

Friends of the Spit

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Spring Bird Festival

Saturday, May 11, 2013

Infrastructure Opening: 9:00 am at Cell One

Environmental Shelter

In this newsletter...

- Infrastructure Projects finally open???!?!!
- Wither TTPUG???
- Contact numbers
- Urban Wilderness Principles

NEWSLETTER

MAY 2013

As an Editorial #1 • Déjà vu

In October 2012 we editorialized that the one year anniversary of the joint management of the Spit by the TRCA and the City had passed: now that we are leading up to the second year anniversary, the same could be said: has anybody noticed any change at the Spit? And it bears repeating that we haven't noticed anything different as the TRCA still continues their work. "Maybe it is all for the better: all we ask is a benign presence from Parks, so the Spit can remain a public urban wilderness, unimproved, and not be turned into a conventional park".

As an Editorial #2 • TTPUG

Trouble Ahead?

Without the ability of stakeholders to meet more frequently, is the Spit in danger of "death by a thousand small cuts"? With the City not present or seemingly over-stretched and unable to participate in the user group, are we in danger of simply being told what is going to happen, when; or worse, only finding out when visiting the Spit? The Spit now needs the City staff to invest in it emotionally, to believe "less is more", to let that guide their actions.

Memberships:

Thanks for all who have enquired about renewals. In this newsletter, you will find a renewal slip (unless you were kind enough to have sent your fee in ahead!). We are an entirely volunteer organization and the minimal membership fee goes to the maintenance of the website and to the production and mailing of the newsletters.

This newsletter is the first to be both mailed and emailed. Thanks to all those who sent us their email addresses: for others who would like to be on the email list, please send your email address to info@friendsofthespit.ca

Seen any Beavers Lately??

There are believed to be 6 active lodges on the Spit!

Infrastructure Projects Finally, Finally Ready!?!?

[we hope]

At the time of this writing, and this cannot be stressed enough – at the time of this writing – we believe that the formal inauguration of the infrastructure projects – the parking lot, the staff booth, the underground environmental shelter, and bird banding station – will all take place on May 11th concurrent with the Birding Festival! Do come to the Spit to join everyone, dignitaries and Spit users alike, for the cutting of the ribbon.

Of course, the bird banding station is already in operation, the underground shelter has already become home to barn swallows in 2012, and hopefully, again in 2013. And the staff booth: well the staff booth may have the brown paper taken off the windows and may be in use if the sewage issues ever get worked out: it seems that Toronto Water wants the price of 2 Maseratis to connect up the sewage! Perhaps a vault toilet or some other facility will be arranged...

We trust all these buildings will open: it would be a shame to see another season pass without them all in full use.

Wither TTPUG? And Why TTPUG??

From previous newsletters you'll recall that approximately two years ago, control of park functions passed from the TRCA to the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation department. The TRCA retained control of the wildlife and environmental aspects of the park, while PF&R took over day-to-day management issues.

In our last issue we called this joint management "Benign Neglect", as the joint management seemed minimally intrusive.

When the TRCA was fully in charge of the Spit, they received informed input from various stakeholders through the Tommy Thompson Park Advisory Committee. This advisory committee met, at a minimum, four times a year, sometimes more frequently if there were "hot" issues. We did get the chance to provide advice and influence activities at the Spit.

Since the transition to joint management, that Advisory Committee has been replaced by the Tommy Thompson Park User Group, famously known as TTPUG! This User Group has an expanded membership and meets only two times a year. Unfortunately, twice yearly meetings are insufficient to use as an advisory forum, and militate against a constructive conversation on the issues of the Spit. The City has had a spotty attendance record at these meetings and hence isn't there to hear what concerns are broached. We have raised this and have been assured a City rep will be present at the November meeting!

Friends of the Spit has two members who attend these meetings and they will continue to attend as it is important to be kept abreast of developments (no pun intended) at the Spit.



Infrastructure - Staff Booth: open soon??!!

Dog-Strangling Vine aka Black Swallowwort

There are now a number of patches of this vine on the Spit. Left unchecked, it will take over other plant communities and reduce biodiversity. The TRCA has tried a number of different measures, from hand-picking to cutting, but these have not been effective and therefore is embarking on a 3-year program, using a herbicide, to eradicate the vines. This is one of the decisions borne of being between a rock and a hard place: you either control the Dog-Strangling Vine or you have a monoculture that is completely foreign to most species. We note all this so that when you see the posted signs, you'll know that a herbicide, with a very short residual life, has been applied.

Factoid:

Black Swallowwort aka Dog-Strangling Vine has evidently been in North America since the mid-1800s! (Presumed as an escapee from the Harvard Botanical Garden); and its distribution in Northeastern America has increased dramatically since the 1970's. The plant is toxic. (*Factoid info from Wild Urban Plants of the North East by Peter Del Tredici*)

Quotable Emails We've Received:

From a former co-chair who now resides in England:

"I very much enjoy my visits to the spit and your newsletters, even if they are late... I have visited the spit twice this year during my visits to Toronto; once in February and once in April. It looks wonderful and I had a great time bird-watching and added considerably to my yearly list. I saw the Snowy Owl, which was remarkable. I hope to get back there soon and I always look out for it when I am flying into and out of Toronto. Keep up the good work, thank you..."

From a B.C. member:

"I've been a member since the late '80s when I was a grad student at U of T, and [the co-chair] gave a talk there. Keep up the good work."

From other emails:

"Keep up the good work!"

"Well done for hanging in for so long. The spit is wonderful and definitely worth it. It has regenerated so well and thank you..."

Port Authority Dumping Lease set to Expire May 31st!!

If this lease does expire, then the amount of trucks being allowed onto the Spit for lakefill dumping will be drastically reduced. There is still a need for some long-term armouring of the shoreline, which will necessitate some truck traffic. However a lessening of truck traffic will mean that the Spit will then be able to open some days during the week, on its way to being open 7 days a week, 365 days a year! We'll keep you posted... It would be wonderful to advance the time-line for the full-time opening – 2014??

The Conservation Authority evidently is awaiting confirmation that the Port Authority is vacating and withdrawing...

New Bird Checklist

Since the publication of the third edition of the Tommy Thompson Park/Leslie Street Spit Bird Checklist in 2006, an additional 13 species have been recorded, bringing the Spit total list to 315: more than the species total for Algonquin Park! Friends of the Spit created the first checklist in the '80s, and subsequently has been involved, in a volunteer capacity, with the second, third, and now, this fourth checklist. Volunteer park naturalists, Tommy Thompson Park Bird Research Station reps, Toronto Ornithological Club members, the TRCA, and of course Friends of the Spit have been assembling this fourth edition. The seasonal abundance codes will be updated too, as will the nesting categories. Look for it later this year.



New Sign Board

Dark Skies:

Wouldn't it be nice if the Spit obtained Dark Skies designation - a wilderness in the city at night!

The Hearn

Throughout the Stakeholder Advisory Committee meetings of the Port Lands Acceleration Initiative (remember back to the opposition to the Mayor's ferris wheel and monorail?), the Hearn plant was identified as a possible site for a "catalyst" use for Port Lands development. That may still be, but an unsolicited proposal has snuck in to the City, for who knows what, because the City can't legally divulge! We are keeping our eyes on this and we'll notify the membership when we know what is intended. Our concerns relate to the appropriateness of the development and the extent to which development of the Hearn would bring undue traffic past the Spit and the Baselands.

Cell Two

In late fall/early winter 2013, the Cell Two habitat creation project will begin. This cell has been used for dumping of dredgeate from the Outer Harbour and is now at capacity. Similar to Cell One, this 9 Hectare area will be made into a coastal wetland through a 5-year project.

(Cell Three is still being used for dredgeate disposal: it has considerably greater depth!)

At the Tommy Thompson Park User Group Meeting #3, November 20, 2012, the following were adopted (hooray!):

TOMMY THOMPSON PARK URBAN WILDERNESS PRINCIPLES

- All actions must be in accord with the Tommy Thompson Park Revised Master Plan, 1992;
- Park activities do not have an overall negative impact on the natural resources, and passive recreational activities are the focus;
- Ecological communities are formed through natural succession with strategic habitat enhancements;
- Appropriate adaptive management takes place to ensure habitat and species protection, while minimizing human disturbance;
- General visitor experiences are natural and self-guided;
- Signage and amenities are minimal;
- What you carry in with you is also carried back out (garbage/recycling receptacles may be located at the Front Entrance, Staff Booth and Ecological Research Station);
- Unauthorized private motor vehicle access is prohibited;
- Pets are prohibited; and
- Admission is free.

Embayment D and the Berm

Embayment D is now enclosed by the new berm built in the Outer Harbour, facing the city. The water control structure (which is there to exclude carp from the embayment, so that Embayment D can eventually become a hemi-marsh) is almost complete, and the land is being readied for its intended use to encourage nesting of colonial waterbirds. However, as time waits for no-one, this also has become a favourite path from the spine road out to the tip of Embayment D. Although not originally intended to include a trail, we at Friends of the Spit see the merits of this linkage and are encouraging the Conservation Authority to open a controlled trail through this area, which could be closed in breeding season: much the same as people are denied access to Peninsulas B and C during the breeding season.

At the most recent TTPUG meeting, the TRCA quote was "any thought of trails would wait until the berm and landform had been greened".



Enjoying the berm on Good Friday, 2013

Who to call:

- In an emergency, dial 911.
- For maintenance items, vandalism reports, absentee staff from control booths, etc., call 311.
- For dogs on the Spit, call 311. On the information board, the number of the attendant at the staff booth will be listed: also call it if you see dogs in the park.
- For questions not as urgent or pressing, send us an email at info@friendsofthespit.ca. We will respond as quickly as we can to your email and, if necessary, send it on to the TRCA and to the City of Toronto, anonymously, so that they might have your comments.
- Finally if you do feel that you wish to comment directly to the TRCA, we suggest that you contact the CAO, Brian Denney, at 416-661-6600 ext. 6290 or bdenney@trca.on.ca. Mr. Denney cut his teeth on the Spit with the Waterfront Board of the MTRCA and has risen through the ranks to now run the TRCA. Brian's heart is still with the Spit, and he will direct your concern to the staffer best suited to handle that enquiry. We're sure he would like the feedback of your perception of what is happening at and on the Spit!

Greening of Leslie Street

The TTC have named the new LRT maintenance building at Leslie and Lakeshore "Leslie Barns". Recently, the TTC held a public meeting with stakeholders and residents to discuss the traffic disruptions which will occur as Leslie Street is dug up to allow construction of the new streetcar lines from Queen south to Leslie Barns. From a Spit standpoint, we understand that the Martin Goodman trail route south to the Spit will have to be shifted and altered at times, but we have been assured that there always will be clearly marked and safely established cycling and pedestrian access going south. In the contract, the TTC notes their contractor is obliged to keep a minimum of one lane of automobile traffic in each direction south of Lakeshore, and access to the allotment gardens has been guaranteed. Should you find that signage is lacking or that temporary routes are inadequate or unsafe, contact the TTC directly at lesliebarns@ttc.ca and cc. us.

Leslie Street Public Art

The City and the TTC will be embarking on a public art competition; those of our members and artist friends who might wish to enter this competition should contact the TTC and also stay in touch through the Leslie Barns website: www.lesliebarns.ttc.ca.

Grassland Mowing

Far out on the flatlands, you may notice that there has been some mowing of the grasses: this is an experimental mowing to see if this will keep some of the larger vegetation down and allow grassland species of birds to have some habitat for migration and for nesting: TRCA staff and volunteers will be monitoring this: we'll report on its success to you in future newsletters.

Ashbridges Bay EA Reintroduced

Stay tuned for more notice and announcements: the TRCA is resuming the Class EA for the Erosion and Sediment Control Project. The EA addresses the risks to navigation and will coordinate to other waterfront plans. Any new land forms may also provide a way to link the Baselands of the Spit though to Ashbridges Bay Park: stay tuned as we watch this.



**GO BIRDING
IN THE
BIG CITY!**

MAY 11, 2013

SpringBirdFestival.ca

Discover the phenomenon of bird migration at the FREE Tommy Thompson Park Spring Bird Festival! Register online for activities like guided birding hikes and see some of 315 bird species that have been spotted at the park.



Butterfly Festival:

In case we are slow with our next newsletter, the Butterfly Festival is scheduled for August 24th. Check the TRCA website!

STOP THE PRESS! – WIND TURBINES YET AGAIN!

A big "thank-you" to the anonymous person who tipped us off that the promoter of a for-profit wind turbine farm wishes to industrialize the Spit by erecting nine 2.3 mw turbines on the "vacant land".

Every issue of our newsletter seems to include some hare-brained idea to destroy the urban wilderness and make it useful for business.

Rest assured we are already in motion to defeat this latest threat!