

of new crops, with three promising crop varieties including okra, yard long bean and Oriental eggplant (see: [www.vine-landresearch.com](http://www.vine-landresearch.com) then, from the home page, search - world crops). Niagara Parks has a trial bed of these crops in both our Queenston Heights Park and at Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens. This is a new and unusual addition to our park “flower beds” with the attractive plants serving an aesthetic purpose, as well as being served to our guests. We are told that a number of these crops already are enhancing community gardens.

## Riparian Buffers

Utilization of parkland as riparian buffers (naturalized zones beside watercourses and sites of surface water such as ponds and lakes) has gained much support recently not only for their importance as environmental filters, but also for reduction of maintenance costs. While many people can agree with the concept in principle, when contrasted with well-groomed parks, natural buffers can “look messy.” How the use of buffers is framed and communicated makes a significant difference with adjacent residents, which is important if you wish to garner their needed support.

Education and outreach about water quality improvement, habitat restoration and ecosystem health can go a long way to counter concerns. Reducing mowing is an option and replanting with native vegetation can improve biodiversity as well. With an addition of attractive wildflowers in the mixture, such concerns can be mitigated. It is even better if the adjacent



Beaver at work, Courtesy of NPC

residents can be involved in the selections, with expert guidance. The ultimate goal of improving water quality and protecting natural water sources is worth the effort and is aided by buffers (see [www.npca.ca](http://www.npca.ca) then, from the home page, search - buffers).

Approximately ten years ago, Niagara Parks created a small series of habitat restoration efforts in several areas of its parks. The result is the establishment of a riparian buffer zone along portions of Niagara River.

## Addressing Challenges

Interesting challenges sometimes exist in parks and nature when these environmental initiatives are implemented. At Niagara Parks, with improved habitat conditions, beavers have re-populated in a number of areas. With increased adjacent development, deer and geese populations are shifting to parklands in record numbers, causing nuisances and damages along with

the rising beaver population. Some human park guests also abuse nature through thoughtless acts of vandalism. Economics and restricted budgets present the need for creative and appropriate new revenue streams and the completion of long-term strategic plans for sustainability to achieve mandated objectives. The ever-present threat of climate change adds yet another concern to the list.

Protection has grown to mean more than a “hands-off” approach. It merits active and well-considered decision-making, management and mitigation of impacts to natural spaces. Parks and related open spaces continue to provide historically documented benefits. Additionally, park agencies are engaged in addressing a number of emerging opportunities. The benefits of our parks and open spaces, and their related value, remain important in potentially new ways as a result.

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