



Natural Heritage

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System comprises almost 1,900 hectares (4,700 acres) of natural lands and open space connecting the Niagara Escarpment to Hamilton Harbour at the western end of Lake Ontario.

The two main watersheds within the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System area are Grindstone Creek and Spencer Creek. The mouth of Spencer Creek is a 250-hectare shallow marsh and open water area known as Cootes Paradise Marsh, which is widely recognized for its ecological importance. Its designations include Provincially Significant Wetland, Important Bird Area of National Significance, and Important Amphibian and Reptile Area.

The Niagara Escarpment is a major geological and ecological feature extending 725 kilometres from Queenston in Niagara Region to Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula. The Niagara Escarpment is recognized internationally by the Bureau of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and Biosphere Program as a World Biosphere Reserve.

Through western Hamilton and Burlington the Niagara Escarpment is characterized by a variety of habitats. This part of the Niagara Escarpment is one of the few sections with a southern aspect. It is this south-facing protected microclimate that creates habitat for a wide diversity of species. These conditions create the specialized habitats for southern Carolinian forest zone plant species to exist at their northern limits and more northern species at their southern limits. The natural areas contain some of the most botanically rich lands in Canada, and provide habitat for many important bird, reptile, amphibian, fish and insect species. Several smaller watersheds drain directly into Cootes Paradise Marsh or Hamilton Harbour from the Escarpment. Cootes Paradise Marsh and Grindstone Estuary connect this ecological unit to Lake Ontario through Hamilton Harbour.

Summary Facts

- One of most biologically-rich areas in Canada, with more than 1,580 documented species
- Habitat for more than 50 species at risk
- UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve (Niagara Escarpment)
- Provincially Significant Wetlands (Cootes Paradise and RBG, Hendrie Valley, Lambs Hollow Wetland)
- Important Bird Area of National Significance (Cootes Paradise)
- Important Amphibian and Reptile Area (Cootes Paradise, Carroll's Bay and Grindstone Valley)
- Several Environmentally Significant Areas
- Provincial Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (Life Science and Earth Science)

Overall, 1,582 species of flora and fauna have been documented through biological inventories of environmentally significant lands in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System area. Surveys have identified over 50 species at risk within these natural areas.

