



DON TASK FORCE

Bittersweet anniversary

Founded in 1989 to restore the Don River by 2001, the Task Force to Bring Back the Don was never supposed to turn 20. The fact is, though, that the Don has not yet been "brought back," and projects like the West Don Lands redevelopment at its southern terminus has placed more focus than ever on Toronto's most famous and worst kept waterway.

Credit for conceiving of a development where the river meets Lake Ontario must go to this City-sponsored citizens' group. "The reworking of the mouth of the Don would have been so far out of reach [in the beginning] that one would never have even have put it in the blue-sky," says long-time member, supporter, and Toronto Councillor Pam McConnell.

But numerous challenges lie ahead. For one thing, it's impossible to even say with any degree of certainty exactly where the river's course or mouth of the Don used to be, let alone how to un-urbanize it. While the Task Force is not driving this project — the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority recently began conducting the Environmental Assessment — their voice has kept the focus on the river, McConnell argues.

Task Force chair John Wilson agrees, pointing out that the group's initial projects (including 40 regeneration projects such as Chester Springs Marsh and the planting of 40,000 trees), proved

so successful and so popular they have since been taken on by others: "We're a little hothouse of a group. We've tended to start things, and then when they become more established, turn them over. So we've become more of a policy-fused group than a grassroots neighbourhood action group."

Some policies, including golf course management practices in Toronto and the city's 25-year Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan, may have no intuitive connection with the restoration of the Don, but storm water and runoff have long surpassed industrial discharge as the river's leading pollutant. Working with the City to both reduce the toxins entering the Don and to rehabilitate the river system so it can better filter and absorb pollutants not only helps the waterway and its resident wildlife but also improves water quality for everyone who lives here.

Not that the Task Force has abandoned its roots: the group still works on improving accessibility through trail-building and on major restoration projects, including Crothers Woods and a proposed Pottery Road Wetland.

Restoration projects, besides contributing directly to the Task Force mandate of a "clean, green and accessible" Don River, indirectly contribute to a healthier environment for the whole City. "This is perhaps one of the most important rivers in our city, and the one that was most abandoned and least cared for," says McConnell. "It was the first river to die...It will be the litmus test as to whether or not we have a healthy environment for city-building." †

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