

Boler Mountain Access Road Environmental Impact Study

Site Plan EIS dated December 20, 2016 (revised August 2017), received by EEPAC August 24, 2017.

Reviewer: R. Trudeau

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Introduction

Boler Mountain is an important natural and recreation area within the City of London. The 'Access Road' will facilitate the long-term vision outlined in the Boler Mountain Strategic Business Plan (January 2013). The 'Access Road' will cross ER lands (significant woodlands), a designated potential ESA and a significant stream corridor. The construction of the road will be the first step in an effort to balance the conservation of natural heritage features and the creation of an attractive recreation facility.

Southdale Road and Wickerson Road Upgrade

There is existing road access to the south end of Boler Mountain from Southdale Road. Southdale Road and the lower section of Wickerson Road will be widened and leveled to replace the 'country' road now in existence. This roadwork, scheduled for the near future, will make the existing road access unusable.

2426 Wickerson Road and Area

A parcel of 2426 Wickerson Road was severed and conveyed to Boler Mountain. This severed land was then zoned OS5 with part of the parcel included in the designated potential ESA. The land that the 'Access Road' crosses was then rezoned OS2. An easement from Wickerson Road across the retained '2426' land completes the connection between Wickerson Road and the Boler Mountain property. Just north of the east end of the 'Access Road', there exists a new SWM facility and a parcel of land zoned AG1. Further to the north, the Wickerson Woods subdivision is being built.

Significant Stream Corridor and Woodlands

The 'Access Road' will cross a tributary of Dingman Creek. This tributary is a significant stream corridor. Fish have not been observed in it. A culvert will be inserted to provide flow under the 'Access Road'.

Roughly 263 trees comprising 12 species exist along the construction zone; 85 trees with DBHs ranging from 12-30 cm will be removed; 170 trees with DBHs ranging from 1-5 cm will be planted to replace the lost vegetation. A Woodland Seed Mix will be dispersed to promote native vegetation.

Several Candidate Significant Wildlife Habitats were identified within the study area, but could not be confirmed. These include: raptor wintering area, woodland raptor nesting habitat and woodland area-sensitive bird breeding.

Impacts

The potential impacts which may result from the proposed 'Access Road' construction are minor compared to what has already happened in the area. Human clearing for agricultural land use has fragmented portions of the natural heritage features. Edges created by clearing are dominated by invasive species. A newly constructed SWM facility adjacent to the road

construction has drastically changed the area. Restoration initiatives should offset any negative impact the road construction will have.

Boler Mountain Strategic Business Plan and The Proposed ESA

As was mentioned in the introduction, the 'Access Road' is the first step towards proposed changes to the area. The Boler Mountain Strategic Business Plan (January 2013) includes the expansion of skiing onto the 'backside' of Boler Mountain and the addition of a unique mountain bike venue. In a Boler Mountain 'Open House' presentation, this venue included a building on the southwest area of the property.

While recreation facilities expand south, the city hopes to expand the Lower Dingman ESA north. This ESA sits about one kilometre south of Southdale Road, with significant unevaluated woodland between it and Southdale Road. The designated proposed expansion of this ESA is north of Southdale Road, encompassing significant woodlands on the south end of Boler Mountain recreation facility. ESAs allow passive recreational use while mountain biking and skiing are highly active and aggressive. A carefully managed approach is necessary to preserve this ESA expansion.

Mountain Bike Trails in an ESA

Mountain-bike trails criss-cross the potential ESA, present in both the NR1 and NR2 zones. Restoration has been suggested to rejuvenate the existing service road and somehow downgrade the existing trails to Level 1 trails. Even though these trails are managed, they exhibit considerable impact on the area. The trails are wider than Level 1 trails and are mowed regularly on each side. Undulations are built into flat sections to provide variety. Turns are heavily banked so bikers can maintain a preferred speed. When erosion exposes root systems, the trail is diverted elsewhere.

Giving up this parcel, when Boler Mountain wants to enhance its mountain-bike venue, will challenge the organization's creativity.

The Bike Pathway Plan

The 'Access Road' has been called a driveway and a recreational trail in documents related to this project. Will the 'Access Road' be gated at Wickerson Road? Once cyclists begin using it to access Boler Mountain, is there adequate parking along Wickerson Road? Wickerson Road is being upgraded with some roadside parking but the road is also becoming popular as a throughway travelling west to Southdale Road. This congestion will continue until the Southdale Road/Westel Bourne Road connection is upgraded.

The proposed multiuse pathway would extend southward from the existing pathway at Ironwood Road and connect to the new 'Access Road'. This combined pathway will run along the northern boundary of the proposed ESA expansion, with passage through cultural communities CUW1 and CUT1 and descend through a FOD5-1 woodland. The significant woodland is moderately steep. The pathway would then follow the south side of the existing SWM facility, up to an access road which would make a final connection to the community of Optimist Park Drive. A bridge over the SWM outlet stream might be necessary.

The Bicycle Master Plan for the City of London currently shows the path connecting to the existing service road and terminating at Southdale Road. This connection to a narrow 'country' road was deemed too dangerous. (Boler Mountain Land Status Report, November 2012). However this narrow 'country' road will be upgraded soon to an 'urban' road with bike lanes and/or a multiuse pathway.

Safety Concerns for Cyclists

The multiuse pathway across the northern boundary of the proposed ESA would cross over several mountain-bike trails. Collisions between the 'cycling' public and mountain bikers will occur. For the bikers, it is an aerobic activity and so speed is important. For cyclists, discovering a network of trails, might entice them to leave the multiuse pathway and explore the varied terrain.

A snowmaking reservoir is located north of the proposed pathway on the west edge of the property. The reservoir is extremely deep and steep-sided; shaped like a 'gravy boat'. A swale (recently built) runs along the west base of Hill 2000 collecting rainwater off the mountain and directing it into the reservoir. This added feature will increase water levels in the reservoir. Increased uncontrolled public access to Boler Mountain will require that the reservoir is fenced.

Both of these concerns would be somewhat reduce if the current Bicycle Master Plan is followed. However, that would mean a multiuse pathway would have to traverse the proposed ESA.

Summary

This report was designed to show support for the Boler Mountain Access Road EIS, but more importantly, to generate a discussion about the potential changes to the area.