

Virtual Presentation: High Park Terrestrial Biological Inventory

Questions and Answers

On April 20 2021, City of Toronto Urban Forestry and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority virtually presented the methodology, findings and observations as presented in the final 2019 *High Park Terrestrial Biological Inventory*. A recording of the presentation is available at this link: [High Park Terrestrial Biological Inventory Presentation](#)

The following questions were submitted by participants during the presentation. This document does not address all the topics covered in the presentation. Its intent is to provide responses to questions raised which were not addressed due to limited time.

It includes the actual participant questions along with responses from Urban Forestry and Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

Dogs Off-Leash and Enforcement

Q: In the report itself it mentions that one of the main reasons of declines is dog off leash - will that be addressed?

A: The Dogs Off-Leash Areas are managed by the Parks branch, and enforcement is managed by Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS). We will pass on concerns to our colleagues.

Q: So a low hanging fruit would be to have much more enforcement of all the off leash dogs which are running throughout the park and the wooded area. Can this report be used to have the City provide more enforcement?

A: The existing Dogs Off-Leash areas have recently undergone a review by the Parks Standards and Innovation Division (Parks branch). As part of this review, feedback from the DOLA community in High Park was incorporated and will be generating a variety of suggestions and next steps for better management of these off-leash areas. It is our hope that this information will help inform future improvements required within the Dogs Off-Leash area.

Project website: [City-Wide Study of Existing Dogs Off-Leash Areas](#)

Comment from a participant in Q&A: 311 needs to know time, day and area of dogs off-leash so that can send officers during that time. They cannot send when a complaint is received as they just don't have enough officers.

Comment from a participant in Q&A: Since there are very few bylaw enforcement officers for the city's parks, by the time one calls 311 and an officer arrives at the park, the offending off-leash dog would be gone. So calling 311 is not worth doing.

Comment from a participant in Q&A: I got the feeling that only if 311 is called will anything ever be done about the almost complete disregard for protecting the on-leash areas.

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A: While reports to 311 may not end in immediate by-law enforcement, they do serve to help track the level of complaints coming in about a particular park, and are used as data to guide decision-making with enforcement staff etc. It is still a relevant course of action for park users observing off-leash activity in on-leash areas.

Phragmites

Q: Did you find any vegetation returning around the pond due to the program in progress to remove the Phragmites?

A: City staff were not able to complete intensive monitoring in 2020, however anecdotal observations did note the following species regenerating in areas where Phragmites was treated:

- Common Milkweed
- Swamp milkweed
- Sweet flag
- Panicked aster
- Cyperus species (one of which is an L3 species)

Purple martins were also observed nesting on site in areas previously dominated by Phragmites. However it is still very early in the management process and there is still more Phragmites to be removed before final comments on how the site's native vegetation rebounds.

Q: Follow-up on reeds - is there a plan to deal with the aquatic reed populations? Given the shallow nature of the issue, can you de-water small areas to permit treatment?

A: This question was addressed verbally during presentation.

Further information: Urban Forestry will be working with the TRCA Ecosystem Management group to review the management plan for invasive Phragmites australis control in High Park. TRCA was exploring manipulation of the water level on the shoreline to increase access but encountered issues with the control weir maintenance. Once a plan has been finalized, it will be communicated to the community.

Pesticide

Q: Can you talk about the invasive species management using Glyphosate in the park? Is it still being used in the pond? Have you found negative effects on other species?

A: This question was addressed verbally during the presentation.

Further information: Pesticide application is one tool used to manage invasive species, and is reserved for the most aggressive plants where alternative mitigation methods such as prescribed burning or mechanical methods alone have not been successful.

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When used in the natural areas, the pesticide is applied using a targeted application only to intended invasive plants being managed, and is not broadcast sprayed across an entire treatment area. There has not been research to suggest negative impact on other species.

Biodiversity is maintained in the park by controlling monocultures of invasive plant species. This maintenance of native plants in turn supports insects and birds.

Q: I am in the park daily and over decade have noticed a significant decline in bird squirrel insect presence, along with ongoing regular 4- season application of glyphosate for invasive weeds. The issues of these chemical herbicides are well documented. Can you address this?

A: See answer to similar question below

Q: Over past decade have noticed significant decline in bird and insect presence. Also notice ongoing four season application of glyphosate. The negative impact of chemical herbicides on biodiversity is well documented. Can you address?

A: This question was addressed by TRCA verbally during the presentation.

Further information: It is important to note that Invasive Species are one of the biggest threats to biodiversity and ecosystem function. Nationally, 24% of species at risk are threatened directly due to invasive species. Invasive species themselves can therefore account for some of the biodiversity decline that is being observed, and enforces the need for proper management of these species.

The application of glyphosate or other herbicides for the control of invasive species in a restoration practice is very different from how pesticides are applied in the agricultural or industrial forestry practices, which is what most literature refers to when citing concerns about pesticide impact on natural areas. The concentration used in managing invasive plants is much lower, application is very focused, and only occurs at most, twice per year. Most ecologists agree that the threat from invasive species outweighs the concerns surrounding pesticide use, and that direct correlations to species decline are not supported by research.

The decline of birds and insects in High Park is a complex issue and not unique to High Park alone. These declines are being observed across the globe and are influenced by many factors that impact birds both in their overwintering areas, and along migration routes. (factors like habitat loss, cities with bright lights, free-roaming cats impacting ground nesting habitat, tropical storms, hunters).

Insect populations have certainly declined as well, and these impacts can also be seen further up the food chain with a decline in aerial insectivore birds. These declines again are likely related to changes in habitat, broad scale agriculture pesticide use, urbanization, etc.

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Comment from Participant in Q&A: There is no proof that the herbicides are harming wildlife or insects. Declines are due to other factors.

General

Q: How is the City going to use this information from the TRCA to help better protect and enhance the natural areas of High Park?

A: This question was addressed verbally during the presentation.

Further information: The report will be reviewed and observations will be evaluated against current vegetation management practices to determine where improvement is needed, or where efforts might be better directed. Observations about park usage impacts to the natural areas will be passed onto other colleagues in the Parks branch for reference and appropriate follow up.

Comment from Participant in Q&A: I've seen *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus* only a couple of times.

Native Plant Propagation

Q: Are there plans to increase the capacity of the High Park Greenhouse in producing native plants?

A: To our knowledge, at this time there are no discussions about expanding the native plant nursery capacity. The High Park native plant nursery is overseen by the Horticulture section in the Parks branch.

Managing Public Use

Q: Following from TRCA Report, and as many of us can see in reality, is that High Park still remains very significant in respect to natural heritage features but it is really struggling to hold on its unique qualities due to unsustainable use. No doubt that use as of now it is not sustainable.

HP ecological function as designated - stopover for migratory birds) is very undermined. "Migratory birds on the City of Toronto" Report from 2009 by Dougans Assoc. concluded that HP, TTP and Toronto Islands provide for most of migratory birds population.

TRCA Report is very clear about necessity to manage public use.

Can TRCA/Forestry talk more about their suggestions for public use management? Natural Heritage Reference Manual, 2010, Official Guide to PPS offers detailed measures.

It is urgent to start mitigation of over use and non-compatible uses. Time for mitigation is NOW.

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What is timeline for mitigation? Thousands of population were added nearby HP and more is in the pipeline.

A: Balancing public use and protection of natural areas within the City of Toronto is a very challenging issue. COVID-19 has highlighted this issue where increased use of parkland has been observed related to appreciation of natural areas to help maintain mental health and participation in multiple forms of outdoor recreation. Parks staff have recently had to address these issues related to the cherry blossoms in High Park with control measures to reduce site access. As well, Urban Forestry has also provided guidance on the installation of fencing or trail closures throughout the park to strategically control access to natural areas.

High Park is a Destination Park so public use extends well beyond the neighbourhood boundaries. Hopefully the creation of new parkland on the eastern waterfront and upgraded infrastructure throughout the ravine system will help to draw people toward other natural areas in the City.

Prescribed Burn

Q: What's this year's plan for prescribed burning?

A: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Urban Forestry will not undertake a prescribed burn in High Park and South Humber Park in 2021. Instead, efforts will be focused on working to complete long term planning, and evaluating progress in habitats being managed by fire to refine site specific goals and objectives.

See the prescribed burn link at [City of Toronto Urban Forest Management](#) for more information.

Other Parks/Biological Inventories

Q: How are you going to apply this process to other park areas - has it been adapted or will it be?

A: TRCA has completed this type of inventory at many sites in Toronto and is available on their website. They have completed ELC inventories for most of the Toronto ravine system but not all. Some of these data gaps will be reviewed for the Ravine Strategy.

Q: I wonder if there is information like yours available for Downsview Park?

A: Downsview Park is Federal land, it is not managed by the City of Toronto.

All of TRCA's biological inventories are posted here - [TRCA Biological Inventories](#)

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Poison Ivy

Q: Isn't Poison Ivy an invasive species? I'm seeing no efforts to control the spread of this plant. The northeast meadow has large areas including the main paths where Poison Ivy is growing over the path. What is the plan for this?

A: From a Forestry vegetation management perspective we do not manage poison ivy as an invasive species because it is native, provides a food source for wildlife, and plays a role in soil stabilization. It is mostly problematic from a human enjoyment perspective.

Parks Operations staff manage poison ivy in high use areas of the park to address health and safety from potential allergic reactions. High use areas include edges of paved recreational trails, near manicured lawn areas, and in some cases along some smaller footpaths.

Parks staff utilize contract services for hazardous vegetation management using manual and chemical control methods. Signage is used to warn park users of the populations within the natural areas so that park users can use caution in these areas.

Soil

Q: Would soil surveying/mapping be worthwhile as a protection tool, such as for ericoid mycorrhizal fungi? Or does the ELC already cover this?

A: This question was addressed verbally by TRCA in the presentation.

Further information: TRCA would love to do more in-depth soil surveys especially of the mycorrhizal communities, invasive earthworms and other soil biota, but do not currently have the resources to do this. The ELC surveys carried out in the report do include a soil component in which the texture and moisture status of soils were looked at in a subset of vegetation community polygons (about 10-20% of the polygons). TRCA was able to confirm the presence of original fine sandy soils of the Humber Plains at High Park, with organic muck in some of the wetlands. Although the biological soil data has not been included in this report, the physical soil characteristics are still helpful in delineating current and historical vegetation communities, and can help direct restoration efforts. For example, the presence of well-drained sandy soil in a manicured area may indicate that it is suitable for re-establishing oak savannah.

Trails

Q: What is the plan to restore the trails once the COVID pressure is done? Social Distancing has widened the trails as people attempt to pass each other.

A: Trail issues have been identified as a priority related to the Ravine Strategy and overflow impacts to natural areas. Further discussion around trails is required and would need to include Parks Operations and various stakeholders to address this growing concern.