

Tree cutting begins on KNL lands

Jessica Cunha

Kanata Courier-Standard | 21 hours ago

The Kanata Lakes North Development Group began removing trees on its land in the South March Highlands on Jan. 4.

The work is expected to wrap by early April, said Jack Stirling, consultant for KNL Development. The developer received the necessary permits to cut trees last month.

Donna DuBreuil, co-founder of the Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre, said she was concerned about wildlife living in the area, particularly those that hibernate.

"I find it very hard to believe that they could not have done the initial clearing at a time that would be least lethal to wildlife," said the Dunrobin resident, adding the best times for tree clearing are after the winter and following the spring birthing season.

Precautions are being taken to avoid killing wildlife, Stirling said.

Areas where Blanding's turtles historically hibernate have been fenced off and Butternut trees selected for preservation have also been marked by fencing. Both are listed as threatened species.

"We've done an awful lot of extensive work on site," said Stirling, adding an environmentalist and city staff visit regularly.



A bur oak tree, centre, is left standing to allow any hibernating or nesting animals to flee before it's cut down. Tree removal on the KNL lands in the South March Highlands began on Jan. 4. A Dunrobin resident is criticizing the city for allowing clear cutting during hibernation season but the city says KNL is complying with its wildlife protocol.

20170104114119

SHARE

0:00 / 0:25

HD X

Kanata North Coun. Marianne Wilkinson said she's been receiving updates from the city's environmentalist who has been on site every day. The tree cutters are respecting the city's wildlife protocol, a document approved in fall 2015 that offers guidelines to help inform developers' mitigation plans for wildlife, she said.

The protocol recommends workers cut around trees with visible nests or cavities where wildlife may be hibernating and leave them overnight to allow any animals or birds to vacate the area.

Wilkinson added that workers are not removing tree stumps at this time "so those (animals) hibernating underground won't be touched."

DuBreuil said she long recognized the development was a done deal, but was distressed to learn tree cutting would take place during the winter.

No matter the precautions in place, it's unlikely hibernating animals will make it out of the construction zone, she said.

"They're in hibernation, they don't hear or feel anything until the ground above them starts to thaw," DuBreuil said. "I think it's silly to say they've taken precautions."

“The wildlife strategy is just so much empty air.”

Wilkinson said the developer is following the protocol.

“They are following it. She may think they're not following it enough but they are following it,” said the councillor.

TRAIL PLANS DELAYED

The city's planned trail network through the highlands has to be reworked as some of the paths cut through “recently-identified or planned turtle nesting areas and basking areas,” according to the city's environmentalist, said Wilkinson.

“That's going to delay getting the trails on city lands,” she said. “We want to get them up as quickly as we can but it's going to take a little while.”

The city will work with the ministry “over the next few months” to identify new trail paths that comply with the Endangered Species Act.

And while work is ongoing, the ski trail between Goulbourn Forced Road and the road allowance on First Line Road is off-limits to the public.

“People have been using it for some time so they're going to have to adjust,” said Wilkinson, adding people can still use the trails in the Trillium Woods, which is city-owned and not being touched.

It's estimated that a trail connection between Goulbourn Forced Road and the road allowance on First Line Road won't be re-established until 2018.

“We want people to know what's happening,” said Wilkinson, adding she will continue to update her website throughout the process.

BACKGROUND

KNL Development received permission to remove trees from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the city last month for phases 7 and 8 of its residential build in the South March Highlands.

A six-metre buffer along city-owned land has been marked and the next step is to erect chain-link fencing along the line, said Stirling.

The developer had a list of conditions to meet before cutting could begin, including protection measures for trees, proper fencing, and wildlife mitigation measures. KNL is also required to meet a number of deadlines for required work.

The area to be cleared encompasses about 75 to 100 hectares of land and is bounded by Kizell Pond, Goulbourn Forced Road and Terry Fox Drive.

Jessica Cunha is a reporter and photographer at the Kanata Courier-Standard. She can be reached at jessica.cunha@metroland.com. Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#)