



Regenerate What is Degraded

📍 Don Valley Brick Works Park

Regenerate What is Degraded

No, it doesn't make much sense to create more natural areas if those that already exist are not protected. But it also doesn't make sense to walk away from the areas that are already degraded. We know they won't fix themselves — nature is good but without significant changes to many of the stressors you've already read about, nature simply cannot keep up.

What is a regeneration project?

Regeneration projects are the in-the-ground, shovel and 'elbow grease' projects that help heal local, natural systems. They generally aim at one or more of four important goals: creation of aquatic habitat, creation of terrestrial habitat, improvement of water quality or control of water quantity.

To reach these goals, agencies, communities and municipalities collaborate on projects, including the: creation of wetlands; detention and treatment of stormwater and combined sewer overflows (CSOs); removal of in-stream barriers; schoolyard and park naturalization; planting of trees, wildflowers and other plants; and the enhancement of habitats in many other ways.

What is being done?

"Regenerate what is degraded" is the second of the three guiding principles in *Forty Steps to a New Don*. Between January 1997 and December 1999, some 130 regeneration

projects were undertaken, making a total of 230 projects since *Forty Steps* was published.

These 130 projects actually exceed the target of 100 set for 2000, but assessment of the success of this work is difficult. The Don needs a significant number of large-scale, multi-functional projects like the Keffer Marsh project in Vaughan to affect real change in the health of the watershed. The overwhelming majority of the 130 projects are small-scale, terrestrial plantings. Major flow and stormwater projects are needed to successfully complement the smaller, community-based efforts.

Regeneration is an ambitious program, and one that requires large volumes of both patience and money. The patience part is easy; the money part is not.

Two things give us cause to believe that a greater focus, both intellectually and economically, will soon be cast upon the Don. The recently released "Fung Report", titled *Gateway to the New Canada, Our Toronto Waterfront*, not only recognizes the undeniable integration between economic, social and environmental revitalization, it also proposes the naturalization of the mouth of the Don. Good news indeed!

The June 2000 Angus Reid Public Awareness Survey also yields promising news. Some 85 percent of respondents to the survey support efforts to clean up the Don watershed, even if it means a small fee added to their water bill to cover some of the clean-up costs.



☞ Keffer Marsh in Vaughan.



☞ Many hands makes light work.



☞ Before,
Lawrence Avenue weir in
the East Don.



After, ☞
East Don at Lawrence Avenue,
with Rocky Ramp installed for
fish passage.



INDICATOR 15: REGENERATION

PROJECTS

How much in-ground work is being done to improve the Don's water quality, flows, and terrestrial and aquatic habitats?

Where we were: (1997)

Almost 100 projects had been undertaken throughout the watershed between the publication of *Forty Steps to a New Don* in 1994 and the end of 1996. Many of these projects were multi-purpose projects that improved stormwater controls or improved water quality in other ways, as well as enhanced terrestrial and aquatic habitats. Ninety-eight percent of residents supported the watershed's regeneration, according to the 1996 Angus Reid survey.

2000 Targets:

Double the number of regeneration projects to at least 200, concentrating especially on the creation and enhancement of the Don's woodlands, wetlands, meadows and riparian habitat.

WHAT'S THE TREND?

in 1997



in 2000



The ten year movement continues; 130 new projects and over 9000 volunteers.



📍 *Planting at Milne Hollow (project led by City of Toronto).*

📍 *Terraviva-Willowfield Park located on the headwaters of the Taylor/Massey Creek (project led by the City of Toronto).*



Where we are: (2000)

An additional 130 recorded regeneration projects were undertaken between January 1997 and the end of 1999, making a total of 230 projects since *Forty Steps* was published. The majority of these projects are the result of progressive partnerships between municipalities, agencies and citizens groups. While a number of large-scale multi-functional projects have been undertaken, including the Terraview, Willowfield Park project on the headwaters of Taylor/Massey Creek and the Keffer Marsh project on the West Don in Vaughan, the vast majority of the 130 projects are small-scale, terrestrial plantings. These small-scale projects are vitally important but they alone cannot achieve the restoration of the watershed because they do not adequately address the fundamental issues pertaining to degraded water quality and destructive flows. While funding mechanisms for small-scale, community-based projects exist, there are no permanent programs providing dedicated funding for large-scale ecosystem/green infrastructure regeneration projects.

The Don Valley Brick Works Park, the largest regeneration project to date and one of the few multi-functional undertakings, was opened in the fall of 1997.

Where we want to be:

By 2003:

- 1) One hundred new projects will be initiated.
- 2) Monitoring and evaluation programs should be implemented.
- 3) All stormwater targets must be met (see Indicator 4).
- 4) A revised set of Community-Based Don watershed regeneration concept sites will be prepared (based in part on the completed Natural Heritage Strategy).

By 2010:

- 1) Major capital regeneration projects in the Don's municipalities should be completed or in progress, including:
 - City of Toronto:** eliminate combined-sewer overflows (CSO); upgrade stormwater system, including downspout disconnection; regenerate the mouth of the Don; complete the G. Ross Lord Dam concept site; complete and implement a Taylor/Massey Creek watershed study.
 - Richmond Hill:** upgrade stormwater system, including upgrading stormwater quantity ponds to address quality and implementing downspout disconnection; implement channel improvements along German Mills Creek.
 - Markham:** complete Settler's Park and Pomona Park concept sites; develop a design to expand the Pomona Concept site and implement it; upgrade the stormwater system, including downspout disconnection.
 - Vaughan:** complete Bartley Smith Greenway and stormwater pond upgrades.
- 2) Community groups will continue to initiate and support both large and small-scale regeneration projects.

By 2030:

Major CSO and stormwater projects will be completed.

How to get there:

Continuing on a major theme of this report card, large-scale projects addressing water, nature and community are necessary to ensure the viability of these community-based smaller efforts. Community groups and interested individuals should act to advocate for funding for large-scale environmental projects for the betterment of the watershed and its communities. The recently released "Fung Report", titled *Gateway to the New Canada, Our Toronto Waterfront*,

contains recommendations for the redevelopment of Toronto's waterfront in a sustainable and holistic manner, recognizing and paying heed to the undeniable integration between economic, social and environmental revitalization. Most importantly for the Don, the *Fung Report* proposes the naturalization of the river's mouth, an objective that must be pursued. Municipalities should include environmental enhancement in all capital projects, considering all opportunities to address water quality and quantity concerns through a hierarchy of measures including lot-level controls, conveyance and/or end-of-pipe measures. All levels of government should view regeneration projects as investments in natural infrastructure and provide the funding required to design and implement them. The Don's position in the Toronto Area of Concern should make it a priority area for Federal and Provincial funding programs such as the Great Lakes 2000 Clean-Up Fund. Local projects can be supported through partnerships among business, government and community groups. It is imperative that regeneration efforts on the Don move toward a more integrative approach in order to ensure the viability of individual projects and the maximization of the watershed's ecological potential. The Natural Heritage Strategy is one major tool for facilitating this type of approach to regeneration. Also, large-scale, integrated regeneration plans incorporating tableland management actions with valley enhancement are required. These integrated "concept sites" would include any or all facets of regeneration: improvements in access, stormwater ponds, fish habitat enhancements, enhanced riparian corridors, protection and management of woodlands, etc. Such an approach would also involve the public in a more meaningful way, ensuring that regeneration actions are driven primarily by the vision and passion of community members.

