



Breathing New Life
into **theDon**

2003 Don Watershed Report Card



A Message to Those Who Cherish the Don

If you brought this report card home to your parents, you would be sent to bed without dinner. Far too many Cs and Ds, not a single A, and — heaven forbid — an F, glaring from the page.

But restoration is hardly a series of simple questions and answers that can easily be slotted into good or bad, right or wrong. It's much more than that. It takes a longer view. The grades are nowhere near good enough, true, but some very important groundwork has been laid in the past 10 years to ensure major strides from here on.

First off, let's address that F. We know we can do better in caring for water, and now, we have a means to improve that grade through the recently completed Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan for the City of Toronto. Once it's put in place, water quality will improve substantially, not only in the Don River, but everything it feeds. The plan will take at least 25 years to implement; we still must include the municipalities outside of Toronto into a broader watershed plan. Bold commitments by federal, provincial, and municipal governments must be made to ensure we have the resources required to really make this happen.

There are quantifiable victories as well. Thanks to changes to five weirs, salmon and other fish now migrate more freely up the Don for the first time in a century. We have seen the completion of the first phase of the Don Valley Brick Works, and a number of other regeneration projects: Little German Mills Creek, The Bartley Smith Greenway, Milne Hollow, and the establishment of the Charles Sauriol Nature Reserve. At a local level, 7,500 downspouts were disconnected by the City of Toronto, showing the power of individual action.

Our research tells us that more than 90 per cent of residents believe the Don is valuable to their community. We need the public to demand a sustainable, healthy Don and environmental education for our children, for their quality of life, and for future generations. Then, we need our elected representatives to act.

Stormwater management, improved habitat and water quality — given adequate funds and resources, we have the expertise to deal with them all. However, our biggest challenge may not be physical, but psychological — convincing a public that, with their help, the Don can bloom as a healthy, vibrant river once again.

We can't do it without you. Little things matter like using less fertilizer and pesticides on your lawn and garden, and less salt on the driveway. Let your yard grow free: naturalized urban spaces use less water, and encourage the growth of native species. Keep the Don clean of garbage and dog waste — it makes a difference. You can also help by letting your MP, MPP, and municipal councillor know you're not happy with the grades in this report card. Ask them to take the issue higher, and promote real change. Even better, write a cheque to the Conservation Foundation of Greater Toronto, and let everyone know you're willing to invest in the future of the Don. Then, take ownership and volunteer. After all, it's your river to use — or lose.

The Don Watershed Regeneration Council

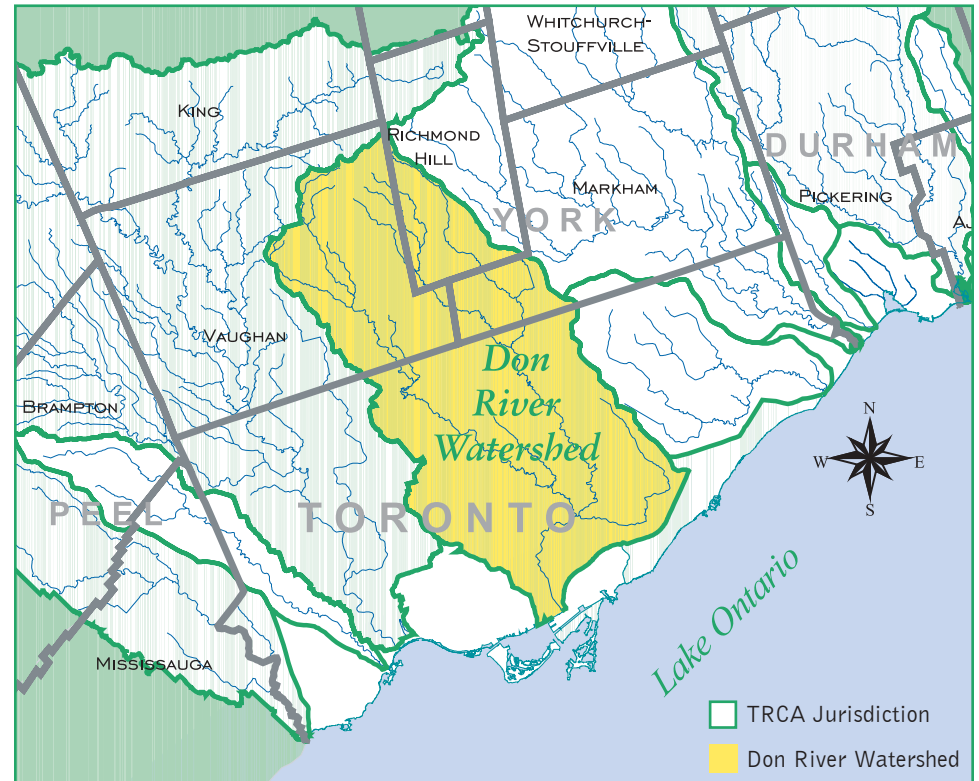
Your Watershed: A Natural Wonder

The Don River flows through the heart of Toronto. For more than 200 years, the Don watershed has been subject to intense pressures from human settlement. It is now 86 per cent urbanized and home to more than 800,000 people. This watershed is more than just a river, it is our home, and a home to a variety of wildlife. The Don's restoration is an integral part of The Living City and the vital community centre of the Greater Toronto region. All of its vital parts — trees, buildings, water, and animals are a major contributor to people's quality of life. Its value must continue to grow as we move toward a healthier and revitalized Don.

Don Watershed Regeneration Council



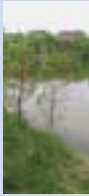

The Don Watershed Regeneration Council is composed of volunteer representatives of Don watershed stakeholder groups and municipal council members who work with Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA), communities, businesses, and government to achieve the vision of a revitalized urban river and watershed. Through the award winning watershed strategy, *Forty Steps to a New Don*, the council's mandate is to "protect what is healthy, regenerate what is degraded, and take responsibility for the Don". Since 1994, thousands of volunteers, environmental groups, and government agencies have made noticeable progress toward this goal. It will take many years of hard work and dedicated community support to return the river to its past natural vitality. A Don Watershed Report Card is published every three years to report on our collective progress toward restoring the Don River and its watershed.





The Don Watershed Regeneration Council is a sub-committee of Toronto and Region Conservation.









Don Report Card Grading Scheme











Grade	Condition	Description
A	Excellent	Nothing more to do — continue to monitor
B	Good	Little left to do
C	Fair	Some areas require improvement
D	Poor	Much remains to be done in most of the watershed
F	Failing	Significant time, effort, and resources are necessary throughout the watershed

Where We Want To Be	Grade	Progress to Date	Trend	How to Get There (Bold Steps)
CARING FOR WATER				
 Increased baseflow and stable surface flow patterns.	F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan in Toronto has been completed, laying the groundwork for significant improvements to the quantity and quality of water in the Don River. Pilot projects such as Clean Water Collector in Vaughan, and Green Roofs at York University and Eastview Community Centre demonstrate innovative methods of flow management. New development meets current Ministry of the Environment stormwater management guidelines. 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the City of Toronto's Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan to improve water quality and aquatic habitat, and stabilize flow through the application of widespread stormwater management measures and the reduction of combined sewer overflows. Develop a stormwater management plan focusing on York Region as part of the Oak Ridges Moraine integrated watershed management plan, complementing the actions of the City of Toronto.
 The Don's water is safe for recreational uses in dry weather.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toronto separated 75 per cent of the combined sewer overflows (CSOs) within the City. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete and implement the provincial Source Protection Plan policy framework to address the protection of ground and surface water resources.
 Increased diversity of aquatic invertebrates and decreased contaminant levels.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aquatic insects used to monitor water quality indicate poor water conditions for more sensitive species. A balance has been struck between the increasing pressures on water quality due to urban intensification and stormwater management initiatives, resulting in no increase in contaminant levels. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor key areas to determine the effectiveness of control measures for the West Nile Virus and to demonstrate that stormwater management programs can be continued safely. Significant funding from all levels of government will be allocated annually for water quality improvement.
 Proper management of stormwater runoff and effective drainage control measures on individual properties.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stormwater runoff is still the greatest polluter of the Don, leading to poor water quality from sediment loads and contamination during storms. Over 7,500 downspouts have been disconnected in the last three years, effectively reducing the volume of water entering combined sewers. Four retrofit projects or newly constructed stormwater management facilities are completed. The Pioneer Park stormwater management pond retrofit in Richmond Hill is ready for implementation. 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MOE will continue to update stormwater management criteria which address infiltration, in-stream erosion, and treatment train approaches.

CARING FOR NATURE				
 Woodlands are being adequately protected and appropriately linked.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Woodlands continue to be lost to development, including the unlawful destruction of four hectares of the McGill ESA during the development of the Eagle's Nest Golf Course. Thirty-four and a half hectares of land will be naturalized and rehabilitated by the City of Vaughan as the Maple Nature Reserve. One thousand hectares of natural habitat have been surveyed within the watershed to date which identified ecologically sensitive communities. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare plans for naturalizing the Don River mouth allowing for enhanced linkages between the lake and the river, symbolizing the efforts of many to restore the Don. Complete and implement the Terrestrial Natural Heritage Strategy for the Don providing clear targets for habitat types and plans to increase species diversity and support species protection or recovery.
 Wetlands are being adequately protected and created.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four new wetlands were created, including the one-hectare Beechwood Wetland in Toronto and Little German Mills Creek in Markham. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial and municipal policies and management plans will address the impact of increased urban intensification on the Don watershed's remaining natural areas.
 Meadows are being adequately protected and managed.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two meadows were enhanced, including the new Yellow Creek Butterfly Meadow in Toronto. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue monitoring and reporting to track progress on the protection and creation of habitat, and its resulting effects on species diversity.
 Riparian habitats are being adequately protected and expanded.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practices have been adopted by some municipalities to restrict mowing along the edges of rivers. 	↑	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake in-stream and riparian habitat improvements to enhance aquatic habitat and support target species protection or recovery.
Frog abundance and diversity are increasing or improving.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six of the seven amphibian species found within the TRCA region are known to be present and breeding across the watershed. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove additional barriers to fish movement, allowing fish access to most of the river.
Fish abundance and diversity are increasing or improving.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensitive species are still mainly found in the less impacted headwaters of the river due to habitat loss and degraded conditions in the lower reaches. The Donalda Golf Club fish barrier has been removed and chinook salmon have been seen as far up the East Don as Cummer Avenue. The designs for three more barrier mitigations are completed, with implementation planned for the near future. 	↔	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and protect the urban forest, recognizing its benefits for migratory birds, energy conservation and water management.

Where We Want To Be	Grade	Progress to Date	Trend	How to Get There (Bold Steps)
CARING FOR COMMUNITY				
 Watershed residents are knowledgeable about the Don and are taking positive actions to care for it.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More than 12,000 youths, residents and businesses have an improved understanding and awareness of the impact of their actions on the environment through the Watershed on Wheels program. • Over 1,500 people participated in conservation seminars in 2002 — the first year of the program. Seminar topics included backyard naturalization, butterfly gardens, and downspout disconnection. • Past surveys have shown that only 23 per cent of residents can correctly define a watershed, and 55 per cent incorrectly identify industry as the primary polluter of the river. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness campaigns, environmental seminars, and community action programs will result in more watershed residents understanding their role in "Bringing Back the Don" and taking action. • Environmental education programs and centres will receive sustained funding in recognition of the deficient school curriculum and the need to develop environmentally literate citizens. • Municipalities will work with users of the Don's natural areas to develop policies and management plans to reduce impacts from non-native species, trampling, and wildlife disturbance.
 Our children are learning about the environment as an integral part of their school life.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With reduced government support, the number of Don students visiting TRCA residential field centres dropped from over 2,600 in 2001 to 1,600 in 2002. • Over 3,300 children participated in the York Children's Water Festival. • No emphasis on environmental issues in the provincial school curriculum. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and resources will be made available to support community initiatives and individual actions.
 Residents value the Don as a place for responsible recreational use.	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impacts of overuse of natural areas for recreational purposes (e.g. dog walking, mountain biking) are beginning to be addressed by some municipalities. • Vaughan, Richmond Hill, and the Region of York are helping to prepare better maps and signage for those who visit the Don. • Past surveys have shown that 91 per cent of watershed residents believe that the Don River is valuable to their community. 		

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DON

 All remaining natural areas in the Don are adequately protected.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and regulations such as the Oak Ridges Moraine Protection Act and Toronto's newly approved Official Plan will serve to protect, regenerate, and enhance natural areas and resources. • The Region of York, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, and Markham are implementing the provincial Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act and Plan. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provincial government will strengthen its Provincial Policy Statement on planning to ensure that natural areas are given sufficient protection from human activity and will implement the Source Protection policy framework and other watershed management initiatives.
 A significant number of projects to regenerate aquatic and terrestrial conditions are undertaken each year.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 69,000 trees and shrubs have been planted by groups within the watershed in the last three years. • TRCA's newly developed Terrestrial Natural Heritage Strategy provides an effective tool for watershed regeneration and identifying priority actions. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The federal and provincial governments will commit greater levels of funding to ensure the de-listing of Toronto as a Great Lakes Area of Concern. • Develop sustained stewardship programs to increase regeneration projects and promote sustainable living. An effective strategy will be developed and funded to deliver environmental stewardship programs engaging the Don's diverse ethnic populations.
 Residents are taking on the stewardship of the watershed as an integral part of their daily life.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household efforts such as recycling, toxic reduction, and energy conservation provide an important step toward sustainable living. • Naturalized gardens are gaining favour — there were 35 Green Garden Visits in 2002, and over 150 nominations for Another Yard for the Don in the past three years. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses in the Don will know the benefits of integrating economic and environmental decision-making and will act on them.
 Businesses across the watershed are doing their part to protect and restore the Don.	D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business efforts toward sustainability management are increasing. • Corporate contributions to the Conservation Foundation in 2002 surpassed \$900,000. Unilever continued to be the Don River Partner. • The Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, with over 700 members, supported the enhancement of the ecological health of the Bartley Smith Greenway. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for environmental projects will become a capital budget item in each municipality in the Don. • Regional and local municipalities will develop and implement tools for litter control, tree protection, top soil preservation, sediment and erosion control, sewer use, ravine protection, and lot level water management.
 Municipalities across the watershed are doing their part to protect and restore the Don.	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some municipalities have adopted leading-edge commitments to top-soil preservation, sewer use, pesticide restrictions, and natural resource enhancement. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply the new Toronto Ravine By-law and York Region's woodland cover targets to ensure that forested areas will be protected and restored.

*“Protect what is healthy.
Regenerate what is degraded.
Take responsibility for the Don.”*

*-from *Forty Steps to a New Don*, 1994.*



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