



Headwaters
**Communities
in Action**

Building A Better Quality of Life Together

July 12, 2006

Dear Editor:

Re: Natural Park Worth Investigating

**Steering
Committee**

Ross Kirkconnell
Community Care
Access Centre of
Wellington-Dufferin

Starr Olsen
Community Living
Dufferin

Rod Freeman
Orangeville Police

Lynda Buffett
Shelburne Rotarian

Bob Baynham
Headwaters Health
Care Centre

Rob Rice
Greater Dufferin
Chamber of
Commerce

Tim Murray
Upper Grand District
School Board

Barbara Horvath
Independent
Consultant

Sylvia Cheuy
Project Manager

Holly
Greenwood
Project Facilitator

We read with great interest your July 4th article and editorial outlining both the support for, and viability of, a natural trail system on the Veteran's Way lands. As co-chair of **Headwaters Communities in Action** (formerly known as the Dufferin Social Prosperity Project), I want to indicate our strong support and endorsement of this idea. I would also like to share some relevant information that reflects what we have learned through consultation with more than 300 citizens from across Dufferin County.

The goal of our Project is to attain the best quality of life for those who live and work in our communities. Our consultations have led us to conclude that this is best done by simultaneously addressing three core areas: economic prosperity, community health and environmental viability.

In May, we hosted a series of meetings with community leaders and topic experts to explore what needed to be addressed within each of the three core areas in order to significantly impact quality of life in the region. Participants in all of the focus groups unanimously identified:

- The need for some structures to support our region in working together in new, more collaborative ways; and,
- A number of specific high impact projects that will affect change in at least two of the three areas specific areas of strategic focus.

One of these ideas is the creation of a **Regional Trails Network**.

Throughout our consultations we have heard that many of us treasure the "green space" of our region and see its tourist potential. However we have learned that this natural asset is underutilized because we currently lack a comprehensive regional trail system or a strategy to create one.

Although a number of committed trails groups exist within Dufferin County, they are primarily working independently of each other. Unlike the regions surrounding us, Dufferin County does not have a regional trail network to coordinate planning and access to resources. Furthermore, we have learned that there is potential to develop the recently acquired CNR land corridor into a trail system, and to connect Dufferin County trails to those in surrounding areas. It has been suggested that, once established, a comprehensive trail system throughout the County would enable us to organize community events that promote trail use for local citizens, and attract eco-tourists to the benefit of our local businesses.

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Another important benefit of a comprehensive trail system throughout the region would be ability to offer our citizens affordable access to a resource that would encourage physical activity and wellness. This is particularly important since our research has shown that:

- Between 1996 and 2001, the percentage of overweight people in Wellington and Dufferin Counties jumped significantly -- from 25-29% to 35-39% in males and from 14-19% to 30-34% in females.
- Dufferin County has a commuter rate that is double the provincial average (46% males and 32 % female residents of Dufferin County commute outside the county) which is significant given that public health research has found that time spent in a vehicle is a BIGGER predictor of obesity than age, income, education, gender & ethnicity. Every 30 minutes of commuting increases a person's risk of obesity by 3%.
- Obesity is becoming one of the most common medical conditions of childhood, according to the Canadian Diabetes Association and Dufferin County has a higher % of children 0-14 years than the provincial average.

Protecting a natural park on Veteran's Way seems to be an important step in making a comprehensive trail system for Dufferin County a reality.

Sincerely,

Starr Olsen
Steering Committee Co-Chair