

## WILLOW PARK ECOLOGY CENTRE – VISION STORY

**Original Vision:** In 1996 the Town Environmental Advisory Committee of the THH (TEAC) wanted to explore opportunities to engage the local community in becoming more involved in environmental activities. To further involve them in the process, TEAC held a Green Communities Forum and invited several Ontario communities to share their local environmental projects with the Halton Hills. One of the projects that was chosen by the participants for further exploration was the development of a local Ecology park based on the one in Peterborough. A trailer park in Norval, that had been appropriated by Credit Valley Conservation because of its location on the floodplain was currently being leased by the town and used for storage space for plant materials. TEAC noted that Willow Park had good representation of 5 ecological zones (woodland, open meadow, wetland, riparian, and riverine) and could be used to help people learn about the natural world.) **Goals:** To maintain the natural habitat for flora and fauna at Willow Park; to promote the use of WPEC to educate & inform students and the general public in Halton Hills about ecological & environmental matters; and to provide a place for passive recreation

**Resources:** In September, 1996 TEAC struck a volunteer Willow Park Subcommittee and started meeting with Town and CVC officials to work out how we could create that facility. The Steering Committee was comprised of volunteers and members of TEAC, the CVC, Town of Halton Hills Recreation and Parks Department, School Boards, local Naturalists' Club, and many others who believed in the idea and spent many long hours working behind the scenes and in the park. In 1997, Town Council accepted TEAC's concept plan for an Ecology Park on the site of the old trailer park and allocated revenue to assist in launching the project. In 1998 the Town Recreation and Parks Department and volunteers built a new pathway and installed the Silver Creek pedestrian bridge - to link the two parks, allow the use of the parking facilities at Norval Park, and to create a new entrance to Willow Park. To help reach our goals, we applied for and received many grants of various sizes – including two large grants from Trillium. These grants allowed us to hire part time staff to assist us with our many ventures over the past years.

**Achievements.** To enhance the species in the area we provided: • A winter home for snakes (hibernaculum), • Lunkers to help fish take a rest • Boxes for bats and birds • Flowers especially enticing for Butterflies • Special areas for Turtles to nest • Trees and shrubs for shelter and food • Native gardens for plants • A wetland for frogs and turtles and the new protective boardwalk

For helping people understand how to balance their lives and the natural world around them, we created parts of Willow Park such as: • The compost demonstration site • The Interpretive Pavilion, the kiosk & Interpretive signage • A weather station

Other important achievements contributing to our progress include many awards from environmental and provincial groups, newspaper and magazine articles, and many volunteers who have helped us by giving freely of their time and energy.

**Lessons Learned:** It has been a long hard road on the way to the present success of our ecology park. To do this we have had to enlist the help of many political and community agencies. It has been of primary importance to have the cohesive influence of a paid staff person – even if part time – to provide the necessary support to all of the volunteers.