

Murals along the Don

PAINTING AWARENESS

By Leah Wong

The artists and organizers behind a mural project located near the mouth of the Don River hope the project increases community awareness about the health of the river.

Friends of the Pan Am Path is working with eight artists to create permanent murals below the Don Valley Parkway and Gardiner Expressway ramps and at the Don Landing Rail Bridge. The artists were asked to create murals that highlight environmental stresses on the Don River such as non-point source pollution and biodiversity decline.

“The way most people experience [the Don] is by not experiencing it at all, but by driving right over it,” Friends of the Pan Am Path curator **Devon Ostrom** told *NRU*. He hopes that the murals draw people’s attention to the Don River and increases awareness about its condition.

A lack of understanding about the importance of the river to the surrounding natural system is one of the biggest challenges we face, said **Toronto and Region Conservation Authority** Don and Highland Watershed project manager **Arlen Leeming**.

“Rivers are the arteries a natural system has to ensure it maintains proper health,” Leeming

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told *NRU*. “The only way it will maintain effective health in an urban context, when millions of people live in the area, is if the people that living around it understand the importance of it and fight to protect it.”

Leeming said that through new engagement projects he’s starting to see residents gain awareness about why the rivers that run through the city important. The murals are a creative way to further engage the public.

Several of the artists chose to highlight the issue of reduced biodiversity in their works. Decreasing biodiversity stems from challenges with stormwater management in Toronto and is one of the biggest issues impacting the health of the city’s urban rivers. When Toronto experiences a major rain storm, for example, Leeming noted that the water moves quickly across impervious surfaces picking up salt, sand and oil, which eventually makes its way into the river, causing damage to the ecosystem.

The murals around the Don River are part of the art festival A Love Letter to the Great Lakes, which seeks to increase awareness about the impacts of urbanization on the health of the Great Lakes. For the festival three collections of murals are being created—the other two collections are at Queen and Ossington and Queen and Spadina. It is part of an initiative by the **PangeaSeed Foundation**, which uses art to raise awareness about issues affecting water sources around the world.

Of the eight artists involved in the project five produced murals on the DVP West-Gardiner bents—**Kirsten McCrea**, **Alexa Hatanka**, **Erica Balon**, **MC Baldassari** and **Rajni**

Perera. Artists **Kwest** and **Jarus** have a mural on the rail bridge and artist **Jason Botkin**’s work is on the DVP East-Gardiner bent. The murals are expected to be completed by Saturday. **nrU**



SOURCE: DEVON OSTROM, PANAMPATH.ORG

Lower Don mural by Erica Balon



SOURCE: DEVON OSTROM, PANAMPATH.ORG

Lower Don mural by MC Baldassari



SOURCE: DEVON OSTROM, PANAMPATH.ORG

Lower Don mural by Kwest and Jarus

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