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UPDATED GREENLANDS SYSTEM POLICY DIRECTIONS: REGIONAL OFFICIAL PLAN UPDATE

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report dated March 3, 2009, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council endorse the policy directions for an updated Greenlands System in York Region outlined in Section 4 of this report for discussion and inclusion in the Regional Official Plan update.
2. Planning Department staff circulate this report to all local municipalities, the development community, Regional partners and stakeholders, and the Ministries of Energy and Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs and Housing for comment and discussion.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides policy directions for the creation of an updated Greenlands System for York Region. The policy directions are based on the Natural Heritage Discussion Paper, 2007 and the Natural Heritage Strategic Directions Paper, 2008.

3. BACKGROUND

York Region takes a sustainable approach to growth

York Region has taken a sustainable approach to the growth challenges ahead. The Region's Sustainability Strategy, which was approved in 2007, provides a long-term framework for making smarter decisions about growth management and undertaking municipal responsibilities that better integrate the economy, environment and community. The Sustainability Strategy has informed the update to the Regional Greenlands System.

Sustainability Benefits of the Regional Greenlands System		
Sustainable Natural Environment	Healthy Communities	Economic Vitality
- Habitat for plant and animal species - Maintains biodiversity - species richness & ecosystem complexity - Improves air quality - Contributes to water management - Mitigating the impacts of climate change	- Contributes to liveable neighbourhoods, our feeling of well-being, our health, and quality of life, community identity and sense of place. - Provides educational and research opportunities - Provides active and passive recreation for healthier lifestyles	- Eco- and agri-tourism - Enhanced property values; creating desirable communities for investment. - Renewable energy opportunities - Disease prevention & treatment resulting in reduced health care costs - Reduced infrastructure costs; reducing peak flows and flooding, natural alternatives to infrastructure. - Helps make York Region an attractive place for businesses

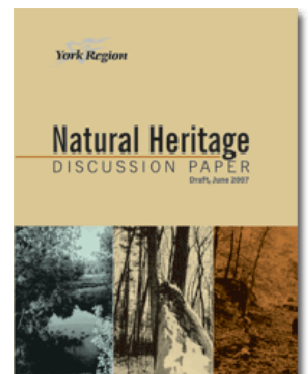
The forecasted growth for York Region has the potential to place considerable additional pressure on the Region's natural systems. A healthy and strong Greenlands System is essential not only to ensure a sustainable region, but, as a key defining feature of York Region, and its continued long term health must be ensured.

York Region has a long history of Greenlands System planning. The original Greenlands System was created in 1993 and there have been considerable successes in protecting and securing elements of the System. The focus on the system in 1993 was to identify and protect the system. Since the original Greenlands System was identified, the Provincial Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt Plans have expanded the system. In this phase of Greenlands System planning, the focus will be on connecting and strengthening the System.

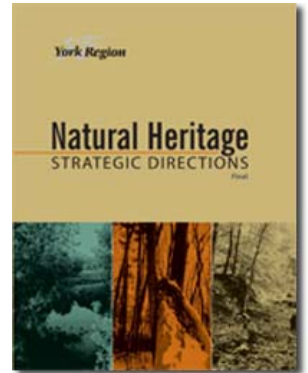
Natural Heritage Discussion Paper and Strategic Directions

Natural Heritage Discussion Paper was endorsed by Regional Council in May 2007, and Natural Heritage Strategic Directions was endorsed by Regional Council in January 2008.

Both papers addressed the natural heritage considerations within the Region's Growth Management strategy, in order to ensure a strong, linked natural heritage system through the Oak Ridges Moraine and Greenbelt, the existing urban areas and towns and villages, and the new whitebelt communities.



The discussion paper stimulated conversation with our stakeholders on updating our natural heritage system and strategy. The paper provided an examination of the emerging policy context surrounding natural heritage, the growth management context in York Region, and identified 8 Action Areas to ensure a comprehensive strategy for protecting and enhancing the Region's natural heritage. The Strategic Directions paper incorporated the feedback received on the Discussion Paper, and provides strategic direction on how to proceed with the 8 Action Areas. The results included a comprehensive strategy for protecting and enhancing the Region's natural heritage.



4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

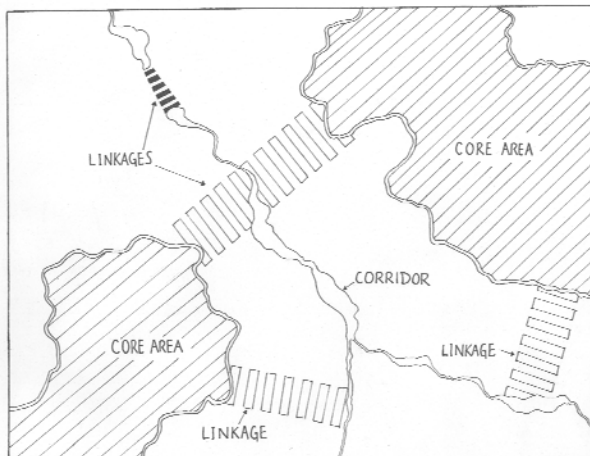
Provincial Policy supports York Region's initiative to update the Greenlands System

The Provincial Policy Statement was updated in 2005 to reflect the change in understanding of natural heritage as a system, and defines a Natural Heritage System as *“a system made up of natural heritage features and areas, linked by natural corridors which are necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species and ecosystems. These systems can include lands that have been restored and areas with the potential to be restored to a natural state.”*

This change in Provincial Policy supports the update to the Region's Greenlands System, particularly the desire to ensure a linked and enhanced system.

Draft Greenlands System Policy Directions: Enhancing York Region's Natural Legacy

Section 2.1 of the Regional Official Plan establishes the basis and policies for the Regional Greenlands System. The purpose of this section is to identify an updated linked, Greenlands System for the Region. This section of the Regional Official Plan will be updated based on the policy directions below.



Key Policy Objective: Enhancement of an updated linked Greenlands System in order to ensure a healthy system for generations to come.

The updated Greenlands System will be comprised of cores, corridors, and

linkages. Core areas are the most significant natural features on the landscape, and include significant woodlands and wetlands, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSIs), and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs). Corridors can include existing significant valleylands, and watercourses. The linkages are smaller features that connect core areas, and are either existing or to be established through restoration. In order to have a healthy, functioning system the core areas must be interconnected by natural or restored corridors and linkages in order to provide for a system that facilitates the movement of animals, plant dispersion, and provide opportunities for pathways for walking and cycling, and ultimately, the creation of a Regional Trail System.

Regional scale linkages will be identified to ensure that the system is linked north to south and east to west. *Attachment 1* identifies a schematic diagram of how these Regional linkages could be identified.

The Regional Greenlands System is connected through the 3 broad land use areas within York Region; the existing urban areas, the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt and the whitebelt areas. While there will be a coordinated overall approach to the Greenlands System, each of these three areas will have a different policy approach and focus recognizing local conditions. Table 1 outlines the general approach to the Greenlands System throughout the broad land areas of the Region.

Table 1
Policy Approaches to Greenlands System

Land Area	Policy Approach
All	- Identify System for protection - Ensure overall system health - Ensure System gains with each development or infrastructure project - Invest in Greenlands - Strategic enhancement & securement - Identify potential Regional trail corridor
Existing Urban Areas	- Protect & strengthen existing features - Increase urban natural cover - Mitigate urban heat island effects through urban greening; streetscaping, green roofs.
ORM & Greenbelt	- Restoration of degraded areas - Protect as per Provincial requirements - Enhance cores, corridors and linkages with greening initiatives - Identify Regional scale linkages (east west and north south) --- see Attachment #1 - Target for securement initiatives - Stewardship initiatives with private landowners

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|-----------|---|
| Whitebelt | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Identify system for protection▪ Strategic enhancement to establish linkages and green Greenbelt corridors▪ Greenlands System Assessment to address interface impacts, strategic enhancement, system gain opportunities and passive recreation.▪ Target key elements for securement |
|-----------|---|
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The new communities within the Whitebelt lands will be developed as pedestrian first, transit-oriented communities within interconnected mobility systems to ensure complete and walkable communities. This vision for the whitebelt must be achieved by balancing natural heritage and infrastructure objectives. The vision for the updated Greenlands System recognizes the need for infrastructure connectivity which may include crossing the System and ensures that where infrastructure is necessary to contribute to complete and interconnected communities that those infrastructure components also contribute to an enhanced Greenlands System.

To complement the system, policies encouraging strategic enhancement of the cores, corridor and linkages will be included. The gaps within the core areas can be enhanced to ensure terrestrial species diversity and core habitat function are maintained or created. Continued and improved investment in our Greenlands System is a necessary complement to the policies requiring the identification, protection, and enhancement of the Regional Greenlands System.

Urban uses and infrastructure projects should contribute to net gains in the system and ensure overall system health through innovative design and construction and contributions towards strategic system enhancements. Every opportunity will be made to enhance or invest in strengthening the Greenlands System.

The Regional Greening Strategy implements the strategic vision for the Greenlands System. The continued successful implementation of the Greenlands System objective lies in creating new and nurturing the existing successful partnerships. The Greening Strategy will be updated to complement the updated Regional Greenlands System and associated mapping.

There are also a series of technical updates that will be occurring in conjunction with the Greenlands System update. These include:

- Incorporation of the Greenbelt Plan into the Regional Official Plan as per the Provincial conformity requirement.
- Key Natural Heritage Feature and Key Hydrologically Sensitive Feature technical data update.
- Incorporation of the Regional Significant Woodlands Study into the Regional Official Plan policy and mapping; and

- Incorporation of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan into the Regional Official Plan.

Relationship to Vision 2026

The updated Greenlands System policy directions addresses several goal areas of Vision 2026, including “Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture”, “Responding to the Needs of Our Residents”, “Managed and Balanced Growth”, “Infrastructure for a Growing Region” and “Engaged Communities and a Responsive Region”.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The updated Greenlands System policy directions and mapping have been undertaken within the existing staff complement and budget allocation for the Planning and Development Services Department.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Regional staff are currently, and will continue to work closely with the Local Municipal staff and conservation authority staff in the creation of an updated Greenlands System and associated policy for York Region.

A copy of this report will be circulated to all local municipalities. Following the release of this report, consultations will be held with the local municipalities on the policy approach and mapping.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region has a long history of award winning Greenlands System planning. The original system was identified in 1993. In the face of the growth forecasted for the Region, the time has come to update the system to create a linked permanent natural legacy. In this phase of Greenlands System planning, the focus will be on connecting and strengthening the System throughout the entire Region. The policies and mapping of the Regional Official Plan will also be updated to reflect a series of technical requirements including incorporation of the Greenbelt and Lake Simcoe Protection Plans, and updated technical information on key natural heritage features and hydrologically sensitive features.

For more information on this report, please contact John Waller, Director of Long Range and Strategic Planning at (905) 830-4444 Ext. 1525.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is attached to this report.)

Attachment 1:
Schematic Illustration of
York's Greenlands System Vision

LEGEND

Regional Greenlands System

Greenbelt Protected Countryside

Natural Heritage System in Greenbelt Protected Countryside

Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM)

ORM Landuse

Linkage

Core

Road

Municipal Boundary

Regional Boundary

Lake *

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