

INVENTORY

Park visitation / Parking / Vehicular Access

- Current annual visitation levels approximately 80,000 visitors.
- Visitors to the park are increasing each year.
- Attraction to the waterfalls is a regional day trip destination primarily on summer/fall weekends.
- Holiday long weekends also see a high number of visitors unless the weather is inclement.
- For the month of July the number of vehicles parking at Spencer Gorge increased by 3,000 vehicles from 2010 to 2011.

Hamilton Emergency Services (HES) Access

- Emergency Services access to the site is currently from Webster's Falls Road. Access to Webster's Falls Road is through a gate closed on weekends. Gate is activated by an access code or siren.

Trails/walkways/stairs and overlooks

- The pedestrian trail/walkway system includes the Bruce Trail-Secondary Trail, a number of stair sections (metal, wood, stone), an accessible asphalt trail (constructed in 2000) to the overlook area at Webster's Falls, on-road pedestrian connections to the site, and the pedestrian walkway from the Greensville Optimist Community Park.
- The inventory identifies width, surface materials, accessibility or level of difficulty, condition, general use and maintenance requirements.
- Several sections of the main trail require improvements to prevent ongoing erosion. Some trails/stair sections are in poor condition and require improvement and/or replacement.

Open Space, Picnic Areas and supporting Infrastructure

- Open lawn areas include the shared use of overflow parking areas, as well as the open space lawn areas along Webster's Creek.
- The historic 'romantic' landscape style of the Webster's Falls area features the remnant dam and restored cobble bridge (restored in 2000), stone channel, decorative metal railings, stone overlook, stone steps, stately trees and spectacular waterfalls, all set off by the open lawn area.
- The open lawn areas are also used for groups and families for picnic, cricket, gathering, weddings, and general use.
- The picnic pavilion's recent repairs include a new roof. The slate floor tiles are in need of repair.

Natural Areas

- Major portions of the park are designated as provincially significant Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) and a locally significant Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). There are also several cultural heritage features located in the park, mainly along the Spencer Creek.
- A number of large shade trees have been removed due to age and condition, from the cultural heritage areas.

ANALYSIS

- Develop strategies for accommodating current and projected numbers of park visitors (ie: encouraging shorter park visits).
- The capacity of the existing parking lots and overflow parking are exceeded at peak use periods-weekends and holidays during summer/fall.
- Overflow parking occurs on local roadways, resulting in illegal on-street parking and traffic congestion.
- Analysis will include data assembly, parking and traffic analysis.

- Alternate strategies for access to the site by HES to be assessed, and to include a review of park facilities, design and traffic analysis. Public input will be sought on neighbourhood impacts.

- Assess trails/stairs for repair, replacement, or removal.
- Analyze trail use, maintenance, and trail signage.
- New lookout opportunities will be considered through public input.
- Develop management strategies (i.e. seasonal trail closures and access to the gorge) for protection of sensitive areas.
- Determine through public input, opportunities for improved pedestrian circulation throughout the study area and recommendations for improvement.

- Issues associated with peak season use include infrastructure demand (washrooms, garbage and recycling).
- Portable washroom facilities and garbage/recycling facilities require frequent collection, and ongoing maintenance. There are issues related to the high use of these facilities and constant on-going maintenance levels required. Garbage and recycling bins are frequently overflowing after a long busy weekend, or during peak park use.

- Analyze current impacts to the natural ecosystem through current uses and management practices.
- Determine the appropriate balance between park active use and natural areas protection will be proposed.
- Identify long term protection, development and management guidelines.
- Identify opportunities for tree planting in the cultural heritage areas.
- Restrict encroachment to natural areas through landscape maintenance practices.