



Nov. 26, 2024

To Infrastructure and Environment Committee, City of Toronto

Item 2024. IE 18.10

Toronto Island's Environmentally Significant Areas (Ward 10)

Needed: Budget Commitment towards Master Plan Promises on Island habitat

The existing \$40,000/year in the budget is a tiny and inadequate amount for natural area restoration on the island, given the outsized importance of the Island's biodiversity, with its 6 environmentally significant areas (ESAs). With almost 84 hectares of land on the Island under ESA or PSW designation, the City has a big responsibility to care for these natural assets, and Canada has international obligations for protected lands under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.

Right now, staff rationale for going slow on natural restoration is as follows:

- City staff are waiting for the city-wide ESA framework for management plans to get started.
- Eventually site-specific management plans for Island ESAs will also get done.
- Several sites are being monitored every five years.

These points are not good excuses for going so slow. "Identifying opportunities to expand and improve habitat" was one of the "first steps" commitments of the new Toronto Island Master Plan, because evidence is clear that Island habitats are already degraded and pressured by high visitor numbers. To give life and momentum to the Island Master Plan promises, the City needs to leverage and engage volunteer groups with skills and experience in natural area restoration on the Island.

City staff have already developed strong, multi-year working relationships with several volunteer-run nature groups, including Toronto Nature Stewards (restoring over 30 sites across the city) and Toronto Field Naturalists (restoring two sites). This approach can be expanded to the Island.

We recommend the City fund a two-year pilot project to quick-start restoration on Toronto Island, committing one city staff position, as a volunteer coordinator and liaison. That staff person would connect volunteer groups with the City's ecosystem expertise and help locate, launch and establish several new restoration sites on the Island. In practice, the work would likely focus on controlling invasive plant species, and perhaps planting native species. In other words, capital costs would be minimal at this stage. Hundreds of volunteers are already trained and certified by the city to do this type of work in city ravines and parks, mostly through the Toronto Nature Stewards. A two-year time frame is important, since there are invariably teething problems in year one of a new project. The project could be evaluated after two years, fine-tuned, and then integrated into the city's existing community stewardship program.

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