

Whenever I have walked or skied in the Durham Conservation area over the years, I don't think there has ever been a time when I haven't silently expressed gratitude at having such a beautiful, pristine area to explore and play in so close to my home.

And now that seems to be changing.

Specifically, what I am referring to is the closure of the upper dam bridge at McGowan Falls.

It has been permanently locked for weeks, the only signage up being from the fall stating the gates would be locked at 8 pm.

What this means is the conservation area is inaccessible from the middle. This now forces people to enter either from the gates on Durham Road, which is okay if you drive, but even still there is very limited, safe road parking. And what if you do not drive?

You scramble down a hill under the Heritage Bridge. Why do they have to enter down there? Because the Day Use parking lot isn't plowed at all, no one can enter via car or by foot. Honestly, I find that shameful. How is a family with several children, sleds and toboggans supposed to get into the park? A friend I skied with today told me they park at the old Library and cross the street. How can anyone think that is okay? That now parents with kids and sleds in tow must cross a highway?

I live in town on Albert Street, how am I to enter a big, magnificent conservation area just waiting for me? I go in on either side of the west end of the Heritage Bridge, down a path is not made for that. It's steep and it is slippery. And if I wish to ski? Well that's going to make it incredibly awkward and unsafe.

I understand all about liability, and the whole town knows that is a big reason why the middle time was closed because of people diving off, and we accepted that. But we are in winter now and will be for months. And with the top gate locked as well, people have no choice but to either park on the side of a road at the east, or risk injury entering under the bridge, and/or crossing highway 6. As far as I know there aren't any safety issues at the bridges, they have been unlocked for years in the winter, except in severe conditions, which is certainly not now.

As I write this, I am sincerely hoping that everything I have written after "the upper dam gates are locked" is moot point. Perhaps it just got locked one day and with the holidays and everything else someone has forgotten to unlock it.

And if that isn't the case, I want one of you to tell me why please. Tell me why in these troubled times when by order of the government the parks are NOT closed, why is it so difficult for people to enter? It is a proven fact, especially during Covid, that to be outside in nature has a tremendous positive effect on people's mental health. And I know all of you care about the well being of your fellow humans, as I also know perhaps you are simply not aware both are closed.

All I am asking is on behalf of myself and many others who I have spoken to who use the park, simply please open a gate, the middle or upper, it doesn't matter which. It makes a massive difference when there are both closed.

Thank you all deeply for your time and help in this matter,

Jennifer Hart