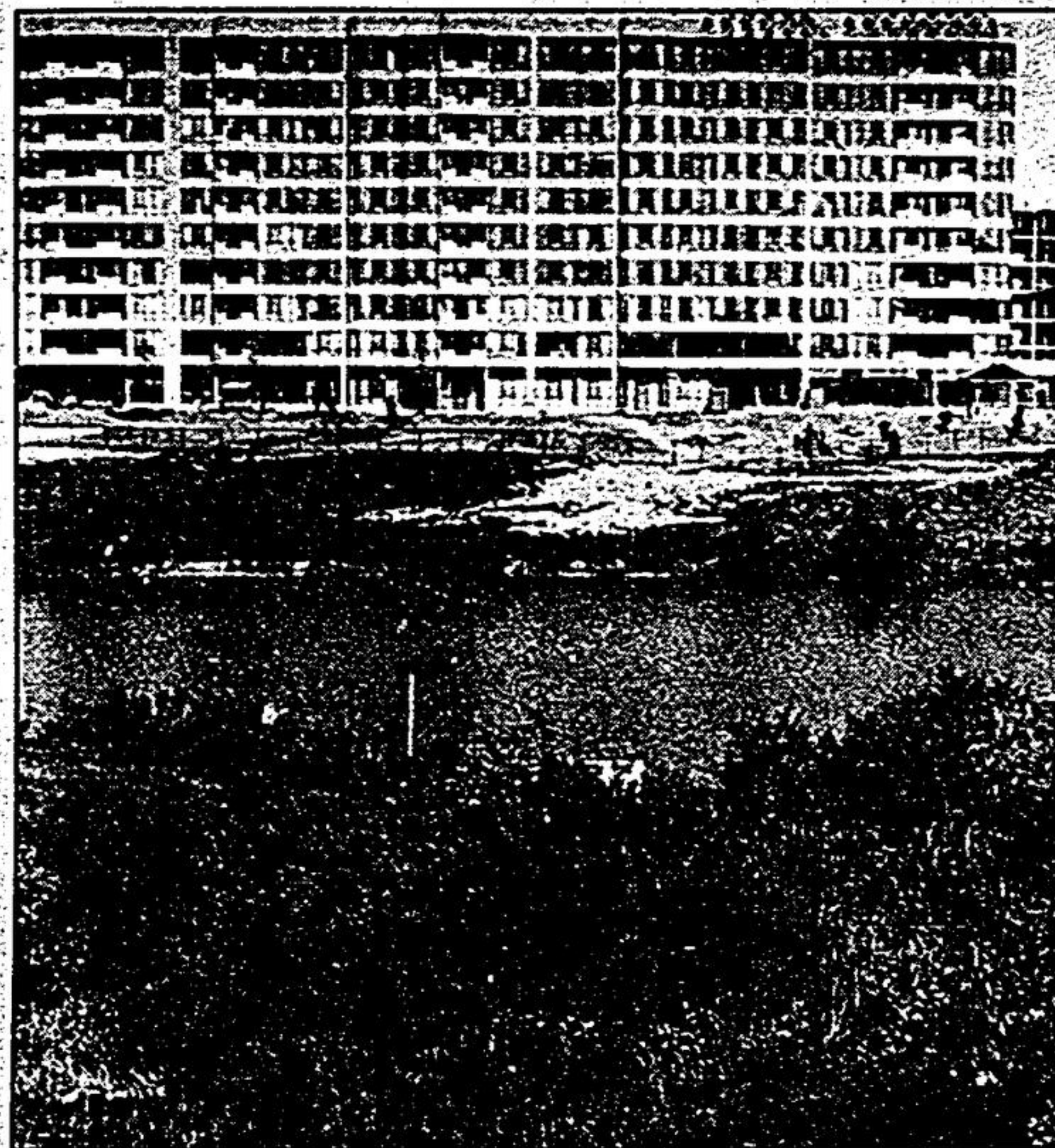


The Rouge tributary at the SE corner of Woodbine Ave and Hwy 7 is channelled through pipe, a serious threat to quality. Also debris litters the stream and

development is too close to the edge, says river spokesman.

— Sjoerd Witteveen



Walden Pond at Bullock Dr. and Hwy 7 is a holding pond which could feature sand spits and a wider shore zone.

— Lisa Buchanan

Rouge River group urges vigilance

By DEB BODINE CHAMPION

Unless the Town of Markham is extremely cautious and wise, it could become an accomplice in a sordid murder — the death of the Rouge River.

The Rouge River is the last example of a natural river system in the Metro Toronto area. From the headwaters in the Oak Ridges Moraine in the north, it flows through Markham south to Lake Ontario, draining over 330 square kilometres of land.

It is currently the cleanest river in the Greater Toronto area but with the phenomenal growth in Markham that could change.

According to a group called "Save the Rouge Valley System", the future of the Rouge River is being jeopardized by the uncontrolled development along its length.

Carolinian zone

The Rouge River Valley is of great ecological significance, and was acknowledged as such by the Ontario Government. June 1, \$1.8 million were allocated to the preservation of the Carolinian zones of Ontario — areas which boast vegetation and wildlife not found elsewhere in the province, and are more common to the southern regions of North America. The Rouge River Valley is a Carolinian zone.

Critical area

The Rouge River Valley has even aroused international interest. The World Wildlife Fund has declared the Finch Meander, just south of Markham, "a Critical Unprotected Natural Area of international significance and in need of preservation for the benefit of future generations."

"This is a very special area from an ecological perspective," says Jim Robb, vice-chairman of SRVS.

"The crucial thing is that as we develop the expanding satellite cities of Toronto, we are gradually consuming all the land that drains into all the rivers that drain into Lake Ontario — the place where we get our drinking water and where we hope to recreate.

Like the Don

Unless we can get a good handle on controlling this de-

velopment so that it doesn't have a deadly impact on the streams, we're going to end up with the Humber and the Don River situations repeated over and over again. Only this will be worse, because they'll be so urbanized right from the headwaters to Lake Ontario, that none of the natural purifying influences of a natural stream will come into play. It will be like an open storm water sewer," Robb said.

Quality a problem

Although Robb is quick to commend Markham for its management of water quantity, he also suggests there is room for improvement when it comes to water quality.

Save the Rouge Valley System advocates the provision of generous buffer zones on each side of the river and its tributaries, to protect the water from the polluting influence of encroaching urbanization, to permit recreational use of the area and to allow sufficient space for possible flooding in the future.

"Generous buffer zones are absolutely crucial. Unless you leave sufficient space, so that you can keep an intact ecosystem, it loses its ability to naturally purify the water."

Where a stream is bordered by pavement, the water flowing into it during a rainfall is of diminished quality and carries with it heavy metals, car exhaust, lead, chemicals from rubber tires and other toxins, oil, grit and dirt.

In choosing appropriate buffer zones to prevent flooding, the stream's storm event history is analyzed. Robb believes that these estimates of storm frequency and severity may be underestimated and that there is likely to be a future increase in the waterflow.

"Very little water enters small streams on the surface. Most of it seeps in through the soil. As more and more area is developed, bringing more and more pavement, water falls onto the roads, flows into the storm sewers and probably takes five minutes to get to the stream. If it falls onto the soil next to the road, it probably takes twenty-four hours to get to the stream," Robb explained.

That difference can cause

huge flash floods."

Buffers inadequate

Robb cited specific sites in Markham where the buffer zones are inadequate. On the Warden Ave. site of Markham Hydro, open storage of transformers is kept on pavement sloped toward a stream leading to the Rouge. Also fill has been pushed right over the banks of the Rouge, covering tree roots which can prevent aeration, thus endangering the trees too.

On the south-east corner of Hwy. 7 and Woodbine Ave., a trailer sales lot backs right up to the edge of a tributary of the Rouge, at times pushing over the banks. The vegetation has been destroyed in places and the stream is littered with debris.

Channelization is another practice which leads to certain death of a stream. Tributaries of the Rouge River are piped underground if the property is required for development.

This occurs at Warden and 14th Ave. where the river is piped underground from a water retention pond and west of Rycroft Dr. to name a few.

Property on the corner of Fonthill Blvd. and Fred Varley Dr., currently designated hazard lands — which can not be developed — is owned by a developer who wants to build housing. A decision on channelling is forthcoming. Standing committee meets Oct. 15.

"It (channelling) is like killing one appendage of the body of the river," argued Robb. Because there is no penetration of sunlight, there can be no life — no vegetation, aquatic insects or animals. The life provides a natural ecosystem which cleanses the water. Removing it results in increased bacterial growth and pollution.

"The Lower Rouge is one of the richest areas in Canada for species diversity — trees, plants and animals. It deserves better protection than it is getting."

Walden Pond

To encourage natural plant and animal life in the retention ponds, such as Walden Pond at Bullock Drive and Hwy. 7, Robb recommends the creation of wider littoral zones — the shall-

low areas around the edges of the pond.

Sunlight is only able to penetrate to a water depth of several feet and growth can only occur with the help of the sun. Marsh growth such as cats-tails and pond lilies act as purifiers of the water, while frogs, minnows and algae — the lower portion of the food chain — attract animal life such as otters, herons and kingfishers.

Robb also suggests the creation of sand spits which would jut out into the pond, creating a stopover point for migratory and wading birds.

"It's a small point, but it is crucial because a lot of their natural habitats are disappearing in other areas as well."

"I must give credit to the Town of Markham," he added. "Markham has definitely shown some of the best foresight in Canada probably, with regards to storm water control, in building reservoirs to control volume and reduce flooding. But the preservation of water quality is another matter."

Toogood Pond

"Toogood Pond in Unionville and the stream flowing through Unionville are quite pretty, but very artificial and do very little for water quality," noted Robb. "The grass surroundings require herbicides and pesticides and a tremendous amount of upkeep by Parks and Recreation staff."

"Some of the reasons I feel

strongly about this issue are economic, and not just because I like flowers and trees."

Defiled beaches

Seventy five million dollars have been dedicated by the Ontario Liberals to clean up the beaches, but 90 per cent of the beach problem is the urban stream problem and nobody will deny that.

"Water is a vital thing. It is crucial to the survival of the human race and life itself, and if we sully it nobody is going to win."

Markham chapter

The first meeting of the newly-formed Markham chapter of Save the Rouge Valley System will be held at the Markham Community Centre (Hwy. 7 and Hwy. 48) Wednesday, October 14 at 7:30.

Save the Rouge Valley System is a non-profit volunteer organization founded in 1975 by a group of concerned citizens who feared the Rouge Valley would be destroyed. Their goal is to protect and enhance the Rouge watershed.

Traditionally a Scarborough-based operation, the SRVS decided to create a Markham branch because of its rapid growth and development. The group is dedicated to protecting the natural habitat in the Markham area.

For more information contact Stephen Marshall at 294-6656 or the Scarborough office of SRVS at 288-8730.



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