



**Report to:** Conservation Advisory Board

**Approved for Circulation By:** Lisa Burnside, CAO

**Reviewed By:** Matthew Hall, Director, Capital Projects & Strategic Services

**Prepared By:** Madolyn Armstrong, Landscape Architect

**Meeting Date:** June 12, 2025

**Subject:** Tiffany Falls Visitor Use Management Plan

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**Recommendation:**

**THAT the Conservation Advisory Board recommends to the Board of Directors;**

**THAT the Tiffany Falls Visitor Use Management Plan be approved; and further**

**THAT staff be directed to implement Visitor Use Management Strategy #5 as recommended in Section 9.1 of the Plan as well as it's associated Action Items outlined in Section 9.2.**

**Executive Summary:**

Following a recommendation from the HCA Board of Directors in March 2024, HCA staff developed a Visitor Use Management Plan (VUMP) for the Tiffany Falls Conservation Area. The site faces growing challenges related to visitor access that are affecting the visitor experience, day-to-day management, and its ecological health. The purpose of the VUMP is to evaluate current visitor use trends and pressures, and to recommend strategies to achieve desired conditions.

As a result of this work; HCA staff recommend Strategy #5: Expand the visitor experience to include the property north of Wilson Street, construct a new parking lot on Lower Lion's Club Road, and restrict access to the existing Wilson Street lot.

This strategy is supported by a set of targeted actions to improve visitor use management.

## **Staff Comment / Discussion:**

### Project Background

In 2023, HCA staff began conceptual work on two parking areas in the Dundas Valley: expanding the Artaban Road parking lot and creating a new lot on Lower Lion's Club Road. This work aligned with a 2019 Board-approved report, "HCA Conservation Area – Visitor Management & Vehicle Parking Review," which recommended priority actions to address rising visitation and parking demands.

On February 8, 2024, staff recommended completing detailed designs and submitting Development Permit Applications to the Niagara Escarpment Commission. While the Board supported the Artaban Road expansion, it requested further review before proceeding with the Lower Lion's Club Road lot.

As a result, on March 7, 2024, the Board directed staff to complete a Visitor Use Management Plan for Tiffany Falls Conservation Area before advancing further consideration for the Lower Lion's Club Road project.

### Developing the Falls Visitor Use Management Plan

In response, HCA staff formed a multidisciplinary internal working group with representatives from Capital Projects & Strategic Services, Watershed Management Services, Conservation Area Services, and Marketing and Communications. The group met monthly from April 2024 to January 2025 in order to develop the VUMP.

The team followed the Visitor Use Management Framework developed by the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (U.S. federal agencies), which has been widely adopted, including by Parks Canada. The framework consists of 14 steps, organized into four parts:

#### **Part 1 – Build the Foundation (Steps 1–4)**

This phase defined the project purpose, documented current conditions, and outlined the planning process. Staff focused on three priority areas affected by visitor use:

- Visitor experience
- Staff management
- Ecological conditions

New data gathered in summer 2024 included:

- Ecological fieldwork: Breeding bird and vegetation surveys conducted by HCA staff; supplemented by a 2022 EIS for the Lower Lion's Club Road site.

- Visitor survey: Conducted from May 27 to August 16 via the Bang the Table platform, promoted through newsletters, social media, and on-site posters. A total of 163 responses were received.
- Trail counter: Installed at the first bridge along the trail, tracking pedestrian visits from July 9, 2024, to March 29, 2025.

## **Part 2 – Define Visitor Use Management Direction (Steps 5–7)**

This phase involved establishing desired future conditions, defining acceptable visitor behaviors, and identifying indicators and thresholds.

Desired conditions were based on:

- Visitor experience: Insights from the public survey and incidental feedback to staff.
- Management needs: Input from operations staff.
- Ecological priorities: Based on recent and historical data collected by ecology staff.

## **Part 3 – Identify Management Strategies (Steps 8–11)**

This phase assessed the gap between existing and desired conditions and identified ways to close it.

### Recommended Strategy

Five potential strategies were evaluated (Section 9.1), a summary is below. Only strategy #5 is recommended.

1. Do nothing and let the Conservation Area function as-is - Continue to operate Tiffany Falls in its current state without any significant capital work or management changes.
  - Conclusion: Not recommended. Changes need to be made in order to address safety concerns, visitor satisfaction and impacts to the site.
2. Make improvements to the parking lot and site access to enhance the existing functionality of the Conservation Area.
  - Conclusion: Not recommended. Options to improve existing site access have been exhausted, further action needs to be taken to achieve desired conditions.
3. Close the existing parking lot with the exception of emergency vehicle and maintenance use and create an alternative access system such as a shuttle.
  - Conclusion: Not recommended. Logistics do not match the short trail length, anticipate decreased satisfaction due to long wait times and congestion, cost of implementation is not feasible.
4. Expand the visitor experience to include the property north of Wilson Street and add a second parking lot on Lower Lion's Club Road.

- Conclusion: Not recommended. Issues associated with the existing parking lot will still be present, moving visitor parking between two lots will complicate trip planning and management.
5. Expand the visitor experience to include the property north of Wilson Street, add a new parking lot on Lower Lion's Club Road and restrict access to the existing Wilson Street lot.
- Conclusion: Recommended by HCA staff. Of the five strategies examined, this strategy would provide the most opportunity for improvements to the visitor experience, conservation area management and ecological conditions. Visitor parking would be removed from Wilson Street with the exception of accessible spaces, which would greatly reduce visitor and staff safety concerns. The new lot location would allow for enhanced management systems and controlled access. Ecological management and restoration would be implemented on both the Lower Lion's Club and Tiffany Falls properties.

### Supporting Actions

Nine actions (Section 9.2) are proposed to support the strategy:

1. Design and Approvals – Finalize design and obtain required approvals for the Lower Lion's Club Road parking lot.
2. Automated Access – Install gate systems to manage entry.
3. Improved Signage – Upgrade interpretive, regulatory, and wayfinding signage.
4. Visitor Guidance – Add planting buffers, barriers, and fencing to protect sensitive areas.
5. Ecological Restoration – Implement habitat protection and restoration work.
6. Visitor Information – Enhance trip planning resources and manage promotional efforts.
7. Alternative Transportation – Encourage use of non-vehicular travel options.
8. Trail Infrastructure – Improve trails to reduce off-trail movement.
9. Trail Ambassador Program – Launch a program to support visitor education and stewardship.

### **Part 4 – Implement, Monitor, Evaluate and Adjust (Steps 12–14)**

This phase will evolve as implementation proceeds. Ongoing monitoring will track progress toward the desired outcomes in visitor experience, site management, and ecological health. Staff will use these findings to evaluate the effectiveness of actions and make adjustments as needed.

### **Strategic Plan Linkage:**

The initiative refers directly to the HCA Strategic Plan 2025 – 2029:

- **Strategic Priority Area – Natural Heritage Conservation**

Initiative – Manage natural areas on HCA lands through monitoring, inventories, strategies and approved master and management plan recommendations to ensure enhancement of natural areas and ecosystems.

- **Strategic Priority Area – Connecting People to Nature**

Initiative – Manage and enhance conservation lands utilising best management practices to support nature appreciation and recreation activities, as communities continue to grow and look to HCA's conservation areas to spend time in nature.

Initiative – Collaborate with partners to share knowledge and work together to enhance access to conservation areas and trail networks.

### **Agency Comments:**

The implementation of the strategy and associated actions outlined in the Plan will require continued collaboration with partner agencies such as the City of Hamilton and the Bruce Trail Conservancy. Development Permits from the Niagara Escarpment Commission (NEC) will be required for the parking lot and trail addition on the Lower Lion's Club Road property before commencement of the work.

It is important to note, a public commenting period will be required during the NEC's development permit review process. During this period of time neighbouring landowners adjacent to the Lower Lion's Club Road property will be circulated the details of the development permit application for their own comments and feedback. This process can sometimes lead to project proposal delays or outright dismissals by the NEC.

### **Legal / Financial Implications:**

This Visitor Use Management Plan was developed internally by HCA staff, no external consulting services were utilized. Appropriate monies for the identified actions recommended in this VUMP have been allocated through existing operational and capital projects budgets.

### **Related Reports and Appendices:**

Attachment A – Falls Visitor Use Management Plan – Final Draft May 2025

Attachment B – Drawing G01 – Falls Site Plan

Attachment C – Drawing G02 – Falls Existing Parking Lot Plan

Attachment D – Drawing G03 – Falls Proposed Parking Lot Concept

Attachment E – Drawing G04 – Lower Lion's Club Proposed Parking Lot Concept