

April 18, 2018

London City Council
Mayor and City Councillors
City of London

Dear London City Council,

On behalf of the Western Wildlife Conservation Society,

As a group of over 80 concerned students at the University of Western Ontario, our main goal is to raise awareness regarding issues faced by wildlife locally and globally, and to use our voices to protect our invaluable environment. Today, the largest threat facing wildlife is habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation; threatening 85% of all species living on earth. As Canadians, and as humans, we have a moral obligation to protect, conserve and maintain ecologically important habitats, and prevent any further disturbances. The development of the Medway Valley Heritage Forest, which consists of diverse habitat types, supporting various local wildlife, would be a severe breach of our responsibilities.

The Medway Valley is an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA), not a park; however, this Conservation Master Plan (CMP) proposes developments that would treat it as if it was a park. The construction of the bridge and paved paths would not only affect the natural canopy cover, but also completely alter the surrounding environment. The machines used will compact the soil, affecting the microhabitat of invertebrates and microbes. It will also widen paths, increasing edge effects such as increased light and temperature, which will alter the abiotic conditions in the forest. There has been reports of American badgers, and other species that are listed on the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species in the Medway Valley. False Rue-Anemone is a Threatened species, listed in Ontario's Species at Risk List. This species is threatened by forest clearing, soil erosion, and agricultural run-off, with road salt having harmed populations. Inadvertent trampling of this plant through habitat destruction due to recreational activities such as cycling, ATV-use and hiking is also known to have severe effects. According to the Ontario Government website for Species at Risk, "Threatened Species and their general habitat are automatically protected". These species are near extinction so the upgrading of trails from Level One to Level Two, as well as the increased accessibility by the two bridges proposed, pose significant threats to the existence of False Rue-Anemone. It would be naive to believe that increasing traffic and accessibility to this ESA would be a protection of this species and its natural habitat.

One goal of the development and work by the City of London, that was communicated to our members, was regarding the removal and control invasive species. There is strong evidence that an increase in the level of disturbance of an area changes the habitat such that invasive species can succeed. Native species that depend on intact forest are becoming more and more rare, as a result of changes to their habitat and being outcompeted by introduced and invasive species. Therefore, the very actions that are planned will only increase the issue. Currently the only bird species that we were able to see during multiple different walks in the valley were European Starlings, House Sparrows and occasionally Blue Jays and Northern Cardinals. Both the European Starling and House Sparrows are introduced species. Much of the native Fauna has already disappeared and we have a duty to protect what remains.

Another problem with this CMP the process in which no Native Peoples were involved or consulted with this plan to develop this ESA. Three First Nations communities in southwestern Ontario are native to the London region, including Oneida Nation of the Thames, Munsee Delaware Nation and Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. Indigenous knowledge is a powerful and unique perspective due to their ties to their Native lands, and it should be considered. The blatant lack of consultation or even attempt to engage Native peoples on this proposal is a clear sign that this CMP needs revisal. At the very least, their perspectives should be respected and considered before submitting a proposal to develop lands that are a part of their traditional lands and tied to their Indigenous Knowledge.

As a student based community organization, we strongly believe that the plan to construct bridges be removed from the CMP and that Council also defer the adoption of this CMP until another plan truly focuses primarily on conservation opposed to having actions that would directly and indirectly work against the protection of the Medway Valley habitat.

We fully support the inclusivity of those with disabilities and understand the importance of accessibility to areas in London. However, there are many parks, recreational areas, and forests in and around London that have already been made highly accessible. We, as a species, have altered the world in such a way that it is almost impossible for other species to thrive. It is selfish for us, as humans, to want to change yet another pristine area for our recreational enjoyment. The Medway Valley Heritage Forest is a small, but beautiful and diverse area that remains one of the few fragments of nature relatively untouched by human development in London. It should be left for the many other species that are depending on it for their survival.

Sincerely,

Western Wildlife Conservation Society,

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