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All is not quiet in the York Region forest on Hwy. 48 north of Ballantrae.

COMING UP: See snakes, salamanders

Go wild in our back yard at York forest adventures

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Catch bugs and butterflies. See frogs, salamanders and snakes — all up close and in their natural environments.

The Good, The Bad and The Bugly takes place July 20 at the Eldred King Forest Tract, 16232 Hwy. 48.

"Just having fun in the forest makes (you) want to protect it," said Stacey Bowman, invasive species specialist for York Region.

The tract is in northern Whitchurch-Stouffville, just north of Ballantrae.

The guided hikes, which take place between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., will help educate people about all that takes place within its confines and how that affects the rest of the world.

"We do know spending time in nature and in forests, in particular, has positive effects on mental health, that is documented," Ms Bowman said.

Hikers will also learn about the emerald ash borer and how it impacts area residents.

Ms Bowman noted the York Region forest does not house a huge ash tree population and what is there has yet to be affected, but "in the next few years, we will see that happen".

The following Saturday, at the same tract, people can learn about the forest's role in the ecosystem,

in particular that of water via the Fantastic Forest Experience.

It runs from noon to 4 p.m.

'We do know spending time in nature and in forests, in particular, has positive effects on mental health, that is documented.'

People in this area have a disconnect with water because of our geographical distance from the liquid bodies, according to Debra Macapagal, creative coordinator for Fantastic Forest Experience.

"We all have a stake in the watershed and (are) affected by pollution and stress," she said.

The self-guided hike to the Eldred King pond includes music, story telling, painting and dancing.

"Get rejuvenated, inspired and protect our forests because we're losing them. They're so far and few between," she said.

Both forest excursions are free, open to all ages and will take place rain or shine.

For more information, go to www.york.ca/forest-events

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Flags lowered to honour Arizona firefighters

While fireworks lit up the night sky over Memorial Park and we celebrated being Canadian, flags at Whitchurch-Stouffville's two fire stations were lowered to half-mast Monday in honour of the 19 firefighters who died in Arizona the day before.

Dubbed as the worst wildland fire tragedy in 80 years, the Yarnell Hills fire charred nearly 8,400 of tinder-dry chaparral and grasslands northwest of Phoenix.

Wind gusts left the lightning-sparked fire inescapable for the 19 Granite Mountain Hotshots deployed to the site.

One member of the elite crew survived. He was away from the scene, moving the unit's truck at the time.

The fire started Friday and grew from 200 to 2,000 acres within hours.

Sunday's death toll is the highest among firefighters due to an American wildland blaze since 29 men died in 1933 battling Los Angeles' Griffith Park blaze.

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