

# Bring Back the Don

SEASONAL UPDATE

Spring 2007

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# D'oh a Deer

By guest writer, renowned Toronto blues musician, Danny Marks

Imagine a place in the sun where the sound of the wind in the leaves softly overpowers the roar of the traffic and the city itself. To see deer within minutes of Carlton and Parliament, fish in the river and hawks in the sky renews faith in rebirth on all levels. From the cliffs of the Brickworks to the Bloor Viaduct, all the way to the Sunnybrook Stables, the Valley introduces open space, life and beauty to the chaos of downtown Toronto. The Don Valley is an escape to nature within the city, a swath of green freshening the air and invigorating heart and soul. Saving and savouring the Don River Valley now and for the future is our goal.

As I stepped out yesterday for my daily trek by the river, I wondered if I would see a new critter, or more accurately, which new critter I'd see. Every day I see somebody I haven't seen before, and every day I try to take a new path. As it turned out, I didn't have long to wait. Looking up towards the highway, I caught a glimpse of steel rail through the trees, a spur line that runs parallel, and just beside the DVP. It hugs the sides of the valley and climbs, leaving the river below.

Pushing my way through the bush I ascended and walked the rails north of the



mighty Bloor Street Viaduct. Off in the distance I noticed the track pass over a trestle bridge, high above the ground. As I got closer I could see two trestles, dovetailed, leading over the Brickworks and beyond, green forest beckoning and hawks circling in the sky above. The tracks were rarely if ever used (they looked rusty) but with no railing offered and only ledges at intervals, I decided the fear factor was too much for me. The big sign read *Train Time is Anytime*.

I took the option of scaling down the cliff-side and back into the river valley. Down I went, clutching at limbs and branches along the way. Upon reaching the bottom,

I followed a dried up creek bed curving towards the main stream. Looking down, I noticed that the earth was, typically of the region, clay. It was then that I saw the distinctive cloven hoofprint of a deer. I stopped to wonder at it, and then glanced back up the way I had just descended.

That's when I first saw her. She was large, big as a donkey, her deep brown-eyed gaze fixed quizzically at me, ears scoping for sound and not budging otherwise. I called out, "there you are" and advanced halfway up to her, then stood still, as did she. No-one moved for the longest time, except her ears still flitting about, like radar trying to catch a sound. I stood awestruck, marvelled at my good fortune, to see such a majestic creature in the wild, and so close to home.

I turned and walked back down the hill to the creek bed. When I looked back, she was gone.

*Danny Marks performed a benefit concert for Bring Back the Don in November 2006 as part of the Hearts Open Toronto concert series. Sincere thanks to Danny, his band, Zuzana and the entire Hearts Open gang! For more information about these monthly benefit concerts, visit [www.heartsopen.ca](http://www.heartsopen.ca).*

*The Task Force to Bring Back the Don reminds everyone to stay off rail lines and all private property along the Don River.*



PHOTO BY JOHN ROUTH

Green Heron and Great Blue Heron at the Don Valley Brick Works.

## New City Council, New Opportunities for the Don River Watershed

*Aynsley Morris, Task Force Member*

**A**t long last, politicians are reawakening and putting the environment back on the top of the political agenda. It's a welcome change for those of us who dedicate ourselves to protecting the planet. With a new Toronto City Council in place for a four-year term, those of us working to bringing back a clean, green and accessible Don River watershed hope that this spotlight on the environment will mean great things for Canada's most urban river.

We asked a few members of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don to tell us what they think City Council's priorities should be for the Don River this term.

Task Force Chair, John Wilson, says "It's all about the water. We need to take seriously the challenge of keeping water clean when it falls as precipitation. And when we fail at that, we've got to clean it before it gets to the river (and the lake). That's what Toronto's Water Pollution Solution is supposed to deliver."

Ron Ballantyne, the Task Force's Planning and Policy Team Chair, wants Council to take a firm position to curtail further advertising and signage in the Don Valley corridor. "There is a noticeable increase in the amount of signage, billboards and electronic notices in the valley," says Ron. "If this keeps up, the Don Valley will look like the Gardiner, an advertiser's paradise. The Don's natural beauty needs to be preserved and enhanced, not taken over by commercialism. New signs (mostly electronic) have appeared further north from the foot of the Don and, more and more, there are other types of signage all along the Don, such as large fabric signs on apartment buildings and Hummers with advertising on them parked strategically at the intersection of Don Mills and Eglinton."

*Continued on page six*

## At Issue

*John Wilson, Task Force Chair*

In March 2007, City Council reconstituted the Task Force to Bring Back the Don for a new term. The changes on the Don since 1989 have been remarkable: new trails, forests, wetlands and thousands of Torontonians discovering and restoring wild nature in the midst of their city.

Great successes. So what more is there to do? Finally, we're getting a fuller picture of the implications—and costs—of restoring a river in a city that was built when clean water was seen as expendable.

The city is launching an environmental assessment for a project that envisions intercepting the combined sewer outfalls that are fouling the river and waterfront, at a cost in the range of \$400 million, phased in over time.

Construction of the flood protection landform in the West Don Lands is underway. The renaturalized Mouth of the Don has a projected price tag in the range of \$70 million (subject to environmental assessment). The Lower Don Innovative Design Competition, scheduled for April 2007, may give us clearer ideas as to what the mouth can become. *Watch for public exhibits where your participation is encouraged in judging design submissions.*

New transit ways are proposed by the city to improve service in Don Mills and take pressure off the DVP, but no price tag has been suggested for building them while delivering a "net gain" to the environment in the Don.

Restoring the Don Valley Brick Works is moving forward under Evergreen's direction with a price tag in the \$40 to \$50 million range.

These proposals don't address city-wide issues like mandatory downspout disconnection, green building standards and rainwater harvesting—all important parts of integrated watershed management to restore our urban rivers.

The mandate of the Task Force is just coming into full view, and it's big!

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours.  
For more information about any of our events, please call 416-392-0401.

## Spring Hikes and Bike Tours

**22nd Annual Don River Walk: "The Philosophy of Regeneration Ecology"**  
**Saturday, May 12, 2007, noon – 3 p.m.**  
Meet at the Broadview Subway Station. Leader Dalton Shipway.

**The "Lost Toronto Islands" Bike Hike**  
**Sunday, June 24, 2007, 2 p.m.**  
Start at the small Kiwanis Parkette at the south end of Leaside Bridge, north of O'Connor Dr. on Pape Ave. Please note that this will be exclusively a bicycle event. It will NOT take place on Toronto Islands. Rather, we will discover vestiges of a prehistoric Lake Iroquois Baymouth Bar analogous to today's Islands. We will be cycling almost exclusively on city streets, not trails, at moderate speeds. We will stop for observations at a number of locations of geological and cultural interest. The end point will be the Rosetta McClain Gardens at Kingston Rd. and Glen Everest Rd. (east of Birchmount Rd.). Duration 2-3 hours; total distance about 14 km. Leader John Wilson in association with the Toronto Green Community and the Toronto Field Naturalists.

## Other Events in the Don

**Riverdale Farm Planting**  
**Saturday, April 21, 9:30 a.m. – noon**  
Join City staff at the Riverdale Farm. The Farm is located at 201 Winchester St, three blocks east of Parliament St. and three blocks north of Gerrard St East. Planting site is at the East end of Winchester Street. Partners: Riverdale Farm

**Trees Across Toronto!**  
**Saturday, April 29, 10 a.m. – noon**  
Join City of Toronto's Deputy Mayor and Tree Advocate Joe Pantalone for this signature event of the Tree Advocacy Planting Program. Five locations across the City:

- Colonel Sam Smith Park – Mayor and media site
- Eglinton Flats Park
- Sun Valley – Lower Don Valley
- Earl Bales Park
- McCowan Park

Please visit [www.toronto.ca/tapp](http://www.toronto.ca/tapp) or call 416.392.LEAF for more details.

**Lower Don Parklands Planting**  
**Saturday, May 5, 10 a.m. – noon**  
Come plant with City staff. Meet at the Beechwood Drive access, near the police dog training facility.

**Cedarvale Ravine Tree and Shrub Planting**  
**Saturday, May 12, 10 a.m. – noon**  
Join City staff and help kick off the City's 'Families in Nature' woodland improvement and wet meadow creation project. Located in Cedarvale Park, at the Markdale Avenue entrance. The Task Force to Bring Back the Don is a partner in this event, along with the friends and family of Karen Nasmith and Paul Gifford, in recognition of their wedding.



## Mark a Watershed Moment and Give the Gift of the Don

Do you know someone who's about to celebrate a watershed moment in his or her life? Why not celebrate the event with a tribute gift to the work that the Task Force to Bring Back the Don is doing in the Don Watershed? We will send the celebrant a special certificate marking the event. You'll get a receipt for income tax purposes.

You can do this at any time of year. Celebrate events, birthdays and holidays with a gift to the Don. To make it even easier to give to the Don, we've included a postage-paid envelope with this newsletter!

Send your donation to: Task Force to Bring Back the Don, Metro Hall, 23rd Floor, 55 John St., Toronto ON M5V 3C6

I am honouring a watershed moment in a friend or family member's life. Please send me a special Bring Back the Don certificate.

Please mark the event as: \_\_\_\_\_

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Events happen rain or shine, and usually last a couple of hours.  
For more information about any of our events, please call 416-392-0401.

## Lost Rivers Walks

### • Earth Day

**Sunday, April 22, 2 – 4p.m.**

Start Summerhill TTC Station, end Summerhill Ave. A walk to observe some Earth features with a stress on fossils, earth materials and landforms. Walk difficulty: moderate. Only difficulty is walking uphill from Summerhill to St. Clair, the rest is easy. Leader Ed Freeman.

### • Lost Creeks of Earl Bales Park

**Sunday May 20, 2 p.m.**

Start at the south-east corner of Bathurst St. and Sheppard Ave., end at Bathurst St. and Wilson Ave. Explore the topography of Earl Bales Park, home to several creeks and former creeks tributary to the West Don. Hopefully we will be in good time for the spring ephemerals still to be found in the park, and for inbound migratory birds. We will also get an update on plans for a storm water retention pond towards the south end of the park. Moderate difficulty—lots of hills and possibly muddy paths. Leader Helen Mills.

### • Backyard Sustainability for UN International Environment Day

**Saturday June 9, 2 p.m.**

A joint walk with LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests). Start outside St Clair Subway Station, south side of St. Clair (just east of Yonge). Fragments of Lost Rivers still flow in the city and, even when they don't, they leave a pattern in the landscape. In the same way, Toronto has many "Lost Forests", relict trees that still reflect the local character of the original forests. One of the most remarkable grows all along the top of the old Lake Iroquois shore cliff (the Davenport Hill). On this walk we will be exploring magnificent oaks in the "Lost Forest" of the Mashquoteh watershed. In honour of International Environment Day, we will be talking about the "Natural Step", trees, water and the "natural steps" you can take in your own backyard. An easy walk along city streets. Walk Leaders: Helen Mills, Todd Irvine of LEAF and Andrew Roy of Green Gardeners.

## Friends of the Don East

For spring event schedule, check [www.fode.ca](http://www.fode.ca)

## Taylor-Massey Project

For spring event schedule, check [www.tmp.org](http://www.tmp.org)



The Nordheimer Ravine

PHOTO BY SUSAN AARON

For complete spring event schedule, visit [www.lostrivers.ca](http://www.lostrivers.ca)



## Bring Back the Don

**Yes, I want to mark a watershed moment in the life of a friend or family member!**

My donation is:  \$200  \$100  \$50  \$25  Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I've enclosed a cheque payable to: "City of Toronto, Task Force to Bring Back the Don"

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

The personal information on this form is collected under the authority of the City of Toronto Act, 2006, s.136, and By-law 272-2007. The information is used to process your donation and issue receipt. Questions about this collection can be directed to Bring Back the Don Task Force Coordinator, City Planning Division, 23rd floor, Metro Hall, 55 John Street, Toronto ON M5V 3C6, or 416-392-8575.

*Thank you for your support!*



Map of Crother's Woods Trails.

Crothers' Woods.

## New Crothers' Woods Management Plan Unveiled

### Task Force Member John Routh Comments

The long awaited management plan for Crothers' Woods was presented to the public at a meeting at City Hall in early March. The meeting was well attended by the environmental community as well as the mountain bikers. There was even a dog walker or two in attendance. The plan was put together by consultant David Leinster from the Planning Partnership and has two main features:

#### 1. Rationalization of the trail network

The plan calls for a reduction of about 1.8 km. in overall trail length. This will reduce trail fragmentation, the main concern for environmentalists. The plan also features the creation of some new trails, especially for beginner mountain bikers.

As well, the plan involves the closure of the trails in the section known as 'The Flats'. This is a section of the valley between the CN Rail tracks and the river that is only partially accessible. Most of the access is across the tracks at informal crossings, which is of particular concern to the city. This proposal caused the most discussion at the public meeting as the bikers are particularly proud of the effort they have put into this section. The bikers did propose some alternatives such as a bridge or a tunnel, but I think these are unlikely. A bridge (or two) will likely run into at least six figures and is not something that the cash-strapped city will spring for, especially to get access to such a marginal area.

Another contentious topic was a proposal to remove unsafe stunts. This is a bit of a euphemism because currently there are no safe stunt structures, so by definition they are all unsafe. Again, the bikers don't want to see their hard work destroyed. They proposed to work on standards for structures. The consultant agreed this was a good idea.

#### 2. Invasive species management

As with other parts of the Don Valley, Crothers' Woods is threatened by a number of non-native invasive species such as Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), Dog-strangling Vine (*Cynanchum rossicum*), and Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). The consultants concluded that complete removal of these species is unrealistic, but their spread can be controlled by concentrating removal efforts in the vicinity of the access points. This should help to limit the spread of seeds which may be carried on clothing of park visitors.

The final version of the plan will be released by mid-April. The City will spend another year working on an implementation plan, so any actual work other than the continuing program of trail improvements won't take place until 2008.

Personally, I think the plan is well balanced and will provide the city with a management plan which will improve the health of the area over the long term.

## Stewardship Season Starts Soon!

*Sign up as a Don River steward this summer*

Every summer, nature enthusiasts participate in the City of Toronto's Community Stewardship Program. Groups of five to 10 volunteers perform essential stewardship tasks including plantings, invasive species removal, water quality testing and vegetation and wildlife monitoring. Along the Don River watershed, there are a number of wetland restoration sites that



Volunteer removes invasive Japanese Knotweed from Beechwood Wetland.

are thriving thanks to the hard work of stewardship volunteers. "Over the years,

the number of native plants has increased without planting and now there is little weeding done in the wetlands proper," says Susan Aaron, stewardship leader at the Nordheimer Ravine wetlands, a Don restoration site near Spadina and St. Clair. "However," stresses Susan, "the path between the two sites [Glen Edyth and Roycroft] and the meadow in front of the Glen Edyth still require weeding." As do many other sites along the Don River. Make this year your year to volunteer for the Don! For more information and to sign up as a steward, phone (416) 392-1948.

# Umbra Supports Bring Back the Don



As a reflection of its commitment to Toronto, Umbra has chosen to support Bring Back the Don and its efforts to revitalize the natural beauty of the Don River area.

Umbra, the worldwide leader of well-designed, contemporary and affordable products for the home, will open its first retail concept store in May 2007 on John St. near Queen St. West. Not only will the new store showcase Umbra's history, breadth of products and design partnerships, but it will also reinforce Umbra's roots in Toronto.

The founders, who are from the city and still live here, started the company over 27 years ago, and while they now have an international distribution network and offices around the world, they have kept their global headquarters in Toronto.

Umbra's commitment to Bring Back the Don will be a donation of one per cent of total sales from the store's first year in business.

"Umbra is very much a part of Toronto and we appreciate the community's support," says Les Mandelbaum, Umbra's president. "In response, we choose to be actively involved in our city's cultural, environmental and social health. An important and unique characteristic of our city's life is its ravine network that owes its origin to our river system. The Don River is a major artery of this system that must be protected and rejuvenated. We applaud the many professionals and volunteers who are dedicated to this effort and we are proud to leverage our new store in downtown Toronto to support the cause."

## New City Council, New Opportunities

*Continued from page two*

Ron also suggests a concerted effort to replace invasive tree and plant species in the Don Valley with native species. "This would preserve and expand the natural beauty of the habitat in the Valley, in essence preventing further deterioration of the native habitat/ecosystem."

In 2005, the City completed an initial assessment of sewer outfalls in Taylor-Massey Creek, a major source of contamination. Water quality in the creek is dismal at best, but Janice Palmer, stewardship team leader at Sherwood Park and Chair of the Task Force's Habitat Restoration Team, would like to see continued pressure by Council to get the creek cleaned up. "It's not a matter of simply separating the sewers," says Janice. "We must find the sources of water contamination along the creek. I would like to see sewer shed maps for all of Toronto's rivers and tributaries. Council could make real inroads to improve water quality in

the City's watercourses if the major areas of contamination could be identified."

Janice also stresses the importance of Council and all City departments communicating with each other so that new projects don't have a negative impact on other initiatives. "We've done a lot of plantings at Sun Valley and in Crothers' Woods," explains Janice. "But when the new Rosemount sewer project starts, will those engineers look at where the plantings have taken place and try to minimize disturbance in those areas? I sure hope so!"

One of the Task Force's original members, Dalton Shipway, adds: "I would like Council to zone the lands in the Don Valley as 'Green and Wildlife Corridors' as part of Green Open Space."

Let's keep the momentum going and make sure that Toronto City Council makes a commitment to bring back the Don! Contact your local councillor and share your ideas on how to make the Don River cleaner, greener and more accessible.

## Doing Research on the Don?

See the bibliography on our website, [www.toronto.ca/don](http://www.toronto.ca/don). The Toronto Public Library has a collection of related materials at its Urban Affairs Branch in Metro Hall, 55 John Street (John at King). Call 416-397-7241 for more information

## 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.

Bring Back the Don events are also posted on the City of Toronto's website: [www.toronto.ca/don](http://www.toronto.ca/don)

