



VALLEY HEIGHTS SECONDARY SCHOOL, ONTARIO

WHERE EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY MEET CONSERVATION

OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA BASED CONSERVATION MEASURE (OECM)

In Norfolk County, Valley Heights Secondary School offers students a learning environment unlike most high schools. Just adjacent to the school building itself, lies a different kind of teaching space, a diverse natural landscape of wetlands, meadows and Carolinian forest that support a rich variety of native plants and wildlife. At Valley Heights, conservation and education go hand in hand. With a protected natural landscape just steps away, students are given a unique opportunity to learn in and from nature. Through both curriculum-based learning and extracurricular initiatives such as the school's Environmental Club, students regularly participate in meaningful stewardship projects that leave a lasting impact. From creating pollinator gardens and planting native trees and wildflowers to maintaining outdoor learning spaces and managing invasive species, these hands-on experiences help students develop practical conservation skills, deepen their connection to nature, and play an active role in maintaining the ecological health of their community.

However, the landscape surrounding Valley Heights was not always as it appears today. The property tells a remarkable story of renewal. Historical aerial photographs reveal that much of the area was once cultivated for agriculture, reflecting the areas long agricultural heritage and the important role that farming continues to play across the region.

As land use changed over time, former agricultural fields gradually transitioned into woodlands and

wetlands, creating the diverse mosaic of habitats that persist today. In 2024, with support from the Grand Erie District School Board, an Ecological Inventory and Management Plan was completed for the property, identifying opportunities to continue to protect, restore, and enhance biodiversity while supporting future education initiatives.

Big Creek is at the heart of this landscape, winding through the property and connecting it to an extensive network of wetlands, forests, and protected natural areas across the region. These interconnected ecosystems provide important wildlife habitat, support ecological connectivity, and contribute to the exceptional biodiversity of the area. The property is also located within the UNESCO-designated Long Point Biosphere Region, a proud partner on the project.

The story of Valley Heights Secondary School demonstrates how everyone has a role to play in conservation. From former agricultural fields to resilient wetlands and forests, the landscape illustrates what is possible when people are committed to helping nature thrive. By fostering meaningful connections between students and the natural world, it serves not only as a refuge for biodiversity, but also as a living classroom. Here, the next generation of environmental leaders can develop the knowledge, skills, and passion needed to care for the landscapes and communities that sustain us all.



Does the property have a defined geographical space?

Yes! The boundaries of Valley Heights Secondary School (VHSS) are well identified and can be accurately placed on a map.



Is there an effective way of ensuring that biodiversity will continue to be conserved into the future?

Yes! As the landowner for VHSS, the Grand Erie District School Board has authority over the property and has committed to implementing the Ecological Inventory and Management Plan. Much of the site is also protected through provincial and municipal policies that restrict development within wetlands, woodlands, and hazard lands.



Is there an expectation that the biodiversity on the site will be conserved for the long term?

Yes! The VHSS property is expected to remain in long-term educational use under Ontario's Education Act. Future stewardship is guided by the Ecological Inventory and Management Plan, and the property contributes to a broader network of protected and conserved lands in the UNESCO Long Point Biosphere Region.



Is biodiversity conservation the primary objective of the area?

No – and that's okay! The primary purpose of the VHSS property is to provide secondary school education under Ontario's Education Act. However, biodiversity conservation is supported through environmental education, student-led stewardship initiatives, and ongoing management guided by the property's Ecological Inventory and Management Plan.

Quick tip
If this answer was "yes" for Valley Heights Secondary School it would likely be assessed as a Protected Area. Both types of areas are important and both achieve biodiversity conservation.



Is biodiversity on the site conserved?

Yes! The VHSS property contains provincially significant wetlands, significant woodlands, and Carolinian forest communities that provide habitat for species at risk and other native wildlife. Habitat restoration and ecological monitoring are helping to maintain and enhance biodiversity values across the property.