To live near a natural area is a privilege and a joy, but with this privilege comes responsibility. As a neighbour of a natural area, there is much you can do, and not do, to protect the land’s ecological integrity and recreational value for future generations.

**Partners in Conservation**
Natural areas such as forests, prairies and wetlands provide essential ecological services. They:

- cleanse water before it enters our rivers and streams;
- reduce pollution in the air we breathe;
- help control soil erosion and flooding; and
- provide food and shelter for wildlife.

Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) is committed to protecting natural areas for the benefit of all living things. But this is only possible with the understanding and involvement of private landowners like you.

**Be a Good Neighbour**
This principle holds true when your neighbour is a person or a natural area. What you do in your yard has consequences beyond your property. Air and water quality, plant communities and wildlife populations can all be affected. For example, common garden plants like goutweed and periwinkle can spread into natural areas, out-competing native vegetation and reducing biodiversity. Be a good neighbour and consider nature before you act.

**Pets in Nature**
Dogs are not permitted to roam free in conservation areas. They can trample vegetation and the nests of ground-dwelling birds. When hiking in these areas, keep to the trails with your leashed dogs and remember to clean up after them. And if your yard borders a natural area, install a fence or keep your dog on a leash while unattended outdoors.

Outdoor cats are also problematic. Cats kill millions of songbirds every year in Canada, and are partly to blame for the near extinction of certain species, including the prothonotary warbler. Keep cats indoors or on a leash while outdoors to reduce bird mortality, especially during peak songbird migration periods (May and September - October).
Keep Them Wild

Nearby natural areas are home to many species of wildlife - from monarch butterflies and hummingbirds, to fox and deer. While it is fun and even inspirational to observe wildlife, it is important to respect and protect the wilderness of these animals. Feeding wild animals is detrimental to their long-term survival, and may cause injury to you and your property. Resist the urge to feed wild animals – no matter how cute. Store garbage in animal-proof containers, and keep pet food indoors. To prevent wild animals from taking up residence in and around your home, eliminate openings under porches and decks, and repair holes in roofs and attics.

Encroachment

From time to time, natural areas are severely affected by encroachment – which is the unauthorized use of public land for personal purposes. Structural encroachment involves the placement of sheds, play structures, fences, pathways, patios and gardens. Examples of the more common non-structural encroachments are outlined in the table below, along with associated problems and suggested alternatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENCROACHMENT</th>
<th>POTENTIAL ADVERSE EFFECTS</th>
<th>ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dumping yard waste</td>
<td>Introduces invasive non-native species, e.g. periwinkle and goutweed; creates a fire hazard; smothers natural vegetation.</td>
<td>Participate in municipal yard waste pick-up programs; leave clippings on the lawn (excellent fertilizer); compost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mowing, pruning or removing vegetation</td>
<td>Disturbs natural vegetation and wildlife habitat.</td>
<td>Call municipality if concerned about potentially hazardous vegetation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting vegetation</td>
<td>Disturbs natural vegetation; introduces invasive non-native species.</td>
<td>Participate in organized tree-planting programs and community gardening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spraying pesticides</td>
<td>Disturbs natural vegetation; exposes wildlife to potentially hazardous chemicals.</td>
<td>Call municipality if concerned about potentially hazardous vegetation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumping garbage</td>
<td>Disturbs natural vegetation and wildlife habitat; exposes wildlife to potentially harmful chemicals.</td>
<td>Dispose of waste responsibly, hiring a company to collect large loads if required.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ALL TYPES OF ENCROACHMENT ADVERSELY AFFECT NATURAL AREAS AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED

Private Land Stewardship

You likely chose your home in part because of its close proximity to a natural area. Being a good neighbour to this area will ensure everyone’s long-term enjoyment of it. Contact TRCA Private Land Stewardship Hotline at 416-661-6600, extension 5742, and discover the many ways to be a good neighbour to nature.

Additional Resources

• Be a Good Neighbour fact sheet [www.creditvalleycons.com](http://www.creditvalleycons.com)
• Mississauga Natural Areas booklet, 905-896-5000
• Neighbours of Mississauga’s Natural Areas booklet, 905-896-5000
• Toronto Wildlife Centre [www.torontowildlifecentre.com](http://www.torontowildlifecentre.com)
• Wild About Gardening website [www.wildaboutgardening.org](http://www.wildaboutgardening.org)

For more information, please contact Toronto and Region Conservation
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