

Measures and Resources Required in 2025 to Protect Toronto Island Environmentally Significant Areas

Date: December 16, 2024

To: City Council

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: Spadina-Fort York - 10

SUMMARY

At its meeting of November 27, 2024, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee requested the General Manager of Parks, Forestry and Recreation provide a supplemental report, directly to City Council, on the measures needed in 2025 to institute effective protections of the ecological functions of the six Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) on Toronto Island, including resources required as part of the 2025 budget submission.

This report identifies an estimated need of \$9.03 million for additional measures, including \$4.43 M in capital costs and an additional \$4.60 M in operating costs, to accelerate protection and naturalization efforts planned in these ESAs. Based on resources and capacity to deliver, the projects outlined in this report would be phased over six years starting in 2025 with \$0.678 million being considered base Operating funding required for Staffing and ongoing maintenance in 2030 and future. The proposed protection and naturalization efforts are aligned with the Toronto Island Master Plan principle of "Supporting the Natural Environment" and include installation of fence and interpretive signage, invasive species management and restoration planting as outlined in Attachment 1 - Additional Measures and Resources for Toronto Island ESAs.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) and Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) have a long history of investment in the natural environment of Toronto Island. The Toronto Island Master Plan prioritizes this ongoing work to ensure sensitive habitats are protected from increased human activity, as Toronto Island Park's popularity increases. Ongoing investment in infrastructure to manage impacts of erosion and park use, as well as management of invasive plant species and planting of native species, within and adjacent to ESAs is critical to the overall implementation of the Toronto Island Master Plan and demonstrates responsible stewardship of these areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. City Council receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Through the 2024-2033 Capital Budget and Plan and 2024 Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the Division has implemented \$0.50 million (M) in 2024 for Hanlan's Beach Habitat Protection Fencing, \$0.040 M for natural area restoration activities and \$0.025 M for community environmental engagement on the Islands, as well as \$0.68 M for cormorant management. The 2025 Operating Budget submission includes similar amounts and is subject to approval through the budget process.

This report identifies an estimated total financial impact starting in 2025 of \$9.03 M, including \$4.43 M in capital costs and an additional \$4.60 M in operating costs to accelerate and enhance effective protections of the ecological functions of the six Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) on Toronto Island. Ongoing operating costs of \$0.678 million will also be required for ongoing maintenance starting 2030. These enhanced measures are not included in the 2025-2034 Capital Budget and Plan nor 2025 Operating Budget submission, for Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

Attachment 1 "Additional Measures and Resources for 2025 Toronto Island ESAs" includes projects and activities summarized in Table 1 (Capital) and Table 2 (Operating) below that are in addition to the above-noted inclusions in the 2024-2033 Capital Budget and Plan for Parks, Forestry and Recreation or the 2024 Operating Budget. The charts below show the estimated annual financial impacts that would require consideration as part of future year budget processes to facilitate implementation.

Table 1. Estimated Capital Financial Impacts by Year in Millions (\$M)

| | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | 2028 | 2029 | 2030 | Total |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Staffing | 0.173 | 0.173 | 0.173 | 0.173 | 0.173 | 0.173 | 1.038 |
| Interpretive Signs | 0.000 | 0.018 | 0.018 | 0.018 | 0.018 | 0.000 | 0.072 |
| Fencing | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.816 | 0.816 | 0.816 | 0.816 | 3.264 |
| Consultation | 0.028 | 0.028 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.056 |
| Total | 0.201 | 0.219 | 1.007 | 1.007 | 1.007 | 0.989 | 4.432 |

Table 2. Estimated Operating Financial Impacts by Year in Millions (\$M)

| | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | 2028 | 2029 | 2030 and ongoing | Total |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|-------|
| Staffing | 0.147 | 0.147 | 0.147 | 0.147 | 0.147 | 0.147 | 0.882 |
| ESA Maintenance | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.531 | 0.531 | 0.531 | 0.531 | 2.124 |
| Invasive species removal | 0.000 | 0.317 | 0.317 | 0.317 | 0.317 | 0.000 | 1.268 |
| Planting and Restoration | 0.000 | 0.082 | 0.082 | 0.082 | 0.082 | 0.000 | 0.328 |
| Total | 0.147 | 0.546 | 1.077 | 1.077 | 1.077 | 0.678 | 4.602 |

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has been advised of the financial impacts associated with this program to be considered along with other priorities in future budget processes.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on November 27, 2024, Infrastructure and Environment Committee considered the staff report 'Toronto Island's Environmentally Significant Areas' and requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to report directly to the December 17, 18 and 19, 2024 meeting of City Council, by itemizing the measures needed, and the resources required in the 2025 Budget, to institute effective protections of the ecological functions of the Environmentally Significant Areas on the Toronto Island in the year 2025.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE18.10>

At its meeting on July 24, 2024, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee adopted the Toronto Island Park Master Plan and requested the General Manager Parks, Forestry and Recreation, in consultation with other Divisions and agencies as needed, to report back on a work program to develop management plans to protect and enhance the Islands' wetlands and Environmentally Significant Areas and identify capital and/or operating resources required in the 2025 Budget to advance protection and naturalization efforts in the short term.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.IE15.2>

COMMENTS

This report and its attachment are being presented in response to the request of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee, on November 27, 2024 to report directly to City Council on the measures needed in 2025 to institute effective protections of the ecological functions of the ESAs on Toronto Island.

Overview of Toronto Island ESAs

The six ESAs on the Toronto Island are:

- Centre Island Meadow/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Hanlan's Beach
- Mugg's Island
- Snake Island Area
- Wards Island; and
- West Algonquin Island.

More detail on the Toronto Island ESAs is provided in the Report from the General Manager, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, titled "Toronto Island's Environmentally Significant Areas", dated November 13, 2024. Figure 1 below provides a map of Toronto Islands with the ESAs identified.



Figure 1: Map of Toronto Island ESAs

For decades, PFR and TRCA, along with a variety of partners, have leveraged available capital and operating budgets to undertake natural area protection and restoration across Toronto's Environmentally Significant Areas, including those on the Toronto Island. To-date, the work on Toronto Island has included infrastructure to manage impacts of erosion and park use, such as fencing, trails and boardwalks, as well as management of invasive plant species and planting native species through staff and contractor-led natural area management activities, community engagement and volunteer stewardship.

The TRCA brings their expertise in wildlife management and flooding and erosion mitigation to work with PFR on Toronto Island, including through active management of the cormorant colony on Algonquin and Wards Island and the 2025 Lagoon Road Shoreline Restoration Project, which will restore approximately 110 meters of degraded shoreline and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife. The Lagoon Road project is supported by Environment and Climate Change Canada.

2025 Actions to Protect Toronto Island's ESAs

The 2024 Operating Budget for PFR includes \$0.04 M for natural area restoration activities and \$0.025 M for community stewardship on the Island, as well as \$0.68 M for cormorant management. A similar amount is planned for 2025.

Staff have developed an enhanced and more detailed list of additional measures to protect the ecological functions of the ESAs on Toronto Island starting in 2025, in response to the request from the Infrastructure and Environment Committee. This list is presented in Attachment 1 and has a total estimated cost of \$9.03M, currently unfunded. These activities include:

- Expansion of the areas managed for herbaceous and woody invasive species followed by restoration planting by staff and contractors
- Fencing
- Interpretive signage
- Communications and consultations
- Staffing requirements for implementation

Additional future projects will be aligned with the Toronto Island Master Plan and Toronto Flood Mitigation Environmental Assessment.

Without additional funding the division will continue to advance the invasive species management and re-naturalization efforts enabled through existing operating and capital budgets.

Long-term investments in Toronto Island ESAs

Management plans for the 67 City-managed ESAs will be developed in coming years, through the implementation of an ESA Framework which will be completed in 2025. This framework will include Best Management Practices for ESAs as well as a prioritization tool for creating Management Plans. The development of an ESA management plan will identify further and sustained measures and resources required to restore and protect these spaces and will be submitted as part of future budget requests.

The Toronto Island Master Plan includes Demonstration Plans that illustrate potential investments in ESAs such as, suitable pathway connections at Trout Pond to minimize trampling, creating lookouts to allow the public to respectfully enjoy Donut Island, or creating a "Restoration Loop" from the Parks Yard to the Lagoon Loop allow the public to witness restoration activities and processes firsthand. These demonstration concepts represent longer-term proposed projects, which to be further studied and assessed for possible implementation over the 25-year life of the Toronto Island Master Plan. If any of these projects are approved for implementation they would include community engagement and detailed design - prior to implementation.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Additional Measures and Resources for Toronto Island ESAs