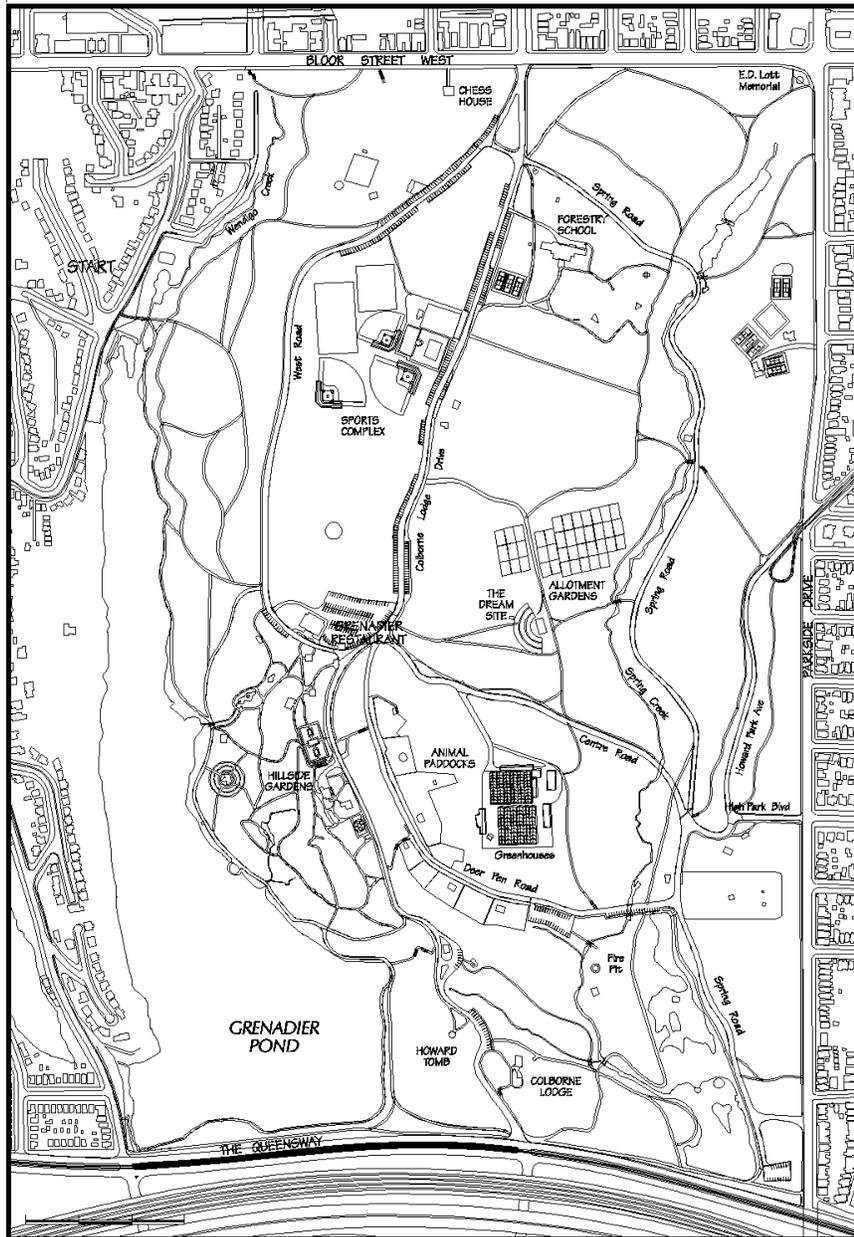




**TOUR HANDOUT PREPARED
IN 2009**

Restoring High Park



Almost 130 years ago, John Howard, the City Surveyor at the time, deeded this area to the City of Toronto to be used as a public park. Since then, the park has grown and has become a place that is visited by more than one million people every year. Over the past thirty years it has been recognized that some of our past actions have endangered and degraded the park's forests, meadows, wetlands, ponds, creeks and wildlife.



Several reports initiated by Ministry of Natural Resources, Metropolitan Toronto and Toronto Region Conservation Authority and the City of Toronto have recognized that:

- High Park provides a home for a large number of regionally and provincially rare vegetation communities and plant species including one nationally rare vegetation community (Dry black oak – white oak tallgrass woodland/savannah), 62 provincially and regionally rare plant species and 23 regionally uncommon plants.
- High Park also provides a resting point for more than 250 migratory bird species and a home for 48 breeding bird species, 6 butterflies of conservation concern, 19 species of mammals and 8 species of amphibians and reptiles.
- The vegetation in the park is threatened by the inappropriate use of natural areas and expansion of non-native invasive species.
- The old oak trees in the park are in poor condition and are getting close the end of their natural life cycle.

Chronology of Reports about High Park

1976: A. Wainio et al. report “An Ecological Study of Grenadier Pond and the Surrounding Areas of High Park - Toronto”.

1982: The Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority identifies tablelands and ravines of High Park Area as an Environmentally Sensitive Area.

1989: Steve Varga, MNR, report: “A Botanical Inventory and Evaluation of High Park Oak Woodlands Area of Natural and Scientific Interest.”

1993: A consulting firm provided an analysis of Historic and Existing Ecological Conditions of Significant Oak Woodlands at High Park Toronto, Ontario and developed a comprehensive restoration strategy for High Park.

In the early 1990’s the City took action to protect and restore natural areas of High Park through the following course of events:

1992: City Council adopted proposal for the restoration and management of High Park in recognition of the Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) designation

1992: High Park Greenhouses began propagating native plants found in the Park to provide a source of plants and seed for reintroduction purposes

1994: City staff developed a relationship with a citizen group named Environmental Dialogue.

1994 – 1996: A large portion of the Grenadier Pond shoreline was restored, and a stormwater management pond was constructed to improve water quality in the Grenadier Pond

1995: High Park Citizens’ Advisory Committee (renamed the High Park Community Advisory Council, HPCAC) was established to assist the City of Toronto in exercising appropriate park stewardship and facilitate ongoing public input.

1996: The City began implementing the test plot program recommended by a consultant in partnership with Volunteer Stewardship Program established by HPCAC

1997 & 1998: first two test burns were implemented in selected areas of the park

1999: A draft Vegetation Management Plan was presented for Public Review.



2000: The City provided capital funding for the implementation of an intensive restoration program. The first operational prescribed burn was implemented. A three person Restoration Crew was established.

The Restoration Program

The program was initiated to restore and maintain healthy, self-sustainable native ecosystems in the natural areas of High Park. The program has been supported by a combination of capital and operational funding.

Restoration Methods & Issues:

Invasive species control

- Mechanical: cutting, pulling
- Chemical: herbicide (responsible, integrated pest management)
- Combined mechanical + chemical

Prescribed Burning (PB)

- PB is a method used for regeneration of native, fire-dependant species and control of invasive species. The first two test burns were implemented in High Park in 1997 & 1998, followed by annual operational burns since 2000.
- PB has been implemented on approx. 37 ha in 13 management units.

Planting

Planting was implemented throughout the natural areas and in the areas that were re-captured by eliminating invasive species. Between 2000 and 2008, the Restoration Crew planted 27,507 plants (1505 trees, 6233 shrubs, and 19,769 herbaceous plants). Native species were planted that would naturally occur in High Park. Wherever possible the source of material has been from High Park or nearby areas, otherwise the material has originated from Southern Ontario. The Volunteer Stewardship Program and Nature Centre also contribute a lot of planting to the park in designated areas.

Woodland Management

Woodland management in High Park includes removal of Norway maples, Manitoba maples and thinning of Sassafras groves.

Oak Decline

Oak Decline occurs where there are mature black oak vegetation communities (woodlands). It has occurred in both Oakville and Mississauga. The reasons for decline include:

- Old age
- Drought
- Cankervorm infestation/defoliation
- Infestation by two line chestnut borer
- Armillaria root rot
- Trampling
- Pollution



Solution for oak decline:

- Restoration of vegetation communities that will provide conditions for natural regeneration of black oaks, acorn germination and protection from squirrels.
- Planting black oaks: Tree shelters – 200 planted from 2003 to 2006, approx. 70% survival rate.

Deadwood

Deadwood is an important element of a healthy ecosystem. Standing dead trees and downed wood represent the natural end of a lifecycle of a tree. A downed tree slowly releases nutrients and provides shelter and food for birds, insects and mammals.

Monitoring

Over 35 photo monitoring points are established in natural areas of High Park. A five-year monitoring database has been established.

High Park Volunteers, Volunteer Stewardship Program (VSP)

VSP has supported City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation department over the past 10 years through active participation in seed collection, plant propagation, planting (adopt-a-plots) and invasive species control.

The Results of the Restoration Program in High Park

- Large numbers of black oak seedlings in the areas that are being actively restored.
- Some native plant species reestablished: large patches of native grasses and wildflowers such as big and little bluestem grass, Indian grass and sedges and round lobed hepatica; wild lupines reestablished.
- Many areas that were invaded by invasive plants are now planted with appropriate native plants.

Recognition

In spring 2002, Wildlife Habitat Canada awarded The City of Toronto, Urban Forestry Services with the “Urban Habitat Stewardship Award” for the exemplary efforts of the High Park restoration program, an outstanding example of ecological restoration of a regionally significant oak savannah within Ontario’s largest urban centre.