

DEPUTATION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PARKS COMMITTEE

FROM: Margaret Catto, Conservation Councillor, Toronto Ornithological Club

RE: Item 22: Proposed Regional Skateboard Facility Location in Col Sam Smith Park

March 9, 2006

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you to-day.

I represent the Toronto Ornithological Club, founded in 1934, whose focus is on the enjoyment and protection of birds and bird habitat. You'll see our members, binoculars at the ready, at all seasons in Col Sam Smith Park and the adjoining Lakeshore Grounds. These areas are well-known and loved by Toronto birders and those from the wider GTA because of their abundance of birdlife, particularly during spring and fall migration seasons.

Toronto is currently doing wonderful things for migratory birds. This spring and fall the recently approved project "Lights **Out**, Toronto" will save thousands of bird lives, and thousands of dollars in electrical bills, by turning out the lights in tall buildings to prevent night-time collisions by disoriented migratory birds. Another excellent Toronto initiative is Toronto Bird Flyways, a series of ecological enhancements in three parks used as resting and feeding stopovers by these same migrants.

Col Sam Smith Park and the adjoining Lakeshore Grounds, with their attractive wetland, rippling creek, old trees, and native plantings, form part of a natural migration corridor which funnels spring birds northward after their long crossing of Lake Ontario, through the city, and towards Humberwood Park, one of the three parks where bird habitat is being improved under the Bird Flyways scheme.

I'd like to quote from one of our most experienced and knowledgeable naturalist members at Toronto Ornithological Club, Glenn Coady, who has this to say about the importance of waterfront parks:

"Waterfront parks with ample food resources, cover from predators and minimized human disturbance, are **ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL** to:

1) spring migrants exhausted by monumentally long distances already covered in migration, including a just-completed Great Lake crossing, especially

in disorienting weather like storms or fog overnight;

AND

2) fall migrants requiring safe places to feed/store migratory fat reserves and safely stage prior to an arduous lake crossing that is merely a minor prelude to an often trans-continental/trans-oceanic/trans-hemispheric migration that forms a devastatingly challenging prerequisite to their safe return the following year. We can do precious little locally to maximize birds' chances of surviving their first winter on their winter quarters, but we CAN do much locally to ensure that their fall migration is undertaken with the least stress possible to see them off with the best fighting chance to survive their first winter (the most critical to overcome in reaching adulthood) and return to us the following year.

Safe waterfront migration fallout sites are crucial to recharging birds' energy stores to make the next inland hop to sites like Humberwood Park - these networks of prime waterfront fallout sites serve to quickly channel birds using our rivers/ravines to even better/safer locations a short flight inland. The combination of BOTH lakefront and inland sites is instrumental and necessary to minimize the stress of migration and to ensure birds arrive in prime condition to initiate breeding quickly on spring arrival, and arrive at winter quarters after fall migration in a condition that will maximize their chance of subsequent winter survival.

We must never underestimate the positive impact we can have when we act locally to tip the odds in birds' favour."

The 1997 Master Design and Implementation Plan for the Lakeshore Grounds states: "Areas and facilities for active and passive recreation should be provided, with the qualification that **passive** recreation facilities should dominate at this location."

I'd respectfully suggest that, for passive recreational pursuits such as enjoyment of all aspects of nature, we have in the Lakeshore Grounds a particularly rich waterfront sanctuary. Toronto Ornithological Club members don't understand why the city would contemplate the destruction of 1500, or is it 3000, square metres of natural habitat, to be replaced with a concrete skateboard facility. We have no problem with the provision of a skateboard facility, but we strongly oppose the loss of any further parkland from the Lakeshore Grounds.