

The Wild Debate

Background

Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary sits at the far-western end of Lake Ontario. It covers 320 hectares, or 3.2 square kilometers. Within this natural space live over 870 different species of plants and animals. It is an important place for birds to pass through on their migration routes in the spring and fall. Cootes Paradise is unique in Canada and around the world.

Much of the area of Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary is protected. Trails are designed to keep humans separate from vulnerable animals and plants. Entire regions of the Nature Sanctuary cannot be reached by people. You cannot build houses, offices, or factories within the Nature Sanctuary. It provides a safe habitat for plants and animals because of these restrictions.

One thing that makes Cootes Paradise unique is its location. It is bordered by cities — Hamilton and Burlington — where over 700,000 people live and work. Many people use the Nature Sanctuary for a variety of purposes. These include outdoor recreation, scientific study, and creative inspiration. Most people are respectful of the land. Yet, the sheer number of people living in this region puts pressure on the Nature Sanctuary. This is because of pollution and habitat destruction. If there will be a future for this important natural space, it will have to balance the needs of both the human population and the natural world.

The Scenario

The government of Ontario wants to create a plan for the future of Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary. This plan will determine how Cootes Paradise will be operated for the next 25 years.

Different groups in our region have been asked for their opinion. Some of these groups want to protect Cootes Paradise. Others prefer to open Cootes Paradise for building and new uses. Each of these groups will present their vision to the government. Once all groups have shared their vision, the government will decide on the best plan for Cootes Paradise.

Your Task

Working as part of a group, answer the following questions:

- 1) What is the most important problem your group wants to solve?
- 2) How can Cootes Paradise Nature Sanctuary be part of the solution for this problem?
- 3) In three complete paragraphs, describe what your group's proposal is, why it is important to the people, plants, and animals of this region, and three things that will result once your goal is accomplished.

Stakeholder groups

Hamilton or Burlington City Council

As a councilperson, your role is to consider the well-being and interests of the city, to keep the city growing and healthy, and to maintain and spend the city's money in a responsible manner. The city council of Hamilton pays part of the cost needed to keep Cootes Paradise a protected space.

Naturalist Club

As a naturalist, your role is to promote the value and protection of nature. You encourage people to learn about the natural world and to make connections to it. You advocate for the protection of natural spaces and species.

Conservation Authority

As a conservation professional, your role is to balance human needs with the needs of the natural environment. You promote conservation as well as the enjoyment of watershed lands and resources (for example, recreational and educational use of natural lands).

Home Builders' Association

As a home builder, your role is to propose new home developments that are affordable for buyers, and available to anyone living in Hamilton and Burlington who wants to build or own one. Land is very expensive in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, and much of it is already developed. You are looking for new opportunities to build houses for new customers.

Fishing Association

As a sport fisherman, your role is to advocate for the conservation of fishing areas, to encourage safe and responsible participation in the sport of fishing, and to create new opportunities for fishing.

Business Improvement Association

As a local business owner, your role is to support local businesses by making the area as attractive to potential customers as possible. You look for ways to make improvements to an area that will make people want to visit, such as accessible walkways and attractions. You seek to help businesses grow and thrive by encouraging customers to buy from them.

Local Proposal

Now, it's your turn to make a proposal. How can we preserve biodiversity in the area where we live?

You can propose to take action on any level — at your school, at home, in your neighborhood, in your city, your province, or across your country!

In three complete paragraphs, describe:

- 1) What your proposal is,
- 2) Three ways in which your proposal will positively impact the diversity of plants and animals,
- 3) How you plan to take action on your proposal.