

**Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA Master Plan Implementation
Community Input
April 15, 2008**

At the January 16th, 2008 Community Meeting for Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA Master Plan Implementation some issues were raised that required follow up. The three issues included:

1. Waterfowl blind at Wellington Road Tourism Centre boardwalk,
2. Sheet erosion concerns behind Wellington Road Tourism Building,
3. Publicizing set fines for dogs off-leash.

UPDATES

Waterfowl blind at Wellington Road Tourism Centre Boardwalk

ISSUE: Members of the original Local Advisory Committee (LAC) voiced concern that a waterfowl blind had not been incorporated into the current boardwalk design behind the Tourism Building. The main concern is that the boardwalk design, location and function could negatively impact the seasonal behaviour of migratory bird populations, and could also negatively impact surrounding nesting habitat for a variety of bird species at Saunders Pond.

HISTORY: The general public, UTRCA and Westminster LAC community endorsed a new hiking trail master plan that was proposed by the City of London's Parks Planning and Design Section in 2006/2007. One component of this master plan was a new proposed boardwalk/viewing platform behind the Tourism Building on Wellington Road. This viewing platform was recommended for three main reasons:

1. Provide a single controlled access point for viewing Saunders Pond from the Tourism Buildings main entrance into Westminster ESA.
2. Enhance and provide an opportunity for wheelchair users (etc.) to experience Saunders Pond and the surrounding ESA habitat.
3. Create a unique educational opportunity for a wide variety of user groups including schools, tourists, etc.

CONSIDERATION FOR A BLIND: In order to address the concerns raised by LAC, the City of London contacted Bird Studies Canada to see who we could contact locally to provide an informed opinion on whether a blind was necessary. Bird Studies Canada recommended that we contact Mr. Peter Read, because in their opinion, Mr. Read is a qualified London birder with many years of experience. On March 7th representatives from the UTRCA, ESA Team and the City of London met with Mr. Read on site to review the boardwalk design and to get his opinion on how local bird populations would react to its presence.

At the time of this meeting the wooden boardwalk deck had not been installed, but its footings and steel 'understructure' were completed giving all present a clear understanding of how the structure will eventually merge with the natural environment. In general, Mr. Read felt that the proposed design was well suited to the site conditions and that the boardwalk would provide excellent educational opportunities for the general public. He was pleased to see that the boardwalk did not extend into the cattails and out towards open water.

Both Mr. Read and staff from the UTRCA felt that the only way to accurately assess if a bird blind was necessary would be to monitor the site throughout 2008 following construction of the boardwalk. The

purpose of this monitoring would be to assess how birds in and around Saunders Pond react to the presence of humans on the boardwalk. In an effort to gather this information, both ecologists from the UTRCA and associates of Mr. Read will coordinate regular site visits to the boardwalk throughout 2008. Findings from these monitoring sessions will be used to identify if a blind at the end of the boardwalk would be warranted.

In the short term, the City has agreed to alter the elevation of corner posts on the boardwalks railing. This will allow the City to add some form of a screen at the end of the boardwalk if it is deemed necessary. Another alternative to installing a blind would be closing the boardwalk to pedestrian use during the spring and fall migratory periods.

Sheet Erosion concerns behind Wellington Road Tourism Building

An inspection was completed behind the Tourism Building following the January 16th community meeting. At the time of this inspection, there was some very minor surface erosion around the new concrete headwall. The contractor responsible for the site was directed to install silt fence and straw bales to ensure that any future erosion would be contained (specifically in the spring). The silt fence and straw bales were installed by the contractor. FYI...the contractor will be completing their portion of the Tourism Entrance project (paving pathways, fine grading, seeding) as soon as site conditions permit and the UTRCA will be coordinating the native meadow seeding application and constructing the deck on the boardwalk at the end of April and May respectively.

Publicizing set Fines for Dog's Off-leash

The UTRCA will do some form of education with respect to off leash dog fines – tied in with an educational piece on why the City and UTRCA do not want dogs running wild in ESA environments. It may not be practical to install a sign at entrances that reflects how the ESA Team can charge people. As you know, the ESA Team will selectively choose to enforce different bylaws depending upon whose land they are standing on (City or UTRCA owned) and how the dogs/owners are acting when approached. There are also different dollar values tied to these individual bylaws (parks bylaw, conservation authority act, and trespass to property act). An educational piece on the radio or in the paper may be helpful. We might also consider approaching the London Dog Owners Association and ask them to post information on their web site explaining the ESA rules. The UTRCA could provide a link on their website (under ESA information) directing people to the Association (www.londondogownersassociation.ca) so they can find out more about legal dog-off-leash parks in London.

Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you.

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