

# Medway Valley Heritage Forest South Conservation Master Plan

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**To: Chair and Members, Planning and Environment Committee**

The Medway South CMP report is very comprehensive and well written. Prompt action is underway for habitat protection, restoration, and removal of invasive species. **Therefore, I support this master plan.** However, longstanding community divisions remain with respect to the amount of Public Access and the limited connectivity of the trail system. **I believe that both objectives, increased access and improved ecological protection of the ESA, can be achieved if the city CMP's consider the following points:**

- 1 Continue to involve community groups that implement new ideas and take progressive action.**
- 2 Increase investment in scientific research and innovation to improve both ecological and trail protection**
- 3 Make fact based decisions**

We begin with an overview of the Medway ESA and some historical facts related to community involvement. Then, comments on the application of Species at Risk and the use of AODA within the master plan.

## **Medway Valley Heritage Forest Overview**

The South Medway ESA is roughly 95 Hectares in size. The current South Medway trail system is about 8700 meters in length with a mix of level 1, 2 & 3 trails. **The trail system occupies less than 3% of the total ESA area.** The Medway community has more than 50 years of experience using the valley. Recent statistics indicate rising trail use due to population growth and the drive to improve physical and mental health. Additionally, there have been a number of trail

closures in the valley. The net result is to increase the use of the remaining trails with rising wear and tear.

### **Some Historical Facts:**

1. In the 1950's, following the first residential development, the valley lands were used by neighbourhood citizens for passive recreational activities such as hiking, bird watching, enjoyment of nature and fishing.
2. In the late 1960's, Thames Valley Trail helped to develop the Medway Trail. It extended from the University through the entire length of the valley to Fanshawe Park Road. The trail was named the Winder Trail after a well know London conservationist Steve Winder. Steve was the editor of the Medway Valley News from ca. 1970-1991 and promoted conservation in the valley.
3. In the early 1990's, the Metamora stairs and nearby bridge were constructed by local community members.
4. The 1996 Envirofest survey results: 90% of respondents believed that the valley should be available for recreational uses, 5% said no and 5% did not respond.
5. In 2008, the Friends of Medway Creek was established. This community group organizes community events, picks up garbage, plant trees, remove invasive species, install benches, and educational signs. This group have raised substantial amounts of money and they have a detailed plan to improve Medway Creek's environment.

In 2015, the city updated **the Life Science Inventory** for the South Medway. We thank you for this research update. The results indicate a long term, average improvement of 32% in ecological diversity. Those that favour restricted ESA access espouse a decline in diversity. Undoubtedly, this is a complex issue and strategic updates will be beneficial.

Proponents of improved public ESA access suggested new trail construction on the Utility Right of Ways and adding five new bridges across the Medway. Three of the bridges were not recommended because of threats to **Species of Conservation Concern and Species at Risk**. Certainly this is a significant concern but are there other solutions? This is likely to be an ongoing debate as we have recreational trails in all of our ESA's and a rising London population. The master plan has a 10 year time frame. I propose a research study be added to explore innovative solutions to address the Species at Risk issue.

### **Use of the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act)**

My final concern is the use of the AODA legislation in relation to bridge construction. When we think of disabilities, we tend to think of people in wheelchairs and physical disabilities. But disabilities can also be non-visible. We can't always tell who has a disability. The broad range of disabilities includes those with vision, deafness, and intellectual or developmental challenges. Here are a couple of examples of persons with disabilities using level one trails and bridges:

1. Thames Valley Trail has members with highly restricted vision that regularly hike on level one trails.
2. Hike for Happiness is a London non-profit that raises money for patients with mental health challenges. We lead hikes in London ESA's on level one trails. The participants not only loved the experience, we raised lots of money for their treatment.

My concern is that the CMP should consider all members of the AODA when evaluating improvements to the ESA trail system. It should not be used to eliminate bridges or level one trails!

**In conclusion**, the public has protected and enjoyed the Medway Valley for more than 50 years. Additional resources, scientific research, and community based innovation are required to continue this enjoyment and improve habitat protection. In these days of fake news, we value fact based decisions. **We urge you to approve this master plan.**

David Potten