

# Island as a Natural Resource Focus Group

## Meeting Summary

October 20<sup>th</sup>

### Purpose

To present two potential circulation design options for feedback.

### Participants

- ██████████ – North South Environmental
- ██████████ – Toronto Field Naturalists
- ██████████ - Protect Nature TO

### City Staff

- ██████████ - Community Planning / Strategic Projects
- ██████████ - Natural Environment & Community Programs
- ██████████ - Forest and Natural Area Management
- ██████████ - TRCA
- ██████████ - Natural Environment And Community Programs.
- ██████████ – Parks Forestry and Recreation
- ██████████ - Natural Resource Specialist

### Project Team

Lori Ellis – City of Toronto  
David O'Hara – City of Toronto  
Victoria Bell – DTHA  
Pablo Muñoz – City of Toronto

### Agenda

- **Presentation shared:** City Staff; Lori Ellis and Consultant; Victoria Bell  
Project team presented two circulation concept design options to participants for feedback.
- **Questions and answers facilitated:** Lori Ellis and Consultant; Victoria Bell  
Map Activity – Participants were asked to identify areas in two concept maps
- **Facilitated Discussion:** City Staff; Pablo Muñoz, Lori Ellis and Consultant; Victoria Bell  
Project tem facilitated a discussion with participants using the following questions as starting points:
  - **Are there specific management practices we should consider in the recommendations?**
  - **Are there any pilot projects or ongoing restoration work/projects that should be identified as quick wins or could benefit from integration within the MP?**

- **What additional recommendations and considerations should be considered to address stewardship and public awareness for the ecology of the islands?**

## Summary of Feedback

### ESA and ESW Fact Sheets

Participants noted that the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry has fact sheets, with recommendations for management of environmentally significant areas and wetlands for the Toronto Island.

### Management of Visitors

Participants suggested that the City adopted an intentional management of visitors that prioritized protection of the natural environment. Some participants suggested seasonal trail closures based on the ecology and the landscape, migrating birds, nesting or turtle crossings.

### Staff

Participants suggested that the Island needed resources and space for a natural resource crew to be located on the Island for at least half of the season. Currently travel time to the island limits the amount of work that can be done. Participants also recommended that the City dedicated staff exclusively to the Island.

### Invasive Species

There needs to be an annual plan to manage invasive species that is complimentary to an overall landscape management plan. Participants also suggested piloting a mow and no-mow programs to address invasive species. Participant pointed out that no-mow programs are great for creating habitat, however if certain areas are mowed once a year it could prevent woody plants and invasive species from accumulating.

### Increased Access

It was brought to the attention of the project team that increased access to various areas of the park will help spread invasive species. Some participants suggested that if we wanted to increase access, we also needed to boost resilience. For example, a higher biodiversity of plant species would make ecosystems resistant to pests.

### Pilot Programs and Studies

Participants suggested that there should be studies to better understand what activities are sustainable on the Island. It was also recommended that an "adaptive management" style was adopted at the Island where different tactics could be tested out and evaluated creating a feedback loop.

### Beavers

Participants suggested a "light touch" on beaver management at the Island. There are beavers at that take down iconic trees. Wire netting could prevent that.

### Stewardship

Some participants suggested that stewardship groups could be brought in to help manage invasive species. City staff noted that the expertise level required for working on the Island's ecosystems is quite high and that staff time and additional resources would be needed to facilitate this.

### Pesticides

City staff shared that sometimes land management requires pesticides and that there is a lot of resistance from members of the community to pesticides being used in City parks. They added that it needed to be explained to the public when those pesticides are a necessary tool, taking into consideration the added pressures of climate change, and the effect that it has on invasive species. One participant brought up the City's commitments to Indigenous communities and reconciliation, and suggested that Indigenous people's opposition to pesticides, and their management approach, needed to be taken into consideration.

### Wayfinding and Information

Participants suggested that information about the Island could be shared both online and on-site. It was noted that Torontonians are not all aware that we have ESAs in our city at the same level of protection as a national park. It was also pointed out that there is no information about the natural heritage of the Island on the City of Toronto's website.

Some participants shared that there could be ways of incorporating the stories of the Island into the landscape itself including information about ecosystems, flora and fauna. One participant suggested that there could be educational videos about best practices like fishing, for example. It was also suggested that the ferries could provide an opportunity to share information since there is a captive audience.

One participant added that even though wayfinding and signage was needed, that signs shouldn't "litter" the Island.

### Additional Comments

- Take a look at the ravine strategy.
- Keep cats indoors.

### Map Activity

As part of the workshop, the project team shared two maps showing two different circulation design directions for feedback.

- In general there were concerns about opening up ESAs and Wetlands to visitors and increasing traffic because of the effect that it would have on ecosystems.
- It was suggested that the North end of Hanlan's beach should have restricted access as it is a nesting area for birds.
- There were recommendations for including signage and information about ecosystems at Gibraltar Point, Hanlan's Sand Dunes and Mugg's Island.
- It was suggested that the old radio tower behind the water treatment plant could be activated in some way.

### Ongoing and Upcoming Projects on the Island

Workshop participants identified the following projects on the Island:

- Board walk design at Hanlan's.
- Gibraltar point sand dune restoration (includes wetlands).
- Turtle nesting enhancement project to happen in the next couple of years.
- Deep lake water cooling project where a board walk was removed to work on that Infrastructure. Replace it at a different location with a different access point.

- Ongoing capital projects replacing and expanding pathways.
- Ongoing restoration. Black locust was removed from the Wards Island ESA. COVID had an impact on restoration and black locust is returning.