# (Re)Engaging Greenspace:
# GROWING STEWARDSHIP
## Engagement Strategy

## The Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve
## Final Report, December 1 2015

Prepared for the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

**(Re)Engaging Greenspace:
The Growing Stewardship Strategy**

Prepared for

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and
Professor Nina-Marie Lister

By

Marika Franko, Brandon Kashin, Jacky Li, Kelsey Prentice
Jahnavi Ramakrishnan, Graham Wilson, and Erin Windross

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## CONTEXT

The Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve (ORCCR) is a linear greenspace located in the Town of Richmond Hill. The site holds significant ecological and cultural importance as the point of origin for what we know today as the Oak Ridges Moraine. The site was assembled through land swap between the Government of Ontario and private landowners in order to protect the area's ecological integrity from development. Today, the ORCCR suffers from a fragmented ownership structure between the Provincial government and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), with the TRCA retaining responsibility for the integrated management of the site.

Over the past 10 years, the park has become surrounded by new residential development which has substantially changed the composition and form of the local community. Residents that were originally involved in the protection of the ORCCR may no longer live in the area, and new residents may not be aware of the ecological and cultural significance of the ORCCR. The TRCA has given us the task of determining innovative ways to re-engage the surrounding community, with a specific focus on youth, in order to grow a new generation of greenspace stewards invested in the recreational use and environmental protection of the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve.

We have developed the Growing Stewardship Strategy to address this changing reality.

## THE GROWING STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY

The ORCCR is divided by different management plans, land tenureship, and topographical features. This provides a unique opportunity for the TRCA to combine both conservation and recreation principles. We do not view these concepts as being in conflict, but rather representing two aspects of a new way of facilitating greenspace stewardship. The Growing Stewardship Strategy aims to foster awareness, experience, and belonging toward the ORCCR among the surrounding community and regional visitors. A central idea in our strategy is to reframe the Conservation Reserve as a Conservation *Park.* By this reframing, we aim to achieve TRCA's conservation goals while simultaneously leveraging sustainable recreational activities to attract new and existing users to the ORCCR in order to build future stewardship.

The Growing Stewardship Strategy will provide foundational research and analysis for future re-engagement efforts by the TRCA and its partners, as well as a list of recommended actions that can be implemented in the immediate, short, and long term. The conceptual framework for the strategy is illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The Growing Stewardship Strategy Conceptual Framework

The Growing Stewardship Strategy consists of core stewardship goals, site and user criteria, strategic directions, and recommended actions.

We have defined three core goals for stewardship: *Belonging*, *Experience* and *Awareness* (Table 1).

| Belonging | Experience | Awareness |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Participation | Visit | Education |
| Advocacy | Play | Understanding |
| Responsibility | Connect | Value |

Table 1: Three core goals for stewardship

Using these three stewardship goals, we developed two sets of criteria to guide the creation of the Growing Stewardship strategy: **Site Objectives** (Conservation, Recreation, and Connection); and **Demographic Objectives** (Culture, Age, and Ability).

Based on these objectives, we have outlined five Strategic Directions for action by the TRCA and its partners for the ORCCR:

1. Branding
2. Park Use
3. Infrastructure
4. Online Presence
5. Community Outreach

Each Strategic Action is coupled with a list of Recommended Actions. Recommended Actions are actions that may be taken at the ORCCR to meet the **Site Objectives** and **Demographic Objectives** of the Growing Stewardship Strategy. Recommended Actions are based on our analysis of user experiences and site observations at the ORCCR as well as best practices and case studies from other jurisdictions.

These Recommended Actions are arranged based on their relative priorities and time horizons to create an action plan for the TRCA and its partners, shown below:



The implementation of these actions will help build upon existing local engagement by cultivating a new generation of stewards of the rebranded Conservation Park.

It is our hope that the Growing Stewardship Strategy will lay the groundwork for park improvements in the ORCCR and future re-engagement efforts by the TRCA and its partners.

## VISION EDITORIALS



The following Vision editorials offer personal perspectives from each team member on the ORCCR as young adults interested in greenspace planning and environmental stewardship. They are meant to be personal reflections on our experience with the ORCCR and represent individual views on how to grow stewardship within it. They are not meant to detract from or contradict the rest of the report, but to provide a space for personal conversations on growing stewardship in the ORCCR.

### GRAHAM WILSON

**Age: 34 | Location: Whitby, ON**

Greenspace is most valued when it is experienced often, and made to feel like one's own backyard. I see the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve as a Conservation Park, serving dual purposes of community greenspace corridor and local ecotourism destination for North GTA. As the surrounding suburbs mature into more dense built forms with some employment and commercial uses, the Conservation Park will become a vital active transportation corridor for local commuting, as well as an important nature reserve and "backyard" for households in smaller units with less greenspace of their own, sporting scenic lookouts, winter sports, and birdwatching (including species at risk such as the Scarlet Tanager). Paved trails with frequent amenities and good wayfinding will help achieve this goal. As new uses such as camping and swimming are allowed in the Conservation Park, it will grow into an "urban oasis" with attractions for the local community and beyond. Conservation will be the goal, but Sustainable Recreation will be the way to achieve it.

## JAHNAVI RAMAKRISHNAN

**Age: 26 | Location: Etobicoke, ON**

I really had no idea about the ecological and cultural significance of this greenspace before beginning this project and it is really a shame that it is so hard to access the site from where I live. I can envision many fun activities happening in this space like cool public art exhibits or nighttime light installations - even something like Painting in the Park - that would motivate me to check out the space more often. Bond Lake seems like a great place to visit in the summertime to get out of the city and go canoeing and kayaking, or to go skating or cross-country skiing in the winter. I really wish there was a faster and easier way to visit natural areas outside of Toronto. If only there was a regional rail network or series of cheap regional buses I could see myself coming here for special events and recreation activities. Maybe I could even rent a hut or yurt onsite like I've done in parks in Quebec and then take a bus or train back home the next day?

## JACKY LI

**Age: 24 | Location: Markham, ON**

The ORCCR is a large piece of greenspace that has been hidden by rapid suburban development. I had no idea something like this existed so close to where I live. On weekends, my friends and I enjoy being outdoors. We go to parks like Trinity-Bellwoods in Toronto or conservation areas outside of the city. We find out about these places through social media and other internet sources. Throughout this project, I've discovered that I didn't know about this park because of the lack of content about the park online. The internet is my primary source of getting information. I think the ORCCR is magnificent and it deserves more exposure online, especially on social media. It is time to start populating ORCCR related hashtags and geotags. People need to know this exists.

## MARIKA FRANKO

**Age: 26 | Location: Etobicoke, ON**

Growing up in Etobicoke, I've never heard of Bond Lake but once I got there on my first site visit, I was so surprised that such a beautiful gem is hidden right in Richmond Hill! I really enjoy doing outdoor recreational activities, whether it is hiking, canoeing, kayaking, cross country skiing or trail running, and I travel around the region to different conservation areas to be active. When I visited the ORCCR, I was astounded by the beauty, how large and diverse the park landscape is, and how close it is to Toronto! What would really attract me to the ORCCR is having some infrastructure put in place such as parking, washrooms, water stations, and extensive trail maps so that I could spend more time in the park and not get lost in it.

## KELSEY PRENTICE

**Age: 25 | Location: Newmarket, ON**

Growing up, I was fortunate to have many experiences that cemented my love of the outdoors, including spending time at cottages and summer camps. However, these experiences are not universal for all youth in the GTA, who may not have access to these opportunities. The ORCCR represents a valuable opportunity to allow the Richmond Hill community to experience the outdoors in their own backyard. The ORCCR will be an increasingly popular destination as greenspace in the GTA becomes more rare. In order to grow stewardship of the park, I think it is important to ensure that the community is allowed to use the ORCCR in a sustainable way.

## BRANDON KASHIN

**Age: 26 | Location: St. Catharines, ON**

I'd like to see more people use the ORCCR, as it's an incredible recreational resource for the GTA. As someone who enjoys TRCA-managed campgrounds in the GTA, I can see that the ORCCR has incredible potential as a campground for all types of people to use. I'd also like to see the ORCCR become more accessible by public transit, so that people without access to private means of transportation from greater distances can still enjoy it. There are many opportunities for events related to camping to be planned for the park if that use was permitted and regulated. Also, I think if people were allowed to camp there with regulations put in place, park stewardship would skyrocket. I think if these two things can happen, then future generations will be more inclined to use the park, and it will become a place where people are able to create lasting memories.

## ERIN WINDROSS

**Age: 28 | Location: East York, ON**

To truly connect with future stewards, the ORCCR must become much more well known. I believe that new branding coupled with targeted infrastructure investments could bring significant attention to the ORCCR. Rebranding the park (or areas of the park) is vital to creating an identifiable entity that users can recognize. A critical and inexpensive way of doing this would be to engage in a renaming competition. Leveraging existing assets on site is also key. I would personally suggest utilizing existing buildings as a canvas for local graffiti or mural artists in order to create focal points for sections of the park and act as a draw for the region. If the TRCA wishes to (re)engage stewardship, these types of ideas should be proposed and examined as a way to bring in younger cohorts and expand the name recognition of the ORCCR throughout the GTA.

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

## VISION

In 2026, the ORCCR will be not only a precious natural resource, but also a precious recreational and educational resource as well. The ORCCR will provide recreational opportunities like lake swimming, fishing and canoeing that are increasingly rare in an urbanizing GTA. The surrounding community will understand the importance of the park and play an active role as stewards of the park. GTA residents will know and understand the park as a space that is equally valuable to them and to the environment. The park will be well-integrated with transit and transportation access, allowing a greater variety of people to enjoy the park.

To achieve this vision, we have produced the Growing Stewardship Strategy in order to help the TRCA re-think the ORCCR to maximize its value and utility to its intended users, as per the objectives of the Living City Strategic Plan.

The Growing Stewardship Strategy is an engagement strategy that aims to foster stewardship for the ORCCR. In order to achieve this vision, we must first define what we mean by stewardship. We have defined three key components of stewardship: *Belonging*, *Experience* and *Awareness*.

### BELONGING

Users should feel a sense of *responsibility* for the ORCCR, exemplified by their active *participation* in maintaining the park and *advocacy* for the improvement of the park.

### EXPERIENCE

Local residents should experience the park as part of their daily lives, utilizing the active transportation network provided by the trails to *connect* with other neighborhoods, and *play* in the ORCCR on the weekend. People from across the region will *visit* the ORCCR to experience this unique natural resource.

### AWARENESS

Local residents will be *educated* about the cultural and ecological importance of the park, and *understand* how to sustainably use the park for recreation. The ORCCR will have name recognition for GTA. residents, who *value* the park as an ecological and hydrological resource.

## BACKGROUND

The TRCA has expressed concern that the ORCCR Management Plan (2006) may be out of date, and does not reflect the values of the changing residential community. The Management Plan (2006) was created with public and stakeholder involvement, and set out priorities for the management and protection of the park. The park was to be a "sanctuary for nature" that provided "windows not doors" for people to learn about and experience nature. However, the current community may want to use the park differently and therefore it is important to re-engage this community in greenspace planning.

### PROJECT MANDATE

The mandate of this project was to undertake research on and develop an innovative strategy for public engagement in greenspace planning, for the purpose of igniting a renewed interest in conservation values and participating in nature programming in the ORCCR area.

### SITE AND STUDY AREA

Geographically, the Growing Stewardship strategy focuses on engaging the immediate residential community surrounding the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve (ORCCR), as well as attracting visitors across York Region (**Appendix A**).

## SCOPE OF WORK

The (Re)Engaging Greenspace work plan set out a project scope (Table 2) that helped to guide the creation of the Growing Stewardship Strategy.

1. The political, historical, and planning context of the ORCCR were described and critically assessed in order to properly understand the values and interests that led to the initial creation of the ORCCR. This initial research helped to inform current uses and will help to identify opportunities and challenges that will be identified in this project.

2. Primary non-reactive and secondary research was completed to identify and understand the current users and uses of the ORCCR, based on who those users are, the types of uses they undertake, and the tangible and intangible infrastructure of those uses and how they shape user experience of the park. A review was conducted of international best practices in regards to engaging youth in greenspace. Also, content analysis of social media and new technologies was completed in order to better understand youth engagement with the ORCCR.

3. The strategy contains recommendations that identify untapped opportunities or gaps identified in the above-mentioned research. These recommendations are based on best practice research and observational analysis.

| In Scope | Not In Scope |
|---|---|
| A. Political, historical and planning context of the ORCCR | A. Detailed future strategies |
| B. Analysis of current use of the ORCCR | B. Recommendation costing and budgeting |
| C. Review of best practices in greenspace engagement | C. Policy recommendations |
| D. Recommendations for next steps | D. Comprehensive design solution |
| | E. Primary active research |

Table 2: Project Scope

# RESEARCH

## POLICY CONTEXT

### PLANNING POLICY

The Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve was the most controversial and highly-publicized conflict of the Oak Ridges Moraine protection saga. In the face of development pressures, residents and stakeholder organizations helped to protect these sensitive lands through mass OMB appeals, public engagement campaigns, and protest (Sandberg & Wekerle, 2013). This grassroots stewardship was an important part of protecting the ORCCR, and of the development of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, 2002. The demographics of the area are changing, including increasing new development on the edges of the ORCCR, and there is concern that newer residents may be unaware of the value of the ORCCR, and of the public effort that went into protecting it.

Currently, land ownership in the ORCCR is divided. The lands east of Bayview are mostly owned by TRCA, but the lands west of Bayview are mostly owned by the province, including the Bathurst Glen Golf Course (see **Appendix B**). Both areas are managed by the TRCA; however, TRCA's powers in the provincially-owned areas are reportedly restricted, such as being unable to maintain or repair several provincially-owned structures in the ORCCR[1].

### LAND USE POLICY

The Oak Ridges Moraine is protected from development by several layers of policy which govern land use, which are summarized in Table 3, below.

| Policy Document | Goals for the ORCCR | Permitted Uses |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan | Protection of Ecological Function | Special Land Uses, "Low Intensity Recreational" Uses |
| Provincial Policy Statements | Protect and/or Improve Ecological Function | Natural Heritage Areas |
| York Region Official Plan | Lake to Lake Trail | "Passive Uses" |
| Richmond Hill Official Plan | Community Linkage | "Passive Uses" |

Table 3: Brief Land Use Hierarchy Governing the ORCCR

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[1] Based on conversations with TRCA, October 2, 2015

First is the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, 2002 (ORMCP), which holds primacy over the Provincial Policy Statement (2014), Official Plans, and zoning by-laws. The ORMCP includes special land use designations for Natural Core Areas, and Natural Linkage Areas (see **Appendix C**). Usage of these areas is heavily restricted, but allows for a wide range of "low intensity recreational" uses including non-motorized transit and unserviced campgrounds.

The Provincial Policy Statement, 2014, recognizes conservation reserves such as the ORCCR under the category of "Natural Heritage Systems", and recommends their maintenance, recovery, or improvement.

The York Region Official Plan, 2010 and the Richmond Hill Official Plan, 2015 refer to "passive recreation" uses in the ORCCR, such as hiking and nature appreciation, including part of York Region's Lake to Lake trail (Lake to Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail feasibility and design study, 2013). This is a more restrictive interpretation of "low intensity recreational" uses; and is a reduction of the scope of uses permitted in the ORMCP.

The ORMCP is currently under review, as part of the Ontario government's Coordinated Land-Use Planning Review, and it is possible that these policies may change (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MAH), 2015).

These policy documents form a set of objectives for the ORCCR:

1. The primary objective for the ORCCR is conservation and protection of ecological and hydrological function, as implemented through the ORMCP. Any recommended actions must preserve the environmental integrity of the site.

2. The ORCCR shall have recreational uses which are "low intensity" in nature. Ecotourism is an important part of the ORMCP, and an important part of encouraging environmental stewardship and appreciation.

3. The ORCCR is to form part of the wider community. The Oak Ridges Trail system is intended to be not just a destination in itself, but as an integral part of surrounding residential areas, for both recreation and active transportation uses.

These objectives will be discussed later in this report.

## STRATEGIC PLANS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS

The TRCA's Building the Living City: 10 year Strategic Plan (2013) forms the lens through which these policies and objectives are viewed by the TRCA.

The Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve (ORCCR) contains both the provincially-owned Oak Ridges Corridor Park and the TRCA-owned Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve (ORCNR).The Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan (2006) currently guides the management of the ORCCR, including both the Oak Ridges Corridor Park and the Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve (ORCNR), while the Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve Management Plan (Draft) relates specifically to the ORCNR.

# USER EXPERIENCE

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Given the residential development activity surrounding the ORCCR and the growing local population, a demographic scan of nine key census tracts was conducted as a starting point in understanding the user profiles of the site. The nine census tracts are bounded by Old Bloomington Road to the north, Leslie Street to the east, Elgin Mills Road East to the south, and Bathurst St. to the west (**Appendix D**). All census data is taken from the year 2011.

The total population of our study area is 70,188 in 2011. The age distribution for the study area features two peaks, one at ages 0-19, and another at 40-54. This illustrates that there is a large portion of young families in the study area and no significant 'millennial' population at this time (**Appendix E**).

In terms of household income, the neighbourhoods surrounding the ORCCR are fairly affluent. The average household total income in 2011 is $119,345.67, and the median household total income is $102,065.11. In comparison, the province of Ontario's average household total income is $85,772, and median household total income in $66,358.

The ORCCR demographic study area is notably multicultural. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the population identify as a visible minority. Of the portion that identify as visible minority, seventeen percent (17%) are Chinese, ten percent (10%) are South Asian, eight percent (8%) are West Asian, and the remaining thirteen percent (13%) includes all other classifications. The ethnic distribution in the area shows a spectrum of individuals from different origins. Fifty-one percent (51%) of private households identify as European origins and forty-six percent (46%) are of Asian origin. Within the latter group, fifty-two percent (52%) are of East or Southeast origins, twenty-eight percent (28%) are of Middle Eastern origin, and twenty-one percent (21%) are South Asian.

## PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILE

To further understand the user groups surrounding the ORCCR, a scan of existing psychographic data was conducted using PRIZM5 by Environics Analytics. PRIZM5 is a tool that uses psychographic data based on Canadian demographics, lifestyles, consumer behaviour, and settlement patterns to create lifestyle profiles for different psychographic sectors of Canadians. This tool is helpful for researchers who want to go beyond age, income, ethnicity and languages, etc. and to gain a general understanding of the lifestyle habits of Canadians living in different settlement areas, as these findings are aggregated by postal code. This information is frequently used to help guide marketing campaigns and outreach/engagement strategies (**Appendix F**).

The ORCCR study area features a wide range of different lifestyles, however there are three major lifestyle segments that stand out; *Heritage Hubs*, *Pets & PCs*, and *Kids and Careers*.

## HERITAGE HUBS

*Heritage Hubs* is a lifestyle profile that consists of middle-aged suburban families who are university educated, with mixed occupations. The community has a high diversity rating and their sample social value is consumptivity. Families in this segment are likely to participate in basketball, swimming, and bowling. Leisure activities include going to theme parks, zoos, and aquariums. They satisfy consumptivity by frequently attending exhibitions like gardening shows, pet shows, car shows, and food and wine shows. Families often visit China, Australia, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica. To save money, families stay with friends, rent cottages, or book all-inclusive vacations (Environics Analytics, 2015).

## PETS & PCS

*Pets & PCs* is a profile that classifies itself as younger, upscale suburban families. Similar to the Heritage Hubs  families are university or college educated, with mixed occupations (goods and service based jobs) throughout the community. The segment features a medium level of diversity and its sample social value is saving on principle. *Pets & PCs* is the largest lifestyle segment in Canada, mainly consisting of young families and pre-school aged children in new suburbs surrounding larger cities. Increasing members of this segment are largely immigrants from South Asia, China, and the Caribbean. This lifestyle segment is likely to participate in team sports such as baseball, basketball, hockey, and soccer; parents shuttle their kids and gear in SUVs. On weekends families go to kid-friendly destinations such as zoos, theme parks, aquariums, and water parks. Their homes are filled with new technology like computers, video game consoles, and iPads. Date nights for the parents are likely to include dinner and dancing (Environics Analytics, 2015).

## KIDS & CAREERS

The third major lifestyle profile that is apparent in the study area is *Kids & Careers*. This segment features large, well-off, middle-aged suburban families. It is one of Canada's wealthiest suburban lifestyles. The population here is largely university educated with white collar/service sector careers. There is a medium diversity level in these communities, and their sample social value is ecological concern. Individuals in this segment are likely to have memberships to golf clubs and fitness clubs. They shop at upscale malls, big box retailers, and attend sporting events. Families are likely to play ice hockey, soccer, football, and basketball. Family rooms are fitted with home theatres systems and they are likely to own iPads, and gaming devices. Members in this segment are likely to invest in stocks and mutual funds (Environics Analytics, 2015).

The psychographic data for the ORCCR study area shows that families in the area are generally affluent suburban homeowners who are likely to participate in recreation, and are willing to spend money to do so. The findings from the following sections also reinforce these descriptive categories.

## SITE VISITS

A total of seven site visits were conducted from September to November 2015 to observe who was using the park and what they were doing. The site visits lasted on average 1.5 hours each between the hours of 10:30am and 4:30pm. Our findings confirmed what we had first observed through the demographic and psychographic information - that the majority of park users are adults moving through the park in a passive manner; either walking, jogging, biking, or dog-walking. Other uses observed and discovered in the TRCA's Trail User Survey include: photography, swimming, downhill mountain biking, and Tai Chi. A makeshift campsite on the north-east side of Bond Lake was also found.

We were also able to access the TRCA's Trail Counter data and Trail User Survey data for the Oak Ridges Corridor Park East. According to the TRAFx trail counter, there were a total of 18,504 visitors to the eastern part of the conservation reserve over a twelve-month period between February 2012 and March 2013. The data from the trail user surveys generally support what we've also found in our analysis thus far; the majority of the people surveyed are over the age of thirty-five and are using the trails passively.
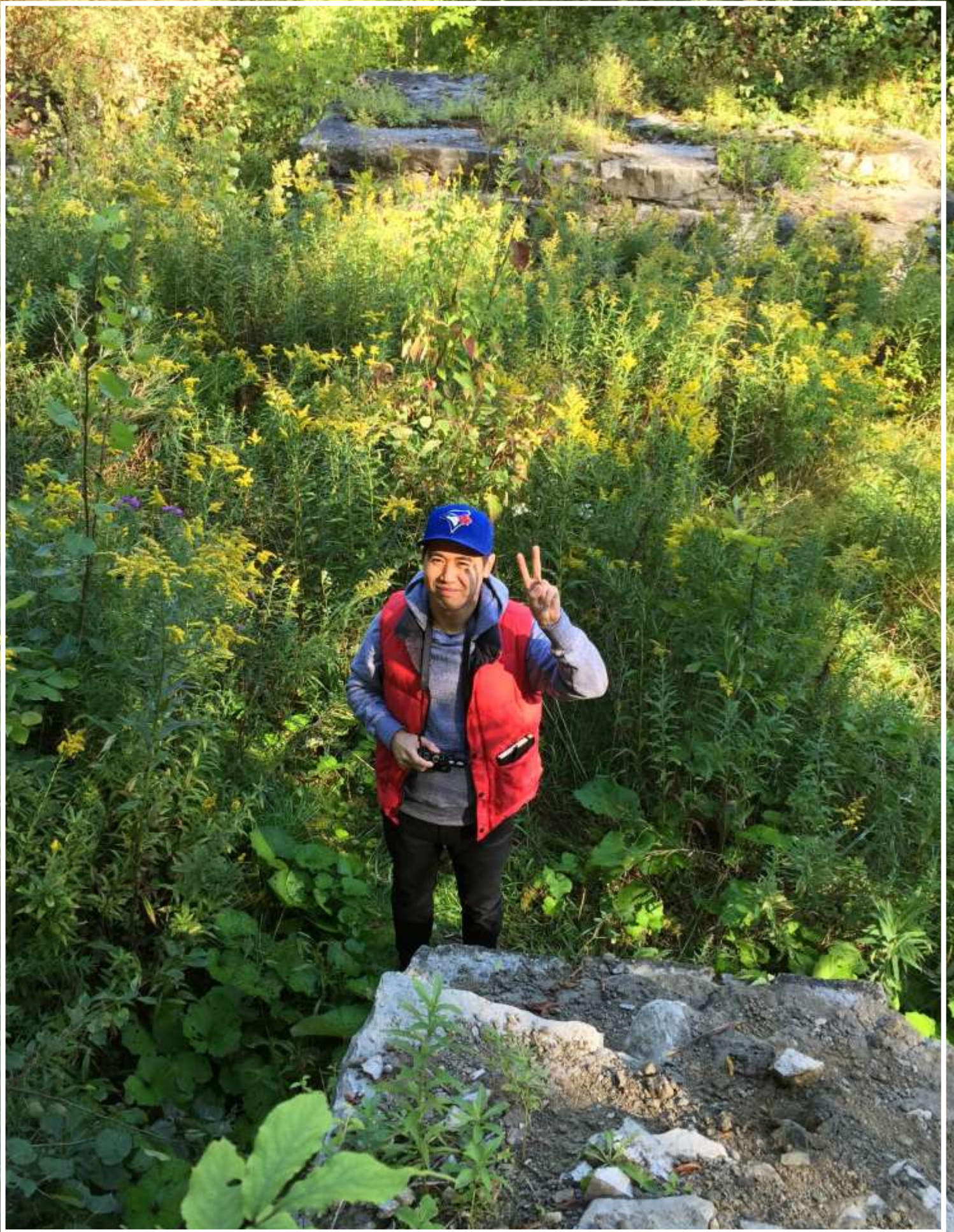
# BEST PRACTICES

## ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

We conducted a preliminary survey (**Appendix G**) of best practices for parks engagement and environmental stewardship that can be applied to the ORCCR. We identified five key themes that organizations employ in their stewardship strategies to engage people with parks. They provide a structure for the strategic direction for achieving the ORCCR vision for 2017. The five themes are:

1. Experiential Learning
2. Citizen Stewardship Groups
3. Digital Engagement
4. Self-Guided Recreation
5. Leadership Training

It is important to note that the TRCA already has programs in place similar to the ones that will be briefly outlined below (**Appendix H**). However, the objective of this section is to provide examples of the most widely-used best practice strategies that other organizations are currently using to address engagement. Though there are similarities between the best practices identified below with some of the TRCA programming offered in the ORCCR, the provided examples offer ways that TRCA can build upon and strengthen the effectiveness of those programs currently running.

## 1. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Experiential learning is the way that users learn through experience or through their reflection of an experience.  Through experiential learning, children become exposed to nature and learn about its importance as it relates to their lives and the ecosystems that exist within conservation areas.  It most commonly happens within an organized, formal setting, but it can also be part of extracurricular or recreational activities such as summer camps or workshops for adults.  Under the large umbrella of Formal Education, many schools in North America have begun greening their schoolyards and incorporating outdoor classes or classes about nature into their curriculums in an effort to re-engage children with the natural environment.  The physical and mental benefits that nature has on people has widely been documented, and children in particular reap the most benefits in their developing stages (White, 2004; Wells & Evans, 2003).

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: ARBOR DAY PROGRAM

The Arbor Day Program in the City of Calgary provides all local Grade One students with a tree seedling to be taken home and planted (City of Calgary, 2015).  More than 10,000 seedlings are given out each year to students in the City.  A Teacher's Resource Guide is provided to all schools and is also available online for students to use as a guide in caring for their tree.  The outcome of this educational event is that it not only develops children's understanding of nature, but it also develops a sense of stewardship in children at a very early age and  teaches them the basics of ecology.

## 2. CITIZEN STEWARDSHIP GROUPS

Traditional stewardship groups are widely active and relevant in engaging people in greenspace. They are focused on community empowerment and collaborative action, and they generally require long-term commitment from local stakeholders. These groups care for parks and conservation areas by creating awareness of environmental and social issues, organizing and mobilizing community members, and providing learning and training opportunities to group members. Many of these stewardship groups are made up of park friends groups, commonly named as the "Friends of" whichever park they advocate for, and they actively contribute to the wellbeing and upkeep of their local park, and arrange activities in their park. These Friends groups are made up of local residents of all ages and backgrounds, who volunteer their time, services and funding to support and enhance their local park. While these groups play an important part in environment care and conservation, the formalities of some of these group structures may need to be revised to encourage more participation from community members. By removing more rigid requirements of membership, such as having people pay memberships, having mandatory attendance at functions, or requiring people to apply to be a volunteer member, more community members will be able to participate in an informal stewardship setting.

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: RIVER GUARDIANS

Situated in Western Australia, the River Guardians is an international example of a citizen stewardship group that is defined by its informality and flexibility. The group has a "top-down" approach as it is run by the state government rather than a non-profit group, in contrast to the grass roots approach of "Friends of" organizations that Ontarians typically employ (Government of Australia, 2015). Membership in this group is free, more flexible, and less formal as members are able to attend meetings and events when they have time. They are also able to use phone apps to contribute to citizen science projects when it is convenient for them to do so, making participation that much easier and time-effective. There are many recreational, educational, training, and volunteer opportunities to choose from, depending on the interest and engagement level of the members.

## 3. DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Similar to other civic agencies, parks and conservation organizations are increasingly looking to use social media as a tool to communicate with their users, draw new users, and understand how park space is being utilized. Social media is an important outlet for youth and is becoming increasingly so for adults. In order for organizations to use social media as an effective engagement platform, a comprehensive social media strategy is required. This could be done by combining efforts with local parks groups in order to seed social media hashtags and share content.

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: THE CENTRAL PARK CONSERVANCY

The Central Park Conservancy is a non-governmental organization that is responsible for maintaining Central Park in New York City. It has adopted social media strategies used in the private sector to market products or events in order to educate the public about their organization. One such strategy is a program that the organization established called "instameets", where they invite instagram influencers - popular instagram users that have very large following and are thus deemed "influential" - for a walk-and-talk through the park while they snap and post instagram photos (Dua, 2015). Another social media strategy that the conservancy created is the seeding of a particular hashtag, where visitors are encouraged to use the hashtag #CentralParkMoments through signage located in the park (Dua, 2015). This hashtag in turn has become quite popular with connections to over 10,000 photos.

## 4. SELF GUIDED RECREATION

For the purposes of this report, we have identified self guided recreation as an active form of recreation that people can do on an individual and informal basis. This type of recreation includes walking or biking, because they are widely enjoyed by park users on their own. Based on our initial site visits and observations, self-guided recreation makes up the majority of park use. The TRCA encourages self-guided recreation such as walking, hiking, biking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching, and other similar activities.  We acknowledge the tension between environmental conservation and active recreation in parks in the ORCCR.  However, as has been mentioned, one of the most important steps to getting people to engage with nature is to first actually get them out *in* nature. This is most easily accomplished by providing people with a reason or a place to be active in nature. From our observations, users of the ORCCR are engaging in many different forms of self-guided recreation, even in areas where certain activities such as swimming or mountain biking are not sanctioned.  These unsanctioned uses in the ORCCR further convey the issue of balancing conservation goals with users' recreational interests.

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: GRASSLANDS CONSERVATION COUNCIL

The Grasslands Conservation Council of British Columbia promotes well-managed recreational uses that can help to foster a sense of responsibility of stewardship in its users.  Their document entitled "Best Management Practices for Recreational Activities" provides information on how they determine which recreational uses will impact the ecological integrity of grasslands parks (Grasslands Council of British Columbia, 2004). The document also speaks to how these recreational uses can be managed so their ecological impacts may be minimized while allowing for a wide variety of user experiences.

## 5. LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Youth leadership programs are an effective and common strategy that many organizations with environmental stewardship mandates (including the TRCA) employ. These programs contribute to the development of a number of important skills and values for youth, including leadership skills, character building, and environmental stewardship. However, there is an opportunity to re-evaluate how these programs attract participants as some of them are experiencing declining enrollment. As an unfortunate example, Scouts Canada, a prominent organization that is based on outdoor recreation, has been experiencing a decline in enrollment since the 1990s and it could be out of members by the year 2017.

### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE: CRISSY FIELD CENTRE YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

An example of youth leadership programming is the Crissy Field Centre's Youth Advisory Council, established by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. Together with the adult advisory group, the youth council advises on the programing and design of the park (Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, n.d.). By contributing to the decision-making processes, the youth are given real responsibility where their skills can actually be used and developed.

# STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

## OBJECTIVES

Based on the research conducted and the client feedback that we received from the interim presentation, two sets of criteria were developed to guide the implementation of the Growing Stewardship Strategy. The Growing Stewardship Strategy is an engagement strategy that aims to foster stewardship for the ORCCR. We define stewardship through the three components of stewardship: *belonging*, *experience*, and *awareness*.

### SITE OBJECTIVES

Research on the historic and political context of the conservation area, consideration of TRCA's resources, and research on engagement best practices lead to the creation of our first criterion, **Site Objectives**:

| SITE OBJECTIVES |
| :---: |
| Conservation |
| Recreation |
| Connection |

- Conservation: Ecological considerations are key priority for the site
- Recreation: Finding and enhancing recreational opportunities at the site
- Connection: The site as a community link to Connect different areas and neighbourhoods

## DEMOGRAPHIC OBJECTIVES

We researched community demographics, user experience, and engagement best practices, to create our second criterion, **Demographic Objectives**.

| DEMOGRAPHIC OBJECTIVES |
| :---: |
| Culture |
| Age |
| Ability |
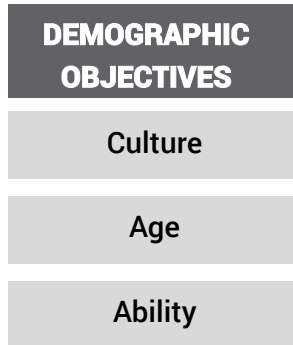
The demographic objectives aim to accommodate and account for people from various cultures, across all ages and abilities based on their various needs and interests. This includes:

- Children
- Youth (including Millennials)
- Adults
- Seniors
- Users from diverse cultures
- Persons with disabilities

These objectives are a checklist of criteria based on the intended vision of the conservation area  They evaluate the Strategic Directions to ensure that they meet Site and Demographic targets described above.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

In addition to the best practices research and client feedback, our observations and experiences from visiting the ORCCR contributed to the formation of five Strategic Directions to meet our Site Objectives and Demographic Objectives. These Strategic Directions represent the elements of the Growing Stewardship Strategy and include: Park Use, Infrastructure, Branding, Online Presence and Community Outreach. They are conceptually represented in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: The Growing Stewardship Strategy Conceptual Framework

These directions are presented in this circular format because they depend on each other for successful implementation. They are not mutually exclusive and our recommendations in this report incorporate a number of strategic directions. See **Appendix I** for the processes of creating these objectives and directions"

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND PHASING

Each Strategic Direction will include a collection of Potential Actions, based on best practices and case studies. These potential actions represent a curated list of possible alternatives, which may not be fully compatible with the TRCA's goals for the ORCCR.

One final set of Recommended Actions will then be chosen from this list of Potential Actions. We have chosen these specific Recommended Actions as they are the most appropriate and achievable actions for the ORCCR, based on the goals and objectives of the Growing Stewardship Strategy.

Phasing is the last component of the Growing Stewardship Strategy as it provides an outline of the resources potentially required in the implementation of each recommended action. The key resources that have been chosen to direct the TRCA in the coordination of implementing the proposed actions are timeline and priority.

These lands are known as
the Oak Ridges Moraine
Corridor Park
and are owned by the
Province of Ontario
and managed by
Toronto & Region
Conservation.
For more information
please call 416 661-6600

TORONTO AND REGION
Conservation
for The Living City

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION: BRANDING

Place attachment through recreational involvement can promote conservation and environmental responsibilities in protected areas, and if TRCA is able to do this, then it can communicate the ORCCR as a place to visit, play, and connect. According to Tsung Hung Lee, a researcher for the Journal of Sustainable Tourism, recreational involvement in environmentally-significant conservation areas can benefit natural areas in a number of ways (2011). Lee explains that nature-based tourism is a term that can be used to describe any type of use of natural protected areas that are established for the sake of environmental conservancy. It is described as tourism to indicate that people go these areas for a specifically-intended recreational use that is supported in conjunction with conservation goals for the area. As such, people who use these areas are considered as visitors to the area (Lee, 2011).

According to Lee, the types of people who use the conservation areas are also more likely to develop place attachment, and foster conservation and environmental attitudes and behaviours from the positive experiences they have there. These emotional connections can directly affect users' understanding, uses, and attitudes towards conservation areas. Lee explains,

> Place attachment refers to any positive or negative relationship that a person has with a location, often arising from the person's complex experiences with the place, and creating an emotional bond with that place (Kyle et al., 2003). In recreation and leisure, place attachment is embodied in the emotions and feelings associated with a recreational setting (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Moore & Graefe, 1994). (Lee, 2011)

Place attachment is typically made up of users' dependency on the place itself, which is directly related to the recreational uses that ORCCR users enjoy. Place attachment is also dependent on users' understanding of place identity, which is either symbolic or physical attachment (Lee, 2011).

If the TRCA implements branding into the ORCCR, then it will be able to build greater understanding, awareness, and appreciation of the conservation area (King et al, 2012). Communicating a cohesive message through a branding strategy will allow a range of stakeholders to take responsibility of the park's ecological and cultural significance.

## BRANDING: CURRENT CONDITIONS

The current branding situation in the ORCCR presents many opportunities for the TRCA to utilize current practices in parks branding strategies. Branding for the park can be implemented through park signage within the ORCCR itself, on signage surrounding the ORCCR on roads and sidewalks, and on digital or physical communications materials.

Current ORCCR communications do not include any park-specific branding. Signage in and around the ORCCR itself consists exclusively of informational materials, and the only types of branding that is present is the TRCA logo. Additionally, there is currently no off-site usage of ORCCR-specific branding.

Speaking to the points made by Lee and King et al, because the ORCCR does not incorporate any specific branding, it is currently missing out on an opportunity to communicate symbolic significance and meaning that may potentially lead to an increased volume of people who use the park for recreation. Furthermore, if more people use the park recreationally under the pretense of the symbolic meaning of the ORCCR branding, then they will also be more inclined to engage in stewardship of the area as mentioned above. An indirect impact of this enhanced and increased amount of ORCCR stewardship may be increases in financial support from private interest groups, and the formation of more formal groups with mandates specific to the ORCCR.

## BRANDING: BEST PRACTICES

There are numerous examples of branding that conservation areas have employed to convey the park mandate and vision of stewardship and conservancy. These examples show that a successful parks branding strategy should focus on communicating the cultural and natural significance of the area. It should also incorporate a strong and symbolic identity based on the natural landscapes within in, make use of a simple and easy-to-remember name, and should communicate the recreational uses available in the park.

Norwegian Environmental Agency Parks Branding Strategy



The Norwegian Environmental Agency has implemented a visual parks branding strategy to help "communicate the important message of both visit and protect to users and visitors" (Snohetta, 2015). The brand strategy relies on Norwegian cultural ideas and feelings toward outdoor recreational activities like skiing and camping in natural conservation areas. Specifically, the branding is centred on the idea of outdoor areas acting as a portal that signifies the passage from urban human-made areas into areas that are completely natural (Snohetta, 2015). The brand allows people to identify that they are not only able to make this transition from urban to natural place, but that the natural place they are transitioning into is as much a part of Norwegian culture as the urban places they normally live. Because the Snohetta branding strategy makes this connection, it allows recreational users to understand these conservation areas as their own, and with that kind of ownership comes a sense of responsibility for their stewardship.

## Colorado Estes Park Brand Strategy



Another good example of conservation area branding has been implemented in the Colorado Estes Park. The brand strategy is centred on creating an expectation of what park users will experience when they go to the park, depending on the physical aspects afforded to these recreational uses (Estes Park, 2013). Because the brand strategy creates expectations of the types of experiences visitors will have when they go to the park, the strategy is meant to act as a 'foundation,' or framing, of those experiences. Particularly, when visitors go to recreate in the park, they will understand this recreation as it forms their emotional connection to the park along with the experiences they participate in. The Estes Park branding strategy incorporates an "Estes Park Brand Promise," which is made up of five different paradigms: getaway vs. gateway, guest vs. visitor, always in season vs. on or off season, favourite vs. one of many, and village vs. resort (Estes Park, 2013). Each one of these paradigms classifies different types of park users by what recreational activities they enjoy in the park, where they come from, and whether or not they are local visitors. By classifying these uses and types of visitors, Estes Park is able to identify why people value the park and its recreational uses, and how they go about fulfilling those uses. The Estes Park brand strategy is now able to determine an appropriate way to communicate the Estes Park Brand Promise to each of these different types of users that is significant to the culture of these recreational users (Estes Park, 2013). The branding strategy is currently being finished to include this last aspect.

## BRANDING: CASE STUDY

### Golden Gate National Recreational Area (GGNRA) Branding Strategy

A collective identity for the GGNRA was developed based on each of the park areas, and the first step to developing a collective identity was replacing the name, "Golden Gate National Recreation Area," because the name was cumbersome, and was not effective for marketing material purposes (GGNRA, 1998).

The GGNRA was changed to "Golden Gates National Park" to capture the   park's close proximity to the Golden Gate bridge, along with the particular landscapes found within the park. The Golden Gates National Park branding team then hired an artist to develop a series of posters for each of the parks, some of the popular park areas, and for the National Park as a whole.

Now, when park visitors see these posters, they develop a strong understanding of the parks as important natural areas that make up part of the Golden Gate area landscape, as well as valuable recreational amenities.

## BRANDING: POTENTIAL ACTIONS

There are several potential actions that the TRCA could take to address branding of the ORCCR. They are listed below.

### #1 USER-GENERATED BRAND IDENTITY

In coordination with community outreach efforts, consult with community members on creating a user-generated brand identity for the park.

### #2 EMPHASIZE THE NATURAL FEATURES OF THE PARK

Center a branding strategy around the natural features of the park, for example the flora and fauna present in the ORCCR.

### #3 FOCUS ON RECREATION

Create a branding identity focused on the recreational activities that occur at the ORCCR. This can turn the park into a regional destination park.

### #4 HIGHLIGHT THE NARRATIVE OF THE PARK

Establish a narrative for the park which conveys the history of the creation of the ORCCR.

### #5 LOCAL RE-NAMING COMPETITION

A local re-naming competition in collaboration with the Town of Richmond Hill or the York Region District School Board.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: DEVELOP ORCCR BRANDING STRATEGY

**Communing with Nature**

**A branding strategy will clearly communicate the values inherent in the corridor park, which will further encourage user responsibility and participation in the parks well-being. Therefore, it is our recommendation that the TRCA implement strategies similar to other successful park branding initiatives.**

A branding strategy should be able to satisfy site objectives by connecting users to the park, creating awareness of the park's recreational uses, and instilling a sense of conservancy in park users. The brand strategy should focus on communicating the park for its users instead of exclusively concentrating on the conservation aspects of the park - people should understand that this area, is there for them to use. The branding strategy can achieve this by fulfilling the demographic objectives, by appealing to all ages, cultures, and abilities. Users will understand that the park's stewardship and conservancy is inherently worth taking on. The TRCA should focus the ORCCR branding in the three following ways:

1.  **Rename the ORCCR.**

    As it was determined that the GGNRA was too cumbersome of a name for marketing purposes, the ORCCR has the same problem. It is difficult to remember the name because it is so long, and it does not properly convey the types of landscapes, scenery, or recreational uses that should be communicated in the branding strategy. A name that would work for such branding purposes would resemble that same simplicity as the Golden Gate National Park.

2.  **Develop a strong branding aesthetic that is symbolic of the ORCCR, to act as the brand's main visual language**

    Branding for conservation parks can engage connection, evoke personal values, and prompt participation in the park's ecological and recreational values. If the Corridor Park is able to achieve this kind of connection with current and potential users, then it will be able to establish future generations of park stewards. The corridor park branding should focus on conveying unique natural landscapes, recreational opportunities, and close proximity and ease of access from residential areas. A Corridor Park brand strategy may want to focus on promoting itself as a scenic ecological recreation centre in the backyard of the GTA.

3. **Implement the visual branding into all ORCCR communications and promotional materials.**

> Any communications materials for the ORCCR, both physical and digital, should incorporate the new park branding. Consistent branding is important in order to ensure that any brand significance and meaning is communicated to park users at every opportunity to do so, and so that any experience of the park may be framed with the brand's core values. The state of current infrastructure at ORCCR is summarized in the following photos, taken during several visits to the subject area.

## SITE OBJECTIVES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The recommended action of developing a branding strategy satisfies our site objectives, by *advocating* for *participatio*n in and *responsibility* of the ORCCR, where *visitors* are drawn to the site by a coordinated branding strategy in order to *play* and *connect* within the natural setting.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND PHASING

Our recommended actions for developing the branding strategy will allow the TRCA to respond to the opportunity inherent in the lack of branding currently used for the ORCCR. The following is a broad timeline of the steps TRCA can take to ensure it takes advantage of this opportunity:

**Immediate:**

*Retain branding expertise*

> Hire a branding consultant with experience in parks branding to develop the branding strategy for the ORCCR.
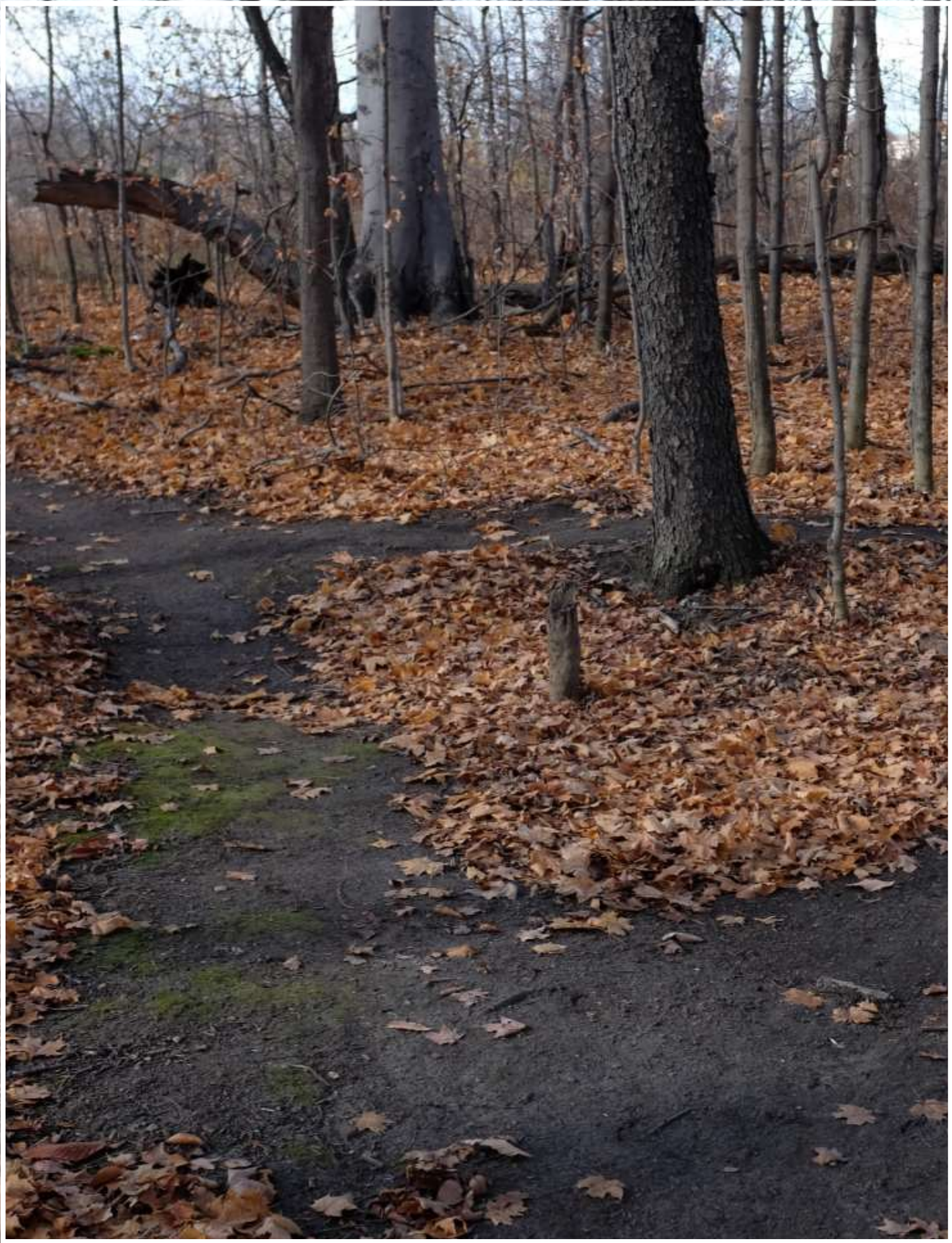
**Short Term to Long Term:**

*Implementation*

> Implement the branding strategy into all ORCCR communications and into site infrastructure.

*Evaluate Branding Strategy*

> Conduct ORCCR user interviews to determine if new branding successfully communicates site objectives, and whether users feel more engaged.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION: PARK USE

'Park use" refers to the self-guided recreation activities that take place in the park, and how they are managed. This is an important issue for the future ORCCR, as unsustainable recreational use of the park could result in environmental degradation. The need to ensure the ecological stability of the ORCCR must be balanced with the need to grow stewardship through recreation.

## PARK USE: CURRENT CONDITIONS

Several layers of policy, including the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP) and the Greenbelt Plan, mandate the types of recreational activities which can take place in the ORCCR. These policy documents form a set of objectives for the ORCCR:

1. Protection of Ecological Function
2. "Low Intensity" Recreational Uses
3. Community Linkage and Integration

Uses at the ORCCR must follow these objectives.

The Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve Management Plan (2006) contains prohibited and controlled activities. Prohibited uses include swimming, motorized recreational vehicles, horseback riding, camping, cutting and removal of native vegetation and dogs off leash. Controlled uses include recreational boating and fishing, as long as they are for research or educational purposes.

The Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve (formerly Oak Ridges Corridor Park East) has it's own management plan (Draft). The Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve Management Plan (Draft) was developed under the mandate of the ORCCR Management Plan (2006) and seeks to protect critically important natural features on the site, while also engaging the public by providing a trail system. This plan utilizes management zones similar to those in the Ontario Provincial Parks Planning and Management Policies, which define which zones are for public use and which zones will be protected from human use. Sixty-two percent (62%) of the ORCNR is designated 'nature reserve', meaning these areas will not be open to the public. Primary and secondary trails will be developed in areas designated 'public use', where passive recreation such as hiking, walking, cross-country skiing, leashed dog-walking and cycling (on some trails) will be permitted (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, p. 14).

The TRCA is responsible for the enforcement of rules regarding permitted uses. These rules are enforced through regulatory signage, site securement, and park monitoring by private security and TRCA staff.

## PARK USE: BEST PRACTICES

Outdoor recreation management literature identifies several different approaches for managing the impacts of outdoor recreation (Manning and Anderson, 2012). In order to address overuse of parks, managing authorities can:

1. Increase the supply of recreational opportunity in the park in order to disperse impacts of overuse

2. Reduce the impact of recreational use through modifying use patterns or activities

3. Increase the durability of the park/experience

4. Limit use of the park

Management practices can act as tactics or tools to achieve these objectives (Table 4). These tactics can be categorized according to the directness with which they act on user behaviour. Direct tactics act directly on user behaviour, giving users little or no freedom of choice. Indirect tactics aim to influence the decision factors on which users base their behaviour. For example a direct tactic aimed at stopping unauthorized campfires would be to impose a regulatory fine, while an indirect tactic would be to employ a public outreach campaign on the dangers of campfires.

| Tactic | Approach | Direct/Indirect |
|---|---|---|
| Zoning | Reduce the Impact of Recreation<br><br>Limit Park Use | Direct |
| Education/Outreach | Reduce the Impact of Recreation | Indirect |
| Best Practice Guidelines | Reduce the Impact of Recreation<br><br>Increase Park Durability | Indirect |

Table 4: Management Tactics

## PARK USE: CASE STUDIES

| Grassland Conservation Council of British Columbia |
| --- |
| The Grassland Conservation Council of British Columbia created the "Best Management Practices for Recreational Activities". This document is meant to guide recreation in B.C.'s protected grasslands and is to be used by recreation groups and other organizations and identify ways in which recreationalists can help sustain healthy grasslands. These guidelines contain ecological objectives for the grasslands, as well as mitigation techniques for environmental disruption (Grasslands Conservation Council, 2004). |

| NSW Sustainable Mountain Biking Strategy for Parks |
| --- |
| New South Wales State government in Australia developed a Sustainable Mountain Biking Strategy for state parks. This strategy outlines what planning requirements will be needed for any new trails, specifies track design requirements and highlights a small number of priority projects. These guidelines were developed in response to user-created unauthorized tracks that were dangerous to riders and other park visitors, as well as damaging to the environment. The objectives of the policy are: <br><br> 1. Ecologically sustainable cycling in parks; <br><br> 2. Recreational cycling activities that provide a safe quality experience for all park visitors and foster public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of nature and cultural heritage; <br><br> 3. Proactive and responsive management of cycling in parks; and <br><br> 4. Effective communication between the park authority, cycling communities and other land managers (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services, 2011). |

| Parks Canada Zoning |
| --- |
| Parks Canada has been using zoning within their parks since the 1960's (Thede, 2011). Like zoning in urban planning, zoning for park planning is based on the idea of dividing landscapes into categories to separate incompatible land uses. Park zoning prioritizes conservation and capacity for human use. The TRCA has applied the Parks Canada zoning system in the Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve Management Plan (Draft). Zoning in park planning is widely used internationally. The Koh Chang National Marine Park in Thailand is zoned based on ecosystem sensitivity as well as a survey of visitors regarding preferred use levels. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia and the Mount Spil National Park in Turkey have also adopted zoning for recreational uses (Manning and Anderson, 2012). |

## PARK USE: POTENTIAL ACTIONS

In managing recreational use of the ORCCR, there are number of different potential actions that the TRCA could pursue.

### #1 ORCCR WEBPAGE

- Create an ORCCR page on the TRCA website that contains information on permitted uses.

### #2 TEMPORARY SIGNAGE

- Install temporary signage directing users to a TRCA webpage (or ORCCR social media account) that directs users on appropriate recreational signage.

### #3 STARGAZING NIGHTS

- Stargazing nights could be organized with Town of Richmond Hill or the Ontario Science Center.

### #4 SWIM DAYS

- "Swim days" could be scheduled monthly in the summer months, by hiring lifeguards for one Saturday and allowing users to swim in Bond Lake safely. Swimming could remain prohibited the remaining days of the month.

### #4 CANOEING CLINICS

- Canoeing clinics could be organized which introduce families to canoeing under the supervision of TRCA (or Town of Richmond HIll) staff.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: MAKE FUN A PERMITTED USE



### Sustainable Recreation

**Users should be encouraged to play and experience nature while keeping the park ecologically healthy. It is our recommendation that the TRCA consider allowing active recreation to cultivate future stewardship.**

In order to achieve the Growing Stewardship Strategy's objectives of engagement, stewardship and ownership, it is essential that more people are encouraged to enjoy the ORCCR through self-guided recreation. Users should be encouraged to *play* and *experience* nature, without the park being ecologically compromised. It is our recommendation that the TRCA consider allowing some active recreational such as non-motorized boating, fishing, swimming and mountain biking. These experiences will help users *understand* the *value* of the park.

Outdoor recreation contributes to the well-being of individuals, communities and our built and natural environments. It has the ability to address challenges related to our increasingly sedentary lifestyle, decreased contact with nature and inequities that limit recreation opportunities for some groups (Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council and the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 2015). However, there exists a tension between the need to provide recreational opportunities with the responsibility to protect the ecological and hydrological function of our natural areas. The TRCA is an organization that must work within this tension, as it has a mandate to further the conservation, restoration and management of our region's ecological resources, while also promoting the ecological literacy of its residents through environmental education.

In order to accommodate additional recreation, the TRCA would have to adopt a strategy that moves towards the sustainable use of natural areas, and away from a strategy that is focused on protection from human use as the primary method of conservation. These additional recreational uses should be implemented alongside educational/outreach initiatives that consult with the community about the ecological importance of the ORCCR and how it can be affected by human use.

Our recommendation is based on the following planning considerations:

- The anticipated increased demand for greenspace due to population growth and increased development in Richmond Hill and the Greater Toronto region.

- The potential for environmental degradation of the ORCCR if users are not educated about sustainable recreation best practices.

- The preference for active recreation by youth, whose exposure and experience to the outdoors is important in fostering environmental values.

The population of the community surrounding the Oak Ridges Conservation Corridor (ORCCR) has grown dramatically over the past 10 years, and will continue to increase for the next 10-20 years. The Richmond Hill Official Plan envisions continued residential development surrounding the ORCCR, as the Town accommodates an additional 22,200 people by 2026 (Town of Richmond Hill, 2015). The ORCCR, together with the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve will serve as the largest accessible natural area for these residents in the Town, and likely for residents of neighbouring municipalities as well. Therefore, it is clear that the volume of users and the intensity of use of this park will increase, as more and more residents rely on this park as a recreational resource.

The Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve Management Plan (2006) was created with public and stakeholder involvement, and set out priorities for the management and protection of the park. The park was to be a "sanctuary for nature" that provided "windows not doors" for people to learn about and experience nature (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, p. 12). However, as previously discussed, the demographic makeup of the community surrounding the ORCCR has changed dramatically in the past ten years and the present community may have a different vision for the park.

Our user experience research suggests that the park is well-used by adults, who engage in passive recreation activities such as jogging, dog-walking and nature appreciation (see

**Appendix J**). We have also found evidence of unsanctioned, active recreation activities such as mountain biking and swimming. It is our opinion that the TRCA should work towards managing these currently prohibited recreational uses.

We know from our research that youth are interested in recreational activities that that are social and incorporate adventure (Canadian Parks Council, 2011) . Therefore, it is not surprising that youth (which make up a large portion of the demographic profile of the area) are not interested in the passive recreational opportunities that the ORCCR has to offer, and have taken up unsanctioned activities, such as mountain biking, swimming and campfires. Given the importance of engaging local youth in outdoor recreation, these preferences should be considered when providing park infrastructure.

The TRCA is well-aware of the importance of educating youth and children about the environment through experiential learning, and we believe that equal importance should be given to opportunities for self-guided recreation. Studies on youth engagement in nature have found that if youth are given more opportunities to have a meaningful experience outdoors, they will be more likely to value nature, engage with it, and feel empowered address environmental issues (The Nature Conservancy, 2011). Beyond formal educational programs, unstructured play in nature is just as, or more important, than formal environmental education. Some research has suggested that childhood participation in "wild" nature, such as hiking, camping, hunting and fishing and playing in the woods, as well as participation in "domestic nature" such as picking flowers and planting seeds or trees are positively attributed to adult environmental values. Interestingly, participation in "wild nature" has a stronger relationship with adult environmental values than "domestic nature" (Wells and Lekies, 2006). The ORCCR presents Richmond Hill's youth an opportunity to explore a natural environment in an unstructured environment, and facilitating sustainable recreation will capitalize on this opportunity.

## SITE OBJECTIVES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

This recommendation will achieve our site objectives by balancing the objectives of conservation and recreation through encouraging sustainable recreation. This recommendation will meet our target demographics by considering the needs and interests of youth.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND PHASING

The successful introduction of additional recreational uses will rely heavily on reducing the impact of these activities through indirect management tactics. In order for indirect tactics to be effective, they must be based on a thorough understanding of the needs of park users.

**Immediate:**

*Research Initiatives*

> Continued research on park usage, which could include reactive research such as neighbourhood surveys or focus groups. This research will contribute to a greater understanding of the needs of park users and determine whether indirect or direct tactics should be used to mitigate harmful activities

**Short to Long Term Actions:**

*Branding Strategies*

> A coordinated branding and community outreach campaign (see Branding and Community Outreach strategic directions).
> - o   Branding and outreach that convey the ecological importance of the park can incorporate information about sustainable recreation.

*Best Practice Guidelines*

> The creation of best practice guidelines, in collaboration with the current users of the park as well as intended users. These best practice guidelines will identify the mitigation strategies for specific recreational activities.
> - o   Research on park usage will inform the TRCA on who needs to be involved in the creation of these guidelines.

*Management Zones*

> Establishing management zones for recreational use, similar to Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve Management Plan.
> - o   These management zones will enforce the permitted uses allowed in each area, building upon the cohesive identity for the park established through the branding strategy.

*Phase in additional uses*

Based on the above recommended actions, gradually introduce additional sustainable recreational uses based on the needs of the community and coordinated with branding and community outreach efforts.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION: INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure at ORCCR is a central part of the user experience, and an important part of achieving the TRCA's Living City plan, specifically objectives relating to Strategy 3: "Rethink greenspace to maximize its value". Park infrastructure must fit the needs of its users. In addition, periodic evaluation and improvement of park infrastructure is an important part of both management plans for the ORCCR.

## INFRASTRUCTURE: CURRENT CONDITIONS

The state of current infrastructure at ORCCR is summarized in the following photos, taken during several visits to the subject area.



Vacant and underutilized provincial properties scattered throughout the lands present certain safety hazards. They could be repurposed and revitalized to provide new and engaging experiences for users.



There are many informal access points to/ from communities. Informal trails across the reserve need to be addressed with regards to wayfinding and safety.

There is a lack of resting areas with adequate shade. Such areas may present opportunities for programming that allows users to learn more about the natural heritage assets they are seeing.



There is a lack of garbage and animal waste receptacles in the park.



There is a lack of wayfinding within the park and the landscape doesn't easily convey which direction you are going and where you will end up.



There are issues with the scale of signage at trailhead points in relation to the auto-oriented nature of the surrounding area. Signs for the conservation reserve are small and not well placed to attract attention.

Based on these findings, it is apparent that the ORCCR lacks appropriate wayfinding and trail amenities, especially for the target demographics of all *ages*, *cultures*, and *abilities*.

In the TRCA 2015 Budget for Tourism and Recreation, the budget for Conservation Parks (of which ORCCR is assumed to be a part) is $5.2M, but of this budget there is no assigned amount for infrastructure  (TRCA, 2015). It is noted that the 2015 budget has a total expenditures of $22.6M, and a shortfall of $3.2M, so there is no additional funding. However, it is possible to offset some of the costs of providing new infrastructure through targeted user fees (which make up nearly half of TRCA revenues) for new forms of recreation, such as camping, canoe rental, or swim lessons. In addition, it is also possible to raise funds locally for additional infrastructure through sponsorships, partnerships, or donation drives. It is hoped that the 50% increase in funding for trail development can result of some trail expansion and improvement at the ORCCR.

The TRCA completed a master plan for trails at Tommy Thompson Park in 2006. This included trail location and design guidelines, as well as washroom locations [2] (TRCA, 2006). This would be an effective tool for public consultation of desired trail improvements and amenity locations.

The TRCA is also in the process of drafting a Master Plan for Albion Hills Conservation Area, which covers a wide range of infrastructure issues, including matching infrastructure to current recreation trends and linking to historic uses [3] (TRCA, 2015a). While the Master Plan concept is a more intensive and prescriptive process than the Growing Stewardship Strategy, it provides a very useful roadmap and evaluation framework, especially for large-scale actions such as major infrastructure work.

## INFRASTRUCTURE: BEST PRACTICES

Best practices in providing and maintaining park infrastructure generally fell into two groups: Master Plans, and Service Level Review.

Master Plans are often used to guide infrastructure investments through having an "end goal" in mind for what the park should look like. The following are some examples of Master Plans or similar documents in use at TRCA properties and elsewhere:

| Master Plan Best Practices |
| --- |
| • Parks Canada Renewal<br><br>Parks Canada is using Federal Infrastructure Funds for a variety of park uses, including renewing trails and visitor facilities, calling it "a bold commitment towards responsible stewardship of Parks Canada's protected places" (Parks Canada, 2015).<br><br>• Dermott District Concept Plan City of Edmonton<br><br>The City of Edmonton has developed a master plan concept for Dermott District Park, which includes signage, transit stops, community amenities, and improved trails  (Edmonton, 2014).<br><br>• Mississauga Parks Master Plan<br>Mississauga's Parks Master Plan places special emphasis on designing park facilities for all ages and abilities, including diverse recreational opportunities, infrastructure including siting of washroom facilities, and design guidelines for park redevelopment (Mississauga, 2014).<br><br>• The City of Revelstoke's Master Plan<br><br>This plan covers not only parks but also demographics, land use trends, and economic trends (2011). |

# INFRASTRUCTURE: CASE STUDY



Albion Hills Conservation Area Master Plan
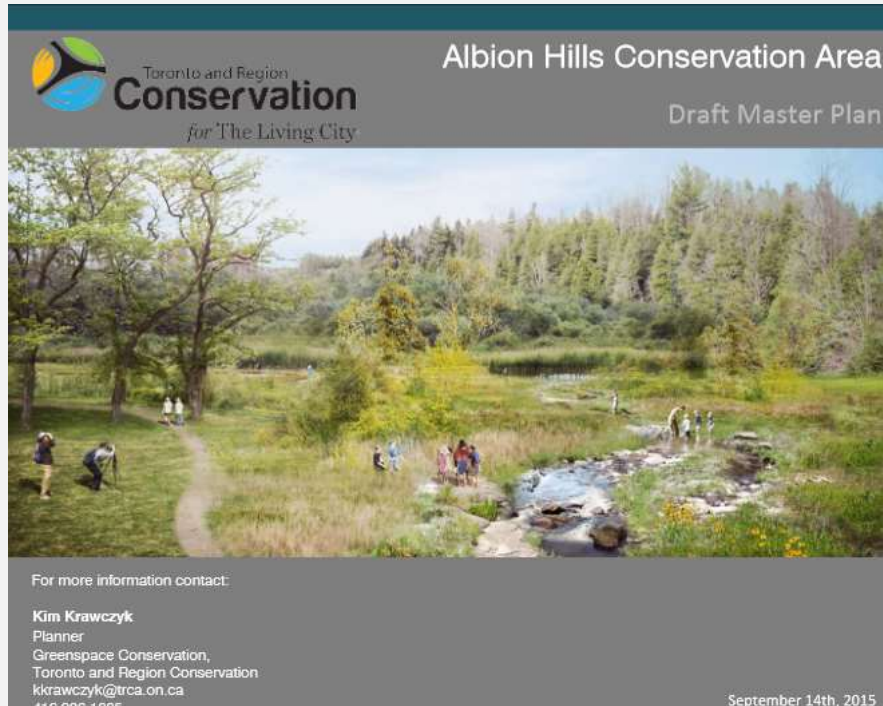
The TRCA is currently developing a Master Plan for the Albion Hills Conservation Area (TRCA, 2015a). This includes an acknowledgement of changing trends in recreation, and working with community and stakeholders to design future infrastructure that will serve those needs. Although Albion Hills Conservation Area is also within the Oak Ridges Moraine, current uses include swimming and camping; these uses could also be introduced in the ORCCR through a similar process of community outreach and understanding local needs.

## INFRASTRUCTURE: POTENTIAL ACTIONS

These possible actions represent possibilities based on infrastructure at parks and Conservation Areas elsewhere. It is important that any future infrastructure at the park be tailored to the needs of its local community as well as its potential users.

### #1 TRAILS

- Expand trails network to create more linkages to nearby residential and non-residential uses and adjacent greenspaces.
- Branded wayfinding at all trailheads and intersections, showing destinations, directions, and distances.
- Improve surface treatments of trails (e.g.: permeable asphalt) to facilitate road bikes, strollers, and wheelchairs.
- Birdfeeding trail loop with signage, birdhouses from local schools, and benches.
- Boardwalks at Bond Lake wetland areas for nature viewing and fishing.

### #2 AMENITIES

- Bathrooms at all major trailheads, Portable washrooms at major intersections
- Waste receptacles as above.
- Drinking water stations at major intersections.
- Rest stations with shaded comfortable benches instead of large rocks.
- Signs advertising special use areas (eg: swimming, BMXing, mountain biking, birdwatching) using park branding.
- Location-based mobile gaming infrastructure (e.g.: Ingress, Pokemon GO!, QR code campaigns) to get the "screen generation" to play outdoors.

### #3 BUILDINGS

- Redevelop the Lebovic Sales Centre as a Visitor's Centre, Museum, Gift Shop, and special event venue.
- The abandoned building at Bond Lake boat launch could be redeveloped into a chalet for ice-skating, or gutted and turned into a structurally secure ruin for exploration or local commissioned art.
- Smaller abandoned buildings on the north side of Bond Lake should be removed or replaced with buildings in support of low-impact camping and lake activities (restrooms, canoe huts, change rooms).

## #4 OTHER ACTIONS

Other potential actions would involve developing plans and partnerships to guide future park infrastructure based on community needs.

- Expand the trails network beyond the borders of the ORCCR by leveraging existing trails in adjacent parks, as recommended in TRCA's Rouge River State of the Watershed Report [11] (2007).
- Work with local transit authorities (Metrolinx and Viva) to get local and regional transit stops at major trailheads to reduce automobile dependency at the park; this would include park branding and signage at nearby transit stops.
- The existing and draft management plans should be upgraded into a single Master Plan for the entire ORCCR, which would include a plan for infrastructure build-out, maintenance, and adjustment over time.

Camping is currently an unauthorized use in the ORCCR, yet several camp sites were noted during site visits. This presents an opportunity to encourage better stewardship of the park through the potential regulation and control of unauthorized activities. Few opportunities for camping exist for residents in the northern region of the GTA. Camping at the ORCCR, especially near Bond Lake, could provide a transit-accessible campground for an untapped market. Camping is already allowed on some TRCA Conservation Areas on the Oak Ridges Moraine (such as Albion Hills) and supporting infrastructure could be built in a way that minimizes ecological impact while allowing the public to enjoy Bond Lake as in the past.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: UPGRADE PARK TRAILS AND AMENITIES

### Laying the Groundwork for a Conservation Park

**The ORCCR needs to be attractive and convenient, while protecting its natural significance.  Therefore, it is our recommendation that park trails and amenities in the ORCCR be improved and upgraded.**

The ORCCR should be made an even better place to *visit*, *play* and *connect* by the provision of improved facilities and signage. Existing park infrastructure should be leveraged to encourage community *education, advocacy* and *responsibility*.

- **Make it easy for everyone to use the trails**

  Improve all intersections and trailheads with basic amenities like waste receptacles, and important features like branded wayfinding and benches. Consider permeable paving high-traffic trails to allow for wheelchairs, strollers, and road bikes, to bring more users into the park.

- **Put forgotten buildings to public use**

  The buildings at ORCCR can be used in a variety of ways to enhance the park experience. They could be refurbished as visitor centres, or gutted and turned into structurally secure ruins covered in local art.

- **Help people find their way in (and out)**

  Better signage at trailheads can help people know where the trails are, where they go, and give them a convenient rest stop on their way in and out.

- **Let people rest their feet and soak up the nature.**

  Comfortable rest stations with waste, washrooms, and water can help to encourage more young and old users

### SITE OBJECTIVES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The recommended actions satisfy our site objectives by providing specialized infrastructure to encourage additional uses while prioritizing conservation at the park, and by improving park trails to strengthen existing connections to the surrounding community with better wayfinding and trail quality

These upgrades will also increase the park's ability to draw people from different demographics by providing improved amenities for users of all *ages*; by providing multi-lingual signage and amenities appropriate for users of different *cultures*; and by making trails accessible to users of all *abilities*.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND PHASING

The Oak Ridges Corridor Park 2006 Management Plan and 2013 Draft Management Plan have recommended actions related to infrastructure improvement, which do not appear to have been implemented based on our observations. Our recommended actions for Infrastructure Improvements are intended as a way to reboot this process by making strategic, high-priority upgrades which are responsive to the needs of the local community.

**Immediate:**

*Asset Mapping and Priority Upgrades*

To achieve this, the TRCA should first create an Infrastructure Asset Map that inventories the condition of all park infrastructure, and identifies all park areas in need of infrastructure upgrades. This should include the following:

- Trail Intersection quality and signage
- Trailhead quality, signage, and location
- Rest area locations and amenities
- Trail surface treatments and walkability

During this process, TRCA can complete Priority Upgrades which address immediate needs, such as adding waste receptacles and temporary restrooms where needed and removing "no trespassing" signs at trailheads.

Following this step, the TRCA could use this updated infrastructure mapping along with other immediate recommended actions to develop a medium- to long-term strategy for infrastructure revitalization at the ORCCR, based on community preferences, additional uses, and a new branded identity.

**Short to Long Term Actions:**

*Wayfinding Upgrades*

Based on user needs, the TRCA should make comprehensive upgrades to signage throughout the park, based on new park branding.

- Include signage at all intersections and trailheads.
- Signage should include information on direction and distances to destinations both inside and outside of the park, like nearby municipal parks, schools, and places of interest.

Renewed wayfinding for the ORCCR should help users feel confident to travel within or through the park, knowing that they are on the right path. It should not only help people find their destination, but help them get there as quickly as they wish to.

*Trail Upgrades and Amenities*

The TRCA should improve existing trail surfaces and amenities, in order to better serve the surrounding community and a wider variety of users

- Permeable paving for bikes, strollers, and wheelchairs
- Frequent rest stops with shade and water
- Permanent, attractive washrooms at major trailheads
- Better Parking and Transit Linkages

Upgraded trails at the ORCCR should support a wide variety of active transportation uses, from strollers to bikes to wheelchairs and everything between. Trails at ORCCR should also support a wide range of users, and not prevent people from using the park by omitting much-needed rest areas for older and younger users.

*Reclaim Abandoned Buildings*

The TRCA should improve visual appeal and reduce user risk by formally taking control of provincially-owned buildings in ORCCR, and reimagining them to serve the needs of the community. The TRCA could refit, replace, demolish, or adjust buildings based on user needs, such as:

- Welcome Centre and Gift Shop at Bond Lake trailhead (old Lebovic sales pavilion)
- Open ruin with local artwork at the trolley ruins site (abandoned brick house at Bond Lake boat launch)
- Replace abandoned small structures on the north side of Bond Lake to support possible future campgrounds

The buildings at ORCCR are currently a public risk and unattractive. They represent an opportunity to create a link to the past reality of the area, telling the story of development pressures and previous development around Bond Lake, while serving current and future needs. By reimagining their appearance and purpose, these structures can become an important part of the park.

It is recognized that these buildings are on lands that are not owned by TRCA. In order to accomplish the reclamation of abandoned buildings, strategic partnerships will be required to develop this initiative.

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION: ONLINE

The Internet has become an integral part of contemporary life. In 2013, 87% of Canadians were connected to the Internet (CIRA, 2014). As the Internet continues to envelope contemporary society, having a strong online presence can help the TRCA solidify its identity in their efforts of conveying conservation and stewardship.

As they are the next generation of park stewards and users, youth and millennials are more inclined to use social media. It is important that the TRCA uses social media effectively in order to engage with the next generation, which is the backbone of the Growing Stewardship Strategy.

Social media allows users to produce social content as well as consume it. The TRCA is able to gain information about its park users through shared experiences on social media as it opens up new ways to learn what is popular based on content posted by users. In other words, it is a good tool to see what the public really wants as it has become the new comments/suggestions box for many organizations. Content posted by users is raw consumer insight.

Integrating a cross-media campaign will reach wider audiences since each communication platform will draw specific crowds. The creative and collaborative space that is the online world can allow for more meaningful engagement between users, their activities, and the TRCA.

A part of our Growing Steward Strategy focuses on developing the online presence of the TRCA that goes beyond social media in order to build awareness and broadcast the message of conservation. A social media reboot is one of our recommendations along with the creation of a consistent online presence.

## ONLINE: CURRENT INITIATIVES

### SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS

There is not a coherent online presence when searching for ORCCR-related information online. When searching for "Oak Ridges Corridor Park", you will find dated Richmond Hill pamphlets, the Oak Ridges Friends of the Environment website, and TRCA management plans for the park under the old name.

When searching for "Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve", you can find TRCA planning documents and management plans, as well as trail information from the Oak Ridges Trail Association.

Most importantly, the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve is not explicitly listed on the TRCA's website under their Places To Visit section, rather it is nested in the Oak Ridges Moraine section.

Additionally, search results for keywords around "Toronto and Region Conservation Authority" or "TRCA" includes a number of different websites and social media accounts.

The online presence for the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve needs to be strengthened in order to increase awareness and exposure of the park's features and the TRCA's values of conservation.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITY

The TRCA is active on multiple social media platforms with varying levels of engagement. This section will focus on the activity generated on Twitter and Instagram, as these platforms are where the TRCA is most active.

The TRCA currently has over 30 Twitter accounts and 5 Instagram accounts; each with varying levels of popularity and engagement. TRCA accounts range from 72 followers to over 5000 followers (**Appendix K**).

To evaluate these accounts, we audited the TRCA's social activity based on its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

| STRENGTHS | <ul><li>Different accounts can allow for different areas of focus; some make sense, others are redundant. Having individual accounts can allows specific areas of focus.</li><li>Twitter has a strong professional network already. Environmentalist groups, community organizations, academics, and professionals have established Twitter presence. It is between these networks where most of TRCA's engagement is occurring.</li><li>On Twitter, @TRCA_news, @TRCAparks are the most popular TRCA accounts.</li><li>On Instagram, @TRCAparks is doing very good engagement with users. They are regramming of users' photos, and liking other users photos frequently. @TRCAparks on Instagram has been collecting followers by the week</li></ul> |
| --- | --- |

**WEAKNESSES/THREATS**

- Too many social accounts. Most of the TRCA accounts are simply retweeting each other. Content becomes repetitive if all accounts are posting the same things.

- Varying numbers of followers between accounts.

- No consistency between accounts in terms of branding, tone of voice, and mission.

- Some accounts post an overwhelming amount of content throughout the day.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- Passionate environmental groups in Toronto and the Region with established social media presence.

- There needs be to an understanding of each social media platform. Each platform has specific demographics and user types. Twitter is for professionals and adults, and it is conversation-driven. Instagram has a notably younger user base. It is also the fastest growing platform on social media right now.

- If the TRCA wanted to focus on the youth cohort, platforms such as Instagram or Vine may be more relevant to youth.

- Direct engagement with followers can grow stewardship when the TRCA interacts with them.

- Social media can allow for a targeted campaign for Growing Stewardship.

The documentation of the experiences on social media is very important to youth since platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat allow youth to be both producers and consumers of social content. It is a readily available and accessible tool that can be used to capture, disseminate, store and share experiences. The TRCA's social media team could begin to identify social media influencers, who are users with large followings, that are willing to champion the TRCA's message of stewardship online.

## SOCIAL CONTENT DRIVERS

The current social content drivers are leisure-related posts. From our scan of social media content in the ORCCR and surrounding neighbourhood, we found that users are posting content about their recreational experiences in the park. Pictures of foliage and selfies with friends or pets are popular.

## ONLINE: BEST PRACTICES

The best practices are drawn from popular social media accounts that are comparable or aspirational to the ORCCR and/or the TRCA.

| Satirical and Youth Focused Social Media |
| --- |
| • Norm Kelly's Twitter @norm <br><br> In the summer of 2015, City of Toronto Councilor Norm Kelly rose to fame as his Twitter account gained local and international popularity. He uses @norm tweets jokes, popular hip-hop references, and Toronto pop culture to stay relevant with the masses. His feed is a mixture of actual information and humour. The popularity with youth solidified his name recognition. <br><br> • @socalitybarbie (Instagram) <br><br> Based in the Pacific Northwest region in the USA, @socalitybarbie posts content of her enjoying life and the outdoors. Nature appreciation is embedded in Pacific Northwest culture and @socalitybarbie pokes fun at users who post conventional content of their leisurely outdoor activities. <br><br> • @omgliterallydead (Instagram) <br><br> @omgliteralldead is a Toronto-based satirical Instagram account that features a plaster skeleton participating in everyday mundane activities. She spends time outdoors and posts Toronto pop culture references. |

To optimize the use of humourous social media, the TRCA can embed the message of conservation in order to communicate Growing Stewardship with users through creative writing and strategic content creation. The wackiness of humour and personality will create a human connection through social media.

| Insta-Meets and Photography Walks |
| --- |

- Instagram has unintentionally created the popular phenomenon of Insta-meets, where Insta-famous (Instagram users with large followings) meet with users and take pictures together. These events bring diverse crowds (different age ranges and subcultures) from all over the GTA. Toronto Insta-meets and photography walks are organized by @Soulection, @IGersToronto, Street Dreams Magazine, 500px and many other companies, organizations and individuals.

- In New York, #CentralParkMoments allows Instagrammers to meet up, hang out in the park, and populate the hashtag in order to share photos and experiences with one another.

- The Toronto Photography Meetup Forum (http://www.tpmg.ca/forum/) is an active online forum where users organize in-person photography walks, share photos and experiences, and critique each other's photos.

Insta-meet and photography walks can bridge the online interaction with real world experiences in order to create meaningful engagement with the community. TRCA can have ecology experts or interesting speakers to host guided tours in Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve.

| Birders in the GTA: Toronto and Southern Ontario Birding Forum |
| --- |

- Birding Forums

  The GTA has a very large and passionate birding community. Birders discuss their experiences of bird watching in different areas of the GTA and share their sightings online through forums and social media. (http://outdoorontario.net/birds/phpBB/)

- E-Bird.org

  A crowdsourced database of bird sightings in Canada (http://ebird.org/)

The TRCA can reach out to surrounding community of the ORCCR to understand how they prefer to communicate to one another, and how they prefer to be communicated to. Furthermore, the TRCA can leverage existing initiatives like eBird to form events and activities for passionate communities in Richmond Hill.

## ONLINE: CASE STUDY

| @JenKeesmat |
| --- |

The City of Toronto's Jennifer Keesmaat has a very strong online presence. She has a strong and influential presence online in Toronto. She runs a very successful Twitter account that combines personal opinions and the City Planning Division's vision.

What makes Keesmaat's Twitter account successful is that there is a human voice behind her messaging. Rather than it being just a broadcasting platform, Keesmaat takes times to respond to users who engage with her tweets.

She also mantains http://ownyourcity.ca/, which is the Official Blog of the Chief Planner of the City of Toronto.



## ONLINE: POTENTIAL ACTIONS

The TRCA can address their online presence with by two potential actions: a social media reboot and/or the development of a digital media strategy. A social media reboot is less costly and quick to implement, but a comprehensive digital media strategy can create a long-term framework for an immersive and engaging Growing Stewardship campaign.

### #1 SOCIAL MEDIA REBOOT

The next generation of park stewards will be heavily invested in digital engagement. A key component to strengthening online presence for the ORCCR is social media. As identified in the TRCA's social media audit (**Appendix K**), there is a lack of consistency in branding and voice across their many accounts.

There is a need for coherent branding/messaging across all accounts. It is suggested that the TRCA close accounts that have small followings or post content that is repetitive. It is problematic when all accounts retweet each other, because the users will see the same post on multiple accounts.

Social media requires a lot of effort and attention. The creation of dedicated social media staff is recommended rather than having social media become an ad hoc responsibility.

The TRCA could reboot their social media campaign while keeping the following notes in mind.

| Current State of Social Media |
|---|

Understand who is using which social media platform and tailor that social content for that audience. The Pew Research Center is a research body that studies Internet usage in the USA.

- Based on their research, Facebook has the largest user base but its popularity is slowly declining.

- 23% of Internet users use Twitter and its largest age cohorts are 18-29 and 30-49.

- 28% of Internet users use Instagram.

- Slightly more women use Instagram compared to men.

- Users on Instagram are more likely to be visible minorities and the 18-29 age cohort dominates this platform.

- There is a higher percentage of urban users than suburban and rural.

- 31% of internet users use Pinterest.

- There are notably more women that use Pinterest compared to men.

- The largest age cohorts on Pinterest are 18-29, and 30-49; and there are more suburban and rural users than urban.

- Facebook is the platform that users visit the most on a daily basis. Instagram follows Facebook in daily visitors but is growing very steadily, surpassing Twitter and catching up to Facebook quickly.

| Keys to Successful Use  of Social Media |
|---|

- Post original content on each account rather than reposting other TRCA accounts. If the TRCA wants multiple accounts for very specific topics, the accounts should really focus on their specific missions.

- Create positive engagements by liking user photos, retweeting, or mentioning people who mention the TRCA. By acknowledging users who post about the park, it creates a positive place for dialogue and the interaction boosts a user's happiness.

- Limit the frequency of posts to 3 maximum per day.

- Be consistent on timing of posts and limits of post.

- Be personable when telling stories online and use a relatable tone. Formal tones are still useful when broadcasting important information.

- Create thematic content and set objectives for engagement.

- Social media should not be at soapbox, be a part of crowd.

## #2 DEVELOP A DIGITAL MEDIA STRATEGY

The development of a comprehensive digital media strategy that goes beyond social media is another route the TRCA can take for strengthening the ORCCR's online presence. A digital media strategy will need to run in conjunction with rebranding activities in order to stay consistent in messaging and identity. The digital media strategy will allow the TRCA to plan out their digital mission statement, which communities they want to reach, what the TRCA wants to say, and how they are going to do it.

For meaningful interactions, online engagement needs to extend into real-world experiences. A digital media strategy can also extend into a cross media campaign – sharing content between social media, print, and other lines of communication. Another way to do so is with influencers. An influencer component in a comprehensive digital media strategy can allow for direct engagement with niche audiences. This component of the strategy will identify influencers that can champion the TRCA's message of conservation stewardship to their users.

The digital media strategy will have to run in conjunction with TRCA branding and can allow for innovative ways to integrate infrastructure, park use, and community outreach ideas from this document. For instance, location-based mobile gaming, QR code educational campaigns, and geocaching can all be integrated into digital media for consumption on mobile devices. These value-added items, however, are dependent on the scale of reinvestment in infrastructure at the ORCCR.

As identified in the Online Presence Current Initiatives section above, there is a need to improve the search engine optimization on activities and leisure of the ORCCR. Implementing a digital media plan can begin the process of populating social media with posts about the ORCCR using different hashtags and geolocation tags.

Once again, a dedicated social media team is recommended rather than an ad hoc responsibility. It is recommended that the TRCA hire a media consultant to help facilitate this process.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: DIGITAL MEDIA STRATEGY
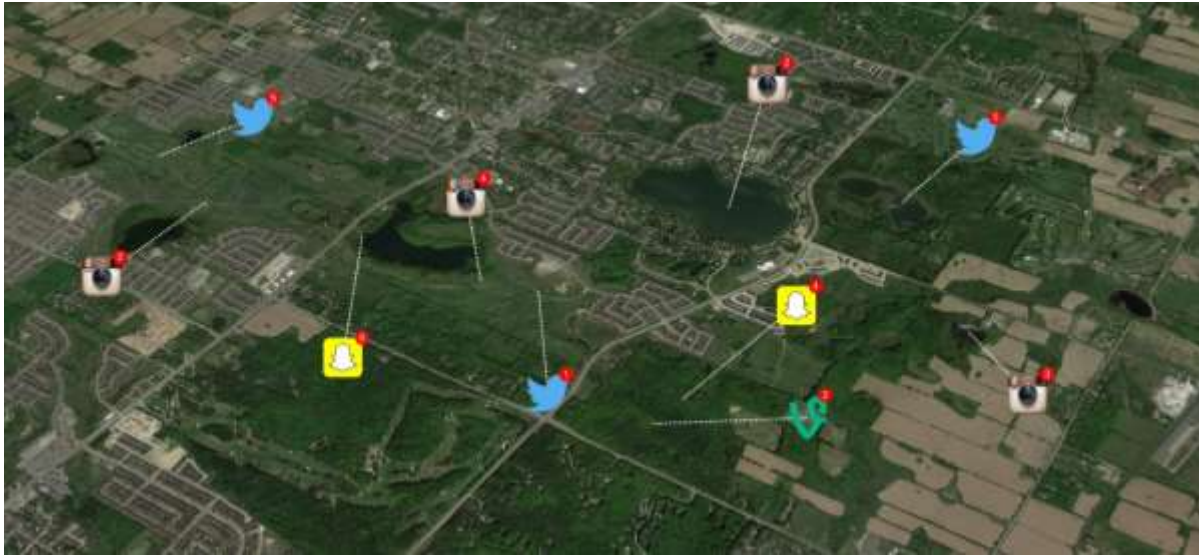


### Planting Digital Roots

**The ORCCR needs a stronger online presence in order to bring awareness to the park itself and the mission of conservation in Richmond Hill. Therefore, it is our recommendation for the development of a comprehensive digital media strategy.**

The priority action that the TRCA should undertake is the development of a comprehensive digital media strategy, as it will map out the TRCA's digital media efforts. The TRCA will plan out their digital mission statement, which communities they want to reach, what they want to say, and how they are going to do it.

### SITE OBJECTIVES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The creation of the holistic digital media strategy will reach the next generation of park users - regardless of their *culture*, *age*, and *ability* - in the communities surrounding the ORCCR and broader GTA. It will envelope a combination of different communication tools that will reach different audiences. Targeted campaigns can be created for specific messaging.

The digital media strategy will bring the message of stewardship online. Permitted recreational uses will be promoted online by the TRCA and the users will in turn share their experiences online, *connecting* real world experiences with social content. The TRCA will look at their online

engagement with community members to understand what users care about. The TRCA can communicate information through a strategic content roll out plan that will effectively grab a user's attention, convey important information steadily, and create the opportunity to establish meaningful and long term engagement with users.

By populating digital media with content about *recreation* in the ORCCR and the mission of *conservation*, the digital media strategy will raise awareness of the importance of the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND PHASING

**Immediate:**

*Retain a Digital Media Consultant*

> The TRCA will need to determine who they want to have work on developing a digital media strategy. The consultant will need to have extensive knowledge of various social media platforms and have an understanding of cross media campaigns.

**Short to Long Term Actions:**

*Comprehensive Digital Media Strategy Development*

> At this stage, the TRCA can identify what they want to say and who they want to reach. This is a phase where the TRCA outlines a digital media vision and mission statement.

> The development team will be able to identify what kinds of features they want to include in their strategy. This can include (and is not limited to) cross media campaigns, real-world meet up initiatives, location-based mobile gaming, and/or QR cofe storytelling initiatives.

> Keep in mind that the digital content needs to be consistent with the TRCA's brand identity.

*Ongoing Strategic Content Roll Out*

> After the completion of a comprehensive digital media strategy, the TRCA will now be able to roll out the content online in accordance to the strategy and brand identity. Content will be published platforms identified in the digital media strategy.
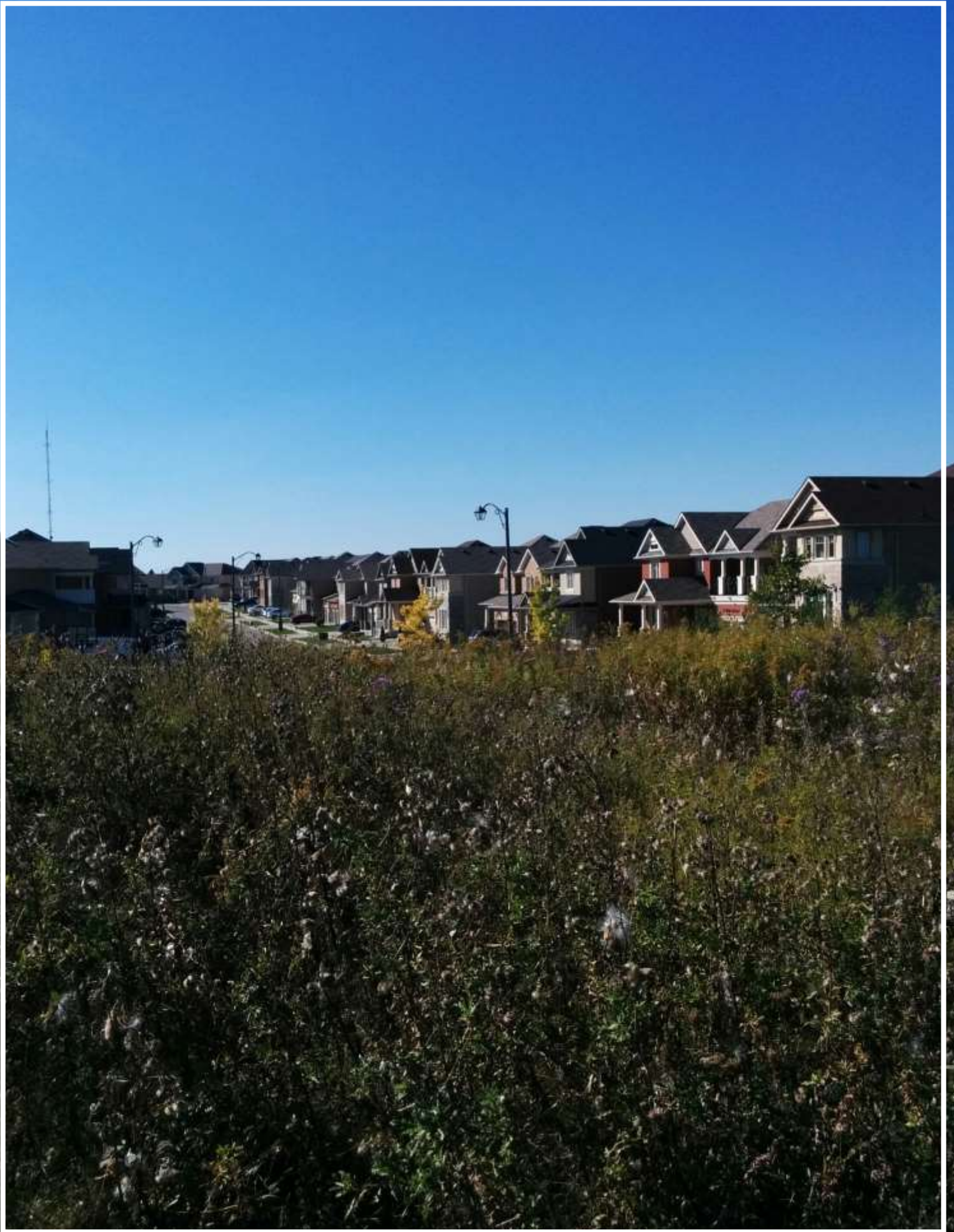
# STRATEGIC DIRECTION: COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Developing an effective community outreach strategy is a key method of making connections between people and places. More specifically, community outreach between the ORCCR and surrounding residents will be a continuous component in achieving the three pillars of our Growing Stewardship Strategy: awareness, experience, and ownership. Environmental organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of crafting a multi-user and multi-point approach to stewardship and conservation in an attempt to diversify the reach of greenspaces and natural heritage features. Given the proximity of users to the ORCCR and the number of people that use the park on a daily basis, there is an opportunity to capitalize on the value of the site and encourage residents and visitors to interact with the ORCCR within and without the park boundaries. The intent of this Strategic Direction is to provide a set of principles upon which to provide a multi-user and multi-point approach to outreach.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH: CURRENT CONDITIONS

### ORCCR INITATIVES

The Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan (ORCPMP) and Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve Management Plan (ORCNRMP) both identify community outreach as central to greenspace stewardship. The ORCPMP speaks about Education and Outreach in three ways: public orientation and interpretation, education and research, and stewardship/community outreach. The ORCNRMP approaches Outreach and Engagement through stewardship, trail captains, and outreach materials. From both of these plans, a number of action items are outlined, including;

- Creating a volunteer stewardship committee to support the integrated management of the new Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve - "Friends of" Group
- Establish a Trail Captains program in partnership with the Oak Ridges Trail Association
- Homeowner information packages, newsletters, and signage
- Development of a trail guide and map that reflects the Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve in its entirety.

In addition to these broad outreach initiatives, the TRCA along with stakeholders and partners developed the Corridor Park Rambler, a biannual newsletter that was mailed out to 8,000 residents, local businesses, town halls, libraries, and the local community centre (TRCA, n.d.: 41). According to the ORCNRMP, this newsletter featured "…management plan updates, event listings and general interest articles…pamphlets on particular topics such as preventing encroachments and reducing unauthorized motorized vehicle use" (TRCA, n.d.: 41). However, it appears as though the newsletter's last publication was in 2010.

It has also been noted in the ORCPMP and ORCNRMP that several organizations already exist in the area and are engaged in stewardship activities related to the ORCCR, such as Oak Ridges Friends of the Environment, Oak Ridges Trail Association, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation and the Richmond Hill Naturalists. The Rotary Club of Richmond Hill also takes part in tree planting initiatives with local schools.

While these groups are an important part of the landscape of stewardship, there are certainly opportunities to broaden participation both from a demographic and geographic perspective.

## SURROUNDING AREA INITIATIVES

The Healthy Yards program is an initiative of the Town of Richmond Hill which was initially supported by the TD Green Streets Canada funding program but is now a continuous municipal program. Its aim is to help area homeowners introduce native plant species into their residential gardens and transition away from chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Similarly, the Backyard Tree Planting Program is a partnership between the Town of Richmond Hill, York Region and LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) that offers subsidized trees to residents in addition to a consultation with an arborist and planting services.

The Oak Ridges Community Centre is also developing an Eco Centre within its building to serve "As a focal point for knowledge and a gateway for eco-tourism" (TRCA, 2010). Just outside this community centre the Town of Richmond Hill is also constructing a Youth Precinct that will figure into the Lake Wilcox Park Master Plan.

## TRCA INITIATIVES

There are also several initiatives that the TRCA is currently involved in at a region-wide scale which could be relevant to the ORCCR either in their present form or slightly modified. For example, the Multicultural Connections program aims to engage Newcomers and reduce cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers. There are a number of initiatives within this program including the ESL/LINC Environmental Outreach Program, Religious River Offerings Program, and the New Canadian Environmental Work Experience Program.

Further examples of the outreach work the TRCA is involved in include, the Professional Access into Employment (PAIE) program, Conservation Youth Corps, Nature Therapy Program, and Integrated Learning Program.

While it is clear that there are several ongoing initiatives related to environmental stewardship at the regional, municipal and community scales, there is still potential to create a more cohesive outreach campaign that cultivates the stewardship ethic of the local community while also creating a sustainable eco-tourism draw for regional populations.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH: BEST PRACTICES

Sometimes community outreach around greenspace stewardship can be regarded as a secondary endeavour following the more technical considerations of maintaining the environmental integrity of a specific site. However, empowering local communities to gain knowledge and build exposure to the environment while investing personally and financially in greenspaces is integral to the future life of greenspace in the region.

Environmental organizations are beginning to shift the focus of their outreach efforts to reflect changing demographics and funding landscapes. Instead of overly privileging natural features over human activity, contemporary organizations are purposefully including local and regional populations in a collaborative approach to simultaneously using and protecting natural resources. Some principles of contemporary outreach include; multicultural and multilingual considerations, accessibility and inclusivity, a focus on children and youth, building capacity/empowerment, engaging a range of stakeholders, fostering partnerships and finding synergies, and finally, establishing shared financial responsibility.

The following are examples of innovative approaches to environmental conservation, recreation and outreach:

| Nature Conservancy of Canada Roving Reporters |
|---|
| • The Nature Conservancy of Canada has a Roving Reporters program, which gives volunteers the opportunity to be reporters for the day at a conservation event. Volunteers can contribute their observations in a variety of media - videos, photographs, interviews, newspaper-style articles, non-fictions stories, etc. |

| National Recreation and Park Association, *Fund Your Park* (United States) |
|---|
| • The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is dedicated to park recreation and conservation at the local level through national-scale awareness programs. These programs are based on their three pillars: conservation, health and wellness, and social equity. The *Fund Your Park* campaign is a crowdfunding platform for local park projects managed by the NRPA. |

| Centre for Sustainable Development Ecopreneurs (Montreal, Quebec) |
|---|
| • The Centre for Sustainable Development in Montreal is a demonstration green building which provides space for stakeholders to unite over sustainable development. The Ecopreneurs event in January 2016 is the Centre's first 'green drinks' event aimed at finding the synergy between business and the environment around the "Ecopreneur" - sustainability-minded entrepreneurs. |

| Arbor Day Program (Calgary, Alberta) |
|---|
| • Arbor Day is an annual event where Grade 1 students across the City of Calgary receive a tree sapling to be taken home and planted on private property. Furthermore, every year schools rotate to host the Arbor Day ceremony and get a special tree planted on their grounds. |

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH: CASE STUDY



| Evergreen Brickworks |
|---|

Evergreen Brickworks is a well-known charity organization promoting green and sustainable cities at a municipal, regional, and national scale. Their mission-driven approach to sustainability has allowed them to remain geographically grounded in the Don River watershed while working effectively through partnerships to advance their message and capacity-building programs (Evergreen, 2015a). The strength of Evergreen's approach is in their emphasis on their ability to tie together environmental and social values, consistently developing innovative ways that various demographics, especially children, can interact with nature. By having a physical hub in the Evergreen Brickworks in the Don River Valley, Evergreen is able to establish an attractive demonstration building that draws visitors and tourists. This building also imbues the visitor experience with important information about the sustainability of the site itself, the Don River Valley, and the larger ecological context.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH: POTENTIAL ACTIONS

### #1 COMMUNITY VISIONING

Organize community visioning sessions to communicate the ecological and cultural significance of the site while also opening up new ideas and values for its evolving identity.

### #2 SCHOOL INTEGRATION

Work directly with schools in close proximity to the ORCCR to develop integrated learning programs which would allow them to create a lasting connection with the park through frequent visits.

### #3 ADOPT-A-TREE

Initiate an 'Adopt-A-Tree' campaign to ensure newly-planted trees are taken care of through their formative years.

### #4 CROWDFUNDING

Start a crowdfunding campaign to raise financial and capital and social buzz around the GTA's 'newest conservation park'.

### #5 NETWORKING

Organize a 'green drinks' networking event for environmental professionals at the Bathurst Glen Golf Course with a guided tour of the ORCCR.

### #6 EVENTS AND MEETINGS

Encourage community groups to hold events and meetings in the park and encourage them to choose sustainable decisions in their organizations.

### #7 LAKE WILCOX YOUTH PRECINCT

Tie the ORCCR into the developing Youth Precinct in the Lake Wilcox area

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: PARTNER WITH THE TOWN OF RICHMOND HILL



### Bring the Conservation Park to the People

**The ORCCR needs to communicate its ecological and cultural value beyond its legal boundaries. Therefore, it is our recommendation that the TRCA and the Town of Richmond Hill work together to develop the Oak Ridges Community Eco-Hub to foster continuous education, connection, and advocacy around the ORCCR.**

Developing an eco-hub in the Town of Richmond Hill will act as an outreach anchor for the community, and as a point of attraction for sustainable tourism to the municipality and ORCCR from the region and beyond. Currently there are several programs occurring across the region, but it would be beneficial for this community hub to create a mandate directly related to the Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve. This would act as a central place to encourage awareness, experience, and belonging of the site through the idea of 'thoughtful recreation.'

Outreach efforts should target a diversity of park users at various life stages and consider accessible and inclusive principles as fundamental to these efforts. Communication materials should be offered in languages other than English where appropriate.

These efforts should be targeted towards a variety of engagement points such as schools, homes, community gathering spaces, offices, retail businesses, institutions, etc. Where specific engagement points may not yet exist in Richmond Hill, these can be created through pop-up events and temporal programming - especially geared toward young professionals and youth.

Finally, conservation education should focus on the ecological and cultural significance of the park in its surrounding context connecting users' activities within and without the park boundaries.

## SITE OBJECTIVES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The recommended actions satisfy our site objectives by deepening connections between the surrounding community and the conservation park. They also facilitate more people to use the park according to updated park use principles of sustainable recreation. Finally, by drawing a relationship between people's behaviors in the park and in their daily lives around the park outreach actions should instill a stewardship ethic into the fabric of the community.

It's clear that the demographics surrounding the ORCCR are changing and as such the recommended actions would take into consideration this reality and broaden current outreach to include new population groups, especially through targeted programs and multi-lingual communication. Having accessibility and inclusivity at the heart of any outreach strategy will further achieve our demographic objectives by ensuring that outreach efforts are also accessible for people of all abilities.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND PHASING

The current outreach initiatives proposed in the Oak Ridges Corridor Park Management Plan and Oak Ridges Corridor Nature Reserve Management Plan rely on existing environmental groups to take the lead in stewardship of the site along with a focus on outreach to area homeowners. These recommended actions are meant to inspire the TRCA and its partners to recommit to the development of a community eco-hub growing stewardship across the ORCCR and the Town of Richmond Hill.

**Immediate:**

*Community Visioning Workshops*

> Consultation materials should be developed building on the brand strategy to re-introduce and re-engage residents in this valuable space.

*Partnership Development*

> Potential partnerships can be mapped out and pursued during this preliminary phase to develop buy-in from a range of stakeholders into the evolution of the ORCCR.

**Short to Long Term Actions:**

*Multi-User Stewardship Group*

> Following from this awareness-raising stage, a Multi-User Stewardship Group can be facilitated with the goal of broad representation from the community. Environmental groups that are already active, such as the Oak Ridges Trail Association and Richmond Hill Naturalists, can encourage those who are new to the ecological and cultural significance of the site, while also participating in the evolving identity of the ORCCR

*Partnership Formalization*

> Partnerships can also start to become more formalized, with agreed-upon mandates to nurture links between the community and the conservation park. They can also build capacity amongst local organizations.

*Funding Infrastructure*

> Set up a diverse network of revenue sources drawing on park user fees, funding/transfers, as well as fundraising, crowdsourcing, and other ideas.
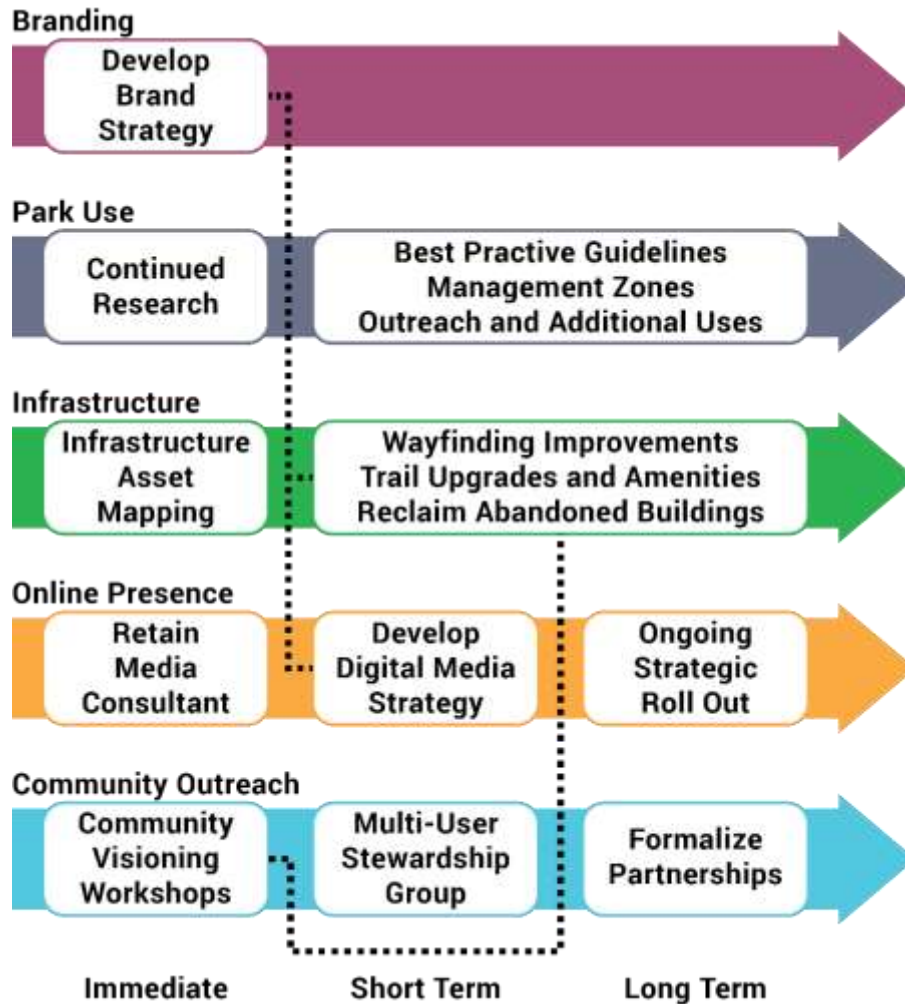
*Conservation Empowerment and Capacity-Building*

> The TRCA can eventually maintain a park management role and an education and training role related to this property. They can do so by empowering local champions to carry on the stewardship ethic in the community.

# TIMELINES

## IMPLEMENTATION AND PHASING

We've created a master timeline incorporating the recommended actions from each of our five strategic directions. These Recommended Actions are arranged based on their relative priorities and time horizons to create an action plan for the TRCA and its partners, shown below:

**Branding**
Develop Brand Strategy

**Park Use**
Continued Research
Best Practive Guidelines
Management Zones
Outreach and Additional Uses

**Infrastructure**
Infrastructure Asset Mapping
Wayfinding Improvements
Trail Upgrades and Amenities
Reclaim Abandoned Buildings

**Online Presence**
Retain Media Consultant
Develop Digital Media Strategy
Ongoing Strategic Roll Out

**Community Outreach**
Community Visioning Workshops
Multi-User Stewardship Group
Formalize Partnerships

Immediate      Short Term      Long Term

Some actions are connected by black dotted lines, which represent actions which are dependent on the outcomes of previous actions.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Brief overviews of recommended actions and their timelines for implementation are summarized below.

| Branding Timeline | |
|---|---|
| **Recommended Action: Brand for Stewardship** | |
| **Immediate** | Retain a branding firm that has experience interpreting the value and opportunities available in conservation parks. |
| **Short Term** | Develop the ORCCR Brand Strategy with the branding firm and then develop a marketing strategy to support and communicate the new branding strategy. |
| **Long Term** | Implement branding in all communications and then conduct surveys of users to determine if the new branding is succeeding with getting community members more engaged. |

| Park Use | |
|---|---|
| **Recommended Action: Make Fun a Permitted Use** | |
| **Immediate** | Continued Research on the uses of the park, both sanctioned and unsanctioned, through surveys, site observations and focus groups, to learn the needs and wants of the community. |
| **Short & Long Term** | Create Best Practice Guidelines for the park with recreational users to identify mitigation strategies of various recreational activities, and establish management zones for recreational use. Gradually introduce additional sustainable recreational uses. |

## Infrastructure

### Recommended Action: Upgrade Park Trails and Amenities

| | |
|---|---|
| **Immediate** | Create an Infrastructure Asset Map that identifies all park areas in need of infrastructure upgrades. During this process, the TRCA can also complete Priority Upgrades which will address immediate needs. |
| **Short & Long Term** | Improve Wayfinding through signage along trails and improved trail maps, implement Trail Upgrades that includes addition amenities such as shaded rest stops or washrooms, and reclaim the abandoned buildings to serve the needs of the community. |

## Online Presence

### Recommended Action: Digital Media Strategy

| | |
|---|---|
| **Immediate** | Retain a Digital Media Consultant to assist with streamlining the TRCA's various social media platforms and build cross media campaigns. |
| **Short Term** | Create an outline of a digital media vision and mission statement through a Comprehensive Digital Media Strategy. The development team will then be able to identify what kinds of features the TRCA will want to include in their strategy. |
| **Long Term** | Ongoing Strategic Content Roll Out. After the completion of a comprehensive digital media strategy, the TRCA will now be able to roll out the content online in accordance to the strategy and brand identity |

## Community Outreach

**Recommended Action: Partner with the Town of Richmond Hill to Establish the Oak Ridges Community Eco-Hub**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Immediate** | Community Visioning Workshops should be organized to provide local residents with the opportunity to learn about the natural heritage qualities of the park and to allow them the opportunity to contribute to the overall vision of the park. |
| **Short Term** | Establish a Multi-User Stewardship Group whose purpose is to provide broad representation of community members and park users so that outreach and coordination of stewardship activities can reach as many community groups as possible. |
| **Long Term** | Formalize Partnerships with agreed-upon mandates to nurture links between community stakeholders and the conservation park and to build capacity amongst local organizations. |

The implementation of these actions will help build upon existing local engagement by cultivating a new generation of stewards of the rebranded Conservation Park.

It is our hope that the Growing Stewardship Strategy will lay the groundwork for subsequent research and analysis on future re-engagement efforts, and the application of park improvements by the TRCA and its partners.

# NEXT STEPS

## FUTURE STUDIO IDEAS

The Growing Stewardship Strategy provides some general recommendations for fostering stewardship for the ORCCR. This strategy will hopefully lay the groundwork for subsequent research and analysis to be completed by the TRCA and partners. It is our hope that this strategy informs further plans regarding branding, park use, infrastructure, online presence and community outreach. Compiled below are brief suggestions for future work that could be completed by either consultants or future Ryerson studio groups.

### COMMUNITY CHARRETTES

Organizing a design charrette involving community members that contributes to the creation of park management zones. Essentially, this will be a visioning exercise with community members to determine what uses and infrastructure should be added to the ORCCR.

### USER SURVEY ANALYSIS

A survey of the users of ORCCR may be beneficial in understanding what people are doing, or want to do in the ORCCR as a whole, not just the Oak Ridges Corridor Park East.

### ECONOMIC STRATEGIZING

There needs to be an economic component to the Growing Stewardship Strategy. One suggested project to support this strategy is an in-depth exploration of potential funding partners, strategic partnerships, and ways to fund the recommendations outlined in this document. The identification of strategic partnerships will help facilitate the Growing Stewardship principles.

### SCHOOL LEARNING PROGRAMS

The expansion of integrated learning programs for area schools may be beneficial for raising awareness and exposure of the ORCCR and its values.

### IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

An environmental impact assessment that evaluates new uses and proposed recreation should be undertaken in order to ensure that ecological heritage is not adversely affected.

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