

THE TAYLOR MASSEY PROJECT

Celebrating and Protecting Taylor Massey Creek

David Lawrie
Aquatic Analyst
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
PDF via email

RE: Don River Fisheries Management Plan

Dear Mr Lawrie,

Please accept our comments on the development of a Don River Fisheries Management Plan and feel free to print and circulate this letter for discussion at tonight's meeting:

1. Proposed Divisions and Ecosystem Approach: While we cannot comment on each of the proposed divisions of the watershed, we feel that at least one new division is required: one to reflect Taylor Massey Creek as a unique sub-watershed. Taylor Massey Creek (TMC) continues to be heavily polluted and thus hostile to most fish species. TMC needs dedicated analysis and management. Recent efforts by TRCA biologists to begin to inventory terrestrial species in the Taylor Massey watershed, specifically in Warden Woods, were a welcome initiative. We need similar, focused efforts on the aquatic species of the Creek, and not have them lost in a hazy view of a section 5 that is too large and regionally-varied.

To place this in context, we remind you that the TRCA's Don Watershed Regeneration Council wrote the City's Wet Weather Flow Implementation Advisory Committee in 2006 calling for TMC to become a "pilot project to demonstrate the value of an integrated, ecosystem approach to stormwater management and a comprehensive package of improvements on a subwatershed basis". Naturally, we think that lumping TMC into an un-focused group that includes degraded mid-town streams runs counter to the need to properly identify and manage local watersheds, and does not honour the integrated, ecosystem approach suggested by the Council.

2. Historic and Current Conditions: With respect to your request for input on historic and current conditions of the fishery, aquatic habitat, and water quality, we offer the following for your consideration:

- 2.1 Headwater Conditions: The historically clean upper base-flow for TMC, originating near Wishing Well Park north of the 401, was diverted to Highland Creek. As a result, TMC now starts with a lower volume of water and a higher concentration of pollutants than historically, as much of the headwater for TMC now consists of run-off from the 401. As existing efforts to capture some of this pollution in the Terraview-Willowfield concept site address only some flow conditions, further initiatives should be considered to either return some clean base-flow to TMC and/or direct polluted water to the

City's sanitary system, rather than have it pollute the Creek. In addition, Stage III of the Terraview-Willowfield Concept Site, to replace the concrete channel from the Willowfield School south to Ellesmere with natural conditions, for which plans have already been developed, should be implemented as soon as possible;

- 2.2 Ellesmere to Lawrence: Most of this reach of the Creek has been lost to the public and to agency monitoring responsibilities. From just south of Lawrence to Manhattan, the Creek flows through private property, extending right to the top of bank. While this section appears to be well-treed, the lack of public trail makes monitoring impossible. What is the state of encroachment? What is the state of illegal discharges? What is the state of the banks and the bottom of the Creek? Can concrete-bottom sections be rehabilitated to natural form? What protocols or partnerships can be developed with local property owners?

Worse, from Manhattan south to Lawrence, the Creek has been placed underground and built over. This aberration of planning can probably never be undone, but its impact should never be forgotten, nor permitted ever again anywhere in the TRCA's jurisdiction;

- 2.3 Lawrence to Eglinton: Much of the creek bottom in this reach is in concrete, significantly scoured where it is not, and most of its length is exposed to direct sunlight with little riparian planting. The TMP, our local partners, and the City have planted 1,175 trees and shrubs between Lawrence and Bertrand over the last 4 years, and will plant another 250 this year. More needs to be done, including:

- More riparian cover should be planted throughout this reach;
- From Lawrence to Bertrand, the TRCA and the City should investigate ways to raise the creek-bed, complemented with the establishment of an extensive community of aquatic plants to improve water quality; and,
- South of Bertrand, options should be developed to rehabilitate the concrete channel, and encroachment onto public lands must be stopped;

- 2.4 Other Habitat Issues: For the rest of the Creek, the dominant problems remain fish barriers, eroding stream banks, failing gabion baskets, spotty riparian cover, and poor water quality, which will be dealt with below. The City's Wet Weather Flow Master Plan provides some assessment of the first four of these challenges, but has sufficient inaccuracies such that it should not be relied upon. The TRCA should perform its own evaluation of the extent of the problems to fish represented by in-stream barriers, eroding banks and downstream deposition, failing stream-bank infrastructure, and areas with little or no riparian cover; and,

2.5 Water Quality: In terms of water quality, TMC will undoubtedly benefit from the City's pesticide bylaw and the move to disconnect downspouts, and remains the number one priority under both the City's Wet Weather Flow Master Plan and its Storm Outfall Monitoring Program.

Pending full funding and implementation of these programs, however, TMC is probably the most polluted watercourse in Canada, presenting severe challenges to fish and all other aquatic organisms.

For this reason, the Taylor Massey Project continues to request that the relevant government agencies produce a Water Quality Index (WQI) for the Creek, to help pinpoint pollution sources, prompt remedial action, and track future progress.

In addition, we remain severely concerned that:

- There is no publicly-accessible database of current water quality conditions for any streams in the region, including TMC;
- The province has no benchmarks for action when readings for a local watercourse fall below the PWQO (Provincial Water Quality Objectives);
- The TRCA has not yet made good on its 2003 promise at a RAP meeting that it would provide an annual spills summary report by 2007; and,
- In spite of the efforts of the City on the Storm Outfall Monitoring Program, the City has still not been able to come up with a numbering system for outfalls – after five years of requests on this issue – which would expedite public efforts to accurately report spills or sewage entering the Creek.

In conclusion, fish cannot live in degraded habitat and/or polluted water. To allow fish to thrive in Taylor Massey Creek, it must be monitored, managed, and regenerated.

We urge the TRCA to develop a Don fisheries management plan based on a comprehensive ecosystem approach that includes adequate funding for habitat protection and restoration, including riparian plantings, as well as meaningful water quality and spills monitoring, including publicly-accessible GIS-referenced data.

Sincerely,

Andrew McCammon

cc Adele Freeman and Janet Ivey, TRCA; Don Watershed Regeneration Council; Local Councillors Kelly, Thompson, Heaps, and Davis; Lou Di Geronimo and Joanne Di Caro, Toronto Water; Task Force to Bring Back the Don; Wet Weather Flow Implementation Advisory Committee; Other selected federal, provincial and municipal elected officials and staff Partners and sister organizations