



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OBSERVATIONS ON MY SUMMER VACATION

The breathtaking vistas, the flora and fauna, the sound of the ocean, the smell of the spruce forests, friendly people and fresh food along with being with family contributed to a wonderful visit to the northeast coast of Prince Edward Island.

Right from the very first evening, strolling the streets of Charlottetown, we browsed in well stocked second hand book stores, noticed vintage clothing and consignment stores well placed in the centre of town, close to the University and three stream waste bins of compost, recycling and garbage set up in the streets. I was impressed with the initiatives being undertaken. The island attracts tourism by promoting cycling with dedicated bike paths on many of the roads we travelled.

Of the six local farmers represented at the Charlottetown Wednesday market, four were organic or pesticide free. Other merchants offered organic, fair trade coffee and healthy baked goods. We purchased our seafood from Souris, directly south of where we were staying and indulged (I might say, overindulged) in sustainable seafood choices of lobster, clams and mussels.

Coming from a place where we are constantly fighting development which destroys our environment (see pg. 4), it was very heartening to see such large areas of intact forest in between the lush farmland. As a horticulturist, I always enjoy the local flora of places I visit - in this case, the fireweed meadows and shoreline plants. While sitting quietly in the St. Margaret of Scotland Pioneer Cemetery est. 1805, I struck up a conversation with a PEI resident and mentioned how perplexed I was regarding the over zealous mowing of natural spaces. She agreed and suggested I write to the newspaper. We regularly saw people weed whacking their roadside ditches, where upon closer observation I found lupines, roses and many other perennials which never had an opportunity to bloom. Not only does this practice diminish visual beauty along our byways, but it removes valuable habitat for pollinators. I have ranted about this right here at home and have photographed natural roadsides (at left) and mowed eyesores (above) for comparison. Richmond Hill and other municipalities are thankfully curtailing extreme mowing, but the Ministry of Transport ludicrously sited safety issues as reason to continue this ugly practice. Leaving ditches and some areas of 'lawn' unmowed will add to, not diminish the beauty of PEI and any other place on earth for that matter, and will be a haven for bees, birds and butterflies.

Gloria Marsh

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## LIVING, BREATHING COMPOST

*By Peter Secord, Environmental Horticulturist & YREA Director*



Our food and yard waste is a remarkable, readily available resource with miraculous benefits when composted and used in the garden. It starts by being made up of organic matter such as leaves, small branches, grass clippings, fruits, vegetables, tea leaves, coffee grounds and more. We place it in our backyard composter or at the curb to be sent off to a composting facility. In less than one year, the plant material is broken down to form black gold. This process involves microbes found naturally in our environment.

When organic matter is composted, it can remove between 50-70% out of the solid waste stream. Another environmental benefit is the reduction of methane gas, which is 21 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub>. By keeping the compost process local, further greenhouse gas emissions are reduced. Gardeners and environmentalists can choose compost as an ideal replacement for less ecological peat moss, realizing these added benefits:

- In clay soil, improves drainage and porosity
- In sandy soil, improves water retention
- Increases soil fertility
- Helps soil store nutrients in the root zone and prevents leaching
- Improves effectiveness of other fertilizers both organic and chemical

- Decreases soil density, allowing for deeper root development
- Increases cation exchange within soil
- Provides humus which helps bind soil particles together making it more workable and resistant to soil erosion
- Improves resistance to plant diseases and insect pests.
- Inoculates soil with beneficial organisms
- Provides habitat and food for beneficial soil organisms from bacteria to earthworms.

Compost has a probiotic effect on soil. This is important when soil has been stripped or disturbed by development, often leaving it sterile. The soil foodweb, when exposed to chemicals such as pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, is interrupted or destroyed and unable to function properly. To correct this, the addition of compost to soil will allow for the following:

- Restart key microbial and fungal nutrient cycling
- Re-establish symbiotic relationships between plants and microorganisms

Compost has been studied for several decades for its bioremediation abilities. Both the chemical and biological properties of compost are well understood as a useful tool for cleaning up toxic soil as follows:

- Helps binds heavy metal contaminants so plants do not uptake them
- Compost absorbs more water runoff into the soil, lessening burden on storm water infrastructure and allowing for natural watershed recharge
- Helps to filter pollutants from water
- Degrades or eliminates toxic chlorinated and non-chlorinated hydrocarbons, wood preservatives, pesticides, and petroleum product contamination in soils

**Adding compost to your soil will not only help the environment, your plants will love it too!**



# GREENWORKS



## A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO TERRY KNIGHT

**TERRY KNIGHT**, pictured at left in her garden, first heard about YREA through friends, then visited our booth at the Mill Pond Splash in Richmond Hill and became a member. 'I like to support groups that align with my basic values and YREA is a group close to home with which I was eager to get involved. I am able to put my teaching skills to good use as a volunteer and find making a contribution in this way is very rewarding' says Terry. She has been invaluable as a YREA presenter of OUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT and SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING educational workshops which Terry has delivered to students in schools and to the community at large.

Not only does Terry donate her valuable time, she is also a generous yearly financial supporter. Without the help of amazing people like Terry, YREA would never be able to accomplish what we do.

**With great appreciation** for continued financial support, we extend our thanks in this quarter to generous annual supporters Diana Bennett and Spencer Lanthier and monthly donor Katia Picada.

**Our volunteers** who have helped us so far this year in community events, administrative work, educational outreach and research include:

- Carolyn Brown
- Sheila Cording
- Liz Couture
- Laurin Fulton
- Dora Hu
- Terry Knight
- Elizabeth Martelluzzi
- Sara Mathew
- Suzanne Perdeaux
- Mohammad Sharifi

## JOIN YREA AS A MEMBER/SUPPORTER

An annual membership to the York Region Environmental Alliance is \$20. By contributing to YREA with a membership or a larger donation, your vital support will help us achieve our goals.



If you prefer, enclose this form with your donation and mail to: YREA, 225 Lakeland Crescent, Richmond Hill, ON L4E 3A5

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Please note the amount of your donation enclosed:

- |                       |                          |                         |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Guardian \$2000 & up  | <input type="checkbox"/> | Protector \$1000-\$1999 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Custodian \$500-\$999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | Steward \$200-\$499     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Keeper \$100-\$199    | <input type="checkbox"/> | Friend \$ _____         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please note: YREA does not exchange the personal information of our members/supporters with other organizations or groups.  
Registered charity - #84559 0553 RR0001



## SAVING THE NORTH GWILLIMBURY FOREST

*By Jack Gibbons, Chair, NGF Alliance*

The North Gwillimbury Forest (NGF) is one of the ten largest forests in the Lake Simcoe watershed. It stretches from the north end of Keswick to Jackson's Point. In the 1980s, the Town of Georgina approved a proposal to build a 1,073 unit mobile home park to be called Maple Lake Estates (MLE) in the heart of the forest. Fortunately, the development did not proceed, but the property was eventually re-sold to Metrus Developments. In 2004, the Ministry of Natural Resources designated approximately 80% of the MLE lands as part of the Paradise Beach-Island Grove provincially significant wetland.

Recently, the Region of York developed a new official plan that recognizes the provincially significant wetland designation for the MLE property and also designates a large part of the property as regionally significant woodland. **THIS MEANS THAT THESE AREAS SHOULD BE OFF LIMITS FOR DEVELOPMENT.**

In May 2012, it emerged that Metrus was negotiating with York Region on a deal that would preserve Metrus' development rights for the MLE lands in exchange for the company dropping its appeal of the Region's official plan at the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB). Fortunately, after getting wind of this potential deal, the North Gwillimbury Forest Alliance's legal counsel asked to participate in the OMB hearing to ensure that the new York Region plan's much stricter environmental protections were not watered down or ignored when it came to MLE. As a result of our participation in the OMB process, on July 10th Metrus dropped its appeal and its request for a special deal with respect to the MLE lands.



This is a major victory for everyone who wants to see this important part of the Lake Simcoe watershed remain intact for two reasons: First, the MLE development is now subject to the enhanced environmental protection policies of the now-in-force York official plan. Second, the Town of Georgina is now obliged to update its Official Plan and zoning bylaw to make them conform with the Region's plan. Specifically, these documents will need to be revised to recognize that **NO DEVELOPMENT** will be permitted on the Paradise Beach-Island Grove provincially significant wetland in the NGF.

Our campaign to save the NGF raises a number of important questions that remain unanswered:

- Why do Town staff believe that they should bend over backwards to protect Metrus' development interests instead of doing everything in their power to protect significant forests and wetlands?

- Why does the Town keep trumpeting a 28-year-old approval for a mobile home park that even the developer doesn't want?
- Will the Town amend its Official Plan and Zoning By-Law to recognize that no development will be permitted on the Paradise Beach-Island Grove provincially significant wetland in the NGF?

The progress we have made in stopping this development in a provincially significant wetland and one of Lake Simcoe's most important forest areas has not come without cost: To date, the NGFA has incurred almost \$80,000 in legal and planning consultancy costs. To support our work and stay current on this issue, please visit our website - <http://www.SaveNGForest.org> and subscribe to our e-newsletter.



## SINGLE FAMILY DWELLINGS: A HOUSING CRISIS?

*By John Stillich, Executive Director, Sustainable Urban Development Association (SUDA)*

According to recent reports, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is in a housing crisis. The average price of a single family detached home in Toronto has eclipsed \$800,000, almost double the cost of what it was a decade ago. Compared to ten years ago, there are roughly 60% fewer new detached homes, semi-detached, row and link houses being built across the GTA. Construction of single family dwellings (SFDs) has been on the decline as much of the construction focus across the region has shifted towards condominium apartments in urban and suburban cores. Municipalities have also expressed concern about slowdowns in revenues generated from development charges on new construction, including SFDs.

It may seem easy to conclude that building more single family detached homes is the best way to ensure that everyone has access to appropriate housing in the GTA. However, there is no land left in Toronto to build more single family detached homes. The only direction remaining to go is up and that, combined with many people's desire for downtown living, has fuelled the high rise condominium boom. New SFDs will have to be located in the municipalities surrounding the City of Toronto, where ample land still exists.

The GTA is forecasted to grow by around 85,000 people every year. Municipal decision-makers will face tremendous pressure from developers and landowners to approve applications for tens of thousands of new single family detached homes. It becomes important to build new communities in ways that minimize negative environmental and economic side effects. Not to do so will be costly for homeowners and for communities as a whole. Unfortunately, building more relatively low density single family detached subdivisions is not a sustainable way of using land.

Municipalities are now following the provincially-mandated density minimum of 50 residents and jobs per gross hectare for whitefield development. However, almost all are treating this unsustainable minimum as their maximum density target. This will result in a loss of almost 500 square kilometres of rural and agricultural land between 2012 and 2031. Before decisions are made to increase the supply of traditional suburban housing, there are numerous questions that must be answered about their impacts and what the alternatives might be. For example, some environmental questions include:



- Can we afford to sacrifice more whitefield land in Ontario for low density living? What may be the long term impact on the region's food security?
- How can traditional development styles at urban fringes be possible without significant increases in consumption of non-renewable energy resources and greenhouse gas production?
- To what degree should broader public benefits such as sustainable natural systems (local, regional and global) affect private land development?

Economically, some municipalities have been cutting back public spending as tax revenue growth falls short of the cost of providing service increases, yet traditional suburban communities are among the most expensive for municipalities to service.

*cont'd on next page*



# GREENWORKS



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- What are the costs of building new public infrastructure such as roads, sewers and transportation through currently rural lands? On a per capita basis, will they be cost-efficient, not only to build, but to maintain this new infrastructure over the longer term?
- From where will the funding for infrastructure come?
- Is the suburban development style that has required the use of personal automobiles to access almost all daily destinations appropriate for families at a time when economic conditions may remain difficult for many years to come?
- How will communities largely comprised of single family dwellings be affected by long term increases in transportation fuel prices?
- How can public transit and active transportation become the primary travel modes in new communities? How can most of the increases in travel by automobile be avoided?
- Is the "demand" for single family dwellings in large part a reflection of shortfalls in the supply of suitable alternative housing choices? Have traditional practices skewed demand?
- How can townhouses and apartments at the urban fringe be viable alternatives to single family detached homes, and profitable for developers?
- To what degree will existing SFDs, semi-detached homes and town homes become available as aging populations migrate to smaller types of accommodation such as apartments? How can this migration be fostered?
- What can be done to change some of the public's perception that living in apartment style buildings is not a good alternative to single detached housing?
- Does happiness depend on owning and maintaining a single family home, or is happiness more about the intangibles in life (career, family, friends, freedom, financial security, etc.)?
- What can be done by municipalities and by land developers to increase the supply of family-friendly apartment-style housing as an alternative to single family dwellings?
- How can public and private sectors work together to provide city-building alternatives that are truly respectful of earth's biosphere, yet are marketable, profitable and cost-effective?
- How can truly sustainable development (similar to the example of Newburg <http://www.suda.ca/newburgx.html>) be fast-tracked to ease pressures for more new SFD-focused communities?



**The Sustainable Urban Development Association urges decision-makers to recognize that single detached housing is not a need, but a want. The benefits of low-density housing subdivisions have not been shown, in the overall, to be more favourable than more sustainable city-building forms.**

Land that is developed sustainably reduces the use of non-renewable energy sources, reduces waste production, is compact in form, and produces economic and social benefits. That is the direction that city-building must go. This means encouraging the development of mixed use communities defined by a variety of residential and non-residential buildings that come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, are highly energy efficient, and in which most daily trips are taken by sustainable transportation.

**SUDA is a registered Canadian charitable organization whose mission is to foster a healthy natural environment by providing information about sustainable city-building. <http://www.suda.ca/index.htm>**



## FALL EVENTS

Although spring is our busiest time for community activities, YREA participates in events throughout the year. We invite you to join us at these upcoming fall festivities.

### 36TH ANNUAL KETTLEBY FAIR - SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8TH FROM 10AM TO 5PM

'The biggest little fair in Ontario', provides a fun environment in which to watch stage and grounds entertainment, shop for crafts, enjoy traditional fair foods and participate in family activities that include meeting farm animals, a mutt show, juggling lessons and a zucchini and sunflower contest. You can 'Ask a Gardener' questions and see a display of the diverse produce grown in the Holland Marsh. Don't miss the parade which starts at noon at the top of the hill on the east side of Kettleby Village, travels west, and ends across the bridge at the Fair Grounds in Tyrwhitt Park.



There is free parking with a shuttle bus east and west of the Village. The Fair is dog friendly and has wheelchair accessible facilities and handicap parking within the fairgrounds. YREA will have a good selection of local hemp products for sale. Make sure you drop by our booth and say hello!

### HARVESTFEST - SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

Transition Barrie will be hosting Harvestfest at Chappell Farms just north of Barrie. Anyone who is interested in any of the Transition activities is invited to attend and to bring your friends and family. It is a great opportunity to meet like minded people and to enjoy a beautiful day on the farm. A full program of speakers, great food and activities is being planned, with more information to be posted soon. If you would like to register or if you can volunteer to help organize please contact Karen Fox: [rightnove@sympatico.ca](mailto:rightnove@sympatico.ca). 705-721-6867

For more information on upcoming happenings, please visit the events postings on YREA's website: [http://yrea.org/?page\\_id=34](http://yrea.org/?page_id=34)

## ONTARIO NATURE AGM

by Sylvia Bowman, YREA director and ON rep

YREA is a member of the Lake Ontario North Region of Ontario Nature (ON). I attended the 80th annual General meeting on June 8th 9th and 10th. We had a very stimulating and thought provoking gathering. Outgoing ON President Brendon Larson, author of *Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability: Redefining Our Relationship with Nature*, gave an extremely interesting opening address on the Saturday morning. He discussed invasive species and the idea that perhaps we need to look at them not as 'the problem' but only the symptom of something else that is driving the dramatic increase in invasives in the last few years. He pointed out that many of the efforts to curb invasives, such as cutting all the green ash in southwestern Ontario, have not been successful anyway. The emerald ash borer is continuing to spread. However, there are some signs that systems are adapting to changes - for example with cormorants. It has now been reported that owls are eating cormorant chicks in some areas. Our IDEA of what is a balance in nature may not be true in that there are many possible patterns of nature in balance. Our keynote speaker on Saturday night was Michael Runtz from the University of Ottawa. His talk was entitled *WHERE NORTH MEETS SOUTH, A Natural History of the Frontenac Arch*, that being the geographical area where we were holding our gathering. It is a very important corridor connecting the Canadian Shield with the Adirondack mountains. It enables species usually seen either farther north or south to intermingle. Workshops, outings, early morning birding and a moth capture and ID all contributed to the success of this event.

