

# Niagara County



## Facelift to Benefit the Residents of Niagara County

The Victor Fitchlee - Royalton Ravine Conservation Park is a 146-acre county-owned park, which is a popular location for conservation education events, hiking, camping and family picnics. Within the park is a 1.5 acre fishing pond that was constructed in the 1970's and was in need of some maintenance. The pond is a combination of an excavated and embankment pond where soil on a sloped field, just upstream of a ravine was excavated down to bedrock and was used to construct an embankment across the ravine at the low end of the field. The embankment backed water up in the excavated area behind the berm, creating the pond. Nearly forty years later, the dynamics of nature had taken its toll. Trees had begun growing on the embankment of the pond, which caused a concern for the long term stability of the earthen structure. Cattails had completely surrounded the pond and were over 20-feet wide in some places. Eurasian Milfoil, an invasive species, had also moved in, completely eliminating all but a couple hundred feet of open water in the pond. The pond's average depth was just over three feet deep, and was being reduced each year from the muck that was accumulating from decomposing vegetation and sediment. The excessive vegetation also afforded too much



**Royalton Ravine Pond before restoration.**

protection to smaller forage fish, which reportedly had substantially altered the bass population over the years. In the summer of 2008, the Niagara County Soil and Water Conservation District provided some long overdue maintenance to the pond; including removal of the excess vegetation in and around the pond and dredging of the accumulated muck in the bottom to restore the pond to its original depth.

Restoration began with the removal of trees and brush from the embankment berm. The berm was then re-graded and planted with grasses to prevent erosion. The majority of the mature trees on the upstream side of the pond were saved to maintain the mature characteristic of the pond and to provide shade to both fish and people. The trees that had to be removed to accommodate the dredging process were set aside and eventually placed in the pond to provide underwater structure for fish habitat and basking logs for the large turtle population. During the pond dredging, the shoreline access was improved by removing the ring of cattails around the pond, although certain areas will be allowed to revert back to provide habitat around the pond. Over 4,000 cubic yards of Eurasian Milfoil and muck was dredged from the pond. This provided an additional 3 acre-feet of water in the pond.

The dredged material was placed upstream, adjacent to the pond, where it will be spread and reseeded after it dewatered. It is anticipated that all the Eurasian Milfoil won't be eradicated from the pond, because any small remaining fragment can sprout roots and start growing. To help control this problem and prevent the pond from being taken over again, grass carp will be stocked in the pond in 2009 to control the invasive plant.



**Royalton Ravine Pond after restoration.**

The pond dredging project was completed in September 2008 and has been getting rave reviews from residents who haven't been able to use the pond for years.