MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR TORONTO'S ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS

Summary

August 2025

TORONTO

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the lands discussed as Environmentally Significant Areas are also traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

It is a shared responsibility for all people that the natural environment, including Environmentally Significant Areas are treated and used with respect so that they can continue to be enjoyed and appreciated by future generations.

INTRODUCTION

Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) are distinct and important ecological areas located across our city that act as biodiversity hotspots within the natural heritage system. A Management Plan for Toronto's ESAs has been developed by the City to improve ESA management and support the Ravine Strategy and existing ESA protective policies. This summary presents the Plan at a high level. The full ESA Management Plan can be provided upon request.

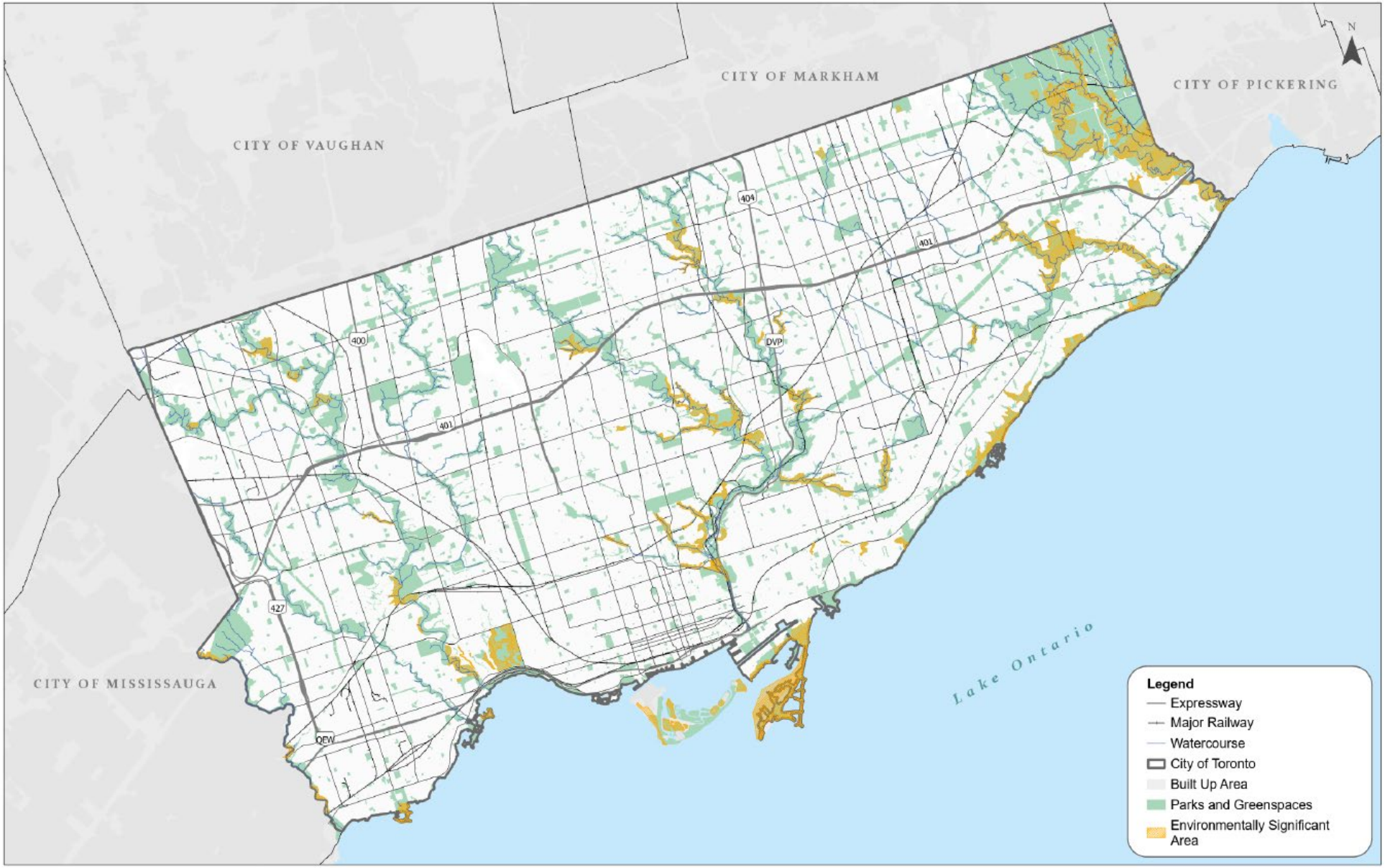
The ESA Management Plan has been developed and enhanced with engagement feedback and knowledge sharing that involved representatives from various City divisions, land-management partners (e.g., Toronto Region Conservation Authority and Parks Canada), First Nation treaty and rights holders, urban Indigenous communities, local community groups, collaborators with natural area stewardship or research interests and the public.

WHAT IS AN ESA?

ESAs are distinct natural areas within the City's natural heritage system (NHS) because they have one or more of the following characteristics:

- They are home to rare or endangered plants and animals.
- They have unique and high-quality landforms that help us understand how Toronto's landscape formed.
- They are large and contain a high diversity of plants and animals.
- They provide important ecological functions that positively impact areas outside of their borders, such as air and water filtration, and migratory stopover locations for wildlife.

Currently, the City's Official Plan has recognized 89 ESAs within city limits. The identification of these ESAs is the result of close to 80 years of evolving public policy aimed at protecting and conserving natural areas that remain in the City of Toronto landscape.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CITY OF PICKERING
CITY OF MISSISSAUGA
Lake Ontario
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DVP
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QEW
Legend
Expressway
Major Railway
Watercourse
City of Toronto
Built Up Area
Parks and Greenspaces
Environmentally Significant Area

EXISTING ESA MANAGEMENT

The City has been managing ESAs since their establishment. City staff use a multi-pronged approach for ESA management to help preserve and enhance their ecological features and functions, and ensures they remain protected and resilient in the face of existing and evolving pressures. Existing management includes **protective policies**, **coordinating** with other plans / projects, and **in-the-field management activities.**

ESA lands and many ESA features are protected through provincial policies, City of Toronto policies and bylaws. The ESA Management Plan complements existing land use policies and regulations that ensure the long-term protection of ESAs. Protective policies include:

- Provincial Policy Statement
- City of Toronto Official Plan
- Municipal Bylaws (e.g. Municipal Code Chapter 658 and 608)
- Conservation Authority Regulations – Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)

The City and its land management partners have many different types of existing management plans, strategies and projects that target localized areas or specific management needs. Many of these can overlap with boundaries or management needs or ESAs. Examples of targeted plans and projects that offer coordination opportunities for ESA management include:

- Park Plans / Master Plans
- Trail Plans / Projects
- Land Management / Capital Projects

Management activities and projects in ESAs are focused on protecting, maintaining, and improving ESA ecologic condition and functions. Management activities implemented by staff include:

- Monitoring
- Planting
- Vegetation Management (e.g. invasive species removal, prescribed / traditional burns)
- Access Management

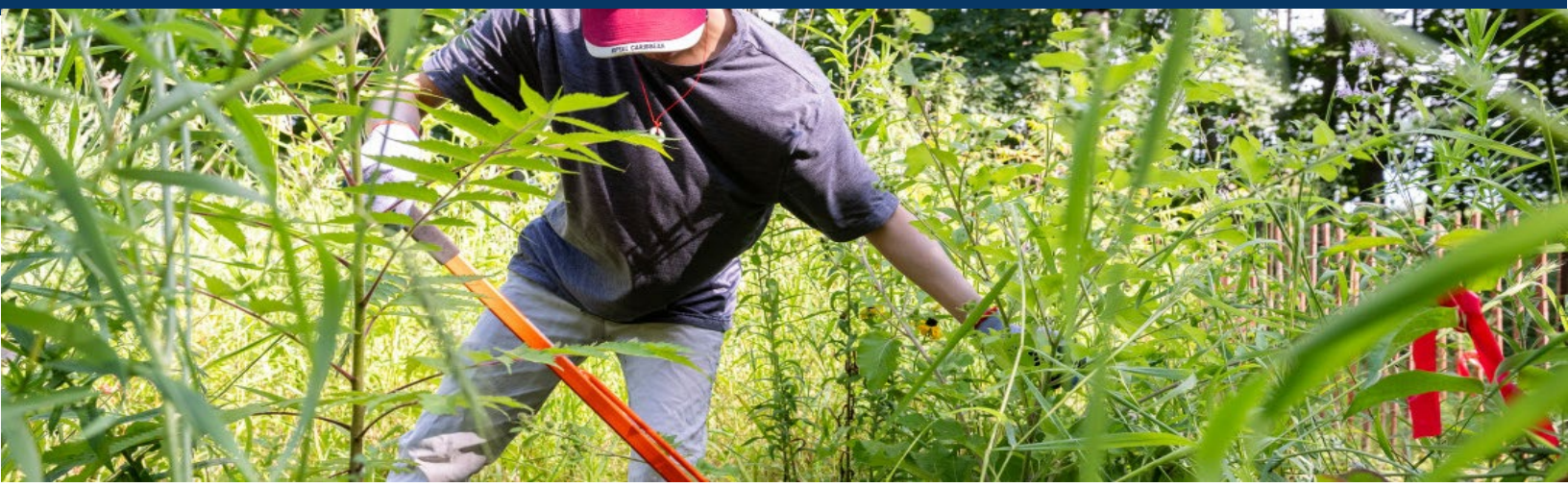
- Education and Awareness Campaigns
- Infrastructure Enhancements (e.g. fencing, trails, signage and wayfinding)
- City-led Community Programming (e.g. planting and stewardship events)
- Litter / Garbage Removal

Selection and implementation of management activities varies based on the characteristics, pressures, concerns, and opportunities for an ESA. Those actions change over time based on shifting priorities, site conditions or available resources. Not all activities are necessary or appropriate for all ESAs. All management activities in ESAs must comply with applicable federal, provincial and municipal policies.

ESA management activities are informed by Best Management Practices (BMPs) and industry standards to ensure that the approaches being used are effective and keep pace with current and emerging practices.

Best Management Practices

BMPs are guidelines or methods with a demonstrated effective approach to undertaking an activity or in achieving a specific outcome. The City has played a key role in contributing to development and review of invasive plant BMPs in partnership with the Ontario Invasive Plant Council (OIPC). The OIPC make BMPs publicly available on the OIPC website so that they can be accessed by other land managers, consultants and landowners to aid in a coordinated response to the threat of invasive plant species.



HOW ESA MANAGEMENT IS MOVING FORWARD

Building upon existing practices and tools, improved **Guidelines for ESA Management** provide clear communication and strategies that can benefit all ESAs immediately.

The Guidelines provide a new core value, "**Protect These Lands**" and set of foundational guiding principles that will be reflected in ongoing ESA management planning and decision making.

- **Restore and enhance** the ecological form, functions and condition of ESAs using effective practices informed by western environmental science and / or Indigenous traditional knowledge.
- **Collaborate with others** to improve the sustainability of existing and proposed parkland uses in ESAs and the management activities that occur in or impact ESAs.
- **Respect** the Indigenous history, current values and natural features of ESA lands.
- **Support information sharing** through ESA-related dialogue to increase awareness of ESAs and recognize their ecological values.
- **Strengthen engagement opportunities** about ESA land management with First Nations and urban Indigenous communities.

No single guiding principle has priority over another. Each provides valuable direction across the range of activities and practices the City uses to manage the ESAs.

The Guidelines also provide examples of ESA management activities or public uses that are aligned with protective policies and sustainable strategies. Some examples of compatible and sustainable ESA activities and uses include:

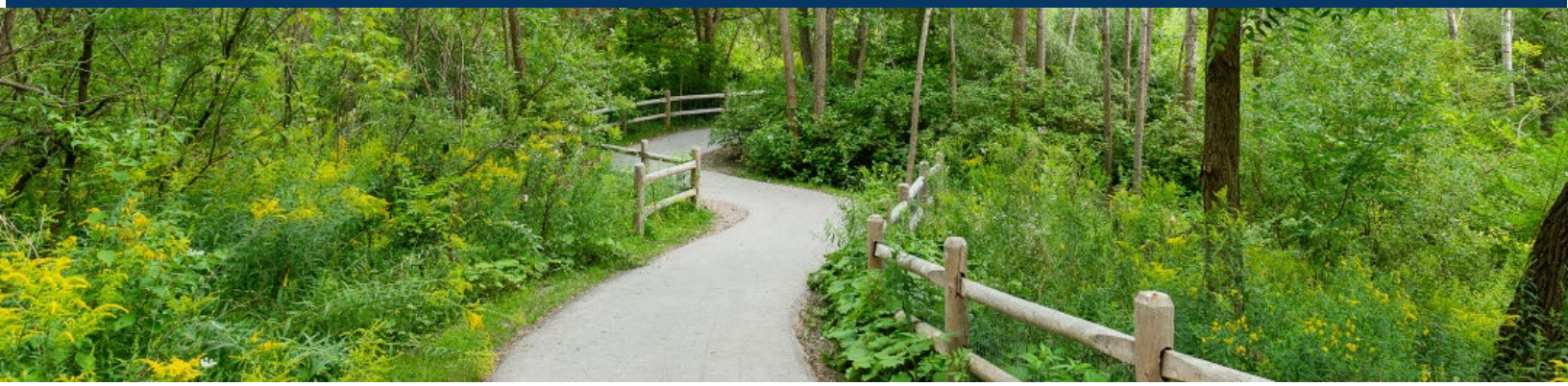
- Activities and projects which serve to protect, restore and / or enhance ESA ecological features or functions and do not introduce harm or risk to the ESA or ESA users
- Management interventions in response to exotic and / or invasive species, pathogens or disease
- Emergency work activities required to ensure the safety of people and / or vital infrastructure
- Planned flood and erosion improvement projects, where deemed appropriate / necessary
- Teaching and knowledge sharing activities
- Planned trails and infrastructure and the maintenance thereof, where deemed appropriate

Traditional Indigenous uses and activities such as placekeeping, ceremony, planting, and access to traditional foods and medicines can be suitable within ESAs. Through the Reconciliation Action Plan the City will continue to foster these types of opportunities and agreements.

Infrastructure and the ESAs

Infrastructure includes utilities, culverts, stairs, retaining walls, trails and trail features. Where possible, new infrastructure should be located outside of ESAs to avoid impacts from construction and maintenance. Infrastructure that supports compatible uses and ESA land or feature protection is excepted.

When planning and designing ESA infrastructure, it is critical to coordinate and consult to avoid introducing barriers to future City management (e.g., access, safety) or elements that require maintenance with a high frequency and / or disturbance level. Significant effort by staff goes into the planning and implementation of these projects to minimize and mitigate environmental impacts and disturbances.



NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ESA-SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT PLANNING

ESA-Specific Management Plans will use consistent steps to create a management plan that is tailored to the specific ESA. They identify the various types of values in an ESA and the leading pressures that impact those values. These values and pressures are informed by pre-existing site information, field assessment data and site-specific engagement that will include First Nation treaty and rights holders, various City divisions, land management partners, community groups, residents surrounding the subject ESA, park users and / or the public.

Management objectives with recommended management actions are established to support ESA values and / or address site pressures, where feasible. Zone mapping is applied to further inform the locations for where management activities should be focused and the types of activities or uses that are most appropriate so that ESA values can be better protected. All information will be summarized into a summary table report with supporting maps. Preparation of an ESA-Specific Management Plan described above is broken down into six (6) key steps:

The ESA-Specific Plans will assist in planning, prioritizing, and managing of City programs and program resources to improve communication, coordination and consistency for management operations and activities. They will be used to determine the most appropriate types of management activities, the locations in the ESA to focus that work, and the locations where necessary construction projects need to be more cautious or coordinated with ESA management activities. In the absence of an ESA-Specific Management Plan, City management of an ESA or other projects in ESAs will still be ongoing and guided by the Guidelines for ESA Management.

A Site Prioritization Tool will be used to help determine the order in which ESA-Specific Plans will be prepared. Due to the number of ESAs, preparation of these Plans will be phased over time. For efficiencies, ESAs that share highly specialized management needs and / or that are

located close to one another may be grouped into a single management plan. The Site Prioritization Tool uses data-based criteria which are applied to each ESA:

- **Ecological Criteria** which include, but are not limited to the number of significant / rare species or habitats, ESA size / connectivity to other ESAs and overlap with other landscape features like provincially significant wetlands
- **Social Equity Criteria** such as consideration for where the City is promoting strong Toronto neighbourhoods and other priority investment strategies
- **Coordination Benefit Criteria** to create efficiencies and co-benefits such as through forecasted capital or land management project locations that would benefit from having an ESA-Specific Management Plan because existing ESA management planning resources are insufficient or not available

The site prioritization tool will be periodically run and updated to capture current criteria data, changes to ESAs or ESA groupings, and to account for the completion of new Site-Specific Management Plans. The tool does not prioritize management activities within any given ESA.

CONCLUSION

For decades, staff have been dedicating resources to managing ESAs by focusing on enhancement opportunities, promoting sustainable public uses and coordinating ESA management with supporting or overlapping infrastructure projects. This work continues and grows in line with available resources and investments.

ESA management is ongoing; it does not have a finish line. It is constantly adapting and changing to accommodate new management tools, changes in policy or process or changing site conditions. ESA management requires adaptive and coordinated approaches that respect site-specific needs. This Management Plan and subsequent ESA-Specific Management Plans strengthen and improve communication about ESA management needs and the resources available for continued use in the City's strategic planning, coordination and day-to-day operations that affect ESAs. ESA management will continue to evolve in response to changing management needs.

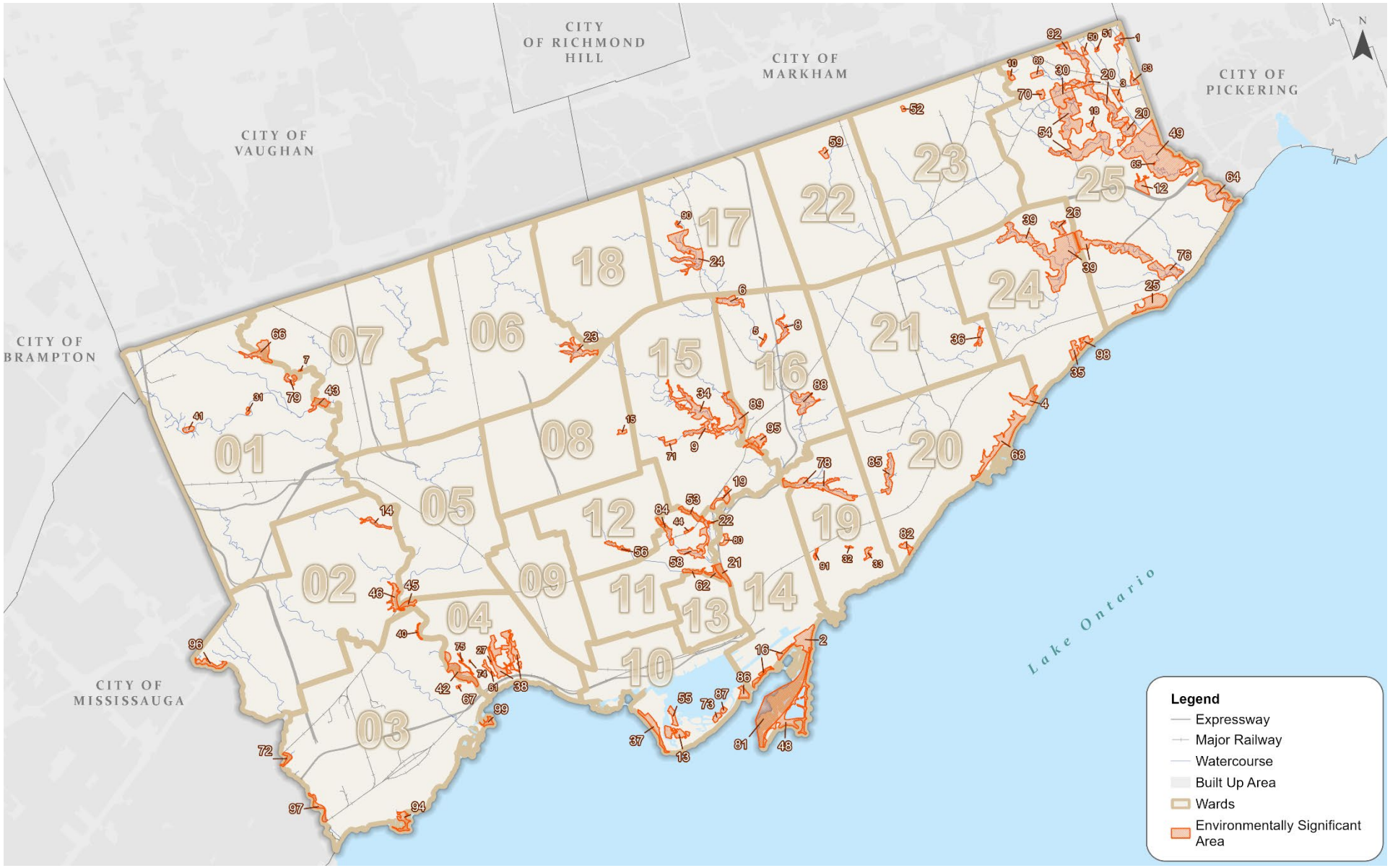
APPENDIX 1

City of Toronto ESAs by ward (2025)

Ward	ESA name	ESA Number
1	Garland Park	31
1	Humber College Arboretum	41
1	Thistletown Oxbow	79
1 and 7	Humberforks at Thistletown	43
1 and 7	Rowntree Mills Swamp	66
2	Centennial Park	96
2	Chapman Valley	14
2	Lambton Woods	46
3	Colonel Sam Smith Park + Extension	94
3	Sassafras Site	67
3	Silverthorn Area	72
3	Etobicoke Creek Valley	97
3	Home Smith Area	40
3	Humber Bay Park East	99
3 and 4	Humber Valley + Extension	42
4	Ellis Avenue	27
4	High Park + Extension	38
4	Lambton Park Prairie	45
4	Rennie Park	61
4	South Kingsway (east flank)	74
4	South Kingsway (west flank)	75
6	Earl Bales Woodlot	23
7	Bluehaven Area	7
8	Chatsworth Ravine	15
10	Centre Island Meadow/Wildlife Sanctuary	13
10	Hanlan's Beach + Extension	37
10	Muggs Island	55
10	Snake Island	73
10	Ward's Island + Extension	86
10	West Algonquin Island	87
11	Don Valley Brick Works - bluff (earth science only)	22
11	Iroquois Shoreline + Extension	44
11	Moore Park Ravine	53
11	Park Drive Ravine /Don Valley (West Side) + Extension	58

11 and 12	Vale of Avoca	84
11 and 13	Rosedale Valley + Extension	62
11 and 14	Don Valley Central Section	21
11 and 15	Moore Park Ravine	53
12	Nordheimer Ravine	56
14	Base of Spit	2
14	Cherry Beach + Extension	16
14	Leslie Street Spit	48
14	Todmorden Mills	80
14	Tommy Thompson Park	81
14 and 19	Taylor Massey Creek + Extension	78
15	Burke Brook Forest	9
15	Crother's Woods	19
15	Glendon Forest	34
15	Sherwood Park + Extension	71
15	Wilket Creek Forest	89
15 and 16	E.T. Seaton Park	95
16	Bell's Woodlot	5
16	Black Grass Site + Extension	6
16	Brookbanks Ravine	8
16	Wigmore Ravine	88
17	East Don Valley Swamp	24
17	Williams Area	90
19	Glen Davis Ravine	32
19	Glen Stewart Ravine + Extension	33
19	Williamson Park + Extension	91
20	Scarborough Bluff Sequence	68
20	Toronto Hunt Club Forest	82
20	Warden Woods	85
20 and 24	Bellamy Ravine/Sylvan Park	4
21	Hague Park	36
22	Passmore Forest	59
23	Milliken Woods	52
24	Ellesmere Woods	26
24	Guild Woods	35
24	Guild Woods East	98
24 and 25	Highland Forest/Morningside Park and Highland Creek West + Extension	39
25	Barkey Woods	1

25	Beare Road Woodlot	3
25	Cedarbrae Woods	10
25	Centennial Forest and Swamp	12
25	Core Woods	18
25	Diller Woods/Pearce Woods/Tabor's Horsetail Meadow	20
25	East Point	25
25	Finch Ave. Meander/Sewells Forest/Reesor Woods	30
25	Little Rouge Forest	49
25	Meadowvale Woodlot A	50
25	Meadowvale Woodlot B	51
25	Morningside Creek Forest/Milnes Forest	54
25	Rouge Marsh Area	64
25	Rouge River Section	65
25	Sewells Forest North	69
25	Sewells Forest West	70
25	Stephenson's Swamp/Highland Creek East	76
25	Townline Swamp	83
25	Woodlands on Little Rouge Creek	92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Legend
Expressway
Major Railway
Watercourse
Built Up Area
Wards
Environmentally Significant Area