

# Friends of the Spit

P.O. Box 51518  
2060 Queen Street East  
Toronto ON M4E 3V7

Tel: (416) 699-3143  
e-mail: fos@interlog.com  
http://www.interlog.com/~fos

Inside:  
- Spit Baselands  
under threat  
- Cormorant cull  
- Who is minding  
the Spit?

## Jim Giffen

We were very saddened by the death of Jim, last fall. A keen birder and nature lover, he was a member of Friends of the Spit Steering Committee for a number of years.

Our organization greatly benefitted from his experience, extensive knowledge, and logical mind. We will miss his sense of humour and enthusiasm for life, which helped make meetings pleasant and lively.

Our deepest condolences to his wife Airi and the rest of his family.

# NEWSLETTER

Spring 2005

## AS AN EDITORIAL

For the Spit, the recent focus on the Portlands is both good news and bad news.

On the positive side, there is active citizen participation in a series of planning exercises that *may* result in a great mixture of extensive parkland, supporting a variety of activities, and, in the area north of the Ship Channel, sensitively-implemented residential neighbourhoods.

This would be complementary to the Spit and confirm its importance within a recreational context.

On the minus side, the Spit is viewed by an increasing number of entities as a handy site to implement their pet project, be it the federal agency Parks Canada with its "Discovery Centre" or the municipal department of Parks and Recreation, with its "tree farm".

Friends of the Spit have never been daunted by challenges, always rallying to protect the wilderness park we have fought long and hard to create.

We will continue to do so, and succeed.

## Parks Canada eyes Spit Baselands for building "Discovery Centre"

### Project threatens wilderness area

*The direct descendant of the "park centre" proposed for the Spit by former MP Dennis Mills in his "Save Our Waterfront" report (see Spring-Summer 2004 Newsletter), this undertaking by the Federal government aims at establishing a presence for Parks Canada in the Toronto area. It would feature exhibits aiming to inform people about the country.*

While there is much merit in informing people about our country, having this facility at the Spit, which is the "preferred location" indicated by Parks Canada, is unacceptable.

A structure for the type of exhibits and activities envisaged has to be large. It needs parking for several hundred cars plus tour buses, access roads, and signposting.

Designed to attract thousands of visitors day in day out, it would create extensive traffic. Transit (when available) would do little to reduce the flow of cars.

The Baselands are an integral part of the Spit. They are critical as a gateway onto the Spit.

The Spit Baselands are an ESA (Environmentally Significant Area). They were zoned Gr (conservation lands) by Toronto City Council, a designation that basically restricts uses to nature reserve/wilderness park. (Article continues over)



*Is this kind of building in the Spit's future? Parks Canada Discovery Centre, opened last year in Hamilton, is a big building, with a large parking lot.*

## Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation adds parkland

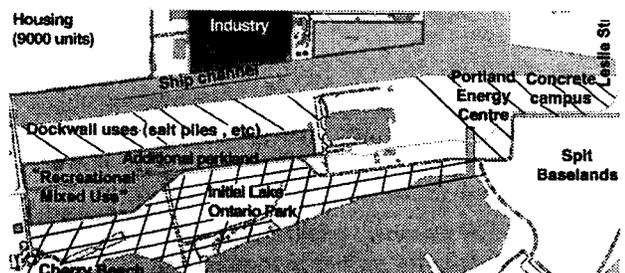
### New plan provides more park area in Portlands

*Friends of the Spit and many others have advocated parkland designations for all the lands south of the Ship Channel. The latest proposal for the Portlands Implementation Strategy significantly increases the parkland area south of the Ship Channel.\**

The greyed area labelled "Recreational Mixed Uses" (Additional parkland) on the map recognizes that this land is unsuitable for development at this time. It also recognizes the input from many individuals and groups, something to feel good about.

Abundant parkland is needed for a growing population, as is a green corridor connected with the Spit. As existing businesses relocate, the land now under lease could be added easily to the park.

\*The report can be obtained at [towaterfront.ca](http://towaterfront.ca), click on "Current Projects", then "Port Lands". To be on the mailing list, contact Tanya Hardy: [thardy@towaterfront.ca](mailto:thardy@towaterfront.ca), or 416-214-1344 ext. 239



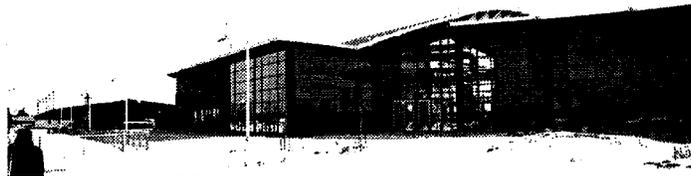
## Membership renewal

Thank you to members who have already renewed for 2005 ahead of receiving their renewal slip.

A 2005 renewal slip is enclosed with this Newsletter. If you have renewed, you will find "REN/05" on your mailing label. We thank you in advance for renewing promptly.

Non-members who are mailed a Newsletter for information will see "COMP" on their label.

Friends of the Spit will vigorously oppose the building of a Discovery Centre on the Baselands or on the Spit. There are many other areas suitable for this kind of facility, for instance in the Portlands, around the Ship Channel or near Cherry Beach,



*The suitability of this Discovery Centre on Hamilton's waterfront is not being questioned. However, this type of facility is totally unsuitable for the Spit, Toronto's only wilderness park.*

*The Tommy Thompson Park Master Plan provides for a SMALL park Interpretive Centre at the base, to the east of the existing spine road.*

where there is good automobile access and where the possibilities exist, within the current zoning, to illustrate how a building and site can be remediated and used for beneficial means.

We have met with representatives of Parks Canada, who have assured us that there will be full public consultation. However, Parks Canada is drilling a series of boreholes in the Baselands, to assess the soil contaminants and the soil bearing capacity. What is very disturbing is that they are not drilling anywhere else in the Portlands.

### *TRCA covets a part of the bounty*

Meanwhile, The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) seems delighted at the prospect of getting federal money that might enable them to proceed with "developing" the Spit, into a showcase of created landscapes and habitats, large interpretive signs, buildings, and other "attractions", including this "Discovery Centre". The informal atmosphere, which makes the Spit so fascinating for so many, will be lost forever.

This change of attitude by the TRCA is very disconcerting. Since the 1991 Master Plan, they have prevented a host of opportunistic schemes that would have been detrimental to the Spit. Why proceed with this one?

A general call to action to stop a Discovery Centre at the Spit is very likely. Be ready!

\*\*\*\*\*

### *Another agency also fancies the Baselands*

## **City looks at Baselands for its tree farm**

*This is another instance of the Baselands and the Spit being seen as handy vacant land to build on. Toronto's Parks Department wants to move its "tree farm", which supplies city parks with trees and shrubs, from Fort York to the Portlands. The Spit Baselands is one of their preferred locations.*

A tree farm is not a botanical garden\*. It is an industrial establishment, with diggers and bulldozers. The trees are temporary, being dug up to be trucked to various parks, and no habitat is ever created. In addition, such operations generally use pesticides and other chemicals.

Friends of the Spit and other groups are on record as being strongly opposed to siting the operation on the Baselands. The zoning does not allow it. And again, there are other suitable sites in the Portlands.

It is also likely that the membership will be called upon to fight this proposal.

\* As worthwhile as a botanical garden can be, it is not suitable for the Spit (and is not allowed by the zoning).

\*\*\*\*\*

### *Lone attendant must drive van, monitor visitors, enforce park regulations...*

## **Who is minding the Spit during public hours?**

*A single attendant may have been sufficient when the Spit had 50,000 visitors a year, who, with very few exceptions, were mindful of the rules. Now that, according to The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), the Spit attracts some 200,000 a year — many oblivious of the permitted uses — a stronger presence is needed to prevent the increase in derogations that accompanies this significant rise in popularity.*

Friends of the Spit and other user groups petitioned the TRCA to add at least one attendant during public hours, so that the large number of "new" visitors (as opposed to the "regulars" of a few years ago, who were generally aware of the Spit history and respectful of its fragile environment) are made aware that official staff are indeed overseeing what is happening and are available in case of need.

The TRCA response was disappointing. They claim that it is not possible to have more than one attendant, for reasons of staffing and funding. While money seems to (continued opposite)

### *Lethal cull agenda?*

## **Cormorant crisis?**

*The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) is considering a more aggressive approach to the management of Double-crested Cormorants at the Spit, including killing nesting birds.*

The reasons given by the TRCA are the steady increase in numbers over the past few years, damage to trees and other plants, and concern over loss of habitat for other bird species.

Friends of the Spit oppose the killing of Cormorants at the Spit. Indeed, we have always opposed plans involving inhumane or lethal methods of wildlife management.

Ironically, killing as a management method may not be effective, since there is a strong likelihood that Cormorants from other



*Fascinating waterbirds, Cormorants are an important part of the biodiversity of the Spit.*

colonies will rapidly replace the culled birds. In addition, it will have a negative impact on the nesting success of other species.

The Spit has been evolving for 50 years.

Its biodiversity has increased as birds, animals, and plants adapted to the park.

We believe that a minimum of management will ensure that this evolution continues.

In view of Friends of the Spit and the Toronto Ornithological Club presentations, and the large number of letters protesting the kill, the TRCA Board decided not to conduct a lethal cull of Cormorants at the Spit this year. However, they told us that this will be an option studied in a forthcoming Environmental Assessment.

\*\*\*\*\*

### *Who is minding... (continued from opposite)*

be available for material projects, such as habitat creation (themselves having merit), funds for operating and supervision, which are critical if these projects are to be successful and lasting, get doled out very stingily.

We are extremely concerned that if the TRCA fail to act at this time to strictly enforce the park regulations, prohibited behaviours will continue to increase and become impossible to eradicate. For instance, there are already significant problems with dogs. With no visible TRCA presence, this will only get worse.

If you witness any behaviour against park rules (such as disorderly conduct, dog walking, picking wildflowers, etc.), inform the attendant AND phone, write or email us.