

## Friends of the Spit

P.O. Box 51518

2140A Queen Street East

Toronto ON M4E 3V7

info@friendsofthespit.ca

http://www.friendsofthespit.ca

### Jane's Walk

Sunday, May 4, 8:00 a.m.

Meet at Unwin and Leslie

### ***SPRING BIRD FESTIVAL***

***Saturday, May 10<sup>th</sup>***

***See notice on page 4...***

## NEWSLETTER

## May 2014

### **As an Editorial #1...**

#### **From the macro... overall planning...**

Once again, Port Lands Planning is underway! Those jaded by decades of consultations, reports and plans may take some solace from the seriousness of this endeavour, as this planning should complement the exemplary work done at the mouth of the Don River.

Alas, FOS has expressed serious concerns about the lack of greenspace, the lack of vision which has ignored the possibility of zoning a wide swath of greenspace to connect the Spit and Base Lands to the Don River green corridor.

Over the next 50 years, as Toronto's population increases, this green space will be so very important. A long-range vision is required, not a short-range vision of street grid and development.

### **As an Editorial #2...**

#### **To the micro... terns & cormorants...**

Wild life management is problematic at the best of times...the tern rafts provided successful habitat for a declining species; yet once their predators had "clued in", it seems that this management method should be abandoned, or dramatically altered. There is no sense in encouraging terns to nest when they have zero chance of success.

On the other hand, at a time when other authorities were killing double-crested cormorants on the Great Lakes, the TRCA, with an advisory group, promoted a very low-key strategy to contain the cormorant colony geographically, and also to encourage ground-nesting. That strategy has been generally successful, and essentially, leads the way! .

**Memberships:** Thanks, great thanks, to all our members who generously responded with last year's renewals. As events have been quiet, we have decided not to ask for renewal monies this year: our bank account should see us through to 2015. So, enjoy a free year!!

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, so we are fine for now.

### **Port Lands Planning: a "constant"**

...this time... with hope !?

Following along the lines of the public consultation process for the Lower Don Lands / Port Lands Acceleration Initiative, the City re-activated its Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) (FOS is a member) and held both SAC meetings and Public Meetings, to continue planning the rest of the Port Lands.

As our Editorial suggests, so far, FOS has been disappointed by the general thrust of the planning for the lands south of the Ship Channel.

Following up on our "Parkland in the Port Lands" position (see map in newsletter of *October 2012*), we continue to advocate for larger swaths of greenspace to connect the Base Lands and the Spit to the Don River Greenway. As port-related uses south of the Ship Channel end, or alter, the land should be returned to park space... (cont' page 2)

### **Tern Rafts: past "Best Before" date???**

#### **The Future of the Tern Nesting Rafts**

Common Terns are listed as endangered, threatened or extirpated in at least nine US states. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) has colonial waterbird management experience for over 20 years and placed several tern nesting rafts at the Spit to assist in the breeding success of Common Terns.

Last year, there was no successful breeding of Common Terns at the Spit. The primary reason was felt to be predation by mink and raccoons.

As a result of these failures, the TRCA will undertake efforts in 2014 to mitigate the predation of the nests. According to a TRCA representative "... management efforts will focus on excluding mammalian predators from the nesting rafts using a design based on research by Dr. Peter Becker, an expert with the German Institute of Avian Research. The modified design uses angled sheet metal (brown in colour) with an L-shaped lip along the raft edges to prevent mammalian predator access. Additionally, the Cell Two rafts will be reduced from three to one and will be moved to Embayment A. Embayment A is bordered by Ring-billed Gull colonies on Peninsulas A and B, and is in deeper water than Cell Two, which should help to distract and dissuade mammalian predators. The raft in Embayment D will receive the same treatment, plus, depending on water level conditions, an electric fence will be installed to address raccoon predation. Fencing is a commonly used management technique and the electric fence will be much less visible than other fencing currently in use at the park (i.e., vegetation protection fencing for geese and beavers)... (cont' page 3)

Our newsletters are now both mailed and emailed. The email copy is in colour!!!!  
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



## Cell 2 Wetland Creation: Plans Finalized!!

The Cell 2 plan (courtesy of the TRCA) illustrated above depicts the ultimate form of Cell 2.

Under the terms of the Keating Channel EA, Cells 1,2, and 3 are to be capped once filled to capacity with dredged material. Cell 2 reached capacity in 1997 (!), and will now be capped with clean fill to contain the contaminated sediment/dredgeate. Rather than a “hard” terrestrial cap, the TRCA has gone beyond the bare requirements and will create a 9.3 hectare coastal hemi-marsh ecosystem. Similar to the underwater capping and habitat creation project at Cell 1, this marsh continues the process of reintroducing wetlands where once large marshes bordered Lake Ontario. (Also, similar to Cell 1, a fish and water level control structure will regulate water levels and will prevent carp from entering the wetland). The success of Cell 1 augurs well for Cell 2!

The TRCA notes that, with regard to funding, several partners are involved with the project, including the City of Toronto (\$550,000); Coca-Cola Canada (\$500,000) as part of their water stewardship replenishment program; Environment Canada (\$150,000) as part of the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund; Fisheries and Oceans Canada (\$205,600) as part of the Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program; and the Toronto Port Authority for in-kind works.

(cont’ from page 1)... For over 25 years of our continuous participation in open houses, stakeholder meetings, and other fora, we have come to the conclusion that **there is no compelling reason to develop the lands south of the Ship Channel.**

On the contrary; there are very compelling reasons to leave it alone, reasons of both land use and technical nature.

From the technical standpoint, the soils have poor bearing capacity, the soils are contaminated, and there is no infrastructure for servicing buildings. These three factors alone would make any development prohibitively expensive! Further, the road and transit infrastructure is poor: to develop the land would require massive additional investments in those amenities.

From a land use aspect, increasing the green space south of the Ship Channel fortifies the necessary green connection (green swath) from the Spit to the Don River and makes the parkland commitment that the currently planned narrow strip does not. Given too that the costs of development would be so high, it makes enormous sense to accept that all lands south of the Ship Channel should be some form of parkland. The existing leases would be honoured, the dock walls maintained, but, gradually over time, the lands would be developed into the green space and parkland the city needs. We visualize that parkland as being intensive recreational uses at the west, tapering to the passive recreation of the Spit and Baselands.

At this point, the City Planners advise us that they are evaluating all the feedback they received, and are evaluating the land use options proposed. They indicate that they don’t have a revised schedule nailed down at this point.



(cont' from page 1) ...so in our opinion does not significantly affect the "wilderness" aspect of the park."

The ecology of the Spit has changed considerably over the years and because of this, past practices may no longer be the best practice today. Friends of the Spit (FOS) understands the desire to assist wildlife and especially those that are at risk. However, in the attempt to right the wrongs caused by the incredible pressures that our society puts on wildlife, these wildlife management initiatives may inadvertently cause more harm than good.

Common Terns do not recognize that the platforms currently put them and their young at risk. Based on the information we have, we all now recognize the risks; so, if the TRCA's initiatives are unsuccessful this year, FOS has stated that the TRCA should abandon the practice altogether. Since the predators are now well-established at the Spit, the current placement and style of tern nesting rafts lures Common Terns to nest in highly desirable locations but with no chance of nesting success. If the terns had to find alternative but less attractive natural nesting sites, they might at the very least may have a better than zero chance of breeding success!

The TRCA will monitor the tern colony to assess their management efforts and success. The success (or lack of success) of the 2014 breeding season will determine FOS's action going forward.



Unimproved tern raft, Embayment D, April 20, 2014. Note Canada Goose on nest!

## More Wildlife Management: Double-crested Cormorants

As part of an on-going consultative process, the TRCA's Cormorant Advisory Group held its twelfth meeting in January. The advisory group was established to discuss and advise on management methods which would contain the colony's growth, without endangering the wildlife, and preserve the tree canopy. A low-key strategy was devised, which, by and large, has proven successful. Peninsula D's canopy is retained, and further colony expansion on C has been prevented. Peninsula B has seen an increase in tree nests.

After many years of explosive growth, the cormorant colony size appears to be relatively stable, and, quite encouragingly, 58% of the nests in 2013 were ground nests. The chart below indicates the cormorant (DCCO) colony sizes since 2003. Over the same period, Black-crowned Night-Heron nesting declined from 1159 nests to 297. As the herons nest on the fringes of the cormorant colony, there is a feeling that they are being "pushed out", but there has also been an increase in mammalian predation (the same predation that affected Common Tern nesting). In 2013, there were no records of Common Tern nesting, but there were 98 Caspian Tern nests recorded. 4 Great Egret nests were noted, as well as approximately 35,000 nesting pairs of Ring-billed Gulls!

DCCO	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Peninsula A			311	228	101	49	22	39	19	13	5
Peninsula B	1582	1241	1763	1535	1072	1050	917	781	1262	982	1310
B ground nests	948	809	872	868	1302	1009	1957	3310	4547	5812	6986
Peninsula C	0	0	2728	3494	4584	4609	4668	5304	5546	4934	3689
Total	2530	5046	5674	6125	7059	6717	7564	9434	11374	11741	11990

Chart courtesy of the TRCA

## Ashbridge's Bay Erosion and Sediment Control Class EA

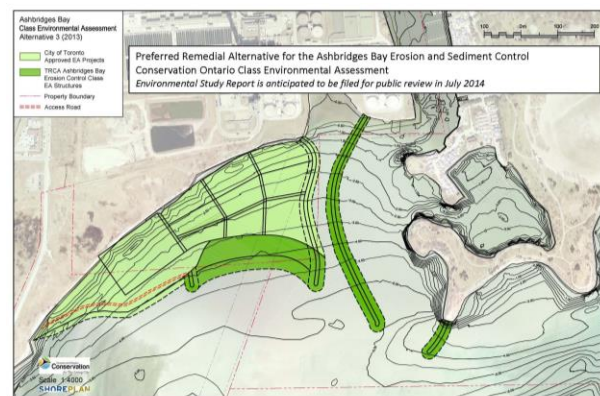
As you will recall from our November 2013 Newsletter, Friends of the Spit have been ably represented at the two meetings of the Community Liaison Committee for the Class EA. This Environmental Assessment is a continuation of two previous assessments which were greater in scope. Ultimately, both were abandoned due to the estimated high construction cost of the project.

A preferred alternative has been selected (see graphic below) and will be recommended in the Environmental Study Report (ESR). The study is not finalized or approved by the City of Toronto yet. Pending City of Toronto Council approval to proceed, the ESR is expected to be filed with the Ministry of the Environment in July 2014 and will have a 30 day public comment period.

The detailed design phase of the Ashbridges Bay Landform project is expected to start in the Fall of 2014. The TRCA has indicated that it will continue to engage the existing Community Liaison Committee and will also solicit public input for aquatic/terrestrial habitat enhancement options/designs for the landform.

For further info, visit the TRCA website:

[www.trca.on.ca/ashbridgesbayproject\\_ea](http://www.trca.on.ca/ashbridgesbayproject_ea)





The original *Checklist Birds of the Leslie Street Spit*, produced by Friends of the Spit, listed Common Raven based on one sighting from Sept 21st, 1985. This year, observers were startled in late March by the sight of two, with nesting material. It appears that the ravens are nesting on one of the stacks of the Portlands Energy Centre!! So, keep a lookout, and add a raven sighting to your Spit list!



**Common Raven**  
From National Geographic: Birds of North America, Third Edition

### Island Airport: Continuing Saga **Unanimously off for further review... both sides declare victory !!!**

City Council, on April 1<sup>st</sup>, unanimously passed a lengthy series of resolutions about the proposed expansion of the Island airport (aka Billy Bishop Airport), essentially postponing a decision until 2015....punted to a new mayor and council.

Both pro- and anti-expansion forces declared victory! Given our stand (see the November 2013 Newsletter) we wonder why a stake couldn't have been put through this expansion scheme now! Our waterfront deserves far better than an expanded airport.



Ice storm damage!

### **Windfall for Rodents**

As many of you will have observed, the ice storm damage provided a good source of food for rodents during the winter. The branches, stripped of bark, now add an interesting sculptural look and subject for photographers.



**Winter of the Snowy Owl.** Photo credit: Snowy Owl at Cell 1/2; by Graham Catley, UK, visiting on February 1st

**GO WILD,  
GO BIRDING!**  
**MAY 10, 2014**

Photo credit: Charlotte England.

**SpringBirdFestival.ca**

Discover the phenomenon of bird migration at the FREE Tommy Thompson Park Spring Bird Festival! Register online for activities including guided bird hikes, and come out to see some of the 316 bird species that have been spotted at the park.

- Birding hikes
- Bird banding demos
- Kid's activities
- Educational displays
- Baillie Birdathon

- Bateman's Get to Know Contest launch

**LIMITED FREE PARKING**  
*No pets allowed.*

*Spring Bird Festival*  
**Tommy Thompson Park**

**Tommy Thompson Park**  
Toronto's Urban Wilderness

**Toronto and Region Conservation**  
for The Living City

### **Butterfly Festival:**

In case we are slow with our next newsletter, the Butterfly Festival is scheduled for August 23<sup>rd</sup>. Check the TRCA website!