

September 23, 2004

To: Economic Development and Parks Committee

From: Task Force to Bring Back the Don

Subject: Crothers' Woods

**Recommendation:**

**The Task Force to Bring Back the Don recommended to the Economic Development and Parks Committee that the following Motion by J. Palmer, seconded by R. Ballantyne, be adopted, as a replacement to Recommendations (2) and (6) contained in the communication (August 18, 2004) from the Ad Hoc Committee on Crothers' Woods:**

**WHEREAS Crothers' Woods has been designated an Environmentally Significant Area by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA);**

**AND WHEREAS the Toronto Field Naturalists, the TRCA and others have identified a number of rare forest species in Crothers' Woods, including hickory, oak, beech and maple species that can serve as a seed bank for a healthy urban forest as Toronto's climate changes;**

**AND WHEREAS many activities and initiatives within, or immediately adjacent to, Crothers' Woods will affect the long-term sustainability of that forest, these including, but not necessarily limited to:**

- the provision in Toronto's Official Plan to extend Redway Road as a transit link,
- the disposition of the North Toronto Sewage Treatment Plant,
- potential Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan initiatives,
- the Rosemount Heights Sewer rehabilitation project;
- ongoing hydro corridor maintenance; and
- Trees Across Toronto forest extension at the Sun Valley site.

**AND WHEREAS Crothers' Woods is under stress from unplanned human uses including proliferating informal trails and unregulated stunt structures used by mountain bikers and others;**

**AND WHEREAS the Natural Environment and Horticulture Section, Parks and Recreation, EDCT, has initiated a program of trail realignment, erosion control and public education, in consultation with the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, the Don Valley Trail Users Club, the International Mountain Biking Association, the Don Watershed Regeneration Council and other stakeholders;**

**AND WHEREAS sustainable initiatives to preserve Crothers' Woods as a ecological treasure must be developed within the context of a plan that recognizes all the competing issues that affect Crothers' Woods;**

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Task Force to Bring Back the Don requests the Economic Development and Parks Committee to direct the Commissioner of Economic Development Culture and Tourism to develop a Natural Area Management Master Plan for Crothers' Woods that preserves its unique character, improves its environmental health and sets out management requirements to minimize negative human impacts, as soon as possible, and that this be a priority in the 2005 Budget process.**

Action taken by the Task Force:

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don:

- (1) referred recommendations (1) (3) (4) (5) (7) and (8) contained in the communication (August 18, 2004) from the Ad Hoc Committee on Crothers' Woods back to the Ad Hoc Committee for further consideration and report back to the Task Force, such report to also include the study of alternative sites for various types of mountain biking; and
- (2) received the communication (August 26, 2004) addressed to John Wilson from Deborah Martin-Downs, Chair, Don Watershed Regeneration Council regarding Trail Management in the Don Valley.

Background:

The Task Force to Bring Back the Don on September 22, 2004 considered the following report and communication:

- (1) Report of the Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Crother's Woods which was held on August 18, 2004.

Recommendations:

- (1) Bring Back the Don (BBTD) Task Force endorse a position declaring:
  - (a) the Task Force is not supportive of further mountain biking trail development in Crothers' Woods as a result of the significant environmental damage caused;
  - (b) the Task Force does not endorse unsustainable trail use in Crothers' Woods;

- (c) there should be a reduction in the number, types and locations of mountain biking trails in Crothers' Woods that place the natural habitat at risk; and
    - (d) priority must be given to determining whether there are feasible alternative sites for mountain biking in Toronto.
  - (2) BBTD Task Force recommends that the City of Toronto urgently complete a master plan for Crothers' Woods and vicinity;
  - (3) BBTD Task Force recommends that the City of Toronto formally and urgently investigate alternative locations for general mountain biking trails/circuits and the creation of a skills/stunt park. A skills/stunt park should not be constructed in the Don Valley;
  - (4) BBTD Task Force immediately take steps to inform, educate and increase the awareness of mountain bikers and the general public about the environmental significance of Crothers' Woods and the risks associated with environmental damage caused by mountain biking;
  - (5) BBTD Task Force recommends that the City of Toronto proceed with the immediate closure and restoration of sections of the mountain biking trails in Crothers' Woods;
  - (6) BBTD Task Force advocate that the City of Toronto give priority to the development and implementation of management plans for the maintenance and restoration of the most environmentally damaged areas/trees in Crothers' Woods and provide progress reports to the BBTD Task Force, at minimum, yearly;
  - (7) BBTD Task Force should be actively involved in the IMBA conference in October 2004 to ensure that key issues related to Crothers' Woods are factored into the planning of the event; and
  - (8) BBTD Task Force continue to seek additional information and knowledge about the usage patterns associated with mountain biking in Crothers' Woods.
- (2) Communication (August 26, 2004) addressed to John Wilson from Deborah Martin-Downs, Chair, Don Watershed Regeneration Council regarding Trail Management in the Don Valley.

City Clerk

Item 2

Task Force to Bring Back the Don (BBTD)

Report of the Meeting of the  
Ad Hoc Committee on Crothers' Woods

Wednesday, August 18, 2004  
6:30 p.m.  
Committee Room 3, Toronto City Hall

Present: Janice Palmer, Bryan Bertie, John Routh, Joe Trakalo, David Tyson, David Yudelman, Ron Ballantyne (chair).

Regrets: Karen Nasmith, Basia Pioro.

Staff: Keri McMahon, Trisha Kaplan-Freed.

Guests: Gregor Gilpin Beck, Bogna Jaworski.

1. Welcome and Introductions: Members and guests were introduced and Gregor Gipin-Beck, Ontario Nature, was welcomed.
2. Review of Ad Hoc Committee Mandate: R. Ballantyne referred members to the motions passed by the Task Force to Bring Back the Don at the July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004 meeting. The specific **mandate for the Ad Hoc Committee** was reviewed briefly.
3. The known documentation (circa 1995) pertaining to the Toronto Region Conservation Authority's designation of Crothers' Woods as an **Environmentally Significant Area (ESA)** was circulated. It illustrated the boundaries of the ESA and identified various criterion related to the significance of the area.
4. A number of **reports** related to the issue at hand were circulated for reference:
  - "Actions Taken By Task Force", July 21, 2004.
  - "Crother's Woods, New ESA", TRCA, circa 1995.
  - "Crother's Woods Flora Inventory", June 1995.
  - "A Landscape Review and Analysis of the Don Parklands From the Forks to Beechwood", Kirk Biggar, November 2002.
  - "Crothers' Woods-Baseline Inventory Existing Trails and Significant Features", Kirk Biggar, March 2004.
  - "A Landscape Review and Analysis of the Crothers Woods and Beechwood Parklands", Kirk Biggar, 2001.
  - "Management Plan for Crothers Woods and Beechwood Parklands", Kirk Biggar, undated.
  - "Trail Shock-Studies Weigh Mountain Biking and Hiking Impacts", AMC Outdoors Magazine, April 2001.

- “Let’s Build Trails, Not Walls”, Backpacker Magazine, undated.
  - “Don Valley Trail Users’ Club Meeting Minutes”, July 13, 2004.
  - “A Brief Case For Mountain Biking in the Don Valley”, by Jonathan Kratky, member DVTUC, August 18, 2004.
  - “Information on Northline Proposed Bicycling Site”, Urban Forest Associates, August 17, 2004.
  - “Photos from Don Valley Trail Stewardship Crew Work Outings”, August 2004.
  - Photos from Crothers’ Woods and Vicinity, R. Ballantyne, August 2004.
5. Members discussed the **extent of trail development and usage** in Crothers’ Woods. The Kirk Biggar document of March 2004 provides a good inventory of the extent of trail development. Over recent years many more trails have been developed particularly in the heart/node of the Crothers’ Woods ESA. It is recognized that an extensive trail network extends well beyond Crothers’ Woods, both to the north and the south. The network of trails is used primarily by mountain bikers. It was acknowledged that there are a variety of mountain bikers with various levels of interest and expertise. A study performed by the City of Toronto Cycling Ambassadors estimated that 80 to 100 mountain bikers use the trails every four hours on weekday evenings and weekends. It is also estimated that there are 40 mountain bikers to every dog walker. Some pedestrian hikers are present but very few and they have difficulty competing with mountain bikes for space on the trails. There are many points of access to the trail network starting at the foot of Pottery Road extending to the Forks of the Don and beyond. Keri McMahon suggested: new trail development should be curtailed; the number of trails may need to be reduced; trails need to be made more sustainable; and attention needs to be paid to user safety.
6. Members discussed what **environmental damage exists** and what **areas are most at risk**. It was agreed that there is very serious cause for concern about the extent of mountain bike trail development in Crothers’ Woods. Many of the trails intersect and have become considerably wider in recent years. Where there are trails, there is no natural undergrowth. Trail erosion is very extensive and many tree roots are significantly exposed. R. Ballantyne circulated recent photos taken of trails in Crothers’ Woods and vicinity. Some restorative work has occurred but certainly not at a pace consistent with trail development. The heart/node of Crothers’ Woods is the area of most concern since it is a popular destination and is central to the trail network. It has many points of access (Loblaws parking lot, roadway to North Toronto Treatment Plant, bridges over the Don, Bayview Avenue, etc.). Gregor Beck compared the challenge facing Crothers’ Woods to what is being experienced in many rural areas with ATVs. He suggested that it would be difficult to block mountain bike usage. Relocating the activity may be difficult.
7. A number of **remedial options** were considered to limit the use of Crothers’ Woods by mountain bikers. Some of these are being implemented presently on a small scale (e.g., trail closures, bridge construction, etc.). Suggestions ranged from closing the trails, to preventing any further man made structures in the valley, to controlling usage via zoning, to creating other trail networks in less environmentally significant areas of the city, to taking advantage of suggestions from IMBA; to working with mountain bikers groups, to creating a skills/stunt park, to enhancing trail stewardship, to educating mountain bike trail users, etc.

Keri McMahon mentioned that the City of Toronto is planning to develop a master plan for the area and has applied for 2005 capital funding to do more trail maintenance/restoration. She stated that the City's goal is to protect, enhance and restore Crothers' Woods to its natural state. She added that there is an opportunity to be involved in the IMBA conference in October; it may be useful to have the Crothers' Woods issues be the focus of some discussion at the conference.

8. Members reviewed **alternative sites** for mountain biking. This issue has also been discussed at a recent meeting of the BBTD Task Force's Habitat Restoration Team. It was recognized that mountain biking has been/is a problem in some other areas of the Don corridor (e.g., Glendon Forest, etc.) and other parts of the City. Currently the Northline Site in the Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve is being considered for general use mountain biking and a skills/stunt park. It was noted that, at present, there is an unofficial skills/stunt site that has been constructed near the Toxic Turtle Pond between the railway tracks and the Don at the foot of Crothers' Woods; this is not considered an ideal location. A number of suggestions were made about other possible sites but concerns were raised about replicating the problems of Crothers' Woods elsewhere. Concerns were also raised about whether any construction should occur in the Don Valley; this may inadvertently set a precedent for other construction. At this point there are no clearly agreed to alternative sites that have been thoroughly evaluated for mountain biking purposes.
9. The Ad Hoc Committee on Crothers' Woods makes a **Statement of Principles/Responsibilities** and submits **Recommendations** as follows:

**Statement of Principles/Responsibilities:**

- The BBTD Task Force has the responsibility, in collaboration with Crothers' Woods owner(s) and property managers, to uphold the quality of Crothers' Woods as an "environmentally significant area" that must be maintained and promoted for its aesthetic, ecological, recreational and natural heritage value. Crothers' Woods has been designated because of the presence of regionally rare plant species and because of the high quality, tolerant hardwood habitat.
- The BBTD Task Force, in collaboration with others, has a responsibility to maintain and promote Crothers' Woods as a valuable, healthy and irreplaceable mature forest. Crothers' Woods has both Carolinian forest and northern forest features with mature species of sugar maple, red and white oak, American beech, hickory, ironwood, basswood, black walnut, butternut, sycamore and black oak.
- The BBTD Task Force has a responsibility to advocate an urgent and concerted effort to reverse environmental damage resulting from the unplanned and informal development of mountain biking trails in Crothers' Woods. The environmental damage includes: exposure of soil, erosion, formation of gullies, damage to tree root systems, prevention of natural regeneration and trail widening.

- The BBTD Task Force, in collaboration with others, has a responsibility to educate Crothers' Woods users about the environmental significance of Crothers' Woods and the risks associated with further environmental damage. Education, awareness and general information will: inform users about rights and obligations, elicit a collaborative approach to honour the environmental significance of Crothers' Woods and assist in reducing damaging usage, particularly in the most vulnerable areas.
- The BBTD has a responsibility, in collaboration with others, to determine the feasibility of alternative sites for mountain biking that will not result in significant environmental damage.
- The BBTD Task Force has a responsibility to develop strategies to prevent further encroachment of invasive plant species into the Crothers' Woods area. By in large, the heart/node of Crothers' Woods is without evidence of invasive species. Extensive mountain biking disrupts and prevents the natural regeneration of native plant life in Crothers' Woods and inadvertently promotes conditions advantageous to invasive species.

### **Recommendations:**

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  - (b) the Task Force does not endorse unsustainable trail use in Crothers' Woods;
  - (c) there should be a reduction in the number, types and locations of mountain biking trails in Crothers' Woods that place the natural habitat at risk; and
  - (d) priority must be given to determining whether there are feasible alternative sites for mountain biking in Toronto.
- (2) BBTD Task Force recommends that the City of Toronto urgently complete a master plan for Crothers' Woods and vicinity.
- (3) BBTD Task Force recommends that the City of Toronto formally and urgently investigate alternative locations for general mountain biking trails/circuits and the creation of a skills/stunt park. A skills/stunt park should not be constructed in the Don Valley.
- (4) BBTD Task Force immediately take steps to inform, educate and increase the awareness of mountain bikers and the general public about the environmental significance of Crothers' Woods and the risks associated with environmental damage caused by mountain biking.
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environmentally damaged areas/trees in Crothers' Woods and provide progress reports to the BBTD Task Force, at minimum, yearly.

- (7) BBTD Task Force should be actively involved in the IMBA conference in October 2004 to ensure that key issues related to Crothers' Woods are factored into the planning of the event.
- (8) BBTD Task Force continue to seek additional information and knowledge about the usage patterns associated with mountain biking in Crothers' Woods.