

At the Forks

The Magazine of the Friends of the Don East

Volume 9

Spring 2002

Issue 1

Environmental Garden Wins Award

by Erica Wilson



Native species flourish in the Newel's award-winning garden

The Newel family is no stranger to ecological gardening. Mary Newel has childhood memories of her sand-box being converted into a compost pit 35 years ago. "We have always been ecologically minded," she says. Continuing the tradition, the Newel family was a Gold Award winner in the *Another Yard for the Don* ecological gardening awards program last year.

Mary Newel became interested in native plants while visiting her cousin in Australia over 15 years ago. Her cousin gardened with species native to her country and Newel was fascinated.

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Watch Out for Electricity "Deals"

by Ravi Mark Singh

INSIDE :

Exploring Don Valley Trails

Tree-Climbing Frogs in the Don

Family Events for Spring

It's really confusing, isn't it? You probably have electricity retailers knocking at your door or calling on the phone (or both); all trying to get you to sign up for one of the "fantastic" deals they are offering.

You've seen dozens of articles and news reports on this whole "deregulation" business and they've done nothing but confuse you even further.

Information can be ammunition – but it's sometimes hard to know where to point your gun, if you can load it

properly in the first place.

The government has decided, for various reasons, that the electricity sector in Ontario will be open to competition as of May 1, 2002 – the same thing happened to the gas sector a few years ago. What this means is that, if you want to, you will be able to choose your electricity supplier from a list of licensed retailers. You could also decide to do nothing and stay with your current supplier – your local utility like Toronto Hydro.

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Protecting Yourself from Deregulation

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This entire process is regulated by the Ontario government and the Ontario Energy Board which requires that your local utility cannot make any profit on the power they sell to you.

This means that, if you stay with Toronto Hydro, you will pay whatever it pays to buy electricity on the open market. This price will inevitably vary but the Ontario Energy Board has forecast that, for the first year after market opening, the "spot market price" will be about 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour (kWh).

This is the cost for the *generation* portion of your electricity only. The other, regulated, non-negotiable charges which will appear on your bill are transmission (the big Hydro One wires), distribution (this is where your utility makes its profit) and special charges (like the debt reduction charge to service the old Ontario Hydro's \$38-billion debt).

The five licensed retailers are all offering 3- and 5-year contracts at prices 35-38 per cent higher than the forecasted rate. Why would you want to sign any of these contracts in the first place? Well, the retailers are hoping that you will be frightened by

what you have heard about the situation in Alberta and California – scared enough to lock yourself into a contract for 3 to 5 years. They start their sales pitch by comparing the energy charge on your current bill, typically 6.4 cents per kWh, to their deal – 5.79 to 5.95 cents per kWh.

Don't be misled: The current energy charge on your bill includes more than just the generation portion of your electricity. So you cannot compare these two figures. If you think that prices are going to escalate overnight, then maybe you should sign a contract. If you don't think this will happen then you should adopt a wait-and-see attitude. No one really knows what will happen.

The general expectation is that the price of electricity in Ontario will slowly rise to be on par with that of the North American market.

There is a great online tool to help you make your decision during this process. It is the Electricity Choices website – www.electricitychoices.org, a free service of the Ontario Clean Air Alliance – which presents all this in more detail while providing you with objective information on the financial and environmental impacts of your choice of an electricity provider.

Amongst other things, it includes a calculator which you can use to compare the costs of each of the six contracts currently available to you.

And keep in mind that your best strategy is to reduce your dependence on electricity – and thus reduce your vulnerability to price spikes and other market forces.

Ravi Mark Singh is the Communications Co-ordinator of the Ontario Clean Air Alliance and can be reached by emailing info@cleanair.web.ca.

At the Forks

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Editor: Don McLean

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Green Power

Starting May 1, 2002 You will be able to sign up with Toronto Hydro Energy Services for 100% pollution-free power from a wind-turbine which will be installed on the CNE grounds in September at a price of 14.89 cents per kWh.

Alternatively, you can purchase clean power from the Grey Bruce Renewable Energy Co-op's wind-turbine located in Port Albert in Huron County. The price is 11.8 cents per kWh.

Both of these wind power options are available for consumers across Ontario. Transmission, distribution and nuclear debt retirement charges are extra.

For more info, visit www.electricitychoices.org and click on "What are my choices?"



Family Events to Spring Into

Things to do this spring to improve the Don Valley

Saturday, April 27 — **East Don Parklands, Tree and Shrub Planting** 10 am Take the walking trail off of Pineway Rd., north of Finch Ave. Meet where the trails cross near the river. Partners: East Don Parkland Partners, Evergreen. Info: (416) 392-5323.

April 28, June 13, June 23 — **Riverdale Park East, Tree and Shrub Planting** Located on the west side of Broadview Ave, just north of Gerrard St. East. Meet at 10 am at the wetland at the base of the south-facing slope. Task Force to Bring Back the Don. Call (416) 392-5323 to confirm details.



Sunday, April 28 — **Drumlin hopping and urban ecology at the edge of the Don Watershed** A Lost River Walk hosted by the North Toronto Green Community and FODE. Meet at 1:30 pm at the corner of Vaughan Rd. and Arlington Avenue. Call (416) 466-9153 to register.

Saturday, May 4 — **Cleanup at Warden Woods Park.** Join Friends of the Don East (FODE) and the 160th Seton Cub Pack in this annual litter cleanup. Meet at 10 am at entrance on the south-west corner of Warden and St. Clair. Info at (416) 466-9153 or www.web.ca/~fode

Sunday, May 5 — **Festive Earth Society's Living Rivers Festival**, 12-5pm. Toronto Brickworks. Program includes Nature Park, Eco Market, Product Info, Eco Info, Eatery, Eco Whiz Quiz and much more. Cost: \$5 which includes shuttle bus from Broadview subway station. For more information, call 416-469-2977 or visit www.festiveearth.com

Sunday May 5 — **Paddle the Don** The annual canoe trip starting between 9am and noon from Ernest Thompson Park. For information visit www.trca.on.ca/ptd.html. Register at 416-661-6600 x 5397

Saturday, May 11 — **North American Native Plant Society Wildflower Plant Sale** 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. at the Civic Garden Centre (Edwards Gardens), 777 Lawrence E. at Leslie. Info at <http://www.nanps.org/sale>

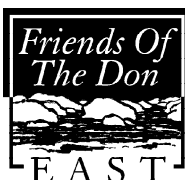
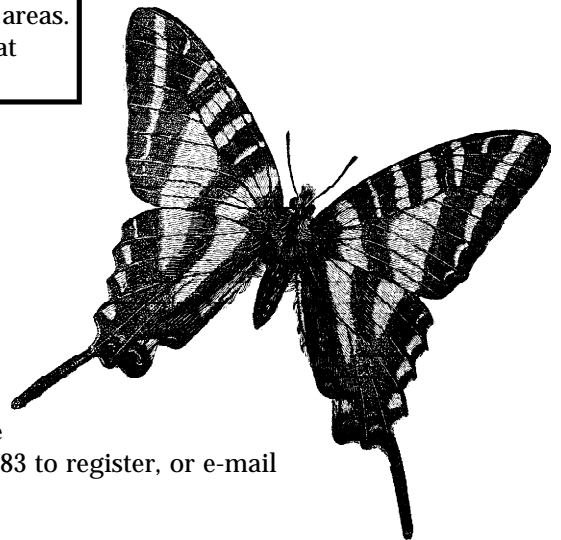
Saturday May 11 — **Ecosystem Performance Criteria and the Mouth of the Don** Meet Dalton Shipway at the Irish Rovers Pub at the corner of Villiers and Cherry Street at noon for this two hour walk.

Saturday, June 1 — **Milne Hollow Tree, Shrub and Wildflower Planting** A Friends of the Don East and Task Force to Bring Back the Don event. The park entrance is located on the south side of Lawrence Avenue East, just east of the Don Valley Parkway exit. Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the hill. Info: (416) 392-5323.

Saturday, June 15 — **Crother's Woods ESA.** Join Friends of the Don East for a guided stroll through one of the Don's most precious natural areas. Meet at 10 am at the corner of Millwood and Redway Roads. Info at (416) 466-9153.

Wednesday, June 19 — **Don River Bus Tour:** a guided tour of stormwater management facilities, the West Don projects, the Baker Sugar Bush, Terraview Willowfield and more. Call Toronto Bay Initiative to register (416-943-8080 ext. 227). Members \$5, Non-members \$10. 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm

Sunday June 23 — **Water in the City Walk.** 10:00 am to 12:00 noon. Learn about the water flowing through the city's underground sewer system, the effects of stormwater on our lake and rivers, and what you can do to be part of the solution. Meet outside the Chester Subway station. Hosted by the RiverSides Stewardship Alliance. Call (416) 392-1983 to register, or e-mail riversides@riversides.org. Free.



Exploring the

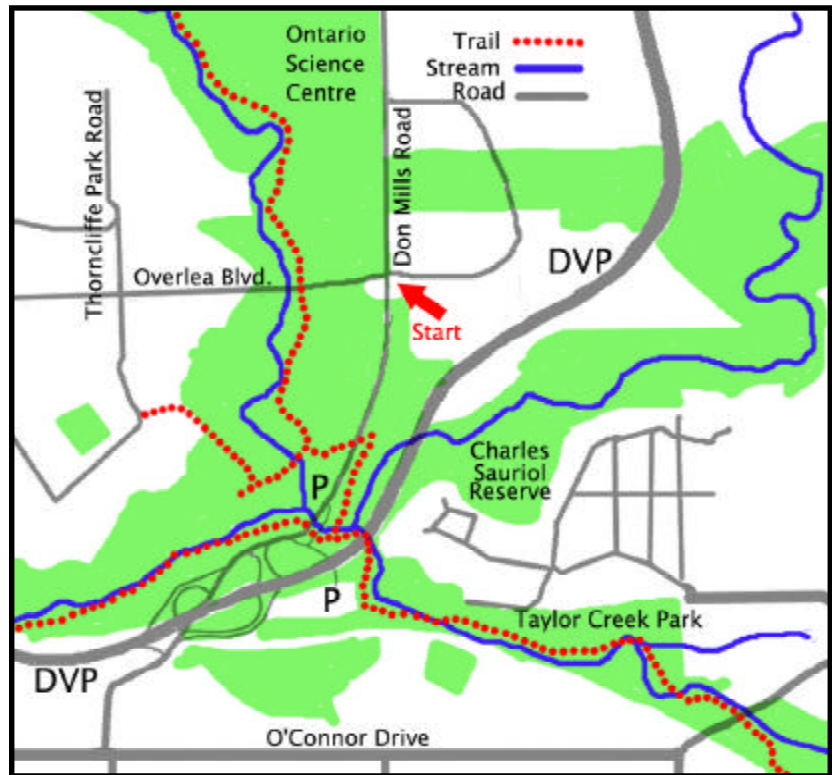
by Jurg

An extensive trail system along the Don Valley invites us to escape the City and explore the urban wilderness at our doorstep. The return of warm weather makes it more attractive, and the following descriptive guide will also make it easy.

The Forks of the Don provided the name to this publication back when the organization was known as Friends of the Don East York (FODEY). Begun in 1993 to protect the Borough's rivers and watersheds when there were no official policies to accomplish this, FODEY expanded beyond its original boundaries to include all of the Lower and East Don. It has become a non-profit corporation, but never lost sight of its grassroots volunteerism. The Borough is gone now, swallowed up in the new amalgamated city, and the reference to York has been dropped from our name. But there is a lot of history here. Let's take a walk.

From the southeast corner of Overlea Drive and Don Mills Road, a sidewalk runs south to a dirt path and reaches an abandoned road that used to be Don Mills Road during another era. It is slowly being reclaimed by nature: the asphalt is disintegrating and grasses now cover half the surface. Young trees have thrust their way through the pavement, cracking and heaving it where their roots run underneath. That road now ends at a wooden footbridge that crosses the railroad tracks.

Beyond the wooden bridge, a modern asphalt path runs down the slope into the valley. At the bottom on the left there's a path that runs into the Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve, a rare patch of urban wilderness. The path does not go far because of the train tracks. A little further along there is a rock on the right with a plaque commemorating the Reserve's dedication in 1989 and the man responsible, the late Charles Sauriol.



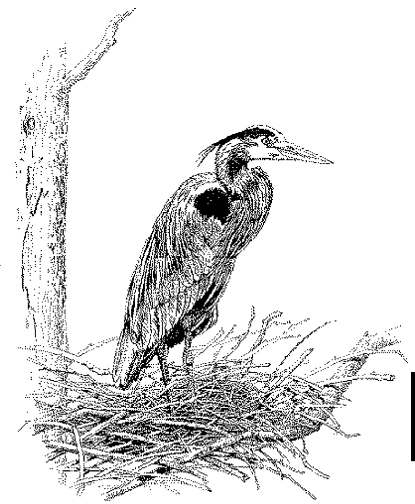
The author of six books on the region, he had camped here with his Boy Scouts in the 1920s and eventually acquired and lived on the land.

An earlier resident on this site was Captain Phillippe de Grassi, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars who drew a grant here of 200 acres in 1831. The place was then known as The Boatbildery.

It's uncertain whether or not boats were made here, but records do show that a boat builder lived close by. Given strong currents to power sawmills, it may have made sense to construct small craft close to local lumber and float them downriver to the town of York. It also highlighted Toronto's origins as a naval base, when the local white pines were reserved as mast timber for the King's ships.

By now the trail has become a road again which crosses an old bridge. Turn left and there are the Forks of the East Don and Taylor Massey Creek. A series of boulders spanning half the

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"Parks & Trails"
map free at civic
centres**



Forks of the Don

sunohler

Nature in Your Neighbourhood – the Walking Paths of the Don Valley

river have replaced a weir (or waterfall) to allow salmon to migrate through again.

Also large as life here are three gigantic plant pots as big as houses, with three more in the distance. They look like big teeth and are easily visible from the Don Valley Parkway. These are the Elevated Wetlands constructed of recycled materials to demonstrate

the importance of wetland ecosystems in cleaning our streams. Water is pumped up from the Don and filtered through native plants and recycled plastic pellets (not real soil) in the pots, as it cascades from one to the other, and back to the river.

To the right a path branches off and disappears under the Don Mills overpass (near an entrance from Don Mills Road if you are driving to this hiking area). Follow the wooden walkway and there on the right, are the Forks of the East, West and Lower Dons, with a distant waterfall cascading over a weir. Hopefully in time boulders will also replace this weir for the sake of the salmon.

Large amounts of Dog Strangling Vine, an invasive plant, can be seen nearby, pulling over the native Staghorn Sumac. This is typical when people introduce foreign plants or animals to an ecosystem.

From here one can take the paved path south to Todmorden Mills Museum at Pottery Road and on toward Lake Ontario, or follow a route east along the banks of Taylor-Massey Creek all the way to Warden Woods Park at Warden and St. Clair.

Alternately, one may backtrack to the wooden bridge over the tracks, and turn left down the wooden ramp going under Don Mills Road, and follow the valley road up to Thorncliffe Park Drive.

Just as that road turns sharply uphill, a distant parking lot comes into view. Go downhill towards it instead and keep going to the well-treed slopes known as Crother's Woods, to explore more trails in one of the valley's most precious forests.

As you can see, the "Forks" can refer to both the confluence of the streams and the intersection of parts of the trail system of the valley.



One of the trails through Crother's Woods - photo by Karen Bernstein

Another Yard for the Don - Nomination Form

You can nominate your own garden or someone else's.

Nominee's Name _____

Address _____ Postal Code _____

Telephone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Check which apply to the garden now or later this year.

- The roof downspout is disconnected
- There is a rain barrel for garden use
- There is little lawn OR it is being reduced
- There is a lot of low-water-use ground-cover
- A composter is used for kitchen and garden waste
- City-provided compost is used
- There are many native plants OR more than last year
- There are plants that attract birds and butterflies
- There is a bird bath, nest box or bird feeder
- There is a pond or stream
- There is a meadow garden

Synthetic pesticides/herbicides are:

- never used seldom used used less than last year

Synthetic fertilizers are:

- never used seldom used used less than last year

Please include photos and/or other information to support your nomination.

Tell us about your yard. Please describe your favourite, or the newest, ecological features in your garden (use a separate sheet if necessary):

Mail this form to:

**Another Yard for the Don
c/o Friends of the Don East
Leaside P.O. Box 43506
Toronto, Ontario M4G 4G8**

More info at (416) 466-9153

continued from page 1

When she returned to Canada, she got in touch with the North American Native Plant Society — then called the Canadian Wildflower Society — and began investigating and recovering the historical features of her property.

The endeavour was shaped by Mary's fascination with the Carolinian Forest originally in her area of north Toronto, and by her mother Ella's love of colour. Together they have created a garden that is beautiful, colourful and healthy for the Don River. Currently, Mary is developing the understory trees, shrubs, grasses and sedges with species such as serviceberry, witch

hazel, and pagoda dogwood.

FODE is now accepting nominations for the fourth year of our *Another Yard for the Don* ecological gardening program. We give awards to residents whose gardening practices reduce pesticides, provide wildlife habitat, help improve water quality, and/or contain native plant species. We have awards for those just starting to make their yards more environmentally friendly, as well as for those who have been improving the ecology of their property for many years.



Tree-Climbing Frogs in the Don

by Don McLean

There are frogs in the Don River watershed that climb trees and change their colour. If you are fortunate you can hear them calling in June and July.

If you are really lucky you might even find one of these amazing creatures near marshes or other wet areas along the river during their early summer breeding period.

The Gray Treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*) is Ontario's only true arboreal frog and it will climb right to the top of the tallest trees where it feeds on insects. They are quite acrobatic and will often leap into the air to catch flying bugs. Occasionally they are found clinging to the wall of a building, especially if there is a light nearby that is attracting night-flying insects. Enlarged toepads allow the

frogs to climb rough or smooth vertical surfaces. Such manoeuvres, along with the sticky toes and big eyes, make the Gray Treefrog seem like a denizen of the tropical rainforest.

As its Latin name suggests, they are able to change colour -- although only from gray to green and back again. This helps them to hide on the bark or leaves of the trees where they live most of their lives, and makes finding them very difficult. They are also only about 8 cm long. You can look for them in the hollows of trees, but even if you hear one calling, you will be lucky to actually see it. Young ones are bright green, but as they get older they look dry and warty like toads.

All of the frogs in Ontario call or "sing" to attract a mate. The short, resonating trill of the Gray Treefrog is

sometimes mistaken for a bird, especially the cry of the Red-bellied woodpecker. Each call only lasts one or two seconds, unless you're listening to a group.

Many frog species appear to be rapidly going extinct in many parts of the globe. The reasons for this are not clear, but it is a bit scary because the amphibians have survived several major extinctions including the one that wiped out the dinosaurs 60 million years ago.

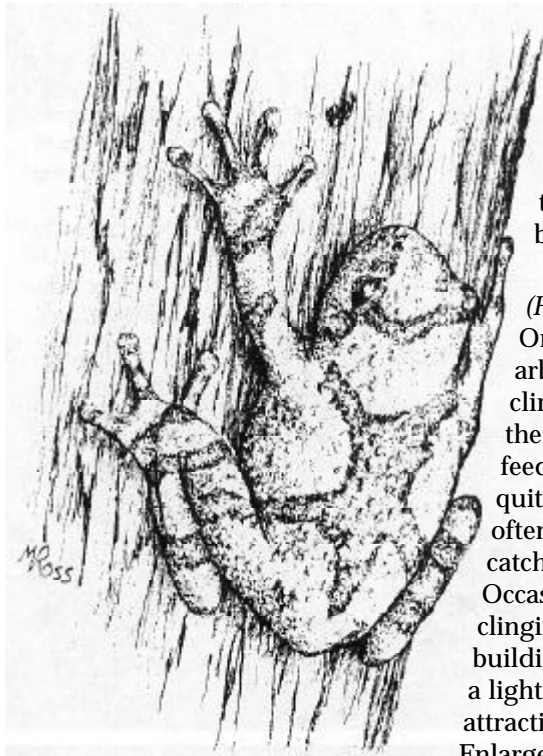
Of course, frogs don't generally do very well in big cities, because most of the places they live and breed in have been destroyed. They need ponds and marshes that are wet until late July or August for their tadpoles to grow and develop.

However, the Gray Treefrog can still be found in the heart of Toronto because of the forests and natural areas along rivers like the Don. They are considered a species of concern in the Don, and their presence indicates a higher quality and healthier ecosystem.

A 1997 volunteer survey found Green Frogs, Northern Leopard Frogs and American Toads throughout the Don Watershed. However, the Gray Treefrog were scarce and found mainly in the most northerly parts of the Don.

Gray Treefrogs apparently taste awful to animals that otherwise like to eat frogs. For example, shrews who have been seeing taking a bite out of a Gray Treefrog quickly abandon their meal, paw at their mouth and retreat. Subsequently these shrews cannot be convinced to try another Gray Treefrog for lunch.

If you find a Gray Treefrog south of Eglinton Avenue, Friends of the Don East would like to hear about it. You can leave a message on our phone line at (416) 466-9153 or email us at fode@web.ca.



Gray Treefrog
(Actual Size)

Does CAA Speak For You?

by Don McLean

The Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) does a little more than start your car on a cold winter morning. It's also a heavy-duty lobbyist that recently threw its weight behind the scheme to add four more lanes to the Don Valley Parkway. Fortunately, the widening proposal was rejected last November by Toronto City Council.

Few of its members realize that the CAA claims to represent their views when it pushes the paving of natural areas like the Don Valley, or opposes efforts to reduce greenhouse gases and establish car-free zones in cities.

At the heart of the CAA's political activities is their Policy 1.1 which declares: "Mobility is the cornerstone of modern society, and private automobile is the principal means of mobility for most Canadians Governments should approach all transportation-related topics with a view to ensuring mobility today and for future generations."

This blind support for everything that serves the car has also led the CAA to lobby for the construction of a new six lane expressway inside the largest park and natural area in Hamilton.

Most people, including no doubt most of the CAA's members, realize that autos are having severe impacts on air and water quality, climate and human health. In a recent

poll on dealing with congestion 49% said improve or expand transit service while only 19% supported widening existing roads, and only 8% said build new roads. Another poll last summer found majority support for restricting use of cars to reduce air pollution.

The CAA, however, argues that "Financial penalties should not be imposed as a punitive measure for the purpose of reducing transportation fuel use to achieve emission reduction targets." This policy is aimed against carbon taxes on the burning of fossil fuels, an approach encourages reduced energy use, while at the same time recovering some of the health and environmental costs imposed on society by excessive driving.

If you're a CAA member, and don't share their outdated views, you might want to contact them and ask them to stop speaking on your behalf.

Adding road capacity to solve congestion is like buying larger pants to deal with your weight problem.



Visit the website of Friends of the Don East at www.web.ca/~fode

Join Friends of the Don East

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**Phone FODE
at (416)
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fode@web.ca**

Enclosed is my annual membership fee:
(Family \$20, Single: \$15, Low Income \$5)
Membership: \$ _____
Donation: \$ _____
Total: \$ _____

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