

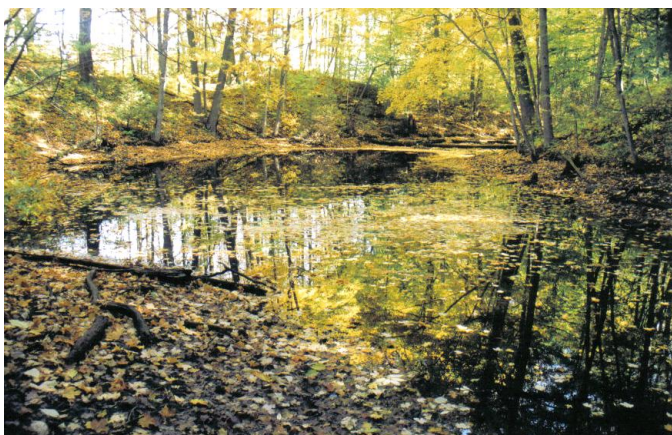
## **Hidden Valley- a natural treasure that should be expanded and preserved**

For the past thirteen years Kitchener and the Region of Waterloo have been encouraged to aim towards bringing into public ownership the Environmentally Sensitive Protected Area (ESPA) inside Hidden Valley and thus guaranteeing that this wonderful natural heritage area would be protected for generations to come. The original River Rd extension design proposed a road through the centre of the ESPA and severed off from the ESPA about 40 acres. By 2006 the Region of Waterloo council approved changing the central road design to an exterior road plan. By 2014 the arguments to preserve the original boundaries of the core environmental area were acknowledged by the Region of Waterloo and the new Region official plan has restored the ESPA to its original size of about 120 acres.

As the road plans were changed, the environmental objectives were articulated more clearly and eventually it was agreed that the following objectives should be achieved:

1. The current forest should be conserved as it acts as an important carbon sink
2. The endangered species such as Jefferson Salamanders should be protected
3. Provincially Significant wetlands should be preserved because of their importance to clean water run off.
4. The addition of some 50,000 residents to the Kitchener core area, as mandated by the provincial Places to Grow Act, requires that a new large green space be set aside to provide park space for this major addition to the population of Kitchener. Further if the new residents are to have access to the new park space by the new LRT, the only major green space left in the central core area is Hidden Valley

The creation of this beautiful enclave in the south of Kitchener dates back some 14,000 years to the time when retreating glaciers deposited the gravel and sand of the Waterloo Moraine. Melting ice blocks formed the deep “kettle-lake hollows” that are so characteristic of this EPA. These have subsequently been modified to form our present-day wetlands; ringed by lush forests with an abundance of wild flowers, a rich variety of birds, and the numerous amphibians and mammals that inhabit this area. This is today’s jewel of south Kitchener — the ESPA known as “Hidden Valley”.



The wonderful natural area forest helps to clean Kitchener's air by removing carbon and also provides a place for solitude and communion with our natural environment.





Wild flowers in spring

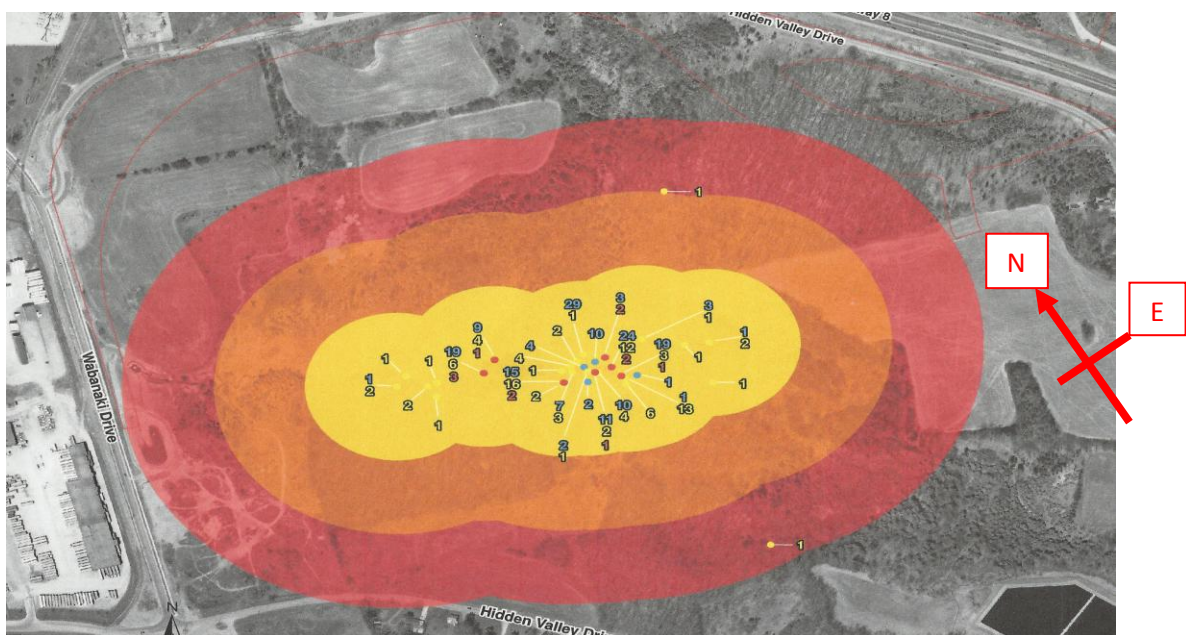


Although the River Road extension design has been finalized, there has still been no formal decision about how much of the 200 acre Hidden Valley property should be preserved as a protected natural area.

In addition to the forest area the objectives listed above specify that there are other parts of the Hidden Valley property that must be protected.

The research done by the environmental firm, LGL, led to an update of the Natural Resource Inventory in Hidden Valley and this data was presented to the River Rd Steering Committee in March, 2013. The first significant addition to the protected areas was the Jefferson Salamander regulated habitat area. The agreed upon boundary was at 300 metres as shown in Figure 1.

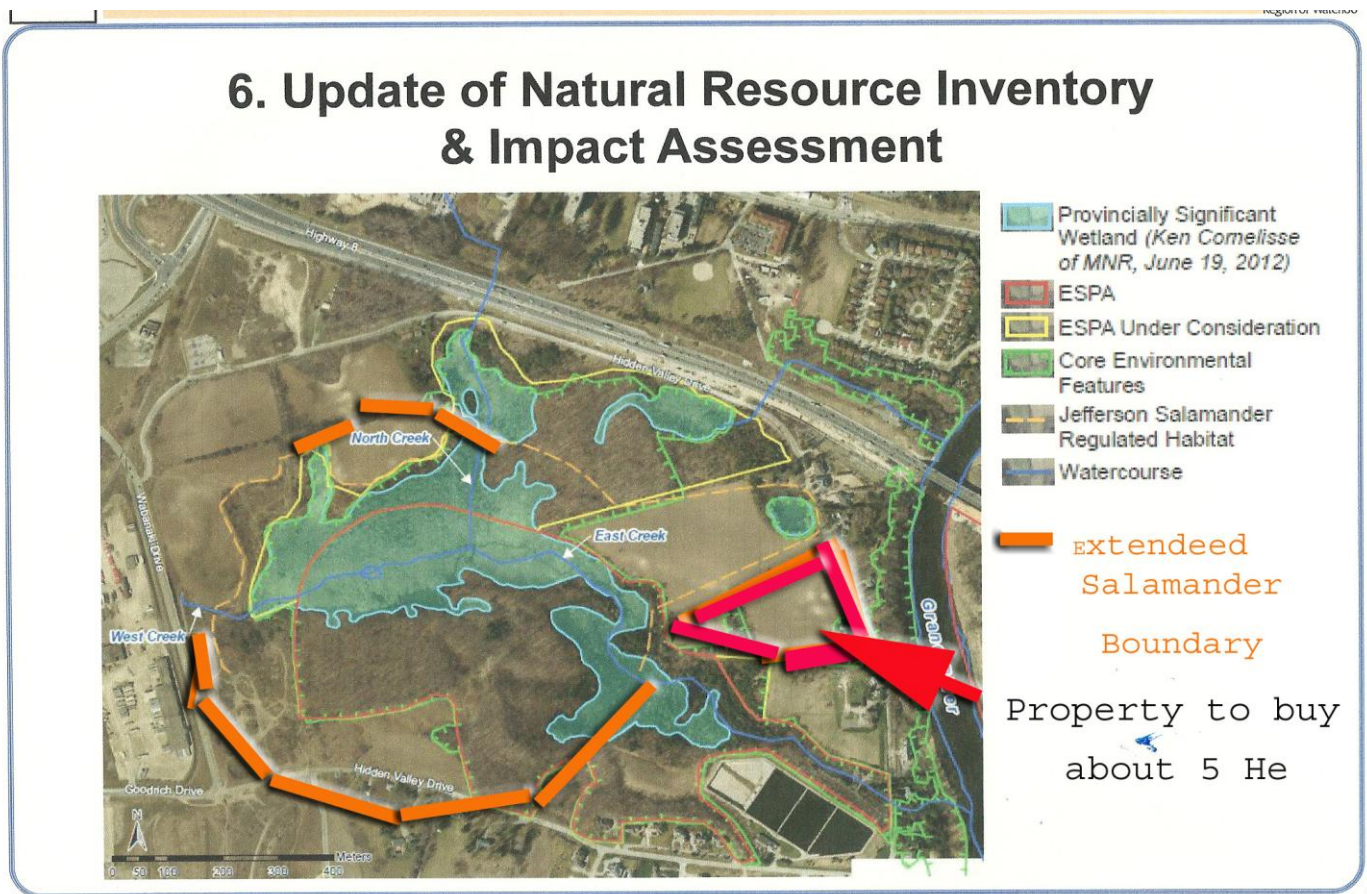
Figure 1-LGL 2007 field study map for Jefferson salamander migration-Yellow-100m, Orange-200m, Red- 300m





In addition to the 300 metre boundary, the second change was mandated by the MNR when it was decided there must be an extension from the main breeding area to the east side wetland adjacent to Hidden Valley Drive. Figure 2 shows how the 300 metre boundary and the MNR migration zone extend the original ESPA, which is inside the thin red line. Also the original 10 hectare open field that was scheduled for residential development on the east side has been cut in half. The remaining 5 hectare piece shown in red is so small that instead of residential development it would be better to add this isolated piece to the ESPA. Since about 4.5 hectares of ESPA lands will be destroyed to construct the road, it is reasonable to expect that the lost forest should be replaced with nearby land, as promised at the Region meeting in July, 2006. Good planning for the future suggests that the isolated 5 hectare piece be purchased from the present owner and reforested. Funds for this small purchase should either come from the Region's budget for the road or from the development charges paid to the Kitchener park acquisition fund by developers. This new forest would be a legacy for our children and succeeding generations which would eventually expand the tree canopy in Hidden Valley to help absorb the carbon emissions that will come from traffic on the new road.

2- Extensions to the Hidden Valley EPA- the orange dotted line shows the 300m boundary from Figure 1



In addition to the 5 hectare piece on the east side, the third point to notice is that the area on the south side between Hidden Valley Road and the ESPA and the area on the west side between Wabanaki and the ESPA are now inside the 300 metre salamander zone, as extended to the south. There needs to be a clear statement by both the Region and Kitchener that the areas inside the salamander boundaries are no longer available for development and the maps must be changed to show these properties inside the ESPA.

These additions to the original protected area suggest that the map for the Hidden Valley ESPA should be formally expanded to include all these features inside a single ESPA boundary. If funds are found to purchase the isolated 5 hectare piece and the newly mandated conditions are formally recognized by both Kitchener and the Region of Waterloo then the new Hidden Valley ESPA would be defined as shown by the red boundary line in the Figure 3 map.

Figure 3- Proposal for expanding the Hidden Valley ESPA to about 150 acres.



The current Hidden Valley ESPA of about 120 acres, as shown on Region of Waterloo maps, would be expanded to about 150 acres. This size of natural area would be an extremely important addition to the Kitchener park inventory and in the future would provide a place for recreation and leisure in a natural woodland setting for the more than 50,000 new residents that will be settled in the central core of the city.

Surely at a time when the IPCC has announced that the level of carbon emissions in the atmosphere has exceeded 400 ppm, it is time for Kitchener and Waterloo Region to take steps to guarantee that the current forest canopy in Waterloo Region is not reduced, and, if possible, is expanded to help absorb the increasing amount of carbon emissions generated by local traffic.

This proposal to formally expand the Hidden Valley ESPA would be a significant contribution to providing cleaner air for future residents of Waterloo Region and would demonstrate to other cities and the Federal government that Waterloo Region is attempting to help Canada reach the commitments made at the Paris conference on Climate Change.