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May 31, 2021

To: Councillor Gord Perks, Helen Sousa, Karinthia Battig

Cc: Chris Clarke, Jennifer Gibb, James Dann

Re: High Park - Time to Revisit Fishing at Grenadier Pond

High Park's natural areas were already under great stress prior to COVID-19, and the past year's escalation in visitor traffic has only heightened the threats to the long-term health of this treasured Environmentally Significant Area. Weekend road closures and the fencing off of the cherry trees were two practical measures taken to try to mitigate the impacts of heavy public use. It is now time to implement another harm-reduction measure: the prohibition of fishing at Grenadier Pond.

Grenadier Pond is too small to support angling pressure in a heavily urbanized environment. Concerns about fishing at Grenadier Pond were [well documented](#) when this subject was last considered in 2016/17. In particular, see our [letter of October 7, 2016](#). Since that time the fishing-permitted area was limited to the lower east and southeast portion of the pond (see [map](#)). In practice, however, the fishing area and other fishing rules are not enforced. The possibility of getting bylaw officers or MNRF conservation officers to carry out enforcement is virtually nil in current circumstances. As advised by bylaw officers in the past, a clear all-out ban is much easier to enforce than a partial ban.

Restoration of Grenadier Pond began after the 1995 Gartner Lee report. To re-establish balance in the pond, one goal was to have enough predator fish to keep the forage fish population in check. This has not been achieved. Instead, the [results](#) of TRCA sampling in the years following restoration look like a textbook illustration of an ecological collapse. The population of large predators (pike and bass) has not grown despite restocking and non-native common carp and goldfish now make up over half the mass of fish in the pond. Carp are destructive to aquatic plants and their presence leads to an increase in phosphorus levels in eutrophic ponds such as Grenadier Pond, which already suffers from excessive levels of phosphorus.

The [City's response letter of June 2017](#) spoke about "balancing all uses" but did not advance any explanation of why the concerns raised by our committee were invalid, nor did it provide any evidence to show how fishing in this heavily used urban pond can be compatible with the preservation of its ecological features. Historical, cultural and social uses seem to be given more weight than long-term protection, and there is no upper limit on intensity. In particular, there has been no apparent increase in protection to balance increased intensity of these activities, which are only increasing further with high levels of public use of the park during COVID-19.

There are many places to fish in Toronto and the GTA - see [TRCA map](#). But as usual, High Park is the high-profile location that gets public and social media attention. The images of a young child getting their first fishing experience at the shore of Grenadier Pond, or a lone fisher settling in for a quiet day's fishing, are very appealing. The problem is, in Toronto thousands of young children and families as well as experienced fishers are looking for this kind of experience. The end result is far from the romantic ideal: tangled line and hooks that threaten wildlife, trampling that threatens delicate shoreline vegetation, and fishing gear and behaviours that are hazardous to other park users. The memorable sight of a dead bird tangled in fishing line is not the kind of nature experience that one would wish to leave on impressionable minds.

In the past year the TRCA has been researching Grenadier Pond and adjacent wetlands in order to propose that this area be given the additional protected status of Provincially Significant Wetland. Notable species of concern, such as Snapping Turtle and Sweet Flag, still flourish here. Grenadier Pond is already recognized and designated provincially as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest, and under Toronto's Official Plan as an Environmentally Significant Area. This precious but fragile resource deserves to be protected for the long term, and the City has written policies to do just that. Protection means limiting activities to those that are compatible with the long-term health of the ecosystem.

We are very concerned that this year's fishing season will be even more destructive than previous years. We believe it is time to accept the fact that High Park is no longer suitable for this kind of high-impact sport - the only extractive activity currently permitted in the park.

We therefore call on the City to take quick action to prohibit fishing at Grenadier Pond as soon as possible, but in any case before the peak fishing period gets underway on July 1, 2021.

Thank you.

Karen Yukich & Leslie Gooding

Co-Chairs, High Park Natural Environment Committee