

Planning and Environment Committee, City of London
267 Dundas Street, Third Floor
London, ON N6A 1H2

Subject: Conservation Master Plan for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA (South)

Dear members of the Planning and Environment Committee,

I am writing to express my support for the Conservation Master Plan (CMP) for the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA prepared by Dillon Consulting Ltd. to be considered by the Planning and Environment Committee on April 16, 2018. The Medway Valley Heritage Forest is an extraordinarily unique and sensitive ecosystem. In particular, the concentration of rare and threatened plant and wildlife species found in the ESA is significant at a national level – at least one plant species in the ESA is found at only a few other locations in Canada and at least two other plant species have highly restricted ranges within which the ESA represents an important refuge. Many Londoners might be surprised to learn that such a remarkable density of rare and sensitive species exists in their own backyards!

Urban natural areas face unique pressures and challenges which are not experienced by rural natural areas. In particular,

- the volume of recreational use by humans is substantially greater in urban natural areas than rural natural areas, which inevitably leads to micro-fragmentation of natural habitats through the creation of informal trails;
- edge effects, such as invasive species propagule pressure, are magnitudes greater at the urban-wilderness interface than at the rural-wilderness interface; and
- harvesting of wild plants in urban natural areas can lead to species extirpation, a particular concern with regionally and provincially rare species.

Natural habitats in cities across Canada experience these effects, sometimes leading to severe degradation of the health and biodiversity of those ecosystems. The Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA is no exception. As London continues to grow, the human pressure on the ESA will inevitably grow with it and will directly threaten the health of the ecosystem and the species it supports.

The CMP represents a proactive, pragmatic approach to environmental management in the ESA. It is by far the most thorough and detailed inventory of the biota of the Medway Valley Heritage Forest ever completed and reflects the efforts of expert naturalists, many of whom I know personally. The management strategy outlined in Section 3 of the CMP includes a management zones approach more often seen in National and Provincial Parks than in municipal natural areas. Specifically, the management zones approach to trail management (Section 3.4.1 of the CMP) will ensure that a formal trail network is established in the ESA that avoids sensitive species and habitats while still allowing the community to enjoy the space. While it may be tempting to manage human pressures on urban natural areas by simply restricting access or not providing facilities such as trails, this management approach is not effective in an urban setting. On the contrary, providing well-maintained trails and linkages will allow the community to enjoy this remarkable area while avoiding sensitive habitats and reducing the ecological impacts of unmitigated recreational use.

The CMP to be considered by the Planning and Environment Committee on April 16, 2018, is the most recent of numerous iterations of that plan – the product of over three years of public engagement and site investigations by expert naturalists and planners. It also stands out at a national level as a unique and progressive approach to natural area management not often seen in Canadian municipalities. For these reasons, I would like to express my support for the efforts made by my peers at Dillon, by City staff, and

by numerous members of the public in producing the CMP. Please feel free to print and include this letter in the Planning and Environment Committee agenda for April 16, 2018.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Van Hemessen', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Will Van Hemessen, B.E.S. (Hons.)
Terrestrial Ecologist, Parsons Inc.
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