

GREENING STRATEGY

2007 ANNUAL REPORT

The need for the Greening Strategy was first identified when the Region was considering adopting a Tree By-law in the early 1990s. The need was further emphasized during the Regional Official Plan Report Card process in 1998, when the public said they “supported our environmental policies but felt we weren’t doing enough to implement them”. In response, Regional Council adopted the Greening Strategy in 2001. Since adoption, the Greening strategy has continued to grow and embrace new partners and programs while fulfilling public needs and expectations. The following is a summary of some of the 2007 Greening Strategy achievements.



Green.  It's in our nature.

February 2008

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Greening Strategy Initiatives

1 Naturalization and Rehabilitation

The Region is committed to protecting, rehabilitating, and creating natural areas through the Greening Strategy. In partnership with a variety of organizations, the Region continues to positively impact the quality of our environment.

1.1 Adopt-A-Stream Crossing Program (AASCP)

This program has been ongoing since 2001 and rehabilitates stream crossings at Regional roads. In 2005, the Trillium Foundation approved a funding request put forward by the program partners: York Region, York Environmental Stewardship and the Environmental Earth Angels (EEA). The Trillium Foundation provided \$130,000 over two years to expand the program and facilitate its integration into school classrooms and programs across York Region.

Key Deliverables: In 2007, over 1000 trees and shrubs were planted on 13 sites with 560 students from 16 classes across York Region ranging from Grade 5 to 12.

1.2 Newberry Park Wetland Restoration Project

This project will restore approximately 1 hectare of wetland in Newberry Park. The project site was a baseball diamond and soccer pitch, but was unusable due to wet conditions. The Town concurred that the sports fields were not essential in this location and support the conversion to wetlands. The site will be restored to a wetland with a cold water stream. Trees will be planted to create swamp conditions while other areas will be planted with wetland herbaceous species to create marsh habitat. The project is expected to create wetland habitat and also provide new cold water stream habitat. Due to the park's location, the wetland will be used for educational purposes with a low observation deck and signage describing wetland habitat, wildlife and the importance of the Oak Ridges Moraine to the area and local wetlands and streams. In 2007, York Region joined a number of other partners by providing \$10,000 of Greening Strategy Funding to this important project.

Key Deliverables: The creation of one hectare (~2 acres) of new wetland habitat as well as significant opportunities to improve public awareness of the importance of wetlands on the Oak Ridges Moraine and within York Region.

1.3 Slokker Property, York Regional Forest Tree Planting

The Slokker Property is the latest addition to the York Regional Forest (2006 partnership acquisition). York Region will manage the approximately 36 hectares (90 acres) of tableland as part of the York Regional Forest with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority Managing the remaining 32 hectares (80 acres) of valley land. At the time of acquisition, the majority of the tableland was in active agriculture. An initial phase of management for this property is reforestation of the tablelands which began in 2007.

Key Deliverables: The creation of six hectares (15 acres) of new forest.



1.4 York Natural Planting Partnership (YNPP)

This very successful program, delivered in partnership with local Conservation Authorities, provides financial assistance to eligible landowners for private property reforestation. Select opportunities to plant on public lands are also considered through this program.

Key Deliverables: In 2007, over 60,000 trees and shrubs were planted on over 28 hectares (69 acres) with 20 private landowners, and 2 public partners.

1.5 Planting Trees with York Regional Staff Volunteers

In April 2007, 35 members of the Management Team of the Regional Municipality of York's Transportation and Works Department volunteered their Saturday morning to plant 1,110 trees in one hectare of land in Rouge Park. Earlier that month, trees were planted at the Ceremonial Tree Planting held to commemorate the greening partnership with the Rouge Park Alliance. As part of the York Region Greening Strategy, these projects contribute towards increasing York Region's forest cover. The Regional Forest Cover target is 25% and with York Region's forest cover now at 22.5%, more planting needs to be done - an additional 4,362 hectares of trees should be planted or reforested naturally by 2026. Partners for York Region tree planting projects are many: the Rouge Park Alliance, 10,000 Trees for the Rouge Valley, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, Toronto Region Conservation Authority, all the municipalities in York Region and many others.

Key Deliverables: Over 1100 trees planted on one hectare of land in Rouge Park.



1.6 Town of Markham / MOEE Stormwater Pond Naturalization

This partnership project lead by the Town of Markham and the local community, is intended to naturalize and beautify a large stormwater pond to turn it into a community amenity for residents and wildlife. The site is 12 hectares in size and represents a significant naturalization opportunity. Signage is being installed to educate the public on the use of the site to manage stormwater and the complementary habitat and community functions.

Key Deliverables: Over 300 trees planted with 220 community volunteers.

1.7 Greening Support of Local Municipal Tree Planting Initiatives

Local Municipalities have fostered very successful working relationships with their local environmental stewards. As a result, they are very active with their communities in naturalizing the landscape. These local initiatives provide a great opportunity to advance Regional objectives to increase forest cover, provide education, and improve the health of the urban forest. Accordingly, funding is provided to cover the costs of plant material required for these community naturalization initiatives at the request of the local municipality.

Key Deliverables: Four local municipal naturalization projects were supported in 2007 by York Region through the Greening Strategy resulting in approximately 6,000 trees and shrubs being planted on over 2 hectares of land.

2 Securement of Priority Greenlands

In addition to securing priority greenlands through education and stewardship, there are a series of property acquisition tools, which are relevant to the Greening and Greenlands Property Securement Strategies. These tools include land bequests, easements, leaseback agreements, long term leases, donations and fee simple purchases. Another essential component of successfully securing priority greenlands is to undertake management planning exercises for strategic parcels.

2.1 Brozic Property Land Donation

The Brozic property donation, completed on 20 December 2007, was a 20-acre land donation to Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) within the Zephyr Creek Wetland. This securement achievement is a success under the York Region – Nature Conservancy of Canada Joint Venture securement partnership. The donation opportunity was discovered by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), and the NCC facilitated the donation to LSRCA as part of their agreement with York Region. The Brozic property lies within one of LSRCA land securement priority areas – the Zephyr Creek Wetland – as outlined in their Land Securement Strategy. An event to celebrate the Brozic property donation, which was approved as a federal Ecogift, is planned for spring or summer of 2008.

Key Deliverables: Eight (8) hectares (20 ac) secured under the NCC / York Region Securement Partnership Agreement. These lands have been conveyed to the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority for management as part of their Natural Heritage assets.

2.2 Securement Partnership agreements

Since 2001, York Region has had successful conservation partnerships with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust. These partnerships have been extremely successful in securing land as reported on in this, and previous, Greening Achievements Reports. These valuable agreements were updated and renewed for 3 year terms (2006-2008) through a report to Regional Council in 2006. The Nature Conservancy of Canada is provided with \$100,000 from the Region to focus efforts within York. The agreement with the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust provides them

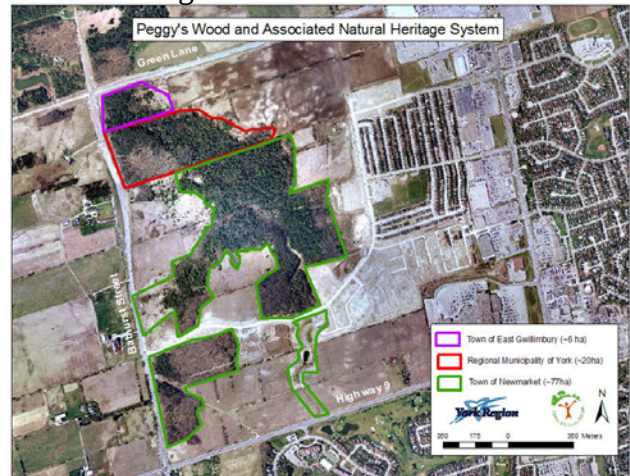
access to \$40,000 from the Region to assist with the legal, professional and administrative costs of securing property within York Region.

Key Deliverables: Increase land protection across all of York Region.

2.3 Peggy's Wood Management Planning

In 2007 York Region, the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Newmarket, the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority came together to form a Steering Committee to oversee the development of a management plan for the Peggy's Wood area. A Request for Proposals (RFP) to undertake the Management plan was jointly prepared by the team for release in January 2008.

Key Deliverables: Management Plan for approximately 100 hectares of newly acquired Natural Heritage lands within the ownership of York Region, the Town of East Gwillimbury and the Town of Newmarket.



2.4 Little Rouge Corridor Management Plan

In 2004, the Ontario Realty Corporation, on behalf of the Province of Ontario, transferred 544 hectares (1344 acres) to the Town of Markham and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority for Rouge Park purposes. The addition of these lands to the Rouge Park makes York Region home to one of the largest natural environment parks in an urban area within the Province and Country. York Region has been an active participant on the Steering Committee established to oversee the development of a Management Plan for these lands. The Plan, which recommends that the majority of the lands be restored to increase the habitat value of this portion of the Rouge watershed, was completed in 2006, and endorsed by the Rouge Park Alliance in 2007.

Key Deliverables: Management Plan for 544 hectares (1344 acres) of newly acquired Rouge Park lands within the Town of Markham.

2.5 Bob Hunter Area Management Plan

On October 26, 2005, the Province of Ontario announced the dedication of a 193 hectares (477 ac) parcel of provincially-owned land in York Region to be part of Rouge Park, in honour of the late Bob Hunter, lifelong environmentalist. The key objectives for the area are to establish an ecologically-based park, compatible with overall Rouge Park objectives. Specifically the plan calls for the protection and restoration of diverse ecosystems, identification and protection of cultural heritage features, compatible public uses and the commemoration of Bob Hunter's memory. In 2007 a Management Plan was completed for the Bob Hunter area, complementing the Management Plan prepared for the Little Rouge Corridor also completed in 2007. Staff continue to work with Rouge Park staff to ensure that existing and planned Regional infrastructure is appropriately addressed in the Plans.

Key Deliverables: Management Plan for 193 hectares (477 acres) of newly acquired Rouge Park lands within the Town of Markham.

2.6 Landowner Contact Extension Services

York Region Natural Heritage and Forestry Services staff contacted 171 neighbours of the York Regional Forest in 2007 to give landowners notice of upcoming workshops, tax incentives for landowners of forested and ecologically sensitive lands, programs for planting trees on private land, and woodlot management. An additional 20 landowners were contacted to discuss conservation options for their land, for the purposes of pursuing land donations, conservation easements, and other securement options.

Key Deliverables: Over 190 landowners were contacted with 5 individuals actively interested in further discussing a donation or other securement option with York Region or a partner organization. A database of key properties and interested landowners has been compiled and updated.

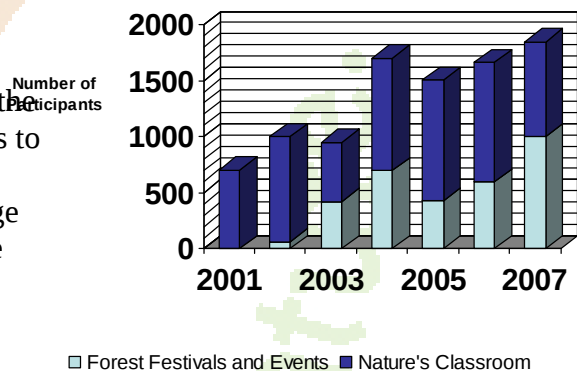
3 Community Education and Promotional Campaign

Public awareness of the values of our natural environment is an essential factor towards securing a healthy natural heritage system for future generations. The Region has a number of promotional and educational initiatives underway to raise public awareness of our natural environment and the Region's diverse environmental programs and initiatives.

3.1 Forest Festivals and Events

Monthly Forest Festivals and Events are hosted in the York Regional Forest. The intent of these events is to educate the public about forest ecosystems and to increase awareness of the natural and social heritage of the York Regional Forest. In 2007, 1000 people participated in two Forest Festivals and ten Forest Events, the highest level of participation since the program began in 2001.

Key Deliverables: Over 1000 community members learned about the York Regional Forest and the Region's environmental initiatives and partnerships by attending Forest Festivals or Events.



3.2 Nature's Classroom

Nature's Classroom is a Regional environmental education program which presents a unique opportunity for a variety of groups to experience and learn about the natural environment in a forest setting. Since 2001, annual participation in the program has been on an increasing trend while the costs to deliver the program have been decreasing.

Key Deliverables: In 2007, over 800 community members were educated about the York Regional Forest and the Region's environmental initiatives by participating in a Nature's Classroom program.

3.3 Corporate Environmental Education Events

York Region hosts a number of environmental education events. The Greening Strategy is a strong partner in all of them with particular success through the York Children's Water Festival and Earth Week celebrations. Natural Heritage and Forestry Services contributed to the Children's Water Festival in partnership with Water for Tomorrow.

Five Thousand (5,000) Grade 4 students attended the Water Festival from across York Region.

Key Deliverables: In 2007, over 5000 students educated through the Children's Water Festival and Earth Week celebrations.

3.4 Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest

In 2007 the Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest was updated to include improved Forest Tract Maps and more detailed information about the Forest including hunting within the Forest and the presence of poison ivy along trails. All libraries, local municipal offices and conservation authority offices across the Region received copies of the revised Guide.

Key Deliverable: Greater public awareness and use of the York Regional Forest.

4 Role of Federal/Provincial Government Legislation

Legislation is a very useful tool to protect, enhance and promote the natural environment. In 2007, York Region was actively consulting the public on ways to ensure adequate protection of the natural heritage system while accommodating significant growth in accordance with the Provincial Growth Plans. Most specifically, the Planning and Economic Development Department released a Natural Heritage Discussion Paper in 2007 which will direct a number of actions in 2008 including a review and update of the Greening Strategy, and an assessment of the need for a restored and strengthened natural heritage system.

4.1 York Region's Sustainability Initiative

With the introduction of the Greenbelt Act and Places to Grow legislation, York Region is comprehensively and proactively looking at our current planning practices and the best means by which to accommodate significant future growth as established by the Province while ensuring that we have a sustainable natural environment, healthy communities, and economic vitality (the triple bottom line). In doing so, the Region is looking at natural heritage planning, infrastructure demands and compact, liveable communities.

Key Deliverables: The Planning and Economic Development Department will develop a new comprehensive approach to growth planning articulated through Regional Official Plan policies and practices throughout all departments of the Region which will ensure policy direction for a Green York Region.

5 Regional Operations

Through the Greening Strategy, the Region seeks to continually expand and improve the protection and enhancement of the natural environment, while providing necessary infrastructure and services to our residents.

5.1 Lagoon Decommissioning / Wetland Creation Initiative

In 2006, Regional Council approved the conversion of surplus Regional Sewage Lagoons to habitat wetlands as the preferred alternative subject to detailed design. The lagoons are currently used by a variety of waterfowl and other wildlife. Their conversion to habitat wetlands will protect these existing functions and provide improved habitat for new species of plants and animals. In 2007 a Request for Proposals was released to

retain consultants to take this project from design to implementation over 2008 and 2009. Funding to deliver the project is available in the Water and Wastewater capital budget.

Key Deliverables: This Water and Wastewater project will result in significant habitat protection and enhancement (over 30 ha / 74 ac) and the opportunity for public enjoyment, access and education in the Towns of East Gwillimbury and Georgina, and the Township of King.

5.2 Naturalization of York Region Properties

In cooperation with staff from a number of Regional departments, naturalization plans are being considered for properties owned by the Region. We will start with the Bales Drive Garfield Wright property, in the Town of East Gwillimbury, as a pilot project.

Key Deliverables: Portions of the properties not occupied by, or required for future structures will be reforested or otherwise naturalized, resulting in an increase in forest cover and demonstrated leadership.

6 Urban Forest

The urban forest plays a significant role in enhancing the natural environment. Trees provide many environmental benefits such as oxygen production, improved aesthetics, and temperature moderation – in addition to enhancing the quality of life in York Region.

6.1 Street Trees – Our Green Infrastructure Symposium

On June 6, 2007, 107 Regional and municipal staff attended a one-day staff symposium *Street Trees – Our Green Infrastructure*. Six highly respected international experts on maintaining the health of street trees spoke at this event, hosted by the Transportation and Works Department. A video recording of this event featuring the keynote speaker, James Urban of Urban and Associates, USA is available for viewing to provide a greater understanding of the requirements of street trees and how to increase their survival.

Key Deliverable: Provide Roads Capital staff with the knowledge and tools necessary to increase survival of Regional street trees and ensure healthy green infrastructure.



6.2 Street Tree Watering Program

In 2007, the Region increased the level of effort exerted on immature tree maintenance to include an aggressive street tree watering program. In addition to improving the survival of recently planted street trees through watering, the 2007 program also included a study analysing different methods of watering to improve efficiency and effectiveness in future years. Some of the approaches used included using the Region's winter maintenance brine trucks modified for watering purposes, contractors, a watering truck operated by students, and slow release watering bags. The results of the study suggest that combining a variety of approaches has the greatest result. Accordingly, a number of street trees

planted in 2008 will be fitted with slow release watering bags and additional watering will be undertaken by Road Maintenance staff using the Brine truck and by contractors planting trees for the Region.

Key Deliverables: Roads Maintenance staff provided with the knowledge and tools required to promote improved survival rates for street trees.

6.3 York Natural Planting Partnership for Private Urban Landowners

In 2007, the Natural Heritage and Forestry Services Section entered into a partnership with LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests) to undertake a feasibility study for a private urban landowner tree planting program for York Region. To date, LEAF has offered a high quality backyard tree planting program exclusively to landowners within the City of Toronto. Their exceptionally successful program offers private rural landowners education, one on one consultation, and subsidized trees for private urban yards. The feasibility study will assess the opportunities, limitations, costs and potential partners for delivering this program within York Region. As a component of the feasibility study, the Region and LEAF have partnered with the Town of Markham to include a pilot program within Markham in 2008.

Key Deliverables: Increased urban canopy with the planting of urban yard trees within the Town of Markham in 2008 and an assessment of a York Region wide program for the future.



6.4 Town of Richmond Hill Healthy Yards Program

The Healthy Yards Program aims to educate the community about the value of planting nature trees and shrubs within their urban lots. It facilitates a tangible increase in native species planted on private properties through the subsidy of nature plant materials.

Key Deliverables: Over 600 trees and shrubs planted within private yards.

7 Green Partnerships

The Greening Strategy is successfully administered with the assistance of numerous partners. Partnerships have been established with local municipalities, other levels of government, academic agencies, and private and public stakeholders. These initiatives have been discussed earlier in this report and are highlighted here to reiterate the value of our partnerships.

7.1 Strategic Partnerships

York Region continues to demonstrate leadership through Green Partnerships. These partnerships enable us to leverage additional funds, services and support, and optimize on the experience of other groups and individuals. Some key partnerships in 2007 included the Nature Conservancy of Canada, York Environmental Stewardship, the Conservation Authorities, LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests), the Ministry of

Natural Resources, the Environmental Earth Angels, the University of Toronto, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, Natural Resources Canada and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

7.2 Providing a Forum for Municipal Interests across the Region

The York Region Natural Heritage and Forestry section takes the lead in facilitating forums for municipal groups across the Region. In 2007, bi-annual meetings with the Area Municipal Foresters and the Land Securement Working Group were held. One Environmental Advisory Committee “Summit” forum for all York Region EACs was co-hosted by Regional staff in partnership with the Town of East Gwillimbury. All participants surveyed recognize the value in York Regional staff facilitating these meetings to provide greater understanding, improved partnerships and increased productivity across the Region.

Key Deliverable: Facilitation of forums for municipal staff increase understanding and productivity.

8 Information Management

The availability of current Geographic Information System (GIS) data and environmental databases is of paramount importance in conserving natural features.

8.1 Natural Heritage Features and Attributes Inventory

In 2007, the Ministry of Natural Resources continued to update wetland evaluations within York Region. The East Humber river and Bogurt Creek were the focus areas for the 2007 evaluations which will greatly assist in ongoing land use planning and restoration initiatives.

Key Deliverables: Updated environmental data and GIS mapping products.

8.2 Land Securement Working Group Web Site Access

The Region chairs a Land Securement Working Group which functions to harmonize the securement of conservation lands across the Region and facilitates discussions about conservation priorities and programs. As further support to the partner agencies working to secure lands in York Region, the Geomatics Division developed, reviews and updates a secure web site that provides these partners with important environmental information and a tool to track and monitor securement activity throughout the Region. On September 18, 2007 16 members of the Land Securement Working Group learned more about accessing land securement information using the York Region Atlas View Website. This tutorial was designed and delivered by Geomatics in partnership with Natural Heritage and Forestry Services staff.

Key Deliverable: Increased knowledge and use of York Atlas View for our land securement partners.

8.3 Greening Web Page

The York Region Greening web page is update and revised on an ongoing basis. The web page includes links to our partners’ sites and descriptions of recent Greening Achievements. The web page will also includes this comprehensive list of Greening Strategy initiatives.

Key Deliverables: York Regions website gets, on average, 200,000 to 250,000 visitors per month. Using the website to promote the Region's proactive environmental protection and restoration efforts through the Greening Strategy has the opportunity to significantly increase public awareness and private land stewardship. Education is one of the most effective means to change personal behaviours that results in greater respect, appreciation and protection of the natural environment.

Welcome to **York Region**



The official website of The Regional Municipality of York

9 Monitoring and Reporting

The Transportation Services and Planning and Development Services Departments will continue to report annually on the progress and achievements of the Greening Strategy including Securement activities. The public continues to be well informed of York Region's Greening Initiatives through presentations, displays and promotional material.

9.1 Vision 2026: Towards a Sustainable York Region

Through Vision 2026: Towards a Sustainable York Region, the Planning and Economic Development Department reports on progress achieved as we accommodate new growth while protecting a sustainable natural environment, ensuring healthy communities and economic vitality (the triple bottom line). Greening Strategy initiatives and advancements form part of this comprehensive report to the public to demonstrate our commitment to the triple bottom line.