

July 30th, 2025

Durham Conservation Area Fence: What You Need to Know

Why was the fence installed at Durham Conservation Area?

The fence was installed to improve safety, reduce after-hours trespassing, and address persistent issues with vandalism, theft, and unpaid access. These concerns placed strain on staff, posed risks to public and staff safety, and impacted the sustainability of this increasingly busy property. The fence supports enforcement of posted closure hours (dusk to dawn), helps protect natural features, and promotes fairness for visitors who contribute to upkeep through valid day-use permits.

The fence also protects the valuable property within the campground; SVCA hosts many seasonal campers whose trailers and personal belongings are on-site for extended periods, and it is our responsibility to make efforts to protect both their assets and SVCA from potential liability associated with unauthorized access or after-hours activity.

Was public consultation required under provincial regulations?

No. There are no consultation requirements under Ontario Regulations 688/21, 686/21, or 41/24 that apply to infrastructure improvements like fencing.

- **Ontario Regulation 688/21** governs behaviour and conduct within conservation areas, allowing authorities to designate access points and closure times. "...To secure the authority's interests in its lands that include measures for fencing, signage, patrolling and any other measures to prevent unlawful entry on the authority's land and to protect the authority from exposure to liability under the *Occupiers' Liability Act*".
- **Ontario Regulation 686/21** requires consultation only for the creation of a watershed-based resource management strategy, not for site-level operational decisions.
- **Ontario Regulation 41/24** governs Section 28 permits for development, interference with wetlands, and watercourse alterations. SVCA's fence project is unrelated to these categories.

What communication did SVCA do about the fence project?

SVCA provided clear and timely public outreach, which exceeded expectations for a project of this type.

- Signage was installed on-site on February 12, 2025, informing visitors of the upcoming fencing project.
- A letter was sent to West Grey Council on April 3, 2025 and pulled for discussion during the council meeting.
- The project was presented at the SVCA Property and Parks Committee on May 5, 2025.
- A full report was delivered to the SVCA Board of Directors on May 15, 2025.
- A press release was issued on July 2, 2025, followed by coverage on radio, television, and in multiple online and print outlets.
- A letter to nearby residents was distributed through door-knocking and letterboxing in the second week of July, 2025.
- Updates were posted to SVCA's website and social media platforms.

Can SVCA charge for access to conservation areas?

Yes. Under Ontario Regulation 688/21, conservation authorities can require a valid permit to enter designated day-use areas. SVCA introduced a modest day-use fee in 2022 to help offset the real costs of maintaining these spaces.

Does this mean the public has lost access to Durham Conservation Area?

No. There is no loss of public space. The fence does not block any trails or recreational amenities. Public access remains open to all visitors with a valid day-use permit. The only change is that access is now physically controlled in line with longstanding posted rules.

Access cards will be required for entry starting in September, 2025.

What does it cost to visit?

- \$5 per day per person, or \$13.50 per vehicle load per day, or
- \$55 for an annual household membership
This membership provides access to 15 SVCA day-use properties throughout the watershed.
- In response to community feedback, SVCA also placed complimentary annual passes at all Municipality of West Grey libraries for those facing financial barriers.
- Memberships can be purchased at the Durham CA gatehouse or with a credit card online at: www.saugeenconservation.ca/annual

For more information, please contact:

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