

# ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS OF TORONTO

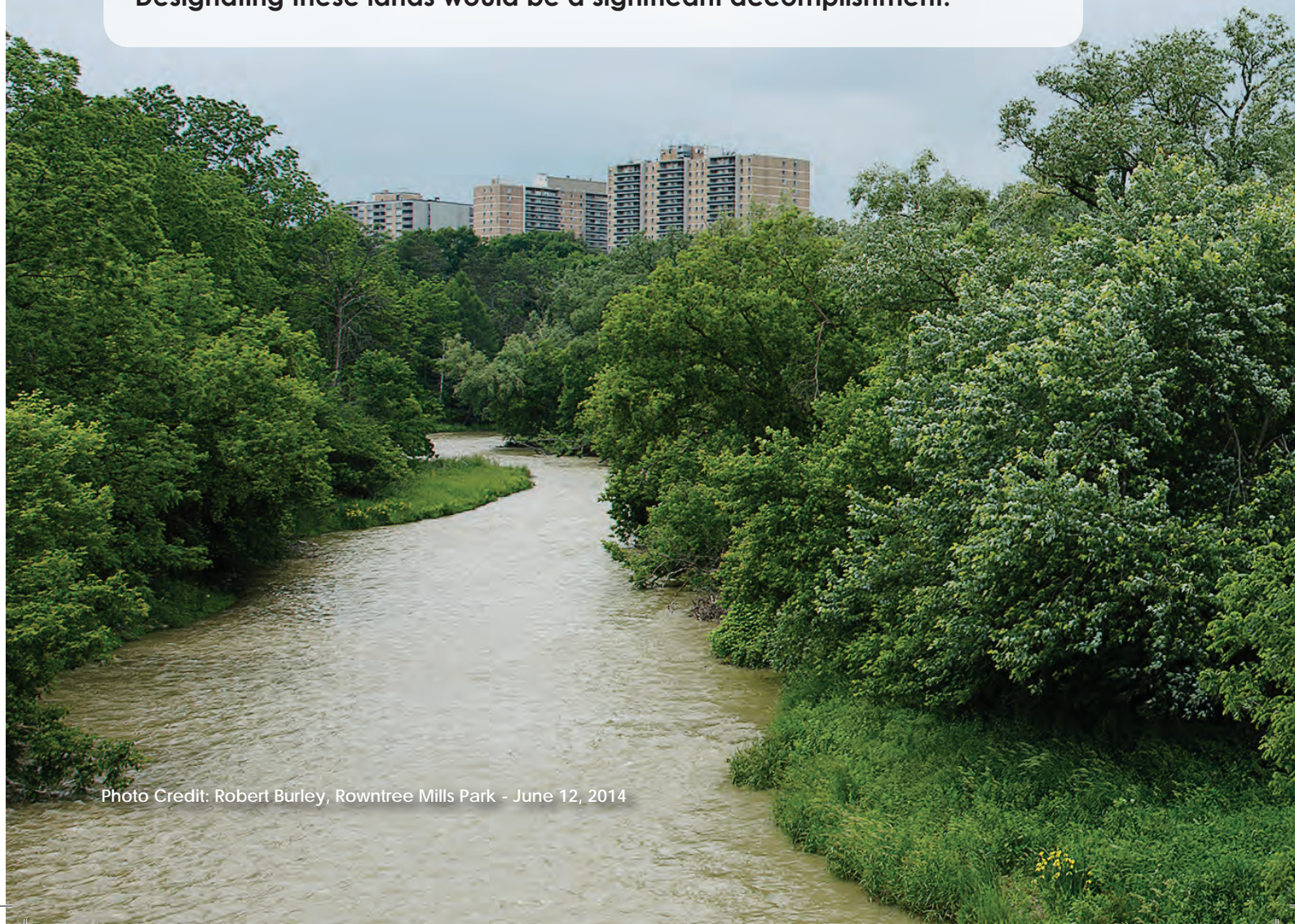
Photo Credit: Robert Burley, Charles Sauriol Conservation Area - May 14, 2014





**The City of Toronto is proposing to designate new Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) in the Official Plan. Designation within the Official Plan means there will be a greater awareness of these exceptionally important areas, which will help ensure their long term protection. Designating these lands would be a significant accomplishment.**

Photo Credit: Robert Burley, Rowntree Mills Park - June 12, 2014







It may come as a surprise that in a city as densely populated as Toronto, many natural areas still remain. Most of these natural areas are located in ravines, river valleys and along the waterfront, where they form the core of the city's natural parklands system. These natural areas support an extraordinary variety of plant and animal life, and provide an opportunity for people to experience wilderness in the city.

## What are Environmentally Significant Areas?

Within this natural system, there are Environmentally Significant Areas that are particularly important because of their unique environmental qualities. These areas contain:

- rare and endangered species,
- habitats of unusually large size or high diversity,
- rare or unusual landforms, and/or
- provide important ecological functions such as serving as a stopover location for migratory wildlife.

With Toronto's population expected to grow to 3.4 million people by 2041, the importance of Environmentally Significant Areas and the natural parklands that surround them will only increase. Our collective challenge is to ensure these areas continue to function and flourish so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

# How are Environmentally Significant Areas identified?

Between 2009 and 2012, the City commissioned a scientific study to identify and understand the value of Environmentally Significant Areas within the City's natural heritage system using criteria in the Official Plan. The study, prepared by North-South Environmental Inc., Dougan & Associates and Beacon Environmental (June 2012) is available at:

[www.toronto.ca/planning/environment](http://www.toronto.ca/planning/environment)

As a result of this study, 68 new sites are proposed to be added to the Environmentally Significant Areas on Map 12 of the Official Plan and the boundaries of 14 of the 18 existing Environmentally Significant Areas are proposed to be extended. All of these areas are located within the natural heritage system identified in the Official Plan and most are located on parklands managed by the City of Toronto.

## Did You Know?

- A total of 2,698 ha or 4% of the City's land area (66,750 ha) qualify as Environmentally Significant Areas. This is an area equivalent to almost 17 High Parks.
- These Environmentally Significant Areas contain over 369 significant plant species, 175 species of birds and 16 species of reptiles and amphibians.





# Why are Environmentally Significant Areas important?

Environmentally Significant Areas contribute disproportionately to biodiversity in the city. They are an important part of the city's parkland system which provides opportunities for children and adults to experience nature and makes Toronto's intensely urban environment a more beautiful and liveable place.

Ecological highlights of Environmentally Significant Areas in Toronto:

## Landforms

- Locations of former Lake Iroquois shoreline
- Bluffs representing modern and glacial processes
- Modern and glacial fluvial and lacustrine features
- Bedrock exposures

## Ecological Functions

- Linkage between habitats required to complete a species' life cycle
- Significant habitat for migrating bird species
- Habitat for colonial bird species
- Amphibian breeding and foraging habitat
- Water storage and recharge
- Air and water filtration and temperature amelioration
- Increased resiliency to impacts of climate change

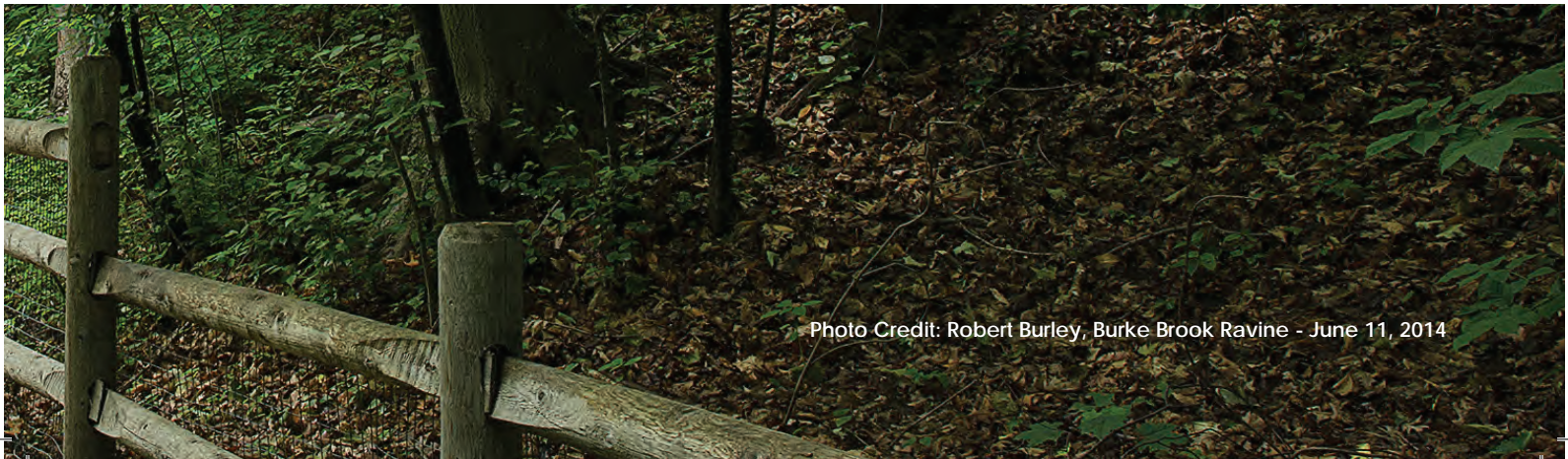


Photo Credit: Robert Burley, Burke Brook Ravine - June 11, 2014



## Flora and Fauna

- Rare forest vegetation types dominated by oak and pine and other shade-intolerant species that require periodic natural disturbance
- Significant plant species associated with prairie and savannah habitats, at the northern edge of their range in this part of Ontario, or with particular affinities to Great Lakes shorelines
- 8 amphibian species, including 6 species considered significant in the city (i.e., northern leopard frog, bullfrog, wood frog, spring peeper, gray treefrog and eastern redback salamander)
- 8 species of reptiles including 5 species considered significant in the City (i.e., painted turtle, snapping turtle, northern map turtle, Blanding's turtle and eastern milksnake)
- A total of 137 bird species were documented during the breeding season with 62 species considered locally or regionally significant
- 29 butterfly species
- 17 mammal species that are primarily common, adaptable species that occur in a wide variety of urban habitats, but notable species included the locally significant hairy-tailed mole and star-nosed mole



Photo Credit: Robert Burley, Rouge Beach - July 10, 2011





Environmentally Significant  
Areas provide unique  
opportunities for people  
to experience and  
learn about nature





Photo Credit: Robert Burley, E.T. Seaton Park - April 24, 2014

Environmentally Significant Areas are located within our parkland system which also supports a range of recreational uses. It is important to balance access to and protection of Environmentally Significant Areas in order to maintain their significant qualities.