



Citizens Environment Alliance



For Immediate Release

April 7, 2005

RARE ECOSYSTEM THREATENED BY CITY OF WINDSOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROPOSAL

Windsor, Ontario -- The option recommended for a truck route within the Schwartz Report, <http://www.citywindsor.ca/001429.asp> and unanimously endorsed by the municipal and county governments of Windsor and Essex County – may seriously damage the Ojibway/Spring Garden ecosystem. The report recommends a large truck route (bypass) be built through one of the most rare ecosystems in Canada.

The Spring Garden Natural Area is part of the Ojibway Prairie Complex, designated an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) by the provincial government and an Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) by the Essex Region Conservation Authority. The City of Windsor recently received provincial approval of its plan to acquire the properties within the ANSI, in order to protect the ecosystem.

“Resources, including public funds, have been applied from all levels of government to attempt to preserve some of the last remnants of rare flora and fauna in the Spring Garden and Ojibway area,” stated Derek Coronado, Research and Policy Coordinator of the Citizens Environment Alliance. “Losing additional acreage in such a unique ecosystem would speak volumes about our governments’ commitment to the environment and public health. This recommendation represents the opposite of smart growth, undermines transportation demand management and will not be environmentally sustainable,” added Coronado.

The complex contains many species that are considered at risk within Ontario and Canada by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. The rare, threatened and endangered species of flora and fauna that inhabit Spring Garden, include: Purple Twayblade Orchid; American Chestnut; Colicroot; Dense Blazing Star; Wild Indigo Duskywing Butterfly; the Eastern Fox Snake, and; the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. Spring Garden also features dry prairie, buttonbush swamp, wetland in the form of an old lagoon, oak savanna and woodland.

The Spring Garden Complex Environmental Evaluation Report recommends that no roadway cross through the complex, in order to preserve the integrity of the ecosystem. Indeed, the report recommends no further bike routes because of the potential impact on ecosystem integrity of the complex.

All levels of government have committed resources to protect the Ojibway/Spring Garden ecosystem. For example, since 2001 the federal Habitat Stewardship Program has provided a total of \$1,250,000 to the Corporation of the City of Windsor's Tallgrass Prairie and Savanna Habitat Acquisition effort, otherwise known as the Spring Garden Prairie Project. Environment Canada has stated that it "is committed to the continued protection and enhancement of this important ecosystem."

"The Ojibway-Spring Garden natural area is unique and has been recognized as such. It was a shock to discover, in the Schwartz Plan, that a bypass through the area was the preferred option," stated Phil Roberts, President of the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club. "We are trying to rehabilitate and enhance our natural areas. If this proposal is completed it would be a significant blow to our efforts and devastate the Ojibway-Spring Garden Area," said Roberts.

There is a small area of interior forest located in the complex south of Turkey Creek. An interior forest is defined as being >100 metres from the edge in any direction. Interior forest is vital to the survival of many animal species, particularly birds. Media reports have suggested that the proposed truck route could be as much as 200 metres from Todd Lane. The interior forest would be threatened, along with the animal species that depend upon this habitat, as a result of building the truck route 200 metres from Todd Lane.

Within the Schwartz Report is the recommendation for context sensitive design, specifically small parks atop short tunnels of the truck route. Ojibway is a nationally significant rare prairie ecosystem, immensely more important than a small park or other type of manicured parkland.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources' *Ojibway Park Prairie Management Plan* states: "The entire Ojibway Prairie site is zoned as nature reserve because of the distinctive tallgrass prairie and oak savanna ecosystems. Public use of the nature reserve will be confined to designated trails, with the exception of approved research activities." Less than 0.5% of Ontario's tall grass prairie and oak savanna ecosystems remain intact.

The Citizens Environment Alliance and Essex County Field Naturalists' Club intend to monitor the progress of the Schwartz Plan and continue to participate in the process of evaluating alternatives and potential environmental impacts. Both organizations are committed to protecting, rehabilitating and enhancing the Ojibway/Spring Garden ecosystem.

Please join representatives of the Citizens Environment Alliance and Essex County Field Naturalists' Club for a press conference at the CEA office (275 Oak Ave.) 11:00am Thursday April 7, 2005.

For further information, contact
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