

When I was young, we couldn't swim in local lakes and rivers because of industrial pollution and mismanagement of human waste. Our sky was turning yellow and there was always a smell from a pulp mill, manufacturing plant or garbage dump. People were losing their parks, their beaches, their health, and they spoke up. Strict regulations were put in place, effluent was treated, exhaust was scrubbed and waste treated, recycled, and re-used. Kids can now swim where I couldn't, the air doesn't smell and we can walk in protected forests without worrying about being shot by some wayward hunter. Our world is not perfect. In fact, we may not survive the cumulative effects of the damage we have inflicted on our planet, but it is improving and that is because of our stewardship. This change came about because people became interested, our governments spent money on reforestation, and parks were developed where mining and forestry was once king. It was easy to access, folks moved in. Most of us liked the little bit of luxury in the forest and we started to fight for it. This has value, and we are willing to protect it.

I have a friend from school days who I had not seen in 30 years. I visited him in Mississauga several years ago. He spoke with pride about the Rattray Marsh Society that he had been a member of for over 20 years, of how they had cleaned up the refuse deposited over years of adjacent development, built boardwalks, trails and viewing stations. I remembered Ivan as the guy with a fast car and a stock-broker's license and here he was telling me about some bog he had helped transform. We went for a walk and it was amazing; a natural area surrounded by suburban sprawl. While we walked, he spoke of the challenges. The one challenge I will always remember involved the tree people and the beaver people. Some wanted to protect the forest while others the animals. The solution was to ignore both and let nature deal with the results: trees will grow back and if the beavers flood a trail, move the trail not the beaver. Some didn't like it but the alternative was to lose it. Rattray is now part of the 325 km long [Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail System](#).

If we don't re-surface the trails, they will deteriorate. If the roots are exposed, trees will die. If the trail is allowed to run over a rotten log, someone will get hurt. Then folks will stop coming, the forest will lose its recreational value, and then there will be little reason to protect it. Maybe the trails look a little too unnatural for some, but if the trails are not maintained they will become muddy, overgrown and hazardous and fewer will come to our grove. If this happens, the forest will become worthless to us and be replaced by something perhaps far worse.

A section of the Green Trail that we were working on last Wednesday was in particularly rough shape. The roots were exposed, it went over some rotten logs and there was a large off-camber area that was unsafe. I worked at one corner for 2 hours. Lou and Mike D. showed me how to pick the best route through a tangle of roots. I learned the difference between a live and dead root and Mike showed me how to protect a root by buttressing it with rocks so the trail could bridge it. We removed deep pockets of organics and replaced them with a fine natural gravel (not clay). This prevents the trail from turning to mud which hikers step around thereby creating large mud puddles. When the leaves fall and the rain comes, this will all be covered ... and there will be peace in the forest again.