

Trails Advisory Group (TAG) – Minutes

Onsite Meeting at Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA

Date: Thursday September 10th from 5:00 – 6:45pm

Attendees: Dave Potten - TVTA, Sandy Levin - EEPAC, Anita Caveney - NL, Dan Jones UTRCA, Horace Krueger - WMP Adopt an ESA, Shawnessy Boland - Westminster Working Group, Linda McDougall - COL.

Minutes by Linda McDougall

Minutes:

- Began at 5pm with Introductions / Sign in sheet / Handed out TAG Role/Management Zone Maps
- Linda identified that WMP ESA is the largest publically owned ESA in London, roughly 250 ha in size, with about 10km of managed trails.
- Linda identified that The Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs – was adopted by Council in 2012 and Council directed staff to form a TAG to provide comment on trail related issues in London’s ESAs that were not in the current Conservation Master Plan for the ESA.
- Linda identified that the Management Zones were applied by the Ecological Consultants at NSE and appear in the April 2015 *Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA: Ecological Inventory & Management Zone Report*, available online (shared with TAG in advance of the TAG visit) and reviewed by EEPAC whose comments were formally addressed on their April 16, 2015 agenda.
- Linda identified that Eastern Meadowlarks and Bobolinks were confirmed to be nesting in the centre of the meadow over the former landfill. These ground nesting birds are Provincially listed as Threatened Species at Risk making the central portion of this meadow area a Nature Reserve (NR) Management Zone (MZ) following the Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs document. The edge areas (approximately 50 m from the woodland edges) are zoned Natural Area 1 as the most sensitive ground-nesting grassland SAR bird species breed in areas away from woodland edges.
- Linda identified that now that we know the MZs (and EEPAC has reviewed them) the next step in the process is a TAG walk. The TAG route is proposed in a Natural Area 1 (NA1) MZ over a former landfill, primarily over the Utility Overlay for the sanitary sewer for the landfill, parallel to the Utility Overlay for the CN rail line and Hydro Corridor. The NA1 MZ typically supports Level 1 - Hiking natural surface trails about 0.5-1.5m in width. However, as the route is over a Utility Overlay the Trail Standards (p.28) suggests “*trails will be located along the same route to minimize impacts to the surrounding ESA while achieving a social benefit by designing the trails to accommodate persons with*

disabilities wherever possible...In instances where there is infrastructure within the ESA, and permanent access to the infrastructure is required; the access route may be a desirable location to locate trails”.

- Horace and Shaunessey described how the Westminster Working Group requested a multiuse pathway be constructed from the Westminster neighbourhood to Commissioners Road East and that Council has directed staff to work with them on this and that is why the TAG walk was happening today.
- Shaunessey asked why CN was not present and Linda advised that we were not that far in the process with CN yet but we can briefly discuss the possible crossing locations today noting grading issues and the PSW do pose constraints to the CN crossing location.
- Linda described that Level 3 multi-use pathways are not typically part of the trail system within an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). However, the Council approved Planning and Design Standards for Trails in ESAs (p.31) document states that: *"In exceptional circumstances, Level 3 pathways may be constructed ... to maintain an existing connection among neighbourhoods where a safe alternative route outside of the ESA is not available"*.
- Linda advised that signage regarding Ground Nesting Birds with a picture of Meadowlark is going up along the managed trails very soon, to assist in advising folks why they should stay on the trail and keep dogs on-leash.
- Sandy asked what surface the community was looking for on the bike path. Noting that Paths are usually asphalt in London.
- Horace said he was in favour of a granular surface trail for bikes and noted how it would connect nicely with the granular surface bike trails in the Glen Cairn neighborhood.
- Anita and others were concerned about bikes using the side of the large berm as a ramp and venturing into the NR areas, and suggested plantings of Prickly-ash in some areas would help deter this activity and provide habitat for Giant Swallowtail Butterflies.
- Dave noted that the minor drainage issues in the lower areas of the trail would need to be considered in the design.
- Shaunessey and others suggested that the bike trail alignment should meander a bit, and not be too wide or too straight like a road.
- Shaunessey asked for a garbage can at the Parliament Access point to help with litter and dog bags.
- Sandy asked about mowing of the sides of the new granular bike trail alignment noting that a max. of 1m on either side of asphalt pathways are mowed in ESAs currently.

- Dan advised that the ESA team mows the surfaces of the existing, roughly 1m wide, managed natural-surface trails in this area about once a year in the late summer to help to identify and maintain their locations, and to help folks to find stay on the managed trails and stay out of the NR MZ areas.
- There was discussion about maintaining the new trail and the consensus was that a maximum of about 1m on either side of the new granular surface trail would likely need to be mowed about once a year (outside of nesting season) to help folks find and stay on the managed trails, keep them open and improve safety and visibility as the vegetation would likely fill them in over time.
- Sandy noted that the Green ESA sign at the Parking Lot was not visible from the parking lot and requested a Green ESA sign (in addition to the ESA by-law sign) for the Parliament access point.
- Sandy noted the Buckthorn present at the Parliament Access, Dan advised that it could be managed through a Capital budget project. Linda advised that Invasive Species work is ongoing in WMP ESA including Japanese Knotweed, Phragmites, Buckthorn control and as part of this granular bike trail project that the Buckthorn and Black Locust should be managed.
- Linda and Dan agreed they would work on that and perhaps some of the weedy Buckthorn and Manitoba Maples etc. should be cleared from around the parking lot to assist with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) issues and visibility for the Green ESA sign.
- Shaunessy noted that people already bike and hike through this area and if a well designed, managed granular trail open to bikes was provided people would be more likely to use it and this would reduce biking on hiking trails and help to keep people out of the NR MZ areas.
- Anita, Dan and others agreed that wooden bike barricades should be built to further deter bikes from using the managed hiking trails at Parliament, at the base of the big hill covered in Sumac on the managed hiking trail in the SE and at the Commissioners Road East parking lot hiking trail access point.
- TAG unanimously agreed that a 2m wide, granular surface trail open to permit bikes generally following the alignment identified on the attached WMP ESA TAG Map with a bike runnel design for the stairs (and repairs to the stairs and railings) at Parliament Cres. access was the best solution.
- TAG agreed that closing, signing the existing ad hoc/unmanaged trails through the NR MZ with wood barricades, strategic plantings of Prickly Ash, and providing a managed trail with a granular surface, 2m wide suitable for hikers, and bicycles is the best for the community and the habitat.

- Linda advised that a report to Council via Community and Protective Services on October 20th will report back on the ecological studies, the TAG walk and the WWG Council Resolution and outline next steps.

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