

What Do You Know About the Highlands?

Kannata Highlands is the parcel of land bordering the back of the properties north of Lakeshore Drive. The Highlands have been designated as an Environmental Conservation reserve area. The intent of this designation is to preserve the area in its natural state. However this designation did not come about easily, as explained below.

A Brief History:

Kannata Valley summer cottage development began in the early 1960's and was administered by the R.M. of Longlaketon, up until 1966 when the subdivision was incorporated as the Village of Kannata Valley. The area, known as Kannata Highlands, was annexed to the Village of Kannata Valley in 1973.

The designation from 'Village' to 'Resort Village' occurred in 1988 with registration completed in 2007.

In 1982 a real estate developer received approval from the provincial authorities to subdivide the Kannata Highlands for private residential development.

Soil composition in the Highlands consists of shale/clay/gravel stones, known as Bearpaw Formation; and is prone to slumping and landslides if disturbed. A development would add considerable subsurface moisture load to the unstable valley wall causing serious concern to the residents of Kannata Valley.

Fortunately, two of our residents, Dora Collins and Jim Webster, spearheaded a campaign to stop any building development in the Highlands. The story is told how several councilor members, including Jim Webster, "physically" barred the roadway in front of heavy construction equipment to prevent them from entering the Highlands. They were determined to prevent any bulldozing in the Highlands.

Following extensive research and many village meetings, the Village took the matter to court. Residents testified before the provincial board proving the potential danger of land slumping and/or landslides if this development was approved. Following years of litigation the ruling was in favor of Kannata Valley, stopping any development on this land. In 1988 the Village zoned this area as non-residential and later re-zoned as an Environmental land, an environmentally-sensitive area.

The intent and purpose of this designation is to preserve the land in its natural state, protecting the area from any misuse and developments at any time in the future. Access and use of the Highlands is restricted to walking, hiking and skiing activities. The use of all types of motorized vehicles, including bicycles, are prohibited. Wheeled vehicles would not only disturb the soil stability and landscape, but would greatly increase the risk of grassfires. It is therefore imperative that everyone adhere to the Zoning By-law prohibiting vehicular activity and joy riding in the Highlands. Offenders can be subjected to a \$1,000 fine.

A cairn was built to recognize the dedication and perseverance of two very important residents who fought to maintain a piece of nature's tranquility for Kannata Valley residents.

The Leafy Spurge Invasion

Prairie grasses and wild flowers flourished in the Highlands until an invasive weed crept into the area. Leafy Spurge is native to Central and Eastern Europe, and has traveled to North America as a seed grain contaminant many years ago. It is an aggressive perennial weed that is difficult to destroy because of its extensive root system and its ability to reseed over large distances. This weed poses a serious threat to native grassland and would eventually take over any natural flora in the Highlands.

The Last Mountain Lake Stewardship Group assumed the challenge of eradicating this weed from the riparian areas of Last Mountain Lake by organizing a project called, "Purge the Spurge". Although there are several ways of controlling Leafy Spurge, the most effective biological method is by using the Aphanthia Flea Beetle. In 2009 a team of volunteers travelled to southern Saskatchewan for a "beetle sweeping campaign". Beetles were captured and then dropped into three heavily infected areas of the Highlands. By 2011 we could see a marked decrease in the growth of Leafy Spurge in the drop areas. As the weed dies off, the beetles move outward to adjacent spurge infestations.

Closing

The Resort Village of Kannata Valley is one of the most appealing resort villages on Last Mountain Lake. Had the building development proceeded thirty odd years ago as planned, we would be looking at a much different picture, certainly one not nearly as attractive as what we see here today. As Leafy Spurge becomes less prominent and wild flowers begin to flourish, we have the privilege of enjoying the beauty and peacefulness of this nature reserve at our leisure.

I hope the information provided is beneficial, especially for those residents who may not be familiar with the history of the Highlands. Please ensure your family and/or friends understand the responsibility and respect that this property deserves.

Submitted By Sherry Forsyth