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In the Blink of an Eye, It Could Be Lost Forever

By Judi Sheppard

The Niagara Escarpment, a natural wonder shaped by geological forces over 400 million years, has witnessed the rise and fall of glaciers, stood tall before Niagara Falls formed, and existed long before dinosaurs became extinct in southern Ontario. It's a place of immense beauty and ecological significance, deserving of our care and protection.

For millions of years, the Escarpment remained untouched, a testament to nature's endurance. However, in the last 200 years, it has been viewed as a resource to be exploited for profit, with little regard for its history, ecological value, or future. If you're reading this, chances are you care deeply about the future of the Escarpment. You understand that we're at a crucial moment. While our individual time on this planet is limited, the Escarpment's timeline is infinite. We must ask ourselves: What do we want it to look like in 50, 100 or 1,000 years? If unchecked exploitation continues, what legacy will we leave for future generations?

If you're pondering this same question, you'll appreciate the work of the Escarpment Corridor Alliance (ECA).

The ECA was formed in 2022 with a vision to create a network of eco-corridors and trails that unite over 500 square km of stunning forests, meadows, streams, and wetlands. This includes five watersheds, connecting the Blue Mountains and Beaver Valley, and linking Castle Glen and Kolapore to the Beaver Valley. In 2023,



Old Baldy on the Niagara Escarpment, Beaver Valley. PHOTO PROVIDED.

the ECA became a registered charity, committed to protecting and preserving the Niagara Escarpment and the Greenbelt in south Georgian Bay from inappropriate development by ways of creating a nature corridor.

The natural beauty and lifestyle of the region are attracting new and returning visitors and subsequently, many new residents, leading to a surge in housing demand. This boom has caught the eye of developers eager to capitalize on the opportunity.

Two major projects are currently posing significant threats to the Escarpment's ecosystems.

Castle Glen

Located on the Escarpment's slope near Collingwood, this beautiful and ecologically diverse property spans over 1,500 acres of forests, meadows, wetlands, creeks, and a small lake. The developers have a plan for 1,600 residential units, hotel

accommodations, golf courses, and 50,000 sq ft of commercial space and a gas station, which would irreparably damage this precious area.

Talisman Project

Planned for the former Talisman Mountain Resort property in Beaver Valley, this project involves constructing 280 townhomes and 90 apartments on land bordering the Beaver River. Although the Niagara Escarpment Plan protects most of the area, it allows development on certain "recreational use" zones, and unfortunately, Talisman falls into this category.

Although the ECA recognizes the need for additional housing and economic development, they strongly advocate against it coming at the expense of the Escarpment's natural features and ecosystems. They advocate for sustainable development with new subdivisions to be built in existing settlement areas where there are already

services and the potential for complete communities and not urban sprawl into rural, natural areas.

The ECA seeks to work together, forming strong alliances with like-minded people and groups across the Escarpment. These two mega-developments are a call to action. They threaten the Escarpment and its ecosystem. As a community, presenting a united front, we can ensure our voices are heard by those in positions of power. The time to act is now, before the Escarpment as we know it is lost forever—in the blink of an eye.

To learn more about the ECA, their ongoing initiatives, and how you can join the ECA in efforts to protect and conserve our Escarpment, sign up for our newsletter at myescarpment.ca. Or contact Jarvis Strong, ECA executive director, at info@myescarpment.ca or 705.441.3346.

Thanks
Judi & Gary