

2025: Our Year in Review

Friends of Swan Lake Park ended its 6th year focused on the rehabilitation of Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park. 2025 was a very active and productive year and a “milestone” year that will shape the future of Swan Lake Park.

On behalf of the members of Friends of Swan Lake Park, thank you for your support.

Fred Peters, Chair, Friends of Swan Lake Park

Markham Approves Two Critical Actions (June 2025)

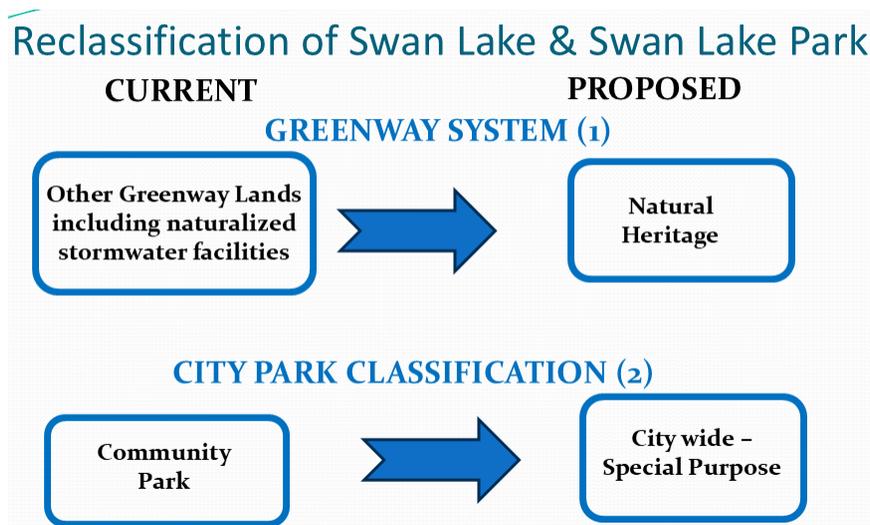
Most of our activities throughout the year are focused on preparing for the annual meeting hosted by the Markham Subcommittee of Markham Council. The Subcommittee is the gatekeeper that determines which actions the City of Markham will support that impact Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park.

Fortunately, at the meeting in June the Subcommittee approved two important milestone activities that will have a long-term impact on Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park.

1) Reclassification of Swan Lake Park

FOSLP was successful in having the Markham Subcommittee approve the review of the classification of Swan Lake Park.

Under Markham’s Official Plan there are two different classification systems that impact the oversight of the park. Environmental status is determined by its classification under Markham’s Greenway system. The park is currently classified as “Other Greenway Lands” and FOSLP has requested that it be reclassified as Natural Heritage Lands, a higher category used for ecologically sensitive areas like Milne Dam Conservation Park and Toogood Pond Park.



Under Markham’s city park system, Swan Lake Park is categorized as a “community park”. FOSLP’s 2024 request for additional shoreline enhancements was rejected because of

“equity with other parks” – but there are no other community parks with a lake in the middle. Only Milne and Toogood have major water bodies with similar shoreline issues.

FOSLP requested that the park be reclassified as a “City-wide- Special Purpose Park” to underscore its ecological sensitivity and significance to the residents of Markham. Our thanks to the 313 area residents that filled out the FOSLP questionnaire to support the reclassification review and to Regional Councillor Alan Ho who was instrumental in advancing the review before Council. We expect the staff recommendations to be outlined in 2027 as part of the new Markham Official Plan process.

2) Water Quality Review

In December 2021, following FOSLP’s pleading that something be done about the water quality in Swan Lake, Markham established a 25-year lake management plan for Swan Lake and initiated a process starting in the Fall of 2025 for the 5-year review of the initial Phase 1 and the development of a plan for the next 5-years (Phase 2).

There have been some significant improvements from the Phase 1 activities but more is needed in terms of both water quality and the aquatic environment to achieve FOSLP’s goal of the sustainable rehabilitation of Swan Lake.

In July, FOSLP received a \$25,000 from a grant from Hydro One. Combined with the \$15,000 contribution from our corporate sponsors UA Local 46 – Plumbers and Fitters, CaTech, Walker Parker Real Estate and Amica Swan Lake we were able to hire two firms of aquatic biologists to contribute to the water quality review. In addition, Dr. Ali Asgary, as part of the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab activities, submitted a detailed assessment of Swan Lake’s water quality based on drone imagery taken throughout 2025.

Our long-term goal is the development of a cost-effective, long-term program that leads to a self-sustaining ecosystem which supports a stable aquatic habitat, complements the biodiversity of Swan Lake Park and provides direct enjoyment and benefits for all Markham residents.

Early in December, FOSLP submitted its recommendations to Markham for the Phase 2 (2026 – 2030) of the long-term water quality plan for the rehabilitation of Swan Lake.

Details on FOSLP’s recommendations for the Phase 2 water quality plan are available at [FOSLP Submits Recommendations for Swan Lake Phase 2 Water Quality Plans \(December 2025\) – Friends of Swan Lake Park](#)

Over the next few months, Markham staff will be developing a draft plan for Phase 2. We have asked them to host a public meeting in March 2026 to outline their Phase 2 plan to area residents before it goes to Markham Council for approval.

Rerouting Stormwater Deferred

In 2022, FOSLP submitted a report to Council outlining options to reroute six stormwater inflows away from Swan Lake. These inflows are the primary source of chloride from road salt that is undermining the aquatic habitat. The FOSLP report triggered Markham’s approval of a \$150,000 engineering study by AECOM. The results of that analysis were submitted to the Subcommittee in June. The engineering report confirmed that over 85% of the chloride could be rerouted from the lake at a cost of \$2.2 million. The Subcommittee approved staff recommendations to defer any action until 2030 (after Phase 1).

FOSLP believes there is a lower cost route option which may reduce the total costs to \$1.3 million and as part of it submission asked Markham to consider proceeding with these changes during Phase 1.

Thank You to the Community for Your Continuing Support

All our efforts build upon the broad community support and the efforts of many volunteers over the years. The following section highlights some of the key contributions made by our volunteers during the past year.

a) Biodiversity Report

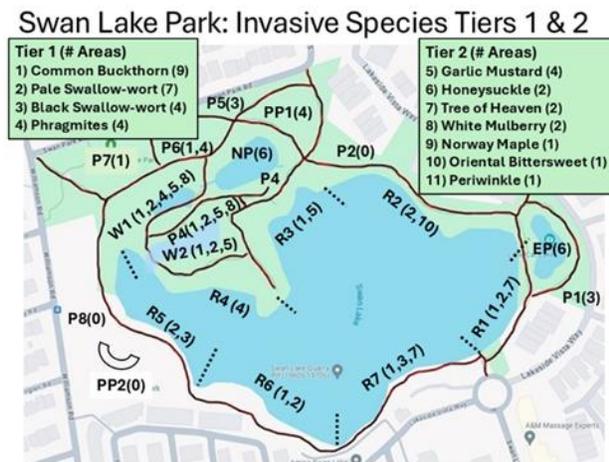
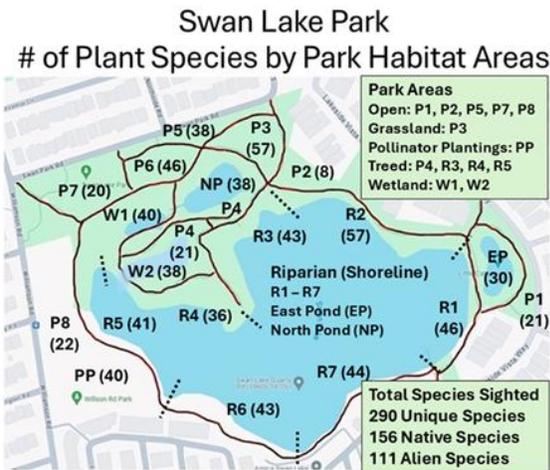
Our Preserving the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park report, documenting the biodiversity of both Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park was submitted in June 2025 in support our request to have the park designated as Natural Heritage Lands under the Greenway system.

Critical Elements of Natural Heritage Network Lands

	Swan Lake Park	Swan Lake
Size	14 ha	5.5 ha
Ecologically Significant	Yes	Yes
Habitat for Species at Risk	Yes	Yes
Key Hydraulic Feature		Yes

Over 65% of the parkland within Swan Lake Park constitutes woodland and naturalized areas contributing to the canopy of the Greensborough area and supporting a wide range of bird and terrestrial wildlife. However, the well documented biodiversity of Swan Lake Park needs protection and nurturing.

Using the PlantNet phone app, 20 FOSLP volunteers went into the park in August 2024 to document the location of 290 different plant species, including 19 invasive plant species of concern.



Swan Lake Park is well known by local birding enthusiasts for its wide range of diverse species with sightings of over 179 species recorded on ebird.org.

In addition, local photographers have documented 14 mammals, 3 species of turtles, 4 amphibians (toads and frogs) as well as 2 species of snakes and 34 species of insects as listed in Appendix D of FOSLP’s Biodiversity report.

In Swan Lake Park, 55 bird species or 30% of all species were categorized by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (“TRCA”) as L3, indicating species able to withstand only minor disturbance. A total of 60% of the recorded species in Swan Lake Park are at risk in the TRCA’s jurisdiction with over 70% of the wetland birds and aerial insectivores rated to be at risk.

Swan Lake has been described by ecologists from the University of Toronto as a “constructed wetland”. Of particular concern are the 32 Wetland Birds reported in Swan Lake Park.

The Markham Official Plan states that a “Key Natural Heritage feature includes habitat of endangered and threatened species and habitat of special concern species.” 15 bird species sighted in Swan Lake Park are categorized as being at risk under both Federal (SARA) and Ontario (SARO) regulations and all of them are protected under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994.



FOSLP's goal is to hire an environmental expert to advise on what can be done to preserve the biodiversity of Swan Lake Park and retain the sensitive bird species currently at risk due to the increasing urbanization in the area.

FOSLP's Biodiversity Report is available on FOSLP's [Preserving-the-Biodiversity-of-Swan-Lake-Park_June-15-2025.pdf](#)

b) Celebrating the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park (June 7, 2025)

On June 7th, over 100 area residents joined Friends of Swan Lake Park ("FOSLP") for a fun day in the park celebrating the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park.

FOSLP members Sheniz Janmohamed and Kathleen Elizabeth Noel led birding, journaling and nature walks while FOSLP's York University partners in the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab displayed drones and Virtual Reality simulation of the features in Swan Lake Park.



c) Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab (2025)

On March 27th, the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab launched at York University's new Markham campus. The York initiative is led by Dr. Ali Asgary, Director of CIFAL York and Dr. Satinder Kaur Brar, Director of York's One Water Institute.

York University researchers hosted Friends of Swan Lake Park for a Design Workshop that outlined the scope of the program and the capabilities of the York team and on May 5th,

project leader Dr. Ali Asgary outlined the scope of the program to over 70 Swan Lake Village residents at an information session at the Swan Club.

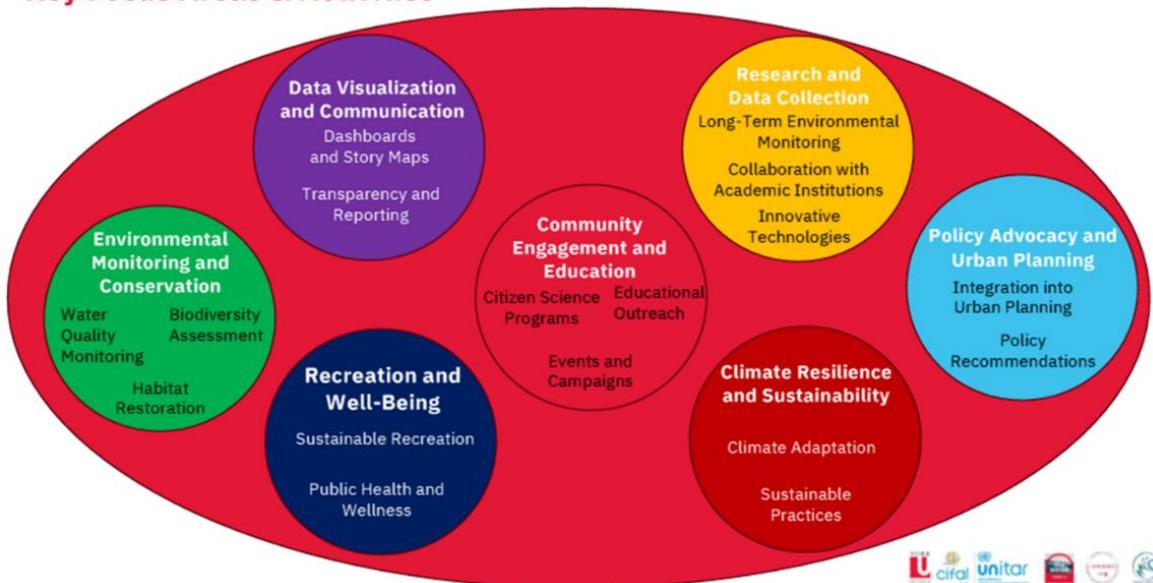
The Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab is a pilot program that will involve environmental monitoring of both water quality and the invasive plant species using four advanced technologies: Drone Monitoring, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality and Simulation.

One of FOSLP’s objectives is to develop a program that will be beneficial for monitoring environmentally sensitive areas throughout Markham. The York team has a more ambitious goal, namely, to use a citizen science lab approach to foster collaboration among scientists, engineers and citizens in the hope of successfully addressing local environmental challenges.

The project leader, Dr. Ali Asgary, is the Director of CIFAL York, which is affiliated with the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNITAR). As educators, one of York’s long-term goals is to develop the program into a format that can be adopted by other community-based environmental groups through the UNITAR and CIFAL Global Network.

The following chart outlines the seven key focus areas of York’s program, but the essential underlying element is the “citizen” component. Success is tied to the ability to engage community participants in both data gathering and educational outreach.

**Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab
Key Focus Areas & Activities**



There were two major SLCS Lab activities throughout the year:

- 1) Peyman Naemi, a PhD student at York, organized “workshops” in the park that included bird walks, nature journaling, nature photography, water quality sampling

and drone monitoring. Sami Khalil Moradkhanloo, a Masters student at York, led a workshop at the lake on the techniques for analysing physical water samples.

- 2) Dr. Ali Asgary and Mahbod Aarabi undertook a comprehensive drone monitoring program of the water quality that involved nine different drone flights over the lake throughout the year. The results were then analysed and submitted to Markham as part of the Phase 2 water quality review. Dr. Asgary’s preliminary report is available at [SwanLakeWaterQualitywith-Drone-V4-Final-for-Submission.pdf](https://www.swanlakepark.ca/SwanLakeWaterQualitywith-Drone-V4-Final-for-Submission.pdf)

To support CIFAL York’s goal of teaching others on the development of citizen science labs, Peyman Naemi initiated work on a documentary film featuring the development and activities of the Swan Lake Citizen Science Lab.

Community Event, Swan Club, May 5, 2025

Mahbod Aarabi explaining the drone controls to local residents



Fred Peters, DR. Ali Asgary, Regional Councillor Alan Ho (l to r)



Drone Monitoring Workshop, Swan Lake Park, September 14, 2025



d) Destination Park Questionnaire (June 2025)

FOSLP endeavours to ensure that its views reflect the community at large and has undertaken several community surveys since our inception to gauge community perspective on the issues before Markham Council. This year was no exception with the focus on our plans to ask Council to consider reclassification of the park.



The initial questions related to the importance of Swan Lake Park as a naturalized area and its reclassification as a Natural Heritage asset.

Over 93% of the respondents are concerned about the possible loss of the biodiversity and believe Markham should be doing more to preserve the wildlife habitat in Swan Lake Park.

88% would like to see Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park designated as Natural Heritage areas.

86% of the respondents would support naturalization of the open parkland areas along Williamson Road if it would help support the biodiversity of the park.

Over 71% of the respondents were concerned about the impact on the park wildlife of an increase in visitors to the park from the expanded Mt. Joy redevelopment.

The questionnaire outlined the nature of possible enhancements that could be considered if Swan Lake Park were to become a Destination Park.

There was strong support for features that were consistent with the naturalized theme of the park, features such as waterfalls (81%) and a Forest Therapy area (78%) and with 54% support for recreational nodes along the shoreline.

There was less support (43%) for facilities such as a boardwalk across the lake or the loss of naturalized areas to additional parking (45%).

Thank You to Our Supporters Throughout the Community

Our success depends on the broad support throughout the community. Our thanks to the many community members for your support throughout the year. To the 600+ on our email list, to the 313 that took the time to fill out our questionnaire and to the many others who joined us at the Swan Club session in May and participated in our day in the park in June – THANK YOU!

Thank You to Our Financial Supporters

Of course, it takes the generous support of many elements in the community to support our efforts.

Since our inception the residents of Swan Lake Village have provided generous financial support and volunteered as needed while the condo corporation has made available use of its facilities to support our monthly and periodic community meetings.

In 2024, FOSLP identified the need to raise \$60,000 to hire professional advisers to support the water quality review and for guidance on the rehabilitation of the habitat in the park. In June 2025, Hydro One awarded FOSLP a \$25,000 grant to support our efforts. Combined with the \$15,000 raised from major contributors UA Local 46, CaTECH, Walker Parker Real Estate and Amica, FOSLP is now able to engage professional advisers to support the water quality review. FOSLP will continue to pursue other funding sources so it can ensure sufficient funds for professional guidance in 2026 for the rehabilitation of the park habitat.

Thank you for your critical support.



Thank You To Our Volunteers

Thank you to all of the FOSLP members and other volunteers who contributed their time throughout the year to advance the cause of rehabilitation of Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park. Your efforts are showing results.

RETURN TO HOME PAGE

[Friends of Swan Lake Park – Save the Lake](#)