



# HIDDEN HUMBER

**YOUR SUMMER GUIDE TO  
PROTECTING AND ENJOYING  
THE HUMBER RIVER**



environmental  
defence



## Hello from Environmental Defence

The Humber River is a Canadian Heritage River that draws water from over 700 smaller waterways spreading from Lake St. George in York Region and up into the Niagara Escarpment in the Mono Mills area of Caledon.

As the Humber enters more densely populated areas of the GTA it brings with it an abundance of fish, birds and mammals that travel up and down the river corridor. It cools the city, and the trees along its banks bring much needed shade and tranquility. Despite passing straight through an urban area of nearly 6 million people, salmon still run up the Humber River every fall.

### **But its at risk because of the proposed Highway 413.**

Today, most of the small waterways that feed the Humber pass through forests, grassy areas and farmland. This keeps the river clean enough to support the plants and animals that call it home.

Highway 413 will cut straight through pristine areas of Caledon and York Region bringing with it more concrete, more pollution and more sprawl. The small waterways that feed a river are like the roots of a tree. Highway 413 will be a direct assault on the Humber River's roots.

This guide is designed to help you enjoy – and take action to protect – the natural bounties of the Humber. Inside, you'll find a list of the best spots to visit along the southern stretch of the Humber River as well as information on threats to the river and how you can join the movement to protect it.

*With deep gratitude,*



**Rebecca Kolarich**

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P.S. I would like to give special thanks to Brian MacLean of Etobicoke Climate Action for providing many of the recommendations in this guide.

Humber River  
**Protect and Enjoy**



# Humber River History

The Humber has been a trade and transportation route for Indigenous Peoples for millenia, with archaeological evidence of human habitation that predates the Pyramids by more than 5000 years.

Many different Indigenous Nations have lived along the river throughout history. In the 1600s, the Seneca – one of the five nations of the Haudenosaunee confederacy – had a settlement of several thousand called Teiaiaigon in the area currently known as Baby Point, near the intersection of Jane and Annette. As tensions between French settlers and the Anishinaabe rose in the late 1600s, Teiaiaigon was either abandoned or destroyed. The Humber River is in the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations who call the river ‘Cobechenonk,’ meaning ‘leave the canoes and go back.’

The name “Humber” was first applied by John Graves Simcoe, a notorious renamer who, in his effort to colonize Upper Canada, sought to erase Indigenous names for places, and replace them with British names. He also attempted to rename Toronto, York, but that name, thankfully, didn’t stick.

The first industrial building in Toronto was a saw mill on the Humber River, near what is now Old Mill Station. In the 1800s the Humber River powered nearly 100 mills for grinding grain and sawing lumber. As steam power took over in the late 1800s, these mills gradually became obsolete.

As urbanization along the river increased, so did flooding. By 1954, the river had flooded at least 78 times. But none of those floods were as devastating as Hurricane Hazel which hit Toronto in 1954. Bridges were washed out, hundreds of homes were destroyed, and dozens of people were killed. To help mitigate future disasters, recently formed Conservation Authorities were given new powers to acquire land and guide construction. Much of what is today Raymore Park was once a residential area that was completely destroyed by Hurricane Hazel.



**The Humber River was named a Canadian Heritage River in 1999 after many years of local advocacy and organizing. Today, it is “the only Heritage River you can get to by subway.”**

*Humber River: The Carrying Place.  
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority  
(2009)*



Hurricane Hazel washed out bridges up and down the Humber. This image shows the bridge at Lawrence Avenue shortly after the hurricane passed through.

*Photo: WikiCommons*

# HANDS OFF THE HUMBER

## Humber River Top Threats

**Urbanization is the main overarching threat to the Humber River. Development, road salt contamination, and plastic pollution are evidence of urbanization and each jeopardize the health of the river.**



### Highway 413

The highway's proposed route will cut through the Humber River and surrounding waterways and green space. These areas contain most of what's left of the high quality natural areas in and around the river, which provide critical habitat for lots of plants and animals, including the endangered Redside Dace. Highway 413 development will threaten biodiversity and the overall functionality of the ecosystem. That means, it'll be harder for the ecosystem to provide clean air and water, climate change mitigation, and outdoor recreational activities.



### Road Salt

Road salt pollution threatens the Humber River and the freshwater creatures that live in its waters. Freshwater species cannot thrive and survive in salty environments. Road salt can be a useful tool for winter road safety, but more isn't better. Too much road salt runs off roads and transforms cool, clear waters into toxic environments, and negatively impacts the overall health of freshwater ecosystems.



### Plastic Pollution

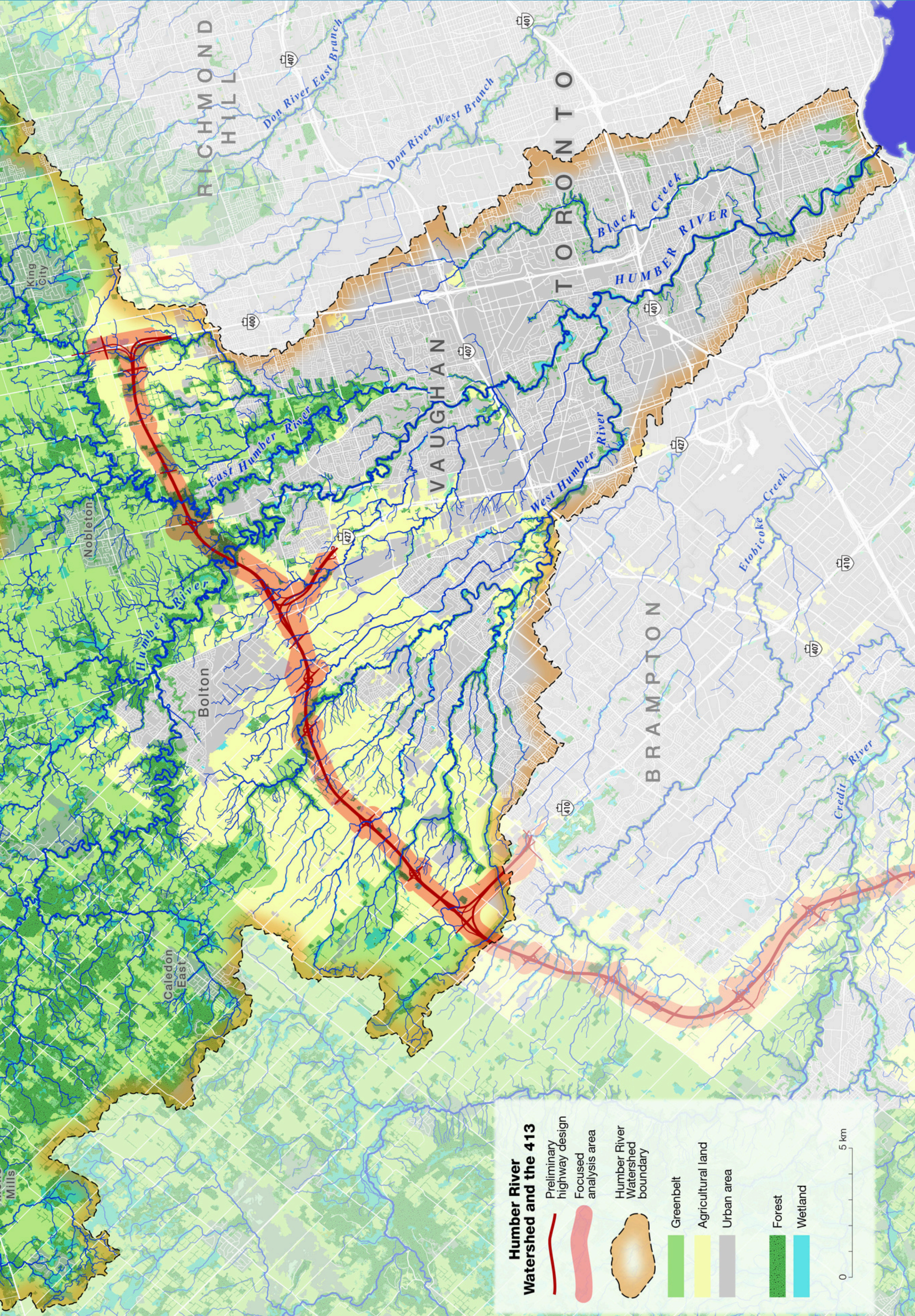
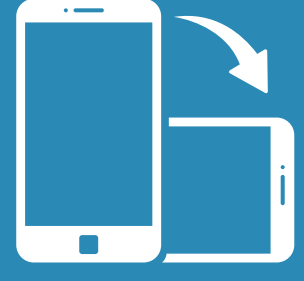
Plastic pollution threatens the animals that live in or on the water, like fish, birds and amphibians. They can eat, suffocate or become entangled in plastic trash. What's more, larger plastic items can degrade into smaller plastic fragments and "microplastics", which have been linked to reproductive and behavioral problems, and other health issues. Urban rivers, including the Humber River contain high levels of plastic pollution.



Highway 413's proposed route will cut through dozens of waterways.

**STOP**  **HWY413.CA**

# The destructive path of Highway 413



# Humber River Watershed

The 750 smaller waterways that flow into the Humber River total 1,800 kilometers in length. The watershed – the area of land that all drains into the river – covers over 90,000 hectares. The Humber's western branch passes through Brampton, splitting into smaller rivers that help bring water to the rich soil of the Peel Plain. Its eastern branch courses down from Mary Lake, Lake Wilcox and Lake St. George and other kettle lakes in the Oak Ridges Moraine. Its main branch travels down from Palgrave and Mono Mills, descending 350 meters from its heights in the Niagara Escarpment down to Lake Ontario – a drop more than 3 times the height of Niagara Falls.



## Watershed Health

Compared to other urban watersheds in the GTA, the Humber River watershed is considered to be relatively healthy. But urban development – including the proposed Highway 413, road salt and plastic pollution – continues to be the river's main threat. Increased development over the last decade or so has harmed and reduced the number of forests, meadows, wetlands and other natural areas throughout the watershed. Fewer natural areas means less critical habitat, which threatens biodiversity and causes whole ecosystems to become extremely vulnerable to climate change. These impacts will only get worse, unless we protect remaining natural spaces from unnecessary development. The health of the Humber River and the natural areas around it are tied together. So, when we protect natural areas we simultaneously protect the health of the Humber River.

# Humber River Top 10 Sights and Activities

1 Humber Arboretum

2 Masseygrove Creek Waterfall

3 Summerlea Park

4 Weston Lions Park

5 Raymore Park

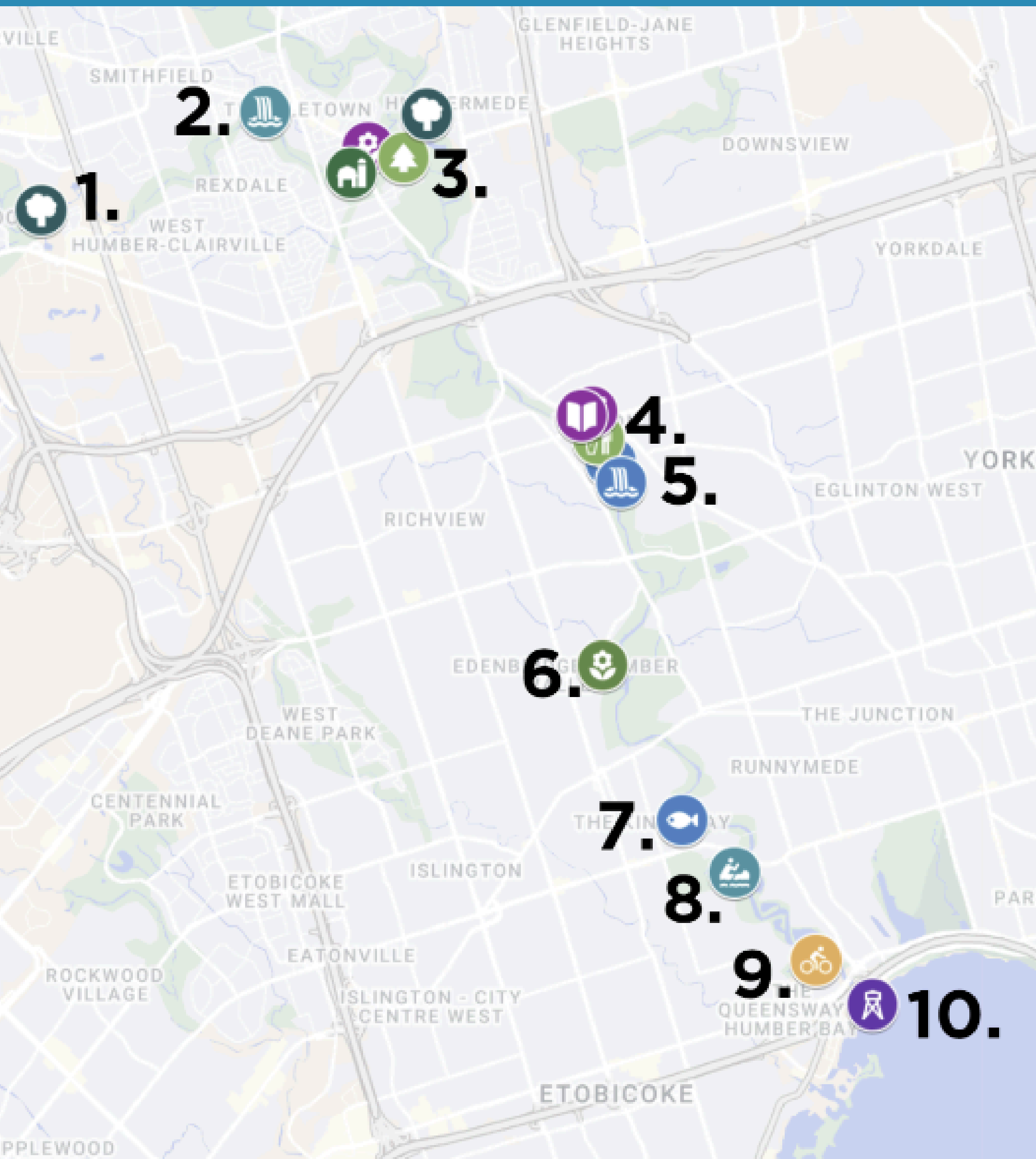
6 James Gardens

7 Salmon Jumping

8 King's Mill Park

9 Humber River Recreational Trail

10 Sheldon Lookout





Humber Arboretum (City of Toronto)

## 1 Humber Arboretum

**Address:** 205 Humber College Blvd.  
**Cost:** Free

At nearly 250 acres, the Humber Arboretum offers a beautiful landscape of diverse trees and a wonderful view down into the valley. Their website includes many ideas for self-guided activities for all ages.  
[humber.ca/arboretum/explore](http://humber.ca/arboretum/explore)

## 2 Masseygrove Creek Waterfall

**Address:** 101 Lakeland Dr.  
**Cost:** Free

Masseygrove Creek flows south across Albion Road between Kipling and Islington. As it joins the Humber River it creates a little-known waterfall. This site can also be reached from the south along the West Humber Trail if the river isn't running high.

## 3 Summerlea Park

**Address:** 101 Lakeland Dr.  
**Cost:** Free

Summerlea Park is right where the main and western branches of the Humber join. There's a beautiful marsh on the east side of the river and, if you're lucky, you might even see deer in the wooded areas. Just to the west, is Anga's Farm and Nursery (89 Bankfield Dr), the last working farm in Etobicoke. To the east, at 76 Coral Gable Dr., is a 250 year old Oak Tree which will soon be surrounded by its own parkette.

## 4 Weston Lions Park

**Address:** 135 Humber River Rec Trail  
**Cost:** Free

Masseygrove Creek flows south across Albion Road between Kipling and Islington. As it joins the Humber River it creates a little-known waterfall. This site can also be reached from the south along the West Humber Trail if the river isn't running high.



## THREAT: Highway 413



### Policy Action

The federal government must re-designate Highway 413 for a new Impact Assessment.

The Provincial government should cancel the highway and use some of the money to subsidize tolls on Highway 407.



### What can you do?

Sign our petition at [HandsofftheHumber.ca](http://HandsofftheHumber.ca)

Get a Lawn Sign at [Stopthe413.ca](http://Stopthe413.ca)

Call your local MP and MPP



**THREAT: Plastic**

## 5 Raymore Park

**Address:** 93 Raymore Dr.

**Cost:** Free

Raymore Park was created in the wake of Hurricane Hazel which hit Toronto in 1954. Residential homes in this low-lying area were carried away by the floodwaters and dozens of people died. Emmett Waterfall is in this park. Further south, the Humber River connects with Humber Creek. Across Scarlett Road along the creek is Chapman Valley Park, a designated "Environmentally Significant Area" with beautiful shale walls along the creek.

## 6 James Gardens

**Address:** 99 Edenbridge Dr.

**Cost:** Free

James Gardens is a lovely botanical garden on the west side of the Humber River. Head down to the river and walk to the south and you will find the point where Black Creek feeds into the Humber.



### Policy Action

- Ontario puts in place a deposit return program to keep plastic drink bottles out of landfills and the environment.
- Canada bans more harmful single-use plastics like to-go cups and lids, cigarette filters, and plastics made with known toxic additives.
- Canada requires grocery stores to come up with plans to reduce the amount of unnecessary plastic packaging they force on customers.

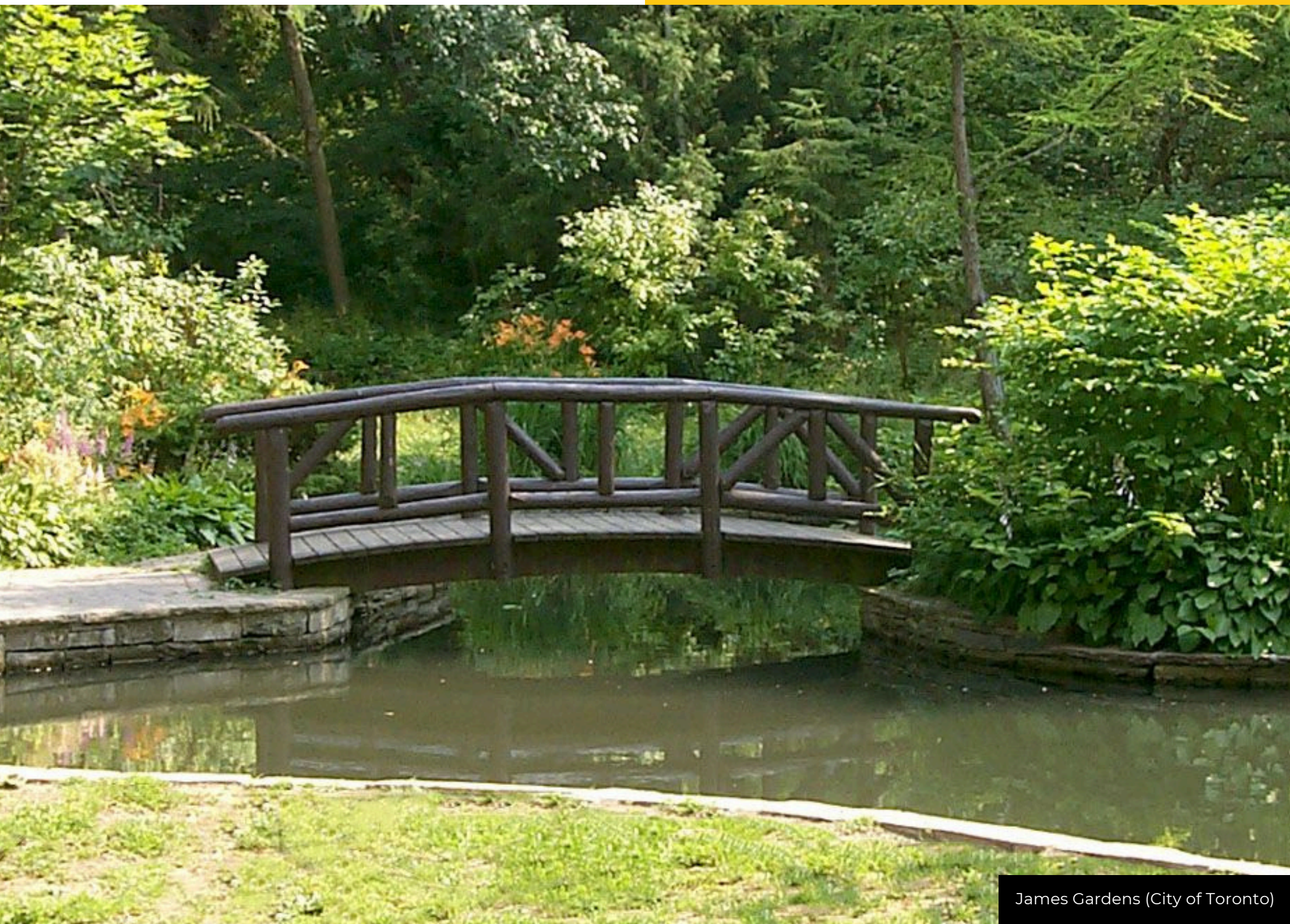


### What can you do?

Sign petition at <https://act.environmentaldefence.ca/page/113165/action/1>

Join a litter clean-up event with Humber River Pals.

Visit [humberriverpals.ca](http://humberriverpals.ca) to learn more.



## 7 Salmon Jumping

**Address:** 10 Catherine Ave.

**Cost:** Free

Étienne Brûlé Park is a lovely park near Old Mill Station and a great place to start a bike ride either to the north or south. It's also the best place to watch the salmon jumping during spawning season each September. Head west along the river and you'll spot the salmon ladder where the Humber turns back to the north.

[trca.ca/conservation/aquatic-habitat-toronto/projects/salmon-in-toronto-and-gta-waters/](http://trca.ca/conservation/aquatic-habitat-toronto/projects/salmon-in-toronto-and-gta-waters/)

## 8 King's Mill Park

**Address:** 105 Riverwood Pkwy.

**Cost:** Free (canoe and kayak available for rent for \$35-80)

King's Mill Park is a lovely park named after the saw mill that once stood at the north end of the park. The park includes an off-leash Dog Park and Boat Launch. If you don't own your own boat, you can rent a canoe or kayak from Toronto Adventures which is located just north of Bloor – pass under the bridges to get there.

[toronto.ca/data/parks/prd/facilities/complex/1080](http://toronto.ca/data/parks/prd/facilities/complex/1080)



## THREAT: Road Salt



### Policy Action

Ontario changes the rules, so property management companies can't be sued if someone slips when the companies applied an appropriate (but not excessive!) amount of road salt.

Ontario better monitors and manages the amount of road salt applied to roadways, parking lots and other public and private surfaces.



### What can you do?

Sign petition at [saltcoalition.ca](http://saltcoalition.ca)

Be #LessSalty. A film canister amount is enough salt to melt a full square metre of pavement!

If you see a business or commercial parking lot using too much salt, let them know.

## 9

### Humber River Recreational Trail

**Cost:** Free (canoe and kayak available for rent for \$35-80)

The Humber River Recreational Trail travels almost continuously for more than 10 km, starting at the Humber Bay Arch Bridge. Where the trail seems to end near Dixon Road, you can head along Weston Road for a few blocks, get back on the trail and head all the way north to Steeles. At the south end, it connects to the Martin Goodman Trail, so you can bike or walk along the shore of Lake Ontario as well. The portion of the trail that runs from the lake north to Stephen Dr. makes a nice leafy ride.

[alltrails.com/trail/canada/ontario/humber-river-recreation-trail](http://alltrails.com/trail/canada/ontario/humber-river-recreation-trail)

## 10

### Sheldon Lookout

**Address:** Martin Goodman Trail, west side of the Humber

**Cost:** Free

Sheldon Lookout is a scenic spot with some nice rocks to sit on. It's a great place to watch the Humber River pour into Lake Ontario on its journey to the Atlantic Ocean.



### Shared Path Discovery Walk

While you're biking or hiking the Humber River Recreational Trail keep your eye out for informative plaques on the history of the area including natural history, Indigenous history and early settler history.

[Check out the full map here.](#)

