

THE 2006 PROGRESS REPORT
BY THE DON WATERSHED REGENERATION COUNCIL

Forging a new deal for theDon



We recount some successes
from the last 12 years and present
some challenges for the future



Dedicated efforts by the Don Watershed Regeneration Council (DWRC), Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) and its partners are producing tangible results. A walk through the valley today reveals kilometres of new parkland trails and interpretive signs, thousands of fresh plantings and hundreds of nesting boxes for local wildlife. Litter and debris is being collected and hauled away. Abandoned industrial sites are being reclaimed. Stormwater ponds are being created to control flow levels. And dams and weirs reconstructed to allow fish to pass upstream. But despite all the progress, there are difficult challenges ahead. The integrated watershed management plan being developed will not only have to maintain the current momentum for change, it must also address emerging environmental concerns about global warming and air pollution, the threat of invasive species, and the ecological stress caused by development and population growth.

The **Don Watershed Regeneration Council (DWRC)** is a volunteer, watershed-wide advisory committee established by TRCA in 1994 to help restore the Don River watershed to a healthy, sustainable, natural environment. The DWRC is a sub-committee of **TRCA's Watershed Management Advisory Board** and is composed of community members, elected officials and representatives from municipalities, agencies, businesses, environmental non-governmental organizations and academic institutions located within or concerned with the future of the watershed.

Twelve years isn't a very long time in the lifecycle of a river. On the geological scale, it's little more than a ripple breaking across the water's surface on a still summer's day. Or the flash of silver as a trout flicks away and down into a dark pool.

Nevertheless, the last 12 years have marked a critical shift in the fortunes of the Don. Over that time, the river's slow decline has been checked, and the first steps towards the watershed's resurrection as a healthy, vibrant ecosystem have been taken.

Since the publication of the regeneration strategy *Forty Steps to a New Don* in 1994, thousands of volunteers and business people, politicians and government agencies, citizens' groups and environmental professionals have worked both independently and together with Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) to translate that ambitious environmental blueprint into reality.

Both collectively and individually, we are striving to protect what is healthy, regenerate what is degraded and take responsibility for the Don.

Work has just begun. We have laid the groundwork, forged partnerships, won the support of residents, and shown politicians at all levels of government what can be accomplished—and what more needs to be done. And there is so much more that must be done.

In this, the Don Watershed Regeneration Council's (DWRC's) fourth Progress Report, we celebrate some of the notable successes enjoyed over the last 12 years. These stories mirror the interconnected themes of the regeneration workplan set out in *Forty Steps to a New Don: Caring for Water, Caring for Nature, Caring for Community and Getting it Done*.

We realize that we can only highlight a handful of the important initiatives that have been launched, and hope to present a representative sampling of the hundreds of remediation projects undertaken and conservation work that's been started.

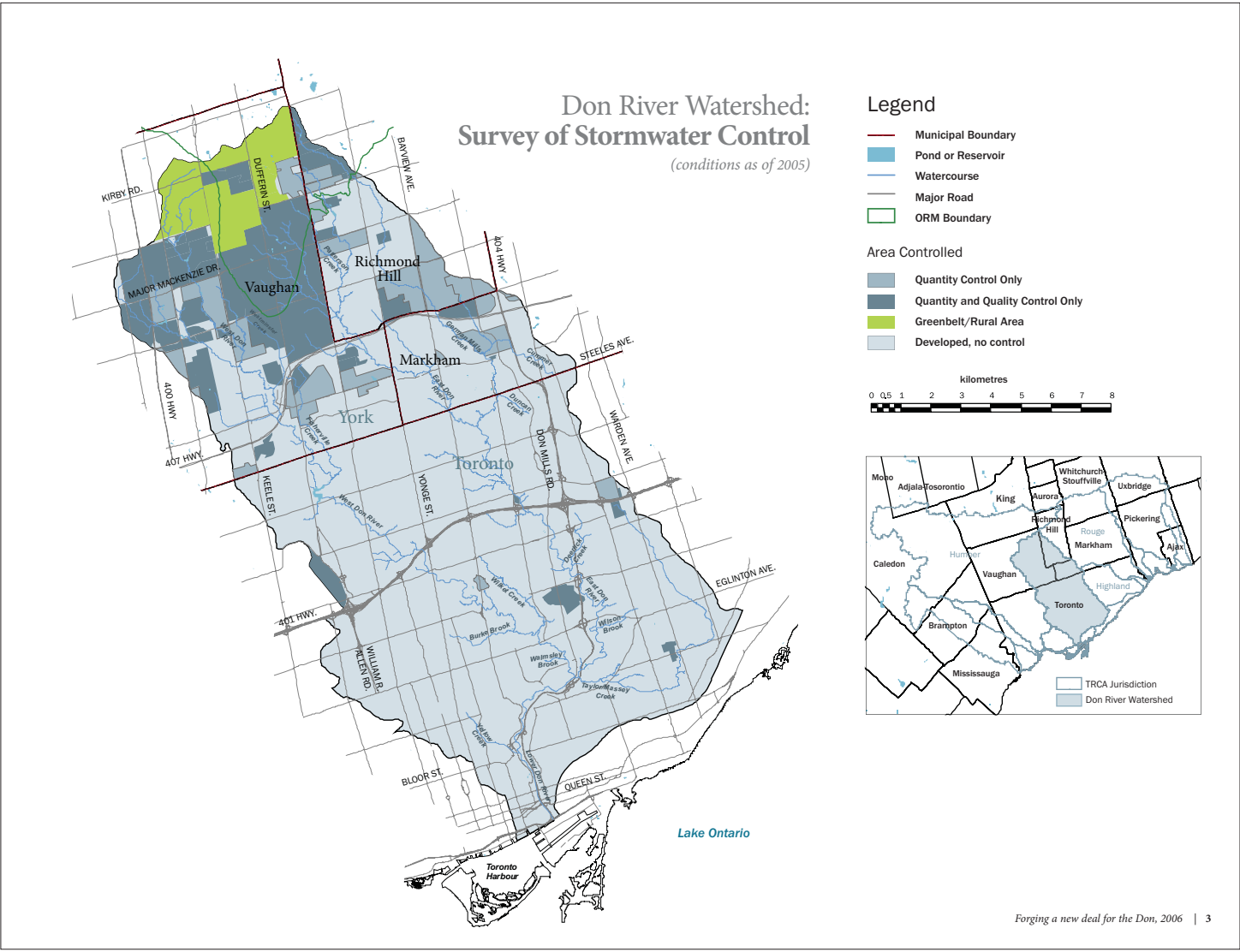
Much of this work remains unfinished. Reversing two hundred years of ill use and neglect takes both time and money. Polluted storm water and runoff still flows unchecked into the river every time it rains. Contaminants are carried in from combined sewer overflows and illegal cross-connections between storm and sanitary sewers, and seep in from dozens of abandoned landfills. Air pollutants drift into the watershed from smokestacks hundreds of kilometres away, and from the tail pipes of cars and trucks on local roads.

We have to keep our focus. Governments forget their promises. Business leaders shift priorities. Activists tackle other challenges. The media moves on to the next calamity or crisis. Even concerned citizens can be lulled into complacency.

After 12 years of hard work, we again stand at a pivotal point in the life of the watershed. We know what needs to be done, the plans are being drafted and the call for funding has gone out. We can rescue, rehabilitate and revitalize the Don if we can stay the course, build on our successes and maintain the momentum.

We must also be prepared to respond to new environmental threats as they arise—and be afforded the political, corporate and community support needed to meet them—if we are to get on with the job.

It's time to forge a new deal for the Don.



caring for Water

Planning is well underway for the **naturalization of the mouth of the Don**, finally restoring the ecological link between the river valley and the waterfront. Combining the area around the Keating Channel, the proposed Don Greenway and the adjoining Commissioners Park, some 60 hectares of derelict land will be transformed into green parkland, interlaced with pedestrian walkways and bike paths. Spectacular views, treed enclaves, secluded wetlands and a restored shoreline will provide habitat for wildlife, while protecting the neighbourhoods to the south and east from flooding.

The City of Toronto's **Water Pollution Solution**, approved in September 2003, provides a blueprint for the **remediation and management of stormwater and combined sewer overflows** for the entire city. The first 25-year phase of the 100-year plan, which will cost \$42 million a year to implement, gives priority to dealing with rain and snow where it falls, followed by upgrading sewers and improving "end-of-pipe" treatment. Environmental assessments are underway for a number of projects and stormwater management criteria have been developed for both new developments and redeveloped sites.

Heavy rains can cause combined sewers to overflow. The untreated sewage bypasses the treatment plant and is discharged directly into the Don River or Lake Ontario. The City of Toronto is developing an environmental assessment study which proposes to **twin the Coxwell sanitary trunk sewer and further define the system of underground storage facilities** needed to contain stormwater overflow until it can be properly treated. Both the Don Council and local community groups have long advocated the need for such stormwater management facilities.

One way to keep rainwater out of storm sewers is to divert it onto our gardens and lawns. Unlike most new homes, the downspouts of many older residences in the City of Toronto are tied directly into the storm sewer network. The city will **disconnect a homeowner's eave-strough downspout** free of charge and add a splash pad, extension or rain barrel, if necessary. The city is now studying a mandatory downspout disconnect program.

Throughout the watershed, a number of **stormwater management ponds** are helping to moderate high water conditions, balance flow patterns and improve water quality in the Don River.



The City of Toronto is planting trees and shrubs to reduce stormwater runoff and enhance the natural heritage of key woodlots.

Approximately 140 ponds have been completed or are currently underway, including those at Earl Bales Park, Terraview Willowfield Park, Killian-Lamar Pond, Harding Park, Rupert's Pond, Pioneer Park, Leitchcroft Pond and Moccasin Trail Park

Road salt degrades river ecosystems and groundwater resources, corrodes municipal infrastructure, and poses a risk to terrestrial and aquatic life. **New road salt management plans** adopted in Richmond Hill, Toronto, Markham, Vaughan and York Region promote no-salt/low-salt practices and other alternate de-icing strategies. These communities also have implemented more stringent salt handling, spreading and storage methods and undertaken assessments of environmentally responsible snow disposal.

Toronto's **sewer use by-law**, rewritten in 2000, is designed to keep heavy metals, waste oil, solvents, grease and other dangerous toxics out of the city's sewers. Industrial waste enforcement officers routinely sample sanitary and storm sewer discharges. The by-law also requires industries in certain sectors to prepare mandatory pollution prevention plans. Contravention can bring fines as high as \$100,000 a day. York Region also adopted a tough new sewer use by-law in January 2005. Both Toronto and Vaughan have established sustainability programs to help small-and medium-sized businesses **embrace pollution prevention (P2) practices**. Technical and financial assistance is available, through their association with the Ontario Centre for Environmental Technology Advancement (OCETA), for conducting P2 assessments that can slash sewer discharges, air pollutants and hazardous wastes. In addition, a Trillium Grant has been awarded to OCETA to conduct workshops and P2 education in York Region.



Toronto and Region Conservation's Healthy Yards program provides residents with the inspiration, information and tools required to create naturally beautiful and sustainable lawns and gardens. Through workshops, fact sheets, a website, and prepackaged garden and lawn kits, residents are being encouraged to maintain pesticide-free lawns and gardens.

On April 1, 2004, Toronto's **landmark pesticide by-law** came into force, banning the outdoor use of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides on public and private property. The move shuts off one of the major sources of poisonous contaminants into the river. Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan have all adopted strategies to reduce pesticide use: Markham has endorsed a pesticide-free parks project; Vaughan's policy covers city-owned property, while Richmond Hill's includes private property. All these municipalities encourage residents to adopt pesticide-free lawn and garden practices.



- ♦ From flooding and erosion control, to turbidity and habitat destruction, the management of water flows is still the number one unresolved issue affecting the long-term health of the watershed
- ♦ Restoring and protecting the Don is key to meeting our international commitments and completing the remedial action plan for the Lake Ontario "Area of Concern" that centres around the Toronto region
- ♦ While there are no active dumps in the Don watershed, investigators have mapped 47 abandoned landfill sites. These all operated before environmental regulations were in place and were built without liners or leachate collection systems.



- ◆ Stormwater runoff, with its load of fertilizers, pesticides, pet droppings, oil and grease from roads, silt and other contaminants, is the greatest source of pollution in the Don. Not only does it affect the water quality of the river, it eventually flows down the Don and makes its way into Toronto Harbour and Lake Ontario
- ◆ Investigators have identified 28 seriously contaminated stormwater outfalls out of the 252 that empty into Taylor-Massey Creek. Upstream surveys have uncovered a number of improper cross connections both from residences and large commercial operations
- ◆ From 2003 through 2005, there were 361 spills or releases of hazardous or potentially toxic material in the Don watershed reported to the provincial Ministry of the Environment—one spill almost every three days.



- ◆ Contaminated runoff is carried by storm sewers and combined sewer overflows into the Don River after every storm. Heavy rainfall events often overload combined sewers in the city centre, causing untreated sewage to be discharged directly into the river
- ◆ When a severe storm hit the Greater Toronto Area on August 19, 2005, it caused wide-spread basement flooding, damage to infrastructure and property, and severe stream bank erosion as a result of flash flooding of creeks and rivers. This storm, which in some areas of the Don was recorded as being greater than a one-in-100-years event, has been estimated by the insurance industry to be the most expensive natural disaster in Ontario's history.



caring for nature

A number of **in-stream fish barriers** that have blocked the upstream movement of fish and other aquatic organisms through the Don River have been removed or reconfigured. On the East Don River, three weirs south of Lawrence Avenue have been reconstructed, as has the weir at the Donalda Golf Course and an obstruction at York Mills/Don Mills. On the West Don, the Concord Floral Dam was removed, while plans are underway to remove a barrier to fish passage along Burke Brook where it meets the West Don, allowing fish to travel as far as Bayview Avenue. While these have been significant accomplishments, much more work remains to be done further upstream.

The remediation of contaminated industrial or “brownfield” sites is a difficult challenge in the urban environment. The **historic Don Valley Brick Works project** incorporates preserved architectural features, natural plantings and regeneration areas, and an internationally significant geological site. Mud Creek, buried beneath the former quarry for more than 100 years, was finally “daylighted” and re-routed through a series of five new wetlands on its way back to the Don, providing habitat for many species of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife. The Evergreen Foundation is currently transforming the derelict buildings on the site into an environmentally based community centre.

Can residential development and environmental protection co-exist? The proposed **Dreamwood subdivision** planned on a 40-hectare section in Vaughan, proves that it can. During the approvals process, provision was made to protect both a wetland on the site and a valley corridor linking the wetland with the nearby McGill Environmentally Sensitive Area. In addition, funds were committed by the developer for wetland mitigation or other regeneration works, a monitoring plan, installation of a clean water collection system and a brochure to educate residents. The settlement was negotiated by TRCA, with the support of the City of Vaughan’s planning staff.

The first sections of the **Bartley Smith Greenway**, a natural corridor that runs 15 kilometres through the valley of the Upper West Don River, were opened officially in June 2001. Over the last two years, the **Friends of the Bartley Smith Greenway** have worked with staff at TRCA and the City of Vaughan to plant more than 4,900 native trees, shrubs and aquatic plants, haul more than 1.6 tonnes of garbage out of the river valley, install more than 200 nesting boxes, decorate 23 garbage cans, work with local businesses and schools on restoration and clean-up projects, monitor wildlife, build trails and bridges, host educational workshops and interpretive hikes, and install interpretive signs and displays.

In 2005, Markham launched the **Pomona Mills Creek Erosion Restoration and Habitat Enhancement Study** to consider alternative rehabilitation schemes for the creek. A number of priorities have been identified, including fish barrier mitigation, stream bank erosion mitigation, flood and water quality improvements, site-specific storm water improvements, water supply issues, recreational trail links and control of upstream development impacts.

Seeing nature as a system, rather than a series of individual pieces, ensures that natural areas can be managed on a holistic and comprehensive manner for maximum local benefit. Toronto and Region Conservation initiated the **Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy** to define the existing quality of the natural areas under its jurisdiction and to assess the options for reversing or stemming the ecological effects of urbanization. This overarching strategy defines a target natural heritage system to guide more detailed local strategies, such as those developed by Richmond Hill or the City of Toronto. It also assists in identifying areas with the greatest restoration and enhancement potential.



An example of a green roof project.

Hundreds of hectares of urban rooftops could be transformed into green spaces, reducing runoff, increasing shade, clearing the air and cooling the city. Toronto’s pilot **Green Roof Strategy**, adopted by city council in 2006, provides subsidies of up to \$20,000 to encourage both new and retrofitted green roof projects on private properties. This strategy is an important contributor to the long-term sustainability of one of Canada’s most urbanized watersheds.

An aging tree canopy, beset by air pollutants, pests, poor drainage and other stresses, needs to be preserved and protected, replaced and expanded. Vaughan has enacted a **by-law to protect trees** on public property, while Toronto has extended the protection to ravines and private property as well. York Region restricts tree cutting in woodlots, Markham has undertaken a Tree By-law Study to review the management and protection of trees on public property, and Richmond Hill has adopted a Tree Preservation Policy and Strategy which aims for 25 per cent of forest cover.



Toronto is planting trees on city-owned street allowances in front of residential properties without charge, while LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) subsidizes the backyard planting of native trees and shrubs.

Growing a green canopy over the city is one of the goals of Our Common Grounds, the 15-year strategic action plan for Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Approved by city council in July 2004, a 20-point urban forestry plan will more than double the current forest canopy from 17 per cent to between 30 and 40 per cent, while supporting the city’s Natural Heritage Strategy and its Parkland Naturalization Program. Annual plantings, public outreach efforts, and service levels would all be increased under the plan.



(Chinook Salmon found at the mouth of the Don River)

- ♦ Salmon have been reported in the Don River as far up as John Street and Uplands Golf Course, and north of the old dam above Cummer on German Mills. There have even been unconfirmed sightings as far north as Highway 7
- ♦ Between 2002 and 2005, surveys showed fish habitat improving at 22 per cent of regional watershed monitoring stations, declining at nine per cent of the sites and showing no change at the remaining 69 per cent
- ♦ Redside dace, a fish species of special concern, is on the verge of disappearing from the watershed and can be found in only a few very isolated headwater locations. The Don is one of the last locations in which this species can be found in rivers within TRCA’s jurisdiction
- ♦ In 2005, walleye in spawning condition were collected in the Lower Don River. This discovery provides further evidence of a growing population of the species in the Don
- ♦ Of the 42 fish species that originally lived in the Don River, only 21 species remain; most of these are considered “pollution tolerant.” The greatest diversity of fish is found in the upper reaches of the river.

- ♦ There are 83 different kinds of breeding birds, 12 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 14 species of mammals living in the watershed. Of these, 72 are deemed “species of local concern” by TRCA
- ♦ The valleys of the Don watershed serve as a major flyway for migrating birds. Over 200 species of birds breed in the watershed or use the valley corridor as part of their migration route
- ♦ Investigators have identified some 358 in-stream barriers and stream crossings that impact aquatic habitat and could limit movement of fish and other species.

(Black-crowned Night-Heron)



- ♦ As of 2002, 80 per cent of the watershed has been urbanized. Of the 20 per cent that remains, nine per cent is forested, less than seven per cent is covered with meadows, four per cent is agriculture, and just half a per cent is wetland, marsh or open water
- ♦ Toronto and Region Conservation biologists have identified 441 native species of trees, shrubs and wildflowers in the Don watershed. Of these, 296 are considered “species of local concern” by TRCA
- ♦ Patches of old-growth forest have survived in the Don watershed, including stands in Sunnybrook Park and sections of Crothers’ Woods near the Millwood Bridge in Leaside. Other high-quality, mature forests can be found in the Rosedale area and in the Charles Sauriol Reserve
- ♦ Unless checked, prolific foreign flora and fauna will continue to overwhelm and displace indigenous species, disrupt native ecosystems, reduce biodiversity and foil attempts to regenerate natural areas.

caring for communities

Complementing the naturalization efforts at the mouth of the Don, the award-winning design for the **West Don Lands revitalization project** will transform a downtown brownfield area into a vital new urban community. The innovative project, estimated to cost \$231 million and take 15 to 20 years to complete, includes new parks and public spaces, a school and daycares, a public transit line and some 6,000 units of housing. The **West Don Lands Committee** has been a persistent champion of the project, which will require the on-going cooperation and support of all three levels of government through the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation, working with TRCA, Ontario Realty Corporation, City of Toronto and Toronto Community Housing Corporation.



As part of the West Don Lands project, a landform and other works will be constructed to protect more than 210 hectares of land west of the river from flooding. Combined with the flood protection works being undertaken at the mouth of the Don, these projects will address the greatest flood risk area within TRCA's jurisdiction.

The first Sunday in May 2006 marked the 13th annual **Paddle the Don** event. Each year, between 300 and 400 eager paddlers navigate the Don River from Ernest Thompson Seton Park down to the mouth of the river at the Keating Channel. While the event is free, donations are encouraged and the Corporate Canoe Challenge rewards those firms that raise the most funds. Over the past four years, participants in canoes, kayaks, and most recently on foot down the adjacent paths, have raised some \$88,500 that is earmarked for naturalization and regeneration work in the watershed.

For eight years, the annual **Richmond Hill Mill Pond Splash** has celebrated the headwaters of the Don River with outreach activities that encourage community stewardship and environmental awareness. At this family-oriented event, participants can view environmental and wildlife exhibits, plant trees and shrubs, build bird houses, join nature walks, and enjoy refreshments, music and other entertainment.

Mountain biking has become extremely popular throughout the watershed, sometimes placing pressure on environmentally sensitive areas. The **Toronto Trails Program** is working with local mountain bikers and the International Mountain Biking Association to create a more sustainable trail system through Crothers' Woods. At the same time, the City of Toronto is developing a master plan for the woods that will accommodate trail users, while respecting nature, and provide a model for future work in the city.

The **Task Force to Bring Back the Don** advises Toronto City Council on a wide range of Don watershed issues. Since completing the Chester Springs Marsh in 1997, the group has created or enhanced a number of wetlands, including the Binscarth Swamp, the Lonsdale Wet Meadow, the Glen Edyth and Roycroft Wetlands, the Beltline Pond, the Riverdale Farm Ponds and the Beechwood Wetland. The Task Force's community stewardship program initiative has been adopted by Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation and extended across the city. The Task Force continues to host public education and stewardship events.

Between 2004 and 2006, volunteers with the **East Don Parkland Partners** have planted 1,800 trees and shrubs, and 1,200 wildflowers. The group also is a strong advocate for Don issues, such as community access and good planning practices. Many of the group's planting projects are self-funded through events like its annual Quest for Chowder dinner, as well as support from foundations, businesses and all levels of government.

Over the last three years, the **Friends of the Don East** have hosted some 25 public education events on such varied topics as pesticide-free and natural gardening, tree identification, the removal of invasive species and protecting water quality. They have also conducted hikes and walks, given presentations at local high schools, organized a number of plantings, clean-ups and other restoration projects with their school, community, agency and corporate partners.

Local community groups continue to champion important stewardship projects throughout the watershed. For example, the **Friends of Little German Mills Creek**, the **Friends of Settlers Park** and the **Pomona Mills Conservationists** all act as park ambassadors through the Town of Markham's Adopt-a-Park Program, undertaking litter clean-ups, plantings and other park-improvement activities.

The **Sherwood Park Advisory Committee**, with representatives from nine stakeholder groups and the local councillor, works to protect and enhance the natural features of the park, and enhance its recreational potential in a manner consistent with its natural heritage. The committee's volunteer team, consisting of students, residents and businesses, organizes more than 100 work events annually, including planting, watering, mulching, controlling invasive species, protecting sensitive areas and general park maintenance.

The **Friends of Glendon Forest** have been working with the City of Toronto and TRCA for more than 10 years to ensure the sustainability of this environmentally sensitive area located in the Lower West Don River valley. The community group has undertaken streambank stabilization projects and trail improvements, participated in multi-stakeholder consultations on the impacts of human use, and organized tree and riparian plantings, clean-ups and other events.



The Town of Richmond Hill has erected water-crossing signs to remind residents that the watershed is an integral part of their community.

RiverSides has been active since 1995, demonstrating urban watershed leadership and creating "RiverSafe" communities, where individual homeowners and companies take action to control stormwater and reduce contamination of the Don River. RiverSides maintains a website packed with how-to info, hosts the annual Water in the City Walk and the RiverSafe Carwash Campaign, and operates programs to promote energy and water conservation, and solid waste reduction.

The **Taylor Massey Project** engages local residents and 23 partner organizations in "reach-level" stewardship groups to celebrate and protect Taylor Massey Creek and its watershed. Over the last four years, the project has hosted 44 events, involving 2,465 participants, who picked up hundreds of bags of garbage and planted over 1,800 trees and shrubs. The project advocates a watershed management approach to the city's Water Pollution Solution and the extension of a trail along the whole creek. The group's website provides a virtual tour of the creek, identifies problems, provides suggestions for remediation and offers self-guided tours.



- ♦ Up to 6,400 cars an hour travel along the Don Valley Parkway into the city every workday, spewing out a mix of smog-forming pollutants and greenhouse gases. Surprisingly, almost as many drivers travel north out the city every morning as come in to work
- ♦ Over the last four years—from 2003 through 2006—York Region and the City of Toronto suffered through 30 smog advisories issued by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, covering a total of 85 days
- ♦ In the last two years, volunteers have marked an estimated 1,930 storm drains with the distinctive "Yellow Fish" logo and visited 4,140 homes throughout the watershed to inform residents of the sewers' connection to the river
- ♦ In 2005 and 2006, TRCA's popular Watershed on Wheels (WOW) program visited local schools, engaging 8,039 participants in classroom projects about freshwater ecosystems and the things we can do to enjoy and protect them
- ♦ There are now 43 certified Eco-Schools in the Don watershed, providing a holistic environmental perspective to students by teaching ecological literacy, waste reduction, energy conservation and school-ground greening.



getting it done

Much of what has been accomplished is due to **the effective grassroots advocacy of local residents' associations and citizens' groups**, which have helped win over many municipal politicians to the cause. Without their support, many important environmental initiatives, including the outfall monitoring program that is tracking down serious sources of contamination and the regeneration of the Upper West Don River into the Bartley Smith Greenway would have been delayed or founded entirely.

Local naturalist groups have been instrumental in **compiling inventories of flora and fauna and monitoring the health of bio-communities** throughout the watershed. For example, Bird Studies Canada conducts an annual bird count every Christmas and coordinates a marsh monitoring program. Under Environment Canada's NatureWatch program, "citizen scientists" track plant flowering dates, count frogs and other key indicator species.

For the past five years, a team of volunteers has gathered much of the information needed to assess ecosystem health at nine sites in the Don watershed as part of TRCA's **Terrestrial Volunteer Monitoring Program**. Ten times a year, the teams survey up to 56 indicator species of flora and fauna at each site. The program supports watershed reporting, as well as the planning and implementation of the terrestrial natural heritage system. In 2006, a new web-based, on-line data entry system helped improve the collection, validation and analysis of the data collected.

The **Citizens' Environment Watch** (CEW) teaches students and community members to monitor air and water quality, using lichens and benthic invertebrates as indicators of environmental health. Because these organisms respond quickly to environmental impacts, and because different species have different tolerances to pollution, they are good indicators of the health of our environment.

Lost Rivers helps us appreciate how the many buried and channelized streams that lie beneath the parks and pavements of Toronto form part of a wider watershed. A joint program of the Toronto Field Naturalists and Toronto Green Community, Lost Rivers hosts public walks, compiles detailed maps and histories of each buried stream, and maintains a website dedicated to these rivers.



The **Richmond Hill Naturalists** foster public interest in nature and promote the preservation of the area's natural heritage. The Naturalists have conducted a Christmas Bird Count in south York Region, including the headwaters of the Don, for over 40 years. They have also been active in local stewardship activities including annual Earth Day clean-ups and tree plantings at Mill Pond Park.

The **Toronto Green Community**, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2005, promotes local environmental action and awareness through community-based projects. The group's Green Garden workshops provide detailed information on native species, organic gardening techniques, composting and rainwater management.

Promoting "watershed thinking" among policy makers and advocating the environmental protection of our natural heritage is an integral part of our work. Over the last five years, members of the Don Council participated in 78 special hearings, public meetings and other environmental forums, and prepared a total of 106 expert briefs, recommendations or letters of concern. Members have commented on draft regulations and statutes, participated in assessment hearings and appeared before committees of all levels of government.



♦ Over the last six years, an estimated 110,000 native trees, shrubs, wildflowers and aquatic plants have been planted by local volunteers, our municipal partners, TRCA and other organizations throughout the Don watershed ♦ Since 1994, more than 300 regeneration projects have been launched throughout the watershed ranging from local stream clean-ups and tree plantings to major initiatives, including the removal of stream barriers and the construction of wetlands and stormwater ponds ♦ Over the past 12 years, more than 50,000 volunteers have participated in Don watershed educational programs, fund-raising events and regeneration projects ♦ Between 1994 and 2006, TRCA has spent \$2,390,000 to purchase a total of 161 hectares (397 acres) of environmentally important greenlands in the Don watershed.

taking the next steps

Much has transpired since *Forty Steps to a New Don* was published back in 1994.

Today, almost all of the Don watershed has been urbanized. The challenge for the future will be to protect and restore the natural heritage features of the watershed—regenerating what's been lost and rehabilitating areas that have been abused—while trying to accommodate the competing recreational demands of a growing number of greenspace users.

In addition, a number of serious environmental threats to the watershed have emerged, none more dire and far-reaching than the evolving spectre of global climate change.

Rising temperatures and shifting climate patterns will dramatically alter biodiversity and water flow throughout the watershed—systems which are already under great pressure. Some species will disappear. New pests will flourish. Ever more violent storms will pose serious flooding and erosion hazards.

Unless a concerted international effort is made to contain this threat, much of the work taken to restore and protect the Don ecosystem may begin to unravel.

A new watershed plan for the Don is currently being drafted. This plan must build on our past successes, creatively manage future urban intensification and plan to mitigate the effects of climate change. It must also address the following challenges:

1. Ensure the **naturalization of the mouth of the Don River** is adequately funded to restore the natural heritage features, and reclaim vacant industrial lands for parkland and new neighbourhoods.

2. **Secure stable, long-term funding** for infrastructure renewal, watershed management, land acquisition, and regeneration and protection efforts from both public and private sources.

3. **Manage stormwater** to moderate flows in the river and maintain baseflow levels, while minimizing destructive flood conditions and reducing erosion.

4. **Reduce the flow of contaminants** carried into the river by urban runoff, storm sewer and combined sewer outfalls, leaking historic landfills and other sources, through a mix of pollution prevention incentives, remediation projects, and restrictions on the use of toxic, stable and bio-accumulative chemicals.

5. **Protect and enhance natural heritage features** when opportunities arise, while planning for urban intensification and increased pressure by multiple recreational uses. Effort must also be made to protect and restore the deteriorating urban tree canopy.

6. **Stem the spread of invasive terrestrial and aquatic species** through the watershed and attempt to control those that have gained a foothold.

7. Motivate both the corporate sector and individual residents to reduce their environmental footprint by **showcasing green technologies**—such as green roofs, solar energy or permeable paving technology—within the watershed.

8. Engage all levels of government to undertake the necessary **long-term monitoring of environmental conditions** and enforce compliance with environmental protection statutes, regulations and by-laws.

9. Incorporate **sustainable, watershed-based parameters into planning and development** decisions, brownfield redevelopment and policy-making at the municipal, regional and provincial levels. Foster **inter-agency co-operation and formal coordination** of restoration activities within the watershed.

10. Continue to facilitate **co-operative partnerships and grassroots efforts** to achieve regeneration and protection goals. Maintain momentum through ongoing public education programs, especially in the local school system, and the greater use of informative signage throughout the watershed.

We would like to thank everyone—every student, pensioner and local ratepayer, every politician, civil servant and business leader—every single one of you who took the time to plant a tree or pick up trash, disconnect a downspout, attend a public meeting, vote to fund a restoration project, or participate in any of the hundreds of other Don River regeneration projects or community events. Your ideas, energy and enthusiasm are responsi-

ble for the successes we've enjoyed so far, and will be required more than ever in the future. It just won't work without you.

For more information on the rehabilitation of the Don watershed, the work that is underway and what you can do to help, visit the TRCA website at www.trca.on.ca

The Don Watershed Regeneration Council

With over 50 years of experience, Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) helps people understand, enjoy and look after the natural environment. Our vision is for The Living City®—a cleaner, greener and healthier place to live, for you today and for your children tomorrow. For more information, call 416-661-6600 or visit us at www.trca.on.ca

