

RE: IE7.8 Toronto Biodiversity Strategy, September 9, 2019

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Biodiversity Strategy for Toronto on behalf of ProtectNatureTO, a coalition of over 20 nature- and stewardship-based organizations advocating for the protection of wildlife and natural areas across the City of Toronto. We are both members of this group. We are also co-chairs of the High Park Natural Environment Committee, where we have gained practical experience with many of the topics addressed by this strategy.

There is much to applaud in the Toronto Biodiversity Strategy. This document is the result of extensive consultation, and many elements reflect the feedback received - a tribute to the collaboration among staff, expert advisors, and the public. This strategy recognizes our city's strengths and opportunities, as well as the challenges that threaten our natural places and the life they support. It underscores the intrinsic value of nature as well as the many ways in which we benefit from biodiversity. The strategy provides a vision of how much more can be done, and needs to be done, to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity in our city. It translates global concerns, such as climate change, into practical local actions.

One of the many important findings of the consultation process is the gaping divide between those who are tuned in to the natural world and those who have minimal contact with nature or are aware of it only as a backdrop. For Toronto's biodiversity to be protected and appreciated in the long term, this divide will need to be bridged through concerted effort. Raising awareness within the City's own staff and related agencies, including awareness of existing legal protections and regulations, is a key step. Fostering more public programs, including participation in stewardship and in guided nature walks, will also help broaden the appreciation of biodiversity in the city.

Educating staff and decision-makers, engaging with the public, removing invasive species - these and many other important steps are included in the proposed action plan. Specific departments are identified as being responsible for a lead role in implementing these actions, while others are identified as partners. This is a sound approach - a great deal can be accomplished through cooperative efforts. But ultimately these actions will only be effective if they are properly resourced, both with staff and with funding. Another essential component is accountability for results. This Infrastructure and Environment Committee can play a key role here in requiring regular updates for each of the proposed actions.

We urge the relevant departments to include the necessary resources in their operating budget requests, starting with 2020, and we urge Council to support these requests, even in the face of difficult fiscal conditions and competing priorities. When it comes to allocating resources and other decisions such as finding space for different types of recreation or space for development, the conservation of our protected areas needs to be seen as essential, as a legal and socially responsible commitment - not just one more "nice to have", to be traded off under pressure. In fact, as recognized by the strategy, our natural areas need to be not only protected, but expanded through connecting corridors and buffer zones. This action is particularly welcome and consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement 2014 ("...connectivity of natural features ... should be maintained, restored or ... improved..." Section 2.1.2).

This biodiversity strategy sets out a roadmap for Toronto to strengthen its position as a world leader in being a liveable, sustainable city. Please do your part to ensure that this strategy is adopted and implemented.

Thank you.

Leslie Gooding & Karen Yukich, on behalf of ProtectNatureTO