



**SUBJECT: Approval of Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System
Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands Management Plan**

TO: Environment, Infrastructure & Community Services Cttee.

FROM: Capital Works Department

Report Number: ES-02-21

Wards Affected: 1

File Numbers: 580-01

Date to Committee: January 12, 2021

Date to Council: January 19, 2021

Recommendation:

Approve the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands Management Plan, December 2019 prepared by North South Environmental Inc., attached as Appendix A to engineering services department report ES-02-01, as the guiding document regarding future management actions for these lands.

PURPOSE:

Vision to Focus Alignment:

- Support sustainable infrastructure and a resilient environment

Background and Discussion:

EcoPark

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (EcoPark) is a collaborative initiative which aims to protect, restore and connect significant natural lands and open space between Cootes Paradise Marsh, Hamilton Harbour and the Niagara Escarpment. This area, located in Hamilton and Burlington, is one of the most biologically rich areas of Canada,

containing over 1,500 documented species of flora and fauna, including over 50 species at risk.

The EcoPark is an alliance of nine partner agencies:

- Royal Botanical Gardens
- Region of Halton
- City of Burlington
- City of Hamilton
- Conservation Halton
- Hamilton Conservation Authority
- Bruce Trail Conservancy
- Hamilton Naturalist's Club
- McMaster University

Since 2007, the EcoPark partners have been working together toward the vision to create one of Canada's largest urban ecoparks, that recognizes the exceptional natural and cultural features; and recreational opportunities of this unique area.

Heritage Lands

The EcoPark is divided into six core areas called Heritage Lands, reflecting the natural and cultural heritage of each area. A key goal is to develop land management plans for the Heritage Lands areas, to provide a consistent framework for future planning, implementation and management of partner-owned lands. It is important to note that the management plans are not land use plans as governed under the Planning Act, but rather contain voluntary guidelines that the partners can choose to adopt to help protect and enhance the biodiversity of EcoPark lands within their ownership. The Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands Management Plan (Plan) is the sixth and final Heritage Lands Management Plan to be completed.

Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands Management Plan

The Plan area is approximately 147 hectares in size and located in the Aldershot community of Burlington. (See Appendix B). Approximately 94 hectares are owned by RBG and include the RBG Centre, Laking Garden and Hendrie Park. Approximately 54 hectares are owned by the City, specifically Hidden Valley Park and an area north of the RBG lands between Unsworth Avenue and Snake Road. A small parcel is owned by the Region of Halton.

Through a competitive bidding process administered by the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Coordinator, North-South Environmental Inc. was retained to develop the Plan. The first phase of the work included development of an Inventory, Opportunities and Issues Report and a Classification and Zoning Report. The criteria to determine the classification and zoning outlining appropriate uses, is based on the

Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System Planning Manual (MNR 2012). While none of the Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands are located within the Niagara Escarpment Plan, the same system was used for consistency with the other Heritage Lands.

The final phase of the work included the development of the Plan. The Plan provides a summary of each of the reports and outlines management recommendations that strive to balance the protection of natural and cultural resources, with appropriate recreational uses.

The Plan is structured as follows:

Section No.	Outline of Content
	Executive Summary
1.0	Introduces the project and summarizes the project governance and methods.
2.0	Provides a summary of the inventory of recreational, environmental and cultural features.
3.0	Reports the management issues documented through the report.
4.0	Summarizes the management recommendations, including the classification and zoning.
5.0	Provides implementation recommendations.
6.0	Provides monitoring recommendations.

The Plan provides the following 15 high priority management recommendations driven by 61 management themes to support land management, habitat restoration, invasive species control, environmental monitoring, education, cultural heritage protection and sustainable recreation:

- Funding
- Trail Connections and Recreation Plan
- Wildlife Crossing Plan
- Parking, Access and Signage
- Trail Flooding and Erosion
- Trail Over-use and Erosion
- Unsanctioned Trails
- Wildlife Viewing
- Wildlife Feeding along Trails
- High run-off and Peak Flows
- Water Quality
- Conservation and Recovery of Species

- Invasive Species
- Wildlife Crossing/Corridors
- Monitoring

For the Plan, see Appendix A. For the Executive Summary, see Appendix C.

Financial Matters:

To support the continued planning of the EcoPark, annual financial contributions are made by each of the partner agencies. These contributions support the costs for retaining the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System Coordinator and associated initiatives.

City staff will continue to assist with EcoPark initiatives including work identified in the Capital Budget and Forecast; and representation on the Governing Council and Management Committee, which are in-kind donations of staff time.

Funding to support the development of the Plan was provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Climate Implications

The EcoPark as it exists today includes approximately 2,200 hectares of protected natural lands and open space. This significant land base within a growing urban area can mitigate the effects of climate change by helping to reduce flood risk, improve air quality and lower temperatures, while protecting biodiversity today and into the future.

Engagement Matters:

The Plan and accompanying reports were reviewed and refined through an engagement process. This included ongoing dialogue and review by the Agency Steering Committee, with representation from the land-owner agencies, a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, and consultation with the public and Indigenous communities, including:

- Hidden Valley Park Pop Up Event (July 6, 2019)
- Public Open House (November 25, 2019)
- Stakeholder Advisory Workshop (May 1, 2019)
- Regular consultation with the Agency Steering Committee

- Outreach to Six Nations (meeting on November 26, 2019), Huron-Wendat (reports sent for comment), and Mississaugas of the Credit (reports sent for comment) First Nations communities
 - Advertisements in the Burlington Post, RBG website and social media platforms
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Conclusion:

The Plan is a compilation of detailed information describing the natural, cultural and recreational resources of the Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands, providing a consistent framework within the context of the EcoPark. This will assist the partner land-owners in the management of these lands to ensure a balance of protection, enhancement and sustainable use. All of the Plans for the six core areas are complete, achieving a significant milestone in the planning for the EcoPark.

Respectfully submitted,

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Appendices:

- A. Lower Grindstone Heritage Lands Management Plan
- B. Plan Area Map
- C. Executive Summary

Notifications:

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Report Approval:

All reports are reviewed and/or approved by Department Director, the Chief Financial Officer and the Executive Director of Legal Services & Corporation Counsel.