

2026: Transitioning from Advocacy to Stewardship

Now in our seventh year, FOSLP is transitioning from its original focus on advocating for the rehabilitation of the lake to organizing efforts that will help sustain the biodiversity of Swan Lake Park.

The Friends of Swan Lake Park's long-term goal is the development of a self-sustaining ecosystem that preserves the biodiversity of Swan Lake Park and provides direct enjoyment for all Markham residents.

Through our years of advocacy, we have convinced Markham to direct resources towards improving the water quality in the lake and to programs that will help sustain the biodiversity of the park, including a review under Markham's Official Plan to reclassify the park as Natural Heritage lands under Markham's Greenway system.

The initial 5-year Phase 1 water quality management program resulted in significant improvements in water quality, but staff have advised Council of the need for a continual management program to maintain lake conditions.

In June 2026, Markham Council approved a \$900,000 budget for an updated Phase 2 water quality program for Swan Lake that will help sustain water quality over the next 5 years of a 25-year plan. Through our funding efforts, we were able to hire two firms of aquatic biologists to contribute to the development of the Phase 2 plan.

FOSLP is now focused on developing a long-term stewardship program to sustain the unique biodiversity of Swan Lake Park in the face of three challenges:

1) Reducing the Impact of Increased Urbanization of the Area

Over 65% of Swan Lake Park is comprised of woodland and naturalized areas that contribute to the canopy of Greensborough and support a wide range of bird and terrestrial wildlife. However, the biodiversity of Swan Lake Park is threatened by increasing urbanization in the area, and it needs protection and nurturing. We have asked, so far without success, that Markham invest in the infrastructure of Swan Lake Park to support the influx of new residents.



2) Sustaining Swan Lake's Aquatic Environment

Swan Lake has been described as a “constructed wetland” and as such hosts many plant, and animal species associated with wetlands. Ontario Nature notes that 20% of the species at risk in Ontario rely on wetland ecosystems.

Continual improvement in water quality and the development of a sustainable level of aquatic life in Swan Lake is essential to sustaining the broader biodiversity of the park. Additional efforts are required to support the species and their habitat within the wetland areas.



Source: Ontario Nature

3) Sustaining the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park

Swan Lake Park is one of the most biodiverse areas in Markham. With 191 species reported on eBlrd.org, the park ranks third for the number of species sighted throughout Markham's park system.

FOSLP's goal is to hire professional biologists to advise on how the land-based habitat can be improved to help sustain the many species at risk, which are facing increasing pressure from intense urbanization in the area.

Earth Day Launch of Two Sustainable Stewardship Programs

Earth Day was Wednesday, April 22, but Friends of Swan Lake Park and many neighbours couldn't wait so on Saturday, April 18 and Sunday, April 19, we filled the park to celebrate and explore its biodiversity, undeterred by the cool, damp weather.

Activities included “Critter Tally”, our effort to find some of the 15 wetland species found in the park, a bird walk led by Kathleen Elizabeth Noel, a Forest Bathing Walk led by Sheniz Janmohamed plus providing volunteers to support the Markham Lion's spring cleanup.

On Earth Day weekend we launched two new stewardship programs:

A) Swan Lake Turtle Stewards Program

The goal of our Turtle Stewards program is to help sustain turtles at risk by following the successful Heart Lake Turtle Troopers program, a program that protects turtles from predators and poachers in several conservation areas near Brampton. This spring we installed nest protectors on three nesting sites in the park to protect the sites from predators.



B) Swan Lake Nature Stewards Program

To strengthen the habitat in the park, we initiated a Nature Stewards program to identify and remove invasive plant species with the goal of replanting the area with native species. We are following the approach of the Toronto Nature Stewards, volunteers who help manage over 50 parks throughout Toronto.



One of our invasive plant tours was led by Marta Donnelly, a leader with the Toronto Nature Stewards, who has coached us on best practices for removing invasive plants.

Marta Donnelly (in vest) with invasive plant volunteers Vicky Ho, Jim Wooller and Andy Allen



Regional Councillor Alan Ho and other invasive plant volunteers



In May, FOSLP volunteers initiated a detailed inventory of plant species in several areas of the park targeted for removal of invasive plants by placing stakes to mark the areas for the plant inventory.

Regional Councillor Alan Ho



Richard Pearce



Julie Yeager



In June, Markham Council asked staff to review FOSLP's request for a 2-year pilot program to remove invasive species from the park. We are hoping for approval by February 2027 so we can launch a removal program for 2027-2028.

Loop-the-Lake Eco Fest: Celebrating the Biodiversity of Swan Lake Park

On June 13th, Friends of Swan Lake Park hosted the “Loop-the-Lake Eco Fest”, an event in the park to increase community awareness of the biodiversity of Swan Lake Park. The event included several children’s nature events, sale of native plants as well as birding, turtle and nature walks through the park.

We were able to raise over \$1,000 from event participants and donors and we thank Park People Canada for their \$2,000 grant to support our 2026 events.



Also, a big thank you to our event partners, Amica Swan Lake, the Markham Lions Club, York University Citizen Science Lab, the Markham Urban Nature store and Danny Fantini for their support. A special thank you to Swan Lake Village Palette Club members for their donations of original artwork and to the local nature photographers who contributed their work as prizes for our donor draw.

At Loop-the-Lake Eco Fest event, Mayor Frank Scarpitti, on behalf of Markham Council, presented a certificate of appreciation to Friends of Swan Lake Park which states:

“In recognition of your dedication to protecting and restoring Swan Lake and its surrounding parkland, and your commitment to environmental stewardship through community engagement and education. We commend your leadership in raising awareness of habitat restoration and fostering conservation through initiatives such as the Loop-the-Lake Eco Fest, which unites the community in support of a healthier ecosystem.

On behalf of the City of Markham, we extend our sincere gratitude to the Friends of Swan Lake Park for your valuable contributions to environmental conservation and community engagement”.



(L-R) Regional Councillor Alan Ho, FOSLP leaders Andy Allen, Kathleen Noel, Julie Yeager, Fred Peters, Toronto Nature Stewards leader Marta Donnelly and Mayor Frank Scarpitti

Funding Efforts

In 2024, we launched a \$60,000 fundraising program to engage professional advisers on developing sustainable solutions for Swan Lake and Swan Lake Park. We successfully raised \$40,000 through grants and the generous support of corporate sponsors, sufficient to hire aquatic biologists to advise on the Phase 2 water quality plan and to support our 2026 operations.

We currently have \$12,000 towards our 2026 funding goal of raising \$20,000 to support two ongoing priorities:

- \$5,000 to sustain our 2027 operations; and
- \$15,000 to engage biologists who can guide us on improving park habitat and protecting wildlife at risk

Thank you for your continuing support.

