

Brief History of the Black Creek Watershed

- ~ The Black Creek watershed is the smallest of the five sub watersheds of the Humber River with a drainage area of approximately 66 square kilometres. The headwaters of the Black Creek lie in the City of Vaughan, just north of Major Mackenzie Road. The creek flows through urban areas for most of its length and it joins the Humber River at Lambton Golf Course in the City of Toronto, just 4 kilometres from Lake Ontario.
- ~ A review of various documents revealed that the Black Creek and its watershed have a rich cultural and natural heritage. The Black Creek watershed was once regarded as an excellent area for settlement because of its wooded forests, fertile soils, fresh water and abundant food supply. As early as 1400 AD., the banks of the Black Creek were settled by the Iroquois peoples. During the late 1790's as the Humber River watershed was settled by European pioneers. The Humber River system, of which Black Creek is part of, and was used extensively by both European settlers and the aboriginal people as a means of transportation between Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario.
- ~ Over the years, the forested landscape of the Black Creek watershed was converted to farmland to suit agricultural purposes. As early as the 1800's, water powered mills were constructed along the banks of the Black Creek. Although the dense forest still existed at this time, by the 1860's, a majority of the original forest cover had been removed for agricultural practices. It took only sixty years for the trees to practically disappear from the valley areas. As farmsteads became numerous along the landscape, small rural communities began to form. Eventually, these tiny rural hamlets and villages were slowly replaced by urban sprawl.
- ~ The transformation from an agricultural lifestyle to urbanization of the Black Creek watershed brought with it many changes. As the population expanded, sanitation problems were one of the first difficulties to develop. Residents used cesspools or privies as a method of disposing of their wastes which contaminated their water supplies when these wastes leaked into ground water wells and streams. Contamination of water lead to serious threats to public health, and there was great demand for improved public services. In response, the city created sewers to carry these wastes to the waterfront.
- ~ By 1887, the wooden plank roads that were in place were found to be less durable as the newly paved streetways. The change from a porous, naturally cycling system to an impervious groundscape created by the paved road increased the volume of water available on the surface. Excess water on the surface caused the roads to become flooded after rainstorms. To resolve this problem, storm sewers were created to collect the surface runoff and divert it to the Black Creek. As a result of high volumes of water being diverted, flash floods were a regular occurrence in the Black Creek.
- ~ The rapid fluctuations in the creek water levels due to the increased impervious surfaces led to the channelization and damming of the Black Creek between the 1950's and 1960's. Many tributaries of the Black Creek were also piped underground to serve the purpose of carrying stormwater quickly and in large quantities to Lake Ontario.
- ~ As a result of past and present actions, the Black Creek is now a highly degraded watershed, and it is the most polluted branch of the Humber River. Urban sprawl has reduced the size and quality of the Black Creek, while land clearance, altered drainage patterns, and pollution have disturbed the watershed ecosystem. Concern for the Black Creek finally materialized in 1982, when, in response to this degradation, the Black Creek Conservation Project of Toronto was established.
- ~ 2013 is the 31th year of activity for the Black Creek Conservation Project.



Black Creek Washout at Finch Ave,
2005.