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For Immediate Release

York Region releases 2005 State of the Environment Report

33 recommendations proposed as part of action plan to protect environment

NEWMARKET – York Regional Council received *Focus on Our Environment*, the 2005 State of the Environment Report, and adopted its 33 recommendations to help continue to protect and enhance York Region's natural environment.

"York Region is committed to environmental protection to ensure that the high quality of life our residents have come to enjoy remains for generations to come," said Regional Chair and CEO Bill Fisch. "This State of the Environment Report is an important step to gauge the current state of the Region's natural environment, the progress that the Region and its partners have made over the past five years with environmental initiatives, as well as what we can do further to preserve a natural legacy for the future."

State of the environment reporting is an important measurement of the health of the air we breathe, the water we drink and the land that sustains us. The Report uses 85 unique indicators to assess the status of land, water and air resources, examines major stresses on these resources and identifies areas where action is required.

"*Focus on Our Environment* is a comprehensive blueprint for a healthy future," said City of Vaughan Regional Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, Chair of the Region's Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee. "Implementing the recommendations and a commitment to following through on these items will be crucial if we are to ensure the sustainability of both our environment and our health."

Focus on Our Environment is a follow up to the Region's initial State of the Environment Report released in 2000. The earlier report recommended the collection, monitoring and reporting on York Region's natural environment at regular intervals.

The Report's findings are divided into four categories:

Indicators of good health:

- The extent of York Region's Greenlands system (29 per cent increase in hectares, 2000-2005)
- High quality municipally-supplied drinking water (99.84 per cent compliance, 2000-2004)
- The warm-water fishery in Lake Simcoe

Indicators where improving trends are seen:

- Population densities in urban areas and villages (17 per cent increase in density, 1999-2004)
- Diversity in housing types
- Transit ridership (44 per cent increase, 2001-2004)
- Water conservation (38.7 per cent decrease in per capita use, 1997-2004)

Indicators of poor environmental health:

- Phosphorus levels in lakes and rivers
- The frequency of poor air quality days and smog advisories (six advisories spanning 14 days, 2004)

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Indicators where worsening trends are seen:

- The number of people driving cars, the number of cars per household (six per cent increase, 1996-2001) and the increased number of car trips per household per day (six per cent increase, 1996-2001)
- The number of times since 2000 that concentrations of ground-level ozone exceed provincial criteria

As a means of follow-up to these items, the report cites 33 recommendations for action by the Region and our partners to preserve our natural heritage. These recommendations are divided into five areas and address monitoring the environment for the future; taking action on sustainability; meeting targets and commitments; enhancing the Region's role as leader; and working in partnership for success.

Focus on Our Environment also outlines key challenges for the future, including balancing population growth with the need to provide services and environmental protection, meeting reforestation and transit targets and meeting provincial criteria and federal standards for air quality.

A key theme that winds through the Report is taking responsibility for one's impact on the natural environment. It is recognized that it is everyone's responsibility to protect and enhance our valuable natural resources. To that end, the Report includes a chapter entitled *Taking Responsibility: What you can do*. This chapter includes 26 tips that everyone can use to lessen our individual impact on the environment as well as important links and resources.

The report, an updated natural features map and a brochure, *An A to Z of Environmental Actions*, will be distributed through each of York Region's nine municipalities, local schools and libraries. They also will be available to the public on the Region's Web site at www.york.ca and through the Information Kiosk at the York Region Administrative Centre, 17250 Yonge Street, Newmarket, in January 2006.

For a complete listing of the 33 recommendations in *Focus on Our Environment*, please see the attached Fact Sheet.

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For more information on the Regional Municipality of York and the services our Region offers, please visit our Web site at www.york.ca

Media Contact: Tim Paleczny, Corporate Communications, York Region
Phone: (905) 830-4444, ext. 1238 or after-hours pager (905) 830-3302
Email: tim.paleczny@york.ca