

**Natural Areas as Neighbours
Homeowner's Guide
For Properties Adjacent to Environmentally Sensitive Areas**

What are Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)?

Welcome to the neighbourhood! You are living in a unique area bordering on land which has been designated environmentally sensitive. ESAs are special areas containing significant natural features or providing ecological functions that are important for maintaining a healthy and diverse natural environment. These include functions which benefit us all, such as:

- filtering pollutants from the air and water
- producing life-sustaining oxygen
- providing a diversity of habitat for a variety of plants and animals, including rare species
- containing large, relatively undisturbed expanses of natural, native plant communities and/or geological features that are unique in Halton's landscape.
- maintaining summer flows and moderate temperatures in streams
- maintaining groundwater quality and quantity
- reducing soil erosion and run-off.

ESAs are of such significance to all of us as to warrant special protection for the best long-term interest of the people and environment of Halton Region. Halton's Official Plan contains policies which restrict the alteration of the physical and biological features of ESAs. However, individual landowners, practising good stewardship, provide the best possible protection for these special areas.

Whether the ESA next to your property is a woodland, wetland or meadow, the special attributes of these areas add not only diversity to your life, but important environmental benefits for your community as a whole.

The attached air photo shows the boundaries of the ESA bordering your property. An excerpt from Halton Region's ESA Study is also attached describing the significance of this area. The features described in the ESA study may not all be near your property. The ESA bordering your property is part of a much larger natural area, and all the small parts together add to the significance of the entire ESA.

How You Can Help

What you do on your property can have an impact on neighbouring land. Good stewardship practices on your own property can benefit both yourself and the neighbouring ESA. Respect the function and attributes of the ESA.

One of the best and easiest ways to protect an ESA is to avoid encroachment.

- Use environmentally friendly alternatives to pesticides to treat your lawns and gardens. Toxic chemicals should only be used if absolutely necessary. Use any fertilizer, herbicide or pesticide sparingly and under appropriate conditions to minimize impacts on natural vegetation, wildlife and aquatic habitat.
- Drain your swimming pool away from the ESA. The chemicals that you use to keep the water clean and clear will kill most fish and the organisms that they eat. Check with your local conservation authority before draining any water from your property.
- Use native, non-invasive species for landscaping, especially along the edge of existing woodland, wetland, meadow or stream. Non-native species can be very aggressive and can outcompete the native plants. Seed and fruit-bearing shrubs and trees can provide additional food and cover for birds. Suitable native species for landscaping purposes are listed at the back of this guide.
- Construct fences, sheds, treehouses, kennels, pools, etc. away from the edge of the ESA. The building department of your local municipality can advise you of any permit requirements.
- Compost your yard and household vegetable wastes in an appropriate site on your property, rather than encroaching on the ESA. Dumping such materials in the ESA can smother and destroy existing vegetation. Another alternative for removal of brush and yard waste is the Halton Region pick-up service. Check the enclosed calendar for pick-up dates and locations in your area.
- Excavated fill from your yard can be taken to the landfill site or disposed of in a location where fill is needed. Fill cannot be placed in a wetland.
- Dispose of hazardous household waste at an established waste depot. Be aware of the connection between your property and the groundwater supply. Materials spilled on the ground eventually make their way down to the water table or into nearby watercourses.

- Your septic system requires regular pumping and maintenance. Practice water conservation to control the volume of water going through your system. Be aware that it is illegal to connect a sump pump to a septic system.
- Use your lawn sprinkling system efficiently to minimize run-off and evaporation.

Your property may border on a woodland. Woodlands offer many benefits. They act like sponges, soaking up rain and snowmelt and releasing it slowly into our creeks to keep them flowing year-round. They reduce the potential for damaging floods downstream. Woodlands replenish groundwater storage areas which supply our drinking water. Trees and shrubs protect woodland slopes and streambanks from eroding. They shade our watercourses, moderating summer water temperatures for the benefit of fish and other aquatic life. Woodlands provide habitat and food for a variety of wildlife species, and trees improve air quality and produce oxygen.

If your property borders on a woodland,

- Resist the urge to “tidy up” in wooded areas. Leave groundcover and understory vegetation. The existing vegetation provides food and shelter for all forms of life, including insects, salamanders, birds and small mammals.
- Leave fallen branches, trees or other deadwood. The decomposition of woody material on the forest floor is important for replenishing nutrients in the soil that support the living vegetation. Fallen trees and branches provide food, shelter and cover for a variety of wildlife.
- Leave dead standing trees and branches where they are, unless removal is necessary to avoid property damage or personal injury. Even dead trees provide homes and food for mammals, birds, reptiles and insects.

One of the most attractive features of living next door to any natural area are the occasional and unexpected encounters with wildlife. Many of these encounters are sheer pleasure, but they can also sometimes be a nuisance.

- Store your garbage in animal-proof containers in an enclosed area. Otherwise, raccoons, coyotes, skunks, foxes, as well as cats and dogs running loose, will help themselves.
- Mosquitoes are never welcome, but try and think of them in terms of the role they play as a food source for birds. Bug repellent when you’re walking, or a screened area when you’re sitting, are easy ways of living through the bug season.

- Do not approach or handle wild animals. Remind your children that any domestic or wild animal may carry rabies and should not be approached.
- Be aware that large expanses of manicured lawn attract Canada Geese.
- Do not feed ducks and geese. Human food does not provide the appropriate nutrition and can lead to an unnatural dependence on “handouts”.

You can help protect our wildlife populations.

- Do not “rescue” baby animals. Most of the time they are not lost, and their parents will return to care for them.
- To protect birds and small animals, do not allow your dog or cat to roam.
- Provide bird feeders with appropriate seed mixtures and/or suet for the types of birds you wish to attract.

You may wish to explore the ESA next to you. ESAs may be privately or publicly owned.

- If publicly owned, use only marked trails and avoid creating your own side trails. Avoid damaging trailside vegetation, and leave wildflowers for others to enjoy. Leash your pets and clean up their wastes, and leave small creatures, such as frogs and salamanders where they live.
- If privately owned, seek permission from the landowner. Respect any conditions the owner requests.

Living next door to an ESA is a unique opportunity for you and your family. Enjoy it and care for it, and you will ensure that the ecological features and function of the ESA are maintained for your family and your community for generations to come.

Where to Get More Information

Halton Region Conservation Authority

Credit Valley Conservation

Grand River Conservation Authority

Region of Halton Planning and Public Works Department

This guide has been prepared by Halton’s Ecological and Environmental Advisory Committee (EEAC). EEAC is a Region-appointed group of environmental experts

who volunteer their time to review development applications and policies that affect the environment with a focus on ESAs. If you wish, members of EEAC may be available to visit you and discuss the significance of the features of the ESA adjacent to you.

Additional information about EEAC is available from the Committee's Staff Liaison at the Region of Halton's Planning and Public Works Department.

EEAC wishes to acknowledge that the wording in some of this brochure was inspired by *Living with Nature: West Side Waterloo*.