

Recommendations



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recommendations



Focus on Our Environment is the second State of the Environment Report for York Region. The development of the Report required much collaboration, consultation, refinement of indicators and information, data gathering, analysis, interpretation and finally, reporting. All this was done in order to provide an answer to the question, “How healthy is the environment in York Region?”

There is not a simple answer to this question. The information and data gathered for this Report have helped us understand that we are blessed with many diverse, beautiful, and important natural resources in York Region. Some of these resources are relatively healthy, and others are not. Many are getting better and some are getting worse. This Report clearly demonstrates that significant progress has been made in protecting and restoring our natural resources over the five year period of 2000-2005. There are, however, many stiff challenges ahead.

Similar to the process for the SOE 2000 Report, analysis of the findings of *Focus on Our Environment* has resulted in recommendations for action. The 33 recommendations, which follow below, outline further actions that the Region, in conjunction with others, should take in order to augment stewardship of York Region’s natural environment. The recommendations suggest activities that will build on current successes and will improve the health of our environment for the future. They are as follows:

Monitoring the Environment for the Future

State of the Environment Reporting lets us measure the health of the air we breathe, the water we drink and the land that sustains us. It also lets us measure the stresses on the environment and the effectiveness of our efforts to protect and enhance it; to pinpoint problems and recognize successes. It allows us to know whether things are getting better, or whether things are getting worse. The information gathered in these types of Reports helps us to protect and restore our natural resources. And it helps us to make better, wiser decisions.

In several instances, data and information systems are not yet in place to evaluate important segments of York Region’s natural environment. In order to make progress in these areas and to be able to monitor and report on them, steps need to be taken immediately to determine and/or develop the most appropriate indicators and to start collection of data for the future. Our activities in this area should be available to all those interested. Therefore, it is recommended:

1. *That the Region take a leadership role in addressing the data gaps and indicators required to more accurately monitor the state of the natural environment of York Region for the future.*
2. *That, under the umbrella of the Greening Strategy, the Region establish a working committee in 2006 to identify the tools and processes required to monitor York Region’s natural environment on an ongoing basis and to address the issues raised in this Report. It is suggested that this Committee consist of Regional staff and representatives of the key partner organizations involved in the development of this Report.*
3. *That the Region and its partners report on the status of York Region’s natural environment to the community, at minimum, every 5 years.*
4. *That the results of these activities be easily accessible to York Region residents and interested parties under the umbrella of the Greening Strategy and via an expanded section on the Greening page on the Region’s website.*





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Taking Action on Sustainability

Sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Inherent in this notion is the idea that sustainability includes a healthy natural environment, economic prosperity and social well-being. Sustainability planning requires consideration of all three aspects. Therefore, it is recommended:

5. *That the Region align its major initiatives (e.g. Greening Strategy, Regional Air Quality Policy, Vision 2026, Master Plans, Human Services Planning and the State of the Environment) and build upon the concept of developing a sustainability framework that integrates economy, environment and community aspects and helps to align the Region's programs.*

Meeting Targets and Commitments

Targets have been set at the federal, provincial or Regional level by which we can measure both progress towards protection of the natural environment from further degradation and the success of restoration efforts. Although much progress has been made over the past five years with respect to York Region's natural environment, many challenges still exist. The following recommendations detail specific targets or commitments that have been made. Progress towards these will be monitored and reported on in future SOE reports. Therefore, it is recommended:

Forest Cover

6. *That the Region continue to invest in initiatives to meet the forest cover target contained in the Regional Official Plan by protecting existing forest cover and re-establishing new forests, in order to ensure a systems approach to linking York Region's Natural Heritage Areas.*

Woodlands Mapping and Policies

7. *That the Region continue to refine and update forest cover mapping and policies in the Regional Official Plan.*

Wetlands

8. *That the Region continue to protect and enhance current wetlands and consider strategies for updating Regional Official Plan mapping and policies.*

Transit and Rapid Transit Initiatives

9. *That the Region continue its efforts to develop and promote conventional and Rapid Transit in order to reach the Transportation Master Plan target of 17% public transit use by 2031, recognizing that the modal split will differ by geographical area in the Region.*
10. *That the Region promote the benefits of Travel Demand Management, transit use, and alternatives to automobile use to manage traffic congestion, reduce emissions and improve air quality for those who live, work and/or play in York Region*

Land Use/Planning

11. *That the Region and its partners continue with planning initiatives related to Regional Official Plan Amendment 43 (the Centres and Corridors amendment), that call for 30% of future population and employment growth to occur within the Region's centres and corridors by 2026, in order to support transit, intensification, affordable housing and more compact new communities in York Region.*
12. *That the Region and its partners work actively to increase opportunities for York Region residents to lead healthier lifestyles through the design of communities that promote walking, cycling, outdoor activities and other options of transportation.*



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Waste Diversion

13. That the Region, in conjunction with area municipalities, continue its solid waste management, waste diversion and household organic waste initiatives in order to meet the proposed Ministry of the Environment target of 60% diversion of total solid waste collected by the Region and municipalities.

Lake Simcoe

14. That the Region continue to work actively with key stakeholders in order to maintain total phosphorus loadings to Lake Simcoe below the LSEMS target of 75 tonnes per year.
15. That the Region continue to explore ways to improve treatment methods for its wastewater, to set targets, and to further reduce the loadings from Water Pollution Control Plants to Lake Simcoe.

Water Conservation

16. That the Region continue with its water conservation programs and set new, higher targets as part of its upcoming Water Efficiency Master Plan.

Water Quality

17. That the Region work with Conservation Authorities and area municipalities to fulfill the requirements for Source Water Protection in order to provide long term protection for sources of drinking water in York Region.
18. That the Region, Conservation Authorities and the area municipalities work together to ensure that stormwater management in new developments in York Region meets or exceeds the highest level of treatment based on provincial guidelines and that stormwater management in existing urban areas protects the health of rivers, streams and fisheries.
19. That the Region work with Conservation Authorities to complete a comprehensive update of watershed plans across the Region.

Enhancing the Region's Role as Leader:

Many opportunities exist for the Region to augment its stewardship of the environment through further actions within its corporate operations, through investment in resources, strategies and initiatives and through an increased role in encouraging actions to protect and enhance the environment by those who live, work and/or play in York Region. Therefore, it is recommended:

20. That the Region expand its internal policies regarding recycling, energy conservation and clean air initiatives and adopts a "Green York" campaign for all its sites and operations.
21. That the Region take the lead on working on future and emerging issues such as local adaptation strategies for climate change impacts and local outbreaks of invasive species, as appropriate.
22. That the Region move to adopt and implement the Regional Air Quality Policy and Clean Air Action Plans to be presented by the Corporate Clean Air Task Force in 2006.
23. That Regional Council continue to invest in strategies and initiatives such as the Greening Strategy and Growth Management Strategy that will better integrate the goals of a sustainable natural environment, a vital economy and healthy communities.
24. That the Region increase its efforts towards community-based social marketing regarding protection of the natural environment.
25. That the Region develop a program through its Regional Air Quality Policy initiative for working with residents, businesses and institutions to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.
26. That the Region, in conjunction with partnering organizations, establish annual environmental awards for achievements of excellence in the protection or enhancement of York Region's natural environment, both internal and external to the corporation.





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Working in Partnership for Success

The Region and partnering organizations and agencies have demonstrated success in many of the environmental initiatives they have undertaken since the SOE 2000 Report. It is recommended that the Region take further action to expand its existing partnerships, explore new partnerships and strengthen its role with respect to advocacy for further policy, direction and action at all levels of government. Specifically, it is recommended:

27. *That the Region, through the auspices of the Greening Strategy, take on an expanded coordinating role on environmental issues with the area municipalities and other related organizations and actively pursue new or enhanced partnerships for the improvement of the status of York Region's natural environment.*
28. *That the Region encourage forward-thinking policies at the provincial and federal level in areas including, but not limited to, environmentally-friendly packaging, reduction of the use of non-essential pesticides, environmental protection incentives for private land owners (e.g. Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program) and enhanced air quality monitoring policies and tools.*
29. *That the Region advocate that the provincial and federal governments continue and/or augment their partnership arrangements with respect to infrastructure funding, such as that for transit, in order to provide services to a growing population while minimizing the impact on the environment.*
30. *That in conjunction with its governmental and non-governmental partners, the Region take action to protect and restore a diversity of habitats (aquatic, kettle lakes, prairie etc.) within York Region.*
31. *That the Region petition that the provincial and federal governments take action on the development of a reliable and valid model for the assessment of the burden of illness related to air pollutants.*
32. *That the Region advocate the federal government for a commitment to pursue research on the health effects of Electromagnetic Fields and other environmental contaminants in a timely manner.*
33. *That the Region continue to work jointly and proactively with other GTA Clean Air Council members to promote the reduction of air pollution and green house gas emissions and increase awareness of Regional air quality issues in the Greater Toronto Area.*

