

**A**s a resident living near a natural area, you have the opportunity to participate in the maintenance and protection of the natural areas as stewards of this feature.

Woodlands in our area are predominantly deciduous forest stands. A variety of native woodlot plants can be found in these stands. There are scattered trees with cavities that provide feeding or nesting areas for some birds and shelter for some mammals. A range of wildlife species utilizes all of these woodland features.

Common mammals such as Eastern Chipmunk, Eastern Cottontail, Grey Squirrel, Raccoon and White-tailed Deer may be observed within or passing through the forest. Amphibians and reptiles such as Green Frog, Leopard Frog, American Toad and Eastern Garter Snake also live in or near the woodland. Along with the local birds, they help to keep the insect and rodent populations in check. The woodland core and edges provide habitat for a variety of birds including woodpeckers and warblers. There are excellent butterfly viewing opportunities.

As neighbours, your attitudes and actions can have positive and/or negative effects on natural areas in our communities. At an individual level, these effects may seem minor, but when multiplied by many individuals, the effects can be much greater. What we do in our backyards can have a direct and significant effect on the functioning of a healthy environment.

Every individual can play an important role in protecting these natural resources for themselves and others by adopting a philosophy of "living with nature."

## **Here Are A Few Things That You Can Do To Help Public Woodlands:**

### **Take only photographs**

Enjoy public woodlands, but when you leave, take only memories with you. Digging up woodland plants disturbs the soil, promotes weedy species to move in and depletes the woodland plant community. It may also encourage others to take plants.

### **Leave only footprints**

Avoid littering. Indiscriminate access and new trail blazing in any natural area results in vegetation trampling, loss of wildlife habitat, declining health of existing vegetation and increased risk of soil erosion.

Keep within your own property boundary. Please do not dump your yard refuse, garbage, fill, branches, lawn clippings or compost into the woodland natural area. The dumped material is an eyesore, inhibits regeneration and promotes the spread of aggressive weedy plant species. Composting of yard refuse (including leaves) provides excellent mulch and soil material for use in the garden. Your nursery supplier can provide information on how to obtain and

use a composter. Please don't extend rear lot limits or activities into the woodland buffer (such as shed erection compost plots, decks, vegetation removal). Such activities tend to "creep" into buffer areas and can result in cumulative damage to woodland resources.

### **Don't feed the animals**

Our small feathered friends enjoy our backyard bird feeders. Watch and enjoy, however, please resist the urge to feed wild animals, ducks and geese.

### **Control your pets**

Please keep your dogs and cats under control. Free ranging pets can kill or disturb large numbers of wildlife. A free roaming cat can kill large numbers of birds, is prone to injury outdoors and is more likely to bring fleas back into the house. At a minimum, put a bell on an outdoor cat. Control your dog on a leash or in a fenced yard. Please stoop and scoop after your pet. Pet waste pollutes!

### **Give nature a helping hand**

When selecting plants for your garden, try to use native plant species as much as possible. Native plant species should be obtained from a nursery or garden centre and NOT removed from the woodland. Native plants are usually easier to propagate and grow and are typically more resistant to local climate extremes, insects and some

plant diseases. Native plants often require less watering than many exotic species commonly used in gardens. Seed and berry producing shrubs, flowers and conifers can enhance your yard and garden by providing food and creating wildlife habitat for butterflies and songbirds.

Non-native trees, shrubs and ground covers can spread from yards and gardens to nearby natural areas and threaten the survival of sensitive native plants. As an example, Norway Maple has infiltrated many woodland areas where its dense shade prevents any ground cover regeneration. Plants like Purple Loosestrife, Dame's Rocket and Forget-me-not escape from gardens and have caused serious damage to wetlands and woodlands. Avoid planting these species on your property.

Using ground covers to achieve plant cover in shaded areas or on slopes can complement garden areas, require less maintenance than lawn and help prevent soil erosion, however, some ground covers such as Periwinkle, English Ivy and Goutweed are invasive and spread rapidly into woodlands to the detriment of native ground covers. Native alternative species such as Virginia Creeper, Bearberry, Creeping Phlox and Wild Strawberry are available. Local nurseries can suggest a number of environmentally responsible species you can use in your landscaping and garden.

As you enhance and protect your lawn and garden, try to use organic alternatives to pesticides and fertilizers that can have direct and indirect effects on flora, fauna and aquatic features. If pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers must be used, please use them sparingly and appropriately. Please do not empty any hazardous wastes (such as oil, varsol, waste paints, automotive or household cleaning products) on the ground, down a sink or storm drain, or in the natural area.

Thank you for doing your part. Enjoy the natural area responsibly and everyone, including the environment, will benefit!

For more information, contact:

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# *Living in Harmony with Natural Areas*



*"working together for a better environment"*