

# **1**

## ***FOCUS ON OUR ENVIRONMENT,* YORK REGION STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORT 2005**

**The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends that:**

- 1. the presentation by Diane Bladec-Willett, Director, Health Information and Planning Branch, Health Services Department and John Waller, Director, Long Range and Strategic Planning Branch, Planning and Development Services Department regarding '*Focus on Our Environment*, York Region State of the Environment Report be received;**
- 2. the recommendations contained in the following report, November 18, 2005 from the Commissioner of Health Services and the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services be adopted.**

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that:

1. Council receive *Focus on Our Environment*, York Region State of the Environment Report 2005(see Attachment 1) and adopt the 33 recommendations for action included in the Report (see Attachment 2).
2. Staff be directed to circulate the *Focus on Our Environment* Report to area municipalities, stakeholders, and all those involved in its development.
3. Staff be directed to make the *Focus on Our Environment* Report available to the general public through libraries, schools and through the Regional website.

### **2. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to present the draft final *Focus on Our Environment*, York Region's State of the Environment Report 2005 (SOE 2005 Report) and to highlight its findings and recommendations for action.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

*Focus on Our Environment* is York Region's second State of the Environment Report. The following section provides information about State of the Environment reporting in York Region to date and describes the development of this Report.

### **3.1 State of the Environment Reporting for York Region**

*Our Environment, Our Home*, York Region State of the Environment Report 2000 (SOE 2000 Report), was the first of its kind for York Region and was released in June 2000.

The final products of this initiative were a technical report, a summary report, a natural features map and an educational brochure entitled *An A to Z of Environmental Actions*. The report was widely circulated to all levels of government, health and community agencies, schools, universities, libraries and to the general public. It was very well received and there was much demand for the final products.

The SOE 2000 Report provided baseline data and information on the state of the land, water and air resources of York Region, described the major stresses on those resources, and reviewed selected aspects of the social environment related to environmental health. It also identified 80 benchmarks or indicators of health to be used to track the health of the environment and the progress being made to protect it on an ongoing basis. The Report contained 24 recommendations for action to protect the environmental resources of York Region. The first of those recommendations was to update the State of the Environment Report at regular intervals in order to monitor the status of York Region's natural environment effectively. The SOE 2005 Report is an update of the 2000 report and addresses this recommendation.

### **3.2 Development of the SOE 2005 Report**

The proposed SOE 2005 Report initiative was introduced to Council in March 2005, Clause 2, Report 3, Planning and Economic Development Committee.

The SOE 2005 Report has been developed jointly by the Health Services and Planning and Development Services Departments. Internal Advisory and Working Committees were established to guide the development of the document and to collect, analyse and submit information and data for the Report. Representatives from Health Services, Planning and Development Services, Corporate Services, and Transportation and Works Departments and the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer, actively participated on these Committees and contributed to the Report.

Extensive consultation with conservation authorities (Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority), provincial ministries (Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Natural Resources), the nine area municipalities, and the seven municipal Environmental Advisory Committees (EACs) in York Region was carried out to gather advice and information for the SOE 2005 Report. Area municipalities and conservation authorities provided information in many critical areas, and were also invited to contribute highlights of their most important environmental initiatives developed since 2000 (see Chapter 3 of the Report). Data and information were also gathered from external organizations including agricultural associations, energy providers and environmental groups.

Feedback on the Report's draft indicators was obtained from representatives of conservation authorities, municipalities, EACs, and other non-governmental and environmental organizations at a stakeholder consultation session held on May 31, 2005.

## **4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS**

### **4.1 Purpose of the SOE 2005 Report**

The purpose of the SOE 2005 Report is to:

- Provide an update on the current state of York Region's natural environment
- Describe the progress made on the 24 recommendations contained in the SOE 2000 Report
- Refine the land, water and air indicators used to monitor our environment
- Communicate trends where possible
- Describe the major environmental initiatives undertaken by the Region and its partners from 2000–2005
- Provide recommendations for future actions
- Provide information so that those who live, work and/or play in York Region can help take responsible actions to protect and restore the natural environment

### **4.2 Indicators**

The heart of the SOE 2005 Report is the suite of 85 indicators that have been developed and refined since 2000 and are being used to assess the current state of York Region's land, water and air resources. The indicator development process began with an extensive literature review of indicators being used elsewhere, including those being developed at a national scale by Environment Canada and the National Round Table of the Environment and the Economy. The literature review confirmed the soundness of the organizational principle of the SOE 2000 Report, e.g., the evaluation of land, water and air and further enabled a refinement of the indicators used. In many cases, the refinement of indicators was a result of improved data collection and analysis capabilities, both inside and outside of the Region. Indicator tables at the end of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide key findings for land, water and air.

In several instances, data and information systems are not yet in place to evaluate important segments of York Region's natural environment and the report clearly indicates where future development of appropriate indicators is required. It is understood that indicators will continue to be refined over time as information systems improve.

### **4.3 SOE 2005 Report Initiative Products**

The *Focus on Our Environment* Report is the most visible product of the SOE 2005 Report initiative. It is augmented by an updated natural features map and an educational brochure that details how York Region residents can take personal responsibility to protect the health of the environment. The report and educational brochure can be

accessed on the Region's website at [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca) and will be joined there by an interactive suite of maps that highlight the many features of York Region's natural environment. Another important, although less visible, product is the database that has been created to house all SOE measures, targets and status from the original report, with the ability to add status changes up to and including 2005. This forms the beginning of an environmental health indicator database that can be updated over time.

#### **4.4 Key Findings**

The SOE 2005 Report was undertaken to answer the question, "How healthy is the natural environment in York Region?" The information and data gathered for this Report have helped us understand that we are blessed with many diverse, beautiful and important natural resources in York Region. Some indicators utilized for this Report show relatively good environmental health and others show poor environmental health. The Report articulates that the Region, in conjunction with its partners, has made significant progress in addressing recommendations from the SOE 2000 Report including issues such as: the Oak Ridges Moraine, greenlands, wetlands, forests, Lake Simcoe, water quantity and quality, agricultural practices, solid waste, air quality, transportation and leadership. Other indicators, however, demonstrate that some things are worse than they appeared five years ago. For certain segments of the environment, we still lack data and information that will allow us to effectively track changes. For all the progress that has been made—and the progress is considerable—there are still many challenges to be faced.

Selected highlights of the findings are presented below. More complete information is presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6; in the indicator tables at the ends of those chapters and in Chapter 7 of the Report.

Key indicators of good environmental health include:

- The extent of the Regional Greenlands System
- The extent of farmlands
- The quality of municipally-supplied drinking water
- The presence of good quality fish habitat in substantial parts of most rivers in York Region
- The warmwater fishery in Lake Simcoe

Key indicators where improving trends are seen:

- The amount of land designated as part of the Regional Greenlands System
- The extent of Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest
- Population density in urban areas and villages
- Diversity in housing types
- Transit ridership
- The use of road salt on Regional roads
- The amount of blue box materials and yard waste processed
- Water conserved through the Region's water efficiency program

- Loadings from Regional Water Pollution Control Plants to rivers and lakes

Key indicators of poor environmental health:

- The overall rate of diversion of waste from landfill
- The number of Boil Water Advisories in Unregulated Communal Water Systems
- Phosphorus loadings to Lake Simcoe
- Phosphorus levels in rivers and streams
- The lack of self-sustaining populations of lake trout and white fish in Lake Simcoe
- The frequency of “poor” air quality days and the number of annual smog advisories

Key indicators where worsening trends are seen:

- The number of people driving cars, the number of cars, and number of trips made by car
- Contaminant levels in some Lake Simcoe fish
- Postings and closures at York Region beaches
- The number of times a year that concentrations of ground-level ozone exceed provincial criteria

Chapter 7 also includes a section that outlines key challenges for the future. Although significant progress has been made over the five year period 2000-2005, challenges include, but are not limited to:

- Balancing the continued high rate of population growth and the need for services with the need to protect natural systems and the environment
- Implementing the Centres and Corridors initiatives and intensification targets
- Meeting reforestation targets
- Meeting transit targets for the percentage of overall trips made using transit
- Meeting the provincial targets for solid waste diversion
- Working with partners to continue to meet targets for phosphorus loading to Lake Simcoe
- Meeting provincial criteria and federal standards for air quality

#### **4.5 Report Recommendations**

Analysis of the findings of *Focus on Our Environment*, SOE 2005 Report resulted in 33 recommendations for action (see Attachment 2). These are grouped under five categories:

- Monitoring the Environment for the Future
- Taking Action on Sustainability
- Meeting Targets and Commitments
- Enhancing the Region’s Role as Leader
- Working in Partnership for Success

The SOE 2005 Report clearly demonstrates that the Region and partnering organizations and agencies have demonstrated tremendous success in the environmental initiatives they

have undertaken during the five year period 2000–2005. Significant progress has been made in many areas. Yet, there is still much to accomplish. The 33 recommendations outline further action that the Region, in conjunction with others, should take in order to augment stewardship of York Region’s natural environment. The recommendations suggest activities that will build on current successes and will improve the health of our environment for the future.

More specifically, the 33 recommendations outline the additional activities that can be taken to improve monitoring and evaluation of York Region’s natural resources, particularly those for which we do not have adequate data or relevant indicators. They also detail the commitments and targets against which progress will be measured over the coming years. Actions that can be taken within the Region’s corporate operations, expansion of existing partnerships, the exploration of new partnerships and the strengthening of the Region’s role with respect to advocacy for further policy, direction and action at all levels of government are also described. Increased efforts in encouraging those who live work and/or play in York Region to take personal responsibility and action to lessen their impact on York Region’s natural environment are also proposed. It is also recommended that the Region align its major initiatives and build on the concept of developing a sustainability framework that integrates a healthy natural environment, economic prosperity and social well-being.

#### **4.6 Taking Responsibility**

Tackling today’s environmental problems requires the involvement of all sectors—government, business, institutions, non-governmental organizations and the public. A key theme that has emerged through the course of the development of this Report is the topic of taking responsibility. Chapter 9 entitled *Taking Responsibility: what you can do* provides an updated A to Z of Environmental Actions that people who live, work and/or play in York Region can take to reduce their impact on the environment and to help make it healthier. It also includes a list of Internet resources and helpful links, including links to websites where people can measure their own ecological footprint—the impact that they make on the natural environment.

#### **4.7 Relationship to Vision 2026**

The development of the SOE 2005 Report and the many environmental initiatives that have been undertaken since 2000 clearly support the Region’s Vision statement of Creating Strong, Caring and Safe Communities. Although this Report initiative most clearly aligns itself with Vision 2026’s Goal of Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture, it supports all eight goal areas of the Region’s Strategic Plan.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Estimated costs for development and production of the SOE 2005 Report are listed in the table below and have been accommodated within the existing 2005 Public Health Budget.

**Table 1**  
Estimated Costs for State of the Environment 2005 Report

|                          | <b>Gross Costs</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Consultant               | \$43,000           |
| Printing                 | 37,500             |
| Materials and Supplies   | 8,000              |
| Total Gross Budget       | \$88,500           |
| Less: MOHLTC 55% Funding | 48,675             |
| Net Tax Levy             | \$39,825           |

In addition to the above noted costs, the estimated Health Services staffing costs of \$105,000 Gross (\$47,250 Net) or 1.0 FTE of combined management and staff time are still on target. These costs have been accommodated within the Health Services Department 2005 budget.

## **6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT**

The SOE 2005 Report highlights the many environmental initiatives undertaken by the Region, area municipalities, conservation authorities and others since 2000 and showcases services that residents of York Region can access locally. Ongoing reporting, education and social marketing about the status of York Region's natural environment and the lifestyle changes and responsible choices we can all take to lessen our impact on our local environment will benefit all area municipalities and future residents of York Region.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

State of the Environment reporting allows us to measure the health of our natural resources; to pinpoint problems and recognize successes; and to track the status of the natural environment over time. The information gathered helps us to protect and restore natural resources, including rivers, lakes, wetlands, forests, farmlands, vegetation and wildlife. It assists in making better, wiser decisions.

The SOE 2005 Report provides a comprehensive description and/or measure of York Region's natural environment. As a follow-up to the *Our Environment, Our Home*, SOE 2000 Report, the SOE 2005 Report is an important tool for tracking environmental progress in York Region, and will assist in the identification and prioritization of future environmental and planning initiatives. As previously mentioned, the Report articulates that the Region, in conjunction with its partners, has made significant progress in addressing recommendations from the SOE 2000 Report.

The Report also proposes 33 recommendations for actions to be undertaken by the Region and its partners. It is suggested that these recommendations be pursued in order to increase our ability to monitor our environment for the future, take action on sustainability, track progress towards meeting targets and commitments, and assess new and evolving opportunities for leadership and partnerships.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

*(Attachment No. 1 – was circulated with the December 1, 2005 Committee Agenda.)  
(Attachment No. 2 is attached to this report.)*