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AREAS OF CONCERN TORONTO AND REGION

Efforts in Toronto and Region are undertaken in a partnership between the Government of Canada, other levels of government and non-government groups, including members of the public.

Undertaking environmental restoration requires a large amount of scientific and technical expertise, local knowledge and hard work. One agency or group cannot engage in such a large task on its own without the help of others.

The contributions of federal, provincial and local agencies, local industries, and others continue to have a positive impact on restoring water quality and ecosystem health within the Toronto and Region Area of Concern (AOC).

Why was it listed as an Area of Concern?

The Toronto region was designated as an AOC in 1986 because a review of available data indicated that water quality and environmental health were severely degraded. Several centuries of agriculture and urban development have dramatically reshaped the natural environment of the Toronto and Region AOC. Contaminants from stormwater runoff and melting snow from the area's six watersheds create serious impacts in Lake Ontario. Overflows of stormwater mixed with raw sewage are a serious problem following heavy rains in the lower portions of the Don and Humber Rivers and along the waterfront. Spills, road runoff and chemical input to sewers from industries and residences also contribute to poor water quality.

What have we accomplished?

- Since implementing the Toronto Beaches Plan in 2009 to improve water quality within the Toronto and Region AOC, eight of Toronto's swimming beaches have been awarded the internationally recognized Blue Flag for high environmental standards for water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety.
- Environment Canada's contribution included research and monitoring on Toronto's beaches, tracking down the source of bacteria and studying groundwater at Bluffer's Park Beach, which helped to set objectives for the remedial actions.
- Projects to restore streams, create wetlands and reduce fish barriers have helped to re-establish fish and wildlife habitats and populations. For example, critical barriers along Lake Ontario tributary waterways were removed or modified to allow lake fish such as rainbow trout to pass through, migrate and spawn.



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- In the past decade, approximately 47 hectares of Lake Ontario coastal wetlands were created through the Toronto Waterfront Aquatic Habitat Restoration Strategy, a priority for the Toronto and Region AOC.
- A seven-hectare coastal wetland was created at Tommy Thompson Park on Lake Ontario in east Toronto, and a one-hectare complex of wetlands that is part of the Toronto Islands was also created.

What is left to do?

In the Toronto and Region AOC, implementing large infrastructure projects and upgrading Toronto's Main Sewage Treatment Plant are major priorities. These projects, as well as the City of Toronto's Wet Weather Flow Management Plan, the Don River and Central Waterfront Trunk Interceptor Project, and the Combined Sewer Overflow Control and Treatment Strategy, will all significantly improve water quality on the Toronto waterfront.

Restoring habitat continues to be a priority in the AOC. An additional 20 hectares of coastal wetlands are planned to be restored at Tommy Thompson Park and at Humber Marshes within the next five years.

Realigning and naturalizing the mouth of the Don River is another major restoration project. This project will reduce flooding, create a more natural river mouth, and add a significant amount of new wetland and riparian (the interface between land and a river or stream) habitat to the Toronto waterfront.

Another priority for Toronto is to replace lost coastal wetland and nursery habitat for fish and wildlife.

Outlook

It is anticipated that the Toronto and Region AOC will be delisted by 2025.

Where can you find more information?

Environment Canada e-mail:
www.greatlakes-grandslacs@ec.gc.ca

Environment Canada web site:
www.ec.gc.ca/raps

Toronto and Region Remedial Action Plan:
www.torontorap.ca

PARTNERS

Ontario Ministry of the Environment

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority