

Invitation to help

# Toronto's Don Valley Urban Forest Clean Up Project

44000 pounds of garbage later

Project supported by



School of Cities

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Presented by David O. Wright, M.Ed.  
University of Toronto

[david.wright@utoronto.ca](mailto:david.wright@utoronto.ca)

# Introduction / Our 20 Year Background

- ▶ Year 1998 – University of Toronto Varsity Mountain Bike Team is founded
- ▶ Student athletes begin to train on the steep ravine forest trails of the Don Valley
- ▶ Trails also enjoyed by dog walkers, runners, community members, children exploring
- ▶ Year 2000 - City of Toronto discusses possibility of closing trails to protect forest
- ▶ Mountain Bike Team reaches out to see how they might help to prevent this
  - ▶ Steps Taken
    - ▶ Some trails closed
    - ▶ Multi-use sustainable trails built
    - ▶ Annual urban forest clean up event started
    - ▶ Build relationship with the community
    - ▶ City of Toronto (Natural Environment and Community Programs, Urban Forestry ) has since done an excellent job managing trail stewardship and the many trail user groups who love the area. They work at ensuring the woods remain sustainable, healthy and accessible.



# About the Community

- **Thorncliffe Park** is a densely populated, multicultural neighbourhood in central east Toronto, in the former Borough of East York. East York merged with five other municipalities and a regional government in 1998 to form the new "City of Toronto".
- **Thorncliffe Public school** is the largest public school in North America (1,500 students) and until recently had 21 portable classrooms on their small playground. 87% of students are from high density / low income areas and are new immigrants to Canada.
- 80% Muslim, 63.5% South Asian, many new Canadians and Urdu is the most common non-English spoken language.
- **Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee:** a local grassroots organization dedicated to creating and implementing public space enhancement projects in the community of Thorncliffe Park.
- **TNO – The Neighbourhood Organization:** a community-based, multi-service agency providing a wide range of community services since 1985.



**Sabina Ali, Executive Director, Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee**

Addressing graduates at 2018 UofT convocation ceremony  
"Milestones and making a change"

Ms. Ali is an Urban Forest Clean Up Project supporter and has worked with the UofT Mountain Bike Team.

# About the Forest – Along the Don River



Used by hikers, mountain bikers, dog walkers, trail runners and nature lovers

Crothers Woods is an area of the Don River valley in Toronto. It is 52 hectares (128 acres) in size and consists of woodland, meadows, wetlands, and an assortment of past and present municipal uses. The wooded area has been designated as an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority.

An ESA designation is useful in highlighting valuable natural areas but this does not affect planning uses. The area is currently zoned as undeveloped parkland. Crothers Woods was named after George W. Crothers who owned and operated an equipment dealership called Crothers Caterpillar which sold and serviced new and used heavy machinery for the construction and mining industries.

# Issue: Urban Forest Health – Garbage



- Possible Source: Apartment buildings (which back onto the steep ravine walls) seem to contribute a large amount of garbage. Some tenants throw bags from balconies into the forest below.
- Much is household waste (plastic/paper) so no smell (out of sight / out of mind)
- Tons of waste has been thrown into the woods. Volunteers have removed hundreds (thousands?) of bags from trees and forest floor.
- Why? How to discourage this? Effect? Other sources?



# Solution: Pick it up (Great start....but)

UofT Mountain Bike Team has organized an annual community forest clean-up for the past 18 years with City of Toronto's Support

University of Toronto Mountain Bike Team  
**8th Annual Don Valley Trail Clean Up Day**  
Sat, June 2, 2007 10am - 1pm

*Volunteers Needed  
Help the environment  
You'll feel great!*

Who: Anyone who bikes, walks, hikes, runs & appreciates urban forests (Ages 5 & up)  
Where: E.T. Seton Park - Parking Lot (off 71 Thorncliffe Park Drive)  
What: Explore the Don Valley trails. Remove litter from forest floor.  
Bring: A friend! (Gloves and garbage bags will be provided)

A bike "Day Care" will be set up to look after bikes while you help. Ride or run the trails after the lunch.

Note: Trail cleanup will be cancelled in the event of rain.  
Please forward this e-mail to those you think may be interested - See you there!

**FREE BBQ, PRIZES & DRINKS** after the clean up!

**MEET HERE** at large parking lot at base of steep paved road of E.T. Seton Park Entrance. Entrance is near 71 Thorncliffe Park Drive.

For more info email Alana at [utmtbclub@yahoo.ca](mailto:utmtbclub@yahoo.ca) or visit <http://utmtbike.ca>

Supported by:  



**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED - DON VALLEY FOREST CLEAN UP**  
Sat. May 12, 2018 - 10am to 1pm  
E.T. Seton Park (71 Thorncliffe Park Dr)

- ✓ Gloves & garbage bags provided
- ✓ Free BBQ
- ✓ All ages

More info - [varsitymountainbiking@gmail.com](mailto:varsitymountainbiking@gmail.com)

Organized by UofT Mountain Bike Team  
**TORONTO MOUNTAIN BIKING**



In 18 years over 44,000\* pounds of garbage has been removed by volunteers ...but it keeps coming

It is apparent there is a need to try and do more to address this urban forest trash issue - We suggest: Research / Raise Awareness / Act



\* Weighed after City of Toronto picks up garbage and offloads at waste transfer station

# Plastic Litter – From Forest, to River, to Lake, to You

## Macrodebris in Mouth of the Don River

| Item                                    | Tally            |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Styrofoam pieces                     | >1000 (133L bag) |
| 2. Hard plastic fragments               | 597              |
| 3. Plastic water bottles                | 187              |
| 4. Plastic bottle caps                  | 128              |
| 5. Plastic food wrappers                | 64               |
| 6. Balls (soccer, tennis, etc...)       | 53               |
| 7. Cigarette butts and cigar filters    | 45               |
| 8. Plastic straws                       | 43               |
| 9. Plastic lollipop sticks and stirrers | 31               |
| 10. Plastic bags                        | 30               |

PORTS  
TORONTO



Photo Credit: Rochman Lab, University of Toronto

- In a recent study (not yet published) student's from UofT's Rochman Lab dissected fish from Toronto Harbour.
- **Discovery:** Contents of fish stomachs contained hundreds of pieces of micro plastic.
- This is a higher concentration of micro plastics than found in fish of the so called floating plastic island in Pacific Ocean.
- Recent garbage audit by UofT Trash Team found 2178 items of macrodebris in mouth of the Don River




# Need to do a bit more - What Next?

~ Reach out to Stakeholders ~ List of supporters of Don Valley Urban Forest Clean Up Project

| Don Valley Urban Forest Clean-Up Project - Supporters and Stakeholders |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| Name   | Title  | Organization                           |
| Aditi Mehta, PhD   | Assistant Professor of Urban Studies, Teaching Stream  | University of Toronto                  |
| Chelsea M. Rochman, Ph.D.  | Assistant Professor - Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology                           | University of Toronto                  |
| David Roberts , Ph.D.  | Director, Urban Studies  | University of Toronto                  |
| David Wright, M.Ed.  | Head Coach, UoT Varsity Mountain Bike Team / Director, Corporate & Foundation Relations Office | University of Toronto                  |
| Davinder Hora  | Property Manager   | Park Property Management               |
| James R. Snetsinger  | Teacher - Thorncliffe Park Public School   | Thorncliffe Park Public School         |
| Jaye Robinson - New elect (TBC)  | Councillor - City of Toronto (Ward 15)   | City of Toronto                        |
| Margaret Herd  | Senior Vice-President, Residential Property Management   | Park Property Management               |
| Melissa Dick   | Coordinator, Community Engagement  | Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) |
| Michele Evans  | President's Office   | Q Residential                          |
| Mike Halferty  | Natural Environment and Community Programs, Urban Forestry                                     | City of Toronto                        |
| Nicole McNeely   | Marketing Manager  | Park Property Management               |
| Rob Oliphant   | Member of Parliament - Don Valley West   | Government of Canada                   |
| Sabina Ali   | Project Coordinator  | Thorncliffe Park Women's Committee     |
| Sandy M. Smith, PhD, FRES  | Professor, Forest Health / City of Toronto's ravine strategy advisory group                    | University of Toronto                  |
| Scott Laver  | Supervisor Natural Environment and Community Programs, Urban Forestry                          | City of Toronto                        |
| Shauna Brail, Ph.D.  | Presidential Advisor on Urban Engagement   | University of Toronto                  |
| Susanne Desrochers   | Director, Corporate Marketing  | Morguard Property Management           |
| Thom Reynolds  | Property Manager   | Park Property Management               |
| Vanessa Rose   | Program Facilitator, Community Enterprise Resource Centre (CERC)                               | TNO-The Neighbourhood Organization     |

## Notes:

- All property owners of apartment buildings in the area have offered to help and support our initiative
- Urban Studies program at the University of Toronto has expressed interest in incorporating this specific urban forest project into their 2018-19 urban studies curriculum and getting their students involved.
- Internationally recognized Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Assistant Professor is interested in possibly collaborating and incorporating waste research education being done on plastics and pollution in the Don river (and global waters) with this urban forest / Don watershed project.



# PROPOSAL: Research, Raise Awareness, and Do Something

## Goal 1: Understand the Issue

- Where is the garbage located on the trails?
- Where is it coming from? What is it comprised of? Research how ravine forest / wildlife being impacted?
- Why are polluters doing it? (Garbage chutes not working? Other?)

## Goal 2: Raise Awareness

- Part of Goal 1 – Raise **our** awareness of why it may be happening
- Involve community
- Invite guest speakers – Grad students/Profs/Community Leaders, etc. (At local apartment buildings / schools / library)
- Art Contest - i.e. Thorncliffe Park School “Forest Art Poster Contest” - winners gets prize, art displayed in school and apartment lobbies three weeks prior to clean-up day.
- Ongoing displays in apartment lobbies – Photos, research posters, presentations, City of Toronto run trail stewardship events

## Goal 3: Act - 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Urban Forest Clean-Up Day – Sat May 11, 2019 (10am-1pm)

- Opportunity for area residents (anyone) to sign up and volunteer at annual event – Free food / gloves and bags
- Same type of annual event we have had for years – Conduct garbage audit
- Keep it simple

Revisit plan on annual basis to see what it working, what isn't.

UofT mentor local high school students lead garbage audit

Art – Urban forest art contest

UofT student / Primary school forest exploration field trip

Education, Research & Community Outreach

**University of Toronto**  
Varsity Mountain Bike Team  
School of Cities / Urban Studies / Kinesiology / Community Based Groups

In-school presentations  
Forest trail waste mapping

Municipal urban policy making education

Encourage involvement with city's excellent trail stewardship program

Access to Community

**Apartment Property Owners**

Forest Stewardship, Community Outreach & Waste Removal

**City of Toronto**

Natural Environment and Community Programs, Urban Forestry

**Goal:**

- Use **outreach, education** and **research** activities to decrease solid waste in Toronto's Don Valley Forest, Don River and the Don Watershed.\*
- We reach these goals by making waste management and science fun and communicating our findings to municipal policy-makers to promote evidence-based decision making.

\* Using Dr. C. Rochman's (UofT) approach to goal setting



Dr. Rochman's Trash Bandit

- Fun teaching tool that could be used in local schools