
Ecological Restoration in Toronto Parks

Beth McEwan

Urban Forest Coordinator, City of Toronto Parks and Recreation
18 Dyas Road, Toronto ON M3B 1V5
416 392-1888 Fax: 416 392-1915
bmcewen@toronto.ca

Abstract

High Park is a major public park close to downtown Toronto. About half of its 160 ha is in natural areas, but many of these have been degraded by establishment and maintenance of non-native vegetation, dog-walking, and so on. Black oak (Quercus velutina) savannah and woodland, a nationally rare vegetation community, is a key feature of the park. Over the past six years there has been a focused effort to restore this habitat using prescribed burns, planting, and exotics removal techniques. The results from regular monitoring show that excellent success rates have been achieved. Canopy cover has been decreased and several native species have started to recover, including wild lupine (Lupinus perennis). In another area of Toronto, the Kimbark-Coldstream Ravine, restoration work has also been a success. Degradation in this area had been severe due to stormwater erosion, mountain bikes, trail proliferation and widening, and invasive species such as Norway maple (Acer platanoides). Removing the Norway maple, posting signs, and blocking unofficial trails have released a vigorous re-growth of natural vegetation. In conjunction with the work on the ground, regulations were strengthened to protect the ravines in Toronto from overuse and abuse in the future, and education and volunteer programmes were utilised to engage local citizens. These two cases are examples of how focused restoration efforts can be successful even in an environment like Toronto where population pressures are extreme.

