

COMMONAGE A 'GEM'

Okanagan Collaborative Conservation Program states importance of Vernon Commonage area

Darren Handschuh - Aug 23, 2025 / 7:00 pm



Photo: 580commonage.ca

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To help do this, the [OCCP](#) has developed a [biodiversity factsheet](#) in collaboration with Ecoscape Environmental Consultants Ltd., listing the importance of the area.

Tucked between Okanagan and Kalamalka Lakes, the Commonage is a 6,500-hectare ecological gem and according to the OCCP "one of the most significant biodiversity strongholds in the BC Interior. "Protecting this landscape safeguards rare ecosystems, preserves native species, secures water resources and maintains critical wildlife corridors."

"The Vernon Commonage is home to some of the most endangered biogeoclimatic zones in the province and habitat for 83 species-at-risk, including a number of species found nowhere else in Canada or the world, such as the [Okanagan hammetail](#)," the release says.

"This is one of the last places in the Okanagan region where large tracts of sensitive habitat remain connected. Wetlands, riparian zones, forests and grasslands come together here to form a living network that supports species year-round."

The OCCP says more than 70 per cent of the area is rated as "environmentally highly sensitive," and is facing mounting pressure from development, pollution, invasive species and climate change.

"This resource is intended to support shared understanding among partners, decision-makers, and stewardship groups. Protecting this rare landscape — a key component of a critical corridor—is essential to maintaining regional ecological connectivity and advancing climate adaptation objectives."

Development concerns in the Commonage were raised earlier this year after it was learned [Kerkhoff Develop-Build is proposing to build a master-planned community](#) on part of its 1,040-acre property known as the [580 Commonage](#), seven minutes from downtown Vernon.

At a May 14 public open house about the project, Eric Kowalski, NONC vice-president, said "basically, this is a classic sprawl development. They are proposing a massive development several kilometres from downtown in a currently undeveloped area. We think it is unfortunate in this day and age we are even considering a sprawl development."

Kowalski said the project is proposed on land that is "really highly sensitive," adding a city study pointed out the environmental sensitivity of the area.

Company CEO Leonard Kerkhoff refuted that the project is urban sprawl, noting it is within city limits and environmental concerns will be at the forefront of the project.

"Their line is 'Save the Commonage.' I feel that's what we're doing," Kerkhoff said. "We are proposing to dedicate and preserve two thirds of the site, potentially even more than that."

"There's protected grasses, there's endangered species and working around that and dedicating [the land] in perpetuity. So I think our vision is aligned. Right now, it is not protected land, it is private land and we are proposing to preserve two thirds of the site."