

STATE OF THE PROJECT

REALIZING OUR VISION FOR THE WESTMINSTER PONDS CENTRE

The Westminster Ponds Centre for Environment & Sustainability has continued to develop rapidly since it was launched in 2019.

We're proud to share that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout 2021 and into 2022, the WPC has taken important steps towards reaching its full potential as a revolutionary catalyst for environmental change and action in the London-Middlesex region.

In this brief update, you will find information about the WPC's current occupants, programs, achievements to date, and more.



ACTIVE AT THE WPC



ReForest London is a registered charity dedicated to partnering with our community to enhance environmental and human health in the Forest City, through the benefits of trees. **As owner of the WPC, ReForest London is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Centre, and spearheading the effort to create a thriving hub for our region's environmental movement.**



Thames Talbot Land Trust is a non-profit, charitable organization that actively works to protect, conserve, and restore nature within Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford, and Perth counties, contributing to a stable climate, human wellbeing, and healthy habitats for all species. They currently protect more than 2000 acres of land (and counting), which are home to at least 50 Species at Risk.



The **London Environmental Network** helps to protect our environment and build a more sustainable community by building participation, collaboration, and capacity in our community to co-create positive environmental change through events and programs such as Green Economy London, Greener Homes London, the Environmental Action Incubator and Depave Paradise.



The **Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB)** is one of the largest public school boards in Ontario, serving 77,000 students in 160 schools. The Environmental Education program strives to be an active leader and corporate model for environmental sustainability, and provides innovative, interdisciplinary programs focusing on the natural environment.



Childreach is a local charity whose mission is to support and strengthen parents and professionals through learning opportunities and relationships, in order to see every child reach their full potential. They offer drop-in playgrounds, fun educational activities, workshops, information, and individualized support for parents and caregivers.



Urban Roots is a non-profit organization that revitalizes underused land in the City of London for agriculture by producing high-quality, organic vegetables, fruits, and herbs and distributing them locally through its model of thirds, donating no less than one third of production, selling no less than one third at affordable rates (half market rates), and selling the remaining production to food outlets. Since its inception, Urban Roots has grown and distributed over 40,000 lbs of fresh, organically grown produce.

PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES

Wild Child

A free, weekly drop-in program offered twice a week by Childreach brings little ones and their parents into the woods to enjoy free play in a natural setting. Wild Child demystifies the risks of outdoor free play, and increases parents' confidence in providing child-led, inquiry-based opportunities for kids. A summer camp is also available for older kids, providing a wealth of fun and engaging outdoor education and exploration opportunities for London's youth.



Environmental Leaders Project

The environmental leadership program offered by the Thames Valley District School Board is a multi-credit Grade 10 program that allows students to explore the outdoors, the environment, leadership, and civic issues through project-based learning. We are excited that the program has expanded to include two terms, allowing them to directly impact over 40 students through the program per year. Students have been able to work with various community partners on a wide range of issues such as:

- Water assessment and river clean-up with Antler River Rally
- Bird friendly windows with Bird Friendly London
- Air pruning seed beds with the Seed Hub
- Invasive species removal with ReForest London
- ESA management with UTRCA

Seed Hub

The Seed Hub is a volunteer-driven program that focuses on ethical seed collection and seed-centered public education. Through the Hub, we aim to enhance local ecological restoration efforts by creating a strong supply base of native tree and shrub seeds to be used for seedling growing and direct planting projects by Reforest London and other partners. To date, the Hub has led seed forecasting and collection events in local parks and green spaces, seedling plantings with schools and youth groups, and a three-part webinar series.



PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES CONT'D

Signal Boost Initiative (SBI)

Through the WPC's first dedicated program, the Signal Boost Initiative, we fund, support, and amplify workshops, presentations, and volunteer training events delivered by London Environmental Network member organizations and other partners, driving environmental impact within the region. Over 140 such events have been held to date! The program has helped to dramatically increase the quality and quantity of environmental education opportunities for volunteers and the general public. In turn, their newfound skills and knowledge will help move the needle on environmental action in our community and collectively cultivate solutions at scale.

London Environmental Network (LEN), in particular, has led many environmental initiatives that have broadened knowledge and bolstered our collective action as an environment and sustainability centre. Through their Member Forums, LEN members were able to build capacity and grow their knowledge of social media strategies with Canadian Freshwater Alliance, as well as discover new approaches to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the environmental sector with Pillar Nonprofit Network. Other examples of efforts led by LEN include a rain barrel sale, community LDD moth kits, and window retrofits with Bird Friendly London.

All these great events require a great space to host them in! To meet this need and continue to support environmental partners and other external groups, we recently developed the fully-renovated Volunteer Training Centre (VTC) as a bookable space for events, collaborations, professional development, and workshops. The new space is situated in the heart of nature, and presents a unique and welcoming venue with high level amenities for both in-person and hybrid experiences.



Outdoor Recreation Programs

Hundreds of Londoners visit the WPC every week to enjoy various recreational and leisure opportunities offered in a beautiful, natural setting. London Hospitals Co-ed Slopitch League utilizes the baseball diamonds during the spring and summer, while the local neighborhood association - Westminster Working Group - hosts a snowshoeing program during the winter. Londoners can borrow snowshoes from the Group or bring their own while they explore the snowy trails, free of charge.

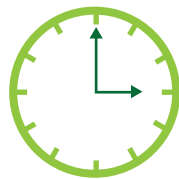
Native Plant Sale

In 2021, the WPC held its first ever Native Plant Sale as a fundraiser in partnership with Thames Talbot Land Trust, Nature London, Climate Action London, Pollinator Pathways Project, and ReForest London. Through the sale, over 2,800 native plants found new homes in the gardens of Londoners, and with the support of Londoners, we were also able donate numerous native plants Meredith Park for their own pollinator garden. We look forward to making this an annual fixture for the London community!

KEY STATISTICS FOR 2021



64 events hosted at the WPC:
- 16 webinars
- 48 in-person events



13,414 hours of participation in programming hosted at the WPC



21 organizations offered programming through the WPC



2,554 people impacted through the WPC's activities and programs



\$2.5 million raised to date out of our fundraising goal of \$12 million

PHASING



Current Status

In 2021, we focused on attracting new partners to the WPC, renovating the Bruce and Huron pavilions into dedicated spaces for environmental organizations and education, and running and expanding the Signal Boost Initiative, our environmental education program. We also began planning our community consultation process to determine what kinds of additional environmental programs, partners, and spaces would be most impactful and valuable at the WPC.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Connectivity

Being in the woods doesn't have to mean being low-tech! Making the WPC a modern facility is vital to providing a home for London's growing environmental sector. The WPC is wired with high-speed fibre optic internet, while the Bruce Pavilion's bookable Volunteer Training Centre features a state-of-the-art audio-visual and teleconferencing system.

Accessibility

Everyone should be able to take part in enjoying and caring for our planet. To make that a reality, we've installed a universal washroom in the Huron Pavilion, automatic doors and accessible porches at both the Bruce and Huron Pavilions, and a pair of accessible parking spots. This summer will also see construction of accessibility ramps and barrier-free paths of travel to the buildings.

Green Building

We've replaced our propane boiler with sustainable geothermal heating systems, making the WPC free of fossil fuels (pictured on the right: the drilling process to lay the geothermal lines). LED lights have replaced old fluorescent lighting in the Bruce and Huron Pavilions, and a solar hot water tank helps provide hot water in the Bruce. Over the next few years, we'll be working to transform the WPC into a net-zero property, exploring how to reduce consumption and produce green energy on site.



Outdoor Features

The WPC's location next to Westminster Ponds makes it a truly special place. Recent changes to the property have included the creation of a pollinator garden thanks to Climate Action London, as well as a number of Ontario Bee Rescue beehives. Our two baseball diamonds are in use throughout the summer, while the Westminster Working Group neighbourhood association offers snowshoeing and other outdoor activities through winter.

Heritage

The WPC is located in London's only designated Cultural Heritage Landscape. As stewards of this heritage, we want to ensure that visitors have the chance to learn about the site's history as a recovery centre for military veterans.

In 2019, we fully restored the historic gatehouse at the entrance to the property, which now hosts a number of signs explaining the property's history, including that of the First Nations and veterans, as well as the exceptional natural heritage found within the Westminster Ponds Environmentally Significant Area. In the future, we hope to showcase stories of people who have been a part of the WPC property at the various stages of its development.



The gatehouse before and after its restoration.

WPC MILESTONES

2015

- London Health Sciences Centre (LHSC) decides to divest the former Western Counties Occupational Grounds
- ReForest London (RFL) begins discussions and research on its future location and the opportunity of becoming land owners

2016

- LHSC undertakes Expressions of Interest process to officially select a divestment partner who has a vision and purpose for the property
- Site feasibility study & business case analysis are completed by RFL to assess risks, issues, and opportunities
- **ReForest London submits an expression of interest and is announced as the successful divestment partner, allowing for the creation of the WPC**

2017

- Property transfer negotiations begin

2018

- Asbestos is removed from all four buildings
- Property Zoning and Permitted Uses are approved by City of London
- The outdated propane heating system is replaced by an environmentally-friendly, zero-emission geothermal heating system
- High-speed fibre optic internet service run to all buildings

2019

- City generously repaves Western Counties Road and parking lots to provide better access for visitors to the Environmentally Significant Area and environmental centre
- Property transfer conditions are all met and ReForest London is the new legal property owner
- The historic gatehouse is rescued from decay and fully renovated to serve as a wayfinding and recreation station for visitors to the Centre
- The WPC's grand opening is held, and 140 guests attend to celebrate the new Centre and share their ideas for what the future might hold
- The Huron Pavilion is completely renovated to serve as the new Huron Pavilion for Environmental Education

2020

- The first bus load of students arrives to participate in Thames Valley District School Board's (TVDSB) environmental education programming at the Centre
- Urban Roots begins growing vegetable seedlings at the Bruce Pavilion for Environmental Action
- The Bruce Pavilion's former great room is renovated to create a new Volunteer Training Centre in the building, boasting cutting-edge teleconferencing abilities and A/V, making it a terrific place for tenants and outside groups alike

2021

- A plan is prepared to preserve the Wellington Pavilion for future rehabilitation
- Concept designs are created for a community boardroom at the Bruce Pavilion

2022

- A pilot Seed Hub facility is established in the Bruce Pavilion
- Accessibility ramps are installed at both Bruce and Huron Pavilions
- The Huron Pavilion's porch is fully replaced and upgraded to become a gathering place
- Community consultations to inform the future of the WPC begin with the help of Tamarack Institute

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

A project of this scale would not be possible without the strong support of our community! Thank you to the many organizations who have joined us on the road to greater sustainability. We are grateful for your support, and for the chance to make this journey together.

\$100,000+
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TO DONATE

We need your help to make the WPC thrive and grow!

You can be a part of creating a thriving regional hub for the environment right here in Southwestern Ontario, one that will offer a wide range of programs, activities and events that you can participate in with your family and friends. By donating, you will make a lasting difference to your community and Ontario's environmental movement.

Donating to the WPC is easy!

Visit westminsterpondscentre.ca and click **DONATE** to donate online, or contact our office at:

ReForest London, PO Box 25144, London, ON, N6C 2A8

519.936.9548 x 221

We are currently developing a list of naming opportunities at the Westminster Ponds Centre. For donors wishing to explore naming opportunities, please contact:

Rodger Moran
Development Officer



rodger@reforestlondon.ca
519-936-9548 x 230

Thank you for joining us as we create a sustainable future for our community, together!

TO LEARN MORE

For more information about the WPC and its activities, please visit westminsterpondscentre.ca today, or contact:



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VISIT US

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