

Headwater hike promotes citizen engagement

The Ontario Headwaters Institute is leading a headwater hike at Terra Cotta Conservation Area (14452 Winston Churchill Blvd.) this Sunday (May 3) at 9:45 a.m., to help local residents get active, outside and engaged in the co-ordinated review of the Province's Greenbelt Plan and three other land use plans.

With support from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, the Institute and local partners will guide participants on a 90-minute hike of approximately three kilometres to see the wide variety of headwater features at Terra Cotta, where they'll learn about the importance of the region's headwaters, including local wetlands, small streams and their catchment areas.

According to the Institute's Andrew McCammon, "Headwaters are the foundation of our watersheds and nurture more biodiversity than any other type of habitat in Ontario."

Headwaters play a crucial role in protecting the region's drinking water, reduce flooding and erosion, and contain key habitats for fish, insects and other wildlife, he added.

Those taking part in the hike will experience three different artificial wetlands, several headwater streams and a unique bypass channel constructed to keep the cool waters of the Credit River, a renowned trout fishery, from being heated in a fourth wetland. In addition, participants may get to see the first blossoming of trilliums in a beautiful setting where plant communities find their niches in small forests, wetlands and along the stream banks.

"We hope the hike encourages people to explore our conservation areas and learn more about the vital importance of the headwaters and the Greenbelt," commented Credit Valley Conservation's Manager of Education Andrew Kett.

Participants of the hikes will also be encouraged to provide feedback on the Ontario government's review of four land use plans by attending one of the regional town halls, submitting advice on the Province's Environmental Bill of Rights website, or by emailing their comments to landuseplanningreview@ontario.ca

"We are pleased to collaborate on this project and hope the hike encourages people to explore our headwater areas and to become involved in the Co-ordinated Land Use Planning Review," Robert Patrick, president of the Coalition on the Niagara Escarpment, said.

"Not only will this hike support the health and well-being of its participants, it will inform them about the vital role our headwaters play in keeping our water clean now and for future generations," remarked Burkhard Mausberg, CEO of Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. "Knowledge is power, and we want to hear your voice at the Province's co-ordinated land use plans review town halls, so together we can strengthen and continue to protect these precious natural heritage sites."