Tommy Thompson park

Fall/Winter 2007

Toronto's Urban Wilderness

Master Plan Implementation Project Community Newsletter

Conifer trees planted in the toplands will provide habitat for species like the Great Horned Owl. Photo courtesy of A. Gray, TTP volunteer naturalist

Background

This newsletter provides an update of current and future activities associated with the Tommy Thompson Park (TTP) Master Plan Implementation Project.

The project

In 1989, Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) completed an extensive provincial environmental assessment and planning process which resulted in the creation of the Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan. In 1992, an Addendum was prepared and later approved by the Minister of the Environment. This planning process became the foundation for the creation of a unique urban wilderness feature on Toronto's waterfront.

Until recently, limited funds have been available to implement the master plan, with the City of Toronto contributing funding for interim management. A funding partnership between TRCA and Waterfront Toronto for $8 million will realize key components of the master plan including natural area enhancements and the installation of park infrastructure.

Project objectives

- Preserve significant species.
- Protect environmentally significant areas.
- Enhance aquatic and terrestrial habitat.
- Enhance public recreational opportunities.

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Triangle Pond with common reed management.

View of Toronto skyline from Embayment D lookout.

Natural area enhancement

Natural area enhancement activities this past spring and summer included invasive species management, nodal plantings of conifer trees and construction of shorebird wetlands.

Invasive flora species can be problematic for habitat restoration projects as they usually grow and spread aggressively, and are very persistent, which allows them to exploit disturbed and marginal environments, often displacing and out-competing native vegetation, resulting in reduced biodiversity. Not all non-native plants show invasive tendencies but those that do typically reproduce aggressively and lack the natural controls found in their native environments such as predators, disease, parasites and competition from other plants that help to reduce their spread. Due to their aggressiveness and the threat to the habitats they occupy, the invasive species that were targeted this year were Dog-strangling vine, common reed and Purple Loosestrife. Control methods employed included removal of the entire plant by digging, mowing or cutting of the plant, as well as the removal of the seed-bearing part of the plant. Invasive species management at Tommy Thompson Park is challenging due to the urban influences that surround the site and control of these invasives will be an ongoing effort.

Conifer trees were planted in strategic areas on the toplands in small nodes or clusters to improve the overwintering habitat for a range of wildlife including Eastern Cottontail Rabbits and owls. Due to the poor soil quality, soil conditioning was necessary and topsoil was added to certain areas to promote the health and survival of the conifers. These plantings will encourage the development of successional communities and add to the overall diversity of the toplands. In addition to planting conifers, habitat piles were added which will provide critical habitat for a variety of wildlife.

The shorebird habitat wetland construction is almost complete. The wetland basins have been carved out, but the lack of availability of organic substrate has prevented the addition of water to the basins. Organic substrate is needed for invertebrate production and we are hoping to find good quality muck soon!

The Aquatic Habitat Enhancement Plan and the Terrestrial Natural Area Enhancement Plan can be downloaded from TRCA's website. Please visit www.trca.on.ca/water_protection/ttp

Tommy Thompson Park shuttle van.

Nature viewing trail.

Park Trails

The TTP Trails Master Plan began implementation this past spring. This year, 4.7 kilometres of trail work was completed. The Primary Pedestrian Trail Level 1 was installed from the entrance to the bridge; trail connections to other park trails were completed; and restoration began on the trail edges, which included soil additions and hydroseeding. Installation of bollards, additional trail restoration and signage for the remaining sections of Primary Pedestrian Trail will progress as conditions permit. In addition, we will be installing a granular base along a section of the south Multi-use trail toward the lighthouse to improve the existing surface in preparation for paving next year.

Multi-use trail.

Construction of the Peninsula D Primary Pedestrian Trail is nearly complete. The remainder of the trail restoration, including installation of the water control structure and bollards, are scheduled to be finished by late November, following the end of the migratory bird period, weather permitting.

The Nature Viewing Trail was mowed in the summer and realigned where necessary. The trail has been receiving a fair amount of traffic, which reduced the frequency of mowing.

In addition to trail installation, eight viewing platforms, including seating stones, were installed and most of the unused light standards along the main road were removed.

Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) is excited about the implementation of the Trails Master Plan and has received great positive feedback from park users and organized groups that are using the new trails. For the first time since the conception of the master plan TRCA is catering to specific park users–pedestrians can access the trail right from the entrance and conflicts with cyclists and the shuttle van have been significantly reduced.

The Trails Master Plan can be downloaded from TRCA's website. Please visit www.trca.on.ca/water_protection/ttp

Park infrastructure

Toronto and Region Conservation is presently finalizing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the design of the proposed site buildings, which include the staff booth/gatehouse, environmental shelter, washrooms and ecological research station.

Toronto and Region Conservation anticipates awarding the RFP early in the new year and will commence design work immediately. Following design completion, TRCA will be proceeding with tendering for construction, tentatively scheduled for spring/summer 2008, pending receipt of all permits and approvals.

Lake Ontario Park update

Waterfront Toronto is currently undertaking a master plan for the area known as Lake Ontario Park. This new park will span from Cherry Beach in the west to Ashbridges Bay Park in the east and will include Tommy Thompson Park. A consulting consortium, led by Field Operations, will prepare a master plan with the goal of fostering the creation of a new waterfront park that is beautiful and sustainable, and that serves as a special place for Toronto, analogous to Vancouver's Stanley Park. The Lake Ontario Park Master Plan will have regard for the approved Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan. For more information about Lake Ontario Park, please visit www. waterfrontoronto.ca

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Trails usage

Off-road cycling is a growing concern at the park, especially with the new trails system. The trails system was developed with a broad spectrum of park users in mind. Paved trails are for cyclists and roller bladers, the gravel trails for pedestrians and the mowed paths for nature viewers. Signs are being developed to inform park visitors of appropriate trail usage and they should be installed this winter.

Park hours

Tommy Thompson Park is open to the public year-round on weekends and holidays, except Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. Operating hours are from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. November to April and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. from April to November.

Please note that the last day of shuttle van service at Tommy Thompson Park for this season was Monday, October 8. This service will resume in April 2008.

Public safety

During the implementation of the project, the use of some areas of the park may be limited. Signage will be posted to clearly delineate areas where access is temporarily restricted.

Open house – November 28, 2007

Toronto and Region Conservation invites you to join us at the second public information night scheduled for November 28, 2007, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. at Council Chambers, Toronto City Hall. Come and learn about what has been accomplished to date and what activities are scheduled in the year ahead.

Fun fact:

Up to 17,000 monarch butterflies migrated through TTP on September 22–23, 2007.

For further information regarding Tommy Thompson Park, please visit www.trca.on.ca/ttp

If you have specific questions regarding the project or if you would like to be placed on the project mailing list, please contact:

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