

Hungry Hollow

Can environmentally-significant ravine survive development?

A plan to manage the town-owned Hungry Hollow ravine in Georgetown has been released to the public for comment.

The draft is available on the town's Web site, www.town.halton-hills.on.ca (look under the Recreation and Parks tab) and at Civic Centre, arenas, libraries and seniors' centres.

The ravine cuts through Georgetown from Cedarvale Park in the west to Willow Park Ecology Centre in the east. The town obtained most of the land through deals with developers, who are building, or have built, subdivisions close to the ravine.

The draft provides a review of the ravine's environmental and geographical features and proposes a course of action for the town to manage the property in the future. Cost estimates will be included in the final report.

According to the draft, written by consultants North-South Environmental Inc., the ravine, dubbed Hungry Hollow after Georgetown's original name, is in "relatively" good condition given its proximity to urban areas.

"Although it is not a pristine area, there is less evidence of urban impacts than is usually found in such areas."

The ravine, created by glaciers thousands of years ago, is considered environmentally significant. For example, Silver Creek, the stream that runs through the ravine from Cedarvale to Norval and its wetlands, has been designated as "provincially significant."

As well, the ravine itself has been designated as an "Environmentally Sensitive Area" by Halton Region due to the rarity of native plants and animals found within its bounds.

During the course of their study, North-South and partners Landplan Collaborative Ltd., found:

- 454 plants, of which 133 are non-native (29 per cent). This proportion is lowest of all the urban ravines in southern Ontario

- 69 plants are considered significant, 34 are considered rare in Halton

Among the recommendation for Hungry Hollow is one to build a continuous trail for the length of the valley with additional creek crossings providing strategic points of access from surrounding neighbourhoods. There is currently a partial trail in the ravine.

Photo by Ted Brown



The public is being invited to comment on a plan to manage the Hungry Hollow ravine, which dominates much of Georgetown. A portion of the ravine has been slated for development. Photo by Ted Brown

Region and 61 are considered rare in the Credit Valley watershed

- One plant, an evening primrose, was considered provincially significant, but the consultants could not re-locate it during their study, and surmise it may have been wiped out during the building of the Mountainview Rd. overpass

- The ravine has beaver ponds, fens, marshes, woodlands and meadows as well as the borderline cold-water stream

- It is home to 134 fauna species— 91 bird species (56 are possible breeders), six reptiles (four snakes and two turtles), six amphibians, 17 mammals and 14 fish species

- 18 of the birds are considered Birds of Conservation Priority Interest in Halton Region and 19 are considered of Conservation Interest in the Credit River Watershed, such as the mourning

warbler, black-billed cuckoo, ovenbird, wood duck and green heron.

- Two— the eastern milk snake and Atlantic salmon— are designated as provincially significant wildlife species

- The six amphibians— frogs, toads and salamanders— were "nowhere in abundance in the Halton Hills ravine, even during the breeding season."

Some of the many recommendations include:

- Build a continuous trail for the length of the valley with additional creek crossings providing strategic points of access from surrounding neighbourhoods. Trail loops should be provided to provide shorter walks

- The trails should be wheelchair-accessible where possible using packed surfacing that will resist rutting in most seasons

- Mountain biking enthusiasts should be encouraged to form an association to ensure proper biking within the ravine. However, if this type of biking proves to be too destructive for the ravine, a ban should be considered

- The use of motorbikes, snowmobiles and all terrain vehicles should not be permitted. They create noise problems for wildlife and humans, are physically destructive to the so other users of the valley system

- Leashing of dogs should be encouraged

- Fishing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing should be monitored,

with action taken to mitigate environmental effects if necessary.

- The old cornfield, adjacent to Main St. should be restored to deciduous or mixed woodland to provide a buffer against Main St. and homes

- The ravine beside Joseph Gibbons Park should also be restored to resemble the east-sloping valley's sugar maple-hemlock mixed forest

- The woodland north of Miller Dr. has been degraded due to excessive fort building, cutting of firewood and erosion. It is recommended that a chain link fence be erected between the woodland and homes to prevent dumping and other encroachments

- Encroachment by surrounding homes is a problem throughout the ravine with many landowners extending their private yards. This includes extending gardens, building garden sheds or locating composters in the ravine. In addition, some landowners are using the ravine as a dumping ground for waste and even draining pool water down the ravine slopes. The report recommends homeowners be educated about their detrimental actions and that bylaw enforcement officers make regular inspections of rear yards and charge repeat offenders.

The final report, with polished recommendations, will be presented to council sometime in January.

—By Cynthia Gamble, staff writer

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