

Woodend Conservation Area: Summary

Overview and Purpose

Woodend Conservation Area (WCA), located at 1 Taylor Road in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. The WCA is a 48-hectare property atop and below the Niagara Escarpment. WCA is known for its scenic nature trails with many having historical significance including part of the [Niagara Escarpment Indigenous trail networks](#), a section of the [Laura Secord Legacy Trail](#), and historic significance as a lookout during the War of 1812 due to its high elevation and proximity to the Niagara River. Managed by Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA), WCA is designated as Escarpment Natural Area under the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP), is within the Greenbelt Plan area, and is almost fully covered by the Homer Escarpment Life Science Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest ([ANSI](#)) designation.

WCA has diverse and unique vegetative communities which support a variety of habitats and species and is also recognized as the most prominent escarpment point of high land in the Niagara Peninsula Sections. This conservation area is located between the Queen Elizabeth Highway (QEW) to the east and Taylor Road to the west and is south of the Daniel J. Patterson Campus for Niagara College, and adjacent to a former agricultural property that was recently acquired by Bruce Trail Conservancy, as well as other agricultural properties. There is a small parcel of Woodend that is south of the main conservation area on the west side of the QEW. Other adjacent land uses include a golf course on the west side of Taylor Road across from WCA and the Walker Brothers Quarry owned by Walker Aggregates to the south of WCA, also on the west side of Taylor Road.

The original goal for WCA in the 1982 Master Plan was to:

“preserve and manage the natural resources of the Area, especially Niagara Escarpment and portion of the Bruce Trail. Furthermore, the Authority wishes to provide compatible recreational and learning experiences for the residents of the Niagara Region and the Province of Ontario”

The Background Report is the first phase in developing a multi-year Management Plan to guide conservation, recreation, infrastructure and community engagement.

Management Plans in the context of other Strategies

The WCA Management Plan will be developed in the context of several other strategic documents, including the [Conservation Area Strategy](#) and [NPCA Strategic Plan 2021–2031](#) (Figure 1). The Management Plan directions will align with the Goals from the Conservation Area strategy outlined below:

- **Protect & Restore:** Biodiversity, Indigenous knowledge, and enforcement.
- **Connect & Experience:** Safe, nature-based recreation, and accessibility.
- **Adapt & Sustain:** Climate readiness and green infrastructure.
- **Inspire & Engage:** Education, stewardship, and partnerships.



Figure 1: Strategic Context of Management Plans

Planning Process

The management plan will unfold in four phases:

1. **Background Research** – data gathering & Background Report
2. **Engagement & Concept Development** – guided by [IAP2 principles](#).
3. **Draft & Final Plan Development** – incorporating feedback and informed by background research, legislative framework, etc.
4. **Implementation** – putting the Management Plan into action.

STAGES OF THE MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS



Figure 2: Stages of the Management Planning Process

Natural and Cultural Heritage Significance

WCA is part of the [Carolinian Life Zone](#), Canada's most biodiverse ecoregion, and is also a part of the [Niagara Escarpment](#) Biosphere Reserve, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) designation, representing the largest and most connected forest in southern Ontario. WCA is one of the Geosites within the Aspiring [Niagara Geopark](#) system, another UNESCO designation.

- **Geology:** Bedrock from Paleozoic Era, Niagara Escarpment, broad talus slopes, rock crevices and cliffs,
- **Hydrology:** several intermittent streams, sinkholes, small wetland.
- **Terrestrial Ecosystems:** Diverse habitat features including Niagara Escarpment, deciduous forest with limited coniferous species. Predominant species include Sugar Maple, Red Oak, and to a lesser extent White Ash, Shagbark Hickory,

Ironwood, and Basswood. Old Growth Sugar Maple and White Cedar present, as well as Pawpaw (Species at Risk, S3) and other Species at Risk. Presence of invasive species including buckthorn, honeysuckle, autumn olive, privet, multiflora rose, and English ivy.

- **Cultural Heritage:** Indigenous Trail Network, Significance to War of 1812, Laura Secord Trail, Thomson House and limestone kiln, history of educational programs, archaeological potential.

NPCA staff have been conducting a comprehensive assessment of the ecological significance and biodiversity of WCA. The Ecological Report will highlight the diverse vegetative communities, old growth forests, critical habitats that support a wide range of species, including Species at Risk ([SAR](#)) and other natural heritage features of significance. Key ecological components being surveyed include plants, large and small mammals – including bats, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Some species of wildlife observed at WCA include White-tailed deer, Eastern Chipmunk, Northern Flicker, and Eastern Garter Snake. The Ecological Report will outline methodologies used for ecological surveys and will provide recommendations for habitat protection and site management.

To complement data and information collected by NPCA staff, data from Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, Natural Heritage Information Centre, iNaturalist, eBird, local naturalists, and other community science resources will be compiled.

Continued monitoring, public education, and strategic planning will ensure the long-term ecological integrity of WCA.

Infrastructure

WCA is classified as a “Passive” conservation area. Passive recreation involves low-intensity activities that require minimal facilities and equipment. Existing infrastructure includes:

- Two parking lots (limited capacity).
- Trail system (Bruce Trail and NPCA trails), as well as informal/unsanctioned trails.
- Memorial benches
- Lime kiln
- Multiple access points above and below the escarpment.

- Signage (aging kiosk sign, Geopark, Bruce Trail, risk management, information/educational signage, trail signs & markers)

Additional infrastructure that is within the area covered by a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with District School Board of Niagara (DSBN):

- [Walker Living Campus](#) including outdoor classroom
- Thomson House
- Stone wall and walking paths
- Fencing around the leased area
- Small pavilion
- Decorative gardens around buildings

Visitor Experience and Feedback

Visitor feedback for Woodend Conservation Area is overwhelmingly positive. Visitors consistently describe Woodend as a peaceful, scenic and well-maintained natural area that is ideal for walking, hiking, running, and quiet reflection. The trail network is widely viewed as easy to navigate, beginner-friendly, and suitable for families, school groups, and casual hikers, while still offering enough variety through loop options, Bruce Trail connections, and escarpment views to remain engaging. Visitors frequently highlight the area's natural features, including rock formations, wildlife, forests, and seasonal beauty, as well as the benefit of free parking and relatively low crowd levels. Common challenges noted include informational signage or limited parking spaces, occasional trail closures or construction, muddy or slippery sections after rain or in winter, and some highway noise due to proximity to the QEW.

Key feedback includes:

- Desire for amenities to enhance the enjoyment of the conservation area
- Desire for interpretive signage
- Appreciation for free parking and scenic views.
- Safety concerns and site lines when exiting the parking lot to Taylor Road

Opportunities and Considerations

- **Opportunities:** Trail upgrades, accessibility and safety improvements, community stewardship, education and research opportunities, further collaboration with Bruce Trail, and enhanced signage.

- **Considerations:** Unsanctioned activities, ecological sensitivity, infrastructure limitations and constraints, Memorandum of Understanding with the District School Board of Niagara, safety of children/students visiting the property, daily bus traffic.

Policy and Legislative Context

WCA's management is shaped by federal, provincial, and municipal legislation:

- **Federal:** Species at Risk Act, Migratory Birds Convention Act.
- **Provincial:** Conservation Authorities Act, Planning Act and Provincial Planning Statement, Niagara Escarpment Plan, Greenbelt Act, Endangered Species Act, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.
- **Municipal:** Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Region Official Plans.
- **NPCA Internal:** Strategic Plan, Conservation Areas Strategy, Land Securement Strategy, Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy, Climate Action Plan, MOU with DSBN

NOTE: Because WCA is part of NEPOSS, the Management Plan will need to be endorsed by the Niagara Escarpment Commission and approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to ensure compliance with NEPOSS.