

Second Annual Harvest Ontario Walk to Stop the 413? Attracts Hundreds in King, Vaughan, Bolton, Brampton, and Caledon

By Jim Stewart

The second annual Harvest Ontario Walk to Stop the 413 took place on Saturday under fair autumnal conditions and temperatures which elevated the spirit of participants. The event ??organized by a coalition of environmental groups including Environmental Defence, The Wilderness Committee, EcoCaledon, Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet, Seniors for Climate Action Now, Climate Action King, and Concerned Citizens of King Township ??was comprised of four walks as well as a bike ride through bucolic sections of Caledon, Brampton, Vaughan, King, and Bolton that will be decimated by the 413. All told, the five gatherings attracted hundreds of concerned residents and dozens of environmental activists who not only celebrated a recent win on the Greenbelt removals, but also assembled to elevate public awareness that the Greenbelt is still under attack by the provincial government. The threat at the heart of Saturday's protests was the ominous devastation that will be wrought on the Greenbelt by building Highway 413, a transportation route that threatens farmland, waterways, and endangered species, especially birds and fish, in its projected pathway. Katie Krelove, Ontario campaigner and naturalist for The Wilderness Committee, led the Harvest Ontario Walk to Stop the 413 through the Nashville Conservation Reserve which commenced at Huntington and Kirby Sideroad. Krelove, during our post-walk interview, felt that the best part of Saturday's event included the weather conditions: ?It was a beautiful day. We actually walked to the spot where the highway is projected to cross the Humber River. The people in attendance realized what's at stake here and they appreciated the beauty of the trails that will be damaged by the 413.?The Wilderness Committee's motto is ?People-Powered Wilderness Conservation? and Krelove noted that the people power that impelled the Ford government to restore the fourteen packets of Greenbelt lands is needed to battle the building of the 413. The naturalist invited reluctant protesters to join the upcoming walks: ?It's really important for people to get out on the land and to see the waterways affected by this highway. The timing of their participation in these walks is important to motivate people to keep the pressure on local government officials. We need to keep fighting for the Greenbelt.?Krelove also invited residents to contact MPs to express their concern about the impact of the 413 on the habitat of migratory birds and the detrimental impact it will have on the fish in the waterways affected by the highway: ?The federal government has the power to conduct an environmental assessment regarding the 413's construction, especially as it relates to the Species-at-Risk legislation that is designed to protect migratory birds and fish that would be adversely affected by building this highway.?It's evident that Krelove works diligently to achieve her organization's goals to conserve wilderness areas, but her participation has a recreational element, too. As a hiker and naturalist, she was drawn to the Nashville Conservation Reserve and now feels a connection to the tract of land and its related waterways: ?One of the best parts of my job is to be out in nature. Being on the ground in the forest and fields is satisfying and enjoyable. The Nashville Reserve has been one of my favorite hiking locations for over 10 years. I did canvassing in Kleinburg for another environment group that was lobbying to prevent the 413 so I got to know the area very well and appreciated its beauty. It was great to be joined today by the Humber Hikers Club. They shared their insights with our group of 35 about the Nashville Conservation Reserve's hiking trails and what will be lost if the 413 proceeds. It's great for residents to hear about this potential devastation from as many sources as possible.?Krelove discussed her connection to Environmental Defence, a significant group of activists who have taken up the battle with the Ford Government over environmental deregulation and the degradation of wilderness lands that is a consequence of myopic legislation: ?Back in 2018 when the Ford government started its controversial rezoning of Greenbelt lands and started deregulating important environmental safeguards, we formed a coalition with Environmental Defence and other concerned groups and named the coalition ?Yours to Protect'. Our mandate is to battle the Ford government's assault on the Greenbelt.?In addition to Krelove's group that walked through the picturesque Nashville Conservation Reserve slated to be torn in half by the 413, four other groups assembled to raise public awareness. They gathered for an Etobicoke Creek Bike Ride in Brampton where ?Bike Brampton? led a 13-km. ride from Rosalea Park up the Etobicoke Creek trail to the proposed route of the 413 at Old School Road where riders stopped to discuss the planned highway. A second Harvest Ontario Walk was labeled the Bolton Walk South which met at the Albion branch of the Caledon Public Library in Bolton. This walk was hosted by Environmental Defence and EcoCaledon. A third Harvest Ontario Walk was labeled the Bolton Walk North which met at the Caledon Centre for Recreation and Wellness in Bolton. It was hosted by ?Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet? and ?Seniors for Climate Action Now.?The fourth Harvest Ontario Walk was designated as

the King-Vaughan Road Walk and was hosted by Climate Action King (CAK) and Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT). Participants walked along the King-Vaughan Road, one of the last agrarian stretches of land left in Vaughan. The five events on Saturday satisfied the objectives of organizers as participants saw the spectacular conservation lands along the Humber River threatened by the Ford government's 413 proposal. Participants also learned about actions to oppose the highway, information about the federal government's impact assessment, and all enjoyed gorgeous fall colors as Mother Nature provided a pleasant autumn day for these ardent advocates of the Greenbelt.