

A Map is Worth a Thousand Words

By Brian Baetz

The Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (C2EP) was first conceptualized in 2006, after protections were maintained for the Pleasant View natural lands in the former town of Dundas. This lovely name invokes images of the mystical treasures of the Cootes Paradise marsh and the equally amazing natural assets of the UN biosphere-designated Niagara Escarpment. In my mind, C2EP had a specific axial configuration from the Cootes wetland complex in the south to the Niagara Escarpment in the north, traversing the Pleasant View lands along the way. This was a decidedly Hamilton-centric, west of Hwy. 6 viewpoint, as there is also a Burlington section of the C2EP. This runs from Hwy 403 in the south to the Niagara Escarpment in the north, traversing the lands of North Aldershot. My mental framework for the C2EP was rigidly built around a south-to-north alignment, on either side of Highway 6.

But last Summer I went out on a field walk with Wayne Terryberry of McMaster and Brian McHattie of the HNC. We benefited from the company of Noah Stegman, a PhD candidate in McMaster's Department of Earth, Environment & Society. Noah made a statement that really made me think--"Cootes to the Escarpment isn't just north-south, it's actually something that radiates out in all directions"--creating a true lightbulb moment. Cootes Marsh is the wetland in the middle, but its connection to the Niagara Escarpment is very unique. This landform wraps around Hamilton, makes a hairpin turn out near Copetown, and then comes back and creates the Valley Town of Dundas. One can stand in Dundas at a number of single points, turn slowly and be afforded lovely vistas of Hamilton Mountain, Highway 403 making its climb up to Ancaster, Dundas Peak and the Sydenham Road rockface cut. If one thinks from a watershed perspective, all the related creeks flowing as waterfalls over the Niagara Escarpment end up in Cootes Paradise. This includes Chedoke Creek flowing down from Hamilton Mountain, Ancaster Creek flowing down from the rural lands surrounding Ancaster, the creeks of the Dundas Valley and creeks flowing in from Halton Region as far up as Milton.

So I took this gem of an idea from Noah, went home and sketched out a rough map that would represent every particle of water flowing from some upstream watershed over the Escarpment, and ultimately landing in either Cootes Paradise or in West Hamilton Harbour as the discharge of Grindstone Creek. Engineers generally sketch maps that are only coherent to themselves, so I then went in to the McMaster Map Library and consulted with the spatial information specialist Christine Homuth in the Sherman Centre for Digital Scholarship. Within very short order, Christine had mapped this using GIS mapping tools and available databases. Her work is captured in the accompanying figure, showing C2EP to be a hydrological focal point, similar to the narrowing of an hourglass with a large upstream area of seventeen watersheds emanating from seven federal ridings.

This is very much a nonpartisan initiative, with Liberal, Tory and NDP MP's representing the areas that flow from their ridings into Cootes Paradise or the West Harbour. Any future resources expended on a National Urban Park to protect these very important lands will positively affect constituents across these seven federal ridings. How many senior government investments can claim that? Many thanks to Noah for opening my eyes to how magnificent and widespread the

C2EP initiative really is, and how many Ontarians will have a vested interest in protecting the lands of this very special area.

<Brian Baetz is the Director of McMaster's W Booth School of Engineering Practice and Technology, and is working with fellow Club members John F. Evans, Kevin Empey, Jen Baker and Brian McHattie on fundraising for land acquisition in the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System.>