

ALTONA FOREST

Community Newsletter

SPRING 2006

VOL. 5 NO. 1

Trail Opening Event!

On September 19, 2005, the Pickering Naturalists, Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) and the City of Pickering hosted a trail opening event at Altona Forest to celebrate one full year of trail work. The work, which was carried out between August of 2004 and August of 2005, was made possible by a grant given to the Pickering Naturalists from The Ontario Trillium Foundation. The grant provided funding for the following areas:

- Earth work – clearing, excavating and grading
- Access areas – parking lot materials, topsoil, stiles and stones
- Restoration – native trees and shrubs
- Wetland boardwalks – at-grade boardwalks, a raised boardwalk and the observation deck
- Rest areas – forest benches and wheelchair-accessible picnic tables
- Signage – trail head signs and trail marker posts

These trail improvements will contribute to the ecological health of the forest and to community well-being. The accessibility of the trail system has been improved and new signage directs hikers through the forest. A parking lot was built to provide a safe and convenient access point for the public. There are also many interesting places where hikers can rest and observe nature. Come out and see the results of all the hard work!

Clean Up Altona Forest!

The annual Altona Forest Spring Clean Up will be held on Saturday April 29 at 10 a.m. We will meet in the parking lot of St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Elementary School and head into the forest.



Trail opening ceremonies (from left to right): Jeff Bowers, AFSC; Mike Bender, TRCA; David Ryan, mayor, City of Pickering, TRCA board member; Larry Noonan, AFSC; TD Canada Trust representative; Doug Lockrey, AFSC and Pickering Naturalists.



Ribbon cutting (from left to right): Jeff Bowers, AFSC; Larry Noonan, AFSC; David Ryan, mayor, City of Pickering, TRCA board member; Michael Noonan, student, St. Elizabeth Seton School; Doug Dickerson, councillor, City of Pickering; Rick Johnson, councillor, City of Pickering; students, St. Elizabeth Seton School.





Opening ceremony dignitaries (from left to right): Jeff Bowers, AFSC; Mike Bender, TRCA; David Ryan, mayor, City of Pickering, TRCA board member; Larry Noonan, AFSC; Rick Johnson, councillor, City of Pickering; Doug Dickerson, councillor, City of Pickering.

2005 Trail Work

By Elyssa Elton

This past summer, Altona Forest was the site of a lot of activity, both on the trails and at the entrances. A number of projects were completed in 2005 thanks to a generous grant from The Ontario Trillium Foundation, volunteer time by the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee, and additional funding and staff time from TRCA.

The most noticeable addition to the forest is the new parking lot located at the main trail head off Altona Road, across from Pine Grove Avenue. A new fence was erected around the parking lot to control the entrance of unauthorized vehicles into the forest and to prevent unlawful activities. The parking lot, which can accommodate approximately ten cars, provides an easy way for residents to access the forest for a walk, jog or even a cross-country ski. A kiosk sign was installed at this new entrance to the forest to welcome visitors and to provide some orientation. There are four picnic tables located near the parking area that are available for public use. Two of the picnic tables were installed on a hardened base to make them wheelchair accessible. A new trail leading from the parking lot meanders through a meadow, enters the forest and meets up with another trail near the Chickadee entrance.

In addition to the construction of a new parking lot, naturalization work continued. Many trees and shrubs were planted this past summer at various locations in the forest. Trees from the parking lot site were transplanted and used to naturalize the surrounding area. An additional 300 potted trees and shrubs were planted near the parking lot, along the new trail, in the area surrounding the wetland and in the north end of the forest close to



Trail signage: Chickadee Trail Head entrance.



Trail signage: Altona Road Trail Head and parking lot.

the hydro corridor. These new plantings will help these sections of Altona Forest to mature and provide improved habitat for wildlife.

There were also exciting changes at all of the formal entrances to the forest. In addition to the trail head kiosk signs, four new entrance signs can now be found at the other access points. Along with the new signage, stiles have been installed at all of the entrances to limit the entry of unauthorized vehicles. The only permitted uses in Altona Forest are hiking, jogging and cross-country skiing.

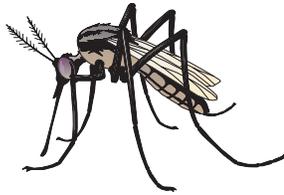
Finally, to create a more accessible trail system, new boardwalks and wooden benches were built at several locations throughout the property. The boardwalks were built in areas where trail creep was extensive because of muddy conditions, especially in the spring and early summer. The 10 benches were built throughout the forest to allow hikers to rest at various points along their path. The benches were placed in areas where trail users can relax and quietly view the wildlife around them.

If you have any questions or comments regarding these or any other projects at Altona Forest, please contact Mike Bender at mbender@trca.on.ca or 416-661-6600, extension 5287.



West Nile Virus

The West Nile virus is mainly transmitted to humans through the bite of a mosquito. A person infected with the virus usually shows either no symptoms at all or flu-like symptoms. Only a very small portion of the population will become seriously ill with West Nile virus. The best way to protect yourself and your family is by limiting the number of mosquito bites you receive. The Public Health Agency of Canada suggests the following ways to reduce your contact with mosquitoes:



- Stay indoors at dawn and dusk (peak times of mosquito activity).
- Use effective insect repellents such as those containing DEET.
- Wear light-coloured clothing, long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Fix all broken or ineffective screens around the house.
- Remove, or regularly disturb, containers that collect water around your property.

Wetlands, such as the ones found in Altona Forest, provide a home for wildlife and insects that eat mosquitoes. These include froglings and toadlets that eat many mosquitoes. Lacey's Pond is very healthy and is inhabited by ducks, frogs, duckweed (which purifies the water), and various other water and land plants. To increase the natural predators of mosquitoes, including the predators of mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus, residents should encourage the development and maintenance of healthy ponds, and support wetland naturalization projects in the area and within Altona Forest.

The Voice of Altona Forest

By Michael Noonan

I am the voice of Altona Forest. I am a home for many animals such as chipmunks, squirrels, deer, coyotes, frogs, owls and other birds. I am also home to many trees and plants such as cherry, maple, beech, dogwood, birch, pine, cedar and hemlock trees. There are also trilliums and other wild flowers, but watch out for my poison ivy! People enjoy me because of my many hiking trails, on which they can go snowshoeing in the winter. I have a beautiful pond that's home to ducks and frogs. There is something important I want to tell everyone: Please do not throw trash into the forest!

Accolades for TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation

By Larry Noonan

Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA), the Region of Durham, the City of Pickering and the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee would like to thank TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment Foundation for providing \$6,695 towards the establishment of the Altona Forest Hiking Trail.

Funding was received for the following:

- One trail head sign/kiosk located at one of the main entrances – off Stroud's Lane – to welcome visitors to the hiking trail while pointing out acceptable activities.
- Thirty-six posts installed along the trail at sites determined by the trail committee (these posts correspond to an interpretive trail hiking guide, which can be downloaded from the Altona Forest website at www.altonaforest.org).
- Thirty metres of boardwalk over two wet areas, close to the southern entrance, to protect forest floor habitat and prevent trail widening. (See article Seton 504 in this newsletter for information about these boardwalks.)

Thanks to the TD Canada Trust Friends of the Environment for their support of this very sensitive environmental area and for helping to make Altona Forest more accessible to visitors who will help to protect the forest, while enjoying all the natural amenities it has to offer.





Bird feeders on a runner line.

Photography by Jeff Bowers

Bird Feeding Ideas

By Jeff Bowers

For those of us with bird feeders, one of the common problems associated with the practice of feeding birds is having uninvited guests such as squirrels, chipmunks and raccoons getting into feeders and emptying them. Many of us have tried varying techniques to attempt to mitigate this problem, such as baffles and hanging the feeders high up. I have come up with a way which has completely eliminated the problem. Perhaps if you are experiencing the same problems you may want to try something like this, too. Although the layout of your home and the surrounding features will dictate what your options are, I hope I can at least introduce you to a better solution.

In my case, I ran a line (thick string available at any home centre) from the house to a dead tree. On this line I ran a runner line, with the feeder attached to it via a pulley system. It allows for the feeder to be moved back and forth along the line, much like a clothesline system works.

The advantage is that the feeder is up off the ground high enough to be out of the reach of critters and you can change the position of the feeder (which is presumably over your lawn) so that you don't have too many seed shells built up in one spot. Depending on how you construct it, you can also pull the line in so you can fill the feeder without even going outside. For example, you could string the line just above your sliding glass door at the back of the home with an eye bolt that could be drilled and fastened into the brick/mortar. Again, each house situation will have varying options. Remember to think 'outside the box' and look for creative ways to make it work. You could, for example, install two small poles in your backyard and have the line strung between the poles. If you have questions, you can email me at bowersjeff@rogers.com



Black-capped chickadee

Did You Know?

- Each person could save 325 trees if they recycled throughout their lifetime. At that rate, a city the size of Pickering could save over 30 million trees by recycling.
- Recycling an aluminium pop can is the same as saving half a can of gasoline. At the price of gas, most people would think twice about throwing it away.



Seton 504

By Mr. Noonan's Grade 5 Students, St. Elizabeth Seton School

Bang, Bang, Slap!

In June 2004, our teacher, Mr. Noonan, brought our Grade 5 class into the forest of mosquitoes to build two boardwalks in Altona Forest. While it was near 34 degrees Celsius in the shade, we hammered away, installing more than 200 boards. Hammering nails, slapping mosquitoes, singing, carrying wood, writing names on the boards, getting our picture taken by the Ajax-Pickering News Advertiser, running out of nails once, and studying the forest life resulted in aching arms and rivers of sweat, and most importantly, the achievement of our goal to build the boardwalks before the end of the school day.

After the day's work, we went inside the school and had popsicles, scratched our mosquito bites and were very quiet. The smelly bug spray, mosquito bites, bruises and hard work was all worth it. We succeeded in building the boardwalks. Showers or a bath, and a nap were on all our minds by dismissal time.

Thanks to TRCA for providing the wood, nails and three helpers. TRCA presented each student in our class with a certificate of appreciation and some small gifts for all our hard work.

When you go for a walk in Altona Forest from the south entrance and walk over the muddy areas, without getting dirty or wet, remember the Grade 5 class of 2004 who built the two boardwalks we call Seton 504.

Check them out!



Grade 5 students installing decking on boardwalks.



City of Pickering's

Environmental Programs

We need your help to preserve and restore Pickering's natural environment. Get out your calendars and get involved! Visit www.cityofpickering.com or contact the coordinator, environmental awareness programs at 905-420-4660, ext. 5221, for more information about any of the programs described below.

Adopt-a-Park

Register your school, community group, association or business to Adopt-a-Park. You may choose to adopt a neighbourhood park or simply a favourite greenspace you enjoy. YOUR contribution will make a tremendous difference. YOUR effort will make it safer, healthier and cleaner for families, pets and wildlife that use the area. A sign will be placed on-site recognizing your support. The City of Pickering is committed to assisting your endeavours.



Pitch-in Parties Litter trashes us all — do your part to help.

Pick a day, an evening or a weekend and organize a Pitch-in Party. Every little bit helps, so gather your family, friends or colleagues, and clean up a local greenspace, stream, trail or roadside. Let's preserve the unique environmental qualities the City of Pickering has to offer. Local businesses and industries are encouraged to step up and demonstrate their civic pride through participation. To help, the city will provide bags/gloves and bag pickup for each Pitch-in-Party event you have.

WANTED — Sponsors for the Altona Forest Website

If you are interested in having the name of your company advertised on the Altona Forest website for a small fee, please contact Jeff Bowers at bowersjeff@rogers.com

Property Green Up: Taking an Integrated Approach to Lawn Care

An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. These are wise words to consider when trying to grow and maintain a healthy lawn. Visit the city's website to learn about the importance of an integrated approach, how to prevent problems and the four R's of problem solving. The site also explains wise pesticide use and disposal, alternatives to pesticides and what the city's approach is on community properties. Check out the city's website this spring to find out the date of the Second Annual Property Green Up.



Be a Part of the Makeover on Friday, April 21 at 2 p.m.

In April, municipalities from around the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) welcome spring and celebrate Earth Day by giving their community a makeover. The momentum is growing for adults and youth alike to clean up their act regarding litter. The melting snow uncovers the fact that there are still a lot of people who need a lesson in responsibility, cleaning up after themselves and not throwing their trash into public spaces.

The 2005 Pickering Makeover was a huge success thanks to the 8,000 participants that registered to clean up litter around their school, neighbourhood and workplace.

In 2006, we are setting our goals even higher for the event that will take place on Friday, April 21 at 2 p.m. Check out the City of Pickering website for event details at www.cityofpickering.com or call the customer care centre at 1-877-420-4666. With the help of our sponsors we will provide free bags and gloves. The city will even haul away the bags of litter that you collect. Large groups, businesses and schools are encouraged to register with the customer care centre.





Take Action and Be Our Eyes on the Street!

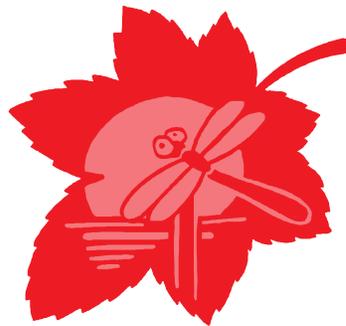
Graffiti, illegal dumping, litter and vandalism negatively impact the community by leading to more instances of the same illegal behaviours, negative perceptions about the affected neighbourhood and detract from the city aesthetically. These issues may also pose health and safety concerns, and impact on our natural environment. Be part of the solution. Help the City of Pickering to address these problems by taking an active approach.

If you see an area that has been targeted with graffiti, illegal dumping, litter or vandalism, contact the City of Pickering to report the type of incident and location.

- Call 1-877-420-4666
- Report online at www.cityofpickering.com/eyesonthestreet
- Email customercare@city.pickering.on.ca

TD Canada Trust Great Canadian Shoreline Clean Up

Be it the shores of Lake Ontario or the meandering stream in your favourite park, we all enjoy having access to water. Maybe you love fishing, bird watching, swimming or the tranquility of just sitting and enjoying the view.



Unfortunately, some people have little respect for these areas and they are getting littered with garbage that can be harmful to kids, fish and wildlife.

In 2005, residents, cadet groups and neighbourhood associations from the City of Pickering joined the hundreds of thousands of people from across Canada that participated in the TD Canada Trust Great Canadian Shoreline Clean Up. From September 16 to 24 get a group of friends, family or co-workers together and commit a small amount of time to cleaning up a section of shoreline.

Call the city at 905-420-4660, ext.5221, so that we can help. Let us know what section of waterfront or stream you are going to restore, or we can suggest areas that need a helping hand. When you're done, we'll even pick up and dispose of the waste and recyclables.



Observation deck

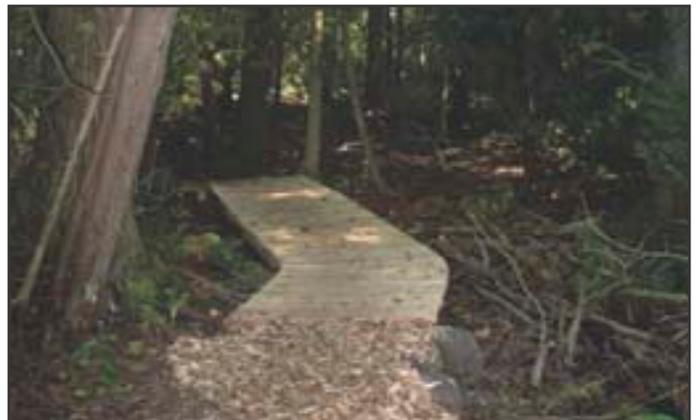
Wetland Boardwalk and Observation Deck

By Larry Noonan

In October 2004, the public was invited to participate in the construction of the wetland boardwalk. A number of families helped to build the 80-metre long structure around the pond, which was completed in one day.

The observation deck looking over the wetland was completed the following week. This deck is used for bird watching or just relaxing and enjoying the pond, trees and flowers in the area. Many animals visit this pond, as can be witnessed by the variety of foot prints visible during the winter months. For the past two years, Mallard ducks have even nested in the pond.

Access to the observation deck is easiest from the Chickadee entrance on the west side of the forest. Hikers can now travel through the wetland area, keeping dry while avoiding damage to this sensitive area. We thank The Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding the boardwalk and observation deck.



Woodland boardwalk





Trail and sign post

Trees, Trees, Trees

By Jeff Bowers

With urban sprawl continuing at a maddening pace in and around the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the need to reforest, where possible, is now more important than ever. Trees allow migrating birds the opportunity to safely rest while on route, without fear from predators, not to mention providing safe locations for nesting. As the number of trees is reduced with urban sprawl, many bird species simply cannot continue to survive and their numbers dwindle as the liveable areas for them continue to get eliminated. Here are some tree benefits that you may not know about:

- Trees provide shelter for other animals.
- Trees help to reduce greenhouse gases as they convert carbon dioxide back into oxygen.
- Trees are sometimes called “carbon sinks” as they safely store within them many of the very gases, which are harmful to the balance of the atmosphere.
- Trees are aesthetically pleasing to the eye.
- Trees provide privacy around homes; they can even increase property values.
- Studies have shown that trees placed near the home can reduce both heating bills in the winter and air conditioning bills in the summer by providing a buffer between the home and the sun in summer, and cold winds in the winter.

There are so many reasons to introduce more trees back into our living spaces. Take the time this year to plant a tree near your house and experience some of these benefits for yourself!



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Danger

By Larry Noonan

Over the last couple years, there have been a number of occurrences where domesticated animals, such as dogs or cats, have been allowed to wander unleashed and unattended in Altona Forest. This is causing a number of problems including dead pheasants and other birds having been found along the trail. They were not killed by coyotes or foxes, but by something else — possibly unleashed dogs. Also, a number of hikers have complained about being aggressively approached by dogs that have no owner in sight.

We ask that the owners please ensure their animals are kept on a leash. If you see stray dogs in the forest without their owners, call Pickering Animal Services at 905-420-4655 and they will come to collect the dogs. The owners may be subject to a fine.

If your dog appears to be missing, visit www.cityofpickering.com to find out if Animal Control has picked it up. And, please remember that for the protection of your dog, the wild animals of the forest, and the security of children and adult hikers, dogs must be leashed in Altona Forest at all times.



Member of Conservation Ontario

www.trca.on.ca

Altona Forest
Stewardship
Committee



www.altonaforest.org

