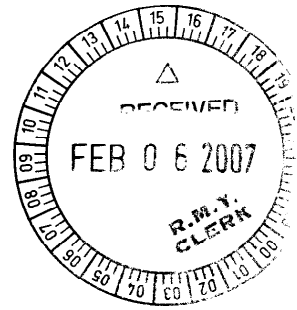


February 3, 2007

Mr. Denis Kelly
Regional Clerk
Corporate and Legal Services
Regional Municipality of York
17250 Yonge Street
P.O. Box 147
Newmarket, ON L3Y 6Z1



Dear Mr. Kelly:

At Authority Meeting #11/06, of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), held on January 26, 2007, Resolution #A306/06 in regards to the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy, was approved unanimously as follows:

THAT the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy (herein 'the Strategy') be approved in principle;

THAT staff publish the Strategy and provide it to member municipalities, stakeholder watershed councils and task forces, the Greater Toronto Home Builders Association-Urban Development Institute (GTHBA-UDI), the Aggregate Producers Association of Ontario, contributing private foundations, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal (MPIR), Canadian Wildlife Service, local universities and colleges, Conservation Ontario, the South Central Ontario Conservation Authorities (SCOCA) Natural Heritage Discussion Group, and participating or interested non-governmental organizations, citizens and professionals;

THAT staff make council presentations, and conduct workshops or information sessions, to inform municipal staff and stakeholders about the terrestrial natural heritage tools and science to assist them in planning for growth;

THAT staff be directed to promote the use of the science and tools in the Strategy to local and regional municipalities to assist them in developing a system to achieve local natural heritage protection and restoration goals in their official plans and to provide support as requested in its interpretation and application in development review/official plans and site specific plans;

THAT staff be directed to work with local and regional municipalities and the province to re-evaluate the natural heritage system requirements in the urban expansion lands, known as the "white belt area", as part of an integrated planning process being undertaken to meet the requirements put forth by the province in Places to Grow, and report back to the Authority in approximately 6 months on progress towards successful integration of these potentially conflicting objectives of growth planning;

THAT staff use the tools and science in the Strategy to inform environmental assessment and plan input and review activities to encourage a terrestrial natural heritage system (TNHS) that will result in long term protection and enhancement of biodiversity, giving each municipality time to develop and define their own system;

THAT staff use the Strategy for Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) activities including watershed planning, land securement, land stewardship, conservation land planning, restoration planning and education;

AND FURTHER THAT staff monitor and report on progress toward achieving the targetted natural heritage system, and continue research and monitoring to provide leadership in advancing the science in sustainable ecosystem management for regional biodiversity.

Enclosed for your information and any action deemed necessary is the report as presented to the Authority. Further at this meeting, the correspondence dated January 26, 2007 from Denis Kelly, Regional Clerk, York Region, was received by the Authority.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact the undersigned at 416-661-6600 extension 5264 (kstranks@trca.on.ca) or Deborah Martin-Downs at extension 5706.

Sincerely



Kathy Stranks
Manager, Chair and CAO's Office

cc. Deborah Martin-Downs, Director, Ecology, TRCA
Dena Lewis, Manager, Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology, TRCA

/Encl.

DISTRIBUTION LIST

Jessica Annis, Senior Policy Advisor, Government Relations, , GTHBA-UDI
Audrey Bennett, Director, Provincial Planning and Environmental Services Branch, Ministry of
Municipal Affairs and Housing
Tija Dirks, Director, Growth Policy, Planning and Analysis Branch, Ministry of Public Infrastructure
Renewal
Bill Fisch, Regional Chair and CEO, Regional Municipality of York
Brad Graham, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal
Denis Kelly, Regional Clerk, Corporate and Legal Services, Regional Municipality of York
Charlie Lauer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Field Services Division, Ministry of Natural Resources
Elizabeth McLaren, Assistant Deputy Minister, Municipal Services Division Planning and
Development Division, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Rob Messervey, Manager, Water Resources Section, Ministry of Natural Resources
Neil Rodgers, Vice-President, Policy and Government Relations, GTHBA-UDI
Robert Taylor, Director, Lands and Waters Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources
Bryan Tuckey, Commissioner, Planning and Development Services Department, Regional
Municipality of York
Kevin Wilson, Assistant Deputy Minister, Natural Resource Management Division, Ministry of Natural
Resources

TO: Chair and Members of the Authority
Meeting #11/06, January 26, 2007

FROM: Deborah Martin-Downs, Director, Ecology

RE: TERRESTRIAL NATURAL HERITAGE SYSTEM STRATEGY

KEY ISSUE

Approval of the strategy document.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy (herein 'the Strategy') be approved in principle;

THAT staff publish the Strategy and provide it to member municipalities, stakeholder watershed councils and task forces, the Greater Toronto Home Builders Association-Urban Development Institute (GTHBA-UDI), the Aggregate Producers Association of Ontario, contributing private foundations, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal (MPIR), Canadian Wildlife Service, local universities and colleges, Conservation Ontario, the South Central Ontario Conservation Authorities (SCOCA) Natural Heritage Discussion Group, and participating or interested non-governmental organizations, citizens and professionals;

THAT staff make council presentations, and conduct workshops or information sessions, to inform municipal staff and stakeholders about the terrestrial natural heritage tools and science to assist them in planning for growth;

THAT staff be directed to promote the use of the science and tools in the Strategy to local and regional municipalities to assist them in developing a system to achieve local natural heritage protection and restoration goals in their official plans and to provide support as requested in its interpretation and application in development review/official plans and site specific plans;

THAT staff be directed to work with local and regional municipalities and the province to re-evaluate the natural heritage system requirements in the urban expansion lands, known as the "white belt area", as part of an integrated planning process being undertaken to meet the requirements put forth by the province in Places to Grow, and report back to the Authority in approximately 6 months on progress towards successful integration of these potentially conflicting objectives of growth planning;

THAT staff use the tools and science in the Strategy to inform environmental assessment and plan input and review activities to encourage a terrestrial natural heritage system (TNHS) that will result in long term protection and enhancement of biodiversity, giving each municipality time to develop and define their own system;

THAT staff use the Strategy for Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) activities including watershed planning, land securement, land stewardship, conservation land planning, restoration planning and education;

AND FURTHER THAT staff monitor and report on progress toward achieving the targetted natural heritage system, and continue research and monitoring to provide leadership in advancing the science in sustainable ecosystem management for regional biodiversity.

BACKGROUND

As part of The Living City vision, TRCA has established objectives for Healthy Rivers and Shorelines, Regional Biodiversity, Sustainable Communities and Business Excellence. The Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy is a significant undertaking toward achieving the objective for Regional Biodiversity, which is to protect and restore a regional system of natural areas that provide habitat for plant and animal species, improve air quality, contribute to liveable environments and neighbourhoods and provide opportunities for enjoyment of nature. The Strategy outlines the science and modeling tools that have been developed to allow us to identify the potential effects of changing land use on existing cover and its habitat value for wildlife species known from the jurisdiction. It also shows us how existing habitat function can be improved with the addition of lands that have the potential to become natural cover. It is the first time that we have been able to model the effects of changing land use on existing habitats and determine what it will take to protect and enhance habitats for the future.

The regional terrestrial natural heritage system defined in the Strategy is designed to protect and improve biodiversity by increasing the quality and amount of forest and wetland habitats in a system that builds upon the existing terrestrial system and optimizes the opportunities for native species diversity. It uses ecologically-based analytical tools to identify lands that have the greatest potential to contribute to improvements in size, shape and connectivity resulting in a target terrestrial natural heritage system. The Strategy incorporates the current thinking on terrestrial natural heritage protection and restoration as well as comprehensive data on the terrestrial natural heritage assets of TRCA's jurisdiction.

The system, as defined in the Strategy is based on a modeling exercise using 2002 base information (the only information that was available for the entire jurisdiction). Therefore, while it can be used to inform TRCA activities, from restoration to plan review, the potential of lands to contribute to the system must be assessed along with site specific, recent information to make informed decisions about the potential of a piece of land to contribute to the system.

It is our intent that the science and tools developed are offered to TRCA's watershed municipalities to assist them in defining a natural heritage system as required by the province for their official plans, and that at this scale the system is updated, refined and conflicts with competing land use objectives and infrastructure needs are addressed.

The Strategy represents over 5 years of work including on-going input from the scientific community, municipalities, the development community, watershed councils and other key stakeholders. The draft Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy was presented at Authority Meeting #4/04, held on April 30, 2004. Resolution #A123/04 was approved as follows:

THAT the draft Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy (April 2004) be circulated to its member municipalities, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Conservation Ontario, South-central Ontario Conservation Authorities Natural Heritage Discussion Group (SCOCA NHDG), non-governmental organizations, the Urban Development Institute, the Aggregate Producers Association of Ontario, watershed councils and task forces, and interested professionals for comment;

THAT the draft Strategy be provided to the Greenbelt Advisory Panel and the Smart Growth Secretariat for consideration;

THAT staff be directed to implement a consultation process to facilitate the review of the draft Strategy document;

AND FURTHER THAT staff report back to the Authority on the comments received regarding the proposed Strategy to enable finalization and adoption.

Consultation

Staff distributed copies of the draft Strategy (2004) to approximately 250 stakeholders with a request to comment on the document and to attend one of two facilitated workshops held on June 14 and 15, 2004. Participation was solicited from municipal staff, provincial and federal government staff, watershed advisory group members, public interest groups, non-government organizations (NGOs), the consulting industry, development industry, professional associations and academics. The objectives of the workshops were to provide an overview of the Strategy and its content in terms of other TRCA programs; to answer questions on the Strategy; and to receive feedback on the strategic directions outlined in the Strategy. Each of the two half-day workshop sessions (one daytime, one evening) were open to all. Forty-seven individuals participated in the daytime workshop and 21 in the evening workshop. Staff presented the rationale and methodology behind the Strategy and participants were then separated into small roundtable discussion groups, each with a facilitator. TRCA staff was available to answer questions that participants raised about the Strategy and related TRCA initiatives. Participants were posed the following questions:

1. Do you support an expanded terrestrial natural heritage system?
2. Do you generally support the strategic directions?
3. Are there any strategic directions that you think should be changed?
4. Is there anything that you think is missing?

Following the workshops, stakeholders were encouraged to continue providing comments. The draft Strategy was posted on the TRCA website to solicit additional comments. To date TRCA has distributed nearly 500 printed copies and 50 CDs of the draft Strategy. Staff sought opportunities to present the Strategy and accepted invitations to attend individual meetings to continue the dialogue on stakeholder needs and discuss constraints and opportunities to achieve the target system. This included presentations to the Regional Municipality of Peel Council, Ministry of Natural Resources Aurora District staff, the province's Natural Heritage Dialogue Group and Ontario Nature's (FON) workshop entitled 'New Directions in Natural Heritage Planning for Southern Ontario' held in Port Hope. Staff met with City of Toronto staff for a half day workshop on July 20, 2004 and presented to Caledon Council on August 10, 2004. Meetings were also held with the Regional Municipality of York, City of Mississauga and City of Pickering. Staff met on three occasions with the Urban Development Institute (UDI) and their technical advisory team.

Staff met with Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) staff on July 7, 2004 to present the Strategy, its underlying data layers and to promote its benefit to the Greenbelt planning and implementation process. The target system map provided support for the Ministry's delineation of the Greenbelt boundary and in some cases provided rationale for additional extensions (e.g. Boyd Conservation Area and Pine Valley Forest on the Humber River in the City of Vaughan). The final Greenbelt plan also included text reference to the importance of identifying sub-provincial natural heritage systems to support and maintain the provincial system defined in the Greenbelt Plan. TRCA's Strategy provides a comprehensive regional-scale plan to assist in that regard.

TRCA also met with Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal (MPIR) staff in April 2006 to discuss the provincial Growth Plans for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and TRCA's potential involvement through our regional terrestrial natural heritage system and watershed planning activities. Discussions were also held regarding the province's own work in the protection of natural systems, specifically the Natural Spaces program. Staff introduced how the Strategy's target system plays an important role in TRCA's integrated watershed planning process and the development of watershed plans. It is expected that watershed plans and the science and tools in the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy will continue to provide municipalities with local level, detailed data and analysis for the update of official plans, planning for new urban areas and redevelopment within existing urban areas as part of the province's growth planning process. This local information will also be available to complement provincial scale information in the implementation of the Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

Summary of Feedback

Through the consultation there was clear support for the need to protect, improve and expand the terrestrial natural heritage system within TRCA's jurisdiction. There was a general agreement that the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy is a positive, science-based step toward improving the natural environment and the quality of life for citizens in TRCA's jurisdiction. There is also general support for the strategic directions that inform the Strategy. However, areas were identified where the Strategy could be improved and strengthened.

Some common themes raised by the stakeholders included:

- the implementation approaches and the potential inability to achieve the system;
- cost and equity issues associated with the plan for an expanded terrestrial system;
- the apparent level of rigidity in the target system implementation through the planning process;
- conflicts with other land use and infrastructure requirements;
- clarification on the intent for implementation through TRCA mandate/policy;
- the ability to coordinate with other initiatives of other levels of government such as the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, the Greenbelt Plan and the Provincial Policy Statement;
- the need for cooperation between municipalities, NGOs and upper levels of government;
- inability of practitioners to use the models to design natural cover scenarios to assist in planning;
- the need to set interim targets and review and monitor the terrestrial natural heritage system on an ongoing basis; and,
- the need to strengthen the link between an enhanced natural system and human health, quality of life and a more natural water cycle, including source water protection.

The results of the 2004-2005 consultation process have been compiled into a table that lists the questions/comments and provides the responses. As well, a summary report of the workshop discussions was prepared and distributed to the participants and others that requested it. A copy of this table and the workshop summary was made available at Watershed Management Advisory Board Meeting #4/06, held on September 15, 2006, for those interested in receiving a copy.

The Strategy was revised to respond to the comments received wherever possible and appropriate. Although the modeling approach to derive the target system did not change from the 2004 draft, the system design process was updated to use the more recent 2002 aerial photographs (the 2004 draft relied on 1999 photography). This has resulted in some minor changes in the target system map, largely as a result of urban areas that were built post 1999.

The key changes to the Strategy document are summarized below:

- The inclusion of a summary of the legislative mandate behind this Strategy.
- Considerable clarification on the intent and mechanisms to be used in promoting the use of this Strategy with municipalities. The document has been revised, and commitments have been made for further clarification as the result of continuing consultation, to reflect the level of flexibility and a recognition of the collaboration and negotiation that will be necessary for the implementation of the Strategy.
- A better depiction of how field-collected species data and the regional distribution of species assisted in setting targets for, and designing, the target system.
- Clarification on how the targets for an expanded system were derived.
- A discussion of the link between the terrestrial natural system, economic benefits, ecosystem services and quality of life.
- A clearer description of how the target terrestrial natural system will be integrated and evaluated with the hydrologic and aquatic systems through the development of the watershed plans, with special attention to multiple benefits.
- The inclusion of technical appendices, including detailed descriptions of the methodologies that were employed and the rationales for their use.

Upon completion of the revisions to the draft document, TRCA staff met with UDI and their technical advisory team to present the revised document and offer them an opportunity to provide final review comments. Although they had agreed to complete this review by the end of August 2006, they requested more time to provide their comments. On September 27, 2006 they provided a letter outlining some initial comments on this draft and requested deferral of the report. At Authority Meeting #7/06, held on September 29, 2006, Resolution #A206/06 was approved as follows:

THAT item 10.1 - Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy be deferred to Authority Meeting #9/06, to be held on November 24, 2006, to allow staff to have further discussions with the Urban Development Institute.

Subsequent to the September 29th Authority meeting, the GTHBA-UDI, as UDI is now known, sent a letter to TRCA staff on November 1, 2006 providing comments on the final draft Strategy. At a meeting held on November 7th between TRCA and GTHBA-UDI the major issues that were raised in both the November 1st and September 27th letters, including TRCA's role in land use planning, technical issues relating to the model, and the need for flexibility in implementation, were substantially addressed and resolutions agreed to. Staff also agreed to some minor changes to the text for the purpose of clarity. A summary of this meeting was prepared and circulated to GTHBA-UDI for comment.

On November 21, 2006 GTHBA-UDI submitted another letter requesting that the Authority not approve the Strategy citing concerns for conflicts with future growth planning and how the system may be applied at the site level. In addition a letter was received on November 23rd from the Ministry of Natural Resources on behalf of Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal (MPIR) and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) requesting that approval of the Strategy be deferred until they had an opportunity to meet with staff. At Authority Meeting #9/06, held on November 24, 2006, Resolution #A259/06 was approved as follows:

THAT item 8.1 - Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy, be deferred to Authority Meeting #10/06, scheduled to be held on January 5, 2007;

AND FURTHER THAT all parties be notified that the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority report on the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy will be dealt with at the January 5, 2007 meeting.

Further discussions have also been held with staff of York Region Planning to address issues that they have for meeting their growth targets for urban expansion lands when considering the significant area of land that has already been included in the Greenbelt. York Region also submitted a letter to TRCA dated December 14, 2006 that identified the issue of competing land interests, particularly in the urban expansion lands to meet the provincial growth targets. They acknowledge that TRCA staff will be working with them to re-evaluate the system requirements during the growth planning process. TRCA staff is participating in regional growth planning workshops. York Region requested a deferral of consideration of the Strategy by the Authority from January 5, 2007 to the January 26th meeting. Their letter was received as part of the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy board report considered at the January 5th Authority meeting. At Authority Meeting #10/06, held on January 5, 2007, Resolution #A278/06 was approved as follows:

THAT consideration of the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy report be deferred to Authority Meeting #11/06, scheduled to be held on January 26, 2007.

Further to the request from the province of November 23, 2006, a meeting was held on December 18, 2006 with staff of MNR, MPIR, MMAH and TRCA to brief representatives of these ministries on the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy and discuss their concerns. TRCA staff presented an overview of the tools and science behind the Strategy. Considerable discussion was had on the implementation mechanisms that TRCA intended for the Strategy, the potential conflicts with the growth planning requirements the province has laid out in Places to Grow and the authority under which TRCA developed the Strategy and provide comments on same through the plan review process. Following on from this meeting, the province put their concerns in writing (Attachment 1). In it they requested that approval of the Strategy be deferred until such time as the mapping could be updated/refined, that clarification on how TRCA intends to implement the Strategy is provided and that the impact of developing a system could be assessed with the municipalities. This matter will be discussed at the January 26th Authority meeting.

Staff also met with staff of the Region of Peel on December 20, 2006. Staff provided an overview of the Strategy and the more recent issues that have been raised, as outlined above. Peel expressed interest in TRCA conducting workshops for staff to assist in understanding the TNHS as well as expectations for transitional applications. They noted that they are embarking on their official plan review and suggested that the timing is appropriate for TRCA to provide the tools and science in the Strategy to assist them in this endeavour.

Staff also received written comments from the City of Brampton on January 2, 2007 on the final draft of the Strategy. In their comments they too note that terrestrial natural heritage is just one of a number of competing interests to be balanced in developing communities. They support the intent that the target system will be refined for inclusion into a variety of initiatives including official plans, greening strategies, watershed plans and secondary plans. They raised concerns for providing for additional land securement other than through dedication during development and the policy framework provided.

As a result of comments received and concerns expressed in the last few months, staff agreed that the Strategy required revision to clarify the intent and implementation mechanisms. The science and tools used to model the system has not changed, nor has the need to develop such a strategy. A revised final draft incorporating the clarifications is included in the agenda package to this report for review by the members.

RATIONALE

Staff is recommending that the Strategy be approved by the Authority at this time for the following reasons:

1. The Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy includes a modeled terrestrial natural heritage system based on 2002 information. By their very nature, models are tools based on science that are used to assist in defining desired conditions and making decisions at a more local scale. The Strategy represents a single purpose interest – to preserve and enhance biodiversity. This is only one aspect of TRCA's objectives for The Living City; it is only one aspect of city building.
2. The modeled system provides a regional scale view of what can be accomplished for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in our jurisdiction in an ideal future condition. It predicts what is expected to happen to the quality of our existing natural areas if we continue to do 'business as usual' and demonstrates that it is possible to maintain the quality of our natural areas if we apply a different way of thinking about their protection with future land use change.
3. Mapping refinements will not be able to keep pace with land use change in this area. Therefore, there will always be a need to incorporate site specific information into the decision process
4. The province requires every municipality to incorporate a natural heritage system into their official plan. Our member municipalities have contributed to the preparation of this Strategy – including funding for the science and the modeling tools. Through the adoption of the Strategy by the Authority and the recommendations, staff will be directed to offer the system to the municipalities to be refined/modified for their jurisdiction as they develop their own TNHS.

Delay in approving the Strategy will not achieve what the province or the municipalities are looking for – a refined system to incorporate into growth plans. This will be achieved by staff participating in growth planning exercises, using the tools and science to assist in refining/modifying the target system to reflect local interests and will be co-ordinated with other land use and infrastructure planning to create sustainable communities.

5. Approval of the Strategy is not just about its use in the urban expansion lands. TRCA has incorporated the targeted system into other aspects of our operations, including restoration projects, land acquisition and stewardship activities.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

In recognition that the targeted natural heritage system was developed using a model based on 2002 air photography and land use planning information, TRCA staff has committed to both York and Peel regions, and indeed will commit to our local municipal partners, to work with them to use the science and tools developed for the Strategy to assist them in re-evaluating the system as currently mapped in the Strategy or through watershed plans, to meet their goals for community planning including the identification of a natural heritage system incorporating areas of provincial interest as per the Provincial Policy Statement (MMAH 2005), protection of key natural heritage features as defined by the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP 2001), protection of watercourses and their floodplains, provision of nature based recreational amenities, climate change mitigation and management of urban drainage.

Staff recognize that the approach taken in the 'white belt' to define a TNHS will need to be flexible in order to be effectively integrated with community design objectives. This is best accomplished through larger scale interdisciplinary planning that TRCA staff is participating in to assist municipalities to optimize and integrate natural heritage planning into growth planning scenarios in both the "white belt areas", as well as in the planned and existing built up areas.

Once approved by the Authority, the Strategy document will undergo a final edit before being sent to TRCA's design group for publication. The published version will be made available to municipalities and stakeholders.

Municipal and stakeholder information sessions will be organized to provide updated information on the Strategy's tools and science, and opportunities for use or inclusion in planning studies.

Work will continue to ensure that the needs of municipalities and stakeholders in terms of terrestrial natural heritage protection and management are met. This will be done by:

- improving the accessibility and adaptability of the Geographic Information System (GIS) modeling tools for use by practitioners in decision-making at smaller/site scales;
- developing implementation guidelines and/or decision making frameworks for restoration, stewardship and recovery planning for species and vegetation communities of concern;
- providing support for the inclusion of a TNHS in municipal and TRCA projects;
- assisting in the watershed report card process in reporting progress toward implementing the Strategy; and,
- assisting the regions of York, Peel and Durham in their growth planning process and continuing to assist the City of Toronto in support of its official plan implementation of the Natural Heritage System.

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Funds were allocated in the 2006 budget for publication of the Strategy and have been carried over to 2008. The new work outlined above has been included in the TRCA 2007-2011 capital budget request. Staff continue to seek other funding partners for the implementation of the Strategy, for example, in the adaptation of a desktop tool to allow users to refine the regional system in site planning.

Report prepared by: Deborah Martin-Downs, extension 5706

For Information contact: Dena Lewis, extension 5225

Date: January 16, 2007

Attachments: 2



Office of the Assistant Deputy Minister
Natural Resource Management Division

99 Wellesley St. West
Room 6540 Whitney Block
Toronto ON M7A 1W3
Telephone: (416) 314-6131 Fax: (416) 314-1994

Ministry of Natural Resources	Ministère des Richesses naturelles
----------------------------------	---------------------------------------

December 20, 2006

Mr. Dick O'Brien, Chair
Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
5 Shoreham Drive
Downsview, ON, M3N 1S4

Dear Mr. O'Brien,

Further to our correspondence prior to the November TRCA Board meeting, the Province has had a chance to undertake a very preliminary review of the final Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy (2006) prepared by the TRCA. We appreciate the work and time the TRCA's staff has dedicated to the development of this Strategy. We also appreciate the briefing and discussion about the Strategy with senior TRCA staff on December 18th, 2006.

We do, however, still have some very serious concerns. The Strategy does not provide direction on the impacts and implications for municipalities on integrating it with provincial initiatives, in particular conformity to the Growth Plan. We feel that additional analysis and clarification in the Strategy is required before your Board considers it for adoption.

More specifically:

- Additional analysis and fulsome discussion with both the Province and TRCA's member municipalities is required on how the Strategy will impact achievement of the Growth Plan policies. In particular, discussion with TRCA's upper- and single-tier municipal partners is required to clarify the implications for achievement of the Growth Plan growth projections, intensification and density targets, and transit-supportive land use policies;
- The implementation section of the Strategy needs greater explanation and clarity on the status and effect of the Strategy, the tools and mechanisms that TRCA proposes to use to implement it, and TRCA's expectations of how impacted municipalities, landowners, the general public, and the Province will implement it; and

- TRCA staff should take this opportunity to work with member municipalities to verify and complete the refinement of mapping and information prior to the final adoption of the Strategy.

It is important that these revisions be reflected in the Strategy document itself, in addition to any changes that are made to the staff report being submitted to your Board.

We appreciate that the Board deferred a decision from the November 24, 2006 meeting to January 5, 2007. However, given the significance of the issues, the Province and all the parties need to take more time to review the Strategy and address these issues. Further dialogue is needed; our ministries and TRCA need to take the necessary time to make sure the Strategy properly reflects provincial policies and that it can be effectively integrated with the municipal implementation of the Growth Plan.

Considering these factors, we are requesting that the TRCA defer this item to the spring to enable the Province and the TRCA to address these issues and review the Strategy accordingly.

It is imperative that all parties have a clear understanding of the implications and the implementation methods of the strategy before it is finalized. We trust that you will appreciate our concerns and will defer this consideration until we can all work together to address these matters.

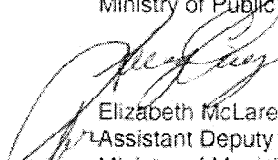
We look forward to working with your staff in resolving these issues in the coming months.

Sincerely,



Kevin Wilson,
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Natural Resources


for Brad Graham,
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal


Elizabeth McLaren,
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

cc: Brian Denney, CAO, TRCA
Ted Tyndorf, Chief Planner, City of Toronto
Bryan Tuckey, Commissioner of Planning & Development Services, York Region
Alexander L. Georgieff, Commissioner of Planning, Durham Region
Nick Tunacliffe, Commissioner of Planning, Peel Region

Attachment 2

January 17, 2007

Mr. Kevin Wilson
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Natural Resources

Sent via email
kevin.j.wilson@ontario.ca

Mr. Brad Graham
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal

Sent via email
brad.graham@ontario.ca

Ms. Elizabeth McLaren
Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Sent via email
Elizabeth.McLaren@ontario.ca

Dear Messrs. Wilson and Graham, and Ms. McLaren:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with representatives of your ministries on December 18, 2006 to discuss the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's (TRCA) terrestrial natural heritage system planning. I asked technical staff to provide a detailed response and clarification to the points that you have raised in your letter of December 20, 2006. This detailed response is attached. Further, your letter is included in the staff report for the January 26th Authority meeting.

I would like to respond specifically to your comment regarding deferral of approval of the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy.

At Authority Meeting #10/06, held on January 5, 2007, Resolution #A278/06 was approved as follows:

THAT consideration of the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy report be deferred to Authority Meeting #11/06, scheduled to be held on January 26, 2007

TRCA staff is of the opinion that deferring approval of the strategy further will not achieve your objective of co-ordination with growth planning as we intend to work with municipal staff to integrate a variety of our interests, including natural heritage, over the next few years. In fact, delay in getting this important piece of work into their hands for use in growth planning may result in delays in municipal growth plan development, inconsistency of approaches and greater confusion as to where the THNS fits with other initiatives.

Regardless of the outcome of Authority meeting, I know that staff of the province and TRCA will continue to seek an appropriate natural heritage system for TRCA's area of jurisdiction, in cooperation with our municipal partners.

Should you wish to speak to this issue at the January 26th meeting, please contact Kathy Stranks at 416-661-6600 extension 5264 to register a deputation. I am sure the Authority members will be interested in your perspective.

As always, I would be pleased to discuss any of these issues further with you. We do appreciate the interest that the province has shown in this initiative.

Yours truly,

Dick O'Brien
Chair

cc. Robert Taylor, Director, Lands and Waters Branch, MNR
Tija Dirks, Director, Growth Policy, Planning and Analysis, MPIR
Charlie Lauer, Assistant Deputy Minister, Field Services Division, MNR
Audrey Bennett, Director, Provincial Planning and Environmental Services Branch, MMAH
Rob Messervey, Manager, Water Resources Section, MNR
Bill Fisch, Chair, York Region
Bryan Tuckey, Commissioner, Planning and Development Services Department, York Region
John Waller, Director, Long Range and Strategic Planning, York Region
Nick Tunnacliffe, Commissioner, Planning Department, Peel Region
Alex Georgieff, Commissioner, Planning Department, Durham Region
Ted Tyndorf, Chief Planner and Executive Director, City of Toronto
Brian Denney, Chief Administrative Officer, TRCA
Deborah Martin-Downs, Director, Ecology, TRCA
Carolyn Woodland, Director, Planning and Development, TRCA
Dena Lewis, Manager, Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecology, TRCA

By way of introduction to the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy (TNHSS), analysis of our natural heritage information determined that 'business as usual' has not resulted in the protection of ecological function and biodiversity, especially in the developing lands of our jurisdiction. Therefore, it was time to develop a new approach. TRCA has been developing its terrestrial natural heritage system science and tools over the last 6 years in consultation with many stakeholders, including our municipal partners, other conservation authorities, academia, ecological specialists and the province. We developed the science and modeling tools to enable us to define a targeted terrestrial natural heritage system (TNHS) for our region based on field collected data as well as remotely sensed vegetation community classification and land use information. The intent of this work was to define the existing cover and estimate the requirements for additional lands to be added (e.g. lands that functionally buffer the system but also provide opportunities to become future natural [potential] cover lands) that would be needed to protect or enhance their biodiversity in the long term. The result is a targeted terrestrial natural heritage system *model* that distributes natural cover throughout our jurisdiction, includes areas of all levels of quality and recognizes provincial interests as well as those of regional and local importance.

This system is useful to TRCA in undertaking TRCA projects, but also useful to municipalities to have a consistent approach across the jurisdiction. The regional municipalities in our area with contributions from private foundations, have funded the development of this program for a number of years. It has always been our expectation that TRCA's terrestrial natural heritage system would be offered to both local and regional municipalities to assist them in defining or refining a natural heritage system for incorporation into their planning documents. Such natural heritage systems would ultimately be determined in consultation with infrastructure and planning staff, as well as through public processes, to integrate a variety of objectives and needs.

You have raised several points in your letter which we have responded to directly below. Your comments are provided in bold italics with TRCA's response directly beneath it.

Additional analysis and discussion with the province and TRCA's municipalities is required on how the strategy will impact achievement of the growth plan policies. In particular, discussion with TRCA's municipal partners is required to clarify the implications for achievement of the growth plan growth projections, intensification and density targets, and transit supportive land use policies;

The province, through *Places to Grow*, has also confirmed the need to identify a natural system that will include natural heritage features and areas at both provincial and local scales as well as linkages between these areas. Implicit in that provincial direction must be the notion of balancing the interests of growth – social, economics and environment. As the growth plan notes – “*successful implementation of the plan's vision will be dependent on collaborative decision making*”.

The TNHSS offers the basis for such a natural system. We have already been involved in discussions with the municipalities on their growth plans and specifically regarding the definition of a natural heritage system. The City of Toronto already used the TNHS as the basis for developing its natural heritage layer for its official plan several years ago and is in the process of undertaking Phase 2 of the Natural Heritage Planning which TRCA staff is participating in. Durham Region recently used our TNHS to inform development of their Natural Heritage Areas layer. Staff is participating in the Liveable Peel process initiated by Peel Region and Peel has expressed interest in using the TNH target system as a starting point for their Official Plan update. We have been participating in workshops with York Region and held several meetings with York Region staff to assist them in understanding the implications and opportunities of implementing a target TNHS in their jurisdiction. The City of Vaughan has also asked us to participate in their growth planning process.

In all of these areas, it is our intent to provide the TNHS as a base and work with the municipality to refine it. Because it is a model and not based on the most current land use information, it must be refined and supported by a policy framework that allows for site specific assessment and modification where appropriate.

Several of our member municipalities are currently undertaking growth planning and will be a number of years in the process. Defining the natural heritage component for the official plan is not something that can be achieved separate from the growth planning exercise.

The implementation section of the strategy needs greater explanation and clarity on the status and effect of the strategy tools and mechanisms that TRCA proposes to use to implement it and TRCA's expectations of how impacted municipalities, landowners, the general public and the province will implement it.

Clearly the draft document requires additional clarification on implementation, a commitment that we made with GTHBA-UDI (Greater Toronto Home Builders Association-Urban Development Institute) in the fall and which we have been working on. A revised draft will be circulated next week that addresses the variety of comments that have been forthcoming in the last few weeks.

We note that you have described the system as **impacting**, in a negative sense, municipalities, landowners, public and the province. The province provides clear direction on the importance of a natural heritage system and what elements it should incorporate – including natural heritage features and areas, linked by natural corridors which are necessary to maintain biological and genetic diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems, and may include lands that have been or have the potential to be restored to a natural state (from 2005 Provincial Policy Statement (PPS)). Natural heritage provides for a variety of ecosystem and social services (e.g. water management, nature based recreation, climate change mitigation, erosion protection, natural aesthetics) that add value to a community. These values are recognized in Places to Grow.

Perhaps the province will provide some additional tools and mechanisms through the Natural Spaces program to assist those landowners who are participating in the creation of a natural heritage system.

TRCA should take this opportunity to work with the municipalities to verify and complete the refinement of mapping and information prior to the final adoption of the strategy.

The information that was used to support the development of the TNHS is based on 2002 air photos and 2002 land use information. To maintain current mapping in this rapidly changing area is an impossible task. It is our intent that the system is offered to municipalities to form the basis of the natural heritage system that they will incorporate into their official plan updates. Such natural heritage systems are typically reflected on schedules that are then refined at a site specific scale using official plan policies.

We would also note that we have been undertaking watershed plans on behalf of our municipalities for the Rouge, Humber and Don watersheds to meet the requirements of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan. The TNHS for all of these watersheds has been further refined based on more current planning information, but are to be completed in advance of the growth planning exercises at the direction of the province.

These revisions should be reflected in the strategy document itself.

It is TRCA's intention to revise the document to reflect the discussions that we have had with GTHBA-UDI and our regional municipalities, which specifically surrounded clarification on the intent for implementation and flexibility. The mapping used for the system will not be updated.

Further dialogue is needed; our ministries and TRCA need to take the necessary time to make sure the strategy properly reflects provincial policies and that it can be effectively integrated with the municipal implementation of the growth plan.

It is our belief that TRCA's strategy properly reflects provincial direction for the development of a natural heritage system that includes natural heritage features and areas, linked by natural corridors which are necessary to maintain biological and genetic diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems, and may include lands that have been or have the potential to be restored to a natural state (from 2005 PPS). What is missing is the integration of this (or a modified) system with other municipal planning interests. TRCA is seeking direction from our Authority to take this tool to the municipalities to assist them in developing a natural heritage system through their growth plans. We have attached a copy of the draft board report for your information. It is still draft as we are having our municipal partners review it to ensure that their concerns have been properly represented and that the intent is clear enough.

We are requesting that the TRCA defer this item to the spring to enable the province and the TRCA to address these issues and review the strategy accordingly

At Authority Meeting #10/06, held on January 5, 2007, Resolution #A278/06 was approved as follows:

THAT consideration of the Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy report be deferred to Authority Meeting #11/06, scheduled to be held on January 26, 2007.

The letter from the province is included in the staff report for the January 26th meeting. Should you wish to speak to this issue at this meeting please contact Kathy Stranks at extension 5264 to register a delegation. I am sure the Authority members will be interested in your perspective.

TRCA staff is of the opinion that deferring approval of the strategy will not achieve your objective of co-ordination with growth planning as we intend to work with municipal staff to integrate a variety of our interests, including natural heritage, over the next few years. In fact, delay in getting this important piece of work into their hands for use in growth planning may result in delays in municipal growth plan development, inconsistency of approaches and greater confusion as to where the THNS fits with other initiatives.