

4.0 PUBLIC USE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Presently, passive resource based recreational uses are permitted including wildlife viewing, hiking and photography. Some of the activities that are prohibited are the introduction of invasive species, hunting and the removal of plant material unless authorized by the Authority.

Planning for any future public use, such as a formal trail system or parking area, will involve public consultation and environmental evaluation through the Authority's Public Use Strategy. Such an environmental evaluation should be consistent with section 3.1.1, Access/Fencing. Consideration for the natural environment will be a paramount concern in this process. Formal trail establishment may be developed in response to public demand that is not inconsistent with the goal and objectives of this Plan and subject to availability of additional funding, except within the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve, where new trails are not permitted. The Ecological Reserve shall be kept in a natural state and not developed for any other use. Formal public trails will not penetrate into the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve. Furthermore, trails will be sited to keep pedestrians from affecting the wildlife, particularly the bird communities, within the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve.

Any recreational development would have to be compatible with the ecological function of the Altona Forest Property and the goals and objectives of this Plan.

4.1 TRAILS/ACCESS

- If a more formal trail system is to be established, subject to the above policies and guidelines, it is recommended that the following standards be considered as the upgrade. For hiking trails the tread width should be 0.5 metres wide within a 1.0 metre wide cleared area and a clearing height of 2.5 metres, as per the Authority's Trail Planning and Design Guideline document. The trail would be surfaced with limestone screenings or another porous material. Other aspects to be explored would include interpretive stations, education components and barrier free access. If trail uses are investigated within the Altona Forest Property, public consultation will include representatives knowledgeable about the needs of people with limited physical abilities. The Town of Pickering Wheel Trans Advisory Committee is one group that may provide input.

4.2 POTENTIAL PARKING

- If ecologically appropriate, vehicle parking may be considered (Figure 2), on the western side of the Altona Forest Property after consultation with the

community and other agencies. However, there are no immediate plans to build this parking area. This use will be subject to the policies and program objectives of the Authority and consistent with the requirements of Ontario Regulation 158.

If the parking area is considered, it is envisioned that there could be parking space for 10 vehicles within an area measuring 0.028 hectares. Topsoil would be excavated to permit construction of the parking area surface. The parking surface materials would be compacted granular limestone.

Parking on Authority land will not be considered at any other location. The parking areas proposed for the separate and public school properties on the east side of the Altona Forest Property should be considered as an alternate location for vehicle parking.

The parking area and access road, if constructed on Authority land, would

- be bounded by a fence, in accordance with Authority standards. A walk through gate would be considered at the end of the parking area in order to provide only pedestrian access into the Altona Forest Property.

4.3 ENCROACHMENT

The degree and type of encroachment can vary considerably. With the increase in private lots abutting the Altona Forest Property it is expected that encroachment into the forest may increase. Conflicts can arise if the adjacent owner's feeling of proprietorship towards the Authority owned lands leads to building structures and other unauthorized activities within the Altona Forest Property. The main deterrent against encroachment is public education, which will be part of the strategy in section 5.0, Community Outreach. To compliment the public education program, the identified boundaries of the Altona Forest Property will be surveyed, fenced as required and marked as part of the site securement activities.

As a matter of policy, the Authority does not permit encroachments onto its

- lands. Staff are directed to locate and correct existing instances of encroachment. Where structures encroach upon Authority land, their immediate removal will be requested. The adjacent home owners will be notified, and the residence responsible for the encroachment will be required to remove the items found within the Altona Forest Property.

An inventory of the Altona Forest Property will be carried out annually by

- Facilities and Operations staff, to identify situations where encroachment is a problem. Any possible offenses or concerns will be reported to the Authority's Property and Administration Section and/or the Enforcement, Safety and Security Section.

5.0 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

This is one of the most important parts of the Altona Forest Environmental Management Plan. Community outreach can be defined as a combination of public information dissemination, consultation, information gathering, education and hands-on participation. It is necessary that adequate time and resources be allocated to this area.

Eventually, much of the Altona Forest Property will be surrounded by residential lots. Residents have their own attitudes and beliefs about woodlands. Many of their actions may have a negative impact on the Altona Forest Property, such as:

- dumping of grass clippings, compost, horticultural debris,
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- dumping garbage,
- planting grass or exotic species, some of which are invasive species such as Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) and Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*),
- permitting pets to roam the Altona Forest Property where they prey on wildlife, particularly cats, as they prey on bird populations, and
- encroachment by neighbours by building structures on the Altona Forest Property or by continuous non-permitted uses.

Encouraging public participation has a number of benefits. Management plans that include a program of building public support and participation are likely to be more successful. They provide a sense of community, often creating a local stewardship reaction that achieves what the agency might accomplish, using fewer resources than the agency. Public participation, such as including the schools in the management of the Altona Forest Property could be consistent with other initiatives, such as, "Adopt-A-Stream" or "Adopt-A-Park" type programs, subject to maintaining the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve in accordance with the goals and objectives of this Plan. It is also recognized that the proposed property management work goes beyond the Authority's present resources and will need the assistance of the public and other agencies to be successful.

A valuable asset to public education is that people who are aware of the Plan and the objectives, in a sense become the Authority's "volunteer stewards". When they see someone doing something within the Altona Forest Property, ie. dumping, digging wildflowers, they are more likely to report or deal with such actions if they themselves have been educated about the impacts these activities have on the Altona Forest Property. Public education will reduce a large percentage of problems.

For the Altona Forest Environmental Management Plan to be successful and for it to reach all the adjacent residents and users, additional avenues of education should also be used, such as pamphlets, direct mailings, signs, and newspaper articles. Funding for some of these projects may be available through environmental funds (ie. Friends of the Environment) or from public donations. Throughout North America, communities

recognized as having successful urban forestry programs, have devoted time and money to public education.

In terms of the Altona Forest Property, it is recommended that the Authority in cooperation with interest groups and government agencies consider the following three initiatives:

Develop a pamphlet discussing the benefits of the Altona Forest Property, in

1. addition to the problems it faces ie. encroachment, garbage dumping, pets. Distribute pamphlets to all residents adjacent to the Altona Forest Property.
2. Work with local developers and prepare an information package suitable for distribution to prospective new home buyers regarding the management of the Altona Forest Property.
3. Establish a volunteer Community Advisory Council to participate in:
 - the review of information regarding the locations for trails, access points and
 - fencing and make recommendations to the Authority on these matters,
 - communications with the community regarding the importance and special character of the Altona Forest Property,
 - community fund raising for the Altona Forest Property,
 - the formulation of community action plans,
 - encouraging community participation in events planned to raise awareness of the forest and stewardship practices
 - monitoring of the Altona Forest Property.

The Authority will take the lead in establishing the Council. A pre-meeting will be convened to establish Council membership, issues to be covered in the Terms of Reference and reporting relationship of the Council to the Authority. The Authority will draft a Terms of Reference. An acting Chair will be designated from the Authority staff to assist in the initial creation and implementation of the group. The Authority will consider the provision of administrative support to assist in the implementation of the Community Advisory Council. Once established this Council will finalize the Terms of Reference for Authority review and approval, and select a Chair-person from its membership.

The Community Advisory Council may consist of people from such groups as the Friends of Altona Forest and Petticoat Creek, Pickering Naturalists, University of Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, local community groups, other agencies and independent citizens.

There are numerous opportunities which exist for volunteers to become involved in managing the Altona Forest Property. Many of the potential projects go beyond traditional activities of picking up garbage and planting trees, to constructing and maintaining trails, closing trails and monitoring work. A Stewardship Program may be a project for the community to sponsor, organize and undertake. While the Plan encourages public

participation, it is imperative that all activities meet and follow the goals, objectives, policies and guidelines established in this Plan.

A myth that needs to be corrected is the idea that woodlands need to be "cleaned up" (the removal of logs, brush, and understorey). This horticultural view attempts to turn a forest into the perfect, clean garden. The removal of this material fails to recognize the immense importance of the decomposers within the natural system. Without the decomposers there is no natural system. For the Plan to be a success, it is imperative that the public be educated about changing management practices, the problems they may be creating, and ecosystem based management of the forest and adjoining lands as a whole.

6.0 CONSULTATION

The Authority will consult with natural heritage groups and the community in addition to the municipal, provincial and federal agencies in the planning and management of the Altona Forest Property. The Friends of the Altona Forest and Petticoat Creek is an example of a local natural heritage group that would be consulted in this instance.

The Community Advisory Council, when established, should report annually to the Authority to discuss the management of the Altona Forest Property.

7.0 MAINTENANCE OF THE PLAN

The term of the Altona Forest Environmental Management Plan is 10 years from 1995 - 2004. Accurate records of work carried out will be kept for general reference and to provide input into the Plan. The evaluation techniques used and data recorded should endeavour wherever possible to measure factors that will address whether the objectives of the Plan are being met. Detailed reports, including maps, will be kept at the Authority and will include information on site securement activities, inventory and monitoring, public consultation and education.

Field studies of the Altona Forest Property will be conducted from time to time to determine whether it continues to fulfil the criteria for designation as part of an Environmentally Significant Area.

If revisions are necessary to protect the natural and cultural values of the Altona Forest Property to reflect changing social, economic, or environmental conditions, it will only be done after consultation with the Community Advisory Council and the public. Revisions to the Plan will be in keeping with the original stated goals and objectives of the Plan and shall not adversely affect the J. Murray Speirs Ecological Reserve.

Appendix A: List of References

Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, 1991 a. Trail Planning and Design Guidelines. 85p.

- 1994b. Environmentally Significant Areas Update. (ESA 95 - Altona Forest)

- 1994c. Valley and Stream Corridor Management Program. 72p.

-1994d. Altona Forest Management Plan.

The Strategy For Public Use Of Conservation Authority Lands, 27p.

-1995e.

Michalski, Michael, 1990. The Altona Forest Area Environmental Management Study, Phase One Report, Planning Department, Town of Pickering 91 p.

Ministry of Environment and Energy, 1994. Stormwater Management Practices, Planning and Design Manual, 260p.

Speirs, Dr.J.Murray, 1994. Birds of Altona Forest Ecological Reserve, independent publication, 38p.