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## 2025 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

### Toronto Nature Stewards

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#### Issue/Background:

- This briefing note responds to a request from Budget Committee, at its January 15, 2025 meeting, that the General Manager, Parks and Recreation (P&R), in consultation with the Executive Director, Energy, Climate and Forestry (ECF), to provide a briefing note on the current collaboration with the Toronto Nature Stewards for stewardship in Toronto's ravines and natural areas and the resources required to enhance the program starting in 2025.
- In 2020, City Council adopted [2020.EX12.1](#) - Ravine Strategy Implementation, which outlined the key actions and recommendations required to implement the Ravine Strategy, including actions to support further opportunities to engage volunteers and residents.
- As part of Ravine Strategy implementation, an additional investment of \$2.1 million annually was phased in starting in 2020, to support restoration and invasive species management, a portion of which funded new staff positions to support volunteer engagement and stewardship programs.
- Since 2021, P&R has provided in-kind support and new staff resources to a program for community-led restoration by Toronto Nature Stewards (TNS), as directed by Council in relation to the Ravine Strategy, to expand opportunities for communities to steward their local ravine.

#### Key Points:

- In 2021, TNS launched a program in collaboration with P&R on nine sites, in ravines and natural areas within the parks system, to implement components of TNS's 'Manual for Stewardship in Public Ravines and Natural Areas: A guide for Toronto'.
- TNS is responsible for program development and management, volunteer recruitment, training and oversight, health and safety, monitoring and reporting. The City of Toronto provides in-kind staff support and resources to review annual site applications, review work plans and activities, and monitor sites for program compliance for best outcomes.

- The TNS pilot has evolved and grown every year since its launch. In 2024, TNS volunteer stewards undertook removal of invasive plant species and litter at forty-two sites (a 367 per cent increase from 2021), as well as planting of non-woody (herbaceous) plants on select sites.
- Staff and TNS are exploring further enhancements to the program in 2025, including identifying additional sites for program expansion and opportunities where Urban Forestry staff could complement TNS efforts by undertaking activities that are not appropriate for volunteers, such as removal of large invasive trees. The anticipated outcome is improved collaboration and better integration of staff and volunteer efforts to achieve improved ecological benefits in ravines and natural areas.
- These proposed program enhancements require additional staff positions, as there is not current capacity to support this integrated model. The additional in-kind support provided through new staff positions would enable TNS to expand their program by number of sites, volunteers engaged and amount of land managed, which are important metrics contributing to the success of the program and Toronto's Ravine Strategy.
- These enhancements would require \$0.62 million in ongoing annual funding and 6.0 permanent Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) starting in 2026, phased in over two years for additional measures (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Financial & Complement Impact**

	Financial Impact (\$ million)	
	Total	
	2025	2026 and ongoing
Gross Expenditures	0.29	0.62
Permanent FTEs	2.0	6.0

## **Questions & Answers:**

### **Q1. How does the collaboration with TNS support the Ravine Strategy?**

A1. The program with TNS helps achieve Action 16 of the Ravine Strategy to provide further opportunities to engage volunteer groups in ravine stewardship. For more than 20 years, P&R has engaged over 4,000 volunteers in approximately 300 events annually through staff-led volunteer stewardship programs. The collaboration with TNS brings additional opportunities to residents, allows more community group input into what locations receive volunteer stewardship, and aims to lead to the improved health of the ravines.

**Q2: Has Parks and Recreation reported back to City Council on Ravine Strategy implementation?**

A2: City Council directed P&R to report every three years on advancement of the Ravine Strategy's actions. The first update, [2022.IE30.9](#) – Ravine Strategy Implementation Update, was adopted by Council in June 2022. The next report is planned for 2025.

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