

Bring Back the Don

SEASONAL UPDATE

SPRING 2001



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Greening the Narrows

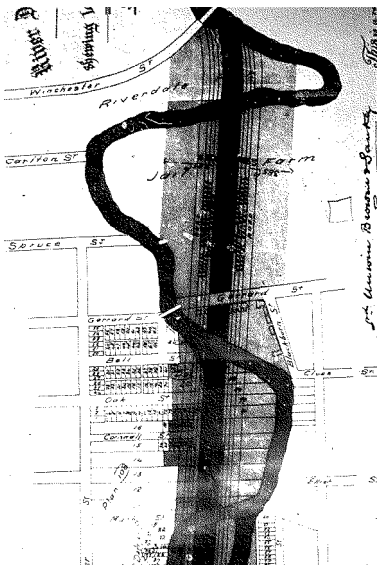
John Wilson, Task Force Member

Bring Back the Don wants to be a catalyst for a new vision of the most challenging part of the Don. We call it the Lower Don Narrows, that section of the river valley between Gerrard and Queen Streets.

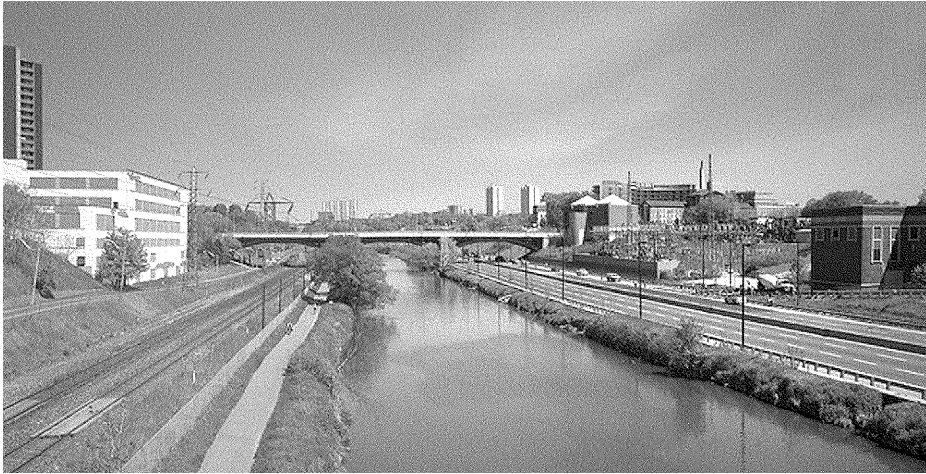
North of the Narrows, the valley broadens into parkland that stretches to the headwaters. To the south, the challenging sections near the river mouth - the Port Lands and the West Don Lands - are getting plenty of attention. But, a healthy river cannot sustain itself with a section in the middle that is so relentlessly unnatural.

The first problem is that the river has been channelized. The late 19th century, (inaccurately named) "Don Improvement" project removed the natural river bends, the soft, vegetated edges and the wetlands on the bottomland. City leaders hoped barges would use the channel to serve new industries. More to the point, they made room for infrastructure - railroads, roads, power corridors and pipelines. Apparently, they gave no thought to how fish, birds, land animals and plants would survive in such an altered environment.

The second problem is one of urban form - the city turned its back on it. Many buildings present a blank back wall to the river. The noise and pollution of the Don Valley Parkway dominate the landscape and repulse the senses.

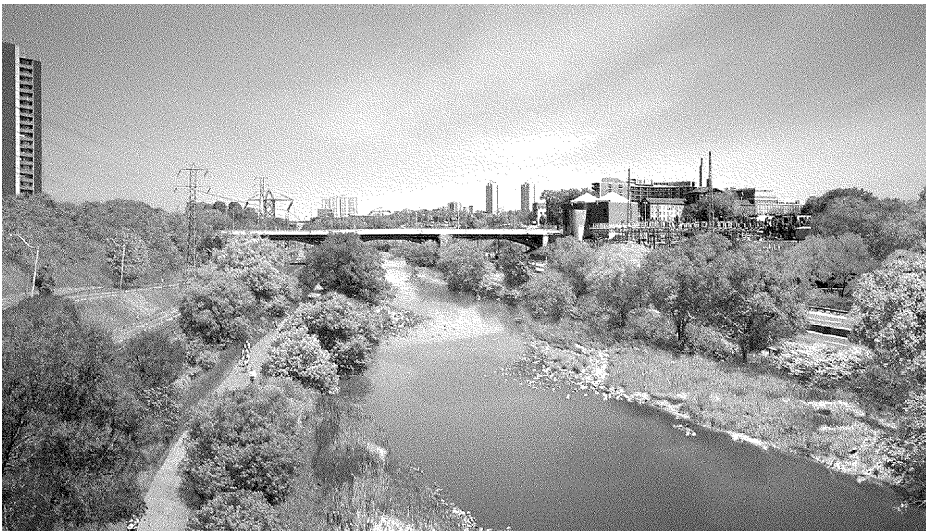


The "Don Improvement" project
Late 19th century



The Don Narrows – 20th century

Imagine, instead, a natural river with a vibrant estuary and profusely vegetated banks. Add to this, an urban scene where buildings graciously face the river and people flock to riverside promenades.



Computer enhancement of the the Don Narrows – 21th century?

We recognize the difficulties to develop this vision, but we notice some signs of hope. The unnaturally wide river channel is making its own softer edge with several gravel point bars that attract water fowl during low flow times, and a few hardy trees on the river banks. Several new businesses are talking to us about landscaping guidelines to improve the face they present the valley. Residential neighbourhoods nearby bring people to the valley edge.

Now, we all need to talk about a new vision for the Narrows. Bring Back the Don has started, first with a computer-enhanced view of a more natural riverbed. In March, we met at St. Matthew's Lawn Bowling Club to take another step in developing our vision. If you live or work near the valley between Gerrard and Queen Streets, we want to incorporate your knowledge and dreams. This vision is a growing thing. We will be trying to find you and all other stakeholders in the Narrows. Give us a call or drop us a line to share your vision.

Issues Update

John Wilson, Task Force Chair

On March 5, the Lower Don received an early Earth Day present - a \$2 million commitment to undertake an Environmental Assessment (EA) of re-naturalizing the Mouth of the Don. Bring Back the Don commends the three levels of government, and we commit ourselves to helping the EA answer all the environmental questions that this project raises.

Environment Canada has taken a major step toward declaring road salt to be a toxic substance under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA). Bring Back the Don expressed its support. While we recognize the safety benefits of road salt, declaring it a "CEPA toxic" substance will lead to careful monitoring of its effects, strict guidelines to minimize its release into the environment, and - we hope - practical, environmentally benign alternatives to its use.

City Council seems determined to permit Tribar Industries to erect two huge signs on the Don Valley Parkway to help finance a suicide barrier on the Bloor Street Viaduct. We recognize the concern that the viaduct is a powerful "suicide magnet". But at what cost? Animated billboards overlooking the valley are not the answer. Please let your city councillor know this!

At Bring Back the Don's February meeting, Tanny Wells officially resigned as our Chair. We thank her for helping us become stronger, more resourceful champions for our lovely, threatened urban river. The Task Force elected me as the new Chair, and Gregor Gilpin Beck and Tija Luste as Vice Chairs. May we serve the Don as well as Tanny did.

The Bow & Arrow Fundraiser for the Don

On February 27, a happy group of Don River friends gathered for a memorable *continued page five...*

Impact of Road Salt Run-off and Snow Dumps on Our River

Kevin Mercer, Task Force Member

Why is road salt a problem? When it snows, we spread salt on the streets and sidewalks. Then we dump the snow in ravines, valleys and parking lots. What is the big deal? We have always done it this way.

Environment Canada/Health Canada's five-year Road Salt Assessment has found that chloride based road salts were so harmful to soil, water (rivers and groundwater), plant life and wildlife that they proposed classifying road salt as an environmental toxic on Environment Canada's Priority Substances List.

This winter, in response to a request from RiverSides Stewardship Alliance, City staff monitored the impact of road salt and snow dumps on its rivers. The Don River significantly exceeded the provincial water quality standard of 250 mg./l. for chlorides with results ranging from 1,200 mg./l. in the German Mills Creek to 850 mg./l. in the river's main branch. In short, we are practically pickling our rivers.

More importantly, Environment Canada estimates that 50% of all road salt eventually seeps into the groundwater table since salt does not dilute and cannot be removed except by distillation.

Early reports indicate Environment Canada Minister David Anderson will confirm the toxic classification but will not recommend actual salt reductions, preferring to require municipalities to write and implement salt management plans.

So how is the City of Toronto doing? The future looks positive. Transportation Services is auditing its salt use practices and anticipates having its salt management plan completed before next winter. New management methods include road temperature sensing, computerized salt trucks, and other plans that could reduce City use by as much as 20%.

As river advocates, it is our responsibility to educate the public about the impact of road salt use. The public needs to reduce its expectations for bare pavement. Homeowners and businesses must be encouraged to use alternatives such as calcium magnesium acetate as a snow melter or sand if traction is required.

By the way, what about snow dumps?

Snow that is collected off roads contains a lethal cocktail of heavy metals, oils and grease, rust and grit, and some de-icing salt. Toronto has 18 public snow dumps and countless private ones. The Works Department is issuing a request for proposals for snow dump management options. Private land owners must be encouraged to take equal measures.

On March 28, Bring Back the Don, RiverSides and other environmental organizations encouraged the Works Committee to endorse the Environment Canada Priority Substances List Report. We commended the City and its staff for their planned efforts to reduce salt use, demanded comprehensive snow dump run-off management and encouraged all councillors to recognize the impact on our rivers from using salt as a solution to snowy streets and sidewalks. Contact your local councillor, Works Committee Chair Councillor Betty Disero and Mayor Lastman and ask them to support a reduction in tonnes per kilometre used on City streets, and to ensure that snow dumps are sited and their discharge treated to prevent heavy metal run-off to our rivers.

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fundraising dinner at The Bow & Arrow Pub and Restaurant in Toronto. The Bow & Arrow donated the dinner's proceeds to the Task Force to Bring Back the Don. Part of the commitment of the Arrow Neighbourhood Pub Group is to support local charitable river restoration efforts in their communities.

We were also pleasantly surprised to find the dining room at the Bow & Arrow decorated with art works of the Don River. Toronto artist Fred Wood displayed his scenes of the river. Fred Wood's Don River series can be seen at The Simcoe Gallery. Call 416-408-1616 for show times.

Plant it and They Will Come

The appearance of beavers is just part of the natural succession of the marsh. Over time, the trees should return. In the meantime, we have wrapped several other mature cottonwood trees with chickenwire as protection.



Beaver damage at Chester Springs March, Fall 2000.

The Story of the Don

Our new brochure

The Task Force is publishing a new brochure. It describes what we do and suggests what you can do at home and in your community to help bring back the Don. Through text, archival images and recent photos, we tell the story of the Don over the past 200 years. It will make a great poster! If you would like a copy, contact the Task Force office at 416-392-0401.



Bring Back the Don

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours.

For more information about any of our planting events, please call 416-392-0401.

Plantings

Plantings are fun for families, individuals and groups. We provide shovels, gloves and other tools. You need to wear sturdy shoes and clothing that can withstand a little dirt.

Milne Hollow, Tree and Shrub Planting

Saturday, April 21 - 10am

The park entrance is located on the south side of Lawrence Avenue East, just east of the Don Valley Parkway exit. Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the hill.

North Toronto Treatment Plant, Tree and Shrub Planting

EARTH DAY

Sunday, April 22 - 10am

Located behind Loblaws at Millwood Road, between Laird Drive and the Leaside bridge over the Don. Look for the blue and white Works signs.

Lower Don Trail, Tree and Shrub Planting

Saturday, April 28 - 10 am

Plant trees and shrubs along the channelled section of the Don, south of Gerrard Street. Meet at the Riverdale Footbridge between Riverdale Park East and Riverdale Farm.

Lower Don Trail, Tree and Shrub Planting

Saturday, May 12 - 10am

Plant trees and shrubs along the channelled section of the Don, south of Gerrard Street. Meet at the Riverdale Footbridge between Riverdale Park East and Riverdale Farm.

Yellow Creek Meadow, Tree, Shrub and Wildflower Planting

Saturday, May 26 - 10am

Planting where Yellow Creek once flowed. In Park Drive Ravine, on the east side of Mount Pleasant Road, and just south of Roxborough Drive.

Nordheimer Skunk Cabbage Patch, Tree, Shrub and Wildflower Planting

Sunday, May 27 - 10am

In Nordheimer Ravine, just west of Spadina Road and south of St. Clair Avenue West, where a tributary stream of the Don once flowed. Access park from Boulton Drive, Spadina Road or St. Clair Ave. West. Street parking on Boulton Drive. St. Clair West subway station is the closest.

Milne Hollow, Wildflower Planting with Friends of the Don East

Saturday, June 2 - 10am

Park entrance is located on the south side of Lawrence Avenue East, just east of the Don Valley Parkway exit. Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the hill.

North Toronto Treatment Plant, Wildflower Planting

Sunday, June 3 - 10am

Located behind the Loblaws at Millwood Road between Laird Drive and the Leaside bridge over the Don. Look for the blue and white Metro Works signs.

Roycroft Wetland, Shrub and Wetland Planting

Saturday, June 9 - 10am

Roycroft Park is in Nordheimer Ravine, east of Spadina Road. Access park from Boulton Drive, Spadina Road or St. Clair Avenue West. Street parking on Boulton Drive. St. Clair West subway station is the closest.

Don Valley Brick Works, Wildflower and Wetland Planting

Sunday, June 10 - 10am

On the west side of Bayview Ave, just south of Pottery Road. Look for the brick buildings. Lots of parking available.

Craigleigh Gardens Wildflower Planting

Saturday, June 23 - 10am

Planting in a wooded area below the formal Craigleigh Gardens, on South Drive between Glen Rd. and Elm Ave. in Rosedale. Meet at the gate to the footpath (Milkmen's Road) off South Drive.

Don Valley Brick Works, Wildflower and Wetland Planting

Sunday, June 24 - 10am

On the west side of Bayview Ave, just south of Pottery Road. Look for the brick buildings. Lots of parking available.

Walks

Join the Bring Back the Don for monthly walks of the Lower Don - along the Lower Don Trail passing through Riverdale Park East, Chester Springs Marsh and other naturalization sites.

May 24, June 14, July 19 and August 16, 6 pm - 8 pm.

Meet at Broadview subway station.

16th Annual Don River Walk with Task Force member Dalton Shipway

Saturday, May 5, noon - 3 pm

Meet at Todmorden Mills on Pottery Road for a walk that explores the North Toronto Treatment Plant site, The Leaside Dump and other habitat opportunities.



Bring Back the Don

UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours.

For more information about any of our planting events, please call 416-392-0401.

Volunteers

Other Bring Back the Don volunteer opportunities.

Group Planting Events

Attention teachers, youth groups and community organizations
Bring Back the Don holds planting events during the week and invites you to sign up your group. Interested individuals are also welcome. Events usually run from 9:30 to 11:30 am. Please call Keri at 416-392-0373 for a list of the weekday events.

Stewardship and Monitoring Programs

Again, Bring Back the Don will be running its Stewardship and Monitoring Programs at several restoration sites in the Lower Don Watershed. Come to an information session for new and past participants at Metro Hall, Room 304, on May 2 at 7p.m. A great way to experience nature in the city! Call Keri at 416-392-0373 for more information.

Task Force Sub-Committees

Our Communications Team is looking for volunteers to help with some exciting education and outreach projects. Or if you are interested in learning more about the Task Force's habitat restoration and water quality projects, join our Projects Team. The Task Force Policy/Planning Team examines policy and strategies issues for the Task Force.
If you are interested in joining one of the sub-committees, call the Task Force office at 416-392-0401.

Other Peoples' Events

Stepstone to the Don

Tree and shrub planting in Sackville Park,

Sunday, April 29 - 2pm

Sackville Park is located at King and Sackville. Call 416-392-0401 for more information.

Tree and Shrub Planting with Friends of Glendon Forest

Saturday, May 5, 10am - 12 noon

Located across the river from the horse stables in Sunnybrook Park (behind Sunnybrook Hospital). Meet in the clearing on the west side of the bridge. Call Kim Statham at 416-392-1339 for more information.

Toronto Region Conservation Authority

Annual Paddle the Don event

Sunday, May 6 - 9 am - 12 noon

Bring your own canoe/kayak, paddles and life jackets. Paddle the Don from Serena Gundy Park to the Keating Channel. To register, call 416-661-6600 ext. 5397.

Festive Earth Society

Spring Fair in Riverdale Park East

Sunday, May 6 - 11am - 6pm

Call 416-469-2977 or email information@festiveearth.com for more information

Taddle Creek Watershed Initiative and partners

Walks of the buried Taddle Creek:

Upper Taddle,

Sunday, May 27, 11am - 2pm

Lower Taddle,

Sunday, June 10, 11am - 2pm

Taddle Creek was once a major stream emptying into Toronto Bay. Today it lies buried beneath the city as part of its sewer system. Interpretative walks along the course of the stream highlight points of interest, past regeneration activities and opportunities for "daylighting" Taddle Creek. Call Eduard Sousa at 416-599-4171 for details and to register.

Walks with RiverSides Stewardship Alliance

Friday April 27, Sunday May 27,

Sunday, June 24 - 10am - 12 noon

Come on a fascinating walk that follows the path of rainwater from where it falls in our neighbourhoods, enters the City's underground sewer system and discharges into local rivers and the Bay. Learn how every house, school and business can be part of the clean water solution. Walk includes hilly terrain and short, off-trail excursions. Meet outside the Chester Subway station (Danforth line). Call RiverSides at 416-392-1983 to register.

Friends of the Don East

A walk in Taylor-Massey Creek

Saturday, July 7 - 10am - noon

Please email fode@web.ca or call 416-410-7153 to confirm date, time and location of these and other events.

Federation of Ontario Naturalists

Woods Talk Conference, June 14 - 17

Held at York University

For more information, call

416-444-8419 or

email fon@event-horizons.com

THANKS TO OUR 2001 FUNDING PARTNERS!

So far this year, funding for Task Force projects has come from: City of Toronto, Environment Canada, Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, Unilever Canada, Toronto Remedial Action Plan, Toronto Community Foundation, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Shell Canada, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Great Lakes Renewal Foundation, Tree Canada Foundation, Deloitte Consulting, and the Bow & Arrow Pub & Restaurant.

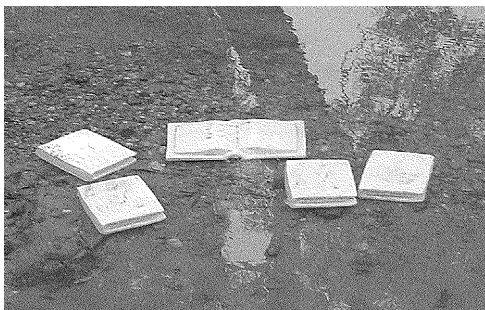
Bring Back the Don also thanks the youth from Covenant House and Serve Canada who have participated in our many events and projects, and contributed to "bringing back" the Don watershed. Thanks as well to Boundless Adventures, Youth Challenge International and the many other schools, youth and community groups we have worked with. Your involvement is much appreciated!

Natural Art at Chester Springs Marsh

Bonnie Devine, Wendy Macmillan, Leighanne Strain, Kevin Kilpatrick and Sylvie Treu Walsh are a group of local artists, known as Plan One, who spent the first weekend of June 2000 in the Don Valley making and showing their artwork. Plan One describes their project:

The show came out of a desire to naturalize our art practices and to explore the contradictions we might discover by situating art outside a gallery or academic environment. The Don River Valley echoed these contradictions - as industrially conditioned land, in the middle of a city - in its struggle to reclaim a natural state.

The works appeared to wash away on the last night of the project, after a storm raised the water level. Most works emerged a few days later filled with snails, wrapped in weeds, or partially buried under the silt. The artists intended to leave the site as they had found it, after giving their art works enough time to come to some organic conclusion. The water's force brought this on quickly.



Plan One exhibit: "Books" by Kevin Kilpatrick



"Escaping 1.1", by Sylvie Treu Walsh

BRING BACK THE DON

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don is a 23-member citizens' group sponsored by the City of Toronto that works to "bring back" a clean, green and accessible Don River Watershed.

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don
Metro Hall
23rd Floor
55 John Street
Toronto ON M5V 3C6

For information about events or activities, please call 416-392-0401, or e-mail us at driver@city.toronto.on.ca.

Bring Back the Don events are posted on the City of Toronto's Web site: www.city.toronto.on.ca/don

DOING RESEARCH ON THE DON?

A collection of Don River materials is housed in the Urban Affairs Branch of the Toronto Public Library at Metro Hall, 55 John Street (John at King). Call 416-397-7241 for more information.

Information about the restoration of the Don can also be found on the web site of Task Force member Mark Wilson: www.mwilson.on.ca/wilson/don.html.



Quote of the Season

"The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit."

Nelson Henderson