

Green for all

Familiar waters

We may be facing rising gas and oil prices, but we do have the biggest Greenbelt space in the world.

No wonder more Ontarians are spending their vacations closer to home

Angler Chris Davis need not stray far from home to indulge in his favourite pastime. "I've always done a lot of fishing in and around Toronto, and it's outstanding," says Davis, 46, who also owns a pub. Even though he now has a cottage in Muskoka, where he spends weekends with his wife, Carrie, and their two children, Davis still gets up at 5 a.m. twice a week and heads off to one of his favourite fishing holes closer to home. "For 15 years, before we had the cottage, I was city-bound and never felt I was missing out. I've found lots of opportunities [just] 20 minutes away."

There are indeed plenty of places in the city for those who like to fish—Grenadier Pond in High Park, the Toronto Islands and Tommy Thompson Park on the lakeshore to Ashbridge's Bay, Bluffer's Park and the Rouge River in the Ontario Greenbelt—where you can reel in everything from trout and bass to pike and perch, and even chinook and coho salmon.

Davis is just one of many GTA residents who don't need to travel far to get away from it all and do what they enjoy. And with 1.8 mil-

lion acres of protected Greenbelt land that wraps around the Greater Golden Horseshoe, there's a lot to explore.

According to Ontario Tourism, more of us are spending more time at home. In 2010 we travelled more in our own province and spent more vacation dollars—\$12 billion, or up to 5 per cent more than the year before. And given how gas prices have soared 30 cents a litre since last summer, it's likely that more of us will be staying closer to home this year, too.

Lucky for those of us in Southern Ontario, we can do almost everything we enjoy doing—whether it's fishing, camping or canoeing or even cycling through wine country—in our own Greenbelt.

For Davis, what's enjoyable is not just the fishing—it's also the feeling of getting away. "It's amazing," he says. "[With] just a short drive, you feel like you're in the country." Here in Ontario, we're surrounded by one of the most precious ecosystems in the world. Southern Ontario is home to Carolinian Canada—a relatively small area of forest that comprises just 1 per cent of Canada but harbours more flora and fauna species than



THOMAS BOLLMANN

Chris Davis explores the Greenbelt in search of the perfect fishing spot.

any other part of our country. Many of these species are rare, such as the badger and grey fox, or threatened, like the Fowler's toad.

Just a drive away

There are many unique local places worth visiting in summertime. The Alderville First Nations Black Oak Savanna and Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge in Rice Lake, for example, is one of the most endangered habitats

The faraway nearby

Not only are more of us choosing to stay close to home for our summer vacations, according to Ontario Tourism, but spending for day trips was up 17 per cent in 2010, compared to the previous year. Here are some day-trip options to consider in Ontario's Greenbelt:

Lure of fishing Visit the Ministry of Natural Resources website to find out where to fish in and around the city and what types of fish you can reel in. View a "Take a Kid Fishing" booklet and a video on how to do it. mnr.gov.on.ca

Craving for camping and canoeing Check out the Toronto and Region Conservation website for information on camping at Albion Hills Conservation Area in Caledon or Rouge Park in the east end of the city, and canoeing at Heart Lake Conservation Area in Brampton. trca.on.ca

A bug for biking or hiking Hit the trail around town or take your bike on VIA Rail to visit Niagara's wine country. Plan a stroll through Alderville First Nations Black Oak Savanna and Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. greenbelt.ca, ontariotrails.on.ca, biketrain.ca, aldervillesavanna.ca

in the world," more threatened than the Brazilian rainforest," says Janine McLeod, an area conservation biologist and natural heritage coordinator for the site. It's surprising enough that we have a tallgrass prairie a drive away, but more surprising, says McLeod, is to find "grasses towering over your head" by the end of summer.

The area is available for public tours, and there are summer day camps for children, featuring

special days dedicated to learning about something new—bird day, bug day, mammal day, and so on.

Other summer activities to consider: camping at Rouge Park in the east end of the city; canoeing at Albion Hills Conservation Area in Etobicoke; and going on VIA Rail's Bike Train to Niagara wine country.

"We're very privileged," notes McLeod. "Throughout the Greenbelt, there's so much to see and so many different ways to do it."

Ontario local food champion

Local matchmakers

Distribution system offers locally grown food to public-sector buyers

The missing link in the "food chain" is being connected, thanks to one of the largest food-distributing companies in North America.

After all, why truck in food from hundreds of miles away—leaving a large carbon footprint and not-so-fresh food on our tables—when our own 1.8 million acres of Greenbelt-protected land are sustaining a \$5.4-billion farming and food-processing industry that is shipping many of its products out of province?

"Everybody wants to get in on the romance of the local food movement to support local growers and the local economy," says Steve Crawford of Gordon Food Service (GFS), whose Ontario headquarters is in Milton. "The food is fresher. And [with] fuel costs being what they are, it makes sense to

distribute locally." Food security is also an issue, he notes, as consumers appreciate the assurance that what they eat meets Canada's strict food safety guidelines.

Until now, much of the problem has been in distribution. Smaller growers cannot sell directly to large public-sector buyers—such as hospitals, schools and municipal agencies—because of the need for an efficient delivery system, which is managed through major distributors like GFS. For instance, says Crawford, it's inefficient to have an endless stream of trucks driving up to a hospital's delivery dock to drop off individual orders for carrots or potatoes or beans.

The Greenbelt Fund and the Ontario Government have awarded a \$360,000 grant over two years to GFS to increase the amount of local food sales to 500 provincial public-

institution buyers by \$2 million. Led by Crawford, a three-member local product team has put a call out to all its suppliers to identify and document local food.

Already, Crawford's team has identified some 900 products, which will be tagged as "local food" on their online ordering system. Public-sector buyers will then be able to choose to buy more of such local food and keep a computerized record of such purchases, thus documenting their success in meeting the province's objective of increasing local food purchases. In turn, it's initiatives like these that help the Ontario government and the public to fully appreciate the Greenbelt's contribution to the provincial economy.

As well, GSF is working with The 100 Mile Market, which also receives Greenbelt funding to



KEVIN KELLY

Steve Crawford heaves bags of carrots up to Josh Taylor to transport to the city. Distribution is the missing link between farmers and consumers.

distribute the products of more than 160 Ontario farmers and coordinate deliveries to buyers in the public sector.

The provincial government would like to see a percentage of broader public-sector purchases

made locally, notes Crawford, and GFS is doing its part by matching local food suppliers with buyers.

"There's that push coming," he says. "We're doing the legwork. And with our tagline, 'Local made easy,' we're making it easier."

Worldly Agriculture in Ontario's Greenbelt

Greenbelt farmers lead the way in growing the multi-million dollar world crop marketplace.



Possibility grows here