
Executive Summary

Vision Statement

To become one of Conservation Halton's regionally significant Niagara Escarpment Parks while protecting and enhancing the natural heritage features of the escarpment – its prominent bluff, pristine cliff ecosystem, forests and fields, as well as providing excellence in high quality educational and recreational visitor experiences through enhanced educational facilities and amenities that include access to scenic views, heritage educational and interpretive opportunities, hiking trails and passive recreation.

Significant Attributes of Mount Nemo Conservation Area

Mount Nemo Conservation Area possesses an impressive array of natural and cultural heritage features including:

- One of the most pristine cliff ecosystems in the province and best caving in the Greater Toronto Area;
- A network of 6.8 kilometres of hiking trails including the 5.25 kilometres of the Bruce Trail;
- Part of the Niagara Escarpment UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve and identified as a Natural Environment park under the NEPOSS.
- Includes both the Mount Nemo Escarpment Provincially Significant Life Science and Earth Science Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) representing the escarpment plain, rim, cliff talus slope and shale slope forests; as well as the Mount Nemo Escarpment Woods Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA)
- Over 300 plant species (7 rare, 11 uncommon), 46 bird species (4 rare, 5 uncommon), 13 mammal species (1 rare), 4 reptiles and 9 amphibians can be found within the conservation area or in the immediate surrounding area;
- Spectacular viewing points looking north to Milton, east to Oakville and south to Burlington and Lake Ontario;
- The former Lowville Quarry as a cultural heritage space;
- Protected habitat for six species at risk as well as three globally rare and four provincially rare habitat types, and 124 ancient Eastern White Cedars one of which is over 876 years of age;
- Individual and group attendance figures indicate approximately 16,000 visitors in 2010;
- Existing natural heritage features provide the equivalent of \$582,623 in ecosystem services annually.

Existing Policy Framework

The *Master Plan for Mount Nemo Conservation Area* builds on and supports existing Conservation Halton and provincial policy documents including the *Conservation Halton Strategic Plan (2009)*, *Halton Escarpment Parks – A Limestone Legacy plan (2007)* and the *Niagara Escarpment Plan (2005)*.

The *Limestone Legacy* document outlines a draft strategy to protect and enhance Conservation Halton's system of Escarpment parks through a unique partnership between Halton Region and Conservation Halton.

Within the provincial *Niagara Escarpment Plan (2005)*, Mount Nemo Conservation Area is designated as a Natural Environment Park that accommodates activities including high quality, low to moderate intensity recreation such as hiking, rock climbing, nature viewing and picnicking.

Summary of Significant Issues and Challenges

Financial Constraints: Over the past 20 years, with changes in government and priorities, Conservation Halton's funding for conservation area development and enhancement has almost disappeared. Therefore, Conservation Halton has been primarily using conservation area revenues to offset operating expenses with limited funds for basic capital maintenance work, new facilities and tools to monitor environmental impact. Currently there is no real base-level capital-funding source. This limited funding has resulted in the deterioration of natural heritage features, facilities and amenities as well as the quality of the visitor experience. Limited funding threatens Conservation Halton's ability to continue to protect and maintain, let alone improve or enhance, the conservation area.

Mount Nemo Conservation Area, along with the other Conservation Halton conservation areas, suffers from the impacts of severely limited tax-supported funding. Funding models in many other Conservation Authorities in Southern Ontario include regional, municipal and/or provincial tax levy support. Additionally, development charges, permit fees and other associated development fees are charged against Conservation Halton for conservation area capital development projects. Other park agencies in the region are normally exempt from these fees and charges.

Growth in Visitation: Over the last five years, Conservation Halton parks have experienced a 9.4 percent annual increase in visitation, while the regional population has grown at a rate of 4.5 percent over the same period. This growth trend is projected to continue, if not accelerate over the next ten years.

Natural Heritage Protection: Mount Nemo Conservation Area's unique and diverse natural heritage system is generally well protected and secure, but some deterioration was identified at certain heavily used locations. These impacts highlight the need for stronger monitoring and protection measures, especially in light of the population and visitation projections.

Cultural Heritage Protection: There is one registered archaeological site within Mount Nemo Conservation Area representing a pre-European settlement site, as well as the abandoned Lowville Quarry site area.

Visitor Experience: While the natural and cultural features of Mount Nemo Conservation Area are spectacular and unique, the present built amenities, facilities and infrastructure are inadequate to serve the projected growth in visitation. While visitors currently enjoy their experience at Mount Nemo Conservation Area, continued growth will put facilities beyond the capacity they were built for, which will detract from the quality of the visitor experience.

Education and Programming: The educational programming at Mount Nemo Conservation Area is not well developed. Given the existing natural heritage, visual quality and cultural spaces, there is potential for interpretive programming aimed at scenic viewing, the geological history of the escarpment and the aggregate industry in the region.

Recommended Policies

The master plan has been developed to support Mount Nemo Conservation Area as a significant regional destination for local visitors and tourists:

- Ensures protection and enhancement of the natural heritage and cultural spaces of the site;
- Promotes environmental values, excellence in education, healthy lifestyles and outdoor recreation;
- Prescribes a workable visitor impact management strategy (VIM) that addresses the expected increase in visitation and any accompanying potential impacts;
- Specifies development requirements and standards that meet the appropriate level of design excellence in high quality educational, interpretive and recreational facilities, programs and amenities; and;
- Outlines a realistic financial management strategy that defines funding and revenue generation requirements, potential partnerships, management and operational costs and that aims at ensuring long-term viability.

Highlights of the Development Proposal

The master plan identifies a range of new facilities to provide enhanced natural heritage protection, visitor experience, amenities, educational and interpretive opportunities and recreational conveniences. Financial and environmental sustainability are defining, and in some cases limiting, factors in the proposed list of master plan recommendations. Some of the proposed development may be exempted from requiring a Niagara Escarpment Development Permit in accordance with section 5.41 of Ontario Regulation 828/90. The main elements of the master plan are summarized as follows:

- A state-of-the-art, 150sq metres interpretive pavilion to accommodate Mount Nemo Conservation Area's expanded role in information, orientation, education and interpretation, which features storylines on escarpment geology, scenic viewing and the Lowville Quarry.
- Enhancements to the Brock Harris Lookout and associated trail access.
- A new interpretive lookout at the Lowville Quarry site.
- A system of entrance, directional, interpretive and other signage that is consistently branded across all Conservation Halton conservation areas and standardized to meet accessibility, readability, risk management and marketing objectives.
- An enhanced, sustainably-designed system of small-scale roads and parking areas that promotes safety and security for visitors and a positive sense of arrival, and which is tastefully designed to harmonize with the natural setting of the conservation area.
- Site technology upgrades, including telephone and video surveillance (future).
- Accessibility upgrades for all structures and pathways to meet Accessibility for Ontarians Disabilities Act (AODA) built environment standards (2013).
- Trail system improvements to ensure protection and enhancement of the natural heritage system including some re-routing, re-construction and closures especially along the escarpment rim and in other sensitive sites.
- New overflow parking and access road (3600sq meters) to accommodate current visitor capacity.
- A new relocated 50sq meter gatehouse
- An upgraded standardized palette of day-use passive recreation amenities such as picnic shelter (150 sq. m), comfort stations, site furniture, etc.

- Site service upgrades including electrical service and waste management that use sustainable technologies that demonstrate respect for the environmental values associated with the site.

Overall Capital Development Costs

Overall capital development cost for the build out of the proposed *Master Plan for Mount Nemo Conservation Area* amounts to approximately \$ 4 million over a ten-year period. A generalized breakdown of this amount is summarized below.

Signage	\$ 85,000
Roads and parking	\$ 1,175,500
Picnic and site furnishings	\$ 95,000
Infrastructure / gatehouse	\$ 269,000
Trails / interpretive pavilion	\$ 515,000
Restoration of natural features	\$ 877,500
Visitors Impact Management Plan	\$ 150,000
Subtotal	\$ 3,083,000
<u>Soft costs, fees, contingency (30%)</u>	<u>\$ 924,900</u>
Total	\$ 4,007,900

Overview of Financial Parameters

The key financial and related parameters of the development plan for Mount Nemo Conservation Area are as follows:

- The cost of the development plan for Mount Nemo Conservation Area over the 10-year development timeframe is just over \$ 4 million (measured in terms of 2010 dollars) and a stable base-level capital-funding source must be established to facilitate plan implementation.
- Attendance at Mount Nemo Conservation Area is expected to grow significantly to just over 26,000 by the year 2020.
- While more visitors will generate increased revenues, the financial analysis in this report demonstrates that by itself this will not be sufficient to offset the higher costs of operation; however, despite increased operating costs, Mount Nemo Conservation Area can operate on a break even basis or even generate a small surplus through a variety of strategies.
- To provide the enhanced level of customer services and environmental protection called for in this master plan and not incur an operating deficit, a pricing study must be undertaken to determine how to increase net revenues or identify means to subsidize operating costs.

Putting it in Context – Conservation Halton’s Contributions to Society and the Environment

Conservation Halton creates significant direct economic benefit in the community. The operations of Conservation Halton, plus the expenditures of visitors who come to the region to utilize the programs and services offered, create nearly \$12 million of additional gross domestic product (GDP) in Halton

Region alone. This is associated with 274 jobs in the Region, \$8.4 million in wages and salaries and \$5.7 million in additional taxes paid. If this were a single business or industry, it would be recognized as a significant component of the economic base of the Region. Beyond Halton Region itself, there are further economic benefits accruing across the Province of Ontario.

In addition to the economic impacts, Conservation Halton provides a valuable service to the community in terms of 'ecosystem services' – the impact of the forest and wetlands maintained by Conservation Halton in terms of filtering and cleaning water and air. Ecosystem valuation quantifies the cost of providing these services commercially, as opposed to having conservation authority lands provide these benefits 'for free.' The estimated savings to society from these services provided by Conservation Halton's holdings are nearly \$16 million annually.

Conservation Halton conservation areas provide a growing population with access to abundant, natural green space for leisure and recreation. More specifically, these spaces offer opportunities for recreation that promotes healthy living through physical activity and exercise. By keeping costs low, Conservation Halton conservation areas strive to offer accessibility to all residents while supporting culturally and socioeconomically diverse communities. In addition to serving local residents, as significant regional destinations, the conservation areas also attract tourists to Halton Region.

The availability of Conservation Halton spaces, programs and services adds considerably to the perceived quality of life in Halton Region. This in turn can be extremely valuable in attracting the highly mobile 'creative class,' those individuals most likely to create businesses, invest in the community and bring new ideas and energies into the region. Thus, indirectly, Conservation Halton operations add to the attractiveness of the region overall as a place to live and work.

Financial Sustainability Strategy

The master planning process has made it abundantly clear that:

- While the prime focus of Conservation Halton's conservation areas has been, and will continue to be, protection and enhancement of the natural heritage resources, it is also imperative to consider the social and economic components of the sustainability model;
- As growth in visitation inevitably increases, so too must the investment in infrastructure, amenities, related facilities and the visitor impact management that is required to protect and enhance the natural heritage features and, thereby, achieve and maintain the necessary balance between protection and usage;
- Protection of natural heritage resources requires key investments in:
 - Enhancements to existing facilities, infrastructure and amenities;
 - New facilities: educational, recreational and interpretive;
 - Protection and enhancement initiatives: visitor impact management, restoration, etc.

An annual base level of financial support should be sourced through Halton Region (the Province of Ontario and / or Municipalities, etc.) as the main recipient(s) of the benefits provided by this conservation areas. This should result from (and possibly be correlated with) the significant population growth occurring in the region, which will by itself place a heavier demand on Conservation Halton's areas and facilities. A new and different business model needs to be developed for Conservation Halton; one that acknowledges the significant economic benefits conferred upon Halton Region by

Conservation Halton and recognizes the pressures placed upon Conservation Halton by population growth.

Consequences of not providing adequate on-going capital funding may include the need to implement one or more of the following actions:

- Raise admission fees at specific conservation areas;
- Raise membership fees;
- Charge differentially at peak times;
- Limit visitation;
- Limit access to certain conservation areas;
- Cut back on some of the programs and services currently offered;
- Cutback the proposed capital development program or extend it beyond the projected 10-year timeframe with subsequent increases in cost.

Conservation Halton creates valuable environmental, social and economic benefits, and provides significant value-added services to Halton Region. To enable Conservation Halton to continue to provide these benefits, ongoing investment in Conservation Halton's conservation area facilities and programs is required.