

Bring Back the Don

SEASONAL UPDATE

SPRING 2005



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Invasives Invade!

Aynsley Morris, Task Force Vice-chair

To the untrained eye, the Don Valley appears to be filled with lush vegetation. Along the trails and at restoration sites, there is an abundance of greenery. Sadly, much of that vegetation is made up of a few aggressive species that are slowly taking over large areas. These plants are invasive species. Throughout the growing season, volunteers and City staff spend countless hours cutting and applying specific chemicals directly to these plants, from Creeping White Clover to towering Norway Maples, in an attempt to stop invasives from taking over the valley entirely.

Invasives are a threat to the entire country's ecological health. The World Conservation Union considers invasive alien species the second most significant global biodiversity issue, after habitat loss. Non-native invasive species come from all over the planet, mostly from Asia and Europe where the climate is similar to Toronto's. Some plants, such as Garlic Mustard and Japanese Knotweed, escaped from gardens; others, such as Dog-Strangling Vine, were accidentally released from experimental farms. Native plants can also be particularly aggressive and considered invasive to local habitats. Collectively, they are causing extensive degradation to our natural ecosystems. They not only affect our native plants but also threaten populations of insects, birds, and mammals that depend on native plants for food.

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Dog-Strangling Vine. Photo taken by Chris Hope, Urban Forestry, City of Toronto

Volunteer – Just for the Health of It!

Marni Sims, Task Force and Stewardship Volunteer

Each year, hundreds of individuals, school groups and service clubs join the Task Force to help restore the Don River and its surrounding habitat. From attending a weekend tree-planting event to tending the same natural area every week, these volunteers are doing their part to bring back the Don. What we may not realize is that we are doing wonders for our health at the same time.

The benefits of engaging in physical activity are well known, but a surprising number of us still do not exercise regularly. Did you know that even low-intensity activities like gardening or planting a tree can improve your health? Activities such as habitat stewardship are widely recognized as helping to prevent heart disease, Type Two diabetes and certain cancers; they are also known to improve muscular strength and flexibility, and reduce levels of stress and anxiety.

Outdoor activities can also help individuals cope with existing conditions such as high blood pressure and can improve a person's ability to function and stay active while dealing with ongoing health problems like arthritis.

The psychological benefits of joining a local stewardship group are numerous, too, and perhaps easier for most of us to identify with. Completing a task in an evening, or working on a project throughout the summer provides us with a sense of achievement and fulfilment, building self-confidence and self-esteem. Imagine the satisfaction of clearing a patch of invasive Garlic Mustard, knowing that its seeds won't have the chance to spread to neighbouring areas because of your hard work! Many Task Force volunteers admit they've joined a stewardship group because they enjoy the social aspect of meeting new people with similar interests. Newcomers to Canada may benefit from the opportunity to practice their English skills in a friendly environment and others may be interested in getting to know more about their new country. *Continued on page six*

Tips for beginners:

Before your first stewardship outing, consider warming up as you would before any other physical activity. Stretch your arms, neck, back and legs before beginning, and don't hold any one position for too long. The volunteer team at Riverdale Farm Ponds will agree that time flies when removing the invasive and tangly Dog-Strangling Vine, but without a break it will take its toll not only on the surrounding trees, but your muscles as well!

Issues Update

John Wilson, Task Force Chair

By the time you read this, the Environmental Assessment for flood protection of the Lower Don River West should be nearing completion. Work should begin later this year to open a wider channel through the CN railway embankment, and next year to create a broad flood protection landform that will double as a riverside park. The railway embankment work will temporarily affect the popular Lower Don Trail connection south of Queen Street, so trail users should watch for postings of closures or changes in the Fall. Next year, work on the flood protection landform will result in local road closures in the Bayview-Front Street area.

The larger Environmental Assessment to renaturalize the Mouth of the Don and provide flood protection to the Portlands is now beginning. There will be many opportunities for public input over the next two years. If you wish to be informed on the progress of this study, contact the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) at kdion@trca.on.ca, 416-661-6600 ext. 5230, or visit their Web site (www.trca.on.ca).

Stormwater and combined sewer outfalls continue to impair water quality in the Don. We are working with City staff on two projects – the Earl Bales Stormwater Pond Environmental Assessment and the Rosemount Heights Combined Sewer and Siphon Replacement. We intend to ensure that these projects meet the highest water quality and ecological standards.

The TRCA is embarking on an Integrated Watershed Management Plan for the Don River. This plan, required under the Oak Ridges Moraine Act, could be one more significant tool for restoring the health of the river. Contact the TRCA or visit their Web site (www.trca.on.ca) to find out how you can contribute to this plan.



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 events, please call 416-392-0401.

Plantings

Attention Teachers and Students:

Our planting events are a great way for students to learn about environmental issues in an outdoor setting, and have a lot of fun! Weekday events are scheduled with school groups in mind and usually run from 10 a.m. to noon, rain or shine. For a weekday event schedule contact Trisha at 416-338-5053, or e-mail tkaplan@toronto.ca.

High school students are welcome to gain volunteer hours with Bring Back the Don at our weekend planting events. Please see the schedule below and contact Trisha at 416-338-5053, or e-mail tkaplan@toronto.ca.

Weekend Planting Events

Plantings are fun for families, individuals and groups. We provide shovels, gloves and other tools. You just need to wear sturdy shoes and clothing. Contact Trisha for information or to register a group of ten or more.

Earth Week at Riverdale Farm!

Slope Clean-up and Planting Saturday, April 23, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Celebrate Earth Week by participating in clean-up and planting activities! Riverdale Farm is located three blocks east of Parliament St. along Winchester St., or three blocks north of Gerrard St. along Sumach St. In partnership with Riverdale Farm.

Beechwood Wetland Planting Event Saturday, May 7, 10 a.m. – noon

Beechwood Wetland is located along the Lower Don Trail north of Pottery Rd., near the Beechwood Dr. access, north from O'Connor Dr., just west of Pape Ave.

Riverdale Farm Slope Planting Event Saturday, May 14, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Join us to plant native species along the lower slope. Riverdale Farm is located three blocks east of Parliament St. along Winchester St., or three blocks north of Gerrard St. E. along Sumach St.

Tours

Lower Yellow Creek Walk Sunday, April 3, 2 p.m

Explore a tributary of the Lower Don, learn about its history and efforts to protect its natural environment. Meet at the front door of Davisville subway station and hike to Craighigh Gardens. A joint endeavour with Lost Rivers.

Restoration Sites in the Don Valley Sunday, April 10, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Learn about the Beechwood Wetland and how the on-going stewardship team operates at this site. Also visit the Sun Valley site. Leaders will discuss the ecological significance of these areas, human use and invasive species. TTC stop at O'Connor and Beechwood Drives. Walk or drive down Beechwood Drive (steep and winding), go under the DVP, turn left, and meet at the large boulder. Limited parking.

Don Valley Points of Interest Saturday, April 16, 10 a.m.

Learn about Todmorden Mills, Crothers' Woods, and the Don Valley Brick Works. Meet at the Broadview subway station. This 11 km walk will be at a moderate pace over muddy, variable terrain and include a lunch break. No dogs, please. The walk will end at the Davisville subway station. A joint endeavour with the Toronto Bruce Trail Club.

Visit Current and Future Forests in the Don Valley Sunday, May 8, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Learn about an existing valuable forest, Crothers' Woods and the Sun Valley site of a future forest. Learn about their ecological significance and the human impact on them. TTC stop at Millwood and Redway Roads. Walk or drive south along Redway Road from Millwood, find a sign "North Toronto Treatment Plant" just past the Loblaws main entrance.

Follow the steep and winding road and meet at the bottom. Limited parking.

Ecological Tour of Riverdale Farm Ponds Saturday, May 14, 11 a.m.

Explore plants and animals of the Riverdale Farm ponds. Meet at Winchester St. entrance. Street parking is possible or walk three blocks north from TTC stop at Gerrard St. E. and Sumach St. Learn how the ponds were formed, past uses, and changes that have made them more attractive to wildlife. Find out about on-going maintenance and how you can be involved. Please wear suitable footwear for climbing steep hills

20th Annual Don River Walk Saturday, May 14, 2 – 4 p.m.

The meaning of "Bringing Back the Don". Join Task Force member Dalton Shipway at Broadway subway station to walk the Lower Don Lands. Rain or Shine.

The Burke Brook – Don River Connection Sunday, May 15, 2 – 4 p.m.

Explore part of Burke Brook, a tributary of the Don River. Meet at the main entrance to Sherwood Park (limited parking) at the eastern end of Sherwood Ave., east of Mt. Pleasant Rd.. Observe how the health of both Burke Brook and the Don River are influenced by neighbourhood activities.

The Don Valley's History, Flora and Fauna Saturday, May 28, 2 – 4 p.m.

Walk from the Forks of the Don to the new Beechwood Wetland. From the TTC stop on Overlea Boulevard near Don Mills Road, walk south on Don Mills Rd. across a bridge. Two signs on the east side indicate a small road to the Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve and Taylor Creek Park. Walk or drive east off Don Mills Rd. immediately south of the bridge. When this road splits, take the left road to the Sauriol Reserve. Meet in the small parking lot between Don Mills Rd. and the Don Valley Parkway.

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don Needs Your Support

For over 15 years, Bring Back the Don has been working to bring back a clean, green, accessible Don River. Since 1989, the Task Force and its volunteers have planted thousands of trees, shrubs and wildflowers in the lower Don. With volunteers and community groups, we have held clean-up days, restored ponds and wetlands, and worked on many safety and accessibility projects. The community education programs resulted in substantial improvements to the watershed and a strong network of environmental and citizen partnerships. **We can't continue this work without your help.** Please consider making a financial donation to the Task Force to Bring Back the Don. Take action for the Don today and fill out the coupon on the reverse side. All donations receive a tax receipt for income tax purposes.



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 events, please call 416-392-0401.

Other Events In the Don

Upper Don, Humber, Rouge Highland and Toronto Island Planting Events

Please visit www.toronto.ca/greentoronto

Trees Across Toronto Special Event – Sun Valley Tree and Shrub Planting

Saturday, April 30, 10 a.m.

Located across the Don River from Beechwood Wetland. Access is from the Lower Don Trail or from Beechwood Drive, which runs north off O'Connor Drive, west of Pape Avenue. Look for signs and volunteers to direct you to the planting site.

This year is the second annual Trees Across Toronto event, initiated by the City of Toronto's Tree Advocacy Planting Program (TAPP). It is part of ongoing efforts to replenish the City's urban forest. Bring Back the Don has been planting at the Sun Valley site, located adjacent to Crothers' Woods, for several years and invites you to join in this special event. For information on this

and other Trees Across Toronto events in the Humber, Rouge, Highland and West Don watersheds, please call 416-392-LEAF or visit www.greentoronto.ca.

Trail Management Event – Crothers' Woods May 28 & 29

Hosted by the City of Toronto Natural Environment and Horticulture Section and the Don Valley Trail Users' Club. Call Keri McMahon at 416-392-0373 for more information and to register.

Riverdale Farm Events

Please visit www.friendsofriverdalefarm.com.

Many other groups host community activities in and around the Don watershed:

RiverSides Water in the City Walks

Sunday, April 17, 10 a.m. – noon

Sunday, June 12 - National Rivers Day,
10 a.m. – noon

Sunday, June 26 in conjunction with Heritage
Toronto, 1 – 3 p.m.

Sunday, Sept 25, 10 a.m. – noon

Follow the path that rain takes through our neighbourhoods as it winds its way

into the Don River. Learn about Riverdale's urban history, lost streams, storm sewer infrastructure, and its impact on the Don River. This two hour walk serves as a short course on individual lot level source water protection and what homeowners can do right at home to help protect and restore the Don River!

Depart from Chester subway station and conclude at Chester Springs Marsh. The walk covers occasionally difficult/wet terrain. Wear suitable footwear. Call RiverSides 416-868-1983 to register. Special group walks by appointment.

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Paddle the Don (12th Annual)

Sunday, May 1, 9 a.m. - noon

Bring your own canoes/kayaks and life jackets. Paddle the Don from E.T. Seton Park to the Keating Channel. New this year, hike the Don! Guided walks will be offered for those who want to enjoy the trails of the Don. Registration will open in mid-March. To register, call 416-661-6600 ext. 5397.

Evergreen

May 28 and 29

As part of Doors Open Toronto, Evergreen will be leading tours of the Don Valley Brick Works on Saturday and Sunday, May 28 and 29. The tours will highlight the Brick Works' natural and cultural heritage but they will also describe Evergreen's plans to adapt and reuse the site's buildings. For more information, go to www.evergreen.ca or www.doorsopen.org.

Friends of the Don East

Please visit www.fode.ca or call 416-466-9153 for a listing of FODE events.

Lost Rivers Walks

Please visit www.lostrivers.ca.

Volunteer for Nature

Please visit www.ontarionature.org.



Bring Back the Don



Yes, I want to help Bring Back the Don!

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"

Please charge my: VISA Mastercard

Number: _____ Expiry Date: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, Province: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone Number: _____

Thank you for your support!

Help in the Fight Against Invasive Plants

- Join a Task Force to Bring Back the Don Stewardship Team. Phone 416-392-0401 for more information.
- Don't buy invasive plants at your local garden centre or nursery and ask managers to stop selling them.
- Learn to identify invasive plants and eliminate them from your own property. The City of Toronto Urban Forestry section has an excellent guide to controlling invasives on its Web site: www.toronto.ca/trees/pdfs/Fact_3_Controlling_Invasive_Plants
- Plant only plants native to the area. The Ontario chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration has a native plant guide available for download from its Web site: www.serontario.org/public. To order a copy of the guide, send a cheque for \$5 made payable to "The Society for Ecological Restoration - Ontario" to: SERO c/o Dan Gregory, 183 Old Upper Middle Rd., Oakville, ON L6H 1M2.
- Help the Task Force at a planting event.
- Talk to your neighbours and friends about the threat of invasive species.

Invasives

Continued from page one

Unfortunately, many of our large trees in the valley and the city are invasive species of trees (such as Norway Maples and Manitoba Maples) and must also be removed. The decision to remove large trees is not taken lightly; City staff deliberate extensively on where and when trees should be removed and what should be replanted in their place. Every attempt is made to educate the community about the reasons for tree removal. The Task Force supports and participates in the removal of invasive plants and the planting of native plants in their place.

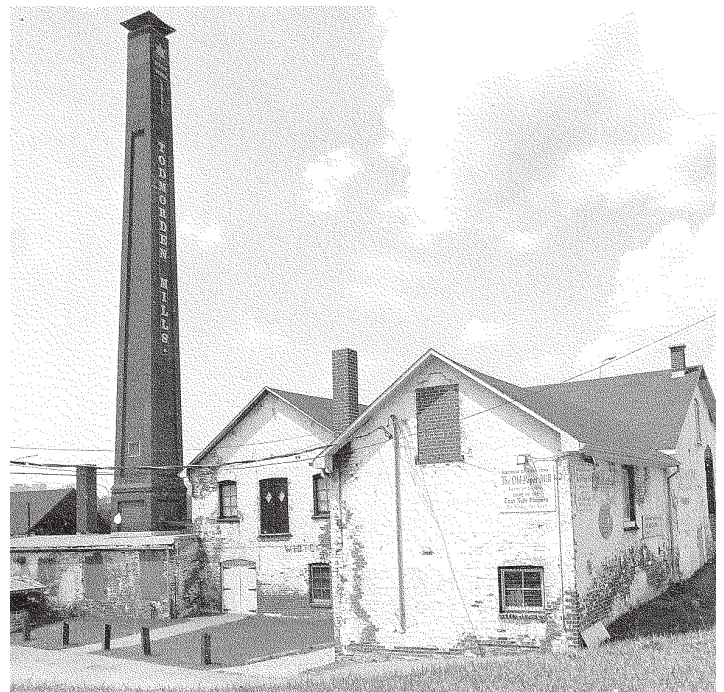
Through all our efforts, from invasive removal to public education, we can reduce the threat of these plants and keep our city's ecology healthy and diverse.

With files from Janice Palmer and John Routh, Task Force members

"Reconnecting with the Don: Balancing the Valley" exhibition moves to Todmorden Mills

If you missed the Task Force to Bring Back the Don's retrospective at the Market Gallery or want to see it for the second (or third or tenth!) time, the show will be on display at Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum and Arts Centre from July to December 2005. Todmorden Mills is located on Pottery Road, west of Broadview Avenue, very close to the banks of the Don. The exhibition explores the history of the Don River, the role it played in Toronto's development and efforts to restore its ecological health.

Here are some comments from exhibit viewers: "Fascinating!" "Through efforts like this we can connect!" "Brings back happy memories!" From a younger visitor, "I thought this place was going to be [a] bore, but really it is very cool and interesting."



Volunteer *Continued from page two*

Conservation volunteering is inexpensive, convenient and doesn't require any previous knowledge of plants or landscaping techniques. Plus, the range of activities – weeding, watering, planting, counting species, measuring water levels – allows individuals to work at their own pace. Volunteering with the Task Force is a great opportunity to improve your health, get some fresh air and know that you are doing something worthwhile with your leisure time. Thanks to the volunteers who came before us, we've witnessed the return of species like the black-crowned night heron and muskrat to the Don River. And we hope to add many others to that list. Phone 416-392-0401 to join a stewardship team or join us at one of the events listed in this newsletter!



Riverdale Farm Ponds Stewardship Team Members conduct Benthic Invertebrate Study. From left to right: Marni Sims, Barrie Gray, Irina Bylina, Steve Gillis, City of Toronto Natural Environment Stewardship Specialist, and Michael Turner. Photo by Charity Landon, BBTB Stewardship Volunteer.

THANKS TO OUR 2005 FUNDING PARTNERS!

So far this year, funding for Task Force projects has come from: City of Toronto, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Environment Canada, EcoAction Community Funding Program, Unilever Canada, Federation of Ontario Naturalists, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and many others.

Bring Back the Don also thanks the many individuals, corporations, school groups and community organizations that have participated in our projects and have contributed to “bringing back” the Don watershed.

DOING RESEARCH ON THE DON?

See the bibliography on our Web site, 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 Streets). 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, or e-mail us at driver@toronto.ca.

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