

*In this issue...*

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Looking for technical information about the Rouge Park or Rouge River watershed? You can access our on-line database 24/7 at [www.rougepark.com](http://www.rougepark.com). See the "Resource Centre" section for government documents, academic, scientific and general literature, as well as other reports, papers and studies done over the years. Have something to add to our database? E-mail us additions and changes at [rougepark@rougepark.com](mailto:rougepark@rougepark.com).

**It's Official!**

Toronto's Official Plan was adopted by city Council this month. In order to become the unequivocal planning document for Canada's largest city, the plan must now be approved by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. One of the supporting documents, the *Toronto Natural Heritage Study*, gave high marks to the Rouge Park for the ecological value it provides to Toronto. See "New Report" inside for details!


## Small Streams: Time for Some Respect

*By Lewis Yeager, General Manager, Rouge Park*

Small watercourses have long resembled Rodney Dangerfield in land use planning and development, but the time has come to modernize this view, for the survival of watersheds such as the Rouge. Scientists who study rivers refer to small tributaries as first- or second-order streams. In a natural watershed setting, these make up about two-thirds of the total stream and river length. These small watercourses are not simply lesser versions of large river channels. They have very important and unique roles to play in the ecology of healthy running water environments.

Small, even temporary, streams provide breeding grounds for a wide range of insects, amphibians and fish, offering protection from larger predators that cannot access these shallow channels. Like vernal ponds, these tiny aquatic habitats are there when they are most needed, even if they are smaller, or even dry, later in the summer. As well, because the water is often moving slowly and has long contact with stream bottoms and banks, small streams are a major source of exchange for nutrients, organic matter, minerals and gases. All these processes are vital to downstream ecological communities, since in the larger portions of the river, water moves faster, and there is proportionately less contact with the soils and vegetation of the river's bed and banks.

I have made the analogy with the human body, where veins and arteries carry bulk blood to and from the heart and lungs. However, it is in the many tiny capillaries that penetrate to every organ and tissue where oxygen and nutrients are delivered, while carbon dioxide and metabolic wastes are removed, cell by cell. Certain diseases, including diabetes, can cause degradation of the capillaries, often resulting in diminished eyesight and loss of extremities. The same can be said of rivers, where the loss of the ecological function of the kilometres of small streams will reduce the quality of downstream portions of the river with respect to fish and wildlife production, water quality and general environmental quality. If we do not want a blind, limping Rouge River, it is important that land use planning recognizes the vital functions played by small watercourses, and develops policies to enhance and protect these processes. The Town of Markham, a Rouge Park Alliance partner, has commissioned a study of small streams in the planning process, and is to be commended for taking this initiative.

The ecological well being of the Rouge River, and the Rouge Park, cannot be assured unless the importance of small streams, swales and even temporary flows, is recognized. Water is an opportunity, not a problem, and with modern methods of stream restoration and enhancement, today's ditch can become tomorrow's hatching and rearing area. 

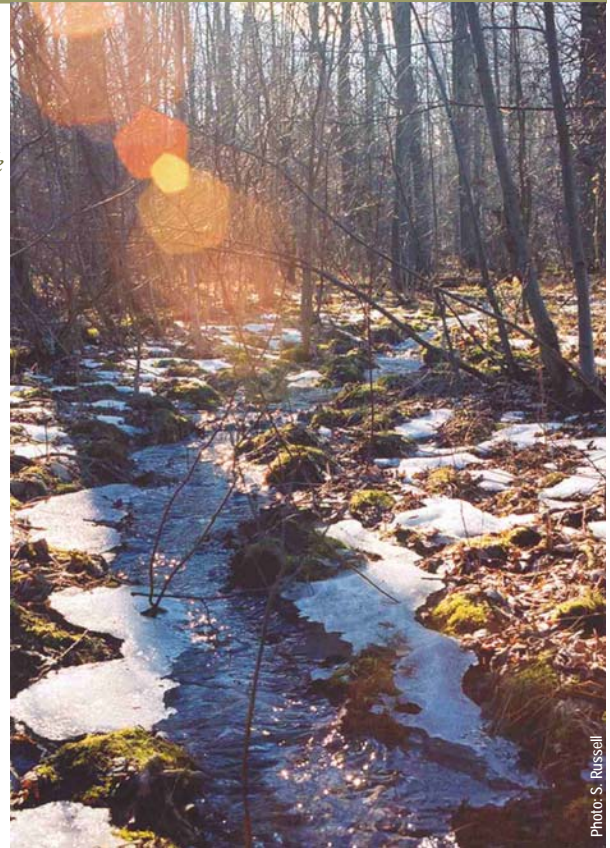


Photo: S. Russell



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