



Report

TO: Conservation Advisory Board Members

FROM: Lisa Burnside, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)

RECOMMENDED & PREPARED BY: T. Scott Peck, MCIP, RPP, Deputy CAO/Director, Watershed Planning & Engineering and Gord Costie, Director of Conservation Area Services

DATE: February 1, 2019

RE: HCA Conservation Area Vehicle Parking Review

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

THAT the HCA staff recommends to the Conservation Advisory Board:

THAT HCA staff be directed to undertake the parking inventory as detailed in the report titled “HCA Conservation Area Vehicle Parking Review”, dated February 1, 2019.

BACKGROUND

Visitor numbers at national and provincial parks and at conservation areas have been increasing over the past number of years with resulting issues being raised such as traffic congestion and safety of communities in and around these natural areas, visitor experience, and impacts on natural areas.

It is anticipated that the popularity will continue with the growing population in the greater Toronto and Hamilton Area and demonstrated through social media with visitors posting selfies and photos showcasing the natural beauty of the area and vistas. Iconic vistas and fall colour destinations throughout Ontario experience enormous parking pressures with the limited available parking facilities that quickly fill during peak times.

The issue is no longer how to attract people to these natural lands, it is how to manage the current visitation and the associated vehicle parking.

STAFF COMMENT

The HCA has been working to address parking and visitation issues by undertaking the following initiatives:

- Implementing the shuttle service at the Spencer Gorge Conservation Area and examining each year how to make this more effective.
- Shuttles have also been utilized to bring visitors to the Telling Tales Festival event at Westfield Heritage Conservation Area by the third party organizers.
- Having conservation staff on site to meet with visitors to provide trail etiquette and information regarding other conservation areas to visit.
- Trail signage and brochures highlighting the need to stay on the trail for visitor safety and conservation of the associated natural areas.
- Working through HCA website and social media regarding authorized access points and visitor education.
- Working with the City of Hamilton regarding municipal no parking and no stopping signage and associated municipal by-law enforcement.
- Installation of automated access gates at conservation areas and installing trail counters to provide accurate information regarding the number of visitors accessing areas, when and where they are accessing and the number of visitors using the various trail systems.

All of the above initiatives are considered to be part of an overall visitor management strategy for the Hamilton Conservation Authority as noted in the HCA Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023. One aspect that needs to be considered as part of an overall visitor management system is an assessment and analysis of available parking.

The purpose of this report is to highlight to the Conservation Advisory Board and the Board of Directors that staff recommend undertaking a detailed analysis and assessment of parking and associated access to our conservation areas. This project will be done in house and will be completed by the fall of 2019. The following template details what aspects will be considered through the parking review:

1. Determine number of existing parking lots at each conservation area.
 - i. Include and map locations.

- ii. Calculate and map total number of parking spaces per lot and per conservation area.
2. Identify and map local roadways surrounding conservation areas with associated parking limitations and restrictions such as no parking and no stopping areas.
3. Identify and map alternative existing parking lots on adjacent private lands.
4. Identify and map adjacent bus routes to all conservation areas.
5. Identify and map regional and local trail and cycling networks associated with conservation areas.
6. Identify and map potential parking lots on HCA lands including a review of the following:
 - i. Access and contour information.
 - ii. Site restrictions such as HCA, City of Hamilton and Niagara Escarpment Commission regulatory, land use and plan requirements.
 - iii. Information related to environmentally significant areas, woodlots, wetlands, watercourses, floodplain, ravine slopes and erosion hazards.
7. Identify and map all conservation area access points.
8. Identify and map location of all manual and automated gates.
9. Identify and map trail counter locations and associated data.

The parking review will assess the supply at HCA areas and identify gaps, provide potential recommendations for parking strategies that support HCA areas while conserving the natural features of the area, and builds upon the existing parking system. Additionally, the review will identify peak visitation times at popular conservation areas and alternative sustainable methods of access.

STRATEGIC PLAN LINKAGE

The initiative refers directly to the HCA Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023:

- **Strategic Priority Area – Conservation Area Experience**
 - Initiatives – develop visitor and parking management strategies to support conservation areas for sustainable recreation, education and tourism

AGENCY COMMENTS

Not applicable.

LEGAL/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

CONCLUSIONS

An HCA conservation area parking review as noted and detailed in this report will inform potential recommendations for parking strategies that support HCA areas. This project will be done in house and will be completed by the fall of 2019.