



July 3rd, 2024

RE: Toronto Island Park Master Plan - item IE15-2

Dear Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee,

On behalf of Toronto Field Naturalists (TFN), I thank you for reflecting on the need for a nature focus for the **Toronto Island Master Plan**. Nature groups have requested nature protection and restoration at many stages of development of the Master Plan, to buffer Island biodiversity in the face of intense and growing visitor pressures. With about 1.5 million annual Island visits currently; with up to 20,000 daily visitors on a busy summer day and with much of Island nature already under siege, the Master Plan promises easier access, much higher capacity ferries, more visitors, year-round services, and more amenities. People come, understandably, to savour the green oasis, but without targets to restore that oasis, what tattered bits of nature will the next generation find there? The Park Master Plan, with its 25-year planning horizon, has a responsibility to ensure that natural aspects of the park are not just retained, but restored for future generations – in other words, that Toronto Island is not loved to death.

The Toronto Island Natural Heritage background report, completed by the City's consultants 2021, and finally made public last week, confirms what nature advocates have been saying all along: Toronto Islands still hold among the most valuable remaining patches of nature in our whole region; including nesting habitat not just for the endangered piping plover, but also for bald eagles and many other species. The Island is a vital refueling stop-over for many migratory bird species; wintering grounds for waterfowl and remarkably, still supports breeding frogs, toads and turtles – just off-shore from the downtown core. So the Island is far, far more than just green lawns or green infrastructure.

The City's own natural heritage consultants also concluded that the Master Plan should protect habitats of species at risk and provincially significant wetlands, and that the Island's Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) should be carefully managed for ecological integrity and to protect rare and unique species and habitats. Please, please make it a short-term priority for the Master Plan to protect and restore the best remaining bits of habitat – the ESAs; to use practical tools like seasonal fencing, and to set clear habitat restoration targets and timelines, to allow Torontonians to track progress. We recommend a long-term target to restore 30% of Island lands to nature, in line with the goals of the Montreal Biodiversity Framework, that Toronto has endorsed. Remember, we're finalizing a Park Master Plan with a 25-year planning horizon; surely we should include stretch goals and targets for nature.

We are glad to hear plans for a Toronto Island advisory committee as a forum for engagement and project advancement. We urge the City to include nature advocates in that committee, to harness community energy and begin rolling out key restoration elements of the Master Plan. An early project could include knowledge-sharing and training operational park

staff in managing habitat and designated restoration areas. These are areas where Toronto's volunteer nature communities have experience and can share expertise.

A commitment to regularly update Council on progress is also critical, to give the Plan momentum and to keep it relevant long-term. We recommend the first progress report be in three years – let's not wait till 2029 for an update.

We look forward to opportunities to work with City staff and other stakeholders to protect unique island habitats for generations to come. Our community would be happy to discuss approaches and opportunities with councillors and city staff.

Sincerely,

Ellen Schwartzel,
on behalf of TFN