Welcome to the Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills Environmentally Significant Area (ESA). This is the largest ESA in the City of London, at just over 250 hectares, with the majority of the lands in public ownership.

The ESA is significant for its size, rich variety of natural habitats, rolling topography and unique “kettle” ponds, all within an urban setting.

**Glacial Soils and Kettle Ponds**

The ESA is situated on the Ingersoll Moraine, an east-west ridge of till (soil) deposited more than 12,000 years ago by a glacier. The kettle ponds were created when large blocks of ice from the glacier formed permanent depressions that filled with water when the ice melted.

**Plant Communities**

The upland ridges between the ponds support a diverse hardwood forest of Sugar Maple, American Beech, Red Oak, White Oak, Black Cherry, and Shagbark Hickory. Spring wildflowers include White Trillium, Bloodroot and Trout Lily. In low wet areas, swamp forests contain Red Maple, Silver Maple, and White Elm. The swamps are home to several species of ferns, and to wildflowers such as Skunk Cabbage and Canada Mayflower.

**Wildlife**

The ESA provides habitat for a large number of bird species. Woodpeckers, nuthatches and other birds nest in the woodlands while Field Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks prefer the grasslands. Mallards, Wood Ducks and Canada Geese nest near the ponds. Among the 20 species of mammals recorded are White-tailed Deer, Red Fox, Raccoon, Beaver, and Coyote. Salamanders, Spring Peepers and Gray Treefrogs rely on the vernal pools within the forest to complete their life cycle. The ponds support fish species such as Largemouth Bass, Yellow Perch and Pumpkinseed.

**Looking for More Information?**

City Ecologist  
www.London.ca/ESA, 519-661-4980  
Upper Thames River Conservation Authority  
www.thamesriver.on.ca, 519-451-2800

Numerous organizations, clubs, committees and local Adopt an ESA volunteers have been involved in the stewardship of the ESA. Their efforts have enhanced the health of this unique natural area.
Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills
HISTORY OF PEOPLE AND THE PONDS

19th Century and Earlier
Humans have been visiting and using the Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills area for a long time. Archaeological digs uncovered artifacts from First Nations campsites that date back as far as 4500 years ago.

The first European settlers arrived in 1815, and by 1820 Pond Mills was a thriving settlement.

During the 1860s William Saunders (1836-1914) and other naturalists were visiting the Ponds to document the area’s rich diversity of plants, insects and other life forms.

Lands and waters that today lie within or near Westminster Ponds / Pond Mills ESA have a long history of use including clearance for agriculture, grazing, logging, drainage and damming.

20th Century
In the 1940s the Department of Veterans Affairs secured lands, mainly north and east of Saunders Pond, and established a residential care and rehabilitation centre for veterans.

Conservation Efforts
About 1910, the Western Ontario Fish and Game Protective Association acquired its first land around Tumbleson Pond. The club later expanded its holdings and continues to operate.

In 1913 W.E. Saunders (1861-1943) made his first purchase of land at Saunders Pond. For three decades, Saunders and fellow members of the McIlwraith Ornithological Club (now Nature London), taught visitors about the ponds, birds and conservation.

During the 1970s the City and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority began acquiring property with the intention of establishing a park. In 2004, London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's Health Care donated land in and around Saunders Pond to the City.

Since the late 1960s, the McIlwraith Field Naturalists (Nature London) has played an active role in advocating on behalf of the natural features of the Ponds area.

In the early 2000s, the Rotary Club of London West funded numerous stewardship projects, including boardwalks built from planks engraved with donors’ names. Many Londoners, both individuals and groups, continue to make important contributions to the health of the ESA through stewardship.

Non-native Invasive Species Control and Ecological Restoration
The City funded UTRCA ESA team and Adopt an ESA volunteers and others manage non-native invasive species in the ESA. The priority is to protect the habitat of rare and at risk species.

A complex ecological restoration project initiated in 2017 included the installation of an accessible trail and boardwalk behind the tourism building. Due to the severe infestation by buckthorn and standing dead ash trees, the work included mulching the buckthorn and ash to allow the ecological restoration and multi-year adaptive management to begin. The City was awarded a Canada 150 Community Infrastructure grant for the implementation of the work.

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