

# Living With Natural Areas

## A Guide for You

### **Why this information is for you!**

Natural areas are valuable features of London's system of parks and open spaces. You probably know this. You paid a premium price to live where you live. And you probably want to keep that value. One way to do that is to minimize your impact on the adjacent natural area.

### **What is a natural area?**

Natural areas are wetlands, meadows, forests, valley lands and other relatively undisturbed lands. They help us to learn about nature, provide clues to the current health of our environment, and add to our quality of life. Natural Areas are valuable and scarce and provide habitat to protect rare species of plants, trees, birds, animals, reptiles and amphibians. The highest form of protection in London is Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). ESAs contain rare and endangered plants and animals, unique landforms, and habitats that are prized for their high quality and diversity.

You are one of the fortunate who now has a home adjacent to one of these areas. As such, it is important how you treat your yard and the natural Area next to it. You can keep these areas in a healthy natural condition that keeps the view from your home beautiful, and sustains the value of your home.

### **What you can do at home.**

Your lot ends at the fence line and you should not encroach on the natural area. If a lawn is mowed past property boundaries into a natural area, the rich habitat is replaced by a manicured lawn and the original diversity is reduced. The cumulative impact of homeowners cutting into the edges of natural areas threatens their integrity.

Any activity extending onto a publicly-owned natural area, is illegal encroachment. Simple examples of encroachment include expanding mowed land or extending fence lines. More permanent examples include planting gardens or trees, or installing structures such as sheds. You shouldn't have a gate in your back fence. (After all, you wouldn't want your neighbour to enter your property without your permission). Only enter the natural area at designated access points and use the trails – don't make new ones. Most ESAs are mapped and have signed entrances to a marked trail system. Keep dogs and cats from running loose in a natural area - they disturb the wildlife and in the case of cats, hunt and kill thousands of birds a year.

Maps of London's ESAs: Kains Woods, Kilally Meadows, Meadowlily Woods, Medway Valley Heritage Forest, Sifton Bog, Warbler Woods and Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills are posted at [www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca)

Please help keep your backyard and the adjacent natural area special. Remove invasive species from your yard and as well avoid putting yard waste into the Natural Area or near it, because seeds travel. The city has regular, curbside pickup of yard waste materials during the spring and summer. For yard waste collection dates and depot locations, phone (519) 661-4585, go to <http://www.london.ca/residents/Garbage-Recycling/Pages/default.aspx>, or check your Garbage Calendar.

# Around your home - having a positive impact

## Does it matter what I grow on my property?

Alien alert! Be careful when growing plants that are not native to Southern Ontario. Plants don't recognize property boundaries and can spread easily from gardens to natural areas. As a result, plant diversity is reduced and fewer places remain where native wildlife can survive. Many alien species do not have natural predators here and are extremely invasive or even dangerous! (read about Giant Hogweed on page 4).

Common species that out-compete native plants are Norway Maple, Periwinkle, and Goutweed (Goat's Foot). Check with your local nursery to find out which plants are native to the London region before purchasing. Native plants are better adapted to the climate, soil conditions, insects and diseases of this area.

A couple of good resources can be found at the City of London web site. One is *Grow Me Instead* [HYPERLINK "http://www.london.ca/residents/Property-Matters/Lawns-Gardens/Pages/invasive-alternatives.aspx"](http://www.london.ca/residents/Property-Matters/Lawns-Gardens/Pages/invasive-alternatives.aspx)  
<http://www.london.ca/residents/Property-Matters/Lawns-Gardens/Pages/invasive-alternatives.aspx>

Another is the *Guide to Plant Selection for Environmentally Significant Areas*, listing plants suitable for use near natural areas and which plants to avoid. [HYPERLINK "http://www.london.ca/business/Resources/Consultant-Resources/Pages/Environmental-Guidelines.aspx"](http://www.london.ca/business/Resources/Consultant-Resources/Pages/Environmental-Guidelines.aspx)  
<http://www.london.ca/business/Resources/Consultant-Resources/Pages/Environmental-Guidelines.aspx>

## Stepping out in natural areas -

### “Take only memories, leave only footprints”

Londoners are proud of natural areas - after all, this is the Forest City! Natural areas can be found throughout the city and offer opportunity for Londoners of all ages to get out and enjoy the natural world.

Many natural areas within the city are accessible to the public. However, the very features that make them precious are also those that could be easily damaged by thoughtless actions. Most damage occurs when people leave the marked trails and trample vegetation. By following the guidelines below, you can enjoy these natural areas without harming them, and leave them in a healthy state

### Rules to remember

- **Use only the official access points and trails.** Managed trails are marked with yellow blazes. Don't create or use trails that originate in people's backyards. These additional trails cause more widespread trampling and disturbance of wildlife and plants.
- **Avoid walking in natural areas when the trails are muddy** and easily damaged, such as in the early spring or after a heavy rainfall.
- **Limited bike use.** Bicycles are only permitted on the asphalt or crushed gravel paths in Kilally Meadows and Medway Valley. Otherwise, no bikes!
- **Keep natural areas litter free.** You can help out by regularly removing litter. Pick up any litter that you find and dispose of it properly.
- **Leashes Please!** Natural areas are not dog parks. All pets must be on leash (maximum 2 metres/ 6 feet). Cats and dogs are hunters by nature. If allowed to run loose, they put great stress on or kill birds and small animals. Don't forget to stoop and scoop!
- **Do not disturb wildlife or pick or transplant flowers.**
  - **Don't release household pets into natural areas, ponds or waterways.** Goldfish, budgies, hamsters, etc. are not native to this area. Some can literally take over a natural area over time.

### **Can I take anything from a natural area?**

Please don't take anything from a natural area beyond photographs. This means leaving all vegetation, wildlife, soil, substrate, and deadfall in place. Every part of the ecosystem has an important and vital role to play in keeping natural areas healthy.

For example, natural areas are often the only wild place remaining for rare native wildflowers to grow. Removing even a few plants can jeopardize the remaining population. It may be tempting to pick plants for food or herbal remedies, but this practice, just like transplanting, is not appropriate or sustainable. Even a few people picking plants can put the local population of that species in danger.

A natural area is no place to find firewood or lawn decorations. Taking dead wood from a natural area will hurt that area's health in the long-term. New growth often depends on old stumps and logs. Cutting trees and brush destroys habitat, tramples vegetation and disturbs wildlife.

Enjoy wildlife when you discover it, but leave it in its natural setting. Don't make survival harder by taking animals out of their homes, leaving fewer behind to carry on. It is illegal to keep wild animals, even injured ones, in captivity without a permit.

### **Beware!**

Finally, there are a few plants you should be familiar with before heading out to enjoy London's natural areas. Be sure you are able to identify and avoid contact with the following plants.

Hogsweed – (insert photo and brief description)

Poison Ivy- (insert photo and brief description)

## **Summary**

When using any natural area please:

- Use only designated trails
- Respect all plants and wildlife
- Leave natural areas as you found them

## **Where can I find out more?**

### **Publications on London's natural areas:**

- Brochures on seven of London's ESAs are available free of charge from:
  - Tourism London at the London Tourism Information Centre (696 Wellington Road South) and the Dundas Street Information Centre (267 Dundas Street)
  - City Planning Department (519) 661-4980 (address??)
  - Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (519) 451-2800, [infoline@thamesriver.on.ca](mailto:infoline@thamesriver.on.ca), [www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca)
- *Guide to the Natural Areas of London and Vicinity*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 2007. Nature London, [www.naturelondon.com](http://www.naturelondon.com), [info@mcilwraith.ca](mailto:info@mcilwraith.ca)

### **More information on London's natural areas:**

- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (519) 451-2800, [infoline@thamesriver.on.ca](mailto:infoline@thamesriver.on.ca), [www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca)

- City of London Environment and Planning Department (519) 661-4980, [www.london.ca](http://www.london.ca)

**More information on being a good natural neighbour:**

- *Backyard Habitats* (pdf brochure) is available on the Ontario Nature web site at [www.ontarionature.org](http://www.ontarionature.org)
- Johnson, Lorraine, 2001. *The New Ontario Naturalized Garden*. Whitecap Books, Toronto, Ontario.
- For composting tips call the “Rot Line” at (519) 672-5991 or visit [www.trea.ca](http://www.trea.ca). This free service is offered to the public by the Thames Region Ecological Association (TREA).

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