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REPORT FROM CITY HALL:
THE DINGMAN CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT

By Ed Corrigan, Councillor Ward 7

In the wake of Walkerton clean water has become a matter of public concern. As Councillor representing Ward 7 I have the privilege of representing the City of London on the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) Board. The Conservation Authority has the responsibility to manage the upper part of the Thames River watershed and operates Fanshawe, Wildwood and Pittock Conservation Areas.

The Conservation Authorities have their origins in flood control efforts to prevent flooding of populated areas by the river systems in Ontario. Fortunately the dams and reservoir system built by the community have prevented the flooding and devastation of bygone years. However, dams built back in the 1950's are now in need of repair and even replacement.

The Federal and Provincial governments have recently committed \$2.8 million to rehabilitate Springbank dam. The City of London is responsible for the remaining third of the cost of repairing the structure.

An important area of responsibility for the UTRCA is the environmental health of the Thames river watershed and its tributaries. One initiative is the Clean Water Project where the UTRCA provides financial assistance to improve and protect water quality in rural areas. Farmers who are interested in this project should contact their local Conservation Authority.

Another project of the Upper Thames CA is preparing Report Cards on the health of the 28 subwatersheds within the Authority's jurisdiction. Unfortunately the Dingman Creek watershed ranks the lowest of all watersheds in the Upper Thames River area. In terms of forest cover, the Dingman watershed received a grade of D. Experts believe that there should be 25-30 % natural cover to sustain our native plants and animals. There is only 14% forest cover in the Dingman watershed.

Dingman Creek surface water quality ranked D minus. Four different water indicators are measured: Benthic, or the aquatic invertebrates that live in the stream; Phosphorus, Bacteria and Conductivity. In Dingman Creek high levels of phosphorus and bacteria were found including fecal coliform bacteria which is almost six times the safe swimming guideline.

Dingman Creek watershed covers 176 square kilometers which includes areas of the City of London and the municipalities of Middlesex Centre and Thames Centre. It is home to a number of rare species including the Greenside Darter fish, the Eastern Hognose snake, Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle and the Spotted Turtle. Rare plants found in the Dingman watershed include American Chestnut, Blue Ash, Broad Beech Fern and False Hop Sedge.

The Dingman Creek watershed acts as a natural corridor between the Dorchester Swamp and Komoka Provincial Park. It provides a corridor for wild life to move between these two

Environmentally Significant Areas.

A joint project has been launched by the Thames Talbot Land Trust and the UTRCA to improve the health of the Dingman Creek and to instill a sense of community stewardship of the watershed. Toward this end an Open House and Community Consultation was held on May 23rd, 2001 at the Lambeth arena. Funding of \$32,000 has been granted by Environment Canada's EcoAction Community Funding Program to support restoration of the watershed. Approximately 6,700 native trees and shrubs and 5,000 native wildflowers and grass plugs will be planted. Eight blue bird-nesting boxes will also be installed. Areas targeted include stream buffering in Southwinds Park and near the Lambeth Legion.

Julie Welker, a Community Partnership Specialist at the UTRCA, is co-ordinating these projects. If you would like more information or would like to help with this project Julie can be contacted the UTRCA at 451-2800 ex.255. I would like to hear from you about this issue or any other City related concern. I can be reached at my City Hall office at 661-1558 or at home at 652-0973. My email address is ecorriga@city.london.on.ca.