



## Thames Valley Trail Concerns about Trail Closures in London ESA's!

For those who have not read the **Planning & Design Standards for Trails in ESA's – ver. 5**, please read the extract on Trail Closures, shown in bold below.

### Trail Closures

As part of the effort to minimize the number of trails, and to optimize the location of trails, it may be necessary to close portions of the existing trail network.

The location of the new trail will be determined by following the planning principles and processes discussed throughout this document. Closing of the existing trail is an essential part of the overall process of trail planning and management. If the former trail is not properly decommissioned and its location sufficiently disguised, it will continue to attract users.

Our major concern is the **lack of protection for the existing 50 Km network of main trails**, especially the heritage trails within the ESA's. For example, **Thames Valley Trail will celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the official opening of the in-city trail on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1973. The trail runs through the Kains Woods, Warbler Woods and Kilally Meadows ESAs. This trail forms part of an **uninterrupted network that extends from Lake Erie to Georgian Bay**. This network, in turn, is connected to the Provincial and National trail grids. To put the size of the ESA trail concern into perspective, London's trails account for **less than 2% of our total ESA area**.

Secondly, due to climate change and other factors, most of the ESAs are expected to **eventually receive the Nature Reserve designation**. This designation means no trails whatsoever, unless an exemption is given. A great deal of subjectivity is required to determine the management zone classification. This was our experience with the North Medway Trail. **The Nature Reserve designation has the potential to destroy the existing trail network if no grandfathering protection is provided in the standards**.

Thirdly, the social value of our trails is well known: improving physical fitness, reducing health care costs, strengthening neighbourhoods, and enhancing environmental education. In the North Medway example, trail advisors gave greater weight to the importance of the environment, proposing a 75% environment and 25% social weighting. **The environmental damage attributed to trail use has not been clearly demonstrated to justify such an environmental/social balance**. We understand the Trail systems will be fully reviewed as part of a Conservation Master Planning process. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to recruit volunteers when it is obvious that the deck is already stacked against them.

We walk in the ESAs on a regular basis and value the physical fitness, social benefits and natural beauty they provide. We also value the environment and have been educated to minimize our impact when using the trails. We also believe that shutdown of our existing trails will harm the ESA's over the long term. Londoner's will withdraw their financial support if they are unable to enjoy the ESA benefits. **Our members do not want to walk next to the busy highways. Please don't force our grandchildren to suffer Nature Deficit Disorder. We request your support and action to fine tune these standards to provide greater protection for our existing trail network.**

Sincerely

David Potten, President of TVTA