

VISION AND A DREAM UNDERLIE EFFORTS TO RECONNECT CANADA'S BIGGEST CITY WITH ITS WATERSHED

Coordinates: 43.40°N 79.25°W, Watershed: Lake Ontario

Anne Casselman | October 10, 2010



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The thing about environmentalists is that must be dreamers, each in their own way. Not only must they imagine a future that is better, and different, from what confronts them daily but they must also persist and fight for a better future that is often just a whisper of reality that risks being carried away by any passing gust of wind.

John Wilson, Chair of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don, is just one of the many people we've met in Toronto who is fighting the good fight and dreaming the good dream to reinstate, empower and celebrate this city's natural creeks and streams. If water advocacy had a recipe, then having a vision would be the ingredient that makes the cake rise.

"It's essential to have a dream," Wilson told Alexandra today, at the garbage and debris-ridden Keating Channel, easily the lowest point along this 38-kilometer river's urban route. "People can't live without a positive vision for the future."

Wilson has been imagining, since 1989, a better Don River for Toronto. The Don River lies in the heart of this city. Historically it was a working river and paid the price in industrial pollution. Today, it is plagued with forceful and dirty stormwater runoff. It's river mouth is a channelized concrete funnel all the city's rain-washed trash collects – a far cry from the estuary that once married the river to Lake Ontario.

“It’s an urban wasteland now but the idea would be that it would be re-naturalized and provide an urban estuary,” Wilson explained as he showed us a rendering of what Keating Channel would look like if he had his way.

Where his vision was verdant and lush with marshland, reality was woven with highways and overpasses. Where his illustration would come to life with the sound of water running and wetland birds, reality whooshed with cars and trucks on asphalt.

“If I have anything to say about it, this will be a sort of model for how a river should be integrated into a city.” Hear hear!

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<http://www.alexandracousteau.org/blog/reconnect-toronto-to-its-watershed>