

Barn swallows will find new homes at Hart farmstead

GUELPH—Every year in May, barn swallows arrive to nest in the old, abandoned Hart Barn. This year, the birds will arrive to new homes.

Andrew Lambden, owner of Terra View Homes, is working with Natural Resource Solutions Inc., a Waterloo-based environmental consulting firm, to ensure the birds have adequate nesting grounds on May 1 -- the swallows' expected arrival date.

The developer recently purchased the Hart farmstead on Hart's Lane West, just off Gordon Street in the south end of the city. Earlier this week, city council approved the removal of a 170-year-old barn after hearing it is so unsafe the late owner wouldn't allow anyone inside.

Lambden said a "complete assessment," cleared by the Ministry of Natural Resources, revealed that 32 swallows have nested in the barn and are likely to return.

He said under the ministry's guidelines the company is designing a nest area close to the surrounding wetlands.

"In essence, we have to create a new habitat for the birds," he says.

The barn swallow, also known as aerial insectivores, is a bird species in serious decline, a result of disappearing habitat and climate change, according to a federal report called The State of Canada's Birds 2012.

The birds are finicky. So, to make the space around the barn suitable, structures will be built with "nesting cups" that encourage the swallows to nest.

The south-end barn's upcoming removal made Guelph resident Laura Murr concerned that developing the land it sits on will destroy important habitat for the birds. She wrote to city councillors about the issue and said she was relieved to learn on Tuesday about the real estate developer's extensive plan to accommodate the birds.

But all too often, she said, she hears about plans to make things better, and it doesn't happen.

"It doesn't stop the habitat destruction in our city. Pretty soon there will only be room for people," said Murr, who has been involved in environmental issues around city development since the 1990s.

Todd Salter, the city's general manager of planning and building services, said the concerns related to endangered species have been addressed by Lambden and the Ministry of Natural Resources.



Barn swallows protected

Mercury file photo

A colorful barn swallow sits atop his perch near hot springs at the Hart Mountain National Antelope Refuge in southeastern Oregon.

Guelph builder Terra View Homes is taking steps to preserve habitat for the threatened swallows that live at a south side city farm

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