen, Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority on the Loop Trail and student internships.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: InTO the Ravines Public Engagement Programming, Community Champions and Micro-grant Recipients

Attachment 2: InTO the Ravines Impact Report: 2021 Impact Report by Park People

Attachment 1: InTO the Ravines Public Engagement Programming, Community Champions and Micro-grant Recipients

Table 1. 2020 InTO the Ravines webinars presented by Park People

Title (Webinar)	Topic and Hosts
Drawing on Ravines	No matter what your age or experience, join native plant expert Lorraine Johnson, and scientific illustrator and Métis culture keeper, Jenna McGuire to explore the wonders of nature and ravine ecology through drawing.
Indigenous Storytelling & Ravine Ecology	Storyteller Hillary Clermont, historian, artist Philip Cote, and Indigenous grower Isaac Crosby connect Toronto's Indigenous history to current Indigenous-led ecology work. These vital links help us understand how we can deepen our connection to the plants and animals of our land and ravines.
Ravines and Resilience – Toronto's Ravines and Climate Change	City of Toronto's Senior Environmental Specialist, David MacLeod and grassroots organization Carbon Conversations TO present opportunities our ravines and our homes offer in building climate resilience.
How to build community love for ravines while respecting their limits	Why ravines are vital for our city, the threats they face, and respecting their sensitive ecosystems, with City of Toronto's Natural Environment Specialist, Mark Sherman, and an impressive lineup of panelists from High Park Nature Centre, Taiaiko'n Historical Preservation Society, Friends of Glen Stewart Ravines and others.
Dawn Chorus: A guided listening tour of morning songbirds	The 7th Annual Dawn Chorus featured experienced birders, Songbirding Podcast host Rob Porter and Toronto Bird Celebration Coordinator Andrés Jimenez who shared a 15-minute recording of the Dawn Chorus from the GTA.
Connecting us through Art: Ravine wandering meets art-making	Join creativity facilitator and horticultural therapy practitioner Emma Rooney and Park People's Kelsey Carriere on an artistic journey using your camera, simple materials found around your home, and inspiration from your closest ravine.
Audio-Guided Forest Therapy Experience with Carolynne Crawley	An audio-guided forest therapy experience with Carolynne Crawley over the phone with peaceful and energizing ways to tune into your surroundings. An opportunity to de-stress and slow down while experiencing the many benefits of nature.

Table 2: 2020 InTO the Ravines online articles presented by Park People

Title (Article)	Author/Interviewees
Reducing the impact and increasing connection to nature for park and ravine events	Park People Monica Radovski, Urban Forestry, PFR Carolynne Crawley, Msit Nokmaq

Title (Article)	Author/Interviewees
Humber River Black History Walk	Jacqueline L. Scott, Black History Walks
Mood walks: How to design nature walks to enhance mental health	Jodi Lastman, Park People
Citizen Activism in Support of Toronto's Watercourses	John Wilson, Co-chair, West Don Lands Committee
A Ravine Runs Through It: Meet Rowntree Mills Park's own Ravine Champion	Jodi Lastman, Park People Adassa Boswell, Community Champion

Table 3: 2021 Park People InTO the Ravines public engagement events

Event	Notes
Maidavale Park Pollinator Event	Partnered with 2020 InTO the Ravine Champion, Toronto Field Naturalists, and EcoSpark
Rowntree Mills Mural Event	Partnered with STEPS Indigenous artist to create mural at ravine trail entrance
Evergreen Biking in Ravines Event	Partnered with Evergreen Brick Works and Flemingdon Bike Hub during Ravine Days 2021

Table 4: [2020 InTO the Ravines Community Champions](#) (\$500 per location for training honoraria and to cover one event per location)

Location/Neighbourhood	Ward
Don River East Branch, York Mills and Don Mills	16
Humber River and Summerlea Park	1
Rowntree Mills Park	1
Don River Valley through Flemingdon Park	16
Don Valley Ravine, Thorncliffe Park	15
Raymore Park	2
Black Creek	5
Taylor Massey Creek	20
Taylor Creek Park	19
Wincott Park	2

Table 5: [2021 InTO the Ravines Community Champions](#) (\$500 per location for training honoraria and to cover one event per location)

Location/Neighbourhood	Ward
Deerlick Creek	16
Tom Riley Park	3
Highfield Park and Ravine	1
Newtonbrook Creek/East Don Parklands	18
Queen's Greenbelt	5
Warden Woods	20
Black Creek-Derrydown Park	7

Location/Neighbourhood	Ward
Grey Abbey Ravine	25
Cedar Ridge Park	24
E.T. Seton Park	15
Raymore Park/Humber	2

Table 6: [2021 InTO the Ravines micro-grant recipients](#) (\$1,000 per organization)

Organization Name	Location/Neighbourhood	Ward	Nature of project
Neighbourhood Information Post	Rosedale Ravine, Glen Stewart Ravine, Nordheimer Ravine	11, 12, 19	Two Zoom meetings for participants to share their photos, videos and experiences and discuss how to better connect with these spaces and give back to the ravines.
Aging In Cloud	East Don Parkland	17	Hiking outings for older adults and senior community in Mandarin and English
Let's Hike T.O.	Humber River	various	Humber River introductory hike with Indigenous history. Hiking group for everyone with a specific focus on engaging people of colour, newcomers and young adults aged 20-40
Lost Rivers Walks	Moore Park Ravine	15	An online event introduction to Mud Creek through historic maps and photos, focussing on the natural history of and tributaries to Mud Creek.
Friends of Thorncliffe Park	E.T. Seton Park	15	Thorncliffe Walks the Don! Allowed residents to experience the sights and sounds together
MakeWay Charitable Society - Community Resilience to Extreme Weather	Rosedale Valley Ravine, Re kai Parkette	11, 13	Discover your St Jamestown ravine - Guided walk into the ravine.
Flemingdon Community Support Services	E.T. Seton Park	15	Walk through the Don River ravine.
The Good Guides	Birkdale Ravine	21	Guided walk for mental health relief and activities to help encourage children's appreciation for nature.
Mount Dennis Community Association	Humber Valley at Eglinton Ave West	5	Youth InTO the Valley - Indigenous history in the area, as well as the other historically significant events that took place.
Scarlettwood Warriors for Change	Raymore Park	2	Fishing in the Humber River

Organization Name	Location/ Neighbourhood	Ward	Nature of project
San Romanoway Revitalization Association (SRRA)	Shoreham ravines (Black Creek)	7	Summer and fall walks
Danforth Gardens Neighbourhood Association	Warden Woods	20	ARTivating our Ravine - Environmentally-themed series of artistic activities for families.
Four Winds - Niiwin Wendaanimak Wellness Program	High Park and Nordheimer Ravine	4, 12	Walk along Humber ravine through High Park to introduce member to the documented Indigenous history and trace the Lost River under Nordheimer Ravine.
Street to Trail Association	High Park and Moore Park Ravine	4, 11, 15	Two hikes - through an Indigenous lens discuss Toronto's ravine system, its importance and fragility and the gifts it has to offer.