

Living Next Door to Nature

A Guide for Homeowners Living Next to Woodlands, Wetlands and Natural Areas



You likely chose your home in part because of its close proximity to a natural area. If so, there is a lot you can do on your property that will protect the environmental and recreational value of the natural area that you live next to.

Let's look after our natural areas

Natural areas including forests, meadows and wetlands provide essential ecological services. They:

- clean water before it enters our rivers, streams and lakes;
- reduce pollution in the air we breathe;
- help control soil erosion and flooding; and
- provide food and shelter for wildlife.

Encroachment

Encroachment refers to the unauthorized use of public land for personal purposes. Natural areas can be severely affected by encroachment. There are two different classifications of encroachment: structural and non-structural.

Structural encroachment includes the placement of sheds, play structures, fences, patios, gardens and pathways intended for personal use on public land. Non-structural encroachment includes dumping garbage, spraying pesticides and draining your swimming pool onto public land.

Below are examples of common non-structural encroachments, their impact on the environment and what you can do instead. All types of encroachment have a negative impact on natural areas and should be avoided.

ENCROACHMENT	POTENTIAL ADVERSE EFFECTS	ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS
<i>Dumping yard waste</i>	Can introduce invasive non-native plant species, e.g. periwinkle & goutweed; creates a fire hazard and smothers natural vegetation.	Participate in municipal yard waste pick-up programs; leave grass clippings on the lawn, or compost for excellent fertilizer.
<i>Mowing, pruning or removing vegetation</i>	Disturbs natural vegetation & wildlife habitat.	Call your municipality if you are concerned about potentially hazardous vegetation.
<i>Planting vegetation</i>	Disturbs natural vegetation; can introduce invasive non-native species.	Participate in organized tree-planting and community gardening programs.
<i>Spraying pesticides or herbicides</i>	Kills natural vegetation & insects; exposes wildlife and humans to hazardous chemicals.	Call your municipality or conservation authority if you have questions.
<i>Dumping garbage</i>	Disturbs natural vegetation & wildlife habitat; exposes wildlife to potentially harmful chemicals.	Dispose of waste responsibly; hire a company to collect large loads if required.

Fish and your swimming pool

Do you have a chlorinated pool? Pool chemicals are harmful to fish and waterways when water is drained into our storm drains untreated. Follow these tips to protect streams and rivers from the impacts of pool chemicals:

- Do not add chemicals for 2 weeks prior to draining your pool, spa or hot tub.
- Never drain chlorinated water directly into the storm drain - It is harmful to aquatic creatures. Drain your pool water across your lawn avoiding the storm drain.

All unused or expired pool chemicals are considered Hazardous Waste and should be taken to your Municipal Household Hazardous Waste Drop-off location.

Habitat = homes for wildlife

Simply put, a bird or animal's habitat is much like the neighbourhoods that we live in. A good habitat provides food, like our grocery stores, shelter like our homes and places to be active and raise young, just like our parks and community gathering places. Like humans, each animal, bird, insect and amphibian is unique and requires different types of homes or habitat.

While it is fun and even inspirational to observe wildlife, it is important to respect and protect the natural spaces that provide habitat. Resist the urge to feed wild animals – no matter how cute. Store garbage in animal-proof containers, and keep pet food indoors. To prevent wild animals from taking up residence in and around your home, eliminate openings under porches and decks, and repair holes in roofs and attics.

Pets in nature

Dogs are not permitted off leash in conservation areas and public greenspaces. They can trample vegetation and the nests of ground-dwelling birds. When hiking in these areas, keep to the trails with your leashed dogs and remember to clean up after them. And if your yard borders a natural area, install a fence around your property or keep your dog on a leash while unattended.

Outdoor cats can also be problematic. Cats kill millions of songbirds every year in Canada, and are contributing to the near extinction of some species. Keep cats indoors or on a leash while outdoors, especially during peak songbird migration periods (*May to June and September to October*).

Community stewardship

We all have a role to play as stewards of the greenspaces in our community. To really make a difference we need the understanding and involvement of private landowners like you.

There are many ways for you and your family to get involved in your community and enjoy local natural areas. From hands-on demonstrations and workshops, to tree plantings and community clean-ups, your efforts will have an immediate and positive impact on the environment.

For stewardship opportunities in your community, visit

www.trcastewardshipevents.ca

Additional Resources:

- York Region Forestry www.york.ca/forestry
- Neighbours of Mississauga's Natural Areas www.mississauga.ca/file/COM/NMNA06.pdf
- Durham Region www.durham.ca/deac and click on *DEAC Natural Areas as Neighbours Guide*



For more information please contact:

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