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Planner: L. McDOUGALL

TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE ON FEBRUARY 6, 2017
FROM:	J. M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	PHASE I CONSERVATION MASTER PLAN for THE MEDWAY VALLEY HERITAGE FOREST ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREA (SOUTH)

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director, Planning and City Planner regarding the Medway Valley Heritage Forest Environmentally Significant Area (south) Conservation Master Plan Phase I and II, the following actions **BE TAKEN**:

- a) The Natural Heritage Inventory and Evaluation for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest Environmentally Significant Area forming Phase I of the Conservation Master Plan and attached as Appendix 'A', **BE APPROVED** in accordance with Section 15.3.8. of the Official Plan and policies 1421 and 1422 of the London Plan;
- b) The Addendum to the Natural Heritage Inventory and Evaluation MVHF ESA, including existing trail review and attached as Appendix 'B', **BE APPROVED** in accordance with Section 15.3.8. of the Official Plan and policies 1421 and 1422 of the London Plan;
- c) The members of EEPAC, Nature London and the community **BE THANKED** for their work in the review and comments on the Phase I document, and;
- d) Based on the process within the recently updated Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs, Phase II of the Conservation Master Plan for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest Environmentally Significant Area (south) **BE INITIATED**.

PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER
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June 2016 - Trail Planning in Environmentally Significant Areas
 September 2012 – Application of the Trail Standards for ESA Planning Projects

PURPOSE

Under Section 15.3.8 of the Official Plan, and, policy 1421 of the London Plan, "Council may request the preparation of Conservation Master Plans for Environmentally Significant Areas and other natural heritage areas. Conservation Master Plans may be adopted by Council, and will function as guideline documents for the purposes of defining the boundaries and providing direction on the management of these areas."

The Phase I Conservation Master Plan (CMP) for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest (MVHF) Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) and Addendum respond to a strong community vision and desire to protect and enhance the MVHF ESA. The CMP process is undertaken in two phases. Phase I of the CMP provides a detailed life science inventory sufficient to formalize and refine the ESA boundaries, management zones and overlays consistent with the recently updated version of the City's Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs.

The life science field-studies completed in 2013 met or exceeded the requirements for ecological inventory in the City's Environmental Management Guideline 2.0 Data Collection Standards for Ecological Inventory and other provincially and federally accepted protocols.

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BACKGROUND

The MVHF ESA is an important natural area within the City of London for which a CMP is being prepared. Protecting a significant natural area like the Medway is challenged by the urban context of this ESA. The CMP Phase I included a careful assessment of the significance and sensitivity the natural features and functions present within the ESA.

The CMP Phase I was developed through a two-year consultative process and provides the framework for ongoing adaptive ecological-management of the MVHF ESA (south).

This process was put on hold by Council for a formal review and update of the Trail Standards in October 2015. In June 2016 the updated [Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs](#) document was reviewed and endorsed by the Trails Focus Group and approved by Council. The new Guidelines and process includes an overview of the various components of the CMP process provided here:



Key Meeting Dates for Phase I of the CMP Process:

Public engagement is a key part of the CMP process for the MVHF ESA and extra effort and time was spent on this given the strong public interest in the MVHF ESA. Community Information Meetings were held on:

- July 25, 2013 - Project Initiation
- January 27, 2014 – Presentation of Key Findings

EEPAC Involvement

Received the Terms of Reference (TOR) and draft Phase I CMP reports for comments:

- February 21, 2013 (CMP Phase I TOR circulated)
- January 15, 2014 (CMP Phase I first draft circulated with presentation by Dillon)
- December 11, 2014 (second draft circulated with responses to EEPAC, Nature London)
- April 16, 2015 (responses to EEPAC’s second round of comments provided)

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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PHASE I STUDY**ESA Boundary Delineation**

Lands included inside the MVHF ESA boundary consistent with the recommendations of the Phase 1 CMP report total 181 ha.

- Total area of land inside revised MVHF ESA boundary = 181 ha
- Total area inside current MVHF ESA boundary on Schedule B1 = 178 ha
- Total area inside current MVHF ESA boundary on Map 5 of London Plan = 175 ha
- Publicly owned land within the revised MVHF ESA boundary = 135 ha
- 75% of the land inside the revised MVHF ESA boundary is publicly owned land

ESA Criterion Update

The Phase 1 CMP report identified that the ESA continues to meet all seven Official Plan ESA criterion identified in 15.4.1.3. and policy 1371 of the London Plan. The rationale and supporting information are updated in the Phase I CMP report in support of the MVHF ESA designation.

Environmental Management Strategy

Data collected was analysed and evaluated to develop an Environmental Management Strategy for the MVHF ESA south to form the basis of the CMP. Many of these recommendations are already underway to protect and enhance ecological integrity.

- **Invasive Species Management and Ecological Restoration**

The Phase I CMP report identified opportunities for restoration and those flagged as a high priority to protect species at risk or species of conservation concern were initiated immediately. In 2014 an Invasive Species Management Plan was drafted to control invasive, exotic Goutweed and Japanese Knotweed which posed a direct threat to False Rue-anemone (a Threatened species at risk), Green Dragon (a species of Special Concern), and Striped Cream Violet (a species of Conservation Concern) in MVHF ESA south.

The City initiated this important restoration work in 2014 with excellent results to date. The Invasive Species Control Program Results reports are circulated to EEPAC. The City's innovative habitat protection work was presented to the Ontario Invasive Plant Council (OIPC) in 2014 & 2015. The City's leadership has improved the knowledge of False Rue-anemone abundance, distribution, biology and threats as noted in the Federal Species at Risk Act Recovery Strategy Series, [Proposed Recovery Strategy for the False Rue-anemone \(*Enemion biternatum*\) in Canada, 2016](#). The largest sub-populations of False Rue-anemone in Canada are found within the MVHF ESA.

The City's MVHF ESA Species at Risk protection, invasive species control and habitat restoration project required \$38,000 in funding since 2014 to plan and implement. Specifically, \$14,000 was spent on the required management plan and monitoring reports, and, \$24,000 to cover implementation work by the UTRCA ESA team. This project will continue into future years.

In addition to Goutweed and Japanese Knotweed, many other invasive species including Phragmites, Buckthorn, and Periwinkle are mapped and prioritized in the Phase I CMP report. Based on level of threat posed and feasibility of control these and other invasive species are managed annually by the City funded UTRCA ESA team as time and funds allow to protect ecological integrity. Phragmites is a high priority and is managed annually in all our ESAs including the MVHF ESA. London is also a leader in protecting Ash trees from invasive insect species in natural areas. Under the Tree-Azin Emerald Ash Borer bi-annual injection program, 74 Ash trees were injected in 2012 and 51 surviving Ash trees were injected in 2014 and 2016 in the MVHF ESA.

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• **Management Zones and Overlays**

The MVHF ESA CMP Phase I and Addendum are consistent with the updated Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs document and process where Management Zones are delineated based on Ecological Land Classification. The Addendum to the Natural Heritage Inventory and Evaluation MVHF ESA (south) concluded that all of the significant ecological features were compatible with the existing managed trails. If new trails are proposed in alternate locations during Phase II, further review would be required following the Council approved Guidelines for Management Zones and Trails in ESAs document and process.

• **Stewardship Opportunities**

Stewardship opportunities are prioritized and those associated with SAR protection were given high priority and immediately implemented with written permission from landowners. Three local groups have adopted portions of the MVHF ESA and are actively participating in the City's Adopt an ESA stewardship program which is coordinated by a City Ecologist. Public Buckthorn Busting educational stewardship events were held in 2013, 2014, and 2015 in the MVHF ESA south.

In 2016 the Trails Advisory Group recommended that the large wooden-staircase be repaired, and boardwalks and ecological restoration implemented to protect the slope and provide sustainable access to the ESA. Completed in 2016 this work required approximately \$70,000 of Medway capital funds previously earmarked for MVHF ESA (south) CMP implementation post Phase II.

PHASE II CMP - MVHF ESA (SOUTH)

Phase II of the CMP will include a public engagement process and formation of a Local Advisory Committee (LAC) to obtain input on goals, objectives, recommendations and a long term implementation plan based on the priorities identified. One of the components of the CMP is ensuring that public use will be managed through careful trail design, signage, education and stewardship. Trail planning and design must address physical sustainability (trails that will retain their form over years of use and natural forces acting on them); ecological sustainability (managing the impacts of trail location and use to ensure no loss of ecological features and functions) and stewardship (fostering of individual and collective responsibility for protection of natural areas).

During the City's CMP process for ESAs, the focus to date has been on rationalizing the presence and/or location of existing trails, not installing new trails. Since 2008 over 4 km of previously managed trails have been closed in the City's ESAs. When Council approved the Coves ESA CMP in 2014, the recommendations included the closure of approximately 6 km of existing informal/unmanaged trails. No new trails were proposed in the CMP. In addition to the closing of trails, recommendations included improving or realigning existing trails to be sustainable and reduce identified impacts.

Who is involved in the Phase II CMP process and what is their role?

There are many groups that are invited to be involved in the process including:

- interested members of the local community
- the larger London public
- other organized groups including local ratepayer groups
- local Adopt an ESA groups
- Huron University College
- Western
- Nature London (NL)
- Thames Valley Trail Association (TVTA)

Agenda Item # Page #

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- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA)
- Advisory Committees of Council (EEPAC, ACCAC)

ROLE OF LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LAC)

The LAC will meet several times to work with staff on the CMP. In Phase II, the LAC will:

1. Review management issues;
2. Attend ESA visits to help to resolve Plan issues;
3. Help to develop the restoration plan, trail plan and recommendations;
4. Prioritize implementation of recommendations, and;
5. Review the draft Phase II CMP reports

ROLE OF EEPAC AND ACCAC

Provide review of draft Phase II CMP reports based on technical skills and mandate of the Committees.

ROLE OF THE PUBLIC

Provide community input regarding the Phase II CMP.

ROLE OF COUNCIL

To review and approve a final CMP based on input from LAC, EEPAC, ACCAC and the community.

NEXT STEPS

An Official Plan Amendment (OPA) and Zoning By-law Amendment (ZBA) process and report will be initiated to update the ESA boundary as recommended by the Phase 1 CMP report.

Phase II will begin with the formation of the LAC, and, a Community Meeting in early 2017 and the notice / invitation will be:

- published in the Londoner
- posted on the City's website
- sent to residents and stakeholders who participated in Phase I CMP process
- sent to residents and property owners within 200m of the MVHF ESA boundary

PREPARED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
L. MCDUGALL, MES, OALA, RPP ECOLOGIST, ENVIRONMENTAL & PARKS PLANNING	A. MACPHERSON, OALA MANAGER ENVIRONMENTAL & PARKS PLANNING
RECOMMENDED BY:	
JOHN M. FLEMING, MCIP, RPP MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER	

Agenda Item # Page #

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Appendix A – [Natural Heritage Inventory and Evaluation for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest Environmentally Significant Area](#)

Web Address/ URL <http://www.london.ca/residents/Environment/Natural-Environments/Documents/Medway%20NHI-Eval-Final%20Report-Public%20Use-Jan2015.pdf>

Agenda Item # Page #

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Appendix B – [Addendum \(November 2016\) to the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA Natural Heritage Inventory and Evaluation, January 2015](#)

Web Address / URL http://www.london.ca/residents/Environment/Natural-Environments/Documents/AddenNH_Inv_Eval_MVHF_2016.pdf