

URBAN FORESTS IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Become a climate change witness: Get to know the forests of the Oak Ridges Moraine

This factsheet is designed to help teachers and parents guide kids in learning about local forests and climate change. It is a companion piece to our Urban Forests in a Changing Climate report.

In the Greater Golden Horseshoe, we all live in a forest. But most of us have no connection to its roots. There are opportunities to learn about forests and nature everywhere, including in urban areas where trees and ravines are relatively easy to access. These cosmopolitan forests are important ecosystems, though they have been heavily manipulated by modern society. Go a bit farther afield, and you will find forests that offer glimpses into what these ecosystems may have looked like hundreds of years ago.

While you won't find forests untouched by humans, you can get glimpses into what these lands might have looked like before colonization. Some of Ontario's older forests can be found along the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The Oak Ridges Moraine is an important geological feature on our landscape in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. It was formed by glaciers 12,000 years ago and covers 470,000 acres of Ontario's Greenbelt. It is an incredibly important corridor for plants and animals moving in southern Ontario and provides drinking water for over 250,000 people. You can learn more about the formation of the Moraine [HERE](#) and find places to visit it [HERE](#).

“As we work to know the life that surrounds us, we stand in a lineage of naturalists — past, present, and even future. We join the "cloud of witnesses" who refuse to let the more-than-human world pass unnoticed.

Lyanda Lynn Haupt

Crow Planet: Essential Wisdom from the Urban Wilderness



Guiding children to witness forest changes

Children and youth will see the greatest impacts of our changing climate. They are also taking the lead on climate and environmental action—Autumn Peltier and Greta Thunberg being two well-known examples of leaders that started their activism as children. Learning about and observing nature can be beneficial to individual kids and communities. Exposure to trees and forests can make kids happier, reduce anxiety and make them feel more connected to their community, among many other health benefits¹. Helping children become witnesses to the natural cycles of forests and their changes over time can help guide a generation to grow with and not separately from nature.

Climate change is going to impact forests in many ways. With changes in temperatures and precipitation, increased pest outbreaks and storms, the way forests look and live is likely to be different for the next generation.

¹ Six Ways Nature Helps Children Learn https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_ways_nature_helps_children_learn

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Forests have much to teach us all and learning from nature brings benefits to kids and adults alike. Here are some ways to encourage children to have a relationship with forests, which they can build over their lifetime.



Find out how to visit forests respectfully

- Become familiar with the codes of conduct of the forests you are visiting. When entering a conservation area or starting a trail, for instance, you may see signs telling you how to engage respectfully and safely with the environment.
- Teach the 'Leave No Trace' Principles: <https://www.leavenotrace.ca/principles>



Learn some basics about life in forests of the Oak Ridges Moraine

... the first step to becoming a witness to the changes in forests is to get to know life in the forests today.

- **Learn how to identify trees of the Oak Ridges Moraine.**
- **Earth Rangers foresters program**
- Look for events and more general educational materials from **Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust** or one of the **nine Conservation Authorities along the Moraine.**



Explore relationships between people and forests

Forests along the Oak Ridges Moraine are shaped by their relationships with people, including First Peoples who have been living with them since time immemorial. More recently, these forests have also been shaped by settler communities. Traces of human relationships can be seen everywhere in the forest. By recognizing how humans have shaped the forests, we can help children recognize that they are not separate from nature—but in fact, have an important role to play in stewarding it.

- **The water walker** book and teacher's resource for grades 1-3 teaches kids about an Anishinaabe water protector and the connection between people and the environment.
- Signs of people are easy to spot in forests like trails, stumps cut by chainsaws and **marker trees**. Discuss the way humans live with forests and rely on them. Our homes, our maple syrup and our books wouldn't be possible without forests.
- Take a look at some **forest jobs**.



Notice the seasons of the forest

Climate change is impacting the timing and types of activities we can undertake in forests. Some of these activities are at risk because of climate change. By taking part in them now we can learn to see how things are shifting. By taking part in annual traditions in the forests of the Oak Ridges Moraine, we can help kids build a sense of connection to natural cycles and become better witnesses to change over time.



SPRING
Maple Syrup festival



SUMMER
Hike



AUTUMN
Colours



WINTER
Snowshoe



Become a community scientist/naturalist

- Join a community of other people just like you by contributing to community-science through the **iNaturalist app**.
- Report sightings of invasive species on **EDDMaps**.
- Keep a nature journal about the things you do and see in the forest.

ABOUT THIS SERIES:

The Greenbelt Foundation partnered with experts to understand how climate change is affecting our daily lives, and ways that we can individually and collectively respond to these challenges. For other installments in the series, visit www.greenbelt.ca/changing_climate