Caring for Nature in Halton

The Unique Nature of Halton

Halton is a region of major transitions where the Carolinian life zone meets the vast Great Lakes St. Lawrence Forest region, Lake Ontario shoreline, and the impressive Niagara Escarpment.

With one of the highest population growth rates in the country, Halton is urbanizing rapidly, and is therefore dependent on advanced planning strategies to preserve its natural heritage and agricultural lands.

Halton's natural environment is an intricate system of physical and biological features. In exploring it, you will find a wide range of microclimates due to elevation changes, soils and Great Lakes weather patterns. Each supports unique habitats and wild species from rare cliff-top communities and northern conifer stands to deciduous swamp-forests.

Typical of the Carolinian zone, Halton has a high concentration of rare species including Flowering Dogwood, Sassafras, White Trout-lily, American Chestnut, and American Columbo.

A Vision for the Future

Oakvillegreen Conservation Association, Oakville citizens, Councillors Allan Elgar and Renee Sandelowsky, and MPP Kevin Flynn, fought hard for the Oakville Land Assembly (OLA), an area of 451 ha (1,115 ac) stretching from Highway 407 to Bronte Road. The Province protected over half of it in 2004, a significant achievement that provides important wildlife habitat and natural corridors. It also links with the Sixteen Mile Creek Area of Natural and Scientific Interest to the north. The OLA was envisioned as part of a Natural Heritage System of connected natural areas in the Town of Oakville's North Oakville Secondary Plan.

What does this mean to landowners?

The conservation of natural areas of all sizes is crucial for Halton's environment. Among many other values, nature provides us with clean air and water. With a rapidly growing population, the Halton landscape faces increasing pressures. The balance between different land uses is a complex negotiation in this corner of the Carolinian life zone. The stories of conservation are as much about farmland as they are about nature. What is needed is a new way to share the costs of preserving the ecological goods and services of our natural heritage with the farmers that steward them. Landowners, both urban and rural, are linked by a concern for healthy lands.

In Halton Region, the efforts of groups and agencies like Conservation Halton, Credit Valley Conservation, Halton Peel Woodlands and Wildlife Stewardship, Grand River Conservation Authority, and many more, are vital, forming partnerships with famers and landowners in rural, suburban and urban environments. A growing number of people and organizations are working together with municipalities to plan urban growth wisely. However, the participation of more people is required to create a network of healthy natural communities.

The Carolinian Life Zone stands out as one of Canada's natural treasures. The Tulip Tree leaf is a symbol of many unique wild plants and animals that live here.

Caring For Nature factsheet series is published by the Carolinian Canada Coalition

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The Big Picture in Halton

Healthy landscapes need large core habitats connected by natural corridors. This type of natural system benefits both wild and human communities. Federal guidelines recommend 20 - 30% natural cover is needed for landscapes to stay healthy and sustainable. In Halton, this number is as low as 12%. The lowest percentage of forest cover is found below the Escarpment, largely in the Carolinian life zone.

The “Big Picture” is the Carolinian Canada Coalition’s vision of a network of green spread out across the Southwestern Ontario landscape. Existing natural areas, such as forests, wetlands and meadows form the backbone of the system. These are connected by streams, rivers, drains, hedgerows, smaller woodlands and even backyard habitat. It shows how Halton natural areas can be conserved and linked across the landscape.

The Big Picture shows 140 core biological areas that act as important reservoirs of natural diversity across the zone. The Oakville Natural Heritage System described below is an example of a local initiative to preserve significant natural connections and core areas integral to the Big Picture vision.

Visit www.carolinian.org to zoom in on any part of the Big Picture and find out more about habitat cores and corridors in your area.

Natural City: The Oakville Natural Heritage System

The establishment of a Natural Heritage System in North Oakville as a “first priority” of planning is a precedent-setting achievement. The permanent protection of about 30% of the 3,075 ha (7,600 ac) of recently urbanized area will protect water quality and wildlife, provide recreational and educational opportunities, and contribute to the overall quality of life for Oakville residents.

The Natural Heritage System was developed through a scientific inventory of the area that studied its flora, fauna, geographical and hydrological features. The inventory found 89 regionally rare species. A highlight and important part of Halton’s heritage is the provincially rare Muhlenberg’s Sedge. The Natural Heritage System is comprised of environmentally significant core preserve areas, buffers for those areas and linkages between them. This system supports a high diversity of wildlife including migratory birds, raptors (eg. Hawks), frogs, salamanders and rare songbirds that depend on large woodlands.

Rather than disconnected, scattered parks, the Natural Heritage System is a plan for a preserved ecological system that will ensure the long-term sustainability of the region’s natural heritage in an urban context. Halton Region is also considering incorporating an updated Natural Heritage Systems approach into its official plans.

Natural Areas Etiquette

When you visit Natural Areas, remember that they exist in a delicate balance which should be respected and preserved. Here are a few simple steps you can take to minimize your impact.

1. Tread Lightly: Stay on designated trails to protect undergrowth.
2. Take only photos, leave nothing behind: pack out all refuse and never remove natural objects.
3. Leash Your Pets: Your favourite animal companion may pose a threat to both plants and animals in natural areas if allowed to wander freely.
4. Respect Trail Closures: they are necessary to ensure public safety and protect sensitive habitats. Avoid muddy trails, especially during spring thaw and in very wet weather.
Landowners Critical to Success
Since its inception, the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program of Conservation Halton and Hamilton Conservation Authority has connected with over 3,500 landowners, publicly recognized 300 Watershed Stewards who have made voluntary agreements to protect over 2,000 ha (5,000 ac) of natural land, 100 km of stream and 200 km of stream bank. More than 50,000 trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants have been planted. The program has become an essential resource for landowners and a model for other regions while contributing significantly to the health of the region. Watershed Stewardship Technicians provide on site advice to landowners with natural areas and watercourses. Financial assistance may be available to landowners wishing to undertake eligible water quality and habitat improvement projects.

Community Gem, Ecological Steward
Royal Botanical Gardens’ 90 ha (222 ac) Hendrie Valley / Grindstone Creek property, found at the southwest corner of Halton, and accessed from the Garden’s Visitor Centre and garden area, is the region’s most ecologically diverse protected area. The sanctuary is dominated by a 2 km long recovering Lake Ontario marshland complex, with woodland trails that feature towering oak and hickory trees in excess of 100 years, and includes the largest Bitternut Hickory in Canada with a trunk diameter of 1.25 m. Once in the valley the surrounding urban environment disappears and an extensive boardwalk system brings wild Carolinian Canada into full view.

Head-of-the-Lake Land Trust, For Nature, Forever
The Hamilton Naturalists’ Club (HNC) is a registered charity that has been active in protecting nature in Hamilton and Halton since 1919. The Head-of-the-Lake Land Trust (HLT), is an HNC program that works with landowners who want to permanently protect natural features on their lands. The Land Trust can facilitate a wide range of conservation options. Donations of land or conservation easements are eligible for special tax incentives under the federal Ecological Gifts Program.

Building Partnerships for Healthy Communities
For over 50 years, Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) has worked with partners and landowners to restore the watershed’s natural environment. The vast majority of the Credit River watershed’s lands and waters are privately owned and building partnerships with residents and other stakeholders is key to the long-term protection of this important resource. The Carolinian Zone in Halton forms a small but important part of the watershed, encompassing the southeastern extremities of the towns of Oakville, Milton and Halton Hills. CVC offers a private landowner tree planting service and CVC’s Green Cities initiative strives to build the connections between a healthy environment and human health. CVC partners with local residents, businesses and institutions to enhance the natural features and ecological functions in the urban and urbanizing areas throughout the watershed and create more liveable communities.

Stewarding the Urban Forest
The Halton Peel Woodlands and Wildlife Stewardship’s new urban forest initiative is aimed at enhancing natural cover in residential environments. Urban forests are critical to healthy communities. Trees provide vital environmental services that protect homes from heat, wind, air pollution and flooding. This program provides practical tools for homeowners and businesses including a planting list of native trees and shrubs. The group also facilitates tree planting events in Oakville, Burlington, Milton, Acton and Georgetown.

These are just a few of the many groups working to protect habitat in your region. See the back page for more Conservation Partners.
The Natural Wonders of Halton Region

Iroquois Shoreline Woods
Surrounded by residential subdivisions, a golf course, and industry, this is one of the Region’s largest remaining upland forests south of the Niagara Escarpment. Red and White Oak, Shagbark Hickory and Sugar Maple are found in the Woods, along with the provincially rare Pale Blueberry and Sharp-leaved Goldenrod.

Crawford Lake
This small kettle lake atop the Niagara Escarpment was left behind when the glaciers melted. The bottom layer of water never mixes (meromictic), and contains undisturbed layers of pollen, allowing the history of tree distribution to be studied. The lake is surrounded by a 468 ha (1156 ac) park protected by Conservation Halton and many hectares of private wooded land. The lush forests are home to northern species such as Sugar Maple and Red Oak, as well as the southern Black Maple, and a reconstructed 15th century Iroquoian village.

Sassafras Woods
At 136 ha (336 ac), this Grindstone Creek Woodland is another of the few remaining sizeable forests in Halton, south of the escarpment. It contains, among other southern species, a magnificent grove of 15 m tall Sassafras. Notable wildflower rarities include the largest colony of Yellow Mandarin and one of Ontario’s largest stands of American Columbo. The nationally threatened American Chestnut tree is also found here.

Bronte Creek Provincial Park
This 684 ha (1690 ac) park is located in the middle of Oakville, yet boasts some of the largest stands of Carolinian forest in the region. A natural oasis for over 5 million people living within the Greater Toronto Area, the park is home to such rare species as the Red-headed Woodpecker, the Northern Shrike, and the Northern Bush Katydid. The volunteer group, Friends of Bronte Creek, provide educational materials such as trail signs and trail guides, help maintain the park grounds and hold special events at the Park. Come, enjoy your wild neighbours.

Links Connect Nature and the Game
Robbie and Sharon Robinson, Superintendents of the Hidden Lake Golf Club in Burlington, achieved their long-time goal of becoming a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary in 2007. For more than ten years, they have worked to protect their local watershed and natural heritage. This certification reflects their continued efforts to enhance wildlife habitat. Their plan includes naturalizing areas that are not in play, restricting the use of pesticides, planting native species and encouraging ecological diversity. Hidden Lake Golf Club is one of only 34 golf courses in Ontario to receive such an accreditation. The Robinsons are Watershed Stewards as recognized by the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program.
These folks and other neighbours too numerous to mention are quietly helping to restore our landscape, to protect rare wildlife, and to make your home a safer place to live by keeping the air and water clean. You can help too, in many ways.

Clean Water. Healthy Livestock
Charlie and Nancy Tilt understood the nutrient problems in their pond were due to rainwater that was draining from the barn eavestrough through the barnyard. With funding from the federal government’s Agricultural Environmental Stewardship Initiative, they re-routed the drainage into a grassy area before reaching the pond. “We’re very pleased,” said Nancy. “Not only are we experiencing better water quality in the pond for the ducks and geese, but we’ve benefited in other ways as well. We don’t have water coming into our barn anymore and we don’t have to worry about the foundation being damaged.” The Tilts are Watershed Stewards as recognized by the Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program.

Restoring linkages along the Escarpment
Many years ago, Paul Fisher saw an opportunity to close a gap on his land in the woodlands that lined the brow of the Niagara Escarpment. He planted a mix of Red Oak, Sugar Maple, White Birch and White Spruce, and tended them as they grew into a healthy woodland. His son Peter continued the tradition of conservation, managing the woodland for timber in a sustainable way. Today, Peter and his son Jamie carry on the conservation work that Paul Fisher started. Many farmers like the Fishers frequently engage in stewardship work without financial assistance and with great personal commitment to create a healthier landscape for their community.

Return to Eden: Stream Restoration at Hidden Valley Park
Erosion problems in Grindstone Creek were degrading water quality and fish habitat in this important tributary for Hamilton Harbour and Lake Ontario. The reach through Hidden Valley Park provides spawning and nursery habitat for Rainbow Trout, salmon and suckers. The City of Burlington commissioned the Grindstone Creek Stream Restoration Project in 2001. A minimum 3 m “No-Mow” strip was established to help protect the creek’s edges from erosion, slow and filter stormwater runoff and provide better wildlife habitat. The Aldershot Community Council, Field and Stream Rescue Team and the City of Burlington organized volunteer planting events, resulting in over 1000 trees and shrubs being planted. On the last Saturday in May, the Field and Stream Rescue Team hold their annual rubber duck race in Hidden Valley Park.

The ‘Living Classroom’
Susan Kennedy and the students of Brookville Public School planted a ‘living classroom’ showcasing Carolinian habitats: tallgrass prairie, meadow, mixed forest, shrub thicket, and a butterfly garden. Native plants were carefully selected from local nurseries. The students now watch native birds, butterflies, amphibians and small mammals visit the garden. The entire community turned out to celebrate their work and both students and the community have learned a great deal and gained a sense of pride and stewardship for the unique nature on their doorstep. The Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program and Conservation Halton were pleased to be a part of this project.

Carolinian Canada’s Signature Sites Guide provides more information on two of the important natural areas in Halton Region.
**AROUND THE HOME**

**Carolinian Canada In My Back Yard**
Attract butterflies, hummingbirds and song birds to your garden by growing low-maintenance native plants. Mix it up with a variety of species and structures – a key Carolinian characteristic is high natural diversity.

**Nature at Home**
Nurture that towering tree or protect a habitat corner from disturbance. Resist the desire to ‘clean it up’— leaf litter, gnarled branches, old logs, tall grass and winter gardens are important for diverse and interesting wildlife.

**Eliminate Toxins & Save your Money**
Grow a lawn safe for kids and wildlife. Use organic fertilizers such as compost, lawn clippings and leaves. Pesticide alternatives are less expensive too. Reduce water use and maintenance by replacing lawn with native ground covers.

**Nature Knows Best**
Avoid planting or dumping in natural areas. Although often well intended, introduced plants, compost and clippings can smother, invade or otherwise damage natural ecosystems. Avoid exotic plantings near natural areas.

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**AROUND THE COUNTRYSIDE**

**Balance the Landscape**
Plant native species next to existing natural areas to multiply their benefits. Create undisturbed interior forest or tallgrass prairie habitats, both rare in Carolinian Canada.

**Make Connections**
Work with neighbours to grow habitat linkages along fences, roads, watercourses and drains. Locate new trails strategically to restore green corridors in rural or urban communities, rather than impacting existing natural areas.

**Water is Life**
Plant natural buffers on slopes and shorelines to protect water quality and aquatic ecosystems. The wider the buffer, the greater the benefits.

**Manage for Sustainable Income**
Work with your local community or association to adopt Best Management Practices (BMP’s) for timber, tourism, agriculture, recreation and other industries. BMP’s help wildlife and also protect long term economic value.

**Plan it Right for Love and Money**
Consult a habitat specialist to develop a plan for your backyard or back 40. With a plan, you may be eligible for a variety of conservation grants and incentives.

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**Why Should I Care?**
Natural habitat benefits city and rural homes, farms and communities with important landscape functions.

**Climate Survival**
A healthy, natural landscape is our primary survival toolkit in a warming world and uncertain future.

**Clean Air**
Natural habitat filters air, provides oxygen and mitigates the urban heat island effect.

**Green Infrastructure**
A linked natural network has proven economic, health and psychological benefits as well as being essential to ecological health.

**Productive Land**
Natural habitat builds soil quality and prevents erosion.

**Healthy Communities**
Studies show that people are happier and property values increase around natural areas.

**Diversity of Life**
Wild places provide beautiful landscapes, natural pest control and homes for wildlife.

**Energy Savings & Safety**
Trees protect buildings and residents from extreme heat, cold, wind and noise.

**Clean Water**
Wetlands and buffers filter water, reduce pollution and guard against floods and droughts.

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**What Can I Do?**
**Stewardship Tips for Rural and Urban Landowners**
Whether your land is large or small, contains natural features or is currently manicured, you can contribute to natural heritage protection. As you get to know your property, rural or urban, in all seasons, you will know best what it needs to stay healthy.
THE PRIDE OF HALTON

Landowners Help Rare Species

Many landowners in Halton are saving habitat, helping Species at Risk and protecting Halton heritage at the same time. Whether you are a rural or urban dweller, you can enjoy a diversity of wild and beneficial neighbours once you give them a little space.

What are They?

Species at Risk are plants or animals in danger of disappearing from the wild here. In Halton over 21 are officially listed ‘at risk’ in Canada and 69 as rare in Ontario, among the highest levels in the nation. Local recovery teams are working with experts and community members to protect critically rare species, habitats and landscapes that support them.

Rare Gems of Nature Close at Hand

Many fascinating and rare wild neighbours are found in Halton Region. Several, like Henslow’s Sparrow, are globally rare. Many of these species, such as the Hooded Warbler or the Eastern Ribbonsnake, are hard to find unless you know where to look. The Redside Dace and the Silver Shiner are some of the rare fish found in our creeks and rivers.

The Redside Dace Swims Again

The colourful Redside Dace is a small fish with a big impact. It is a provincial and national Species at Risk, and lives in several small streams throughout Halton. The main threats to the Redside Dace are the siltation of streams due to erosion and loss of habitat from vegetation removal. Halton residents can help by diverting rainwater onto gardens and lawns, reducing pesticide use and planting stream buffers. The Halton Peel Woodlands & Wildlife Stewardship has embarked on a Redside Dace recovery project with the Town of Halton Hills, Credit River Anglers Association, Credit Valley Conservation, and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to promote greater public awareness and habitat restoration.

BUTTERNUT

(Juglans cinerea)

ENDANGERED

Look for:
• Tree with a broad crown
• Young trees have grey, smooth bark; mature trees have grey, flat-topped ridges in a diamond pattern
• Large compound leaf, with 10 to 16 leaflets

Did You Know?
The Butternut is a member of the Walnut family
• The nut is edible
• It needs full sun to regenerate and thrive
• Is at risk from a serious fungal disease called Butternut Canker which causes early decline, mortality and reduced regeneration.

REWARD: Help conserve a valuable Carolinian species

HELP! IF YOU SEE THIS ENDANGERED TREE CONTACT:
Butternut Recovery Team, www.fgca.net, Greg Bales 905-713-7410, greg.bales@ontario.ca, or the Ontario Woodlot Association at 1-888-791-1103 or contact wildlife@carolinian.org

Carolinian Canada has 1/3 of the country’s species at risk, many of which live in Halton. Get to know your wild neighbours through Carolinian Canada’s species at risk kit and NEW Habitat Workshops.

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

(Melanerpes erythrocephalus)

THREATENED

Look for:
• Adult birds with bright crimson heads.
• Undersides white, black back with white patch on each wing.

Did You Know?
These woodpeckers nest in cavities of dead and dying trees in open deciduous woods
• Attracted to peanuts and suet at birdfeeders
• Is at risk due to habitat loss from logging, firewood cutting, and dead-tree removal for aesthetic purposes and competition for cavity nest sites in trees.

REWARD: Thrill of seeing this rare species!

HELP! IF YOU SEE THIS ANIMAL CONTACT:
Jody Allair, Bird Studies Canada @ 519-586-3531, extension 21 or contact wildlife@carolinian.org
Find a Conservation Partner

A Helping Hand for Landowners

A Good Place to Start for Property Assistance

Conservation Halton conservationhalton.on.ca 905-336-1158 Habitat protection & tree planting

Grand River Conservation Authority grandriver.ca 1-866-900-4722 Habitat protection & tree planting

Hamilton-Halton Watershed Stewardship Program of Halton and Hamilton Conservation Authorities
Sheila O’Neal 905-352-2181 ext. 164 or 905-336-1158 ext. 263 Habitat stewardship information, advice and on-site assistance

Halton Peel Woodlands and Wildlife Stewardship
Greg Bales 905-713-7410 www.ontariostewardship.org/ontarioStewardship/home/osHPWSIndex.asp Promoting stewardship of land, forest, water and wildlife

Hamilton Conservation Authority conservationhamilton.ca 905-648-4427 Habitat conservation & restoration

Credit Valley Conservation Authority creditvalleycons.com 800-668-5557 Heath Yates ext. 450 Rural habitat stewardship information Donna Havinga ext. 450 Urban stewardship information

Specialized Project Assistance or Funding

Ducks Unlimited Canada ducksunlimited.org 1-888-402-4444 Wetland protection and creation

Head-of-the-Lake Land Trust hamiltonnature.org Jennifer Barker 905-324-3339 Land protection, conservation easements

Nature Conservancy of Canada natureconservancy.ca James Duncan 1-866-281-5331 Land protection, conservation easements

Ontario Forestry Association foreston.ca 1-800-387-0790 Ontario Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources mnr.gov.on.ca/mnr/speciesatrisk/ 519-826-4955 Species at Risk Stewardship Fund

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association ontariosoilcrop.org 1-800-265-9751 Jonathan Watchurst, Halton Rep for Environmental Farm Plan

TD Friends of the Environment Foundation ttd.com/fef/ Funding for community environmental projects

Meet Your Neighbours – Learn, Volunteer, Network

Halton Environmental Network the-hen.net 905-339-2290 Clearinghouse for information on Halton environmental groups

Halton/North Peel Naturalist Club haltonnorthpeelnaturalists.org Learn about natural heritage in Halton Volunteer for clean up work

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• Plan Your Habitat Project
• Get Ideas to Enhance your Property & Reduce your Ecological Footprint
• Meet Local Conservation Partners & Other Landowners
• Consult with Experts
• Find out about Funding & Assistance

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NEW!
CARING FOR NATURE HANDS-ON
A New Workshop Series for Landowners
• Plan Your Habitat Project
• Get Ideas to Enhance your Property & Reduce your Ecological Footprint
• Meet Local Conservation Partners & Other Landowners
• Consult with Experts
• Find out about Funding & Assistance

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